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## THE IMPLIED READER IN THE HISPANIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF THE "ENCUENTO" SERIES

Genny D. Ballard  
*University of Kentucky*

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Genny D. Ballard

University of Kentucky

The Graduate School

2005

THE IMPLIED READER IN THE HISPANIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE  
OF THE "ENCUENTO" SERIES

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
completion of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Studies at the  
University of Kentucky by Genny D. Ballard Lexington, KY

Director: Enrico Mario Santí, William T. Bryan Endowed Professor of  
Hispanic Studies

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## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPLIED READER IN THE HISPANIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE OF THE "ENCUENTO" SERIES

This dissertation discusses the implied reader in the “EnCuento” series illustrated children’s stories. All the stories are written by well-known Hispanic authors. This work elucidates historical, cultural, and semiotic gaps in the reading process. It explores the ways in which textual elements- such as style, focalization, and manipulation of reader’s expectations- affect the implied reader’s ability to produce or extract meaning. Our study will add to knowledge of the function of the implied reader in children’s texts.

This study is divided into four chapters, each focusing on the implied reader. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the series discussing three books that are easy to understand, with simple vocabulary, chronological plots, and strong protagonists. Chapter 2 explores irony in two horror stories; Chapter 3 discusses books that promote a particular ideology. Finally, Chapter 4 explores books with protagonists who are outsiders. The books within each chapter have enough in common in terms of decodability that they seem to pursue the same kind of implied reader.

Each chapter illustrates the way that style, point of view, manipulation of reader’s expectations, and telltale gaps affect the implied reader’s ability to make meaning. Within the series, each contributing author creates a system through which the reader can participate in the story. The authors’ intent is to communicate meaning to the implied reader. In sum, interpreting texts is communication between author and reader. In all of the “EnCuento” texts, authors employ response-inviting structures, making them interpretable on many levels.

This study further analyzes “EnCuento” stories the better to decide if their primary purpose is didactic. Because of the political content of texts written for adults- as in the case of the stories written by Benedetti, Paz, and Valenzuela- I expected them to communicate a clear political message to their child readers. The thesis also inquires into whether books are, in fact written for children and children exclusively. Because the “EnCuento” authors are accomplished writers of adult literature, this study analyzes the degree to which the authors communicate specifically with a child audience. Finally, the dissertation analyzes the illustrations in several of the texts and finds that book illustrations are essential to making connections with the reader. It also explores cultural references to decide if they are specific to Latin America.

**KEYWORDS:** Severo Sarduy, Senel Paz, Luisa Valenzuela, Camilo José Cela, Hispanic Children’s Literature.

Genny D. Ballard

05/31/05

THE IMPLIED READER IN THE HISPANIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE  
OF THE "ENCUENTO" SERIES

by

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DISSERTATION

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University of Kentucky

2005



THE IMPLIED READER IN THE HISPANIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE  
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DISSERTATION

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## Introduction

This dissertation examines the implied reader in the Spanish “EnCuento” series of illustrated children’s stories. This study will elucidate historical, cultural, and semiotic gaps in the reading process and will discuss the extent to which these gaps are bridged in terms of an implied reader. Over four chapters, twelve books will be examined. While some books are easier to read than others, each displays multiple levels of meaning. Each text will thus be explored in order to illustrate the ways that textual elements - style, focalization, manipulation of reader’s expectations, and telltale gaps- affect the implied reader’s ability to make meaning. Our study will attempt to add to knowledge of the function of the implied reader in children’s texts.

The “EnCuento” series of children’s books comprises thirty-eight<sup>1</sup> (as of February 2005) illustrated children’s books published from 1984 to the present, all written by well-known authors; the texts pursue a diverse audience. While very young readers and pre-readers can understand some of the books, others in the series are more appropriately identified as juvenile fiction. When I interviewed the series creator and editor, Patricia Van Rhijn, she said this variety was intentional. She sought and accepted texts for this project that met certain standards of “good writing.” Van Rhijn is aware that texts contain multiple levels of meaning. Therefore, readers of the “EnCuento” series are expected to make sense of the texts’

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the appendix for a list of all “EnCuento” stories.

technical aspects, such as irony, narration, focalization, and characterization, as well as more enigmatic aspects.

Our study is divided into four chapters, each focusing on the implied reader. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the series discussing three books that are easy to understand, with simple vocabulary, chronological plots, and strong protagonists. While Chapter 2 explores books from the series that fall into the genre of horror tales, Chapter 3 discusses books that promote a particular ideology. Finally, Chapter 4 explores books with protagonists who are outsiders - that is, those who do not fit in or conform to mainstream culture. These divisions prove to be useful when examining the books in terms of an implied reader. The books within the chapter divisions have enough in common, in terms of decidability.

Each chapter will illustrate the way that style, point of view, manipulation of reader's expectations, and telltale gaps affect the implied reader's ability to make meaning. Within the series, each contributing author creates a system through which the reader can participate in the book. The authors' intent is to communicate meaning to the implied reader. In sum, interpreting texts amounts to communication between author and reader. In all of the "EnCuento" texts, authors employ response-inviting structures, making them interpretable on many levels.

#### WHO WILL USE THIS STUDY?

This study will add to our knowledge of the function of the implied reader in children's texts. Critics who analyze stories using reader-response theory will view this study as a detailed look at intertextuality, culture, and telltale gaps. This study

expands as well upon implied reader theory in children's literature by providing interpretations of actual texts, a specific area neglected in extant studies of children's literature.

This study will also be useful to anyone studying children's literature as an overall introduction to (1) major theories of children's literature, (2) terminology used to discuss critical reading, and (3) implied reader theory. Children's literature critics can use this study as well because it examines the degree to which these books are interesting to both adults and children. Our study discusses which specific literary elements transcend from child to adult audiences.

Finally, this study will be interesting to critics who study Latin American children's literature, as compared to world children's literature. For instance, as part of the study of telltale gaps, this paper discusses how "EnCuento" authors use Hispanic culture, recognizable locations, and local customs to connect with the implied reader. Cultural critics can determine if, in this series, Latin American and Spanish culture are represented differently, or if the authors have chosen to refer to a more generic world culture.

Teachers, parents, and librarians looking for interesting new books to read to Spanish-speaking children can use this study to develop lesson ideas. This study reveals a variety of material within the "EnCuento" series and provides starting points for discussion in classrooms. Our thesis will help teachers recognize intertextuality and other literary patterns and explain these to very young readers. It will also reveal ways these books correspond to stories of the past.

## WHY THESE BOOKS?

From a professional perspective, the “EnCuento” series dovetails with the goals of this study because the series editor set the goal of creating high-quality children’s books. The authors of “EnCuento” are all well known, and this study can draw from the body of criticism written about their other work. Lavishly illustrated by professional artists, their children’s books depict different cultures. The storylines vary greatly and encourage discussion of diverse topics like exile, psychological disorders, death, and capitalism. They are also interesting from a structural point of view because they contain writing styles, varying from nonsense to simple logic, to cryptic poetry.

Patricia Van Rhijn created “EnCuento” to formulate a series of original children’s stories in Spanish. As she felt that Mexico, in particular, lacked a good body of essential children’s literature, she solicited manuscripts from well-known authors of adult literature whose work she admired. Collecting, editing, and publishing stories over twenty years has resulted in the “EnCuento” series. To date, there are thirty-eight books, all by notable authors of literature in Spanish.

## DEFINITIONS OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

One problem that arises in the study of children’s literature is its base. Van Rhijn states that through this series, she hopes to expose more children to good children’s literature. The question does remain: What is “good” children’s literature? Critics have debated the definition of children’s literature for more than a century. Originally, the controversy surrounded whether or not children’s literature needed to



contain a didactic component. In formulating a definition, critics have considered author's intention, children's response, the notion of childhood, and most recently the role of the publishing industry.

Many critics believe that children's literature exists because authors write books intended for children. This is a simple definition. The argument contradicting this definition is twofold. First, some authors assert that their books were not written for children, but rather that publishers marketed them as children's books. Second, in children's literature there must be something about the structure of the text that makes it inherently geared for child readers.

Another aspect of the definition debate surrounds the very notion of childhood. Post-structural critics believe that adults work with a definition of childhood in order to write and select books for children. They also believe that the notion of childhood is impossible, given the many variants of the meaning of childhood in different cultures. Following this argument, some critics have declared that children's literature does not exist, a skeptical attitude that leads to exhaustion. Yet we do need to define more carefully the notion of childhood in order to write and select good children's literature. As critics, we can look at texts and determine what was assumed about children in the writing, editing, and publishing of books for children.

One useful definition of children's literature is provided by James Steel Smith: "Children's literature is less rational, reflects the limited experiences of children, limits the range of language and terminology, reflects the shorter length of children's attention span, and limits the amount of story elements" (15). In order to

define children's literature, Smith sets up a binary opposition, analyzing children's literature in terms of adult literature. In his definition, all aspects of children's literature have less value when compared to adult literature, and thus, by extension, his characterization of children is derogatory. While Smith's statements generalize subjectively about children, his definition is nevertheless useful because it points to the need to examine the experiences of child characters in order to understand what the text assumes about children in general.

Jack Zipes, a children's literature critic, denies altogether the existence of "children's literature." He says: "I am not being coy—children's literature does not exist. If we take the genitive case literally and seriously we assume ownership and possession are involved when we say 'children's literature' or 'the literature of children'" (38). Zipes concludes that children's literature can, in fact, include everything children read (39). He believes that, unless we want reading to become another kind of consumerism, we need to teach children to be literary critics- that is, teach them to use critical reading strategies. Zipes proposes for example, pointing out intertextuality wherever it exists in stories so that young readers can begin to recognize this device. His hope is that children can grow to appreciate good children's literature.

John Rowe Townsend uses a different pragmatic definition: children's literature consists of those stories that are published for children. Townsend says that after struggling with the definition of children's literature in *A Sense of Story*, he concluded that "the only workable definition of a children's book is: a book that appeared on the children's list of a publisher." Such a definition acknowledges that

institutions—especially the publishing industry—create, rather than simply sponsor, children’s literature. Libraries and schools also play a lesser role.

Townsend’s definition works particularly well with the “EnCuento” series. Van Rhijn requested authors to write stories for children and placed no other restraints. She discloses, however, that some authors did submit books she could not accept because their content was not appropriate for children. The editor of “EnCuento” does have, then, a particular notion of what children’s literature is, and she has chosen books according to such standards. This demonstrates how the pragmatic definition of children’s literature works for the series. Van Rhijn does admit that her idea of what children can understand and appreciate is broadly based and includes different interests and levels of meaning. The series was established using her criteria for “good children’s books.” Although Van Rhijn’s views may encompass a broad spectrum of acceptable stories, this series is the result of the image of childhood filtered through one person. We must all, as adult critics of children’s literature, believe to some degree that we know what children like and appreciate.

## CHILDREN’S LITERATURE THEORY

Children’s literature critic Aidan Chambers says of the definition debate:

There is a constant squabble about whether particular books are children’s books or not. Indeed, some people argue that there is no such thing as books for children but only books which children happen to read. And unless one wants to be partisan and dogmatic—which I do

not, having had my fill of both—one has to agree that there is truth on both sides and the whole truth in neither.

The fact is that some books are clearly for children in a specific sense—they were written by their authors deliberately for children—and some books, never specifically intended for children, have qualities, which attract children to them. (34)

The “EnCuento” series fits into Chambers’s first definition of children’s literature because it comprises books written by their authors “deliberately for children.” The authors are asked by the editor to write books for children.

It is clear that Van Rhijn as editor believes she knows what children will like. Perhaps she works from her own notion of an “implied reader.” According to Chambers, all children’s texts have an implied reader. Chambers’s idea of the implied reader evolved from the understanding that authors create relationships with readers in order to discover the meaning of the text. He bases his theory on Iser’s idea that the critical method “is concerned primarily with the form of a work, insofar as one defines form basically as a means of communication or as a negotiation of insight” (*Booktalk* 36). In Chambers’s words, “it takes two to say a thing” (*Booktalk* 34). Distinguishing the implied reader from the actual reader, Iser believes that the implied reader is a creation of the text because the text coaxes the reader through response inviting structures that he calls “gaps” (Chambers *Booktalk* 48). For Chambers, the implied reader provides a far more interesting subject than do the book’s actual subjects. Chambers’s writing often concerns the manner in which the reader is brought into contact with the reality an author presents (*Booktalk* 54).

Chambers elaborates his theory of the “reader in the book” by explaining how literary elements of style, point of view, manipulation of expectations, and “telltale gaps” help the critic to identify the kind of reader the text seeks (*Booktalk* 55). In Chambers’s theory, as in Iser’s, texts are dynamic. The reader is invited to interpret the text. Texts are purposefully written with “gaps,” such as pauses in speech, missing information, ambiguous historical or cultural references, and intertextuality. These gaps invite the reader to interpret them. However, not every reader fills them in the same way. Child readers are likely to work from their own experience when filling in gaps.

The concept of implied reader becomes especially relevant in the “EnCuento” series books because many of the texts invite the child reader to play with the text. One such example is Álvaro Mutis’ *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hamelin* (1994). Aside from the gaps created through intertextuality with the story of the Pied Piper, the text is a game hosted by an unreliable narrator who favors the protagonist, who happens to be a serial murderer of children. Thus children either will play along, recognizing the irony of the unreliable narrator, or else they will not understand the game and will be horrified by the story. Using Chambers’s critical method of the implied reader, one can decide what kind of reader a book pursues.

There are two distinct approaches to literature through reader-response theory. These two approaches are the subject of Peggy Whalen-Levitt’s study “Pursuing ‘The Reader in the Book’” where Iser’s approach is differentiated from Louise Rosenblatt’s. On the one hand, Iser asserts that his is a theory of aesthetic response (*Wirkungstheorie*) and not a theory of the aesthetics of reception

(*Rezeptionstheorie*); he studies potential rather than real effects. On the other hand, Rosenblatt calls for the study of actual-reader responses.<sup>2</sup> The same distinction can be drawn in the criticism of children's literature between Chambers's method of exploring the implied reader in texts and Kay Vandergrift's actual-reader studies. Vandergrift advocates the study of actual-reader responses, as opposed to more theoretical approaches, and she outlines an in-depth study of children's responses, such as in "The Child's Meaning-Making in Response to Literary Texts." Her strategy describes the procedure for selecting a population sample, selecting the text, and analyzing reader-response data. She also defends her approach on her Internet web site, where she says:

There has been an increase in lengthy and more theoretically-based critical analyses of works for children and young people, but too often this work is assumed to be esoteric, isolated from and unrelated to either children or the teaching of children's literature. Many who teach children's literature dismiss this work as being that of those who have little sense of the child for whom the literature was created and even

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between Iser's and Rosenblatt's approaches is made by Peggy Whalen-Levitt in "Pursuing the 'Reader in the Book'" (1980; reprinted in Bator 135-41). Her article, as the title clearly shows, is a response to Chambers's "implied reader" theory. She applauds Chambers's theory but hopes to open the field to studies of actual responses.

less for the practical problems of bringing that child and the literature together.<sup>3</sup>

The benefit of Vandergrift's approach is that it values the actual responses of real child readers, the target audience of children's literature.

## ACTUAL-READER RESPONSES AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

One of the limits of the Vandergrift method of reader-response analysis is that children's responses are solicited by an adult authority figure. Teachers and parents ask questions which children answer. Logically, children try to often answer in the way adults would want them to respond. Reader-response in children's literature, as employed in the Vandergrift study, was developed in the field of Education as a way of teaching children to read and respond independently to texts. Through this method, children learn that that they may formulate many acceptable conclusions about texts. In the classroom, more emphasis is often placed on teaching children to react to texts than on teaching elements of literature. Of course, this method has its benefits. At best, it teaches critical thinking; at worst, it creates students who believe they are always right.

Some of the most respected reader-response critics in the field of children's literature have formulated their theories based on the reading and responses to reading of their own children. One example is Jill P. May, author of *Children's Literature and Critical Theory*. May used her own experience as a teacher and a

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<sup>3</sup> Vandergrift devotes a section of her website to the problem of reader-response theory. The above quotation is from <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/>.

librarian to conclude that reader-response theory is the most valuable form of criticism. One of her colleagues at Purdue University said she taught like a New Critic. As a defense, May began working with her students and her own children on response journals. After this change in perspective, she concluded that the value each reader draws from literature comes from the reader's personal sense of the world. May writes, "The real readers are the children and they should be telling adults how children's literature entertains, instructs, and reflects their lives. For those of us who practice reader-response theory in children's literature, this is exactly what we must do" (166).<sup>4</sup>

The "EnCuento" books are not given to children to be read before they are published, as they are in publishing houses such as Scholastic. In our interview, Van Rhijn stated she believes that one child's reaction to a book does not tell about other children's reactions; the fact that one child rejects a book does not mean that other children will not love it. She trusts that she has an adequate sense of what is good writing for children. The "EnCuento" series has broad appeal, due partly to the fact that the authors are from so many different countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, Paraguay, Perú, Portugal, México, Nicaragua, Spain, and Venezuela. The books are widely available from bookstores, libraries, schools, and the Internet,

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<sup>4</sup> Hugh Crago is another critic who employs reader-response theory. He and his wife compiled journal entries about their daughter's pre-reading experiences in their book *Prelude*. They chronicled what they read to their daughter and wrote down the questions she asked. Crago uses this article to generalize about reader-response, as compared to the psychological profiling of the "child" (61).



and its authors have great name recognition. Because of these factors, combined with the immense popularity of children's literature in general and the globalization of the children's publishing industry, the prospective audience is vast.

## THE IMPLIED READER

It is the job of authors to perceive who will be their audience; these authors are writing for children, and they work from their own concept of the child. This is the subject of Jacqueline Rose's study *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984). Rose believes "there is no child behind the category *children's fiction*, other than the one which the category itself sets in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes" (10). She therefore suggests that children's books are repressive and conservative. Her critique is that authors have not done their job. Rose uses post-structuralist logic to illustrate what she believes is patriarchal objectification of children to prostrate that the child is an objectified image, a cultural myth.

The criticism of children's literature is unique in that it is the only type of literary theory whose texts are interpreted by "others," who believe they know what the audience will accept, enjoy, and learn from. In order to do this effectively, critics must construct their own image of "the child." Most critics are careful to define the population they are writing about because of the elastic notion of "childhood." There are often divisions in the notion of childhood among socioeconomic, religious, and gender groups within one culture.

## CRITIC AS “CHILDIST”

Peter Hunt’s answer to the problem posed by Rose is to label himself and other children’s literature critics as “childists.” By this Hunt means that as there are feminist critics, adult critics can adopt a pro-child attitude through which they can examine children’s texts. Hunt asserts that texts for children and their criticism have been marginalized, and he thereby seeks to improve the reputation of children’s literature. (The editor of the “EnCuento” series, had it seems, the same goals in mind.) One difference between “childist” and “feminist” theory, however, is that children cannot achieve equal status to adults in society (nor should they), yet equality is in fact the goal of feminism. Another problem with Hunt’s analogy is that feminist literary theory is not necessarily separate from feminist politics. Were it possible to separate the two and consider only literature, then the correlation between “childist” and “feminist” might work. Feminist critics hope that, in the future, literary criticism will not be dominated by an entrenched patriarchal society that denigrates women’s accomplishments. Likewise, Hunt hopes that children’s literature will be viewed on a par with adult literature. Hunt’s theory of the critic as “childist”, combined with a conscientious concept of the image of the child, should produce quality children’s literature criticism.

## READER-RESPONSE THEORY

Aidan Chambers’s article “The Reader in the Book” (1978) is a benchmark of children’s literature criticism. The article has been reprinted in several collections of seminal criticism. His method bridged the gap between the criticism of literature

written for adults and the criticism of children's literature. In his introduction to one reprint, Hunt writes that Chambers has had a massive international influence (93). In Hunt's collection of essays *Understanding Children's Literature* (1999), Michael Benton offers an article "Readers, Texts, Contexts: Reader-Response Criticism," in which he outlines the current state of reader-response theory as applied to children's literature. According to Benton, the majority of reader-response theory is currently based on the responses of actual readers. He argues that studies of response focus mainly on how children develop as readers of literature and cites the studies of many critics who worked in classrooms, recording the responses of students to particular books (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 91). Benton states that while the work of Iser and Stanley Fish was initially influential in the development of textual criticism of children's literature, surprisingly little has been written since, as a means of interpreting actual texts (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 74, 80).

Benton's article refers as well to John Stephens, one of the leading reader-response critics in children's literature today. Benton states that one cannot study the implied reader without divulging the author's ideological standpoint. His argument is that all texts contain some didactic elements, and asserts that "contemporary discussions of literature have paid increasing attention to the ideologies pervading texts and to the ways in which creative literature represents the individual both as subject and as agent" (12). Stephen's book, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (1992) examines these ideas in narratives written for children.

In my own study I use the specific critical terminology discussed in Richard Beach's *Reader Response Theories* (1993). Specifically, I use what Beach calls "textual reader response theory," according to which "textual readers focus on how readers draw on and deploy their knowledge of text or genre conventions to respond to specific text features" (15). Using this approach, then, our study is able to examine some actual readers, and to a greater extent, implied readers. Rather than explore the responses of children to these particular books, this study will focus on the reader's ability to interpret actual texts.

#### CULTURE IN THE "ENCUENTO" SERIES

Along with discussing the literary devices used in the "EnCuento" series of books, this study will discuss culture. In order to explore culture, some characteristics of the series need to be clarified. The series comprises thirty-six different books written by authors from fifteen different countries. In many ways, the books reflect this diversity. Spanish is the primary language spoken in twenty-two countries around the world; thus the vocabulary of the books varies greatly because they reflect regional, cultural and linguistic differences. In several of the EnCuento books words that not all children would understand are defined at the bottom of the page. The cultural variety is even greater because the series book illustrators are, in many cases, not from Latin America or Spain. Often the illustrations depict non-Hispanic cultures.

## CHAPTER 1

### Culture, Style, and Text-Gaps: *Las hermanas*, *Gatico-Gatico*, *El Señor Simplón*

This chapter considers style, culture, and text-gaps of three very basic texts: Senel Paz's *Las hermanas* (1993), Severo Sarduy's *Gatico-Gatico* (1994), and Davi's *El Señor Simplón* (1999). Here I will show three different uses of culture in simple texts. In my reading of *Las hermanas* I will demonstrate how the author depicts a particular country as a setting and how he enriches the story by alluding to specific aspects of Cuban culture. In my analysis of *Gatico-Gatico*, I will discuss how the author presents culture. Finally, in my reading of *El Señor Simplón*, I will show that the author makes very few specific references to any known culture; indeed the world invented for the book has so few cultural references, that it could take place anywhere and at any time. All three stories have bold beautiful illustrations, few characters and simple storylines so they seem to be written for children with beginning reading skills.

Admittedly, selecting books for children of a certain reading level is difficult, but critics and educators must accomplish it nonetheless. Librarians, educators, and parents use their own criteria to choose books. Lesnik-Oberstein calls for more diligence. Using her criteria, books must be studied in terms of their style, vocabulary, characters, and the culture represented in the book (17-22). I used these criteria for grouping the texts in this study. The three books in this first chapter are similar in style and difficulty, yet different from each other in the cultures they portray. I will attempt close readings of the texts in order to discover the point of

view represented, along with other text-gaps that might pose problems for beginning readers.

According to Lesnik-Oberstein, critics must take several factors into account when deciding what books are appropriate for what child. She thus questions “childhood” as a viable general notion because she doubts its existence as portrayed by writers, critics, teachers, and psychologists:

Complexity arises because the reading child of children’s literature is primarily discussed in terms of emotional responses and consciousness. Children’s literature criticism, for instance, actually devotes little systematic discussion (but many random comments) to cognitive issues such as the correspondence between vocabulary levels in books, or to levels of cognitive development thought to be necessary to understanding the content of the book. . . . This is the case even with many teachers’ guides to children’s literature which purport to be able to draw connections between psychological and educative investigations and children’s books. (This exercise, even when it is seriously attempted, is in any case fraught with difficulties, and even in the best cases produces very limited results). (18)

Lesnik-Oberstein’s study of the “notion of childhood” refers to Jacqueline Rose’s *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, which refutes the notion that books are written for “children.” Rose’s main argument is that “children’s literature” is impossible because there is no such thing as a “child” that can be conceptualized using scientific criteria. Accordingly, children can be divided

based on social class, origin, ethnic group, age, intelligence, race, and many other categories that make it impossible to write for “children” (Rose 19). She also states that while authors have created a concept of “childhood,” it does not reflect reality. The image constructed by most authors and critics is of an idealized child.

Peter Hunt, in his study *The Subculture of the Child, the Book and the Critic*, agrees with the objection that Lesnik-Oberstein raises: critics must question whether books said to represent a child’s point of view do that, or whether they actually represent what the adult author believes is a child’s point of view. Child readers may go along with it simply to please adults (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 42-60). Hunt’s, Lesnik-Oberstein’s and Rose’s studies, used in combination with a close reading of these three texts, will illuminate the points of view represented and other text-gaps.

The three books under study are among the most accessible—for the youngest of readers- in the “EnCuento” series. Their vocabulary and storylines are easily understood by beginners: each story moves forward from one point in time directly to a finishing point; there are no complications in the plotline, such as flash-forwards or flashbacks. Action in each story surrounds one main character, there is minimal dialogue, and a large proportion of each of the books is devoted to illustration. In spite of their relative simplicity, these texts’ potential information is not on the actual page but in the reader’s mind. The authors often provide minimal information to engage the reader’s knowledge. Children reading these texts are therefore filling text-gaps, for the most part unconsciously. Robert Pope explains Wolfgang Iser’s idea of textual indeterminacy:

Iser's indeterminacies, gaps or blanks are the basis for what Umberto Eco calls "ghost chapters" and "possible worlds." These terms express what takes place in the reader's imagination when confronted with these gaps. When a text leaves out something and the reader has "to infer what took place during that missing time," he writes a "ghost chapter" or constructs a "possible world" in his head. A "ghost chapter" therefore is a chapter, which is not actually present at the discursive level of the text, but which is needed to complete the text at the level of narrative structure. (184-85)

According to Pope, "possible worlds" readers frequently assemble more than just the minimum necessary to get from one point in the story to another. They may mentally construct many aspects of the story to satisfy their need to fill in the gaps. The filling-in of text-gaps is usually triggered by a structure in the text that provokes a reader to create the story that is not being told. These interpretation-inviting structures include leaps in time and changes in narrative voice or setting. If the story is interesting to the child reader, he or she will want to know what is happening in the other setting or to the other characters that she was introduced to earlier in the text. The child may fill in the text-gaps with any of the infinite possible configurations of information. According to Pope, readers are more likely to construct possible worlds while reading stories in which they are more involved (14).

Iser believes that if every text has an infinite number of interpretations, it is because all texts have multiple response-inviting structures—or telltale gaps. Each



reader may construct a unique interpretation of a text. The “gaps” stimulate meanings that would not otherwise come into existence: “Reading literature gives us the chance to formulate the unformulated” (Iser 287). Examining text-gaps elucidates some of the processes involved in reading and meaning-making. Identifying text-gaps in each of these children’s texts will show how even the simplest of children’s books contain a wealth of response-inviting structures.

### *LAS HERMANAS*

Paz’s *Las hermanas* won the Premio al Arte Editorial, género infantil, 1994, given annually by the Cámara Nacional de la Industria Editorial Mexicana to the best publication of the year according to the Mexican national organization of editors. Author Senel Paz is best known for writing the screenplay of *Fresa y chocolate* (*Strawberry and Chocolate*; 1993), a Cuban film about homosexuality, literature, and efforts to subvert an oppressive socialist government. The film was adapted from Paz’s own short novel *El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo* (*The Wolf, the Woods and the New Man*; La Habana: Edición Homenaje 1991), which won the Juan Rulfo Prize awarded by Radio France International in 1990.

Each of the books in the “EnCuento” series includes a brief introduction to the author and his or her work by the editor, Van Rhijn. The introduction to *Las hermanas* says:

Senel Paz, narrador y cronista de cine, nació en Fomento, Cuba, en 1950. Creció viviendo en pequeños pueblos, lo que refleja en sus relatos, poblados de personajes infantiles rurales y pueblerinos, donde

la naturaleza y los animales suelen ser tan importantes como las personas. El humor, la ternura y la imaginación son constantes en su obra, la cual goza de gran popularidad y aprecio en su país.

[Senel Paz, author of narratives and screenplays, was born in Fomento, Cuba, in 1950. He grew up in small towns, as is reflected in his stories, populated with young rural people, where nature and animals tend to be as important as the people. Humor, tenderness and imagination are constant in his work, which enjoys great popularity and appreciation in his country.] (Borego 5)

The book introductions, like the texts, are directed to a child reader. While each has a different format, all explain in an accessible way the author's writing and life. They serve as brief, generalized prefaces to the books, but more care should be taken in connecting the introduction to the book's content. For instance, in the introduction to *Las hermanas*, Van Rhijn mentions that in Paz's stories, "nature and animals tend to be as important as human characters." While this statement might give young readers a broader view of writing about rural areas, *Las hermanas* is set entirely in interior spaces, devoid of animals and nature. The editor may have been referring to other stories by Senel Paz, as the author says of his youth:

Nací en una clínica de Fomento un día de tormenta, según mi madre. Sólo estábamos allí para eso, de modo que en cuanto escampó cargó conmigo para el campo y hasta los ocho años viví en distintos puntos siguiendo el camino viejo que iba a El Pedrero: Piedra Gorda, Sipiabo. Entonces nos mudamos para Cabaiguán y allá pasamos la guerra. Todo

lo que en mi literatura y memoria es paisaje rural, incluidas las nubes pasando por el cielo, pertenece a Fomento; y todo lo que es urbano o pueblerino, a Cabaiguán. Pertenezco a los campos de Fomento, que son mi paisaje, pero cuando digo mi pueblo me represento a Cabaiguán, pues es ahí donde hice la Primaria, la Secundaria, tuve los primeros amigos, descubrí el cine y la lectura. . . . Yo no soy, sin embargo, un hombre de ciudad. El recuerdo visual más importante de toda mi vida son los campos de Fomento: los árboles, los animales, los ruidos silvestres; la atmósfera es la de Cabaiguán como pueblo. Estos son mis sitios sobre cuales-quieras (sic) otros. Para mí La Habana es el símbolo y resumen de Cuba. De las ciudades lo que más me gusta es la posibilidad del anonimato, de pasar inadvertido, y pasar inadvertido es para mí, siempre ha sido, un regocijo. [I was born in a clinic in Fomento on a stormy day, according to my mother. We were only there for that, so when the storm broke she picked me up and took me to the country and until I was eight I lived in different places along the old road that went to El Pedrero: Piedra Gorda, Sipiabo. Then we moved to Cabaiguán and there we lived during the war. Everything in my literature and my memory that refers to rural landscapes, including the clouds that pass in the sky, belongs to Fomento; and everything that is urban or small town, is Cabaiguán. I belong to the rural settings of Fomento, they are my lands, but whenever I say my town I mean Cabaiguán, because there is where I finished Elementary and High

School, had my first friends, discovered the movies and literature...I am not, however, a city man. The most important visual memories of my life are the scenes of Fomento: the trees, the animals, and the forest sounds; the atmosphere is that of Cabaiguán. These are my places above all others. For me Havana is the symbol and the summary of Cuba. What I most like about cities is the possibility of anonymity, to pass unrecognized, and to pass unrecognized is for me, it always has been, a joy.] (Paz, Nov. 12, 2002 < [www.escambray.islagrande.cu](http://www.escambray.islagrande.cu)>)

*Las hermanas* reflects a number of aspects of the Senel Paz's youth. In fact, one of its most appealing characteristics is that its illustrations and story represent Cuban life, a rare attribute within the "EnCuento" series.

The great majority of the books in this series do not represent life in Spain or Latin America. While the books are all written by Latin American and Spanish authors, there is little about them that make them specifically Hispanic. They are, for the most part, stories that could be set in any country, with protagonists who do not have problems or joys related to a specific Hispanic identity. Instead, they represent a generic, universal notion of childhood. For instance, in most of the "EnCuento" stories, it is difficult to decide where the action actually takes place. The stories have a great variety of settings— urban and rural, modern and historical, real and fictional—yet few stories represent identifiable characteristics of a particular culture. One reason for this could be that while the authors are either Spanish or Latin American, the illustrators are from many other countries. Because within the texts there are few references to actual places in Latin America or Spain,

the illustrators may have taken the license to represent images from their own experience or from a more generic western experience.

Yet Paz's *Las hermanas* does allude to specific Cuban cities, names, and food. One other feature of the story that makes it particularly Latin American is the inclusion of one problem that is especially notable in Latin America: the migrant parent. The story tells of a young boy in Cuba whose mother has left the family to work in La Habana, the country's capital. While she is gone, he remains in the care of his two preteen sisters and his blind grandmother. The boy tells how his sisters have come of age in their mother's absence. His comments show how the girls take care of the house, doing all of the cooking and cleaning while taking care of him and his grandmother.

Children's stories often use a very sharply focused point of view. This focus is often achieved by putting a child character at the story's center; the child sees, feels, and understands. Such a point of view establishes the child reader's relationship to the book. Aidan Chambers notes that for this relationship to work, the text must display an understanding of childhood that is "not just concerned with the nature commonly shared by most children but the diversity of childhood nature too" (*Booktalk* 128).

*Las hermanas* presents a good opportunity to discuss the use of point of view in children's stories in terms of such diversity. The child narrator's problem is personal and specific to him or her, but many children can understand it. Understanding is assisted by a straightforward style and by large colorful illustrations which make the book accessible to the youngest readers. This particular

young male protagonist does not judge so much as report what his sisters do, as if the boy were the one watching his sisters while the mother is gone. He reveals, for instance, that the sisters are not ashamed to ask the grocery store owner for one more week of credit, and he comments that they lie to bill collectors and flirt with the man who brings the electric bill. The boy-narrator presents all of this information in a matter-of-fact way (see Fig. 1).

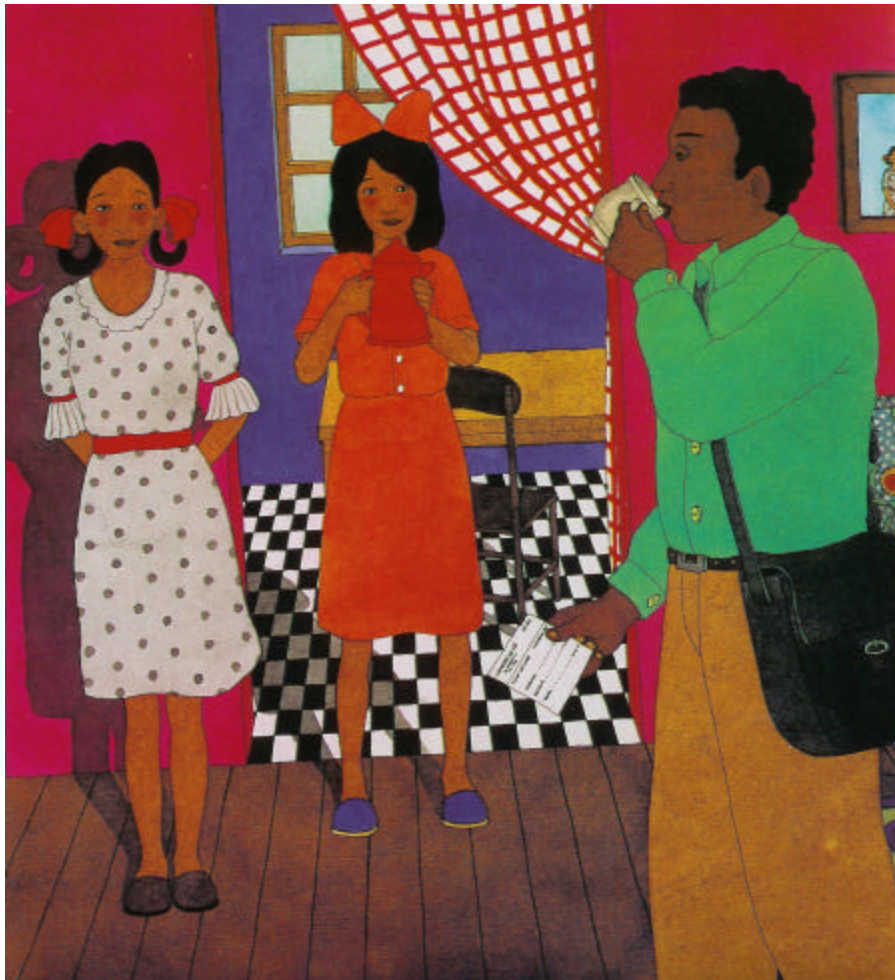


Fig. 1. Claudia de Teresa in Paz, 14.

Aware of the boy's point of view, we can therefore detect a telltale gap in social customs as the author refers to aspects of Cuban life that are unfamiliar to many readers. Among the text-gaps I will discuss are the migrant mother, the girls' sexual maturation, food and social identity, and the extended family.

The setting for *Las hermanas* is an unnamed town a great distance from La Habana. The first line informs the reader of her absence: "En cuanto su madre se fue a trabajar para La Habana ..." [When their mother went to work in La Habana...] (Paz 7). We know the distance is great because the mother lives and works in the capital and is unable to return home at night to stay with her children. Indeed, the absent mother is one of the story's principal themes. The absent mother is a theme of many classic children's stories (including "Cinderella," "Snow White," "The Little Mermaid," "Beauty and the Beast"), but the migrant mother is a twist on the old theme. In *Las hermanas* the mother is living but absent from the home. Therefore, these children, unlike children in classical tales, await their mother's return. The thought of her underlies many of their actions, as evidenced by references to her throughout the book. Each reference is a response-inviting structure, as readers may wonder where the mother is and what she is doing.

Analyzing some specific references to the absent mother will enable a closer examination of the mother-daughter relationship in this book. Trites devotes a chapter of her study to the question of mother-daughter relationships in modern children's literature (100-22). She states that in the majority of children's stories, the relationship is either Freudian or Anti-Freudian, and she explains this concept by using the Oedipal complex as a model for the typical relationship portrayed in

children's stories (101). Thus the daughter has to fight for her independence from her mother so that she can replace her. According to Trites, this view usually favors the child, which for Trites is the embodiment of the ego. Trites describes a study by Adrienne Kertzer that explores the silencing of the mother figure in picture books. The latter's thesis is that mothers are silenced in children's picture books more than any other character type and speculates that this is the "result of the desire to promote children's point of view in literature" (qtd. in Trites 102). In *Las hermanas*, this appears to be true: because of the mother's absence, we see the sisters from the boy's point of view.

The boy views several scenes that allow the reader to formulate an opinion about the mother–daughter relationship in the story. He notes that sometimes the girls place the blame on the mother publicly for not sending enough money to pay the bills. "Le explican al bodeguero que mamá mandará todo el dinero la semana que viene" [They explain to the shopkeeper that mamá will send him all of the money next week] (13). While the sisters consider themselves responsible for the bills, they still have their mother to blame when there is not enough money.

The sisters have obviously established a pattern of telling creditors that their mother is away in the capital. However, the man who comes to collect the electric bill does not care. "Al que cobra la luz sí que no le importa el cuento que mamá está en la Habana" [The one who collects the electric bill does not care about the story that mamá is in Habana] (15). This statement has many layers: It shows that the bill collector has heard the story so many times that he no longer cares. The story about their mother is no longer sufficient for him, as it was for the shopkeeper. And so, for



the man who collects for the electric company, the sisters add to the story. The first sentence goes on to say: “pero las hermanas le guardan café fuerte y cuando llega se ponen tan simpáticas y abuela está tan enferma y yo estoy tan enfermo que entre los dos hemos tomado diez pesos de medicina” [but the sisters save some hot coffee for him and when he comes they act so sweet and abuela is so sick and I am so sick that between the two of us we have taken ten pounds of medicine ] (15). This scene is a progression from the previous scene, which took place in the store. Though the shopkeeper accepted their mother as the culprit, the electric bill collector does not, and so the girls must use other means to appease him. The sentence invites such interpretations as the following: (1) perhaps they begin to tell the bill collector the story of their mother, but it fails, or (2) perhaps by now they have had so many encounters with this man they know they will need to be more persuasive, and so they are ready with coffee and kindness. This scene shows some independence on the girls’ part; now they know they cannot simply rely on their mother to pay the bill, nor can they rely on the story of their mother to appease the collector. They are forced to rely on themselves and their wits.

The absent mother is mentioned in the book several more times. One of the references is to her letters. “Van algunas tardes a casa de tío Anastasio a que él escriba las cartas para mamá, o nos lea las que ella nos manda” [They go some afternoons to uncle Anastasio's house so he can write letters to mamá, or read the ones that she sends us] (21). This reference to the mother makes clear that she is distant from the family and that there are communication barriers between them. She is not at home to communicate with them directly, and they apparently do not

communicate with her by telephone. Instead, they receive her letters, which they can neither read nor reply to without the assistance of someone who lives outside their home. The passage also makes clear the sisters are expected to behave like adults in their mother's absence. There is so little communication possible between mother and sisters that, to continue to run the household the way she did, the girls must rely on memory and tradition to guide them.

The final reference to the mother serves as a bridge to yet another text-gap: the adolescent sisters' sexual maturation. Near the end, the little boy describes what he sees when he walks in on his sisters: "Un día entré de repente y las sorprendí delante del espejo, con los zapatos de tacones de mamá y los labios pintados: asustadas, se echaron a reír" [One day I walked in and surprised them in front of the mirror, with mom's high heels and lipstick on] (25). Here the boy refers to his mother in a different way, upon seeing that his sisters have taken things from her. The illustration on this page shows the little boy entering his mother's room. The girls are in front of the mirror, wearing high heels and putting on makeup (see Fig. 2).

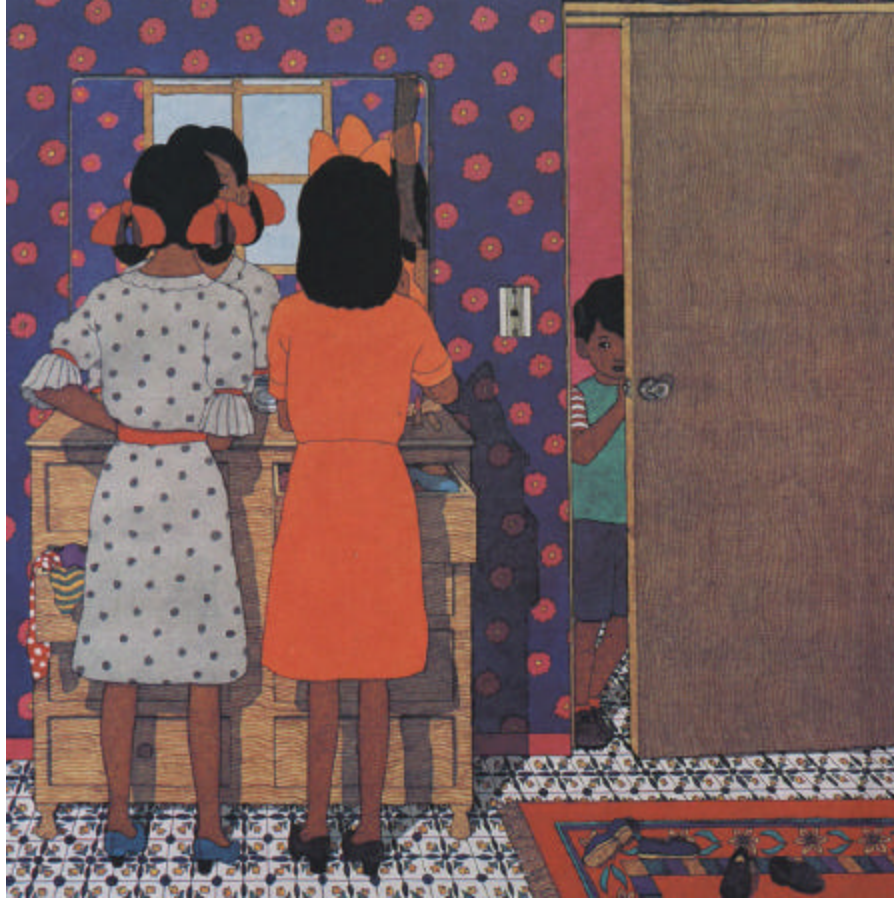


Fig. 2. Claudia de Teresa in Paz, 25.

Readers of this text would consider the illustrations as part of the text since they accurately portray the story through pictures. Pre-readers often experience texts through illustration first, as Barbara Elleman notes:

When evaluating a picture book, one needs to look at literary standards—character, plot, theme setting, viewpoint, and voice—as well as artistic criteria—color, line, shape, texture, composition, perspective and style. But, judging a picture book needs to go farther than that. It means thinking about many aspects such as an illustrator’s purpose in choosing a certain palette or technique, the cultural attributes in the images, and the artwork’s effect on a child. (20)

In *Las hermanas*, text and illustrations work together to tell the same story—something not always true of picture books. All of the previous references to the mother portray her absence and their need for her: to cook, clean, take care of the boy and the grandmother, and pay the bills. This page is different because it shows the girls transforming in physical appearance from children to adults, thus becoming their own mother. They have gone into her room and put on her high-heeled shoes and makeup. From the illustration, however, we can see that the boy is unhappy about his sisters' usurping his mother's things. It is a logical extension to believe, then, that the boy rejects his sisters as a substitute for his mother, an interpretation he confirms at story's end.

The mother–daughter relationship has many Freudian overtones, as the girls seek to replace their mother. The transformation of girls into mother occurs in subtle ways throughout the book. One way is through obvious signs of their sexual maturation, as noted by the boy. Even though he comments on their seemingly strange actions, it is obvious he cannot understand what is happening to them. The book refers variously to development of the girls into adults. Such scenes are focalized by the boy, and he invariably refers to such changes with distaste.

For example, the first such reference occurs early in the story, when the boy makes a list of the things the girls no longer do. The boy says that the sisters “no se juntan con las demás niñas a bailar la suiza porque rompen los zapatos, no juegan con los varones” [they do not get together with the other girls to jump rope, they do not play with boys] (Paz 9). This statement implies that the girls used to play with boys and now they do not. Their brother feels that this change in their relationship to

boys is noteworthy. The boy-narrator also notes the girls' new attraction to boys: "y cuando llega del trabajo el hijo de Felamida a uno le cae mucha risa, y si pasa en bicicleta el muchacho de la carnicería se dan pellizcos por los rincones" [and when Felamida's son comes in from work one of them laughs a lot, and if the butcher's delivery boy passes on bicycle they pinch each other in the corners] (23). The clearest example of the sisters' sexual maturation is the difference between the way they treat the bill collector and the way they treat the shopkeeper. When the bill collector comes to the house, they give him coffee and act sweetly, instead of paying the bill (15). The illustration on this page shows one of the girls blushing and the other locked in eye contact with the bill collector.

One dichotomy related to family structures in this story is the difference between children and adults. Here the boy represents childhood; the mother, adulthood; and the sisters, the bridge between the two. The illustrations support the idea that the girls are maturing in the course of the story because the girls appear to be very young in the illustrations: one wears braids, and they both wear hair bows. If in fact they are very young, then their maturation can be seen as premature, precipitated by their mother's absence.

According to Jung, triads involving the three ages of goddesses are a pre-Christian archetype. In Greek mythology, Jung found, the ages of women were symbolized by the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone. The Maiden, the most youthful of the triad, is post-pubescent and searching for a mate; Mother symbolizes nurturing, caring, fertility and power. Crone, an elderly woman past the period of fertility, is wise and counsels both Mother and Maiden (Gray 162). These three ages

of women are represented in *Las hermanas*. The Crone is embodied by the grandmother, who is blind and cannot care for the children (see Fig. 3). The children's relationship with her is one of mutual care: They feed her, administer her medicine, and take her outside to "coger fresco al patio" [get fresh air on the patio] (Paz 7). The grandmother, on the other hand, is the only character who has a connection to the family's past and tradition. She tells the girls stories and allows them to rummage through the attic and admire her old treasures, even though this makes her nervous: "De todos modos, abuela tiembla cuando las oye sacando de su baúl los vasos floreados que le regaló el abuelo el día de la boda, los platos que le trajo en el primer aniversario, la máquina de moler carne que se la compró antes de casados" [In any case, grandmother trembles when she hears them taking out of her chest: the flowered vases that grandfather gave her on their wedding day, the dishes he brought her on their first anniversary, the meat grinder he bought her before they were married] (17).

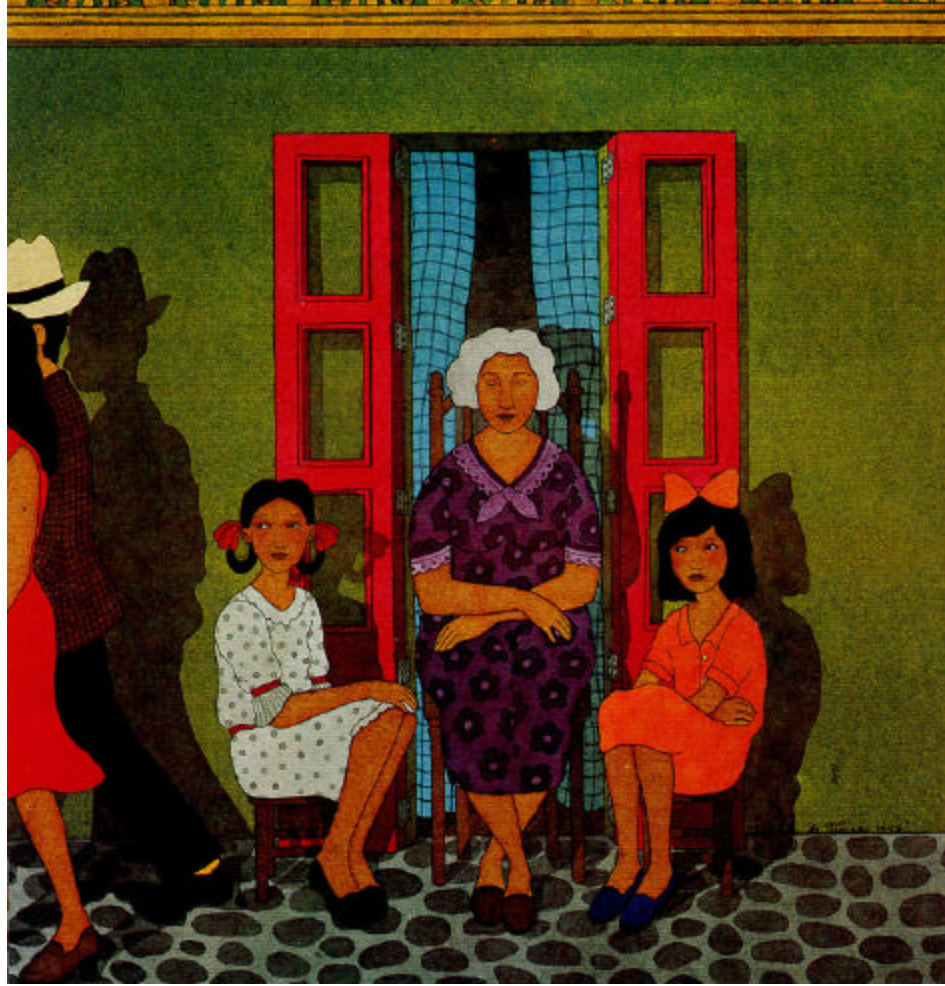


Fig. 3. Claudia de Teresa in Paz, 10.

In *Las hermanas*, the children must endure poverty, sometimes borrowing food and frequently being unable to pay bills. Taking this into account, the items their grandmother saves in her chest may appear frivolous, and yet they are the children's last connection to their past and to their late grandfather. The anecdotes the grandmother tells allude to better times in the family: perhaps the family was more stable before the Revolution. However, since the story makes no mention of the Castro regime, the Revolution, or politics, these are text-gaps, too. While young child readers may have no context for questioning why the family situation has

changed, older, more informed readers may fill in text-gaps by providing reasons for the current economic status of the family.

One particular passage tells of how the grandmother gives her engagement ring and earrings to the sisters “con el encargo que nunca las pierdan, pues esa sortijita fue de su abuela y las dormilonas ni sabe a qué vieja por ahí para atrás pertenecieron, y ambas cosas están nuevecitas” [with the order to never lose them, because that ring was her grandmother’s and the earrings, no one even knows who they used to belong to way back when, and both of them look like new] (19). The boy, without judgment, makes these comments. While alluding to a past that was more affluent, he provides no commentary on the current situation, much less in comparison to the past. The grandmother’s role in the story as matriarch of the family therefore connects the girls to their past: the history of their family and the history of their country. She supports tradition, teaches the girls, and encourages them in their new roles within the family.

Food is a signifier of social identity, position within the family structure, gender roles, cultural identity, and sexual maturation. Food in the text is specifically Cuban. The girls learn to cook *sofrito*, rice, and *natilla de chocolate*. Food and cooking not only symbolize the change in the sisters from girls to adolescents but are also used to help in their seduction of the bill collector. Cooking is, in fact, the first of the chores mentioned among the new things the sisters do now that their mother has left: “Cocinan, lavan, planchan” [They cook, they wash, they iron] (7). There is a great difference between the way adults and children relate to food in this book. Adults buy and prepare the food, and children consume the food. The girls,



who are becoming adults, are the ones who purchase the food, prepare the food, and even eat last: “Nos sirven primero a abuela y a mí” [First, they serve abuela and me] (9). This order shows respect and maturity on their part; by serving the grandmother’s and little boy’s plates first, the sisters are showing deference to them.

The boy indicates that his sisters no longer fight over who will be allowed to scrape and eat the crusty rice from the bottom of the pan. “Ya no lloran por ponerse la mejor bata ni comerse las raspas del arroz” [Now they do not whine to put on the best dresses or to eat the crusty rice at the bottom of the pan] (9). In cultures where rice is a staple, some people prefer the hard rice at the bottom of the pan. This is a text-gap that some children in countries where rice is not a staple would not understand.

Food also connects the girls to their grandmother, their history, and their Cuban identity. In the story, the grandmother helps them with their cooking. “Ella a veces les cuenta alguna historia y les explica cómo se hace el sofrito y lo difícil que es que el arroz salga bien, ni duro ni en pelotas” [She sometimes tells them stories and she explains how to make sofrito and how difficult it is to get the rice to come out right, not dry or clumpy] (11). Not only is rice a staple in Cuba, but *sofrito* is a particularly Cuban food. Made with onions, green peppers, and garlic cooked into a paste, *sofrito* is used as flavoring in many meals. It would not be uncommon for families to have *sofrito* prepared in order to have it on hand to use every day. By learning to make *sofrito*, the girls remain closely connected to their Cuban heritage.

Early in the story, the boy refers to neighbors’ borrowing salt or onions, making reference to their generosity, saying that the girls “saben cuánto deben dar si

son las vecinas las que no tienen cebollas o sal” [they know how much to give the neighbors when they do not have enough onions or salt] (9). This shows that the girls have obtained the knowledge expected of those who are in charge of households. It also marks a pattern that has been established in their family of sharing with others. Perhaps their mother shared, so they know they must share even while she is gone and they are in difficult straits. Their changing relationship toward food and cooking marks the girls’ passage onto adulthood. Using food to connect with their neighbors, learning to cook, manipulating the electric bill collector with food and care, and serving their brother and their grandmother first are all ways of demonstrating their ability to run the home. The text invites interpretation through its multiple cultural text-gaps, such as the absent mother, the boy’s point of view, and the relationships of the characters to food.

### *GATICO-GATICO*

Our second story is authored by another Cuban author, Severo Sarduy, but unlike *Las hermanas*, his book offers no direct references to Cuban culture. While *Gatico-Gatico* does make specific cultural references, the author’s intent is not to refer to a particular country but to show preference for a type of culture. This work, like *Las hermanas*, has multiple response-inviting structures.

The introduction states:

“Gracias por la alegría que me han dado al pensar en mí para este cuento. Tanto escribirlo como leerlo después, imitando las voces de los personajes, fueron un constante placer.”

Severo Sarduy, escritor nacido en Camagüey, Cuba, en 1937. A partir de 1960 se estableció en París, dedicándose tanto a escribir poesía como crítica artística y literaria. Por su deslumbrante lenguaje barroco, se dice que era un millonario en palabras. Murió en 1993 a los 56 años de edad. *Gatico-Gatico* es un texto inédito y el único que Severo Sarduy escribió para niños. Reproducimos las palabras con las que acompañó el envío de este maravilloso cuento que, tan gentil y generosamente, accediera a realizar especialmente para la colección *En-Cuento* poco antes de morir. [“Thank you for the happiness you have given me by thinking of me to write this story. Both the writing of it as well as the reading of it afterwards, imitating the voices of the characters, gave me such pleasure.” Severo Sarduy, writer born in Camagüey, Cuba, in 1937. After 1960 he lived in Paris, dedicating this time to writing poetry as well as literary and art criticism. Because of his dazzling baroque language, he has been called a millionaire of words. He died in 1993 at the age of 56. *Gatico-Gatico* is an unpublished text and Severo Sarduy’s only children’s story. We have included the words here that accompanied his story that he graciously

agreed to write especially for the EnCuento series shortly before his death.] (6)

In Sarduy's story, when a small cat is born, his parents christen him "Gatico-Gatico" because of his diminutive size. The cat leads a difficult life with his family and finally decides to move away, hoping that his fortune will change. He not only leaves his home but also abandons civilization: he crosses a river and begins his exile in the jungle. He soon finds that he is still subjected to discrimination because of his size. In the jungle, after much harsh treatment from other animals, he finds a mentor in an owl who hears him crying one day and tries to help him. When the owl learns that the cat is named Gatico-Gatico, he immediately pronounces this name to be the source of all of his troubles. The owl renames the cat "Gatón-Supergatón." It is then that the cat's life begins to change; he grows into a huge cat, in fact becoming the very cat immortalized by Botero in his sculpture in Paris's Champs-Élysées and other world cities.

*Gatico-Gatico* is a modern fable, told using animal characters who have human traits and who overcome obstacles and learn from experience. Like all fables, this story has a moral, which provides direct instructions about the lesson to be learned by the reader: "Hay que pensar mucho antes de hablar para escoger siempre la palabra justa" [You must think before you speak in order to choose the exact word] (23). Fables are always didactic, and this one teaches about the power of words and their importance in life.

"Animal Stories," Keith Barker's history of the fable, states that while Aesop's fables were not originally written for children, they were adapted for

children in their first English translation by Craxton in 1484 (282). He mentions that John Newbery, for whom the Newbery prize is named, popularized adapting the genre by including several of Aesop's fables in his 1744 collection of stories for children. Barker believes that the long tradition of using animal characters and fables as a common format for children's stories stems from the shared privileged position of both children and animals in western society (282). In Spanish children's literature there is the same tradition of adapting fables for children. In her two-volume collection of children's stories, *Historia de la literatura infantil española*, Carmen Bravo-Villasante includes stories from *Calila y Dimna*, a collection of Spanish medieval fables (Bravo-Villasante 2).

Barker notes further that "Early children's books used animals as a device which is still employed today in modern children's stories. Animals in this type of story are portraits of human characteristics to young readers in a way that they will not find threatening or disturbing but which will teach them a lesson in human (rather than animal) nature" (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 283). This assertion seems altogether obvious to the adult reader: Sarduy's story is meant to analyze human, not cat, behavior. The message is subtler to children, and they may be more accepting of it because of its subtlety.

An actual moral written separately at the end of the text marks a story as didactic. Even young readers recognize the moral as instructions to be followed by them, not the cat. Through the moral, the author makes clear that nothing in his work is random; he makes specific choices: a protagonist who goes into exile to break away from persecution, an escape to a profoundly different environment, an

epiphany, growth, a return to society, social triumph, and finally persistent self-doubt.

The tiny cat leaves home to escape his problems, echoing a choice in Sarduy's own life when he went into exile from his home country of Cuba. While the tiny cat chooses the jungle as his refuge, Sarduy chose Paris. In the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, Daniel Balderston reports that Sarduy "received a fellowship from the new government to study art in Paris in 1959; after the fellowship expired, he stayed, preferring self-exile to the repression he would have suffered in Cuba as a homosexual and a writer" (135). The cat's banishment is also self-exile to escape repression. When the cat finally decides to leave home, it is to escape: "Tantas eran las confusiones debidas a su tamaño que Gatico-Gatico tuvo que escapar de ese mundo de gigantes y se fue muy lejos de su casa, muy lejos" [There were so many confusions because of his size that Gatico-Gatico had to escape from this world of giants and he went very far away from his house, very far] (Sarduy 13). This is where his adventure begins; like many other characters in fables, the cat must overcome a number of tasks before he can return home. The first obstacle is crossing a river; being a cat, he is afraid of water. Dismayed to find that his new chosen home is violent and dangerous, he manages several close escapes from death. The last is an encounter with an eagle who mistakes him for a mole. This experience leaves him in tears, the tragic state in which he is found by the owl that will change his life.

Structurally, the story is written in the format of all pure animal fables according to Vladimir Propp: introduction, trauma, turning point, climax, and

resolution (332). The meeting with the owl is the story's turning point, and the change of Gatico-Gatico's name is the climax that leads to the resolution when the cat begins a new, happier life.

In Sarduy's text, civilization is preferred to the jungle, a fact we confirm by textual analysis of the treatment of the two environments. There are differences between the life Gatico-Gatico leads before exile and the life he leads during exile. He prefers home life, but he must leave home to appreciate what he has been missing. For instance, the text shows home to be a nurturing place where he is cuddled by his mother: “. . . preguntaba la madre gato inquieta, mientras le ponía un abrigo de lana para que no cogiera frío y lo mecía suavemente entre sus brazos” [asked the mother cat nervously while she put on his wool sweater so that he wouldn't get cold and rocked him gently in her arms] (Sarduy 7). On the other hand, while in exile, he has no friends until he meets the owl who changes his name. The objects and surroundings described in his home are much more pleasant: “Si jugaba en un sillón, desaparecía bajo los cojines” [If he played on the couch he disappeared beneath the cushions] (9). In exile, the jungle is described as harsh and dangerous: “Había troncos tan filosos y protuberantes que parecían querer atrapar en sus garras de madera a todo el que pasara por allí. Las hojas lanceoladas y amenazantes eran espadas prestas al combate. Las frágiles lianas: una trabazón de sogas que en cualquier momento podía atarlo” [the fragile vines: a thicket of ropes ready to trap him at any moment] (15). Sarduy's works are known for their “new baroque language.” In describing the forest, Sarduy shows he is not pardoning his young readers. The vocabulary is difficult: dense with layered meanings, specific

adjectives, symbolism, and allusions to visual tricks. Using the poetic device of personification, the author transforms the jungle into a psychological nightmare for the small cat character (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Patricio Gómez in Sarduy, 14.

At the same time, the words and surroundings are unfamiliar and alienating to the reader. Even Sarduy's vocabulary choices show a preference for the home world. Before the above description, the omniscient narrator notes immediately that the world of the jungle "no era más clemente que el de su casa" [it was not more calm than his house] (15). The description of the threatening environment evokes emotions felt by the cat and his sympathetic reader. Because an omniscient narrator, who has more authority than the small cat, tells the story, the reader may internalize some of the cat's fears. Had the cat himself described his environment as



threatening, his reaction might be dismissed because of the paranoia he displays in all of his surroundings. But having the narrator describe the jungle, undoubtedly focalized by the cat, gives this description more credibility in the reader's eyes.

As in all adventure tales (Greek heroes Hercules, Jason, and Odysseus are examples), the hero must venture out into the world to prove himself. Only then can he return home. Sarduy calls the cat's exile an *hazaña*, an adventure, and the story follows the hero's pattern as well: the cat struggles at home, goes into exile, changes his tragic flaw, and then returns, triumphant: "Así, gigantesco y egipcio, volvió a su país natal y fue admirado por todos" [Like that, giant and Egyptian, he went back to his native country and was admired by all] (23). But there is a twist to this hero's tale: upon seeing himself immortalized in sculpture by Botero, the cat expresses self-doubt. "Se preguntó, en el fondo de su alma gatuna, si no deseaba aún ser un gatico, una miniatura de gato, para que su madre le pusiera un abrigo de lana y lo meciera entre sus brazos" [He asked himself, deep down in his little cat soul, if he did not still long to be a tiny cat, a miniature of a cat, so that his mother could put a wool sweater on him and rock him in her arms] (23).

The moral itself ("Moraleja: hay que pensar mucho antes de hablar para escoger siempre la palabra justa") is one of the most complicated text-gaps of the story. The reader must first trust that the moral is truly an important message from an authority figure. Contrary to the straight didactic nature of fables, this tale provides a moral that in itself is a response-inviting structure. Perhaps the moral refers to the name the father chose for his baby. Had the father lived by the moral exposed by the story, then he would have thought about the curse he was putting on

his son by naming him “Tiny Cat.” It seems the owl follows the moral: he chooses exactly the name that will change the cat’s life; yet, even after the great transformation caused by this new baptism, the cat still has doubts. The moral, then, may invite the old gypsy curse “Be careful what you ask for or you may get it.” The tiny cat thinks all of his problems would be resolved if he were bigger, and yet he finds that, upon growing, he misses being small. If this final interpretive response is in fact what the author intended, it is a brilliant lesson for a children’s book. It teaches the reader, among a multitude of other lessons, to appreciate what he or she has at the moment. Even so, the story is written with multi-layered language that contains a number of lessons and indeterminacies. It seems that Sarduy’s adopting the structure of the fable is his attempt to mimic a didactic form of children’s literature, to suggest that the message is simple—distilled into one italicized line—when in fact he uses the structure to complicate the message purposefully.

According to Peter Hunt, critics must understand that picture books are anything but simple. If anything, they are more complex because there is the added element of illustration to be interpreted. He adds:

The stylistic-linguistic approach to children’s literature points out the inevitable complexity of texts. This is no more obvious than in the case of the picture book—where it is often assumed that pictures are in some way “easier” to interpret than words. As Scott McCloud points out in his book—it is “nothing short of incredible” that the human mind can understand icon-symbolic representations or abstractions from reality, as readily as it does. Picture books cannot help but be polyphonic; even

the “simplest” require complex interpretive skills. What is missing is a complex interpretive vocabulary as exists for words. . .

Underestimating the picture-book is tantamount to underestimating the “child” as reader. (8-9)

If we assume with Hunt that *Gatico-Gatico* is indeed “polyphonic,” we can try to decode what the two voices of author and illustrator are saying in order to determine whether they are transmitting the same message. One of the author’s principal messages, already analyzed through textual examination, is his preference for civilization over the jungle. A closer look at the illustrations makes it apparent that the illustrator assists the author’s objective. Upon comparing the illustrations of the jungle and of Paris, one notes a great disparity. In the first jungle illustration, the tiny cat is barely visible (14). The surroundings are dark and threatening, and he is the smallest animal pictured on the page, nearly a quarter of the size of the butterfly. In contrast, after his transformation, in the final illustration, the cat’s statue is pictured on a bright and sunny day in Paris; while people look at it and smile peacefully (22) (see Fig. 7). Though these illustrations are a good reflection of the author’s attitude in the text toward the two different environments, the illustrator is not always faithful to the text.

Another nexus where text and illustration meet is the descriptions of the animals, compared to their illustrations. According to Barker, there are several kinds of animal stories. In some of those in which animals interact with humans, such as E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* (1952), they coexist in a normal way—humans do not know that animals can talk. However, in other animal stories, such as Arnold

Lobel's *Frog and Toad Are Friends* (1970), animals exist without any human interaction, and are anthropomorphic characters themselves. Yet another type is those stories in which animals act like humans and humans know it. For example, in Beatrix Potter's stories, the rabbits wear clothing and live in a burrow decorated like a home. When Mr. McGregor confronts the rabbits, he doesn't deem it strange that rabbits in his garden should wear clothing (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 283-85). Like Potter, then, Sarduy combines styles, and he has anthropomorphic animals interact with humans, who in turn take no notice of the animals' clothing. Like Peter Rabbit, Gatico-Gatico is terrorized by humans, in his case by neighborhood children: "Pero lo peor fueron los niños del vecindario. Otro día, como Gatico-Gatico dormía un sueño tan profundo que había olvidado ronronear, creyeron que era un juguete de peluche y lo envolvieron en un papel para regalo adornado con estrellas y flores" [But the worst were the neighborhood children. One day, as Gatico-Gatico slept so deeply he forgot to purr, they thought he was a stuffed animal and wrapped him up in wrapping paper decorated with stars and flowers] (11). His first interaction with humans is violent (Fig. 5). The only other time humans are pictured is at the end of the book, when tourists admire the cat sculpture on the Champs-Élysées. Apparently, their change in attitude comes with his change in size (Fig. 7).



Fig. 5. Patricio Gómez in Sarduy, 10.

Chambers discusses the different degrees of anthropomorphism in children's stories and their effectiveness in terms of an implied reader. He notes that the most effective characters often retain traits of the animal while accurately portraying human emotions (*Booktalk* 42). *Gatico-Gatico* demonstrates this with great skill. The cat is a cat: he is afraid of water, loves the smell of fish, purrs and meows. But he also has many specifically human traits: he is riddled with self-doubt, is insulted by insinuations about his diminutive stature, and displays a bevy of other human

anxieties. The mixing of human and animal traits in characters is quite common in fables. Barker notes that this kind of anthropomorphism can be seen in Beatrix Potter's stories. Oddly, in Potter, the animals' human traits are most evident from the illustrations, as described by Nicholas Tucker: "In all her stories, in fact, Beatrix Potter describes a half-human, half-animal world, populated by partly-clothed animal characters that have titles and surnames. . . . This type of ambiguity enables her characters to flit between human and animal roles, according to the needs of the plot" (286).

This ambiguity is present in Sarduy's text, but is oddly not represented in the illustrations: "El padre gato, gordón y vestido de cuello y corbata para el bautismo, movió sus bigotones y tocándose la sien derecha con una pata, declaró. . ." [The father cat, fat and dressed in a collar and tie for the baptism, moved his whiskers and touching his right temple with a paw, declared...(7). The illustration that accompanies this page shows the cat parents without clothing (see Fig. 6). But anthropomorphism occurs through the progression of the sentence. First, it is noted that the father cat is fat and dressed in human collar and tie. The second part of the sentence says he moved his *bigotones*, which could mean his whiskers but evokes an image of the father's moustache. But in the third part of the sentence, the father cat touches his temple with his paw, a uniquely cat appendage. In one sentence, the character's complexity is fully revealed.



Fig. 6. Patricio Gómez in Sarduy, 6.

In Beatrix Potter's books, the illustrated animals all have human clothing and homes, thus matching the text, because the same person is both author and illustrator. In Sarduy's text, however, the illustrator, Patricio Gómez, chose not to portray the animals the way they appear in the text. In none of the illustrations do the cats wear clothing, even though the text makes three references to the clothing worn by the cats.

In his introduction to Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), W. W. Robson notes that in children's books with animals, even in Kipling's children's classic, there is usually a preference for the human over the animal world. The jungle is viewed as the training ground for real life in civilization. Upon this dynamic Robson reflects:

Mowgli spends his whole life among animals. But as he approaches manhood he begins to find that he is not like the animals. . . . Mowgli has passed through a preliminary training which in many ways is like that suitable to animals. But there comes a time when he must move beyond his animal brothers and realize the truth about himself, and accept the responsibility of being a man, and the recognition sets him apart. (285)

Like Mowgli, then, Gatico-Gatico proves himself in the jungle only to return home, to the world of “men,” which, as in *The Jungle Book*, is the preferable setting.

Sarduy prefers civilization not only in order to complete the circle the hero sets out on, but also to show his own preference for high culture. The cat does not just return home to a neighborhood, where he began, but returns to civilization: no less than Paris’s boulevard Champs Élysées. There is no doubt this is where the cat will spend eternity: in one of the world’s most famous cities, on its most famous street, immortalized as a respected, permanent, and imposing art form—a sculpture—and by Botero, no less. (The choice of sculptor could be a bow to Latin America, as Botero is Colombian.) The formerly tiny cat will remain there, as a sculpture, alongside many other famous sculptures in the world, all of which also reside (some in exile) in Paris (see Fig. 7).





Fig. 7. Patricio Gómez in Sarduy, 22.

The reader may see that art transcends emotions and even life itself. This transcendence is obvious in many ways, as the cat notes a permanent image of himself reflected in the sculpture. No matter how he feels about himself in the end, people will remember him as the robust cat from the sculpture. This book may be children's first exposure to Sarduy, as it was his only children's book. Ironically, by the time it was published, he had already died. What remains of the author is his

writing—showing the child reader in a very palpable way that art does transcend life.

### *EL SEÑOR SIMPLÓN*

The last of our three books is very different from the previous two. It is the only one by an author, Davi (David Zabay Caballero), who writes predominantly for children. In *El Señor Simplón*, the world of the book has been created for this story, and the references to any known culture are minimal, giving the book a universal quality. Señor Simplón could hail from nearly anywhere, and is just as likely to be from nowhere. He is a very improbable character. At the same time, he is very sympathetic and sure to endear children to him.

The story is about a delicate, thin man who lives a trouble-free life. The author shows this simplicity by saying that Señor Simplón lives in a round house so that he doesn't have to sweep the corners (6). He hangs up everything he needs in his armoire: bed, mirror, pan, blanket, and comb—to comb the one hair on his head (9; see Fig. 8). The happy protagonist washes his hair with juices from fruits and vegetables in the hope that he will grow two more hairs for a braid, but to no avail (13). Author Davi makes few assumptions about what a child reader can understand without explanation or description. This demonstrates the author's attitude toward the child reader and gives insight into the type of implied reader he seeks: a very young reader who enjoys nonsensical humor.

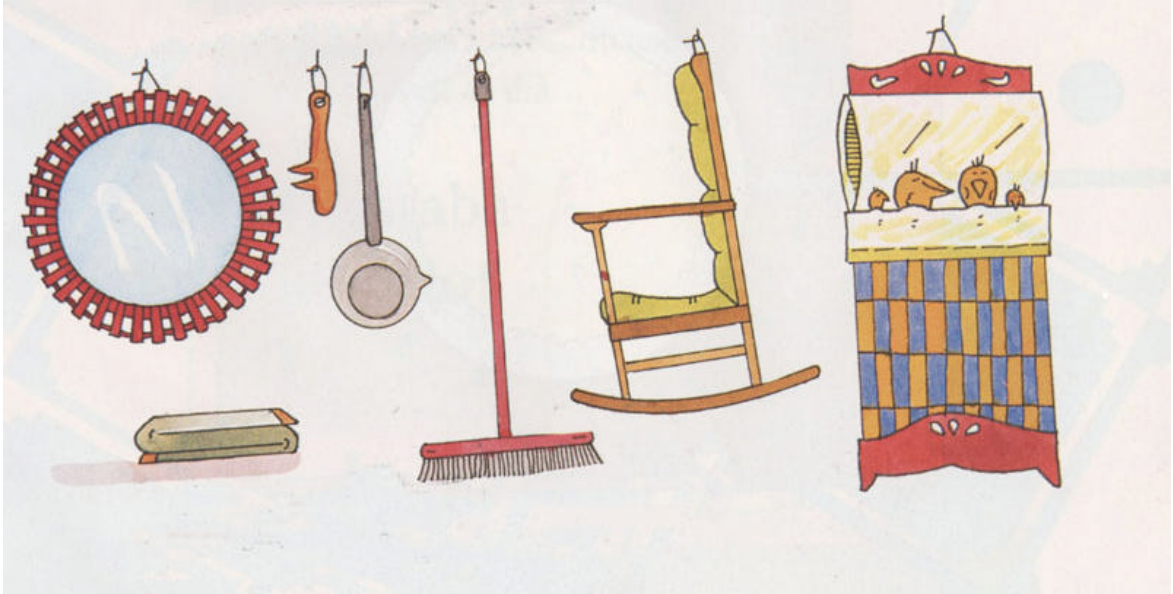


Fig. 8. Davi, 9.

*El Señor Simplón* is written from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, who takes the side of the protagonist. Aidan Chambers argues that children expect the narrator to be on the side of the child in the book (*Booktalk* 43). From the opening sentence, we can tell from the narrator's word choice and characterization of the protagonist that the narrator likes him. "El Señor Simplón era cándido, torpito y muy delicado." [Mr Simpleton was candid, clumsy and very delicate]. The editor footnotes the word "torpito," defining it as "torpe, de manera cariñosa", which indicates that he is clumsy but in a sweet way. Words in the "EnCuento" series are often defined in footnotes, not just to help beginning readers but also because Spanish words have different regional meanings. So while "torpe" can mean awkward in a socially debilitating way, it is clear here that the diminutive is meant to connote Señor Simplón's fragile nature. This characterization gives him a childlike quality and at once endears him to the reader.

An effective aspect of Davi's style is the way he uses situational humor to connect the reader to the story. There are "inside jokes" in this story, in the sense that author and reader have knowledge of the world the protagonist does not possess, owing to his simple mind. For example, Señor Simplón eats only once a day because he heats up his soup on a blanket, which takes a long time (11). The child reader knows that this is an inefficient method of heating food. On the day Señor Simplón decides to braid shoelaces into his hair, he removes the soup from the blanket before he leaves his home so that the soup will not boil while he is out. Even the young reader realizes that soup will not boil on a blanket; this is an example of why this text is so appealing to children—the reader is in on the jokes. The inside joke, a common trope in children's literature, serves to build a relationship between author and reader.

Another aspect of the book's simple style is its familiar format. Readers know that stories often present a problem situation, followed by failed attempts to solve the problem, and ending with a resolution. This is the format many fairy tales, fables and parables follow. In *El Señor Simplón*, the protagonist wishes to braid hair. After three failed attempts at growing his hair, he decides to use shoelaces to make a braid. As he runs to the store to buy shoelaces, he catches his one hair on the door, which breaks it into three pieces, two of which fall to the ground (see Fig. 9). He returns home and makes a braid with his three remaining pieces.

Young readers recognize patterns in literature and are comforted by their familiarity. As children develop as readers, they understand more complex literature that deviates from established patterns. They must have read basic texts in order to

appreciate complicated texts more fully. Once they appreciate these patterns, they understand the irony and parody present in the “EnCuento” texts, as discussed in a later chapter.

As fictitious as Señor Simplón seems to be, the author claims his source was a real person. In the introduction, Davi explains how he met him: “Una mañana de mucho calor, en un pueblecito de Australia llamado Ouldabinna, Davi conoció al conmovedor señor Simplón.



Fig. 9. Davi, 20.

Fue entonces cuando decidió escribir esta historia” [One very hot morning, in a little town in Australia named Ouldabinna, Davi met Mr. Simpleton, and that was when he decided to write this story] (Davi 1).

In our first two stories, *Las hermanas* and *Gatico-Gatico*, there are multiple references to the cultures described. In *Las hermanas*, for example, the modern family and the references to Cuba identify the setting as a particular time and place. In *Gatico-Gatico*, Sarduy provides detailed descriptions of both jungle and civilization, as specific as a particular street name in Paris. *El Señor Simplón*, however, makes only minimal reference to any real-world objects that would allow the reader to know the story’s setting. In his description of the supposedly real Señor Simplón, Davi reveals the city and country names where he met him, and even describes the weather there. He is vague about references to the culture in the story most likely because he is leaving all of the background open to interpretation. If the author invents a world but does not give it adequate description, s/he creates a text-gap the reader will be eager to fill. Throughout the book, there are only two details of the world outside Señor Simplón’s house. The first is that he lives in a desert where, of course, it never rains, and cactuses abound. The second is a strange reference in context: Señor Simplón asks a priest to baptize him so that his hair will grow. “¡Incluso llegó a bautizarse tres veces!, creyendo que el agua bendita haría crecer su trenza. Hasta que el padre Ramón le dijo enfadado que ya estaba bien, que bautizarse no era como ir a la playa. Y el señor Simplón que nunca había visto el mar, no pudo entender las palabras del padre Ramón.” [He even went to get baptized three times, thinking that holy water would make his braid grow! Until one day when

Father Ramon angrily told him that getting baptized is not like going to the beach. And Mr. Simpleton, who had never seen the ocean, did not understand what Father Ramon meant] (17). This passage is the only reference in the book to Señor Simplón's contact with other humans. Sadly, the scene shows that the protagonist does not communicate well. But this same interaction does contain another inside joke. The reader probably understands what the priest means when he says: "getting baptized is not like going to the beach," but Señor Simplón does not.

Several aspects of this story—a fantastic imaginary world with a fabricated, albeit sparse, setting; nonsensical thought patterns of an impossibly simple protagonist; inside jokes with the reader—are response-inviting structures that add to the young reader's enjoyment.

At first glance, *Las hermanas*, *Gatico-Gatico*, and *El Señor Simplón* appear to be simple children's books because each has bright illustrations, large-print text, simple vocabulary, strong protagonists, and linear plots. Yet they are all complex for different reasons, such as their narrative structures and voices, textual patterns, and text-gaps. The one characteristic they do have in common is an abundance of response-invitations that cause readers to invent possible scenarios to fill the gaps. Each book depends on an authoritative narrative structure that provides enough guidance to give it credence. In each, readers depend on text-gaps the author creates to lead them to respond. All three have a measure of "side taking," which at first endears the reader and then compels him or her to remain interested in the protagonists. In many instances, the interest will be strong enough to make the reader wish to know what happens to characters between scenes, or after the story is

over, compelling readers to invent “possible worlds” and become the writers of new tales.

Of the entire “EnCuento” series, these three texts are the simplest; the two treated in our next chapter are among the most difficult. I shall then examine irony in two texts, Álvaro Mutis’s *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hammelin* and Francisco Serrano’s *Los vampiritos y el profesor*. The implied reader of in both texts requires greater reading knowledge. The reader must possess the sophistication to understand irony and metaphor in literature so that the text-gaps created by those devices interest them.



## CHAPTER 2

Irony: Álvaro Mutis's *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hammelin* and  
Francisco Serrano's *Los vampiritos y el profesor*

This chapter examines irony in Álvaro Mutis's *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hammelin* (1994) and in Francisco Serrano's *Los vampiritos y el profesor* (1998). Both texts postulate an implied reader with a higher level of reading knowledge than the ones studied in the last chapter. The reader these texts seek must be willing to follow involved storylines and must possess the sophistication to navigate the text-gaps created by a number of narrative devices. By analyzing the content of these stories, we can discuss how their implied readers are able to comprehend the use of abstract concepts. I intend to show how the first story most likely will not be appreciated or understood by most children, and how the second is more appropriate and enjoyable for children.

### MUTIS'S *LA VERDADERA HISTORIA DEL FLAUTISTA DE HAMMELIN*

Álvaro Mutis (Colombia, 1923) is a poet and novelist who has lived in Mexico since 1956. Because of his alleged misuse of funds from Esso (Standard Oil), the multinational company, he was forced to leave Colombia. Upon recommendation by Luis Buñuel, among others, Mutis was hired by a publicity firm to promote television commercials (Mutis *Diario de Lecumberri* 4). After only three years in Mexico, the authorities jailed him for the misuse of funds charge. Mutis claims that his fifteen-month incarceration changed profoundly his understanding of human

suffering. His personal letters to Elena Poniatowska document his time in Lecumberri Prison. In them he notes that cruelty and good can be found in equal measure both in jail and in the outside world (Mutis 7). After his incarceration, Mutis spent twenty-three years as the director of sales in Latin America for Columbia Pictures. With help from Octavio Paz, he established himself as an author in Mexico. Since 1988, he has written one book a year and has received a number of awards for his work internationally, including the 2001 Cervantes Prize.

Much of Mutis's work for the adult audience deals with cruelty and violence. His recurring protagonist, Maqroll el Gaviero, has been called an "anti-protagonist" because of his lack of human feeling and emotion (Stavans 2). This trait is also evident in Mutis's first book for children, *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hamelin*. "EnCuento" series editor Patricia Van Rhijn writes that when she asked Mutis to write a children's book, he responded that he was not interested because he hated children. She nevertheless persuaded him to write the book, and three days later he sent her a story. According to Van Rhijn, the story went through minimal editing before it was published. The editor's introduction says: "En esta recreación del cuento clásico, el autor trastoca los valores convencionales y convierte en víctima al villano, a través de un negro y agudísimo sentido del humor en que la crueldad se vuelve fin a ironía y comicidad" [In this re-creation of the classic tale, the author flips conventional values, converting the villain into the victim, using dark humor which turns out to be ironic and funny] (1).

Mutis's story begins in a small hamlet in medieval Germany, where a shoemaker suffers because of the town children's incessant questions. To escape his

suffering so that he can live and work in peace, he devises a plan to exterminate all the children in his hamlet by incinerating them in the baker's oven. Yet the shoemaker's happiness is short-lived, since more children are born months later. Thus he leaves that town for another one, where he employs another original method for ridding the town of children. This time he lures them to a cave with toys and then crushes them with a giant boulder. Happiness eludes him when more children are born. He then moves to Hammelin, the town of the legend immortalized in Grimm's fairy tale "Die Kinder zu Hameln" (1816). Here the shoemaker crosses paths with the Pied Piper, who makes a deal with the townspeople to rid them of their pests in return for three bags of gold. The townspeople happily oblige, but, unbeknownst to them, the shoemaker steals the gold and hides it from the piper. The following night the piper comes to collect his payment, and when the townspeople refuse to pay him again, he exacts his revenge on the people of Hammelin, leading all the children to the river and drowning them. The shoemaker lives happily ever after.

Mutis's account is recognizable to many readers because the Pied Piper scenario has been used in various children's books and later cartoons. The story was published by Nathaniel Wanley in 1678 and can be found in collections of stories from 1634 and 1650 (Carpenter 63). The story was popularized by the Grimm Brothers' collection of German folktales, *Deutsche Sagen* (1816), which documented eleven different sources for the rat-catcher story. The legend of the Pied Piper was further popularized by Robert Browning's 1842 narrative poem "The Pied Piper of Hamelin."

The oldest historical record of the Pied Piper is by a fifteenth-century Dominican historian named Heinrich von Herford. His story begins in 1284 in the German town of Hamelin, on the Wesser River near Hanover, and tells of leading 130 children from the town into the mountains and never returning (Carpenter 63). Enough historical details suggest that children were actually taken from Hamelin sometime in the thirteenth century. Historians speculate that the children could have been taken as part of the Children's Crusade in 1212. Yet another theory is that the children were taken to colonize the territory of Moravia. The story is widely familiar to child readers in at least some of its many forms (Carpenter 63).

Several elements make *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hammelin* a challenging read for a child. Chief among them is the level of irony. A number of important studies have analyzed children's ability to comprehend irony. Kümmerling-Meibauer notes that nonliteral language, such as metaphor or irony, "requires the listener/reader to consider statements that are contrary to fact, but which are still on some level true and authentic. Thus, in nonliteral utterances the relation between the two aspects of meaning is one of striking divergence: what is meant is not a logical extension of what is said and clashes with what is said" (158). Kümmerling-Meibauer goes on to claim that most readers do not develop the ability to understand irony until age nine. One of the possible misinterpretations by readers prior to that development is to mistake irony for the intent to deceive. The difference between irony and deception is one of the most important distinctions the implied reader will encounter in *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hammelin*. I will

analyze this story in terms of the possible text-gaps produced by irony and demonstrate how some children may mistake irony for the author's intent to deceive.

While all of the "EnCuento" books begin with an introduction describing the author and his body of work, this story includes a second introduction by Mutis. He writes:

Desde niño sentí gran admiración por el Flautista de Hammelin. El famoso personaje de mi infancia y el más admirado de todos los personajes de leyenda. Ya grande, me dediqué a averiguar su historia y a estudiar todos los detalles de su inolvidable y bella hazaña, gracias a la cual libró a la ciudad de Hammelin de la molesta plaga infantil. Consultando papeles y archivos muy viejos, logré, al fin, saber la verdad de los hechos y es esa la que voy a contar ahora a mis pequeños lectores. [Since I was a child I have felt great admiration for the Pied Piper, the famous character of my childhood who was the most admired of all legendary figures. Now, as an adult, I dedicate myself to investigation of his story, studying all the details of his marvelous deed, through which the people of Hammelin were liberated from the pesky plague of children. Using ancient records and archives I finally uncovered the truth and this is what I will present to my young readers.] (Mutis 7)

This passage is significant because irony is introduced even before the story begins. Mutis says that he has admired the Pied Piper since he was a child and that what he most admires about him is his relieving Hammelin from the "plague of children."

Another very compelling part of this introduction is the statement that the author has chosen a story with medieval origins and a number of literary sources. Children may know part of the history of the Pied Piper tale, since some details are explained in critical introductions to the story. Mutis builds upon this history by saying that he has consulted “very old archives.” This complicates the reader’s ability to grasp the story’s irony. Not only is Mutis professing that what children are about to read is the “true” version, he is also claiming to have researched the story. Thus the introduction serves to expose the reader to irony, as well as to a complex narrative structure that makes the story less accessible to children.

Another complicating factor is that the narrator sides with the protagonist, a mass murderer of children, and by so doing makes an adversary of the child reader. Aidan Chambers notes that children are attracted to books in which the narrator takes sides with the implied reader. He claims that once an author has forged an alliance and a point of view that engages a child, he can then manipulate that alliance as a device to guide the reader towards the meanings s/he wishes to negotiate (*Booktalk* 46). One example of this alliance between implied reader and author can be seen in *El Señor Simplón* (discussed in Chapter 1), where narrator and reader both understand jokes the protagonist does not.

Mutis attempts what Jauss calls ironic identification, “where the reader is drawn in, and willingly submits to, a fictional illusion only to have the author subvert this aesthetic experience” (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 82). In *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hamelin*, Mutis subverts the experience by reducing the possibility that the child might identify with the book at any level. At the level of author–

reader, the reader cannot trust the author because of what he states in the introduction. At the level of narrator–reader, beginning with the first paragraph, the reader knows that the narrator sides with the protagonist. At the level of protagonist–reader, the child-murdering protagonist is obviously to be despised by the child reader. It is an unusual dynamic indeed, where cruelty and violence are the story’s predominant characteristics. But it is one that has become more common in recent children’s literature. This text requires a reader who has a literary intelligence level high enough to appreciate the irony; otherwise, the text creates too much distance between reader and narrator.

Iser notes that the narrator’s choosing sides against the reader creates sympathy for the oppressed character or characters (116). In the *Mutis* story, the narrator sides with the protagonist, an obvious enemy of children, but identification with the child characters is nearly impossible because the latter are not fully developed as characters. This makes it even more difficult for children to relate to this story. The children in the book are nameless victims who are viewed only through their murderer’s unfavorable focalization, who in turn views them as cruel, loud, and distracting (*Mutis* 9). Thus irony is rendered even more complex in the story by the various levels of deception employed by the author. Kümmerling-Meibauer explains further why irony is often difficult for children to grasp:

Irony is a linguistic and literary phenomenon that represents a complex discursive strategy presupposing a certain previous knowledge, since for even the most simple of verbal irony, for example, there would have to be mutual agreement on the part of both participants—the speaker

and the addressee—about the following basic things: that words or sentences have literal meanings, but that words/ sentences can, however, have more than one meaning; that there is such a thing as irony, where a spoken meaning is played off against implied but unspoken meaning. (157-58)

There are examples of irony that children can understand and even enjoy. For instance, irony in *El Señor Simplón* is suited to the young reader because most children possess the metalinguistic framework that enables understanding in this simple form. But because of the way irony is complicated in *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hamelin*, children will have difficulty understanding this text. Kümmerling-Meibauer notes that in order to appreciate irony, the reader must be able to understand that “there will likely be some shared markers or ironic clues to signal both that irony is in play and how it is to be interpreted” (156). There are not enough cues in this story to indicate to the child reader that the author is using irony and does not actually admire his protagonist. Such lack of cueing is one of the main problems with the Mutis text. The story contains many such gaps that the reader must recognize and negotiate so that s/he does not become confused.

Mutis alienates the reader in various ways, beginning with the shoemaker, Hans, who hates children. Despite phrases such as “pobre Hans” [poor Hans] (9), “pobre zapatero” [poor shoemaker] (15), “nuestro amigo” [our friend] (15), and “el simpático zapatero del pueblo” [the friendly town shoemaker] (27), Mutis does not try to create a sympathetic character. He has, in fact, no redeeming qualities. He is the protagonist nonetheless, a fact that alienates the audience from the outset. Mutis



continues to offend the audience as the story progresses. Because the narrator sympathizes with the evil protagonist, the reader finds the narrator is not to be trusted either. The narrator's alienation of the audience begins more subtly and progresses slowly. In the beginning, the narrator depicts Hans as a grumpy old man who is annoyed by children's games and songs. Then the narrator alienates readers further by stating that Hans hates girls particularly because they ask more questions than boys and have shrill voices: "Las niñas, sobre todo, eran las más preguntonas y las que más irritaban al pobre Hans con sus vocecitas chillonas y sus risas estridentes y sin motivo" [the girls, especially, asked the most questions that irritated poor Hans with their screechy voices and their loud pointless laughter] (9). The sentence provides one example of ironic identification: the narrator says "pobre Hans" while using derogatory language to describe girls, more than half of his potential reading audience. The juxtaposition of these two contradictory ideas on the text's first page lets the child reader know early on where he or she stands.

Offenses continue as Hans commits murders that go unpunished and the narrator reports them. For the first murder plot, Hans develops a plan to get rid of all of the children by spreading the news that at midnight on Ash Wednesday, cookies and cakes will be left inside the baker's oven for all of the town's children. Once all of the children enter the oven, Hans locks them in, bricks up the entrance, and starts a fire that burns for two days. In the narrator's report, "Hans tapó la entrada del mismo con ladrillos y cemento y encendió la leña que tenía preparada. Dos días duró el horno ardiendo sin parar" [Hans blocked the entrance of it with bricks and cement

and he then lit the firewood he had prepared. It burned for two days straight without stopping] (11). Nothing in this report betrays any judgment on the narrator's part.

Several aspects of this story make it appear to be a fairy tale. Even Patricia Van Rhijn explained, in her interview with me, that in considering the story's worth, she believed that it had many of the qualities of the traditional fairy tales of Grimm and Andersen. Jack Zipes defines a fairy tale as a story set in the distant past or that describes events that would be impossible in the real world (xv). Stephens defines it in yet another way:

In the case of the fairytale a given text is also the symbolic outcome of a writer's interactions with folklore, with other authors, and with implied or unimplied readers. In other words, the fairytale is radically intertextual, as its meaning not only results from a self-contained linguistic system, but also emerges against a background of complex inter-relationships between the author's dialogue with him/herself, language, audience, text, other texts, and the socio-cultural determinations of significance. (85)

Fairy tales often include magical events and magical beings, but their heroes and heroines are usually mortal beings. Many fairy tales originated in Oriental story collections, such as the *Panchatantra*, *Book of Sinbad*, and *The Arabian Nights*. Many original fairy tales include a frame story, such as Scheherazade's postponing her threatened murder. Such books are not intended for children, as their subject matter is often violent or bawdy. Fairy tales as we know them today developed for children in the late seventeenth-century in Europe. And of course, the fairy tales

collected by the Brothers Grimm in the nineteenth century were all written for children. Since then, fairy tales have become a part of literary discourse (Carpenter 63).

The child reader may immediately identify Mutis's book within two contexts: first, as already mentioned, as a fairy tale–like story; and second, as a book within the “EnCuento” series. Mutis subverts both contexts. In the case of the book series, the author may not have been as aware of other stories in the collection as readers are, and therefore his deviating from the norm may have been unintentional. In the case of the fairy tale, however, the author purposefully calls to mind the fairy tale and then systematically unpacks the genre.

First, the story title *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hammelin* invokes a fairy tale and intrigue. The use in the title of a mythical character, the Pied Piper, combined with the implication that the reader does not know the “true” story, demonstrates that the author is playing with the reader before the story begins. Like Cervantes in *The True Story of Don Quixote*, Mutis claims he decided to research his history after learning about the Piper's great feats and to share with young readers the new information.

Yet another fairy-tale quality is the setting. Details such as the foreign names of towns and the book's illustrations, which show medieval hamlets, may comfort especially the modern child reader. Like many fairy tales, the story is set in a place that is “far, far away.” This detail distances the readers from the book's actions in a way that is healthy and good. Because the narrator is clearly not on the reader's side,

and because the plot does not help, the fact that the setting for the story's events is some distant place and time may comfort the reader.

Several other key elements of plot also serve to distance the story from reality. A plague of rats invades Hammelin when the shoemaker arrives. Only then does a piper come to town and promise to rid it of rats in exchange for three bags of gold. Hans knows that if the town does not pay up, the piper will take all the children away. And so the shoemaker bricks up the entrance to the safe and the townspeople think they have been victims of some sort of enchantment. In revenge, the piper takes away the children, and much to the dismay of the young reader, Hans lives happily ever after. All these elements make the story distant from modern reality, and child readers become comfortable with that distance.

A fairy-tale aspect that Mutis deconstructs in addition to those already mentioned—title, setting, and illustrations—is the protagonist's name. Hans is a stock German fairy-tale name, like the English John. Several Grimm stories have the name Hans in the titles: "Hans in Luck," "Clever Hans," "Hans Married," "Hans the Hedgehog," and "Strong Hans." In the Grimm stories, Hans is nearly always a hero. Hans is not necessarily clever but in the end is the winner nonetheless. By naming the character Hans, Mutis is able to characterize his protagonist as an everyman fairy-tale hero, a characterization he quickly deconstructs by (1) making his Hans an evil character with no redeeming qualities, (2) allowing Hans to transgress further rather than improve, and (3) rewarding rather than punishing Hans in the end. Another aspect of the story that makes it seem like a fairy tale is that Hans is a

shoemaker. Readers may recall the famous fairy tale “The Elves and the Shoemaker.”

In the Grimms’ “Märchenhausen” collection, gruesome death is used to frighten children into obedience or to educate them that the world can be deceptive. The story most often used to illustrate such *grusometod* is “Hansel and Gretel,” in which “the old woman behaved very kindly to them but in reality she was a wicked witch who waylaid children and built the bread house in order to entice them in; but as soon as they were in her power she killed them, cooked and ate them, and made a great festival of the day” (Carpenter 63). Fairy tales are often used to teach the child audience through the story, and children within the story often learn. However, in the Mutis story, children do not have a chance to use strength or intelligence to defeat evil, as they do in fairy tales such as “Hansel and Gretel,” “Pinocchio,” “Three Billy Goats Gruff,” “Rapunzel,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” or “Jack and the Beanstalk.” All are stories in which child protagonists are able to overcome errors and defeat foes. *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hammelin* is different from these fairy tales because the children have no chance to defend themselves. The children are helpless in the first town, where Hans traps and burns them, and in the second town, where he lures them into a cave full of toys, again on Ash Wednesday, and crushes them with a giant rock. Illustrations show Hans leaving the children to burn in the baker’s oven (see Fig. 10).

Several other literary devices make this story complex and create text-gaps for the reader to negotiate. Among them are focalization, slant, and the genre of children’s horror. In studying narrative in children’s literature, Nikolajeva states

that non-judgmental relationships, such as the one between narrator and protagonist in *La verdadera historia*, are common in contemporary children's novels.

Focalization can be used to alienate the reader, and in her view it



Fig.10. Alberto Celletti in Mutis, 10.

implies a limitation of the point of view, both perceptual and conceptual. Traditional children's literature presupposes the reader's identification with the focalizing character. This is, however, not necessarily the case in contemporary children's novels, which can make use of various narrative devices to question this simple identification. "Estrangement," for example, means that the focalizing character is

alien in some way, for instance, unpleasant, physically or mentally handicapped, an immigrant, a homosexual, an animal, even a monster.

*(Children's Literature Comes of Age 230)*

This technical use of focalization to alienate is successfully demonstrated by Mutis in his creation of the evil protagonist Hans and again in his use of a pro-Hans narrator.

Nikolajeva identifies an additional narrative device that can be found in Mutis's story: slant, "a breach in the point of view between the narrator and the reader when the narrator may deliberately tell a lie, conceal information, or distort it" (*Children's Literature Comes of Age 230*). Mutis uses slant by having the narrator side with the protagonist, as previously mentioned. Such technical use of slant becomes increasingly obvious as the relationship between reader and text further deteriorates, as when Hans becomes happier than ever in the days following the murders. Details like these infuriate the child reader further. Indeed, the relationship between reader and narrator becomes more complex as the reader expects the "bad guy" to be punished, since in most fairy tales hints are dropped everywhere that the hero will triumph over evil. Yet the problem posed by this pseudo fairy tale is that the hero is really an "antihero," an evil protagonist who will in fact go unpunished.

While this story is unique in the "EnCuento" series, many studies of children's books have found that stories are used to frighten children into certain behaviors. Stallcup, a specialist in power structures in children's literature, notes this tradition in his analysis of *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*.

Many eighteenth and nineteenth-century texts were designed to frighten young readers into obedience through threatening dire punishments for disobedience. . . . While such threats are considered unacceptable by modern adults the goal of securing adult authority has not changed—only the means of attaining it have been inverted. Rather than invoking threats of violence to frighten children into submission, many modern picture books seek to reassure children that they have nothing to fear from imaginary dangers while at the same time demonstrating that there are very real dangers that only adults can defuse. (125)

Stallcup believes the latter trend in children's books supports the power that adults have over children and that adults find this approach appealing because they are concerned with maintaining control. Mutis's story, though, obviously uses the former method described by Stallcup: behavior modification through fear.

Mutis may also be making a statement about religious authority by creating a protagonist, Hans, who is a religious fanatic. As a sociopath, Hans may justify his wrath against children through irrational manifestations of his allegiance to a higher power. The story makes several references to Ash Wednesday, the day he commits the two mass murders. Ash Wednesday is the first day of fasting during Lent in the Roman Catholic religious calendar. When Hans lures the children into the oven, it is with cakes and cookies. And when he coaxes them to the cave, it is for gifts and toys. Mutis may be making reference to the recent spree of fanatics of many different religions who punish their victims for supposed indiscretions against God. Hans may be punishing the children for the sin of avarice on a day of fasting



specifically set on the religious calendar. In other versions of the Pied Piper story, the children disappear in June, not on Ash Wednesday, which falls months before. Mutis may have chosen to change the date of the murders to Ash Wednesday because this day is a reminder of the reality of human fate—ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Ironically, the children in the story are literally turned to ash. “Los carbonos fueron guardados en un museo de la ciudad y poco a poco se fueron volviendo polvo y hubo que tirar el montón de hollín en que se habían convertido” [The ashes were kept in the town’s museum where slowly they turned into dust. Finally the townspeople had to throw away the pile of dust that was once children] (13). This grotesque imagery shows the narrator’s disregard for the situation and his siding with the protagonist (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Alberto Celletti in Mutis, 12.

Mutis's book has great value and importance within the series because of the lessons in rhetorical device it teaches the young reader. The reader must stretch the imagination and be a willing participant in the game the author plays. Child readers are introduced to many devices, such as irony, self-reflectiveness, unreliable narrators, and metafiction. However, if the child reader is not sophisticated enough, the story's true intent may be lost. If one is to believe Mutis's own reflections on the writing of the story, one would not know whether the book is clever, ironic, or just plain cruel. However, when Van Rhijn reflected on the book in my interview with her, she said she viewed it as clever. She believes that Mutis was being facetious and hopes children will recognize that in their reading. She also stated that this story was a favorite of Mutis's grandson, and that as a result of the experience, Mutis now has gone on to write other books for children.

#### SERRANO'S *LOS VAMPIRITOS Y EL PROFESOR*

Children exposed to books come to expect certain things. As there are often cultural codes established within a book series, children recognize patterns in literature. The "EnCuento" series comprises picture books that are recommended for children ages eight to ten. Because of its tone, *La verdadera historia* differs from this cultural code. As an adult reader, I can be sure that the author does not endorse the serial mass murder of children; for a child reader, however, this book is an education in irony. Two other stories, out of the thirty-six in the "EnCuento" series, invoke fear: Francisco Serrano's *Los vampiritos y el profesor* and Enrique Serna's

*La caverna encantada*. While these two books contain monsters and vampires and use suspense and horror in small doses, both are appropriate for children. The monsters are obviously fictitious and not very threatening. I shall focus on Serrano's story exclusively and shall discuss the text's use of intertextuality, highlighting its many references to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and other vampire legends. I shall also discuss the illustrations as compared to the text.

The introduction to *Los vampiritos y el profesor* describes its author as follows:

Francisco Serrano nació a mediados del siglo XX en la ciudad de México. Desde niño se sintió atraído por la literatura y el cine y escribió guiones y cuentos de aventuras. Estudió para ser cinematógrafo, pero no terminó la carrera y en cambio se dedicó a escribir, convencido de que la literatura y, sobre todo, la poesía le resultaba un medio más adecuado para alcanzar lo que le interesaba: estimular la inteligencia, la imaginación y la sensibilidad de la gente. Francisco Serrano ha trabajado mucho con otros artistas, como pintores y músicos; es autor de varios libros de poemas, obras de teatro, libretos para ópera, y juegos y narraciones infantiles. Con *Los vampiritos y el profesor* quiso escribir un cuento para no dormir a los niños.

[Francisco Serrano was born in Mexico City around the middle of the 20th Century. Has always been attracted to literature and film and even as a child he wrote film scripts and adventure stories. He studied to become a cinematographer but he did not finish, instead he decided to

write, convinced that literature, especially poetry was the best way to achieve what he desired: to stimulate the intelligence, imagination and sensibility of humankind. Francisco Serrano has worked with many artists, like painters and musicians; he is the author of many poetry collections, plays, operas and children's games and stories. With *Los vampiritos y el profesor* he wished to write a story that would keep children awake at night.] (5)

The story is about Dr. Tarantado Persiles, a professor, who works in a blood lab all day. He is a phlebotomist, and he likes to take his work home with him to do experiments. He is trying to understand the properties of blood and improve it so that people will never go hungry again. One day he receives a notice from the postal service stating that two boxes will be delivered the next day. When the boxes arrive containing caskets, he is surprised to find they also contain what he believes are wax dolls. Soon he realizes that "dolls" are actually children. An enclosed letter explains who they are and offers the professor a check for one million dollars to take care of them. Then the children awake and tell him their story. They relate the history of their family and the tragic reasons they had to leave their home and come live with him. The doctor is aware that the children who have been sent to him are vampires. His greed makes him keep them despite the danger. The children meet the obese landlady who, even though she hates Dr. Persiles, loves the children. Soon the children begin their adventures as young vampires on their own in a new city.

The term "intertextuality" applies to this story in that the author uses known literary texts to construct a new narrative fiction. In intertextuality, as defined by

Barthes, the meaning of an artistic work does not reside in that work, but in the reader's understanding of it (1). The basis of *Los vampiritos y el profesor* and most other vampire stories is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). In Serrano's version, the children recount their story to the professor after he accepts them into his home. They tell him they are descendants of the Anciano de la Montaña, a terrible man who drank the blood of people in his region. The emperor had him sent away with all of his descendants, and the family was divided. The children's ancestors went to Transylvania (14).

Serrano uses humor and parody in his descriptions of the family history to draw the child reader into the story. Building on the child reader's understanding of histories, the narrator says:

Una rama de la familia, al mando de Ator de Sava, se dirigió a Trebisonda, en el Mar Negro; otra, bajo las órdenes de Sator de Ava, encaminó sus pasos con rumbo a la muralla de montes Lunán, hasta Sedom, en el Mar Muerto; y un tercer grupo, que comandaba el viejo Petatoros de Cazán, fue a poblar las remotas tierras de Transilvania, en Europa Oriental. [One branch of the family, under the command of Ator de Sava, went to Treisonda, on the Black Sea; another under the command of Sator de Ava, directed their steps towards the Lunan Mountains until they reached Sedom, on the Dead Sea; a third group, commanded by the ancient Petatoros de Cazan, went forth to populate the remote land of Transylvania in Eastern Europe.] (14)

By using names such as Ator de Sava and Sator de Ava, the author is playing a word game while poking fun at medieval histories, which include many similar names and the origins of the people. These word games are a common response-inviting structure throughout the story. Robyn McCallum describes intertextuality in children's fiction: "In metafiction these are often foregrounded so as to heighten their conventionality and artifice. Intertexts include specific literary texts, as well as generic and discursive conventions and cultural texts and conventions and cultural texts and discourses" (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 401). McCallum goes on to say that intertextuality does one or more of the following three things: "It creates one story out of another, it indicates possible interpretive positions for readers, or it enables within the text a plurality of voices, discourses and meanings" (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 401).

In *Los vampiritos y el profesor*, the history of the young vampires can be viewed as a text within the text. The author peels away from the action in present-day Mexico in order to begin a discourse that recounts the children's history for several pages. This segment is different from the rest of the story in that it contains only the children's history and how it relates to the history of the vampires. The one interruption to this narrative is when the narrator flashes to Persiles's thoughts, then quickly returns to the past. This interjection of the present into the past is enclosed in parentheses: "(Lo que los niños no le dijeron al profesor es que ese alimento era la sangre de los seres humanos. Pero no hizo falta: a esas alturas Persiles Tarantado había comprendido perfectamente quiénes eran sus huéspedes. Y tembló al pensarlo)" [(The children did not tell the professor that this sustenance was human

blood. But they did not have to by now Professor Tarantado understood perfectly what his guests were. And it made him tremble to think about it)] (16). During the two pages of narrative, only the omniscient narrator refers to the past. The children and the other present-day characters do not focalize the story. By choosing an omniscient point of view over a focalization by one of the children, who would retell the family history, the author lends authority to the entire history while also creating distance.

The illustrations that accompany this portion of the text are a family portrait of the vampires (see Fig. 12), complete with their capes and fangs and a Transylvanian castle.



Fig. 12. Claudia Legnazzi in Serrano, 15.

The illustrations themselves contribute to the “text within the text” effect, for they contain many elements that children can relate to other vampire stories. The first illustration is a family portrait of eight vampires. The men have long dark capes with high collars. All are dressed in lavish clothing and have pale skin and long, sharp fangs. These figures are recognizable to children, not so much because they are familiar with the Stoker novel, but because they have encountered similar images in adaptations of the novel, such as the various films and animation versions that reference the vampire theme. The second illustration in this section of the book features a decrepit castle, obviously referencing the legendary Dracula Castle (see Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Claudia Legnazzi in Serrano, 17.



One of the obvious innovations of this story is its use of ostentatious typographical elements, such as enlarged, distorted text. While the book contains several examples of this technique, the majority are just large, boldface printed expletives such as “¡Aaay nanita!” (10). Like Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, which uses not only letters and diaries, but also dictation tapes and newspaper accounts, this story contains a letter, written in calligraphy. The letter is written to convince the professor to take the children into his care. This text presents a particularly difficult text-gap for children to interpret. The language is difficult, and when combined with the font, it presents a challenge to the reader. The author uses a number of mechanisms to invite the reader to delve into the letter, the most compelling of which is its prominent presentation on the page. The large print coaxes the reader into attempting to decipher it.

Excellentísimo Professor:

Ha de conoscere que en questas terra, por querrer del cielo, ha mucho que exisbte una muiy noble familia de señores a los que trisstemente ha golpeado e ferido la fortuna, de forma que un muiy espantable terremotto, que erra como si derrumbaren las altas montagnas de la luna, ha detruydo nuestra morada echando abajo ssus murs e altas torres. (11)

The letter is signed “Count Desmodus var Rolacy.” The text of the letter mimics the pronunciation vampire characters, usually of Romanian extraction, use in film. Several words in the passage add an extra hissing *s* or rolling *r* to call attention to the stereotype of accents of vampires that are familiar to children.

A second illustration, and a text in itself, is the picture of a check for one million dollars that the family of the vampire children Lop and Kiria sends the professor (see Fig. 14). The illustration on the page looks like a photocopied check. The words on the check say “Banko de Transylvania,” and at the bottom there appears the count’s unique signature.



Fig. 14. Claudia Legnazzi in Serrano, 12.

Persiles’s fatal flaw is greed: he takes the children in for the money. He tries to justify his greed by changing the children, but in the end they are all vampires, born to drink blood. It is interesting that the professor was chosen by the count to be the children’s guardian because he works with blood. In the first few pages, the professor is characterized as someone whose goal is to win the Nobel Prize for his work with blood. At the same time, however, the text makes it clear that he is not a doctor—simply a phlebotomist who thinks of himself as a doctor. This is but one of the ways we know he is less than scrupulous.

The illustrations that accompany the book's first page are startling. Pictured is a bathroom with large vats of blood stored everywhere; blood flows into the tub, pumped into tubes that are connected to the shower, siphoned from the toilet, and running down the sink drain. There is also, oddly, toilet paper aplenty, even though the toilet can obviously not be used for its normal purposes. Judging from the illustrations, the professor brings home large quantities of blood for his experiments.

Aclaremos que el profesor Tarantado para nada era doctor. Había estudiado química en su ciudad natal, había querido progresar, había viajado a la capital y se ganaba la vida trabajando en un laboratorio de análisis clínicos. Por las noches, sin embargo, en secreto, Persiles Tarantado tenía otra ocupación: Había instalado un pequeño laboratorio en su cuarto de baño y se pasaba las horas dedicado a la investigación de la sangre. (7)

The author gives Persiles Tarantado a humorous last name to provide some immediate characterization of him. "Tarantado" sounds like *atarantado*, implying that Persiles is restless, nervous, and impulsive. One of the professor's high-minded goals is to change human nature by changing the composition of blood. "Según él estaba a punto de descubrir una sustancia maravillosa que mezclada con el plasma sanguíneo lo vigorizaría de tal manera que casi no sería necesario comer" [He believed he was on the brink of discovering a marveolous substance that when mixed with blood plasma invigorates you so much that it would not be necessary to eat] (8). Tarantado wants to make blood different so that humans will not go hungry.

Then he will be able to use his talent to attempt to change the little vampires in his care.

Serrano's book is dedicated "a los monstruos," obviously a reference to children, because in the story the "monsters" are Kiria and Lop, who in the end convert all Mexican children into vampires. Through the relationships he sets up in the text, Serrano persuades the reader to accept such monsters. Yet the striking element in this story, unlike the one we examined by Mutis, is that it includes likable protagonists. In *El flautista de Hamelin*, the protagonist is despicable, and children have no one to like in the entire story. In Serrano's story, while the protagonists are monsters, they are also children. All of the Serrano characters have flaws, yet, in stark contrast to the characters in the Mutis text, they are likable.

Until now, the books we have examined have scarcely mentioned cities in the Spanish-speaking world. Most books within the "EnCuento" series do not refer to specific places in Latin America or Spain, perhaps because the stories have a broader appeal if they reference fictitious worlds. Among the stories of the first chapter, only *Las hermanas* refers to life in a Spanish-speaking country (Cuba). *Gatico-Gatico* takes place in Paris and in an unnamed jungle. *El Señor Simplón* makes few references to a real-world environment, but from the introduction we know that the character hails from Australia. *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hamelin* refers to a world created by another author who in turn based his narrative spaces on images that suggest medieval Germany. So far, space has been a relevant aspect of the stories. Each of the different settings has served to convey a mood to the stories. One of the most relieving aspects of *La verdadera historia* is that it is a fairy tale set

in the distant past; the villain must have died many years before and no longer poses a threat. The places mentioned are so unfamiliar to the readers that the added element of fantasy should console them.

Francisco Serrano attempts to create the opposite effect. His characters obviously reside in the Distrito Federal: the children visit actual landmarks in Mexico City, such as the Chapultepec Zoo. Serrano places his vampire protagonists in Mexico City so that they can infect a large number of children. Perhaps the choice of setting is also a marketing tool, since the editorial offices, as well as the largest concentrated readership, of the “EnCuento” series happen to be in Mexico City. The name of the school the vampire children attend is “El niño artillero.” While this is of course a real place, by choosing this name for the school, Serrano makes reference to real-life child war heroes, such as Mexico’s “Niños heroes,” and to the actual violence and danger children face everywhere.

In their first trip out on their own in the city, the children, who have special powers and can appear anywhere, visit the “Espacio Escultórico Pedregal de San Angel Xitle.” The narrator compares the volcanic rock and the sculpture gardens in Mexico City to a place the little vampires used to visit in Italy. This part of the story is suspenseful because the reader knows that the children are out alone in the city and are susceptible to the light of the full moon. At first, they play like other children at make-believe and hide-and-seek (26). But it soon becomes apparent that the children attack victims on their outings. The narrator describes how these attacks usually occur: “Cuando descubrían la víctima, se acercaban con disimulo fingiendo estar perdidos, la acorralaban, le ponían una zancadilla, y dando terroríficos gritos

que paralizaban a cualquiera: ¡Ish-kik!, Ish-kik!” [When they found a potential victim they approached pretending they were lost, they trapped him/ her, they tripped him/her, and screaming in a way that would paralyze anyone: Slurp! Slurp!] (26).

Had this story been matched with different illustrations, it might be much more frightening to children. But the illustrations are cartoon-like, and there is nothing mysterious or frightening about the little vampires. Even the vampires' ancestors seem harmless and buffoonish in the pictures (14). Examples abound in the “EnCuento” series in which texts and illustrations demonstrate differing viewpoints; this is one such example. The author's stated goal in the introduction is to scare the reader: “Escribir un cuento para no dormir a los niños” [Write a story that will keep kids up at night] (5). But with this type of illustration, there is not even a remote chance of provoking fear in the reader. It is even doubtful the author intended to write a horror story, since most of the situations are more comical than suspenseful or frightening. The greatest contributing factors to this humorous atmosphere are that the monsters are children, the narrator makes them likable, and the reader takes sides with them.

While the vampires are a menace, they represent children's empowerment. Kiria and Lop become independent throughout the story, overcoming barriers to their success. In the beginning, they need help to overcome their aversion to sunlight, and they also need doña Elodia to get into a school. But once they gain access to their victims, they become unstoppable. They disobey their poor guardian and there are no repercussions, as he is too weak to stop them.

Another appealing aspect of Francisco Serrano's story is the humor used to relate the grotesque aspects of the story, such as the blood-soaked bathroom, blood-sucking attacks in Mexican parks, and the biting of all the birthday-party guests. When the children invite all their school friends to a birthday party, the narrator describes the party amenities, such as the cake, drinks, and balloons. Once all the children have arrived at the party, Lop announces he wants to play hide-and-seek with the lights off. The illustration of the same page shows all the happy guests getting bitten on their necks by the little vampires (see Fig.15). The narrator says, "Kiria y Lop, se chuparon, uno por uno, a todos los amiguitos de la escuela. Lo hicieron suavemente, sin lastimarlos" [Kiria and Lop, sucked the blood, one by one, of all of their school friends. They did it softly without hurting them] (33). This passage marks the difference between the way the little vampires violently attack their anonymous adult victims in parks and the way they gently bite their party guests—a difference the child reader appreciates.

In the end, the vampire curse could be a metaphor. Vampirism can be viewed as a metaphor for a terrible medical epidemic, or for something as common as the flu.



Fig. 15. Claudia Legnazzi in Serrano, 32.

Children are more susceptible to illness and are more likely to transmit contagious diseases, so the young vampires are able to contaminate quickly the entire population of Mexico City. “Cuando llegaron los papás de los niños a recogerlos, ninguno sospechó que, con sus hijos, llevaban a sus casas los gérmenes de la más temible invasión de vampiros que se tenga memoria” (34).



According to Van Rhijn, Serrano's book is one of the top ten bestsellers in the series. Many other stories in the series address death, but not as appealingly as Serrano's story does. For example, in Eugenio de Anrade's *Historia de la yegua blanca*, a farmer kills a donkey with a shovel when the donkey mounts his mare. In *Otrariana* by Silvia Molina, a young princess is lost in the woods and eaten by ferocious beasts. She escapes her body and returns to it only when she decides that life in the royal court is not for her. In Mada Carreño's *La pulga Cecilia*, a flea tries to live the life of her famous flea ancestors who inhabited the bodies of the great leaders of the world, Napoleon among them. She finally finds a rich woman to inhabit, but soon after, the flea drowns in her host's bath. Among the stories that have death or violence as themes, *Los vampiritos* is the most appealing to children because of its accessibility, humor, and captivating storyline.

## CHAPTER 3

### Learning Child Protagonists in *La caverna encantada*, *El niño que buscaba a ayer* and *El cordoncito*

This chapter discusses the implied reader's ability to create meaning in three "EnCuento" texts: Enrique Serna's *La caverna encantada* (1997), Claribel Alegria's *El niño que buscaba a ayer* (1995), and Vicente Leñero's *El cordoncito* (1997).

Previous chapters have discussed how literary devices may challenge young readers. For example, I have pointed out the difference between adult and children's literature, showing how text gaps are perceived differently. I have also presented the argument that book illustrations contribute both to the creation of meaning and new text gaps. In this chapter I intend to expand my discussion of text gaps and illustrations, as well as show how in certain instances the "EnCuento" authors use narrative structure and point of view to teach children social and cultural values.

Everyone brings to reading preconceived notions of what constitutes "good literature." We accept therefore, that children read books that are written by adult authors, chosen by editors, and selected by parents or teachers. Presumably, books chosen for children contain a viewpoint approved by adults. We cannot, however, discount the child reader as an active participant in the creative process. Children read and learn from texts, and what they read forms part of their understanding as adult readers.

In this chapter I will show that authors form a relationship with an implied reader based on their own personal beliefs about the background knowledge children

possess. At least three children's literature critics have specifically studied the relationship between background knowledge and meaning-creation in literature.

The first of these critics is John Stephens, who writes in, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (1992), writes that all texts assume background knowledge as shaped by the author's political opinions. Stephens believes that writing for children is purposeful indeed because authors write to teach children social and cultural values. According to Stephens, they do so in two different ways, either by perpetuating socially dominant values, or by resisting them (3). According to Stephens books which present society as it is present a "dominant" view of society. While those that present a different reality are termed "divergent." He views divergence as a type of protest or resistance to dominant society. Stephens concludes that all texts, whether they espouse dominant or divergent values, are implicitly ideological.

According to Jack Zipes, who has a similar opinion about the nature of writing for children,

Culture (as it is represented in children's books) is an historical process of human objectification, and the level and quality of national culture depends on the socialization developed by human beings to integrate young members into the society and to reinforce the norms and values which legitimize the sociopolitical system and which guarantee some sort of continuity in society. (54)

Therefore Zipes, like Stephens, believes that children's stories socialize children. When Zipes refers to stories which present culture in a way that legitimizes the

sociopolitical system he is referring to what Stephens terms a “dominant” representation of culture.

For Charles Sarland, who shares Zipes’s assumptions, “ideology” in children’s literature refers to “all espousal, assumption, consideration, and discussion of social and cultural values, whether overt or covert” (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 43). Sarland’s definition is broad in scope and includes not only ideology in terms of economics, class systems, and power structures, but also the use of language itself. Thus for Sarland, Zipes, and Stephens, all children’s stories contain presuppositions about the culture of the reader and their capacity for understanding. This chapter uses all three positions to show how culture, elements of style, and language do have the potential to create text gaps.

There are many useful techniques that authors may draw upon to establish a relationship with the implied reader. By establishing this relationship, the author may have more success in transmitting his or her message to real readers (which according to the critics listed above is every author’s goal). In order to transmit a message best an author must employ some of the methods discussed by Chambers in “The Reader in the Book.” Of particular interest is Chambers’ theory about how authors create an implied reader using a particular tone to attract children. Chambers suggests that tone is made up of the narrator’s voice and point of view as conveyed through language and form. In the “EnCuento” texts explored here, authors transmit their point of view by using child protagonists who learn lessons. Thus the child protagonist is a key element of narrative structure that sets the tone of the story and establishes a relationship with the child reader. Chambers believes that children’s

literature attempts “to explore, recreate and seek meanings in human-experience” (*Booktalk* 42). For a text to do this successfully, it must connect to the child reader through the use of narrative structure, style, and a sharply focused point of view.

In the books considered in this chapter, I shall examine the methods used by the author to connect to the child reader. I have selected stories that are set in Mexico and Central America with child protagonists and in a realistic setting that will be recognizable to Latin American readers. In the first two stories authors present a problem in society and have their protagonists fight against established systems in order to make change. In the third story, however, the child protagonist works within the economic system to improve his situation. Using Stephens’s criteria, then, the first two stories present divergent views, while the third story presents a dominant view.

Generally, the “EnCuento” series comprises texts of such diversity that one cannot identify one single ideology. (Diversity is a specifically stated goal of the CIDCLI publishing house.) The series’ authors hail from different countries in Latin America, including Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, Spain, El Salvador, Colombia, and Perú. And while each represents a different culture and viewpoint, the texts themselves can be divided into three categories: texts that are fantasy stories, those that have animal protagonists, and those that portray realistic stories with human protagonists. The fantasy plots, such as those written by Mutis, Valenzuela, and Alvaro del Amo, rely on the reader’s understanding of fairy tales. They are intertextual, in the sense that they use techniques of traditional fairytales, such as those exemplified by the Brothers Grimm. The second category is the animal story,

such as appears in traditional fables, where anthropomorphic animals learn valuable life lessons. These include the books by Sarduy, Bryce Echenique, and Carreño. In the third category are those books that present human characters in plausible settings. The three samples offered in this chapter exemplify this kind of story, as they present human protagonists who resolve their conflicts by the end of the narrative. Within these three types of stories, however, there are a variety of historical, cultural, and geographical frameworks.

### *LA CAVERNA ENCANTADA*

Serna's *La caverna encantada* overtly demonizes consumerism. Among the "EnCuento" texts this story is most critical of modern society. A Mexican novelist and essayist, Enrique Serna (b.1959) won the 2000 Mazatlán Prize for Literature. His most successful books to date are the novels *Uno soñaba que era rey* (1989), *Señorita México* (1993), and *El seductor de la patria* (1999); a short-story collection *Amores de segunda mano* (2001); and a book of essays called *Las caricaturas me hacen llorar* (1996) (Nov. 2004, [www.ficticia.com](http://www.ficticia.com)). While Patricia Van Rhijn herself writes, as editor, many of the introductions to the "EnCuento" books, in this particular case Serna introduces his own book by way of describing his personal relationship as a child with literature: "Cuando era niño me aficioné a la literatura porque veía leer a mi madre y me daba curiosidad saber por qué amaba tanto los libros. Empecé a leer a tu edad y desde entonces no he dejado de hacerlo. Me gustaban mucho las novelas en que los niños como yo eran protagonistas de grandes aventuras, pero también la ciencia ficción y las historias de terror." [When I was a

child I was a fan of literatura. I saw my mother and I was curious to know why she loved literature so much. I liked novels in which children were the protagonists of great adventures, but also science fiction and horror stories].

Serna states that as a child he enjoyed science fiction and horror stories, obviously he assumes that all children will. *La caverna encantada* happens to be a horror story. In the rest of his introduction, Serna attempts to recruit child readers:

En la escuela nos enseñan que la lectura es una obligación, pero en realidad es un entretenimiento. Haz la prueba y verás que a veces es más divertido leer un libro que ver la tele. De tanto leer, un día me dieron ganas de inventar mis propias historias. Tomé la pluma y escribí mi primer cuento, *La bóveda*, donde la acción transcurría en una caja de cerillos. Desde entonces no había vuelto a escribir un relato fantástico. *La caverna encantada* es mi primer cuento infantil, pero creo que también puede interesarle a un adulto. Ojalá te haga soñar y reflexionar. [At school they teach us that reading is an obligation, but in reality it is entertainment. Try it for yourself and you will see that sometimes reading is more fun than watching TV. After reading so much as a child, one day I decided to create my own stories. I took a pen and I wrote my first story, *La bóveda*, where the action takes place in a matchbox. Since then I have not written any more fantasies. *La caverna encantada* is my first children's story, even though it might be interesting to adults too. I hope it will make you dream and reflect.] (5)

Serna's story tells of a little boy who goes to a shopping center with his mother. She asks him to remain in the car while she shops. Instead, he disobeys her and goes on an adventure in the underground parking structure where he finds an enchanted cave. The cave is a kind of Purgatory filled with monstrous prisoners who are doing penance for their shopping excesses. During his underground adventure, Manolo, the protagonist, gets the urge to shop scared right out of him. In the cave Manolo meets the creatures who formerly inhabited the mall, and by meeting them he sees the kind of "monster" he himself will become if he continues shopping. The reason for Manolo's "anxiety" is his desire. For days before his adventure in the cave, the boy begged his mother to buy him a special pair of basketball shoes. To surprise him, she buys him the shoes but when she brings them to him he fears accepting them and throws them out the window: "Al llegar a la garita del cobrador, mamá buscó dinero en su bolsa y Manolo aprovechó su descuido para arrojar los tenis por la ventana. Sólo entonces sintió que había escapado de la caverna" [When they arrived at the window to pay parking, mom looked for money in her purse and Manolo took this chance to throw the tennis shoes out the window. Only then had did he feel he had escaped from the cave] (27).

Symbolically, Manolo's relationship with the shoes represents his relationship with consumer society. At first he feels a strong draw to the nonessential shoes and then a complete rejection of them. The story provides many details about the basketball shoes Manolo wanted. The shoes, named for a famous basketball player, have lights on the soles (see Fig.16). Through his rejection



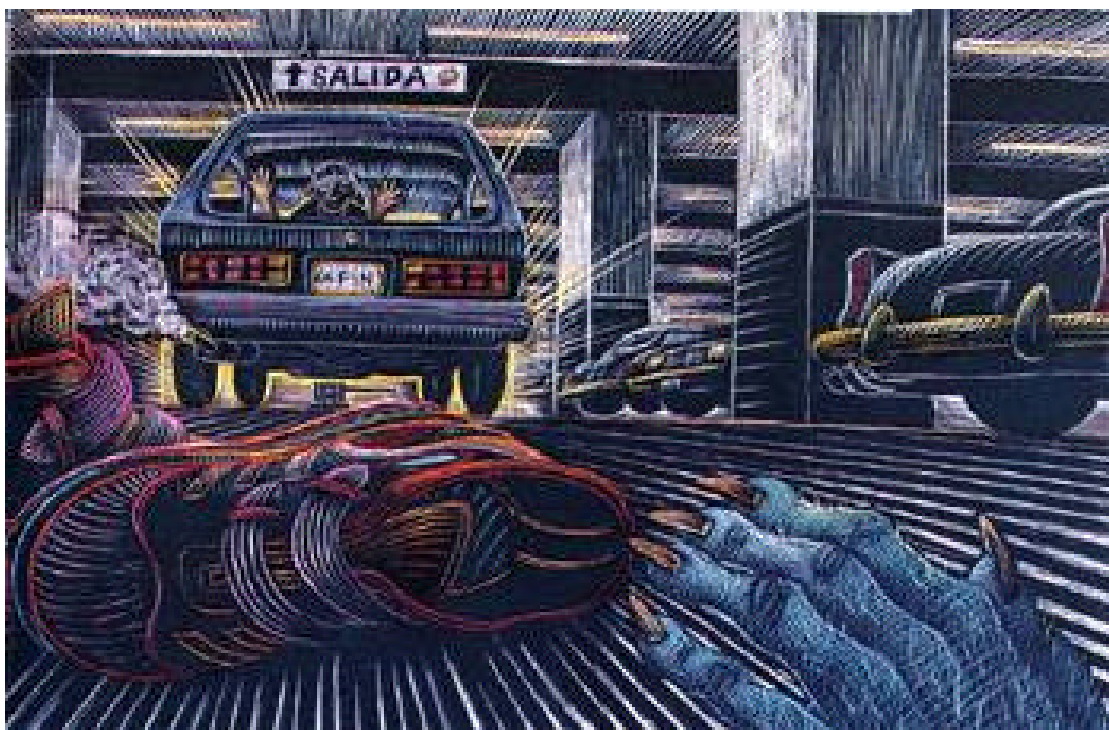


Fig. 16. Gómez Morín in Serna, 27.

of the shoes, Manolo demonstrates he is able to overcome the social pressure to value frivolous possessions. Originally, Manolo wanted the shoes to impress his friends: “A Manolo no le gustaba el basquet, ni los tenis con foquitos, pero como todos los compañeros de su colegio llevaban los tenis de O’Hara, se había sentido inferior a ellos por no tener unos. ¡Cuánto le había rogado a mamá que se los comprara!” [Manolo did not even like basketball, or tennis shoes with lights, but because all of his school friends had O’Hara’s he’d felt inferior because he didn’t have any. Oh! how he had begged his mother to buy him some] (26). Serna highlights here a negative aspect of Manolo’s desire for consumer goods.

The fact that basketball shoes are the object of Serna’s implicit critique also brings up the idea of U.S. capitalist influence. While NBA professional basketball is played only in the United States, its products and entertainment values reach across

many national borders. The use of basketball, instead of a more homegrown sport like soccer, shows the author's critique of imported culture. Several ideas point to such negative influence. Children in school want the "O'Hare" brand shoes, but "O'Hare" is not a typical Mexican surname; the boys in this story want basketball shoes rather than soccer jerseys. The "O'Hare" name is probably a spoof on "Shaquille O'Neal" an NBA basketball player who was immensely popular in 1997, precisely the year *La caverna encantada* was published.

The use in this story of a product's name as a popular brand becomes a commentary on the ability of sports stars to lend their names to a product, and by so doing make it more marketable.<sup>5</sup>

Once Manolo discovers he has fifty pesos in his pocket, he decides to leave the car and go to the mall by himself to buy something. The first thing he buys is an ice cream cone. After that, Manolo goes to his favorite store, *La deportiva*, where he finds the raft of his dreams. Once he realizes he could never afford this boat with his meager allowance, Manolo decides to spend the rest of his money on video games. He becomes distracted by the games and loses track of time. In a hurry he rushes

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<sup>5</sup> This trend is especially apparent in the marketing of sports products. By calling shoes "Air Jordan," for example, Nike Corporation uses a single name to brand a product. This highly successful marketing technique is seen in the seven satirical commercials directed by Spike Lee. The 1988 Nike Air Jordan campaign featured basketball star Michael Jordan collaborating with Lee, who played "Mars Blackmon," a short man who believes that Nike Air brand basketball shoes by themselves will vastly improve his athletic abilities.

back to the car. Here the illustrations tell a story different from the text. In the illustrations the reader can see that the other shoppers in the mall are depicted as monsters (12). Perhaps as a visual warning to the reader Manolo is slowly transformed: at first he is depicted as a normal boy, perhaps even a little timid, but gradually he becomes a monster, like the other shoppers.

One illustration in particular that depicts Manolo as happy is of him in the dream raft. In a subsequent illustration, however (see Fig. 17), he is pictured as a monster playing video games. These illustrations foreshadow what the boy will encounter inside the parking structure.



Fig. 17. Gómez Morín in Serna, 13.

While searching for his mother's car in the parking structure, Manolo becomes lost. The signs in the elevator lead him the wrong way. After several attempts to find the car by himself, he asks for help from a security officer. When the boy asks the police officer where level 2A is, his answer is accompanied by a strange laugh "que parecía venir de otro mundo" [that seemed to come from another world] (15). The book illustrations allude to the fact that monsters inhabit the mall from the outset, but this is the first time the text actually makes explicit reference to supernatural beings. This is where the story now becomes most interesting to the child-reader. Children naturally are at once attracted to as well as repulsed by, fear. Fear is exciting to children, and being frightened by what one reads is a safe way to achieve that excitement.

By titling the story *La caverna encantada* Serna perhaps wanted to refer to Plato's parable of the cave. In *The Republic*, Socrates explains to his pupil that prisoners who spend time in a cave develop their own perceptions of reality (not unlike the monsters under the mall parking structure). When Socrates explains that, cut off from reality, the prisoners would construct a false reality in order to cope, Plato (speaking as a character in the story) states: "Then most certainly, such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things" (Bloom 7). Metaphorically then, Manolo enters the underground cavern with one point of view and emerges knowing the Truth. It just so happens that in *La caverna encantada* monsters are also called prisoners. Virgilio makes this clear when he introduces himself: "Yo soy Virgilio. Soy el prisionero más antiguo de este enorme calabozo." [I am Virgil the most ancient prisoner of this enormous jail] (19) Like

the Pilgrim Dante, only Manolo leaves the cave in the end. He is allowed to leave perhaps because he has learned the Truth and he will be able to use this knowledge outside.

Serna's entire story is focalized upon the boy, an approach that intensified the relationship between reader and text. As the story progresses the protagonist is in danger and the reader certainly feels compelled to read on. Before Manolo enters the cave, the story does not depict interactions with other people, even though he is in a crowded mall. The book illustrations show that everyone in the mall is a monster, something the child-reader will see—and yet the protagonist never notices any monsters around him. When Manolo gets lost trying to find his mother's car, he panics, and the narrator focalizing this fear comments: "Ya ni siquiera le importaba encontrar a su madre, se conformaba con salir de ese laberinto." Focalization, then, effectively portrays the positive relationship between narrator and protagonist. This literary device, used to ally the child-reader with the protagonist, makes it much more likely the reader will understand the lesson Manolo himself learned.

Several elements in this story suggest that the boy might have entered an alternative reality, a motif common to both children's literature and science fiction. While trying to escape, Manolo sees people leaving in cars but they cannot see him. Thus the narrator comments again: "Cualquiera de los conductores que circulaban a su alrededor podía sacarlo de ahí, porque todos tomaban coches y salían sin problemas. Pero no podía confiar en ellos, pues al parecer veían otra realidad o estaban confabulados para hacerlo sufrir" [Any one of the drivers who went by could have helped him out of there. They all got in their cars and left without problems.

But he could not trust them, it was as if they were experiencing a different reality or they were plotting against him to make him suffer] (17). Even at this point in the story there is a question of whether the boy is in a dream or the events are actually happening.

Child readers are familiar with dream sequences in stories. Some of the most popular children's stories—*Alice in Wonderland* (1864) and *Where the Wild Things Are* (1964)—are composed largely of dream sequences. Within Serna's story the protagonist addresses this possibility and rejects it at once, saying that the events really happened—not in a dream, but in a different reality. One way the reader knows this happens to be a different reality altogether is through the use of time.

Time is indeed of great importance in *La caverna encantada*. At the outset, for example, Manolo notices that his mother leaves at 5:20 p.m. Because he is certain she will be gone for at least fifteen minutes, he leaves the car. When he finishes playing video games he realizes it is 8:45 p.m. Several hours have passed, so he rushes back towards the car and gets lost on the way. When Manolo finally returns to the car and realizes it is only 5:45, the narrator adds: "Miró con asombro el interior del Caribe azul y comprendió que había vivido una aventura fuera del tiempo. Pero había sido real, tan real que tenía rasgado el cuello de su playera" [He looked with amazement at the inside of the blue Caribe and he understood at once that he had lived an adventure outside of time. But it had been real, so real that his shirt was still ripped] (26). Manolo has lived this experience and can prove it because of the claw marks on his shirt. But the experience has occurred outside of time as he understands it, or perhaps in another dimension.

Thus Manolo has experienced time differently from his mother and other characters. We know that the events take place at an accelerated rate because hours of his life pass in only a few minutes. Moreover, the reader is kept apprised of Manolo's progress through time as he reads the time on his watch three times while out of the car. When he returns to the car, he returns to a dimension where he exists in a time period he shares with his mother.

The first actual monster Manolo meets is Virgilio, who claims to be the oldest prisoner in the "calabozo." The name Virgilio might remind the adult reader of Virgil the Roman poet and author of *The Aeneid* (19 BCE), who becomes Dante's guide in *The Divine Comedy* (1306). Serna's modern Virgil inhabits the underground Inferno and also serves as a guide to Manolo, —but we soon find that unlike Dante's guide this Virgil has evil intentions. Virgilio explains that he is a prisoner and introduces several other captives. It soon becomes obvious they suffer from shopping addiction. According to Virgilio, they are all there doing time for the crime of believing that human value comes from ownership: "— creer que la gente vale por lo que tiene. Todos los que estamos atrapados en este sepulcro éramos compradores avorazados. Algunos hemos cambiado, pero otros siguen igual" [- to believe that people have value only because of what they own. We are all trapped here because we were such avid shoppers. Some of us have changed but others remain the same] (22). Among the captives who remain unchanged are two old ladies who fight over which of the two owns the nicer watch. Virgilio calls them harpies saying: "Vámonos de aquí no soporto a estas dos arpías" [Let's get out of here I cannot stand those two Harpies] (21). The feared Harpies of Greek myth (the name means

“the soul snatchers”) are traditionally depicted in classical mythology as winged women or as birds with women’s heads. In several myths Harpies carried off children’s souls (Grimal 170).

After giving Manolo a tour of the mall underworld, Virgilio, acting tired, leads him towards a group of armed monsters. Alarmed, Manolo attempts to escape and looks to his guide for help. It is then he realizes his guide has conspired against him. What follows are the story’s most gruesome scenes, when Virgilio pins Manolo down upon his stomach and cuts his shirt with a knife. He asks the mob “¿Cómo lo van a querer: asado o crudo?” [How do you want him roasted or raw?] (23). thus intimating that they are going to eat him. Manolo fights his way out, biting Virgilio’s hand, and literally runs for his life. Thus the child protagonist overcomes a deadly challenge and emerges triumphant, a fact that endears child readers. We also see how this story differs from Mutis’s *La verdadera historia del flautista de Hamelin*, where children are not developed as characters, nor is there any opportunity for them to combat their enemy. Clearly Serna’s story intends to show that superficial consumerism is negative. But another possible reading is that American and European influences are also bad for children like Manolo and Mexico in general. I have already mentioned that the shoe brand Manolo desired “sounds” American. The monsters hold Manolo down on a Peugeot as a sacrificial altar; the watch the shoppers fight over is a Cartier (one accuses the other of having an imitation Cartier made in Hong Kong); the bag the corpse clutches has a *Sears* brand. To counter this symbolically when Manolo enters the dark cavern, he sees an altar to the Virgin of Guadalupe and takes a candle from it to light his way. Thus



Mexico's patron saint protects Manolo in the darkness from spirits who have been condemned because they embraced an imported culture.

Serna's story makes ample use of the symbol of the labyrinth. Manolo remarks he is trapped in a labyrinth shortly after he attempts to make his way back to the car. One illustration in particular (see Fig. 18) pictures a labyrinth in an oil spot spilled on the parking structure floor as Manolo runs away (14-15). From this point on in the story there will be obstacles to Manolo's escape.

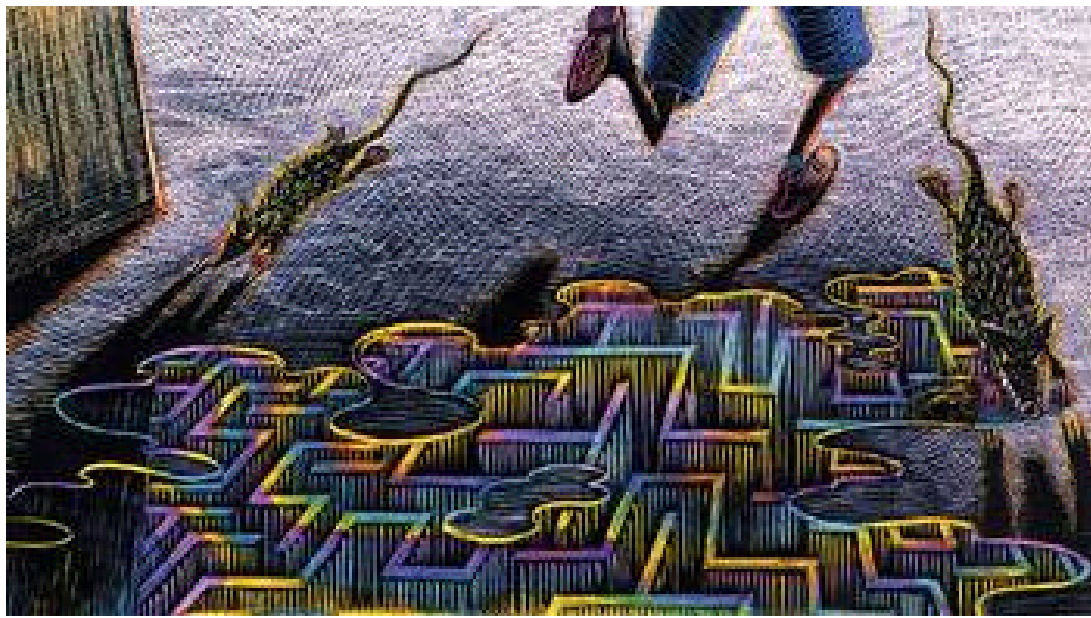


Fig.18. Gómez Morín in Serna, 14-15.

In his famous essay on Mexico, Octavio Paz views the labyrinth as a symbol of human identity. Accordingly,

The myth of the labyrinth pertains to this set of beliefs. Several related ideas make the labyrinth one of the most fertile and mythical symbols: the talisman or other object, capable of restoring health or freedom to the people, at the center of a sacred area; the hero or saint who, after doing penance and performing the rights of expiation, enters the

labyrinth or enchanted palace; and the hero's return either to save or redeem his city or to found a new one. (Paz 208)

A similar pattern is seen here: a child left alone goes into a labyrinth and emerges from his demanding adventure with new knowledge. While most child readers will not be familiar with Paz's essays, they may have heard of the Greek myth of Daedalus's maze used to trap the Minotaur. Regardless, the labyrinth still in modern literature, from Borges to Serna, always symbolizes a difficult task. Clearly, Manolo negotiating his way through the labyrinth represents a boy trying to create his own identity. Perhaps as a child he symbolizes the future, and since he was able to escape with newfound knowledge, he is the hero that will redeem society.

*La caverna encantada* succeeds as a children's book for several reasons. First, the child protagonist is believable and modern. He has the same problems that many of his readers face: peer pressure—desiring things he doesn't have and cannot afford—and feeling he wishes to be older so he can get more respect. The protagonist has a problem and in the end resolves it successfully. While this is a typical pattern in children's stories—a child overcoming an obstacle—only five of the thirty-six “EnCuento” books have characters who resolve problems by story's end. Second, the story develops a sufficient level of fantasy to make it more interesting to a child reader. Because the entire action is focalized upon the boy, the reader becomes engaged in the action. There is also the added intrigue of space/time travel as the boy enters and exits a parallel dimension. Third, fear: the monsters are menacing and frightening; and they provoke enough fear to motivate the reader to side with the child protagonist. In the suspenseful scene that culminates in the

attempted murder and cannibalization of the protagonist, the child emerges triumphant, on his own. Finally, the story has value because of the simplicity of its message. Clearly, the boy should not focus on acquiring things he does not need or he will end up like the monsters in the parking structure. This message is not overtly preachy; it does not have elements of traditional didactic tales, such as fables do. There is no moral; there are no steps to tell children the “correct” way to do things; the narrator is not judgmental, nor does he dispense advice. The main character comes to a conclusion that dovetails into the one the author wishes for his child readers.

#### *EL NIÑO QUE BUSCABA A AYER*

Claribel Alegría (Estelí, Nicaragua, b.1924) has distinguished herself as a poet, essayist and writer of testimonial fiction, among other types of writing. When she was nine months old, Alegría and her family moved with her exiled father to El Salvador, where the Central American revolutions became an important influence on her life. Alegría has lived in various parts of the world with her husband Darwin Flakoll (a U.S. activist, diplomat, and author). Her life is evidenced in her writings, some of which were produced jointly with her husband, who has at times also translated her works. During the 1970s and 1980s she became involved in Nicaragua’s Sandinista movement, and in 1983 she and her husband established their principal residence in Managua (Velásquez 2). Alegría’s writings exude political opinion, and in her work she reveals herself as a feminist, a mother, a revolutionary, and an environmentalist (Velásquez 2).

*El niño que buscaba a ayer* (1995) deals with a young boy, Cristóbal, who wakes up one day thinking about how wonderful yesterday was because he had been to the circus. Thus he decides to go out and look for Ayer/Yesterday. He recalls specific features of the circus: “trapeceistas vestidos de colores, bailarines, payasos, una pantera, tropeles de elefantes y perros que hacían pruebas” [trapeze artists dressed in bright colors, dancers, clowns, a panther, and elephant troupes and dogs that did tricks] (7). He is happy when he remembers these things, and this memory causes him to go searching for Yesterday. As the story progresses, he gains new information that also causes him to remember these things with less fondness, until finally he distances himself entirely from the circus as the ideal. On his adventurous search, the boy meets plants and animals that guide him to the dawn of a new day where he falls asleep. When he awakes, he is holding Yesterday in his hand: not the original yesterday, when he went to the circus, but rather the yesterday when he made friends with plants and animals.

As the story develops, Cristóbal feels closer to elements of nature than to those of the circus. While in the beginning he sets out on a journey looking for the circus, in the end his goal changes, yet he becomes even more satisfied. The characters here are carefully selected for their symbolic meanings: those from the circus are artificial; those from nature are far more authentic.

The perspective Alegría uses in much of her literature reacts against political and economic systems of Latin America. The perspective presented in *El niño que buscaba a ayer* is one that clearly prefers the natural world to the man-made world. The Yesterday the boy, Cristóbal, seeks is the day he went to the circus. After a few

hours of searching for Yesterday, Cristóbal says to a tree: “Ayer en el circo no pude hablar con los animales y hoy me he hecho amigo tuyo y del zenzontle y de la tortuga y de las abejas” [Yesterday at the circus I could not speak with the animals and today I have made friends with you, the zenzontle, the tortoise and the bees] (21).

The thesis that nature is preferable to a man-made world is exhibited by Alegría through the way Cristóbal is able to explore another reality, one in which nature becomes humanized, that is, where animals and inanimate objects speak. The story is set in the Central American rainforest. Examples of the flora and fauna found in the story are: the Lempa, a river that runs from Guatemala to Honduras; the Zenzontle, a tropical songbird; and the Izote, a tropical tree found in Central America (21).

Ricardo Radosh’s beautiful illustrations also serve to draw in the child reader and reinforce the beauty and wonder of the natural world. They are created with a paper cutout technique that makes this one of the most visually pleasing books in the entire “EnCuento” series. In contrast to the illustrations in Serna’s *La caverna encantada*, whose darkness reflects of the tone of the story, Radosh’s illustrations are light and fanciful which reflect the lighthearted nature of the story. In almost every case they feature Cristóbal interacting with objects in nature.

In her narrative Alegría uses the Central American landscape to show how important it is to her. She gives her character, Cristóbal, a new language so he can communicate with objects in nature, including animals, plants and the river. The

child reader will be able to view Cristóbal as an example and apply his lesson of the importance of nature, to his or her own life.

Alegría creates a secondary world that fits the worldview she prefers. She uses Central American landscape and many recognizable natural elements while at the same time introducing less familiar plants and animals. This secondary world is reflected in the illustrations. The majority of the illustrations feature objects in nature, highlighting their importance. The illustrations of this story are unique within the “EnCuento” series as they use paper-cut technique (see Fig. 19). Vibrant colors, three-dimensional effects, and focus on nature reinforce the preference for the natural world created by Alegría in her text. In developing his notion of secondary world Tolkien says that authors create the place where characters live.



Fig. 19. Radosh in Alegría, 16.

The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) “the inner consistency of reality,” is indeed another thing, or aspect, needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. (36 *On Fairy Stories*)

According to Tolkien, readers help participate in creating that world in their imagination. It is Alegría’s distinct choice that the fantasy world she presents reference some real-world aspects. Few authors of children’s books—and certainly no other “EnCuento” authors—draw upon Central America as the basis for the secondary world they create.

If, after reading the story, the reader returns to the first illustration (see Fig. 20), he or she will see that the circus is just a hollow two-color cutout, as compared to objects in nature which are radiant full-color illustrations. The circus depiction could be simplistic because it represents a child’s memory. But it is more likely so bland because the artist chose to depict it as artificial and fleeting. In the illustration the image of the circus is escaping from his room, which is why Cristóbal must leave in order to follow it.

Embarking upon his search for Ayer, the boy begins at the river. Alegría’s description of the river Lempa is poetic, as she uses personification, repetition and metaphor. This passage provides a literary description of some geographical features of Central America, choosing words and providing information in a careful way that is aesthetically pleasing and sets an inviting tone:



Fig. 20. Radosh in Alegría, 7.

El Lempa es un río oloroso y joven. Un río elástico que salta entre las piedras. Lleva entre sus aguas peces y plantas raras. Le gusta reflejar el cielo, sobre todo cuando el cielo está lleno de nubes blancas.

Viene desde muy lejos el Lempa. Arranca en Guatemala y se va estirando hasta tocar Honduras. Recoge en el camino a otros ríos y juntos todos se pierdan en el mar. [The Lempa is a fresh smelling new river. It bends and twists between rocks taking with it fish and rare plants. It likes to reflect the sky, especially when it is full of white



clouds. The Lempa comes from far away. It begins in Guatemala and stretches out until it touches Honduras. It picks up other rivers along the way and all of them get lost in the sea.] (7)

The narrator uses personification when telling the reader that the river likes to reflect the clouds in the sky as it stretches out to touch Guatemala. This prepares the reader for the next segment where the river becomes a speaking character. Here repetition is used for dramatic effect repeating the words “el río.” Such repetition is common in picture books, as they are frequently read aloud.

The river in this passage functions as connecting force throughout Central America and introduces the setting for the story. Alegría calls the objects that the river carries “peces y plantas raras”—exotic fish and plants. This suggests that her implied reader would not be familiar with Central American plants, perhaps because she imagines a foreign readership, or perhaps because of changes in Central American landscape due to extinction and deforestation.

“El camino” (the Road) is the first character to dissuade the boy from his quest in finding Ayer. That “El camino” is a symbol of the path through life can be gathered from the following passage:

Se despidió del cedro y siguió corriendo hacia el oeste. De pronto se detuvo. El camino era ancho. Estaba cubierto de polvo asoleado y se alargaba hasta llegar al bosque. Cristóbal le preguntó si había visto a ayer. –Todos los ayeres pasan por aquí-, respondió el camino. –Quiero encontrar a ayer- dijo el niño impaciente-, ¿crees que está en el bosque? –No podría decirte- dijo el camino dando un lánguido bostezo. ¿Por qué

quieres encontrarlo? Todos los ayeres pasan con la misma expresión de fatiga en sus rostros, en cambio hoy es hermoso, cargado de ilusiones.

Qué pena me da cuando vuelve a pasar ya hecho ayer.

[He said goodbye to the cedar and continued running westward.

Quickly he stopped. The road was wide. It was sunburned and covered in dust and it stretched out to reach the forest. Christopher asked it if it had seen yesterday. - All yesterdays pass by here - responded the road.

- I want to find yesterday - said the child impatiently- Do you think it is in the woods? - I couldn't tell you - said the road with a lazy yawn.

Why do you want to find it? All of the yesterdays pass by here with the same exhausted look on their faces, but today is beautiful, full of possibilities. I hate to see it turned into yesterday.] (11)

As the boy goes out to search for Ayer, the Road tells him that he has seen all yesterdays and it is useless to look any further. The Road is the first to question outright the validity of Manolo's search for Ayer. However, later in the story he will have to decide on his own about the significance of Ayer.

Cristóbal's interactions with the road demonstrate that the road is a metaphor for the path through life. El Camino is a wise advisor because it has seen all of the Todays and Yesterdays. Thus, for the first time in his journey, Cristóbal is discouraged. The road shares his view that today is positive and yesterday is negative. And because Cristóbal trusts the road, which has more experience than he, he becomes disappointed and struggles to recuperate his enthusiasm for the quest.

One of the ruling concepts of Alegría's book is that, in a fictitious world—or as Tolkien calls it, a “secondary world”—all characters work under the same set of rules. Thus Cristóbal is looking for Ayer as if it were a tangible object—something he wishes to hold in his hand and, at once, experience its memories. So Road and other characters also consider Ayer to be an object. In the “secondary world” created in the book, Cristóbal can communicate with animals and inanimate objects in nature. It is not until the end of the story that we find this communication is possible because Cristóbal feels he has a special connection with objects in nature and not those of the circus.

In each of the texts discussed in this chapter the child protagonist learns and establishes a pattern for what the child reader should do. Here Cristóbal progresses through several stages and each time he reflects upon what he learns. Each encounter with an element in nature affects him differently, and he learns a little more each time. We know that he has finally learned enough when he rejects both the circus and Ayer as ideals and accepts instead nature and Hoy. When he speaks to the mayfly, the conversation goes like this:

¿Cómo es ayer? -dijo la mosca. Muy bello. Lleno de colores y tropeles de elefantes, pero hoy es más bello aún. Ayer en el circo no pude hablar con los animales.... Me siento tan feliz mucho más que ayer. [What is yesterday like? - said the fly. Very beautiful. Full of colors and elephant troupes, but today is even more beautiful than that. Yesterday at the circus I could not speak with the animals ...I feel so happy, so much happier than yesterday.] (21)

Cristóbal's newly found ability to communicate with the animals in nature convinces him of the value of Hoy over Ayer.

Child readers are familiar with the journey pattern. Indeed, several "EnCuento" books use the journey as a plot pattern. Thus, Cristóbal's journey has many similarities to Sarduy's *Gatico-Gatico's* (Chapter 1), as both boy and cat seek something intangible. In the end, they each find something they were not looking for. The difference is the level of satisfaction with the end result. Sarduy's cat sets out to find a better home and he grows up; yet, once the journey is over, he wishes to become little again. Similarly, Cristóbal has one goal in mind when he leaves home on his journey, but in the end he discards that goal for a higher purpose. The main difference between *Gatico-Gatico* and Cristóbal is that the boy is satisfied with the result.

Time in this story, as in *La caverna encantada*, plays an ever-present role. Each character is defined by his or her relationship to time. Among examples are the tortoise and the mayfly, which appear together, but have different life spans: the tortoise that has lived many years and the fly that only lives one day. Alegría contrasts two characters in order to show the differential in possible life spans. The tortoise whose customary message would be one of the value of history and learning from the past, says: "Olvídate de ayer y acepta la belleza de hoy" [Forget about yesterday and accept the beauty of today] (19). But it is the fly, which has only one day to live, who finally makes Cristóbal realize he should stop chasing Ayer and embrace Hoy.

By the end of his journey the evidence is overwhelming. The boy goes to sleep and awakes with Hoy in his hand. Hoy, the symbol of the natural world, is in young Cristóbal's hands. He has learned that Today is better than the Yesterday he originally looked for, and was never able to attain.

Unfortunately Alegría's is one of the least enjoyable books in the "EnCuento" series. The story does not have many points of interest or a plot line with enough surprises to hold the reader's attention. The patterns are simplistic and repetitive, making the story predictable. In fact, while several of Alegría's choices of symbols are too cryptic (bees), others are too simplistic (river and road): the former confusing and the latter patronizing. Frequently in this story, text gaps are bridged for the reader because the author gives the reader too much information. Chambers calls this effect "writing down" to the reader, and notes it in Enid Blyton's works:

Ultimately Blyton so allies herself with the child reader that she fails them because she never takes them further than they are. She is a female Peter Pan, the kind of suffocating adult who prefers children never grow up, because then she can enjoy their pretty foibles and dominate them by her adult superiority. (Chambers *Booktalk* 45)

Alegría's story presents a similar problem. For example, child readers will understand the pattern after Cristóbal meets three animals from nature and presents them with his problem. But the author goes on to repeat the same problem with eight different characters, making the story tedious and redundant. The one redeeming attribute of this abundant repetition is that each character symbolizes something different. The child reader can learn to find symbols in literature.

It is clear, then, that Alegría uses style, point of view, and a learning child protagonist to create an implied reader. While abundant repetition makes the story tedious, the story's message is nonetheless clear. The child protagonist prefers the natural world to the artificial world and the child reader should, too.

### *EL CORDONCITO*

Vicente Leñero's *El cordoncito* (1997) uses a different approach. While the protagonists in the other two stories fight against the dominant view of society, the protagonist here works within the system to improve his situation. Leñero's story uses a familiar fairytale pattern. Humor and illustrations help the reader relate to the story.

Leñero's story is written using a common pattern: a child leaves home seeking fortune and returns successfully. The introduction to the story explains that Leñero heard a story similar to the one he tells here:

*El cordoncito* es uno de los dos cuentos que ha publicado para niños.

En él, el autor nos lleva por un mundo concreto y a la vez fantástico de un niño de barrio, recurriendo a la repetición y a la forma circular del cuento: Anda que andarás, anda que andarás,..., en recuerdo quizás, de aquellas viejas historias que le contaba su hermana Celia en el patio de la casa mientras sus hermanos hacían tortas de lodo que se secaban al sol. [*El cordoncito* is one of the two stories he has published for children. In it the author takes us to a realistic yet fantastical world of a barrio boy, by means of repetition and the circular form of the story:

*And on and on you go. ...This story recalls perhaps the stories his sister Celia told him in the yard while they made mud pies that they dried in the sun.] (7)*

While Leñero drew upon his memory, he added details, such as linguistic peculiarities, references to different Mexican regions, and traditional games and toys, which I will discuss here. I will also discuss the illustrations, and how they add to and detract from the text. The relatively simple text following a familiar format leaves room for interpretation, which I shall also explore.

Mexican novelist and screenwriter Vicente Leñero's (b.1933) most famous novels include *Los albañiles* (1964), *El garabato* (1967), and *Los periodistas* (1991). In his study of Leñero, Danny Anderson writes how he frequently uses literature to criticize aspects of Mexican society (3). One obvious example is Leñero's screenplay *El crimen del Padre Amaro* (2002), adapted from the Portuguese novel which criticizes the Catholic Church and the power of the priesthood, in particular.

*El cordoncito* is one of Leñero's first children's stories. As the story begins, Paquito's mother sends him out on the streets to find his fortune. The boy goes no further than the sidewalk in front of his house and finds a piece of string. He plays with it a minute and tries to think about how he will be able to use it to get something better. He swings the string above his head like a lasso, making it attractive to other children. When a boy asks him to share the string, Paquito stubbornly refuses, until the boy agrees to trade it for a top. Paquito continues through the streets, trading up as he goes, all the while commenting on the lives of the children he meets. His trades always benefit both parties. He finally trades for a

tricycle that he sells to a street vendor, and then uses the money to buy food for his mother.

In our previous two books, children change substantially by the end of the story. Manolo, who wants a pair of tennis shoes like those of his peers, ends up rejecting consumerism. Cristóbal, who sets out to find the artificial world of the circus, grows to appreciate the natural world. In each story events make the protagonists change the way they feel about the world. In *El cordoncito*, however, Paquito works within capitalism to change his economic status—at least for that one day. Of the three he is the only character who does not have a different point of view by story's end.

The narrative has a familiar storyline, as Leñero's introduction makes clear. In this contemporary version of Grimm's *Hans in Luck*, a child of a poor family works his way up through the economic system accessible to him. One of the most appealing aspects of this story is its familiar structure and children will be able to understand the pattern early on. That is, they are able to anticipate that the boy will keep trading his possessions in exchange for something better. And they can anticipate a happy ending.

This story differs from other journey plots found in "EnCuento" stories. Here, Paquito is sent out into the world by his mother, who tells him "Ve a buscar fortuna" (6). The difference is that he does not choose his quest, like Gatico-Gatico (see Chapter 1 of this study), or Cristóbal. Rather, his mother, who provides him a clear objective, chooses the quest for him. He transforms into an entrepreneur using ingenuity much like fairytale characters such as Puss in Boots, Hans in Luck,



Rumplestiltzkin and Jack of Beanstalk fame. Like a good *pícaro*, Paquito advances himself using intelligence and a few tricks to overcome obstacles. Like many other famous *pícaros*, Paquito starts out with nothing and ends up with a lot.



Fig. 21. García in Leñero, 8-9.

*El cordoncito's* illustrations depict city life in Mexico. Figure 21 shows Manolo's street in Mexico City. The shop signs are in Spanish and the streets show stores and homes. One can also see a home that shares a wall with a mechanic shop, patios inside buildings, and women sweeping the sidewalks in front of their home. Also apparent is that two- and three-story concrete buildings cover many city blocks. One slightly unrealistic aspect is that there are relatively few people and cars on the street in the world's densely populated cities. As we have seen in several "EnCuento" stories, the illustrations are part of the story and serve to fill or create text gaps. This story would be quite different if the illustrator had chosen to picture Paquito and his family in abject poverty. But the illustrations match the text's light,

playful tone, as well as the story's positive outcome. While the narrative is serious and presents an actual problem in today's society, the tone is hopeful and humorous.

As I mentioned, the narrative voice is cheerful. Much of the story's humor is based on the narrator's description of other children making the trades. These descriptions have the double task of adding humor and establishing cultural roots. The author chooses simple names for the main characters: the mother is "Paquita" and the son "Paquito." Leñero chooses generic names to popularize the events in the story and thereby shows that anyone can do what they have done. This technique is particularly useful in stories where the child reader learns something because it shows that anyone can do what the protagonist did.

Yet another technique Leñero uses is focalizing speech within a particular cultural group- here Mexican children. A good example of the use of focalization to reflect the Mexican child's viewpoint is found in the names of the characters that make trades: *Lupe la Greñuda*, the messy-haired girl; *Toro el Gordinflón*, the chubby boy; *Matildita, la niña de trenzas*, the girl with braids; *Don Jesús el Pelón*, the bald street vendor. These names reflect both children's speech and the particular propensity of Latin Americans to use descriptive appellatives.

Another example of the narrator's humor is his use of stock fairytale phrases and patterns. Throughout the story the narrator inserts *anda que andarás, anda que andarás*, a phrase from typical folktales used specifically in stories, not in everyday speech. It is a phrase like "far far away" or "Once upon a time." "Anda que andarás" means "as he walked along." After Paquito trades in the tricycle, the narrator begins

the page by saying “anda que andarás . . .” for the third time, and then interrupts to “mejor dicho, perdón: *pedaleando en el triciclo*” (20).

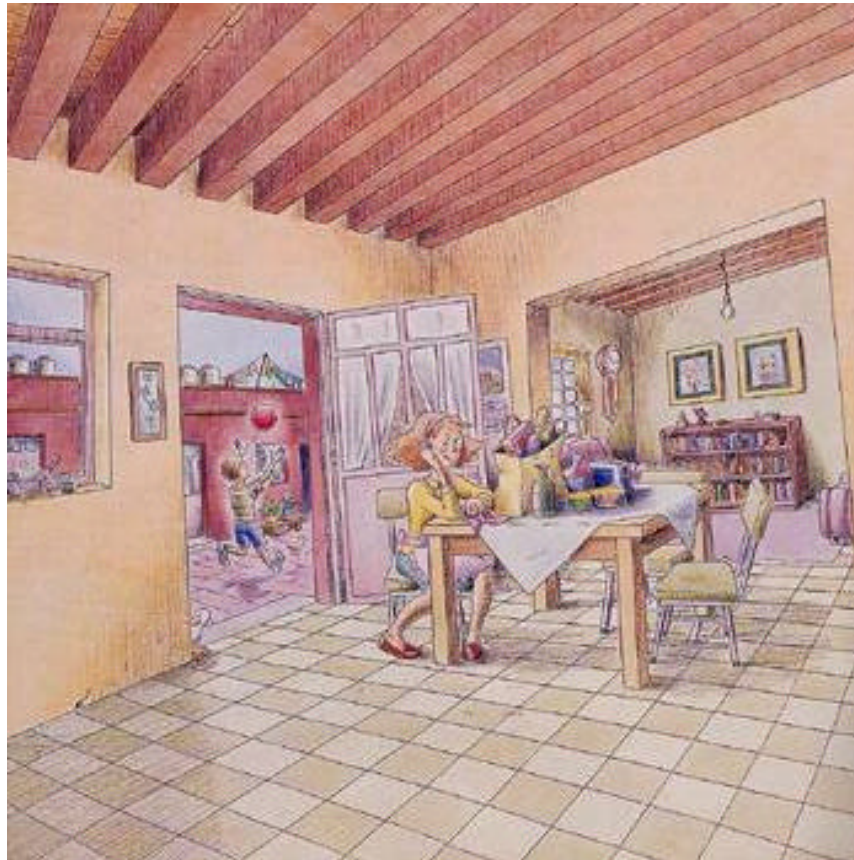


Fig. 22. Humberto García in Leñero, 22.

When his mother returns to find that Paquito has purchased groceries for the week, she adds: “vaya menos mal,” concealing any pride for her son’s deed. In Figure 22, however, we can see the mother with a proud look on her face. Paquito’s trades are not based on work for pay, but rather on employing ingenuity—putting to practical use a simple piece of string. The storyline features the child being proactive to change his family’s situation. As the title indicates, the objects traded are a string, a top, some bottle caps, a doll, a scooter and a tricycle: all are

children's toys. But Paquito's final trade is for money, which he uses to buy food. What was child's play takes on adult seriousness as he makes a tangible contribution to his family's finances. The child reader will see his final trade as a very selfless act, and the whole story as inspirational.

Because of the simple pattern and the language, children will be able to follow this storyline and enjoy it. The lighthearted illustrations match the upbeat narrative and add to the story's value. Humor and local color combine to complete the story's charm. Of the three protagonists in this chapter, Paquito will be the most appealing to the child reader. His is not a journey of personal growth, and as a protagonist he does not change throughout the course of the narrative. Instead, he leaves home with a plan and returns home triumphant.

## CONCLUSION

*La caverna encantada*, *El niño que buscaba a ayer* and *El cordoncito* are examples of three "EnCuento" books that present the authors' viewpoints in ways that child readers will understand. Several books among the "EnCuento" texts present problems that child protagonists solve, but all are particularly interesting because it is easy to ascertain the type of moral these authors wish to convey. For example, in Serna's story the message is that people should not be consumed by the quest for materialistic objects, or be seduced by commercials and marketing ploys.

Each story contains a child protagonist with problems that are resolved in different ways. Authors use the learning protagonist to show what they want the child reader to learn. What differs among them is the way children learn: Manolo is

frightened into a new way of thinking, Cristóbal is gently convinced by his natural surroundings; and Paquito achieves more confidence with each successful trade.

Despite such differences, the books are all didactic and all offer positive solutions.

Two of the books at first appear to be similar. *La caverna encantada* and *El Cordoncito* both feature protagonists who live in poverty. The boys are the same age and live with their mothers in Mexico City. But as I mentioned, the boys learn in different ways. Another difference is in the type of story each represents which the illustrations make apparent almost immediately upon opening the books (Figs. 13-15, Serna, Figs. 22-23, Leñero). Gómez Morín's illustrations for Serna's book utilize a scratch technique where the entire canvas is painted black and the illustrator scratches out the drawing and later adds watercolor over the drawing. The result is striking, as the illustrations are dark and mysterious, a perfect match for a story where a lost boy nearly gets cannibalized in an underground labyrinth. Gómez Morín's illustrations differ greatly from the bright ink and watercolor illustrations of the Leñero text. The latter reflect the upbeat mood and simple storyline of the Leñero text. The first illustration shows a panoramic view of the city street. This sets up the story in a particular space, giving the reader a view of where the action will transpire. The illustrations never depict poverty in an oppressive manner. Perhaps this is because the Leñero text is written for a younger implied reader rather than for the more complex Serna text. The Leñero text is more upbeat in general throughout and this tone culminates in the final illustration, which shows the mother at the table with the food and signaling how pleased she is that her son has solved the problem. While Serna and Leñero employ different methods, in the end both

boys triumph over their personal obstacles, a metaphor for the larger social ills of poverty and consumerism.

All three books present young male protagonists in Latin America. In each text the children learn a lesson. If the target audience for the “EnCuento” stories is primarily Latin American children, the lesson is easily transferable. The Serna text rejects materialism both through the presentation of characters and the way the plot proceeds: materialistic characters are monsters. In Alegría’s *El niño que buscaba a ayer*, Cristóbal changes his viewpoint from being enamored with the artificial world of the circus to an appreciation of the natural world. And in *El cordoncito* Paquito, a poor child, makes enough advantageous trades that he is able to buy food for his family. While the texts use different methodologies, they all present inspirational stories from which children can learn valuable lessons.

Our next chapter analyzes “EnCuento” outsider protagonists. While the protagonists in this chapter are much like the implied reader of each of the stories, the protagonists of the next chapter are meant to be different from the implied reader. Unlike these stories, the texts’ messages are less clear. One reason for this is that there is no solution to the character’s problems, and the story endings are open. I intend to show how strong narrators are used as a buffer between characters and the readers. This type of narrator–implied reader relationship serves to facilitate the reader’s gradual acceptance of the outsider protagonist. While the protagonists are all alienated from the culture present in their books, they are all endeared to the implied reader by a narrative voice that makes them more appealing.

## CHAPTER 4

### Outsiders in the “EnCuento” Series

This chapter examines five “EnCuento” stories that feature outsider protagonists—that is, protagonists who are different from mainstream characters in the stories. Tales about outcasts, oddballs, and underdogs enjoy great success in children’s literature. There is something innate about the reader wishing that disenfranchised characters succeed. Fiction from Huck Finn to Harry Potter and all the Roald Dahl stories feature quirky underdogs who triumph over adversity. Likewise, several “EnCuento” books feature outsider protagonists either because of gender, age, disability, economic class, physical differences or language. At present and surprisingly there are not stories in the “EnCuento” series that specifically address race or ethnicity.

The peculiar aspect of the stories of this chapter is that in most cases there is no solution to the characters’ problems, and the story endings are open and ambivalent at best, and tragic at worst. This chapter analyzes the role of the outsider protagonist in Mada Carreño’s *La pulga Cecilia*, Mario Benedetti’s *El hombre que aprendió a ladrar*, Luisa Valenzuela’s *Otrariana*, Silvia Molina’s *Mi abuelita tiene ruedas* and Camilo José Cela’s *Las orejas del niño Raúl*. In each of these stories I will focus on the implied reader and text gaps, such as those presented by the protagonist, the narrator, the message, the illustrations, and the endings. I will also evaluate the appeal of the outside protagonists to child readers.

The “EnCuento” protagonists discussed here are markedly different from other characters in their stories and are isolated because of it. First, Cecilia is a flea who is picky about whose blood she will suck; second, Raimundo learns to communicate with his dog; third, Ariana is a princess who runs away to the forest because she feels vulnerable; fourth, María is a child whose favorite playmate is her disabled grandmother with Alzheimer’s disease; and fifth, Raúl is a child obsessed with measuring his ears. In order to show how the implied reader may interpret the outsider in these texts, I will discuss critical theories that can be used to show how “EnCuento” authors construct the implied reader in their texts.

We must begin by stating the obvious: all children are “others.” By definition, in their relation to adults, children are in a position of lesser power. This is one of the problems discussed in Jacqueline Rose’s *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984). Rose challenges critics to examine the balance of power between adults and children as it relates to the culture of children’s stories. Books are chosen for them, read to them, and interpreted for them. Adults and children characters often mirror this relationship, as does the relationship of the author and the implied reader. Wherever applicable, this chapter will illustrate how the adult narrator in certain texts establishes a relationship with the implied child reader, and serves to interpret the protagonist’s actions.

Roberta Seelinger Trites analyzes the ideological tension present in all children’s texts:

The fact that these messages come from an adult (who, having access to power over the child, information the child cannot hold, and control



over the child's life, functions as an "insider" representative of adult culture) for the purposes of instructing a child (who is an outsider by virtue of the powerlessness of being a child) creates an ideological tension. (*African American Review* 8)

Thus by creating protagonists who differ from the mainstream, authors offer outsiders to the implied reader. The child reader may feel solidarity with them because of their similar conditions as an outsider in relation to adults.

The previous chapter analyzes the point of view conveyed in three stories. Here those stories are more complicated and the messages not as clear. One significant difference between stories of the previous chapter and these is the way these stories end. In the previous chapter each story had a resolution and a happy ending: Manolo escapes, Cristóbal finds yesterday, and Paquito buys food for his family: in short, they all acquire knowledge or learn lessons. In this chapter only one of the stories has a conclusion where the problem of the protagonist is resolved and a lesson learned; the rest have open endings. In most cases the characters in these stories are so strange that it would be too convoluted to wrap up the ending within a neat package. I plan to look at the narrative position of each story in order to show how the narrator helps create the implied reader.

In her reading of Virginia Hamilton's children's fiction, Trites simplifies Genette's explanation of narrative position writing:

Gérard Genette, for one, has codified ways of investigating narrative position. Genette identifies "author-narrators," those with a concept of the entire narrative structure, as "extradiegetic" narrators (229).

Interior narrators, those with knowledge of only a portion of the narration, he calls “intradiegetic” narrators. Extradiegetic narrators are those who have a connection to the “public” in the way that they address their story to a reader who exists outside of their own story, but intradiegetic narrators are connected only to other characters within the narrative (Genette 227-37). Narrators are thus defined by narrative distance; that is, by the amount of knowledge they have about the events they are narrating. Since possessing knowledge inevitably affects power relationships, narrative distance is a key factor in inclusion and exclusion. (159)

Narrative distance is therefore a useful tool in examining these texts. The authors have already created some distance between characters and implied readers by crafting such enigmatic protagonists. In this chapter I will examine whether the difference is meant to attract or repulse the child reader.

According to John Stephens, the people who choose books for children “see personal development and growth in self-understanding” as major purposes for reading literature. He goes on to explain that

this perception is mirrored in the fiction itself in a tendency for children’s fiction to focus attention predominantly on the individual psyche. Arguably the most pervasive theme in children’s fiction is the transition within the individual from infantile solipsism to maturing social awareness. (3)

Personal development and growth are pervasive themes in most children's fiction. While the protagonists in these stories are among the strangest in the "EnCuento" collection, there is still growth in consciousness, and therein lies a message for the implied reader. I shall examine each of the books individually in order to decide how the protagonist changes from beginning to end. I shall also decide how this change process might give us clues to deciphering the messages of each of the stories.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

In previous chapters I wrote that illustrations are a second text to be decoded by the child reader. Van Rhijn, the series editor, explained the process of adding illustration to text. CIDCLI chooses an illustrator from a worldwide catalogue of established illustrators and then sends him/her the text. The editors then put texts and illustrations together. This means that the author does not choose the illustrator, nor does s/he necessarily see the text before publication. It is even possible that the illustrator cannot read Spanish and therefore must have the text interpreted for him/her by a third party. The editor then makes the final decision concerning the illustrations and their textual complement.

The illustrations of "EnCuento" texts are visually complex and provide a wealth of text gaps. Stephens speaks to the importance of analyzing the illustrations:

The inscription of ideology in picture books, whether it is implicit or explicit, is subject to several key considerations. Picture book discourse is either socializing in purpose, or is oriented towards

particular social considerations of representation and reality. It is a double discourse, and because pictures involve both represented objects and a mode or style of representation, discussion of them, as with verbal texts, requires attention to the nature of their discourse and its production of story and significance. An audience thus has to learn how to interpret or “read” a picture just as much as a verbal text, and that learning is part of acculturation. (198)

One of the most outstanding qualities of the “EnCuento” series is the excellence of its illustrations. Each artist brings his or her unique style to the series. There are a variety of different art techniques, including pen and ink, paper cut, scratch, watercolor, acrylic, and cartooning. Because the illustrations are of consistently high quality and are well matched to texts, this makes the series visually pleasing. In many “EnCuento” texts, such as Serna’s *La caverna encantada* (scratch technique) and Alegría’s *El niño que buscaba a ayer* (paper-cut), the reader takes notice of the illustrations because they differ greatly from those of most other books.

Often a writer’s work is paired with a specific illustrator (Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake, Beverly Cleary and Patricia Reily Giff). Famous author–illustrators, such as Maurice Sendak, Theodor Seuss Geisel and Anthony Browne, have control over both the text and images. Whenever a child reads several books by one author, especially books in a character series, s/he expects continuity. In the “EnCuento” series diversity is more highly valued than continuity. Only a few illustrators have designed more than one “EnCuento” book. While all of the texts are written by

Hispanic authors, Van Rhijn mentions that selection of Hispanic illustrators was not a goal of the series. The illustrators in fact hail from many different countries: Spain, México, Italy, The Netherlands, Cuba, China, India, France, Russia, Argentina, and Perú. In many books the illustrator's home country is represented in the illustrations. Such is the case with the illustrations of Mada Carreño's *La pulga Cecilia*, illustrated by Kshitish Chatterjee, from India.

### *LA PULGA CECILIA*

Born in Madrid, Mada Carreño (1914-2000) escaped Spain as a twenty-four year old refugee of the Spanish Civil War. While she is best remembered as a newspaper reporter and writer, Mada Carreño was an actor, artist, singer and dancer as well. Before her death in 2000, she published over one-hundred stories. Many of the stories are adaptations of classic fairytales, while others are interpretations of Bible stories, and still others are her original children's stories. *La pulga Cecilia* belongs in the latter category, as it is one of the most interesting and unique stories of the "EnCuento" series.

Cecilia, a flea, is born into a large family. Showing talent at an early age, she learns to jump with great height and accuracy. She is proud to be a flea in a noble line. While her siblings and classmates listen to important lessons about "the dangers of soap," she daydreams, aspiring to be a flea that inhabits a wealthy, famous or beautiful host. On the day the baby fleas go out into the world, Cecilia rejects the first possible hosts because dogs are not good enough for her. She stays near her home on the side of the street knowing she needs to make a decision.

Finally she sees a beautiful woman pass by. The woman smells of perfume and wears fine clothing. Cecilia is in love with her host. But tragically that night Cecilia drowns in a warm bath.

The implied reader of this story is created through the use of illustrations, narration, and the manipulation of bias. The illustrations provide interesting text gaps by presenting the reader with a less familiar culture. The extradiegetic narrator takes sides with the implied reader, at first endearing the reader to the outsider protagonist and then finding fault with her.

One of the most interesting aspects of this story is that it is illustrated by Kitish Chatterjee, from India. Humans in the story are portrayed as Indian, and there are several scenes that depict streets in India. Women wear *saris*, a skirt with a short top and a length of material draped over the shoulder, and *salwar kameejes*, a knee-length collarless top with loose-fitting drawstring pants underneath. Many women decorate their forehead with a *bindi*. Men in the illustrations wear *dhoti*, a skirt tied at the waist with an extra length of material pulled up between the legs. The pictures provide glimpses of different realities of Indian life. For instance, there are pictures in the street of very poor people and working children (Fig. 23).

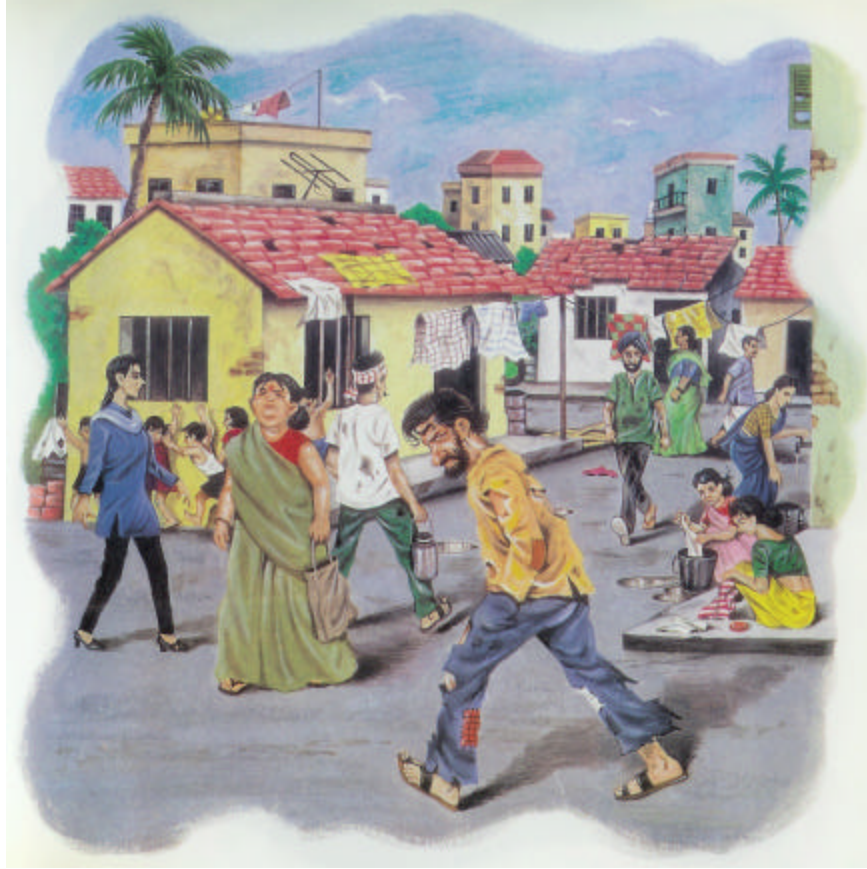


Fig. 23. Kitish Chatterjee in Carreño, 19.

There are also illustrations that depict people with more means, such as the people in very clean, elegant homes, and of course Cecilia's host. The paradox is that, physically speaking, the dirtiest people would be the most desirable to fleas. These illustrations provide text gaps and interest to the story. They present, in effect, a second text to consider, full of images, which will likely be unfamiliar to the child reader in the distribution area of the stories. The images themselves are educational and may provoke the child reader further to investigate the culture portrayed in them.

Compared to the illustrations in other series books, these are among the most colorful and comical. These humorous illustrations endear the reader to the protagonist, who is after all a flea and hardly adorable by nature. The artist uses bright colors to fill the pages. All of the fleas pictured have hairdos, and Cecilia stands out in the crowd with her red bow (see Fig. 24). The artist takes special care to add many details, such as expressions on the fleas' faces, rips and stains in the street peoples' clothing, cracks in walls of poor homes, and sparkling clean windows in the rich peoples' homes. Because the illustrations are humorous, this helps alleviate the sting of Cecilia's tragic end.



Fig. 24. Kitish Chatterjee in Carreño, 11.

Throughout the story the omniscient narrator foreshadowed Cecilia's death. The voice guides the reader through several instances, when Cecilia could have



made a different choice. In the end, the narrator says s/he is not the type that likes to dwell on tragedy, and thus describes Cecilia's passing briefly: "No soy de los que se solazan en la tragedia, ni voy a demorarme acerca de los últimos momentos de Cecilia, de su final prematuro. Sólo diré, para que conste en su historia, que aquella misma noche murió ahogada en agua tibia" [I am not among those who find solace in tragedy, nor am I willing to dwell on the final moments of Cecilia, before her premature end. I will tell you so you know how her story ends, you need only know she died, that very night, drowned in warm water] (27). Most of the story's illustrations depict three-dimensional street or home scenes with action occurring on several planes. The final illustration is an effective complement to the narrator's closing words, as it does not add frivolous elements to the image: it simply shows the flea floating, feet up, in soapy water (Fig. 25).



Fig. 25. Kitish Chatterjee in Carreño, 27.

As befits a hero in a classical tragedy, Cecilia is doomed with a fatal flaw. While all the other fleas are listening to lectures on the dangers of soap, Cecilia is daydreaming. The text tells us this will be her downfall. When the other fleas jump on the first dog that passes by, Cecilia refuses. Several of them invite her to do so, to no avail. In this way the story is very fatalistic, and yet she does not know she is doomed from the start. Because of her arrogance, she is an outsider even among fleas.

Foreshadowing is one of the most obvious response-inviting structures in this story. The narrator uses foreshadowing to relate information to the implied reader that the characters in the story do not know. Cecilia believes in fate and destiny and at the outset the story leads the reader to believe that she is destined for great things. The narrator states that Cecilia showed early talent; she could jump higher and more accurately than other fleas. Then the narrator foreshadows Cecilia's death. During her mother's lessons Cecilia learns that she descends from a long line of fleas that lived on important hosts. Cecilia dwells on her lineage and ignores other important messages in her mother's lessons. Thus by creating a relationship with the reader the narrator manipulates the latter's expectations. The narrator mentions the danger in Cecilia not listening, and so the reader knows not to expect that Cecilia will succeed. In the end, Cecilia was not destined for greatness, but an early death.

Rocío Miranda, one of the series editors, compares the life of the flea to that of her creator:

*La pulga Cecilia* puede considerarse un texto, en cierto modo, autobiográfico, porque la autora sintió desde pequeña que en el mundo

no había mucha consideración hacia los demás. Por eso imaginó a una pulga que, habiendo nacido con un corazón amoroso, no tenía más remedio que chupar la sangre a los otros. Ella no supo encontrar la solución, pero quizá haya alguien que la encuentre.

[*La pulga Cecilia {Cecilia the Flea}* can be considered, in a way, an autobiographical story because since she was young the author has always felt that most people did not have much consideration for others. Because of this she imagined a flea that in spite of her kind heart did not have any choice but to suck the blood of others. She never found a solution to this problem, perhaps there is someone out there who will.] (CIDCLI)

Cecilia's tragic flaw is not contained entirely in the above quotation. Having been born with a loving heart, "no tenía más remedio que chupar la sangre a los otros." [did not have any choice but to suck the blood of others] (10). There are brief moments in the story when Cecilia feels anxiety about her lot in life, but in the end it is arrogance that kills her. She chooses such a clean host because she did not listen to her mother's lessons. Her tragic end is alluded to early in the story when she daydreams during lessons: "A veces le gustaba imaginar historias fantásticas, perdiendo así gran parte de las enseñanzas que hubiera debido asimilar, descuido que le acarreó finalmente las peores consecuencias" [Sometimes she liked to imagine fantasy stories, because of this she missed a great deal of what she was expected to learn, which in the end had the most tragic results] (10).

There is a clear message to be extracted from this story: Listen to your mother! Cecilia dies because she doesn't listen. Three times before the mother lets the fleas go out into the world she tells them to use their noses to guide them to the safe places. The mother says: "Podréis correr el orbe en autobuses y vagones de ferrocarril, confortaros con la sangre emocionada de los espectadores del cine y, en fin, con sólo un poco de olfato y buen criterio, subsistir sanamente" [You can travel the World on busses and boxcars, comforting yourselves with the hot blood of movie goers and, in the end, by using your sense of smell and a little good judgment you will live a healthy life] (15). The mother explains that fleas are to avoid all clean places, especially good-smelling places with white curtains and clean babies. Her warning is stern and she indicates that they will die if they do not heed this advice. (15). Indeed, this is her final advice before she opens the door to let her daughters go out into the world: "Y no os digo más, sino que uséis vuestras narices como linterna y guía" [And I will not tell you again, use your noses as lanterns and guides] (15). But Cecilia does not use her nose properly; in fact, at the first chance she uses her nose to discriminate instead. As she stands by the side of the road, a dog approaches her. Several fleas call out for her to join them. She chooses not to, because "todo aquello olía agrio. Cecilia rehusó con una sonrisa, y el perro prosiguió su camino, olfateando unas veces y trotando otras" [it all smelled stinky. Cecilia said "no thanks" with a smile and the dog went on his way. Stopping to smell things then trotting off] (16). So Cecilia then does use her nose; however, she uses it to contradict her mother's warning.

The importance of the olfactory sense continues up until the end of the story. It is because of her fine sense of smell that Cecilia falls in love with her first host. “Un perfume desconocido para Cecilia la embriagó toda. No tenía nada que ver con los olores estridentes de otras mujeres. Aquella falda, aquellas medias finas olían a seda, a cuero fragante, a campo” [An unknown perfume filled her senses. It was nothing like the strong smells of other women. That skirt, those stockings, they smelled like silk, like leather, like the country] (27). While Cecilia is supposed to use her nose to survive in the city, her senses betray her, and she dies as a result. Near the end of the story the author uses the narrator’s voice to communicate more directly with the reader. This is an example of how the extradiegetic narrator has a closer relationship with the audience. Here the narrator asks questions of the child reader so that they relate Cecilia’s story to their own life. “¿Qué pasó por la cabeza de la pobre Cecilia? ¿Qué pasa por nosotros, infelices, cuando nos enamoramos? ¿Cómo podemos prever lo que va a sucedernos después? Uno sigue simplemente su destino, y Cecilia siguió el suyo” [What passed through poor Cecilia’s head? What happens to all us poor souls when we fall in love? How can we predict what will happen next? We simply follow our destiny and Cecilia followed hers] (27). The end is fatalistic and it is the narrator’s opinion that this is what had to happen to Cecilia.

Several response-inviting structures combine here to create a relationship between implied reader and story. These include, first, the illustrations that picture Cecilia as a cute flea troubled by indecision, a flea in love, and then a flea dead in the water; second, the narrator, who sides with the implied reader, informing the

reader of the story's outcome through foreshadowing; and finally, the conclusion to the story, where the narrator communicates directly with the implied reader, asking the reader to make connections to his or her own life.

### *EL HOMBRE QUE APRENDIÓ A LADRAR*

The next story, Mario Benedetti's (1920), *El hombre que aprendió a ladrar*, tells of a man determined to change his destiny, or at least fight against nature. Raimundo is resolute on learning to bark like a dog. Benedetti was born in Paseo de los Toros, Uruguay, and as a young man worked as a reporter in Buenos Aires. Upon returning to Montevideo in 1945, he wrote for the weekly news publication *Marcha*. His first successful collection of short stories, *Montevideanos* (1959), is about common people and their lives, particularly politics, sex, violence and death—themes he still writes about today. A year after publishing *Montevideanos*, Benedetti achieved international recognition for his novel *La tregua* (1960). In 1973 Benedetti began a long political exile from Uruguay and during this time he lived in Argentina, Perú, Spain, and Cuba. He has now returned to live in Montevideo.

Benedetti has published over seventy works. He writes literature in all genres including novels, poetry, essay, and even musical lyrics (*Bibliografía Virtual Cervantes*). Students of Latin American literature might be surprised to see Benedetti's name among the "EnCuento" authors because much of his work is political in nature, contains explicit language, sex, and violence and is thus inappropriate for children. José Miguel Oviedo says Benedetti's writing is "marked by a firm, ideological radicalism and the testimonial urgency of an intellectual

directly engaged in the political struggle” (Oviedo's included in the *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* edited by Pupo-Walker and González Echevarría 421). His children’s story, *El hombre que aprendió a ladrar* is no different. Benedetti dedicates his story to Tito Monterroso saying the story is a companion piece to Monterroso’s *El perro que deseaba ser hombre* (6). While Benedetti’s is the shortest “EnCuento” story, it is also far from being a simple story for children, as it contains many response-inviting structures.

Raimundo, the protagonist, does not want to imitate dog sounds but actually learn to speak and understand the language of dogs. He works for years to achieve his task and nearly quits, but perseveres and becomes fluent in dog-language. Raimundo is driven by an impulse to communicate with dogs, even though people make fun of him. He feels that to love is to communicate: “Amor es comunicación” [Love is communication] (7). The greatest day of Raimundo’s life is when he and his dog, Leo, finally understand each other. It is through their daily afternoon conversations that Raimundo realizes that Leo has a very astute worldview. It is after many such conversations that Raimundo decides to ask what he has been dying to know: can you really understand me when I bark? To which the dog answers that he can, but Raimundo still needs to practice because he has a human accent. The story ends with this open conclusion and the reader never knows how the protagonist reacts to this criticism from his dog friend.

The introductions to the “EnCuento” books are all written with the child reader as the implied audience. The introduction to Benedetti’s work is particularly complimentary of the author.

Poeta, narrador y periodista, Mario Benedetti nació en 1920, en Paseo de los Toros, Uruguay, pero pasó su primera infancia en un pueblito cercano llamado Tacuarembó. A los ocho años ingresó como alumno al Colegio Alemán de Montevideo, donde aprendió a hablar alemán y adquirió una sólida formación cultural. [Poet, writer and reporter, Mario Benedetti was born in 1920 in Paseo de los Toros, Uruguay, but he lived his young life in Tacuarembó. When he was eight he began Colegio Alemán de Montevideo where he learned German and received a solid cultural formation.] (5)

This section of the introduction replicates what happens in the story. An individual learns another language, and as a result gains knowledge of another culture. It forms part of the introduction so that the child reader knows that Benedetti learned another language as a young child.

As mentioned, Benedetti's work for adults is well known and frequently contains explicit sexual references, controversial political opinions, and descriptions of violence and torture. Because he does not normally write for young children, the introduction further presents Benedetti with a particularly flattering description of his personality:

Benedetti es un hombre amable y cálido con la gente y, a pesar de su popularidad, se comporta de manera humilde. Su poesía tiene la virtud de emocionar a los lectores de todas las edades. Muchos de sus poemas han sido musicalizados y están grabados por reconocidos cantantes, lo cual lo ha hecho más popular aún, no sólo en su país sino en toda



Latinoamérica y España. Sus cuentos y novelas tratan sobre el hombre común y sus alegrías y miserias cotidianas. Cercano a los ochenta años, Benedetti sigue escribiendo diariamente y está lleno de proyectos relacionados con la literatura. [Benedetti is a warm and kind man who, despite his popularity, is quite humble. His poetry has the ability to compel readers of all ages. Many of his poems have been put to music and have been recorded by famous singers, something which has made him even more popular, not only in his own country but in all of Latin America and Spain. His stories and novels are about the common man and his everyday joys and miseries. Nearly eighty years old, Benedetti still writes every day and he still has many literary projects.] (5)

It is difficult to determine what kind of implied reader this text seeks.

Because of the theme, the vocabulary, and the references to existential problems, it seems likely that Benedetti originally intended this story for an adult audience. Nonetheless, as an illustrated story in a children's book series, its message will reach children.

When Aidan Chambers discusses the problem of the implied reader, he compares Roald Dahl's novel *Danny, Champion of the World* (1975) to Dahl's short story "The Champion of the World," written for *The New Yorker*. Chambers points out that few words are changed from the original adult version in order to make the text more readable for children (*Booktalk* 40-41 ) However, one difference is the focus on the child protagonist, easily noted in the change of title. Chambers observes that the relationship between reader and book is established by the adoption of a

child-centered point of view, taking sides, and indeterminacy-gaps. Examining these elements in Benedetti's story as well will reveal the complex nature of the message in *El hombre que aprendió a ladrar* for the implied child reader.

When considering the definitions of an implied reader as outlined by Chambers, there are several reasons to believe that Benedetti did not have a child audience in mind for this text. Among them are the psychological implications of the story, cultural references, and the vocabulary he uses. Even in this very brief illustrated story several references complicate this reading for children. One of the most complicated factors is lexicon. For such a short story, this text has several words glossed; among them are *Pragmático* "práctico"; *Autoflagelaba* "se reprochaba a sí mismo"; *Sagaz* "astuto"; *Escueta* "forma de hablar breve y sin rodeos." Several more words require explanation. Only a few "EnCuento" books have more words defined in the margins; among them is Leñero's *El cordoncito*, a twenty-three page text (compared to this four-page text) whose young protagonist uses street slang. The majority of glossed words in *El cordoncito* are defined because they are unique to Mexico, not because they are difficult for children to understand. One example is "Chácharas y cachivaches," defined as "objetos viejos e inservibles" [old useless items]. The glossed words of Benedetti's story are singled out because they would not be comprehensible to a child reader. Thus, the editor thought it necessary to provide a bridge between adult author and implied reader, whereas the editor of Leñero's text only found it necessary to provide assistance to non-Mexican readers. Lexicon is therefore only one example of a text-gap in this brief story; others include references to psychological disorders, saints, and

language acquisition. As we will see, the illustrations create indeterminacy gaps as well.

The illustrations by Cees Van Der Hulst for this text are simple line art drawings filled in with light colors, reminiscent of Thurber's *New Yorker* illustrations. Upon closer inspection, the viewer notices that the pictures are actually quite complicated. There are hidden images on several pages (see Fig. 26).

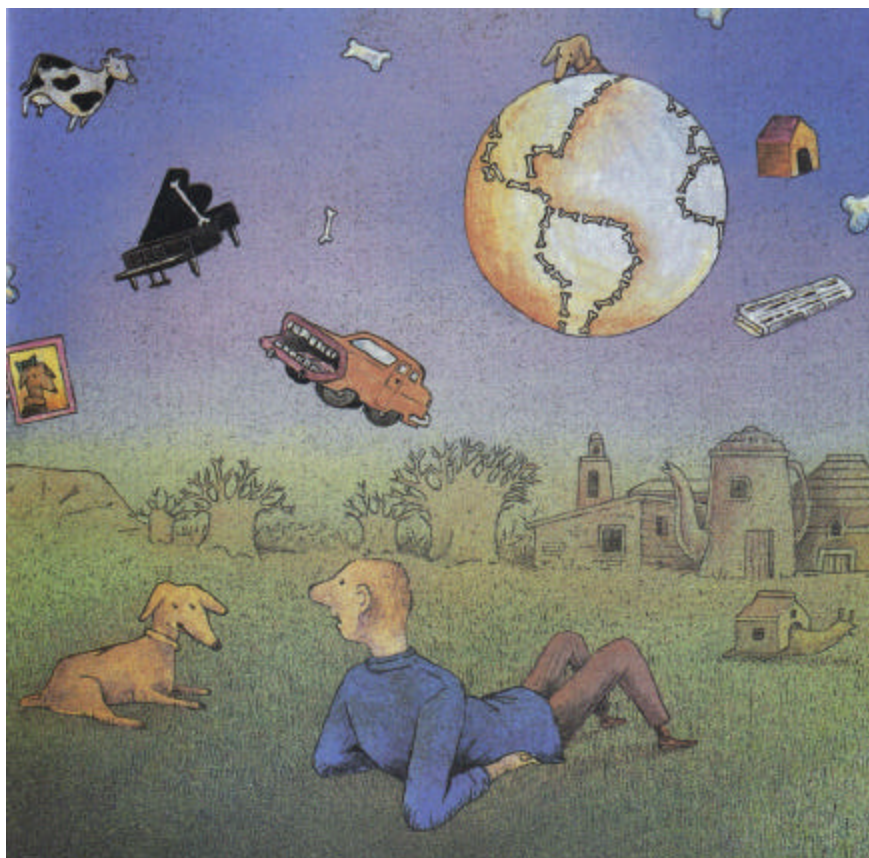


Fig. 26. Cees Van Der Hulst in Benedetti, 9.

Dog images abound, not just pictures of Leo but also framed photos of a female dog, doghouses, dog bones, water bowls and a world map made of bones. There are also several strange images that are meant to complement the unusual plot; such are a green dog floating through the air in an umbrella, a snail with a doghouse for a shell,

a car with teeth and tongue where the grill would be finally the protagonist himself appears as an illustration in a book the dog is reading. Many images are repeated more than once in a frame, especially pictures of Leo. On one page, Leo is sitting in the top bureau drawer (see Fig. 27), while stuffed versions of him are under the same piece of furniture and poking from the top of a teakettle on the floor. The illustrations are meant to entertain the child reader and complement the story. These particular illustrations call out for interpretation.



Fig. 27. Cees Van Der Hulst in Benedetti, 10.

## INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The better to understand this story, it is useful to examine Benedetti's other works and the reference to Tito Monterroso's story he makes in the introduction. One theme in all of Benedetti's literary work is loneliness: Raimundo feels it as he tries to relate to and communicate with dogs. Benedetti describes a phenomenon called "desexilio" where exiles have to recover from their time away and rejoin their communities (Smith 114). The processes involved in exile and "desexilio" are alluded to in much of Benedetti's work. Many of the characters in his fiction suffer psychological problems because of feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Some of these themes are evident in his children's story as well. For instance, the story references language acquisition, fear of inadequacy, and living as an outsider.

In his dedication to the book Benedetti states, "A Tito Monterroso este agradecido complemento de *El perro que deseaba ser un ser humano*" (6). The Monterroso story is based on a similar premise: someone who wants to become something s/he is not. In Monterroso's story a dog decides to become a man. The dog makes quite a successful transformation, except for wagging his tail and howling at the moon.

En la casa de un rico mercader de la ciudad de México, rodeado de comodidades y de toda clase de máquinas, vivía no hace mucho tiempo un perro al que se le había metido en la cabeza convertirse en un ser humano, y trabajaba con ahínco en esto.

Al cabo de varios años, y después de persistentes esfuerzos sobre sí mismo, caminaba con facilidad en dos patas y a veces sentía que

estaba ya a punto de ser un hombre, excepto por el hecho de que no mordía, movía la cola cuando encontraba algún conocido, daba tres vueltas antes de acostarse, salivaba cuando oía las campanas de la iglesia, y por las noches se subía a una barda a gemir viendo largamente la luna.

[Not long ago, in the house of a rich merchant in Mexico City, surrounded by all of life's comforts and every imaginable machine, lived a dog that had it in his head that he was going to become human and he worked towards achieving his goal.

After many years and persistent efforts to change himself, he was able to walk on two paws and sometimes he felt he was nearly a human. Even though he did not bite, he wagged his tail when he saw an acquaintance, turned around three times before laying down, drooled when he heard the church bells and climbed the fence at night to howl at the moon.] (*Labuenanueva Librería Online*, Nov. 23, 2004)

The two stories definitely provide the same lesson: one cannot completely change oneself, no matter how hard one tries. In both cases, the situation presented is a metaphor for human behavior. And at the end of both stories, the authors/philosophers are insinuating it is impossible to change nature completely. Monterroso's dog, who tries to change into a man, does not achieve his goal. The parts that are impossible to change are innate dog traits. In contrast to Monterroso's dog, Benedetti's protagonist wishes to make more subtle changes. His goal is to remain human but communicate with dogs in their language. Arguably, Monterroso's

dog wishes to become an “insider,” or at least part of the dominant human society, Raimundo wishes to become (or at least communicate with) an “outsider.” Yet in the end neither dog nor man is able to transform fully.

The choice of a dog by Benedetti is interesting because it brings with it social implications about man’s place in society. Dogs have long symbolized the underclass. People are said to “work like dogs,” “be treated like dogs,” “be the underdog.” If we assume that dogs symbolically are beneath humans, then Raimundo, a member of an elite class with the time and resources available to him to learn another language for academic purposes, is reaching out to an underclass to try and understand them. To his surprise, Leo has much more intelligence and insight than he imagined. “A pesar de su amor por los hermanos perros, Raimundo nunca había imaginado que Leo tuviera una tan sagaz visión del mundo” [In spite of his love for his dog brothers he never imagined that Leo World have such an astute view of the World] (8). So even Raimundo with his love of dogs previously developed some uninformed stereotypes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In another famous South American dog story, *El hombre que se convirtió en perro* (1975), Argentine playwright Osvaldo Dragún embarks on a comedic social criticism of the power structures in place in capitalist society. Dragún’s unemployed protagonist is so desperate to find a job that he agrees to become the night watchman’s dog. He is forced to stay in this position for so long that he learns to walk on four legs live in the dog house and eat bones. At the conclusion of the play his wife leaves him because she is afraid she will have puppies. The obvious difference between Benedetti’s and Dragún’s protagonists is their ability to choose.

In his early stories Benedetti considered man's relationship with dogs. "Se acabó la rabia" (*Montevideanos* 1959) for example, is focalized by a canine. The narrator reports all the action in terms of what the faithful family dog, Fido, sees.

Aunque la pierna del hombre apenas se movía, Fido, debajo de la mesa, apreciaba grandemente esa caricia en los alrededores del hocico. Esto era casi tan agradable como recoger pedacitos de carne asada directamente de las manos del amo. [Even though the leg of his master barely moved under the table, he really appreciated this caress next to his muzzle. It was almost as pleasurable as taking meat right out of his master's hands.] (Benedetti)

The story differs from *El hombre que aprendió a ladrar* in that the implied reader is an adult. Content and language are two of the differences that demonstrate the distinct techniques that the author uses to communicate to an implied child reader.

In Benedetti's dog story for adults, the faithful dog leads his owner to a hidden cigarette case that proves the man's wife has had an affair in their home. But the results of the dog's loyalty are tragic.

Entonces decidió acercarse y lamerlo con ternura, como era su deber. El hombre levantó la cabeza y vio aquel rabo movedizo, aquel cargoso que venía a compadecerlo, aquel testigo. Todavía Fido jadeó satisfecho, mostrando la lengua húmeda y oscura. Después se acabó. Era viejo, era

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Raimundo chooses to bark like a dog while Dragún's protagonist is forced to behave like a dog. But this difference marks Benedetti's questioning the nature of the symbol of the dog in literature.



fiel, era confiado. Tres pobres razones que le impidieron asombrarse cuando el puntapié le reventó el hocico. [So he decided to go lick him tenderly as he usually did. The man raised his head and saw that wagging tail, that drag that had come to comfort him, that witness. Fido was still satisfied and panting, showing his dark wet tongue. Then it was over. He was old, loyal and trusting, three reasons that prevented his astonishment when the foot cracked his jaw.] (Benedetti *Montevideanos*)

The violent image of the owner kicking his dog's face is meant to show how an innocent suffers for the crimes of another. Fido is not nearly as astute as Leo. Fido is innocent and trusting, qualities his owner punishes. Leo is intelligent and forthcoming with criticism of his owner. Another substantial difference between them is that Leo is semi-anthropomorphic, as Benedetti imagines him with human insight and intelligence. Fido, on the other hand, remains a dog even though the story is focalized by it.

The foregoing demonstrates how two Benedetti stories with dogs at their center are meant for entirely different audiences. The text gaps of the adult story would be prohibitive to child readers' understanding; and the narrator of the adult story endears the reader to Fido only to evoke strong emotion when he is kicked violently. The function of the narrator in *El hombre que aprendió a ladrar* is entirely different.

The narrator of Raimundo's story is extradiegetic and allies himself with the reader early on. The narrator clearly speaks from outside the narrative. He is not a

character in the story yet sympathizes with the protagonist. This can be seen from the outset: “Lo cierto es que fueron años de arduo y pragmático aprendizaje, con lapsos de desalineamiento en los que estuvo a punto de desistir” [The truth of the matter is that there had been years of hard work, with times when he strayed from the course and nearly gave up] (6). Only Raimundo would know that in his struggle to learn to speak with dogs, there had been moments when he felt like giving up and yet the narrator communicates this to the reader. The narrator tries to persuade the reader that Raimundo’s quest is a good one by describing Raimundo as hardworking and persevering, a man who had to work at this task for years in order to learn how to bark.

There are instances in the story when the narrator addresses the reader directly. One example is when s/he says, “¿Qué lo había impulsado a ese adiestramiento?” addressing the child reader’s imaginary question, [“Why did he want to bark like a dog?”]. This kind of direct acknowledgement of the audience serves to create a stronger bond between the implied reader and narrator, and has the added benefit of creating sympathy for the protagonist. The narrator sides with the protagonist and serves as his advocate when presenting him to the child. This protagonist needs a supporter because of his outsider status. In order to prevent alienating him from the child reader, the narrator constantly intermediates. Raimundo is strange, the narrator acknowledges: “Ante sus amigos se autoflagelaba con humor: ‘La verdad es que ladro por no llorar’” [He made fun of himself in front of his friends: “The truth is I bark so that I won’t cry”] (6). Raimundo makes fun of himself, and creates a quasi-self-exile in preferring to become part of dog society.

Here the child reader is asked to side with the learner, the human being. Between Raimundo and Leo, the man is the weaker, more childlike of the two. Because of his knowledge of language and culture, Leo is in a position of power. So the reader, naturally, will find Raimundo more sympathetic. This relationship is further fostered because the narrator sides with the protagonist. One clear example of the narrator siding with the protagonist occurs early in the story when he describes the process Raimundo goes through to communicate with dogs. “Pero al fin triunfó la perseverancia y Raimundo aprendió a ladrar. No a imitar ladridos, como suelen hacer algunos chistosos o que se creen tales, sino verdaderamente a ladrar.” [But through perseverance he learned to bark. Not to imitate barks like some clowns do, instead he learned to really bark] (6). He says that Raimundo learned to actually speak dog—not just imitate barking sounds like some people do in order to be funny. It is obvious the narrator sides with the protagonist and values Raimundo’s experience. This kind of relationship in children’s books is more comfortable than an adversarial relationship where the narrator presents a protagonist that s/he does not admire.

Because the story has an open ending we do not know if Raimundo feels successful. His feelings are a large part of the story, and the open, albeit humorous, ending leaves the reader to speculate about Raimundo’s reaction to his canine companion’s criticism.

Por fin, una tarde se animó a preguntarle, en varios sobrios ladridos: “Dime, Leo, con toda franqueza: ¿qué opinás de mi forma de ladrar?” La respuesta de Leo fue bastante escueta y sincera: “Yo diría

que lo haces bastante bien, pero tendrás que mejorar. Cuando ladras, todavía se te nota el acento humano.”

[Finally one afternoon he decided to ask him in several barks: “Tell me, Leo, and be frank: “What do you think about the way I bark?” Leo’s answer was short and to the point: “I’d say you do it well, but there is still room for improvement. When you bark you can still note a human accent.”](11)

Benedetti is obviously reflecting upon the metaphor for the human condition dogs provide, something he had in mind when he said, “La razón que el perro tiene tantos amigos es que mueve la cola, no la lengua.” [The reason dogs have so many friends is because they wag their tails more than their tongues].

#### *OTRARIANA*

Our next story is by Luisa Valenzuela (1938), who was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Like many Latin American authors, she began her career as a reporter. She worked for both *La Nación* and *Crisis*. She has published twelve books, most notable among them her short story collections: *Cambio de Armas* (1982), *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (1990), and *Simetrías* (1993), and her novels *Cola de lagartija* (1983) and *Novela negra con argentinos* (1992). All have been translated into English and are frequently studied in universities in the United States and Europe. Valenzuela’s works, including her children’s story *Otrariana*, hold particular appeal for those interested in sexual politics. In her stories she often writes about Argentina’s dirty war, violence and torture, and their effect on women.

The introduction to *Otrariana* explains that Luisa Valenzuela is one of the most recognizable Latin American authors today:

Escribe, dice ella, desde que empezó a vivir, porque desde muy pequeña tenía grandes y diversos intereses que sólo logró conjuntar al ponerse a trabajar con la pluma y el papel. Empezó a los 17 años, como periodista, pero en el campo de la literatura ha publicado seis novelas y cuatro libros de cuentos para adultos. Este cuento, escrito especialmente para la colección “EnCuento,” es el primero que Luisa hace para niños. *Otrariana* es una historia que saca a la luz los temores más íntimos de una niña que, a diferencia de los adultos, sí se atreve a enfrentarlos. Es un cuento para reflexionar. [She has been writing, she says, since she began to live, because from the time she was a child she had such great and diverse interests that the only way she could get them all together was by putting pen to paper. At 17 she became a reporter, as an author, she has published six novels and four short story collections for adults. This story, especially written for “EnCuento,” is the first that Luisa has written for children. *Otrariana* is a story that brings a little girl’s fears into the light, a girl who differs from adults in that she is not afraid to confront her fears. This is a story that will make you think.] (5)

The introduction reveals the author’s polemical style of writing. By saying the child protagonist is able to face her fear of intimacy while adults are not, the editor points to one of the many dichotomies Valenzuela addresses in this story. Long known as a feminist writer, Valenzuela uses her first children’s story to introduce male/female

binary oppositions and to question patriarchal norms before an audience of young readers.

While *Otrariana* is described in catalogues as “The story of a brave young girl who faces her fears and grows from the experience,” this is a strange and convoluted story, even for the “EnCuento” series. Ariana, a young girl who forms part of the evil queen of Castillo’s court, is being groomed to become either queen or a member of Parliament. She is struck one day with an inescapable feeling of vulnerability. From the outset, then, it is obvious that Ariana sees herself as an outsider because she does not share others’ goals for her.

Ariana decides to leave the castle and enter the forbidden forest. Escaping beneath the infrared lasers, she enters the almost impenetrable forest under a cloak of “vulnerability.” Exhausted, she falls asleep on a patch of moss and is promptly devoured by amoeba-like monsters consisting largely of eyes. From her corpse, another Ariana emerges. This second Ariana is her spirit, which escapes her cadaver and watches as a knight-in-armor comes and takes her still beating heart from her ribcage. Being a faithful knight, he takes the heart to the despotic queen. Ariana follows him. At the castle, the queen promptly promotes him and tells the guards to take the heart to the freezer in the science lab for future experiments.

The knight protests as he has protected the heart, warming it with his own breath. The queen chastises and dismisses him. Relieved from duty, he happily returns to the forest. Meanwhile, Ariana’s spirit grabs her heart and returns it to her body. As she is returning the heart, the amoeba-monsters reappear, intending to finish eating her. Her spirit intervenes and gives each monster a name; this

transforms them into nearly recognizable animals. This results in a collaboration of sorts, as Ariana and the monsters are able to return her spirit to her body. In her rejuvenated state, Ariana decides she wishes to stay in the forest where she feels safe. She meets her friend, the knight, and they remain friends forever.

Valenzuela is a declared feminist, and her commitment to feminism is obvious in this text as well. Roberta Seelinger Trites, in her book *Waking Sleeping Beauty* (1997), discusses feminist voices in children's fiction and shows how feminist literary theory helps us the better to understand children's literature. She maintains that "No organized social movement has affected children's literature as significantly as feminism has" (ix), and she begins her analysis with the idea of feminist re/vision. Through this process, critics examine the position of female protagonists in children's literature; Trites herself describes the direct relationship between the feminist social movement and female characters in children's books. She concludes that because of changes in the political and social systems that took place in the second half of the last century, female protagonists have become stronger (Trites 11).

Valenzuela's story echoes Trites's findings as it deals with the empowerment of a young female protagonist who has suffered under a despotic matriarch. Trites says that modern feminist children's fiction gives women and children a voice, while in the past both groups were silenced. She cites Lissa Paul, who states that "Women make up more than half the population of the world- and all of us were once children. It is almost inconceivable that women and children have been invisible and voiceless so long" (48).

Ariana combats powerlessness by taking control of her fears. When Ariana returns the heart to her corpse, the beasts are waiting to finish eating her. The text tells us that the monsters were created by and for (“por y para”) Ariana. Therefore, only she has power over them. The monsters are shapeless, so Ariana decides to name them, and as she does they take on the characteristics she gives them until she no longer fears them.<sup>7</sup> This is certainly a metaphor for the fear of the unknown. When she is able to name her fears, she is able to control them (see Fig. 28).



Fig. 28. Mauro Evangelista in Valenzuela, 12.

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<sup>7</sup>We discussed the importance of choosing a name in chapter 1. In Sarduy’s *Gatico Gatico*, when the owl renames the cat, he takes on the characteristics of that new name.



This story's feminist framework is also evident in Ariana's escape from the queen's despotic authority. As the illustrations clearly show, the queen in the story is evil. Early on we know that Ariana's relationship to the queen causes stress. "Esta reina de ahora era bastante despótica, por desgracia, y solo tenía tres hijos, varones por desgracia, y por eso pretendía que todas las princesitas de la corte la quisieran como a una madre" [This queen was quite despotic, sorry to say, and she only had three boys, sadly, and because of this she wanted all of the princesses of her court to treat her like she was their mother] (9). Later we learn that Ariana despises the queen because of her abuse of power (see Fig. 29).

When the knight attempts to protect Ariana's heart from the queen's experiments, the queen becomes angry with him and tells him he is worthless.



Fig. 29. Mauro Evangelista in Valenzuela, 16.

- No puede hacer eso, le salió al guardabosques casi sin pensarlo.
  - Puedo hacer lo que se me antoje, contestó la Reina irritada.
  - Pero yo calenté la lata con mi aliento...
  - Era aliento de guardabosques que no vale nada, ahora sos mi escudero.
  - Ahora soy Rodrigo, le contestó el que fue guardabosques y nunca sería escudero porque allí mismo presentó su renuncia y se retiró altivo.
- (19) [- You cannot do that, said the forest ranger, without thinking.
- I can do whatever I please, said the queen angrily.
  - But I kept it warm with my own breath...
  - That was forest ranger breath which was worthless, now you are my page.
  - Now I am Rodrigo, answered the one who used to be a forest ranger and will never be a page because he resigned right there and left haughtily.

The queen tries to convince him that he has value only as her servant. But he escapes her control and returns to the forest. This exchange is used to characterize the queen as a stereotypical evil queen of fairytale lore. Thus, when Ariana is able to escape from her control, she triumphs.

Children know castles and queens belong to another time and most often to fairy tale world. Upon first glance, *Otrariana* seems to fit within the fairytale genre. But fairy tales are forgotten as soon as the reader discovers that laser guns protect

the castle, infrared rays protect the forest boundaries, and body parts are refrigerated for scientific experiments. This mixture of past and present lets the reader know they are involved in a futuristic fantasy world. Like Alvaro Mutis, Valenzuela relies on children's knowledge of fairy tales in order to play with genre. The story's intertextual references to fairy tales enable the implied reader to recognize the narrative pattern at work: a damsel in distress leaves the castle, meets a prince, rebels against the wicked queen, and lives happily ever after (with the prince). But Valenzuela only uses this pattern like a shell in which she hides the real story for surface structure. As we have seen, her story deviates from the normal fairy tale at nearly every plot turn.

A true feminist, Valenzuela sets up several binary oppositions only to break them down. The first is "civilization versus barbarism," a binary opposition famously contemplated by Argentina's Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888). Sarmiento promoted modernization as the most effective means to national progress. Ariana rejects the modern world as she feels vulnerable in the castle, the domain of the evil queen, and so she escapes to the forbidden forest. In stories of development, young females often find more room to grow in natural surroundings, than in civilization. Annis Pratt expands upon Elaine Showalter's theory of the green world, which states that female adolescents in literature have an affinity for nature because it is a yet untamed world where they can create their own identity without having to fit into the patriarchal mold. Pratt develops this idea further, saying:

At the adolescent stage, however, her appreciation of nature is retrospective, a look backwards over her shoulder as she confronts her

present placelessness and her future submission within a male culture. Visions of her own world within the natural world, or naturalistic epiphanies, channel the young girl's protests into a fantasy where her imprisoned energies can be released. (17)

Ariana does not find immediate gratification in her greener surroundings. In fact, she is killed and eaten by beasts. But in the end, she returns to the forest:

Encantada, nuestra Ariana se largó a correr por este nuevo bosque...  
Todo lo sentía en su cuerpo y su cuerpo estaba feliz. Sentía que nada le resultaba pegajoso como antes. El aire, el perfume, las flores, los animales, hasta la gente de este mundo era y sería liviana para ella.  
[Enchanted, our Ariana ran away through the forest....Everything she felt in her body was happy. She felt that the forest was not sticky to her now as it was before. The air, the fresh smells, the flowers, the animals, even the people of the world were and would be easier for her to live with.] (27)

Ariana most definitely prefers the natural space of the forest where she is free from the stifling confinement of the castle. Even though the ending comes through convoluted methods and plot lines, it does have, like most fairy tales, a happy ending.

#### *MI ABUELITA TIENE RUEDAS*

Our fourth story is by the Mexican writer Silvia Molina (1946). Molina studied anthropology at UNAM where she later became a professor of literature.

Molina worked as the writer-in-residence at Brigham Young University. Molina also served as cultural attaché in Mexico's Belgian Embassy.

Molina has penned many children's stories. Her popular *Mi familia y la Bella Durmiente: Cien años después* (1993) is written in epistolary form and contains several pockets from which the reader must extract letters written to the narrator/protagonist in order to follow the story. Innovative and interactive, the story shows how the child narrator is related to the fairytale character Sleeping Beauty. Her "EnCuento" story, *Mi abuelita tiene ruedas*, is also narrated by a child.

*Mi abuelita tiene ruedas* is about a grandmother who suffers from senile dementia. María, the child narrator and protagonist, has a limited understanding of the grandmother's condition. For instance, she knows that her grandmother sometimes forgets things, such as her own name. Despite their age difference, María still thinks of her grandmother as a peer (see Fig. 30). However, the most compelling aspect of this story is point of view. She compares her



Fig. 30. Svetlana Tiorina in Molina, cover.

grandmother to others she knows. She prefers her grandmother to her friend Rosa, who screams at children; Luis, who is deaf; or Tere, who doesn't speak at all. While her own grandmother has dementia and is confined to a wheelchair, the narrator likes her because she is the most child-like and thus compatible to María.

The introduction to this story is different from those of most "EnCuento" stories. Molina, an experienced children's author, writes her own introduction. She speaks to the child reader employing a personal tone.

De niña quería ser bailarina o cantante, pero de grande me di cuenta de que comunicarme con los demás por escrito me atraía cada vez más. Escribiendo podía decir las cosas que me pasaban o las que imaginaba. Me pareció maravilloso poder transformar la realidad en algo distinto. Por eso escribo, porque es una forma de soñar. Hasta ahora he escrito varios libros para adultos y otros de literatura infantil. En ambos campos he tenido la suerte de recibir premios que me impulsan a seguir escribiendo con más entrega y responsabilidad. Escribir para niños y niñas es difícil pero divertido, como si estuviera haciendo una travesura. Y muchas travesuras las escribí para mis dos hijas. También me dedico a publicar libros para niños que han escrito otros autores, y me gusta mucho leer, ir al cine y al teatro porque encuentro que todo es un reflejo de la vida. [When I was a child I wanted to be a singer or a dancer, but as an adult I realized that to communicate through my writing was what I wanted most. Writing, I can communicate everything that happens or that I imagine. I think it is marvelous that

one is able to change reality into something else. This is why I write, it is a kind of dreaming. Up until now I have written books for adults and children. In both genres I have been lucky enough to receive awards that compel me to surrender myself to writing and give me more of a sense of responsibility. I write for children, it is difficult but fun, like playing a prank. And many of these pranks I have written for my two daughters. I also publish books that other authors have written for children, and I love to read, go to the movies and the theatre because I find that everything is a reflection of life.] (5)

More than any other “EnCuento” introduction, this one gives the reader perspective into the author’s life and her reasons for writing. She also provides insight into differences in the writing process, distinguishing between writing for children and writing for adults.

Similarly, the illustrator, Svetlana Tiorina, has many years experience in children’s literature. Tiorina studied book design at Moscow’s Polygraphic Institute from 1983-88. She has lived in Amsterdam since 1995 working as an illustrator, book designer and painter. In fact, the characters of María and her friends can be found in other stories she has illustrated. Tiorina’s illustrations convincingly portray the grandmother as kind and happy yet oblivious to her surroundings.

The story is told with a first-person child narrator named María. She describes the object of the story, her grandmother, Nina. The first thing she tells us about Nina is that she has wheels. María explains that it is not a bike, roller skates or a skateboard (surely this is a reference to the common Spanish adage: “Si mi abuela

tuviera ruedas, fuera bicicleta” [no sense in speaking about the hypothetical]). While the child does not explain any further, the reader can see the grandmother sits in a wheelchair. In the first few sentences we can tell the child narrator is very young and does not understand her grandmother’s condition. Early on in the story the reader may realize what the narrator does not: that her grandmother has dementia and will not recover her memory. The grandmother’s name is Dorotea and when the child sings her a song about her the grandmother says, “Yo conozco a una Doro”—in other words, she does not even remember her own name. The child approaches this with innocence, saying that sometimes her grandmother forgets things (7).

Molina creates a convincing child narrator using short sentences, simple vocabulary, abundant dialogue, and child syntax. Throughout the book the child narrator uses phrases such as “ya lo requetedije” [I already told you, over and over]. When she tells a long story, she strings together her thoughts with “y.” On one page she begins all paragraphs with “y.” “Y si no le entiendo, Y no le digo, Y regreso, Y es que los pájaros...” “[*and* if I do not understand her, *and* I do not tell her, *and* I go back, *and* it is because birds...] (17).

In spite of her youthful innocence, María shows more wisdom than many adults in the story. Because María does not understand her grandmother’s ailment, she thinks of her as a playmate, rather than as an authority figure. During the story María remembers when Nina first came to live with them. This was a point of contention between her parents. Her father and three brothers felt they did not want the grandmother to live with them because she was losing her memory (see Fig. 31). The narrator, on the other hand, views such loss of memory





Fig. 31. Svetlana Tiorina in Molina, 14.

positively. She thinks of it as a game because she can guess what her grandmother wants. “Mi Nina dice, por ejemplo: ‘Pásame la sal,’ y yo sé que quiere sus lentes porque tiene el periódico en la mano” [My Nina says, for example, “pass the salt” and I know she wants her glasses because she has the newspaper in her hand] (15). This is fun for the narrator because she likes riddles.

Through her story, Molina presents a positive perspective of an otherwise harsh reality. She does so primarily through the child-narrator. One of the most positive messages in the book is that the child can have a strong bond with a grandparent, even one who suffers from dementia. Another message is that the elderly may become like children again. María has respect for her grandmother but it is out of naiveté. She sees her as another child, even though she claims that she does not: “Mi abuelita anda en andadera y no es bebé, es mi abuela, ya lo requetedije,

aunque parece una niña como yo” [My grandmother rides in a stroller but she is not a baby, she is my grandmother, I have told you over and over, even though she seems like a little girl like me] (18). María is the one in the house with the best attitude about the situation, and the others recognize this, calling on María for help when they do not know what the grandmother wants.

In the story María is kind to Nina because she is likable, not just because she is her grandmother. This story ends with all of the other children in the neighborhood wishing they had a grandmother like María’s.

#### *LAS OREJAS DEL NIÑO RAUL*

In Camilo José Cela’s *Las orejas del niño Raúl*, his child protagonist is not nearly as fortunate as Molina’s. Winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1989, Cela (1919-2002) was one of the most renowned Spanish authors of the twentieth century. His novels *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942) and *La Colmena* (1951) have enjoyed international success. Cela’s highly descriptive writing style has been described as “grotesque brutality interrupted by moments of tenderness and lyricism.” (Cándido Ayllón 79). Cela established this style, often called “estilo tremendista,” in works published during Spain’s postwar period.

The introduction to the story expounds upon the idea that Cela demonstrates tenderness toward his characters. It also notes his affinity for characters living on the margin, especially those with psychological problems like the young protagonist of his “EnCuento” story. The introduction elaborates by stating:

Su vasta producción literaria, se ha caracterizado siempre por una gran riqueza en el manejo del lenguaje, por su profunda observación de lo real y por la ternura que muestra hacia sus personajes, muchos de los cuales, como el niño Raúl, son débiles, pobres humillados, debido a esa clara predilección que el autor ha tenido por los temas populares y costumbristas. [His vast literary productivity has always been characterized by a real agility in handling language, because of his keen observation of real life and for the tenderness he shows his characters, many of those, like Raul, are weak, poor humble souls, owed to the clear predilection of the author for depicting everyday life and prevalent customs.] (5)

*Las orejas del niño Raúl* is about a boy obsessed with measuring his ears. He worries that one is bigger than the other. Raúl constantly checks in the mirror to see how big they are, but because he can never see both ears at once the mirror does not help allay his fears. His obsession makes him sad and depressed and his family tries to help him. Raúl decides the best way to make sure one ear has not grown larger than the other is to measure them with his fingers and then put his hands together to make sure they are the same size. His goal is to keep track of his ear growth constantly. He feels best on days when he has time to measure them frequently. One phenomenal day he is able to measure them at least three thousand times (see Fig. 33). The narrator says that Raúl's measuring his ears becomes a natural reflex, like digestion or hair growth. When his father asks him what he is doing he says, "Nada, Papá; me mido las orejas." [Nothing, Dad I'm just measuring my ears] (13).



Fig. 32. Roser Capdevila in Cela, 12.

One day it occurs to his father the only thing the family house needs to become complete is a henhouse in the garden. For the implied reader this is a response-inviting structure because it is not logical that a henhouse will complete a family. Raúl also has his doubts, and in his mind his father's decision to change his surroundings leads to his downfall.

When the henhouse is finished, Raúl and his father go out to buy hens and a rooster. As they walk along, Raúl becomes more and more concerned.

El padre de Raúl iba delante, con un paso firme y decidido y aire de jefe de una familia b6er colonizadora del Africa del sur. Daba gusto verlo. El ni6o Raúl se quedaba atr6s, midi6ndose las orejas, y despu6s daba un trotecillo para alcanzar a su padre. [Raúl's father walked in front, with a strong decisive pace and an air about him like the head of

a colonizing Boer family in South Africa. It was great to watch him.

Raul fell behind, measuring his ears, and afterwards he trotted a bit to catch up with his father.] (21)

After the hour-long walk Raúl's left ear feels markedly larger than his right ear. They arrive at the farm and buy chickens. Raúl puts one hen under each arm and they set off toward home. As they walk, they both speak of how happy Raúl's mother will be with the chickens. After a few moments of silence Raúl becomes nauseated, his legs begin to shake, and he is in agony. This sudden change worries his father, who asks what is wrong but Raúl cannot answer. Raúl gives his father a tender, sad look - as if begging for mercy- and releases the hens to measure his ears.

Raúl, the protagonist, is sympathetic and pitiful. Children may relate to him because he is simple and likeable. Because Raúl is so strange the author wants the implied reader to view him as a third-person subject rather than try and relate to him as a first-person narrator. Perhaps this is why the author chooses an extradiegetic narrative position. Except for *Mi abuelita tiene ruedas*, all of the stories of this chapter are narrated in the third person. Perhaps this is because most outsider protagonists of children's stories are accepted by the implied reader, especially if there is a buffer zone between protagonist and child reader. Here the narrator provides this distance, interpreting Raúl for the child reader. The narrator's descriptions of Raúl are humorous, using a straightforward tone: "El niño Raúl tenía manías, una bicicleta y diez o doce años." [The child Raúl had manias, a bicycle, and was ten or twelve]. He says that he has a tic disorder and a bike, in the same

sentence. He does not give an exact age for Raúl and instead he says he is ten or twelve. This means that Raúl may just be a type of child, one with a psychological disorder. The other option is that the narrator does not really know the character well, which creates distance.

In Cela's popular fiction for adults, he often adds colorful young characters that allow him to show tenderness and humanity. In *Viaje a la Alcarria* (1952) for example, he also adds one of those eschatological touches for which he is famous:

El viajero le alarga la mano y el niño la rehuye.

- Es que la tengo sucia ¿sabe usted?

- ¡Anda no seas tonto!

El niño mira para el suelo.

- Es que me ando hurgando siempre con el dedo en la nariz.

- ¿Y eso que importa? Ya te he visto. Yo también me hurgo, algunas veces. Con el dedo en la nariz. Da mucho gusto ¿verdad?

- Sí señor mucho gusto.

[The traveler stuck out his hand but the boy rejected it.

- My hand is dirty you know?

- Don't be ridiculous.

The little boy looked at the ground.

- Because I'm always picking my nose.

- And what does that matter? I already noticed. Sometimes I pick too. It feels good doesn't it?

- Yes sir, very good.]

Like Raúl, the child in this passage has an obsession, and his mania also affects his daily life. Because he picks his nose, he does not want to shake hands. The adult narrator in this short story encourages the child's behavior. When the child tells the adult, with some shame, he is a nose-picker, the adult says he too, picks sometimes. This conversation validates his feelings and thus enables the child to feel more normal. The message in Raul's story is different. Because he is obsessed with his ears, he loses the chickens. Here the message seems to be clear that obsessive-compulsive behavior is destructive.

In his adult fiction, Cela often uses child characters. Perhaps this is because he has such fond memories of his own childhood. He says: "yo tuve una niñez dorada. De pequeño era tan feliz que cuando las visitas me preguntaban qué quería ser de mayor, me echaba a llorar porque no quería ser nada, ni siquiera deseaba ser mayor" (*Centro Virtual Cervantes*).

In contrast, the childhood of Pascual Duarte, Cela's most famous protagonist was a different experience. Duarte's mother is described as one of the most fiendish mothers in the history of Spanish literature.

La madre de Pascual reúne, desde el principio, todos los defectos y no posee una sola cualidad buena: es mala esposa, adúltera, madre cruel o indiferente, alcahueta, discutidora, sucia y descuidada, borracha, entrometida, y no manifiesta nunca a Pascual el más mínimo amor, ni siquiera atención. [Pascual's mother unites, from the outset, all possible defects and not one redeeming quality: she is a bad wife, an adulteress, a cruel mother at least indifferent, a pander, opinionated,

dirty and unkempt, drunk and nosey, and above all she does not show Pascual the slightest bit of love or even attention.] (Sobejano)

Pascual Duarte kills his mother.

The illustrations for this story are watercolor with pen and ink designs by Spanish illustrator Roser Capdevila. Her rendering of Raúl is as tender as Cela's description of him. The Raúl of the illustrations never smiles and is always worried (see Fig. 33).

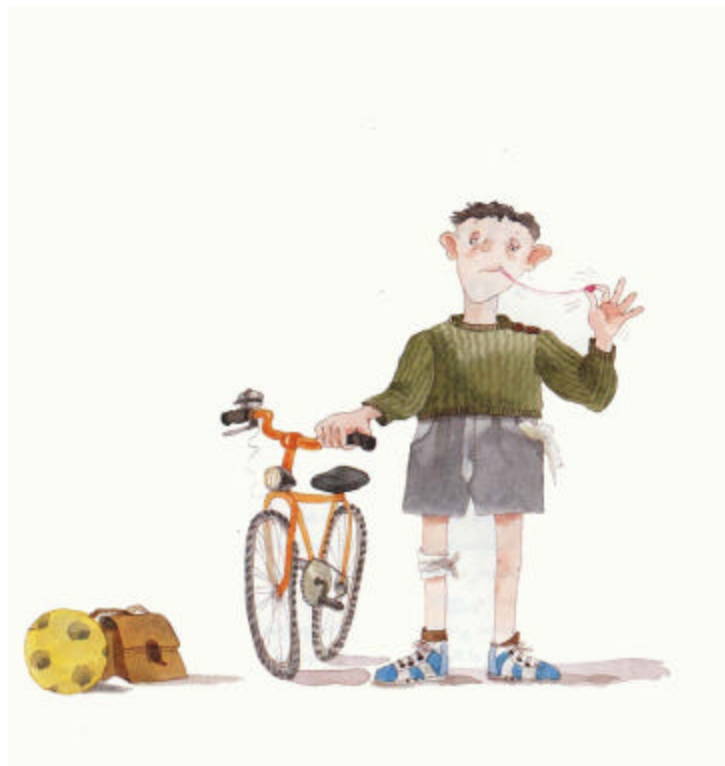


Fig. 33. Roser Capdevila in Cela, 6.

Throughout the story and in every illustration, Raúl is shaking. But in the penultimate illustration, Raúl looks physically ill: he sweats, has dark circles under his eyes, and his skin is whiter than on other pages. The motion lines around him show he is shaking all over. This image clearly foreshadows what will follow (see Fig. 34). When turning the page the reader sees the chickens flying away, and Raúl



is measuring his ears. And so, before the child has a chance to read the text, s/he anticipates the ending.



Fig. 34. Roser Capdevila in Cela, 25.

In the end, Raúl's obsession with measuring his ears is punished. This will affect the whole family. According to the father, the chicken house is all the family needs to make their lives complete. But it seems the father is ignoring a larger problem: Raúl's tic, or the underlying anxiety that causes the tic. Thus part of Cela's message may be directed at parents. But as in many of these stories the message is complex. Perhaps Raúl himself should take control of his tic. As he is the child protagonist and the one with the "problem," the message to the implied reader may

be that obsessive-compulsive behavior does not pay. Most likely, however, is that Cela is just presenting a sad but humorous slice of life without providing solutions.

## CONCLUSION

The stories analyzed in this chapter bring up existential questions for children. Why did Ariana feel vulnerable? Why did Cecilia have to die? Why has the grandmother lost her memory? What makes Raúl so obsessed with his ears? None of these are optimal bedtime stories. And none of them provide many solutions. They all present outsiders who have different levels of failure integrating into the mainstream.

According to Jorge Ruffinelli, Benedetti was “a perceptive reader of Kafka” (Smith 114), whose most famous protagonist, Gregor Samsa was the ultimate outsider. Samsa suffers literal and metaphorical transformations into an enormous, hideous insect. Unlike most protagonists of this chapter, Samsa does not choose his outsider status; rather, it is thrust upon him suddenly. Even metaphorically, Samsa is a victim of society. Power structures have prevented him from succeeding in life. But the “EnCuento” protagonists of this chapter contribute in some way to their status as “outsider.” They, unlike Samsa, wake up one morning as outsiders. But the books do not all suggest that this would be optimal.

It seems that among the authors included in this chapter there is the common goal to promote social awareness. The stories present large social issues such as feminine identity, socio-economic class, language barriers, care for the elderly and the disabled, and understanding of psychological disorders. Further, in the stories of

this chapter, those who learn valuable lessons grow and thrive (Ariana); and those who don't, perish (Cecilia).

*La pulga Cecilia* provides an example for children of what not to do. Cecilia does not experience personal growth. Even though it has the best possible education available to a flea, it does not heed her mother's words. Instead of acting rationally it acts out of passion. Cela's Raúl does not experience personal growth; but rather degrades into an obsessive-compulsive child with no self-control, and he and his family feel the disorder's effects. Benedetti's Raimundo does, however, experience personal growth. He learns a new language, and is able to use this skill to the end of communicating with his dog friends. Further, he gains insight into dog intellect, which he previously thought inferior. The ambivalent ending, where Leo remarks upon Raimundo's human accent, only serves to show that Raimundo should continue on his path of growth, learning more dog language and culture.

Valenzuela's Ariana is the outsider who experiences the most personal growth. She changes from feeling vulnerable and fearing intimacy to becoming strong and empowered. She escapes the castle (symbolically the rule of the queen), and then escapes her own body (her own self-doubt), leaving behind the exterior and interior pressures that have prevented her from thriving. Finally, once she has acquired enough insight to return to her body she becomes so strong that she becomes able to conquer her fears one by one by simply naming them. In the end she even develops a lifelong relationship with a man.

Among the protagonists of this chapter, María is the outsider because she is the most normal. Her idiosyncrasies derive from her innocence. She only believes

what she does because she is a child. She relates to her grandmother so beautifully because they each have the mentality of a three-year-old. But it is clear that in Molina's *Mi abuelita tiene ruedas* there is a message to the implied reader to be kind and understanding to those in need. The lesson is recognizable and one of the only clear messages in these five books. The child-narrator is too innocent to understand her own kindness. María is kind most likely because she thinks of her grandmother as a playmate. The implied reader will understand this but can still easily abstract the message from the story. The message for the implied reader could even be broadened to include advice to the reader to look for the positive aspects of all negative situations.

This chapter's outsiders are all bizarre but still lovable. While each is alienated from the culture present in their books, they are all endeared to the implied reader by a narrative voice that makes them appealing.

## CONCLUSION

### The Implied Reader

As Henry James puts it, the author creates his “reader very much as he makes his characters. . . . When he makes him well, that is makes him interested, then the reader does quite half the labour” (Hunt *Encyclopedia* 71). The “EnCuento” series contains works that engage the reader. Thus this study explored ways the authors “create” their readers. The four chapters focused on the implied reader. Chapter 1 discussed the implied reader sought by texts that are straightforward and easy to understand, with simple vocabulary, chronological plots, and strong protagonists. Chapter 2 explored two horror stories with contrasting author–implied reader relationship. Chapter 3 discussed the implied reader in books that promote a particular message or point of view using problem-solving child protagonists. Chapter 4 included books with outsider protagonists and shows how narrators bridge the gap between characters and readers.

Throughout this thesis, the relationship between authors and their audiences was discussed. It was important to me to investigate this relationship in order to learn which stylistic elements and literary devices were engaging to readers and which were not. I have asked my reader to join me in at looking at several books to see what an author is communicating to a reader and how this is achieved. I have suggested that, in these stories, authors and readers form a bond in order to provoke some action or emotion. To form this bond, the authors use literary devices such as style, irony, and text gaps. Of utmost importance to this relationship is the narrator’s

role. Upon exploring the narrator's role, I found that one of the most obvious ways the narrator reaches out to readers is through emotion. The stories I found to be most engaging to a child reader were those whose narrator is able to affect quickly a reaction through the use of humor or fear.

At the outset of this study, I was surprised by several aspects of these stories. It became interesting to me that few "EnCuento" authors were overtly didactic. Because of the political content of their texts written for adults- particularly in the case of Benedetti, Paz, and Valenzuela- I expected them to communicate a clear political message to their child readers. And yet, political messages are actually infrequent among the "EnCuento" books. The next surprise was that while there are books in the series that look like children's books, they do not appear to be written for children. It was also interesting that the book illustrations are so essential to making connections with the reader. Finally, I was struck by the relatively few cultural references specific to Latin America.

One of the questions I posed at the outset concerned the image of the child in these stories. I tried in every case to imagine the image of the child that the author created in order to write his/her story. This is important to my study because if the implied reader is not a child, then the book cannot really be considered children's literature. In many of the "EnCuento" stories authors assume an intelligent reader, one with a strong vocabulary who can grasp intertextual references. Yet none of these stories actually have a complex technical structure. They all do have a chronological storyline and central characters. This is characteristic of the entire

series, not just the books studied here. This means that the authors understand (and in some cases underestimate) the level of their child audiences.

To create this series Van Rhijn personally recruited authors to write a book. In some cases, she did so shortly before their deaths (Severo Sarduy, Camilo José Cela, and Mada Carreño). In fact, the “EnCuento” books by Cela and Sarduy are their sole contributions to children’s literature. As a writer, Sarduy is known for baroque language and paradigmatic indecision. Randolph Pope says of Sarduy: “If postmodernism corresponds to the meaningless jumble and agglomeration of post-industrial society, Severo Sarduy has taken it further and with the greatest refinement the irreducible coexistence of different traditions, the shattering of a stable identity, the opacity of meaning, and the similarity or indifference of time found in the contemporary global market” (Pupo-Walker, González Echevarría 276). Yet his children’s story, *Gatico-Gatico*, is chronological and features one main character—because he obviously has a child reader in mind. In *Gatico-Gatico*, not only does he not fracture the concept of identity and time, but he instead consolidates them in a very traditional way. *Gatico-Gatico* uses the most common children’s genre—fantasy—in a traditional animal fable with a moral at the end. Sarduy’s is not an elusive postmodern fable, but a very straightforward, comprehensible tale that can be enjoyed by children. Cela is another author known for complex, intertwining storylines. His award-winning post-Civil War novel, *La colmena*, for instance, has over three hundred characters, but *Las orejas del niño Raúl* has two. The fact that the work of these authors here is so different from their

work for adults shows they do understand their audience and make efforts to communicate meaning, whether for didactic purposes or pure pleasure.

To write for a younger audience, Cela and Sarduy made adjustments that worked effectively. But other authors do not make similar adjustments, and their works do not have a clear-cut implied child reader. Obviously, the Mutis text stands out in my study as a story that will be particularly difficult for children. While children could read and understand the text, the subtleties of irony conveyed by the unreliable narrator will escape most young readers. Similarly, the Valenzuela text has a more mature implied reader. The confusing plotline and the convoluted *deus ex machina* ending will be lost on the child reader.

As mentioned above, I sought to understand in several texts what a child would take from the story. What kind of meaning would the story have for children? In a few cases, authors obviously had a clear lesson in mind. But in most cases, it seems, authors were more concerned with children enjoying their stories than with preaching to readers. Authors who clearly had a child reader in mind as they crafted their stories create texts that are most enjoyable to children. These authors take care to create enough response-inviting structures to keep readers entertained. Frequently, they take sides with the child reader. This is mostly accomplished with a narrator who bonds with the child, often bridging text-gaps to the story, or its characters.

One of the most surprising aspects of this study is how important and enjoyable the illustrations turn out to be. Through closer analysis, I was able to show that illustrations are more than just decorations; indeed, they actually tell a



story through a secondary text. In most cases, illustrations match the story told by the text with little variation, thus adding to the child reader's understanding and enriching his or her reading experience. Sometimes illustrations are used to help with understanding of response-inviting structures. Such is the case in *Gatico-Gatico*, where the illustrations show Botero's cat statue. Or else, illustrations set the mood as they do in *La caverna encantada* and in *El niño que buscaba a ayer*. There are also examples of illustrations that create text gaps by introducing the reader to other cultures, such as those in *La pulga Cecilia*. The rich diversity and quality of illustrations of this series contribute to its value as children's literature.

I intend to use this study as the basis for further research in children's literature. The first extension will be to compile actual reader responses to these same texts. Soon for example, I will teach this group of books to a class for Spanish majors. My students will work with a community of native Spanish speakers to collect responses. We will begin with a framework of open-ended questions suggested by Chambers (*Booktalk* 172) to elicit responses to children's stories. Through classroom discussions, my students will use these books to explain intertextuality and other literary patterns to very young readers. The student responses will help us learn more about children as potential critics.

I can also envision another study of these same authors that compares the implied readers of their stories for adults to those of their own children's texts. This study might closely examine selections of stories, looking for similarities and differences in text gaps, the approaches the authors use to attract the audience, and the culture represented in the books.

Other future studies could include ways of looking at this same set of stories using approaches other than reader-response theory. For instance, this series lends itself to consideration using any of the following approaches: historical and cultural studies, feminist criticism, intertextuality, linguistics, and psychoanalytical criticism. Using one or a combination of these theories, some of the most obvious aspects to be studied are the families, work, and female protagonists in the stories. Finally, any future study would need to include further discussion of the excellent illustrations.

In the end, the relationship between author and reader is arguably the key element in the success or failure of any children's book. The "EnCuento" authors have proven themselves capable of reaching out to a new, younger audience, and have thereby extended the range their literary talent, perhaps even with a future generation of adult readers.

## APPENDIX

List of all “EnCuento” series books published before February 2005

### ALBERTO, UN PEQUEÑO CAPITÁN

*Author:* Alfredo Pita (Perú)

*Illustrator:* Fabricio Vanden Broeck (México)

### APALKA

*Author:* Ernesto Cardenal (Nicaragua)

*Illustrator:* Felipe Dávalos (Mexico)

### BESOS MÁGICOS

*Author:* Ana María Machado (Brazil)

*Illustrator:* Federico Delicado (Spain)

### EL CORDONCITO

*Author:* Vicente Leñero (México)

*Illustrator:* Humberto García (México)

### LA CAVERNA ENCANTADA

*Author:* Enrique Serna (México)

*Illustrator:* Mauricio Gómez Morín (México)

### EL DUENDE DEL MAR

*Author:* Hilda Perera (Cuba)

*Illustrator:* Leonid Nepomniachi (Russia)

### LA FIESTA Y EL FESTÍN

*Author:* Álvaro del Amo (Spain)

*Illustrator:* Leonid Nepomniachi (Russia)

## GATICO GATICO

*Author:* Severo Sarduy (Cuba-France)

*Illustrator:* Patricio Gómez (Chile)

## GERARDO Y LA CAMA

*Author:* Fabio Morábito (México)

*Illustrator:* Carmen Cardemil (México)

## GOIG

*Author:* Alfredo Bryce Echenique (Perú)

*Illustrator:* Ana María Dueñas (Perú)

## GRACIAS A JOHANNES

*Author:* Luis Ignacio Helguera (México)

*Illustrator:* Judith Morales (Spain)

## LAS HERMANAS

*Author:* Senel Paz (Cuba)

*Illustrator:* Claudia de Teresa (México)

## LAS HIJAS DE ROMUALDO EL RENGO Y OTROS CUENTOS

*Author:* Francisco Gabilondo Soler, Cri-Cri (México)

*Illustrator:* Irina Botchanova (Russia)

## HISTORIA DE LA YEGUA BLANCA

*Author:* Eugenio de Andrade (Portugal)

*Illustrator:* Martha Avilés (México)

## EL HOMBRE QUE APRENDIÓ A LADRAR

*Author:* Mario Benedetti (Uruguay)

*Illustrator:* Cees van Der Hulst (Holland)

## LA HORMIGA GERTRUDIS

*Author:* Alonso Nuñez (México)

*Illustrator:* Ricardo Radosh

## EL INVENCIBLE Y MALVADO DRAGÓN CURIAMBRO

*Author:* Alonso Núñez (México)  
*Illustrator:* Tania Janco (Czechoslovakia)

## LA ISLA DE LAS LANGOSTAS

*Author:* Andrea Maturana (Chile)  
*Illustrator:* Jian Hua Wu (China)

## LOS JUEGOS DE CAROLINA Y GASPAR

*Author:* Augusto Roa Bastos (Paraguay)  
*Illustrator:* Claudia Legnazzi (Argentina)

## LECCIÓN DE PIANO

*Author:* Felipe Garrido (México)  
*Illustrator:* Marie Flusin (France)

## MI ABUELITA TIENE RUEDAS

*Author:* Silvia Molina (México)  
*Illustrator:* Svetlana Tiourina (Russia)

## EL MISTERIO DE LAS DAMAS CHINAS

*Author:* Eladia González (México)  
*Illustrator:* Ana Laura Salazar (México)

## EL NIÑO QUE BUSCABA A AYER

*Author:* Claribel Alegría (El Salvador)  
*Illustrator:* Ricardo Radosh (México)

## LAS OREJAS DEL NIÑO RAÚL

*Author:* Camilo José Cela (Spain)  
*Illustrator:* Roser Capdevila (Spain)

## OTRARIANA

*Author:* Luisa Valenzuela (Argentina)  
*Illustrator:* Mauro Evangelista (Italy)

## PEQUEÑO CUENTO DE HORROR

*Author:* Alberto Forcada (México)  
*Illustrator:* Ritva Voutila (Australia)

## EL PIRATA MALAPATA

*Author:* Guisopete de Piropillo (Italy)  
*Illustrator:* Glenda Sburelin (Italy)

## LA PULGA CECILIA

*Author:* Mada Carreño (Spain)  
*Illustrator:* Khitish Chatterjee (India)

## EL SASTRECILLO ¿VALIENTE?

*Author:* Leonardo Garnier (Costa Rica)  
*Illustrator:* Juan Gedovius (México)

## EL SECUESTRO DE BENITO

*Author:* Ramón Díaz Eterovic (Chile)  
*Illustrator:* Sacha Gepner (France)

## EL SEÑOR SIMPLÓN

*Author/Illustrator:* Davi Zavay (Spain)

## SINFONÍA DE CUNA

*Author:* Nicanor Parra (Chile)  
*Illustrator:* Enrique Martínez (Cuba)

## LA TABERNA DEL LORO EN EL HOMBRO

*Author:* Mario Delgado Aparain (Uruguay)  
*Illustrator:* Gabriel Pacheco (México)

## EL TEJÓN TRAICIONERO

*Author:* Poli Délano (Chile)  
*Illustrator:* Cecilia Rébora (México)

## UNA VACA QUERIDA

*Author:* Laura Antillano (Nicaragua)  
*Illustrator:* Ana Ochoa (México)

LOS VAMPIRITOS Y EL PROFESOR

*Author:* Francisco Serrano (México)

*Illustrator:* Claudia Legnazzi (Argentina)

LA VERDADERA HISTORIA DEL FLAUTISTA DE HAMMELIN

*Author:* Álvaro Mutis (Colombia)

*Illustrator:* Alberto Celetti (Italy)

UN INVIERNO EQUIVOCADO

*Author:* Ida Vitale (Uruguay)

*Illustrator:* Isabel Pin (France)

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