

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**An analysis of the readings of cultural indicators embedded in children's literature texts**

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*Award date:*  
1998

*Awarding institution:*  
Coventry University

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**An Analysis of the Readings of Cultural Indicators Embedded  
in Children's Literature Texts**

**Sandra June Williams**

A thesis submitted in complete fulfilment  
of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

**January 1998**

Coventry University in collaboration with  
Worcester College of Higher Education

## ABSTRACT

The thesis identifies cultural indicators of Englishness through an analysis of readings of children's literature texts. These were taught on a children's literature course to Czech student-teachers at the Pedagogical Faculty, Brno in the Czech Republic from 1992 to 1995. The aim has been to identify cultural indicators of Englishness embedded in the texts and to reveal myths of national identity. This has been achieved by using a cross-cultural perspective whereby the Czech readings have been used to identify taken-for-granted aspects of English culture. The outcome has been to provide a paradigm for the exploration of culture in and through children's literature texts and to argue that children's literature should be incorporated into the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language and cultural studies for non-native speakers of English. In addition the methodological implications for the teaching of children's literature texts in the EFL classroom are discussed. The theoretical position which underpins the work is phenomenological in that it is an investigation of meanings. The readings by the Czech students and then the researcher were considered from two theoretical positions. An ethnographic perspective has been employed using the work of Geertz and Cohen to investigate the readings of three cohorts of Czech students who are outsiders to English culture. The reactions of the Czech students to the texts significantly reveal the legacy of the totalitarian system which began to end with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Literary theory has been applied by the researcher to investigate the texts from an insider's perspective. Reader response theories involving the notion of the implied reader (Iser) and horizons of expectations (Jauss) are adopted to reveal and interrogate a culture's notions of childhood. It is established in the thesis that hitherto a sociological perspective has been taken with children's literature texts in the investigation of ideology with reference to class, race and gender. These have been oppositional readings which locate English children's literature as a site for the socialisation of children into the norms, values and beliefs of dominant society. It is argued in this thesis that by a careful investigation of the texts from a literary perspective and using the cross-cultural information gained, another view might be taken which is that English children's literature texts are less than normalising.

**This work is dedicated to my Czech friends and to John Ives**

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## **Introduction:** Background to the Study, Research Methodology

Peter Hollindale in a paper concerning ideology in children's texts wrote:

“...a large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in...writers for children are transmitters not of themselves uniquely, but of the worlds they share”.<sup>1</sup>

If this is the case, then Englishness will be embedded in the transmission of what might usefully be termed the social circulation of meanings. I began such a consideration of Englishness in English children's literature texts began during the time I was teaching children's literature to student teachers in the Czech Republic. For while the Czech students enjoyed engaging with the literature offered, they were often surprised that the texts they read were written for children. I therefore began to consider cultural differences in perceptions about books for children. I perceived that, apart from surface features of English life, many of which I explained in seminars, there was something else underlying that required investigation. I considered that the Czech students' views of the Englishness of the texts would make an important cross-cultural comparison and highlight taken-for-granted aspects of English culture. It was pleasing, therefore, to be awarded a bursary at Worcester College of Higher Education where such research could be undertaken.

The research question concerns cultural meanings inherent in children's literature in which the aim has been to identify what I have subsequently termed “cultural indicators” of Englishness which are embedded in children's literature texts and to draw out myths of national identity. The dominant methodology driving the research is phenomenological in that it is an investigation of meanings. This has involved examining the meanings made by Czech students through their readings of English children's literature texts and a literary analysis applying reader response theories which involve the construction of meaning between text and reader. Furthermore the literary analysis, bearing Peter Hollingdale's point in mind, also includes the author and their world at the time of production. As such this is a large study which, apart from research into three cohorts of students, also includes the investigation of more than seven texts. It will be seen that this is a piece of research that pulls together such areas as Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Literary Theory, Ethnographic Investigation, Czech History and Literature for Children. Consequently it is a work of synthesis and as such entails spread rather than depth and this should be viewed as its strength. I am confident that this study will open up other avenues of research in the field of children's literature. The outcome has been to:

- a. Expose both overt and covert indicators of Englishness in such texts.
- b. Suggest a paradigm for the investigation of culture in children's literature texts.

- c. Consider children's literature in teaching English as a Foreign Language.
- d. Offer insights into the effects of a totalitarian system as it emerges from a Communist to a Post-Communist society.

It will be seen from the diagram below that the work is divided into two with the texts firmly located at the centre and these have been investigated from two standpoints. Firstly, an ethnographic perspective was applied to the Czech student's readings which are from an outsider's position to English culture. What has been significant is the revelation through interviews and questionnaires of the students' horizons of expectations which they brought to the texts. A second reading was taken from an insider's perspective, that of the researcher, and involved applying literary theories to the texts in which the implied reader was carefully examined.

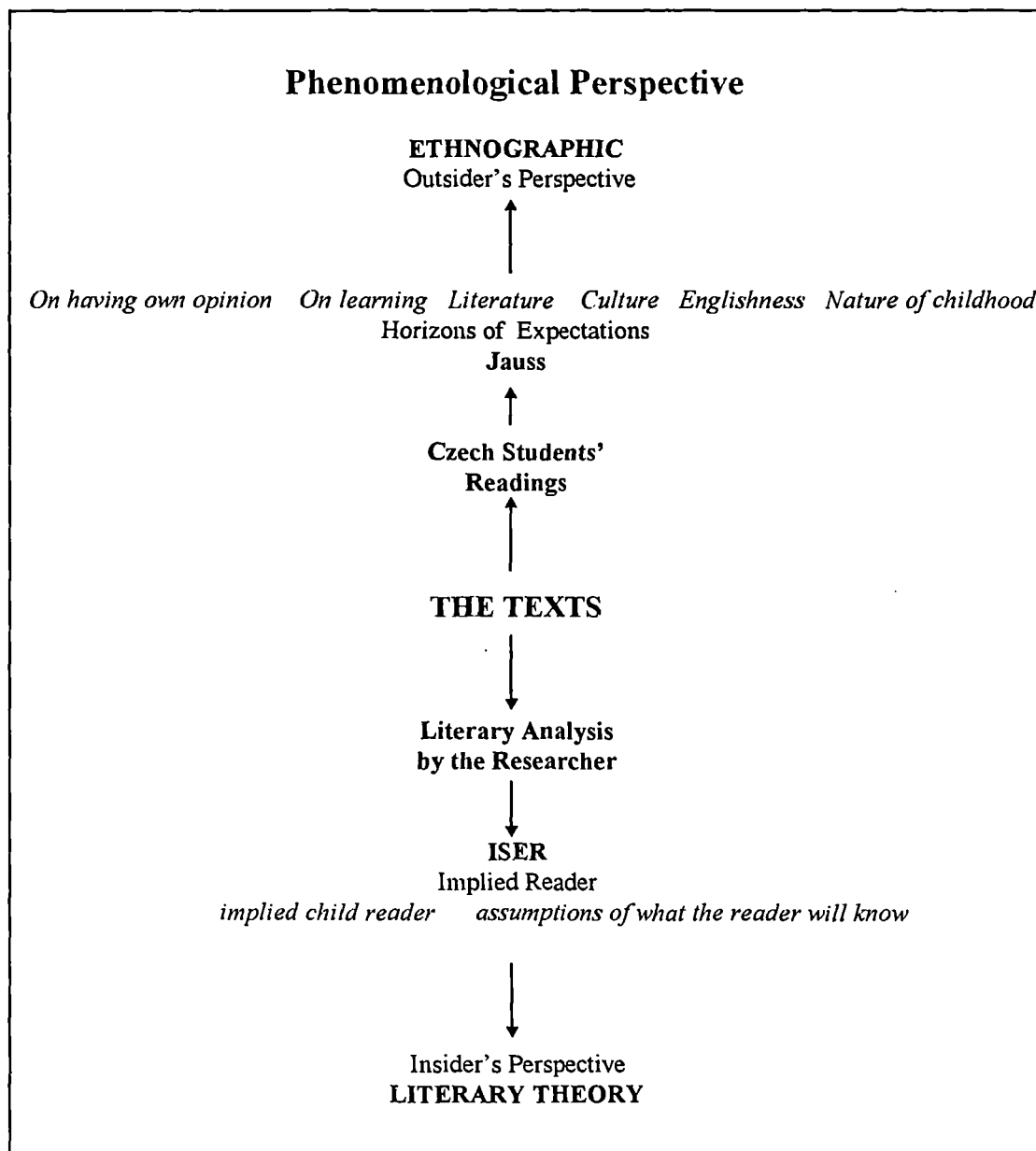


Fig. 1. A Model of the Thesis



From the centre of the diagram, the reader of this study may move in either direction and read the ethnographic research or proceed to the literary analysis of the texts. In either case it is strongly advised that the first chapter “Context” is read before moving in either direction for this places the work in the Czech context which will not be well-known to the average British reader. In Chapter 1, a broad outline of Czech history is given which is followed by the background to the development of the course in the Pedagogical Faculty and finally there is a survey of Czech children’s literature. Chapter 2 concerns the collection of data for the ethnographic aspect of the research. The significance of the results is discussed in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 to 10 contain a detailed analysis of each text in which reference to the Czechs’ readings are made and cultural indicators are drawn out. Finally in Chapter 11, myths of cultural identity are discussed and a research paradigm for identifying cultural indicators is suggested. The research is centred on a specific children’s literature course developed by myself which I delivered to a group of Czech students with a defined number of children’s literature texts. As such the resultant study could not have been written by anyone else - it is unique. Furthermore the course could not have been taught before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 for, as will be explained in Chapter 1, the Pedagogical Faculty in Brno did not train teachers of English before 1989 and very few foreigners were given permission to work in what was a politically isolated country. As such this work forms part of the growing research into post-communist Europe, for the analysis of the interviews with the students reveals how they are thinking and feeling at a potent time post 1989 and the importance of this cannot be under-estimated as contributing to evidence of the post communist condition. Such evidence indicates ways forward in the teaching of EFL and cultural studies and will be discussed in the final chapter.

The qualitative research, which was undertaken with Czech students, is in the tradition of sociological and anthropological enquiry and is also employed in Action Research in education. It is important to emphasise that, unlike earlier research methods where the researcher was virtually invisible, the researcher is in this work firmly present. For what is now considered important is that the subjective experience of the researcher is deemed valid. Indeed according to Maurice Punch it is more than valid for he asserts that the researcher’s

“social and emotional involvement in the research setting constitutes an important source of *data*”<sup>2</sup>

The problem with the hypothetico-deductive model in which some sort of objectivity is strongly implied is, as Kirk and Miller point out, that:

“... the investigator must already know what it is he or she is going to discover”<sup>3</sup>

My position was different for, as I suggested above, I knew what I wanted to find but did not have a preconceived idea about what that would be. As such this has been a genuine piece of research, a

process of discovery, which has an impact on ways of researching children's literature texts on one hand and some understanding of the post-communist condition on the other. However, while the research undertaken is personal and reflective, this is not to say that there is an absence of either reliability or validity. Kirk and Miller define reliability and validity as follows:

"Reliability is the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research, and validity is the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way."<sup>4</sup>

Such "accidental circumstances" have been removed by the methodology employed, the detailed interviews conducted with a range of students from all three cohorts A, B and C. Cohort B<sup>i</sup> were interviewed twice in the Czech Republic and 9 from that group, who came on a study-visit to Worcester for 3 weeks, were observed and interviewed in more depth. The similarity of responses confirms reliability. The validity stems from three sources:

- a The researcher's insider knowledge and experience of Czech culture having lived there for three-and-half years.
- b From research into the history of the former Czechoslovakia
- c From information gained from Czech academics and friends concerning their lives since the end of World War II.

Interpreting the students' observations has involved an interrogation under the surface level of what they have been saying. This process is described by Gubrium:

"...as fieldworkers, we must, to some degree, ignore what people actually say, just as they do, and attend to what they could be telling each other and us. Their conversations alone are inadequate to the task. They voice much more than they say."<sup>5</sup>

The empirical research undertaken with Czech students was based on the work of ethnographer Clifford Geertz. He describes man as "an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun"<sup>6</sup>. Ethnography is seen by Geertz not as an experimental science but "as an interpretative one in search of meaning"<sup>7</sup> My role was to search for and interpret the meanings that were produced with my students through the texts we read and the methodology employed. These meanings are mediated through the language of English by a foreigner (i.e. myself) who spent three and a half years teaching in the Czech Republic. A British person with a limited knowledge of the Czech language, who has never lived under a totalitarian system, and who belongs to a post-imperialist island nation is likely to construct different meanings from those of the landlocked, post-colonised Czechs. The lack of familiarity I experienced when I first arrived changed into a more comforting sense of understanding after a while but it is easy to be lulled into a false sense of "knowing". A warning is given by Wittgenstein

"...one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come to a strange country with entirely strange traditions: and, what is more, even given a mastery of

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 2

the country's language. We do not *understand* the people.....we cannot find our feet with them."<sup>8</sup>

Bearing this in mind the first part of the study is an attempt to find some meanings produced in that "... far away country ...of (which) we know nothing"<sup>i</sup>

Geertz advocates what he terms "thick description" as a way of looking and uncovering such meanings. This is the methodological approach employed in the first part of the work and is the reason for the amount of detail included in this study. For example, it is important to explain if the students volunteered to be interviewed in their own time and how many for this will inform the reader of their relationship with the researcher and the underlying attitudes of the students, which is of particular import when working with subjects from a post-Communist background. The reactions of those Czech students who came to Worcester on a study-tour will not be meaningful without a detailed description of that visit. In order to explore and analyse the response by the students to the course and the texts they read it will be necessary to put as much as possible into context. And in attempting to describe how the course came into being and what went on while it was being taught it is necessary to unravel a series of what Geertz terms "webs of meaning"<sup>9</sup>. These webs might be seen in a series of concentric circles where the outside ring encompasses a wide perspective and each consecutive ring narrows the focus:

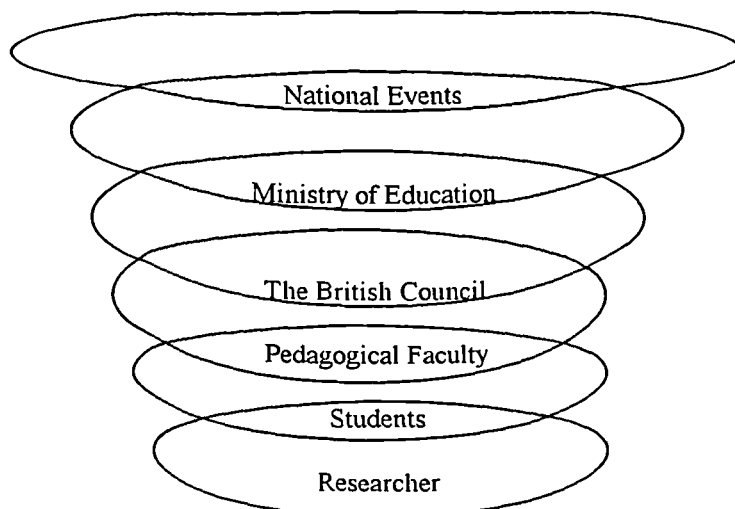


Fig.2. Webs of Meaning

Nationally there were enormous changes taking place in society in the Czech Republic during the time the course was being taught and now while the thesis is being written. The Czech people are creating new webs of meaning as they change from a totalitarian regime to an emergent democratic post-communist culture. This tension between the old structure communism and new style capitalism is an important factor to take into consideration. In the next three circles are those external elements which directly affected the course and how it was taught: there was the Czech Ministry of Education

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<sup>i</sup> Neville Chamberlain on Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland, 27th September 1938 (see Chapter 1. Czech History)

who set up the new “Fast Track” Course; the British Council who gave expertise and funding; and the staff at the Pedagogical Faculty. The students themselves are situated in the penultimate circle with their webs of meaning constructed from a combination of what was happening on a macro-level described above, and on a micro-level with their life experiences of family, friends, schooling, etc. Finally there was the meaning given to the course by myself as the teacher and now the researcher. The way the course was devised, how it was taught, how it is now described are linked to my own webs of meaning. These meanings affected the structure of the course, how I approached teaching the Czech students and my perceptions of what was happening in Czech society at the time.

Maurice Punch in The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork realises the problems of relying on the researcher’s meanings:

“...in field research we are heavily reliant on the integrity of the researcher in terms of detailing the nature and quantity of observations and interviews, the process of interpreting the data, and the selections made in the report”<sup>10</sup>

He advises that the researcher must “come clean” and this has been done in two ways. Firstly the researcher’s values will be clear from the main body of the work from the way it has been written and the transparency of how the research process evolved. Secondly in Appendix II, aspects of my own history with overt reference to my meanings have been drawn out.

At this point the following terms and theoretical positions will be made explicit as they underpin the central argument in this study : Boundary-marking, Englishness, Culture, the Implied Reader, Ideology and Nationality.

### **Boundary Marking**

Cohen’s notion of “boundary marking” which is used by people to denote difference from others has been used to discuss different meanings between Czechs and English. It is particularly useful because boundary marking occurs when one culture meets another:

“...we are not aware of the distinctiveness and the circumscription of our own behaviour until we meet its normative boundaries in the shape of alternative forms”<sup>11</sup>

Boundary marking takes place all the time in the inter-face between teacher and students in language seminars. Similarly the empirical research undertaken with the students involved the marking of boundaries and locating what Kramersch terms the ‘fault-lines’<sup>12</sup> between them. Fault-lines denote the place where different cultural meanings are made visible. It will be argued that because the Czechs perceived themselves as coming from a small and oft conquered nation they boundary-mark Czechness to a high degree. This is supported by Cohen who comments on marginalized groups:

“This persistent ‘production of a culture’ and attribution of value becomes an essential bulwark against the cultural imperialism of the political and economic centres, and thus provides fundamental means by keeping the communities alive and fruitful”.<sup>13</sup>

The English, on the other hand, with secure borders and world-wide recognition, perceive less need to boundary mark nationality resulting in a difference in the marking of national identity in children’s literature. It will be argued that in Czech children’s literature there is more concern with establishing national identity than in English children’s literature where such an identity is taken-for-granted.

### Englishness

This study is not about the British because the Irish, Welsh and Scots do not have the same experiences as the English. All too often the word “English” is used to include the Celtic areas of the British Isles and this is unhelpful for they have their own history, culture and perspective as dominated groups which are different from that of the dominant English. If the Scots, Irish and Welsh are rendered invisible in this study, it is not through neglect but respect for their separate identity.

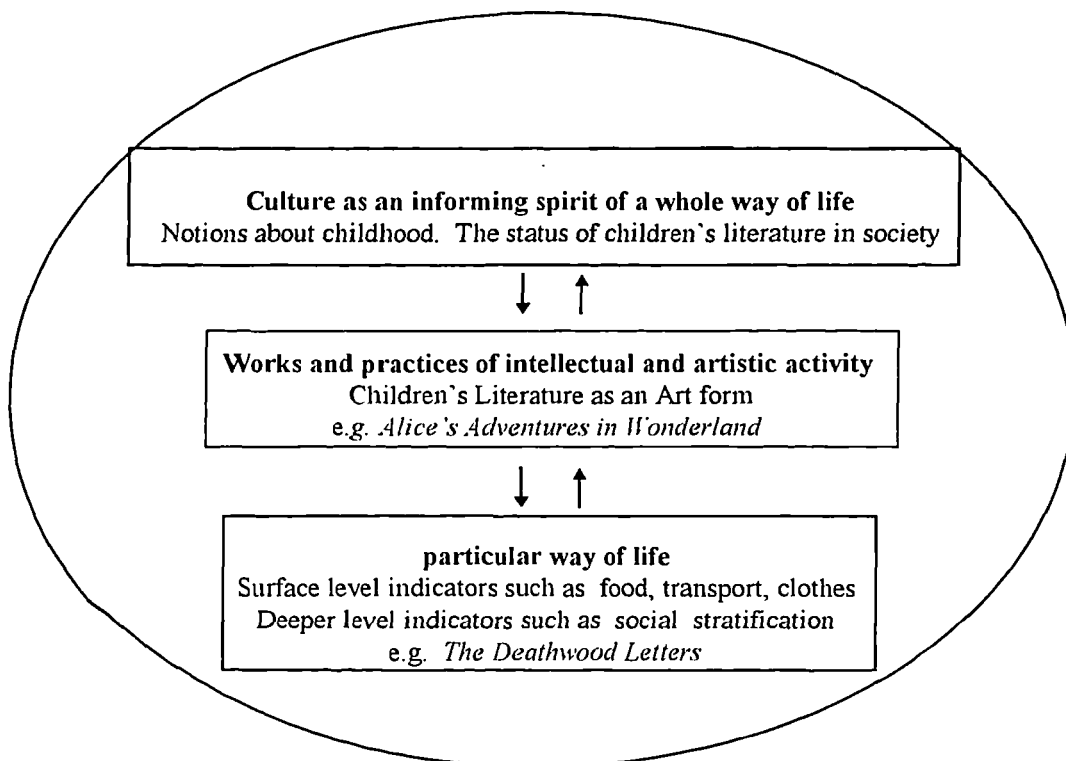
### Culture

Raymond Williams<sup>14</sup> in his attempt to define culture posits three broad areas which are:

- 1 Culture as an informing spirit of a whole way of life - a signifying system
- 2 Works and practices of intellectual and artistic activity
3. As a particular way of life

Examples of how children’s literature appears in all three is illustrated by the following diagram:

Fig. 3. Children’s Literature in a Society’s Cultural Imagination



All the above are interrelated and should not be viewed in isolation

The most obvious aspects of Englishness are the surface level indicators which appear in the third definition, which is ethnographic, as any children's text is likely to have a number of surface level indicators such as food, clothing and family routines. It was these indicators that I assumed the Czech students would be readily able to identify. That children's books appear as a cultural artefact, William's second definition, is clear and needs no further elaboration. But the first category does and there are two important indicators to discuss. In England, children's literature plays a significant part in forming the nation's cultural imagination which is why it appears in the first box in the diagram. As George Orwell observed in an essay concerning boy's weeklies:

"It is probable that many people who would consider themselves extremely sophisticated and 'advanced' are actually carrying through life an imaginative background which they acquired in childhood..."<sup>15</sup>

English children's books play a significant part in the creation of such an imaginative background and from the appearance of John Newberry's Little Pretty Pocket Book in 1777 a significant number of children's literature titles have been published in this country. Since the middle of the 19th century the range and quality of such books has grown including fantasy as well as other genres such as the school story and the adventure story. References to children's texts continually arise in everyday discourse, the phrase "curioser and curioser" from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is frequently quoted and many refer to themselves as "a bear of very little brain"<sup>i</sup> to denote confusion. It is an aspect of Englishness which is taken for granted and forms part of the nation's collective imagination. Because the English, unlike the Czechs, do not have to explain who they are, English children's literature does not have the overt role of maintaining a national identity. Furthermore, the absence of a need to maintain a national identity and the "critical mass" of texts that have been built up<sup>ii</sup>, creates a climate where experimentation with form can take place. Hence the playfulness and inter-textuality which appears in such texts as the Ahlberg's The Jolly Postman.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, the second significant cultural marker which may be placed within this first category of culture as an informing spirit of a whole way of life concerns attitudes towards childhood. What is particularly important is what *drives* the literature, for as Hunt observes:

"...what a culture thinks of as childhood is reflected very closely in the books produced for its citizens...children's books very often contain what adults think children can understand, and what they should be allowed to understand; and this applies to 'literariness' as well as to vocabulary or content"<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Reference to A. A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh

<sup>ii</sup> For example in 1981, 2,934 children's literature titles were published of which only 496 were reprints and new editions: from Norrie, I., Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling in the Twentieth Century Bell & Hyman, 1982

As such the implied child reader is a significant cultural marker and having conceptualised the notion of culture, discussion will move to reader response theories.

### **The Implied Reader**

As notions about childhood are reflected in children's texts they have been analysed from a reader response perspective employing Iser's notion of the implied reader, as this reveals values about children that are embedded in the texts. Furthermore what is also exposed is what the writer assumes the reader will know and this too has significant cultural implications. Similarly applying Jauss' notions of "horizons of expectations" to the Czech students' readings demonstrates the differences of approach to children's literature and accounts for the different meanings made. It will therefore be argued that for historical reasons there are marked differences between notions of what is perceived as appropriate for a child between Czech and English culture and this is reflected in the literature they produce for children.

### **Ideology**

At this stage it is important to emphasise the approach taken on ideology in this study. Criticism in English children's literature has evolved from Harvey Darton's historical survey in the 1930's to the present when increasingly literary theories are being applied to children's texts. A significant move occurred in the late 1960's where the main focus moved to analysing ideology in literature for children. For it appears almost axiomatic that children's literature has a strong socialising function helping to inculcate the norms, values and beliefs of those in positions of power. As Hunt asserts:

"It is arguably impossible for a children's book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology and, by extension, didacticism." <sup>18</sup>

This is the position taken by many critics from the late 1960's onward when issues of race, gender and class were examined and children's books, particularly those from the last century, were found wanting. Kimberly Reynolds, writing in the 1990's, provides an example of this perspective:

"Understanding the nature of ideology is important when considering the role and development of children's literature at any time for, as Stephens argues, children's literature is particularly revealing in what he calls its 'struggle for young people's minds'." <sup>19</sup>

Most of such analysis is from a sociological perspective and takes an oppositional point of view with concomitant negative views on children's literature as an instrument of perpetuating inequality. But it is not difficult to analyse the works of Henty, the 19th century writer of adventures stories for boys, and discuss imperialism and to lament how women were represented in 19th century literature. In this century Enid Blyton and W. E. Johns have been easy targets and such texts were criticised with

an almost evangelical zeal.<sup>i</sup> However, not all books should be seen as propaganda for the status quo. For literature, as Butts points out, cannot be viewed in such a simplistic way:

“To see literature as a straightforward response to social conditions is too deterministic and reductive. Literary creation is a process in which the writer often struggles with the world he or she sets out to depict, so that while some works undoubtedly do reflect their society in very passive ways, others articulate its contradictions, question its values, or even argue against them”<sup>20</sup>

Mitzi Myers also hints at oppositional readings in proposing a New Historicist perspective:

“It would pay particular attention to the conceptual and symbolic fault lines denoting a text’s time-place, gender-, and class-specific ideological mechanisms, being aware that the most seemingly artless and orthodox work may conceal an oppositional or contestatory subtext.”<sup>21</sup>

Work on ideology has moved from a somewhat crude analysis by such critics as Bob Dixon in Catching Them Young<sup>22</sup> published in 1977, to a more considered linguistic analysis from Stephens<sup>23</sup> in 1992. However, the main focus remains sociological and political. It was necessary 30 years ago because hitherto children’s books were not seen as a site for ideology. However, now we are in a position to take another look and from a different angle. So while the sociological implications of children’s books have been addressed, and issues such as imperialism have been debated with reference made to the quintessential Englishness of certain books such as A.A. Milne’s Winnie the Pooh, there has been little on what exactly is *English* about English children’s literature although they are, according to Hunt, part of the national psyche:

“It’s characters - Cinderella, Pooh bear, the Wizard of Oz, Mowgli, Biggles, the Famous Five, Peter Rabbit - are part of most people’s psyche; and they link us not simply to childhood and storying, but to basic myths and archetypes”<sup>24</sup>.

Therefore in this study there has been an alternative emphasis. In the search for indicators of Englishness, literary theory has been employed, rather than sociology, in which the texts themselves have been carefully interrogated and not merely the surface level content. Through this careful analysis it will be shown that children’s literature texts, on a surface level, reflect many aspects of everyday life at the time of production. More significantly it will be argued that they may be seen as, if not wholly subversive, at least critical. Therefore this study did not begin with a predetermined oppositional perspective where children’s books were seen only as serving to support the values of the dominant culture. It must be remembered that while children’s books were visible in the educational world, they had a low status in the literary world and were marginalized<sup>ii</sup>. It will be argued that this lack of critical attention has provided children’s writers with a site for questioning the status quo.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 6, Culture Shock

<sup>ii</sup> See Introduction by Peter Hunt in Literature for Children Contemporary Criticism Ed Peter Hunt, Routledge 1992



Therefore it is not suggested that children's books are somehow value free rather the question arises as to what values and whose values are embedded.

### Nationality

A related concept to "ideology" which requires clarification is "nationality". This is a difficult topic for the English literary critic who is typically liberal and left of centre, for as Miller acutely observes:

"The nationalist celebrates his attachment to an historic community; the progressive liberal concedes it with reluctance and shame."<sup>25</sup>

Consequently this is one of the reasons why the focus on children's literature research has been on dominant ideology as discussed above and less on what is English in the texts. Of further significance it is vital that the notion of nationality as something concrete in itself is questioned because as Miller points out:

"...national identities typically contain a considerable element of myth. The nation is conceived as a community extended in history and with a distinct character that is natural to its members"<sup>26</sup>

Therefore it will be *myths* of national identity that will be discussed in the conclusion to this study because it has been argued that a particular myth of English national identity is embedded in many children's texts. Such an English myth of national identity is brought into sharp focus when compared with that of the Czech myth, as will be demonstrated by this study.

In conclusion this thesis should be located in the space where according to Hunt "Literary and cultural studies ...meet over many children's books"<sup>27</sup>. For this study is situated at a place where English and Czech cultures meet and the fault-lines between capitalist and post-communist societies are exposed.

Peter Hunt is clear about the direction research into children's literature should take:

"The academic study of texts is at a crossroads, and in children's books the involvement of the reader, and many different specialist disciplines, gives us the opportunity to develop an intelligent, accessible, useful discourse."<sup>28</sup>

Such an intelligent, accessible and useful discourse now awaits the reader.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Hollindale, Ideology and the Children's Book Thimble Press, 1988 p.15

<sup>2</sup> M. Punch, The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork QRM Series 3, Sage Publications, 1986 p.14

<sup>3</sup> J.Kirk, Marc L. Miller Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research QRM Series 1, Sage Publications, 1986, p. 17

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.20

<sup>5</sup> J. Gubrium, Analyzing Field Reality QRM Series 8, Sage Publications, 1988 p.74

<sup>6</sup> C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures Heineman, 1975 p. 5

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.

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- <sup>9</sup> Geertz, op.cit., p.5  
<sup>10</sup> Punch, op.cit., p. 14  
<sup>11</sup> A.P. Cohen, Belonging MUP, 1982 p.4  
<sup>12</sup> C. Kramsch, Context and Culture in Language Teaching OUP, 1994  
<sup>13</sup> Cohen op.cit., p.6  
<sup>14</sup> R. Williams, Culture Fontana, 1981, pp 11/12/13  
<sup>15</sup> G. Orwell, Inside the Whale Penguin, 1971 (first published 1940) p. 200  
<sup>16</sup> J & A Ahlberg, The Jolly Postman, Heineman, 1986  
<sup>17</sup> P. Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature OUP, 1994 p. 5  
<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 3  
<sup>19</sup> K. Reynolds, Children's Literature in the 1890s and 1990s Northcote House, 1994 p. 5  
<sup>20</sup> D. Butts (Ed), Stories and Society Macmillan, 1992 p. xiii  
<sup>21</sup> P. Hunt, Literature for Children Contemporary Criticism Routledge, 1992, p. 12  
<sup>22</sup> B. Dixon, Catching Them Young Pluto Press, 1977  
<sup>23</sup> J. Stephens, Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction Routledge, 1992  
<sup>24</sup> Hunt 1994 op.cit., p.1  
<sup>25</sup> D. Miller, On Nationality Clarendon Press , 1995 p. 15  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 35  
<sup>27</sup> Hunt, 1994 op cit., p.19  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 19

## Chapter 1: Context

### A. Historical Developments in Czechoslovakia and Life Under Communism

As outlined in the introduction the aim of this study is to investigate and identify cultural indicators in English children's literature texts which were taught to Czech student-teachers as part of their initial training<sup>i</sup>. In order to gain an insight into the students' readings and their horizons of expectations it is necessary have some knowledge of their cultural background. This has been done through tracking historical and political events experienced by three generations of Czech families. A theoretical underpinning for such an investigation is provided by Geertz in his definition of culture as:

“an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life”<sup>1</sup>

In order to contextualise the worlds of the students and their families such “transmitted patterns of meanings” and the “inherited conceptions” of Czechs over three generations have been traced via the macro events in Czech history and the micro aspects of everyday living. A broad outline of political changes since the foundation of Czechoslovakia has been drawn which is followed by a more detailed description of how such changes impinged on the lives of the Czech students and their families.

During a period of 70 years a number of potent events have taken place which have had a profound effect on Czech feelings about their security and stability which may be traced through three generations of the students' families. The majority of Fast Track students were born in 1975 and grew up during the years of “normalisation” under one of the most totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe. Their parents would have been teenagers during the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion in 1968, while their grandparents would perhaps just remember democratic Czechoslovakia before the Nazi occupation and would certainly remember the German presence during the war, the liberation by Soviet troops in 1945 and the communist coup in 1948. During this same period the borders changed no less than four times. Grandparents will recall the Czechs and Slovaks united for the first time in 1918, then the separation during the Second World War and re-unification in 1945 when the country later became in 1948 the Czech and Slovak Socialist Republic. After the “Velvet Revolution” in 1989 the name of the country changed to the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and in January 1993 the Slovaks once more left the federation and became an independent Slovakia while the Czechs became citizens of the Czech Republic.

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<sup>i</sup> For further information see following section in this chapter “The Pedagogical Faculty and the ‘Fast Track’ Course”.

These traumatic changes - from colonialism to a brief period of independence under a liberal democracy, followed by a German fascist regime, then Soviet Stalinist style Communism and once more an independent liberal democracy within three generations, characterise the instability experienced by people living in a small landlocked country where there has been a constant struggle to establish and maintain a national identity. It will be suggested that the Czechs as a minority culture of 10 million in a central European state with no natural strong borders, who have been isolated from the West for 50 years and with a long history of being conquered will, as a people, not only feel insecure but will need to emphasise their Czechness. This may be contrasted with the English, living in the comparative safety of an island which has not been invaded since 1066, with a relatively stable form of democracy for at least 10 generations. Furthermore, the English have been a major imperial power and because of this speak a language that is understood worldwide. The English just *are* and don't really need to explain themselves - a statement that cannot be applied to the Czechs.

What follows is an outline of the major political events from the creation of Czechoslovakia to the present time. While earlier history will not be discussed in detail it should not be forgotten that a characteristic of Czechness is that of a struggle for self-preservation; this has been part of Czech life for over three centuries. Written sources range from Polišenský's History of Czechoslovakia in Outline (first published in 1948 and which has, not surprisingly, a strong anti-German bias and is optimistic about the future under a socialist system) to Šimečka's The Restoration of Order (1984) written from the perspective of a dissident removed from his university post and forced into manual labour. Letters and essays from Václav Havel, now President of the Czech Republic, have also been examined as well as an account by Karel Čapek of the first President, Masaryk in President Masaryk Tells His Story first published in 1934. Bernard Wheaton and Zdeněk Kavan give first hand accounts of the events in The Velvet Revolution (1992). Other texts have emanated from academics living outside the country including Czechoslovakia, The Unofficial Culture (1987) edited by Roger Scruton, which was circulated privately, and has a warning on the fly leaf for it "not to fall into the wrong hands".

The Czechs lost their independence at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 when Czech Protestant forces were defeated by the Catholic Hapsburg Army. The combination of this defeat and the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) led, according to Polišenský, to the loss of two social classes, the nobility and the bourgeoisie<sup>2</sup>. From this time on there was no indigenous ruling class as the upper classes were replaced by German speaking foreigners. This state of affairs continued for three centuries with the Czechs, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, subservient to the German-speaking Austrians. During this period the Czech language was maintained, though there were times when even possessing the Bible in Czech was forbidden. However, while spoken Czech survived, it was written Czech that was neglected in favour of German which was the imperial language and therefore the language of education and upward mobility.

The early career of the first President of Czechoslovakia, Tomas G. Marsaryk, exemplifies the low status of the Czech language in comparison with German. Marsaryk had been educated in German, had obtained a lecturing post in Vienna so naturally his intellectual thinking was in the German language. Consequently he had problems when he was appointed as lecturer to the Czech University in Prague, founded as late as 1882, because he was uncertain about his abilities to express his thoughts in Czech and did not have a deep knowledge of such areas such as Czech philosophy and literature<sup>3</sup>. He was also new to the capital city Prague, knowing the imperial capital Vienna much better.

The struggle for the status of Czech culture developed in the last part of the 19th century in the Czech National Revival movement when Czechs were involved in creating and re-creating their own *Czechness*. The heated controversy over the authenticity of two early medieval manuscripts written in old Slavonic demonstrates the eagerness of many to discover a Slavonic past. Marsaryk became involved in the debate and made many enemies by taking the side of those who thought the manuscripts were forgeries. Čapek quotes him as saying:

“Our pride, our culture must not be based on a lie. Besides, we could not truly get to know our own real history while we were obsessed by a fancied past”<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from this statement that in the late 19th century Czechs were unclear about their own past. If we compare this state of consciousness with that of the English who possessed a powerful Empire and a strong sense of their own place in history we can see that for the colonised Czechs there was a lack of confidence about their own identity.

### **The First Republic**

In 1918 the Czechs became citizens of a nation state for the first time when Czechoslovakia came into being after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the First World War in 1918. T. G. Masaryk became the first President and looked towards Britain as a model for a democratic state. Czechoslovakia between the two world wars may be characterised as democratic, industrialised and ethnically diverse. By 1938 it had a flourishing economy and was rated the 10th industrialised nation in the world. However, 23.4% were German speaking Sudetenlanders and many of them found difficulties adjusting to a change from being in the majority under the Habsburg Empire to a minority group. Other ethnic minorities were Jews, Gypsies, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Ukrainians and Russians. Unfortunately this period of national growth and stability was to be short lived and once more the Czechs were to be invaded.

## **The Nazi Invasion**

It was the presence of the Sudetenland Germans which gave Hitler the excuse to cede the Sudetenlands in 1938 and to make Bohemia and Moravia a German Protectorate in 1939. The Slovaks were given “independence” by the Germans and formed a nationalistic state on Nazi lines.

In the Czech lands the German occupation was, according to Wolchik, directed at “extinguishing all vestiges of Czech culture and political values”<sup>5</sup>. One of the methods used was to close down all Czech universities removing more than 1,200 teaching staff while on November 17th 1939, nine student leaders were executed and 1,200 transported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp<sup>6</sup>. The Jewish community was virtually destroyed with only a quarter remaining alive by the end of the war<sup>7</sup>. By 1945, the country had suffered heavy economic losses due to the enforced production of industrial products for the German war effort. This meant a loss of the intelligensia through disruption of the universities and the elimination of Jewish academics. The Czech language once more was subsumed to German and the country was left in severe economic straits.

## **Post War Czechoslovakia and the Rise of Communism**

Most of the Czech lands were liberated by the Russians from the East while the Americans only managed to reach Plzen from the West. Consequently the main influence after the Second World War came from the Soviet Union. The pre-war President, Edvard Beneš, returned from exile and a modified form of pluralism was established between 1945 and 1948. The Sudetenlanders were forcibly expelled and only a small number of Jews remained. Thus two ethnic minorities were no longer part of Czech cultural life.

In 1945 there were a million members of the Communist Party and in 1946, according to Wolchik, 37.9% of the population voted Communist in the election<sup>8</sup>. A variety of circumstances led to “elections” in 1948 where *only* Communist Party candidates were offered. This coup resulted in Klement Gottwald, leader of the Communist Party, taking control and running, contrary to Czech culture, a Soviet Stalinist model of government. It may be argued that the Czechs and Slovaks were once more subordinated under an imperialist regime. Terrible purges took place and any opposition was effectively neutralised. Those with experience of “the West” were considered dangerous and were imprisoned and many were executed. It is ironic that people such as Czech pilots, who had flown with the RAF in the war as Soviet allies, were among the victims. Other victims were democratic socialists who were trying to establish a fair and just society based on the values seen before the war. This socialist model on Soviet lines meant that unified mass organisations were subordinated to the Communist Party. There was a centrally planned economy with all private ownership virtually eliminated. The economic plans focused on heavy industry, not the light industry which had been the Czechs traditional strength. Foreign trade was redirected from West to East and by 1960, 90% of the land had been collectivised.

Wolchik describes how the Soviet example was used to promote social changes. Disadvantaged groups were supported by a manipulation of wage policies and access to secondary and higher education was controlled. Membership of the Communist Party was more important in gaining a place in the University than talent. One of the weapons used against dissidents was that their children would not be admitted to University. Playwright, Václav Havel (later to become President) was not allowed entry into Higher Education because his parents were “bourgeois”. This Stalinist model of communism survived in Czechoslovakia until well after Khrushchev’s denunciation in the USSR 1956.

If we consider the lives of the students’ grandparents, it is clear they experienced three different regimes, democratic Czech, Nazi Fascist and Soviet Communist. But in the 1960’s a new movement developed which would be remembered by their parents.

### **The Prague Spring:**

In the 1960’s there was a movement towards a more democratic form of socialism termed “socialism with a human face”. By 1963 the economy was stagnating and the reforms that were needed to stimulate the economy meant political changes. At the same time writers and other artists opposed Party control of cultural life and scholars began to question and renounce established dogmas. During this period there was an intense period of cultural activity. The internationally acclaimed film “Closely Observed Trains” (director Jiří Menzel from a story by Hrabal) was made; Miloš Forman was directing films in Prague; Milan Kundera was teaching at the Film Academy and with Ivan Klíma spoke out against censorship at the Fourth Congress of the Czechoslovak Writers’ Union in June 1967. In 1968 the hard-line President, Novotný, was replaced by the more liberal Dubček and for eight months the Soviet system was challenged. During the time of this brief “Prague Spring” censorship was relaxed and the goal was for a form of socialism to be established which was better suited to western democratic traditions. Such historical links with the West and economic development were stopped by the arrival of Russian tanks on August 21st 1968.

### **Normalisation**

This was the period when the majority of the Fast Track students were born, grew up and were educated and so it is likely to have had the strongest influence on them. Dubček was replaced by hard-liner Husák and the process of “normalisation” began. Many influential people lost their positions and were replaced by hard-liners. As in Nazi times, it was the intellectuals who were removed first :

“The centres of intellectual life were particularly hard hit by the personnel changes made at the time, as many of the most capable experts lost their positions”<sup>9</sup>

Between 1969 and 1970 half a million people lost their positions. One example of these changes was the closing down of the English Department at the Pedagogical Faculty in Brno. The consequences were far reaching because it meant that fewer teachers of English were being trained and another window closed on the world outside.

Writers were also selected for special treatment. Some, including Milan Kundera, escaped to the West while others were forced to find manual work such as stoking boilers. Ivan Klíma emptied dustbins and playwright Václav Havel cleaned barrels in a brewery. Compliance was achieved through a combination of material rewards and coercion. This meant that, compared to other Eastern European countries, the shops were reasonably stocked with food but there was little space for expressing an opinion. The following popular joke, which operates by boundary-marking differences between life in Poland and Czechoslovakia, illuminates a number of points.

A Polish dog and a Czech dog meet at the border of their two countries. The Polish dog is on his way to visit Czechoslovakia.

“Why on earth are you going to visit my country?” asked the Czech dog. “It’s terrible there”.

“I’m going there to eat” the Polish dog replied. “But why are you going into Poland? It’s a rotten place, the shops are empty and there are long queues for everything”.

“I’m going there to bark”, replied the Czech dog.<sup>i</sup>

Concrete examples of how “barking” was discouraged and affected family life are given by Vaclav Havel in his open letter to President Husák dated April 8th 1975:

“For fear of losing his job, the schoolteacher teaches things he does not believe; fearing for his future, the pupil repeats them after him; for fear of not being allowed to continue his studies, the young man joins the Youth League and participates in whatever of its activities are necessary; fear that, under the monstrous system of political credits, his son or daughter will not acquire the necessary total of points for enrolment at a school leads the father to take on all manner of responsibilities and ‘voluntarily’ to do everything required.”<sup>10</sup>

A school teacher told me how ashamed he feels now about an incident in his school when he let his class outside to play even though he knew it was dangerous as the local factory had accidentally emitted noxious gasses.

The power of the police state may be described as panoptic where, even though not being observed, Czechs behaved as if they were. Havel in his letter to President Husák in using the metaphor of a spider’s web to describe how the power of the State is able to influence the individual:

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<sup>i</sup> Told by poet Miroslav Holub on October 10th 1995 at the plenary session of “In Search of the Enemy” at the Cheltenham Literary Festival.



“For this is the hideous spider whose invisible web runs right through the whole of society; this is the point at infinity where all the lines of fear ultimately intersect; this is the final and irrefutable proof that no citizen can hope to challenge the power of the state. And even if most of the people, most of the time, cannot see this web with their own eyes, nor touch its fibres, even the simplest citizen is well aware of its existence, assumes its silent presence at every moment in every place, and behaves accordingly - behaves, that is, so as to ensure the approval of those hidden eyes and ears.”<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult for those who have only ever experienced living in a democratic country to appreciate life in a totalitarian regime. Many Czechs have told me that only the next generation will be able to lead their lives untouched by the past.

One aspect of life under “normalisation” was the marking of anniversaries which is reflected in Havel’s wry observation:

“..we live from anniversary to anniversary, from celebration to celebration, from parade to parade..”<sup>12</sup>

May Day was always a big event and the arrangements in Brno were described to me with amusement by friends who were expected to attend these “celebrations” every year. A whole team of people were employed all year round to organise the event. Each section of pavement on the route was designated to a particular sector of the work force and it was expected that all employees would attend and absences were noted. Simecka describes the behaviour of the crowds on these occasions:

“Once or twice a year, citizens are called on to take part in some demonstration or celebration. The adapted citizens fill the squares or join the parade. They chat among themselves and do their best not to hear the speaker, applauding listlessly whenever the claue in front of the platform shouts one of the regulation slogans”<sup>13</sup>

I witnessed a hangover of such cynical behaviour from my Head of Department and her colleague at the opening of a Fast Track conference. When the Minister for Education got up to speak they immediately began to play noughts and crosses and refused to listen to him. This was now three years since the “Velvet Revolution” and they had slipped back into “old times” behaviour when staff meetings at schools and universities were compulsory and comprised political “education” only. It is important to bear in mind that the Fast Track students spent their formative years in this oppressive atmosphere and its hardly surprising that they continued to adopt a passive as opposed to active approach towards their studies.

However, not everyone was stopped from “barking” and in 1977, Charter 77, was founded to champion Human Rights in Czechoslovakia. According to Wolchik<sup>14</sup> even though in 1987 only 2,500 people had signed it Charter 77 became a significant independent or “second” culture and enjoyed wider influence than is reflected in the signatures. Václav Havel, a founder member, became spokesman for the group. In April 1978 Havel also helped to organise the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS in Czech). In October 1979 six members of the committee were

tried for criminal subversion of the republic and Havel received a four-and-a-half year prison sentence. He was released before the end of his sentence in January 1983 because he had developed serious pneumonia. Meanwhile outside the country changes were taking place that were to lead to the dramatic events in Eastern Europe in 1989. Gorbachev became President in the Soviet Union and began the reforms that led eventually to the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The “Velvet Revolution” was triggered by a students’ demonstration on November 17th and within 23 days the Communist Party had fallen. On December 29th, 1989 Václav Havel was elected president.

This time may be characterised as a period marked by constant changes as the country moves from a totalitarian to a democratic system. But for many of the older generation these changes had come too late: the teenagers of the 1960’s had suffered three decades of lost opportunities. But for the young there were now exciting opportunities. However, the legacy of the past continues to hang over the nation internally; in the mind-sets of people and externally in the appalling infrastructure which was revealed once the heady days of the “Velvet Revolution” were over. President Havel in his New Year address of 1991 spoke about how he had described his country a year ago as a “neglected house” but now he realised he was wrong and it was in fact “a ruin”<sup>15</sup> 1991. This “ruin” had been the tenth industrialised nation in the world in the 1930’s with a democratic government, a large middle class, high literacy rates and a thriving creative culture. In February of 1990, 60 political parties registered out of which 23 (including the “Friends of Beer” party) participated in the June elections where Grandparents voted in the first free elections since the end of World War II and their children and grandchildren enjoyed a free vote for the first time in their lives.

Although my first hand experiences of the country began in February 1990 and ended in August 1996 there were many old communist structures still in place and the economy, although developing, still had the ghosts of the old system which I experienced. Some significant features of life pre 1989 will be described in order to give an indication of how the regime affected my students as they grew up. Information about life under totalitarianism comes from the many people I was in contact with over those four years. It must be emphasised that my proficiency in Czech was not good enough for in-depth conversations and all the information and insights I have gleaned came from conversations in English. This means that people I spoke to were likely to be positive about English-speaking people as they had made a considerable investment in learning the language. This applies particularly to friends of my generation who kept their knowledge of English intact under difficult conditions. One of them learned English through reading the “National Geographic” magazine which was the only source of English he was able to obtain. This group of English speakers were also professionals and the perceptions of sections of the community such as manual workers was not available to me. Such conversations with these groups were of a phatic variety with daily pleasantries occasionally being exchanged when shopping or with the boiler men and cleaners at the faculty as we queued together for our salaries once a month.

There was a shortage of accommodation and in order to solve the problem large housing estates were built in the late 60's and early 70's. In towns the majority of Czechs live in these state flats which look to English eyes like council estates but it must be remembered that all social classes live there. Some families live in flats in older properties built in the last century and many of these have not been modernised and are in poor structural condition. Flats were not owned but either rented or leased. It was and still is particularly difficult to find accommodation in the capital city Prague. Houses are always referred to as "family houses" and are more usual in the country where some have been built by the families themselves. There is less personal space on the whole for Czechs compared with the English. Living rooms usually double as bedrooms and specific items of furniture are designed for storing bed-linen. I lived in a small one-bedroom flat on a housing estate and my Czech friends were surprised at the amount of space I enjoyed.

Many families own a country *chata*<sup>i</sup>, and these vary enormously from a building no larger than a garden shed in a plot of land, to something resembling a Swiss chalet. Before 1989 when travel abroad was restricted there was an exodus each weekend into the country by many families and much time and energy was put into restoring and improving their *chatas*. This retreat into the private sphere is termed "inner emigration" by Wheaton and Kavan and they describe the symbolism of the *chata* which in no way resembles an English "second home".

"An apt if symbolic example of this state of affairs was the preoccupation with country cottages. These modest, mainly wooden structures represented not simply temporary flight from city life in which urban pressures were exacerbated by the relentless confrontation with the ideological, but also a target for the meaningful investment of the work ethic that the public conspicuously failed to deliver in its economic performance during the week".<sup>16</sup>

There is less social mobility than in the UK for two reasons. Firstly under the Communist system there was virtually 100% employment and a very narrow range between bottom and top salaries. This reduced the need to move in order to gain employment or seek promotion. Secondly the chronic housing shortage mentioned above made it very difficult to move. Property could not be bought and sold and people changed their accommodation by a complicated system of exchanges.

As a consequence of the above there is less notion of independence for young people than in the UK and parents remain responsible for their children for a much longer period. Currently, in 1997, students still have their fees paid for by the State as in the UK but do not receive a maintenance grant and have to rely on their families for support. This means that students tend to study at the nearest university with most of them travelling home at the weekend. The housing shortage means that few young people leave home before they are married. They also tend to marry young and have children early. A number of my students were already married with children before they reached the age of 21.

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<sup>i</sup> There is no exact translation but the closest is "chata" although the Czechs often use the word "cottage" which conjures in the English speaker's mind an entirely different picture from the wooden structure which is typical of the Czech *chata*.

The communist system led to greater conformity in people's behaviour because a significant number of people were informing on the rest of the population. This affected people's lives in a number of ways. As mentioned above, those not considered politically correct would experience difficulties if their children were applying for a university place. This caused tensions within families with parents feeling guilty if their children had not succeeded in enrolling on a course. As a result families became closer because that was the only place where they could speak freely. A slogan in the November 1989 revolution illustrates the dilemma:

"It's very hard to raise children so that they don't lie at home and they don't blurt out the truth outside"<sup>17</sup>

Church going was regarded as suspect, as was speaking English and having friends or connections with the West. Those whose families had left the country were also under suspicion. This led to the population having a neutral public face and very private ideas and opinions. There was little room for a negotiation of ideas under the totalitarian system so opinions tended to be polarised and this filtered through to the examination system which focused on facts which were memorised and answers were either right or wrong.

The equal rights of women were celebrated every year on International Women's Day but few ideas about feminism, as developed in the West since the 1950's, have infiltrated. Women had the right to work and in fact were expected to. Nurseries were provided and women went back to work quickly after having their babies. Sadly, abortion was the major form of birth control. Men's attitudes towards women's work on the whole changed very little so women found themselves in the double-bind of working full-time outside the home and full-time in the home with little support. Shortages in the shops with the necessary queuing and little in the way of convenience foods made domestic work more time-consuming. The whole idea of Feminism tends to be treated suspiciously by Czechs as a remnant of communist ideology and consequently has to be handled delicately by an outsider.

The one remaining ethnic minority in the Czech Republic, gypsies, were given housing under the communist regime and were expected to work but they managed to retain their identity and are a source of concern to Czechs who see them as having a very different culture. There is a major problem now with racism towards this group and many gypsy children find themselves in schools for slow learners. The gypsy "problem" has been made visible in the UK in recent weeks (November 1997) with large numbers of Czech and Slovak gypsies arriving at Dover requesting asylum.

A final point which is fundamentally important is that in this closed world with little information

from outside the communist block, exposure to different cultures and life-styles was severely limited<sup>i</sup>. Consequently many of the changes in British culture since 1945 due to increased foreign travel and immigration did not happen to Czechs and Slovaks. On many occasions I felt close to 1950's England as the whole country seemed stuck in a time-warp where traditional Czech food of meat and dumplings or potatoes with few fresh vegetables was redolent of the British diet in the 1950's. Shortages were a way of life and queuing for scarce items was a daily experience.

In conclusion Simecka sums up the experience of the last 30 years:

“In the course of those years three generations of Czechs and Slovaks have become integrated into a precisely determined social structure which differs fundamentally from any that has gone before. The population of a country whose development was very much in the mainstream of European civilization adapted itself to a system which, at the outset, seemed to many to be temporary, absurd, unstable and, in its excesses, quite insane.”<sup>18</sup>

This means that the task of creating a liberal democracy is formidable. As Wolchik observes:

“...the task of creating a political culture that is based on a view of oneself as an active political subject rather than as an object of politics will be a lengthy one in Czechoslovakia”.<sup>19</sup>

In summary the following points identify those significant aspects which impinge on Czech children's literature and the students' readings of English children's literature texts:

- Events in Czech history have given rise to a constant struggle to maintain a Czech identity
- The last three generations have witnessed fundamental politico-historical changes
- The “fast track” students grew up under the rigid system of “normalisation”
- There was little access to the outside world
- Access to knowledge was carefully controlled
- Children tended to be protected by their families and consequently were more dependant on them.

I would suggest the biggest difference between the English and the Czechs, which underpins all of the above is that English people are less likely to see themselves as objects and more likely to feel themselves active subjects. My role in the Pedagogical Faculty was to support my students in that movement from object to subject and what follows is a description of the Pedagogical Faculty and the re-established Department of English.

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<sup>i</sup> Even Czechs travelling to Russia had to stay in their own groups and were not encouraged to talk to Russians just as visitors from the West.

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- <sup>1</sup> C. Geertz The Interpretation of Cultures London 1975 p.89
  - <sup>2</sup> J.V Polišenský, History of Czechoslovakia in Outline Bohemia International Prague 1991 (reprint from 1947) p. 60
  - <sup>3</sup> K. Čapek President Masaryk Tells His Story London, 1994
  - <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 154
  - <sup>5</sup> Wolchik in J. Held (Ed) The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century N. Y. 1992 p.12
  - <sup>6</sup> B Wheaten & Z.Kavan The Velvet Revolution Czechoslovakia, 1988-1991 Westview Press, 1992, p.41
  - <sup>7</sup> V.S.Mamety & R. Luža (Eds) A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948 Princeton, 1973, p. 321
  - <sup>8</sup> Ibid p.130
  - <sup>9</sup> Ibid p.139
  - <sup>10</sup> J. Vladislav (Ed) Václav Havel or Living in Truth Faber and Faber, 1990, p4
  - <sup>11</sup> Ibid p.7
  - <sup>12</sup> Ibid p.26
  - <sup>13</sup> M. Šimecka The Restoration of Order - The Normalisation of Czechoslovakia Verso, 1984 p.142
  - <sup>14</sup> Held op.cit
  - <sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.150
  - <sup>16</sup> B Wheaten & Z Kavan op.cit. p.9
  - <sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 192
  - <sup>18</sup> Šimecka op.cit. p. 139
  - <sup>19</sup> Held op.cit p.150

## B. The Pedagogical Faculty and the Development of the Fast Track Course

*"A country that once could be proud of the educational level of its citizens spends so little on their education today that it ranks only seventy-second in the world"*

This sad fact was revealed to the Czech nation by President Václav Havel in his New Year Speech less than two months after the Velvet Revolution in 1990. One of the reasons for the decline was the many effects of "normalisation" in which:

*"The purge of the institutions of knowledge was in some ways the most deleterious for society as a whole in that its stranglehold on education and the arts resulted in a 'cultural desert' as the intelligentsia later described it"<sup>1</sup>*

The quality of education was low due to:

*"The neglect of certain subjects, the narrowing of access, the failure to produce research in the social sciences, the conduct of research on the basis of rigid ideological principals, the suppression of religious education, and the effects of limitations on travel, which gave students a distorted view of the outside world"<sup>2</sup>*

One of those "neglected" subjects was English and in all Pedagogical Faculties, including the one in Brno which is the subject of this study, English departments were closed down. The result of this meant that there were fewer posts for teachers of English in Higher Education so no teachers of English were being trained and therefore very little English was taught in elementary schools. Consequently many teachers of English found it difficult to find employment in education and were forced to earn their living in other ways. The main foreign language taught in schools was Russian and it was compulsory. Although English was still taught at Philosophical Faculties, as a subject it had a low status and those who were teaching it were constantly under suspicion because they might have contacts with "the West".

After the "Velvet Revolution" in November 1989 the education system was one of a myriad of structures where there was an urgent need for change as emphasis was placed on converting the old totalitarian education system to suit a more democratic one. Of the many developments that took place at that time the one that relevant to this study is the change of status of the English language from a low status, minority subject to one with a high status. Wheaton and Kavan note that great stress was placed on English as a window as it would

*"...help the young gain some knowledge of the wider world"<sup>3</sup>*

Russian was identified as an imperialist language and the majority of parents no longer wanted their children to learn it while English was seen as an important international language which resulted in a

great demand for it to be taught in schools. Clearly the Czech Ministry of Education felt an urgent need to meet this strong grass roots response.

The Masaryk University in Brno was founded in 1919 and has a number of faculties including the Pedagogical Faculty which is for students who wish to become teachers. Traditionally student-teachers take either a 4 or 5 year course which comprises two main subjects plus some pedagogical elements. Students completing 4 years of studies are qualified to teach in the *Základní škola* (Elementary School) and those who stay on for a 5th year are qualified to teach in a *Gymnasium* (Grammar School). In 1992 a new "Fast Track"<sup>i</sup> course was established which will be discussed below. The English department at the Pedagogical Faculty re-opened in September 1990 with a newly established staff. At the same time in Elementary and Grammar schools there was a desperate search for teachers of English and many teachers of Russian, who had just a slight knowledge of English, were told that they would be teaching English instead. In addition to a chronic shortage of suitably qualified staff, there were also few resources for teaching English because text books from Britain and the USA were too expensive and the traditional Czech text books were out-of-date both in terms of methodology and ideology. The Government asked for help from abroad and many agencies were at hand to give assistance to post-communist countries. Czechoslovakia was not alone in finding representatives from the Peace Corps, Education for Democracy, United States Information Service, the Jan Hus Foundation and the British Council among others.

The British Council had remained in the country throughout the Communist regime playing a low-level role which became high-profile after 1989. A needs analysis exercise was carried out and in September 1990 a new British Council Project for Czechoslovakia began. In the area of Education the following areas were pinpointed for support:

- Initial teacher training (PRESETT)
- In service teacher training (INSET)
- British Studies
- English for Special Purposes
- Resource Centres

Qualified British lecturers were provided for the first four areas while premises, resources and Czech and Slovak staff were found for the Resource Centres.

Presett staff were sent to Pedagogical faculties and I was appointed as Presett lektor by the British Council to the Pedagogical Faculty, Brno in September 1991. We were encouraged to devise our own brief according to local circumstances as each institution was so different. I decided to focus on the following four areas:

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<sup>i</sup> The official term is: *trileté jednooborové studium*



- a. to help identify and then organise resources which the British Council would fund
- b. to give professional advice on course development
- c. to teach the professional elements of the course i.e. methodology
- d. to offer in-service support

My post began in the second year of the newly established department and while there had been native speakers in the first year, this was the first where professional support was available from qualified staff. At that time in the English department, there were two groups of second year students, three groups of first years and a large group of teachers re-qualifying from Russian to English on one-day a week release over a 3-year period.

When the English department was re-opened the new Czech staff were confronted with many problems as there were few resources, little money and no qualified native speakers for advice. It is not surprising, therefore, that the traditional Czech syllabus was adhered to with little scope for innovation. This syllabus focused on developing the student's knowledge about English but with less focus on the application of English and the development of pedagogical skills. The syllabus included grammar, lexicology, phonetics, semantics, some practical English classes, and in later years methodology and literature. Nearly all assessment was oral and took place in closed offices between student and lecturer. The students were tested in a question and answer format where they were expected to have memorised what they had been taught. There was no moderation of standards either within the department or externally and the time taken for each student was variable.

The Pedagogical Faculty syllabus tried to emulate the syllabus in the English Department of the Philosophical Faculty which enjoyed a higher status. This meant there was hardly any sense of the professional development of student teachers where methodology lectures did not begin until the third year and were only 45 minutes a week. Teaching practice took place at the end of the third year for two weeks where only 4 lessons had to be taught. No assessment procedures were in place for teaching practice and students were rarely observed. The literature syllabus consisted of an historical survey of what were considered important authors and books. There were few primary sources available in English and the students were not expected to undertake much reading of original texts in English. In short they were told about the books and students were assessed on their ability to memorise the information they had been given.

Resources were still scarce at the Pedagogical Faculty when I arrived in September 1991. In place were a few reference books held by lecturers and a few sets of modern course books for students. There was no photocopier in the department with only one to serve the whole faculty. Computers were only to be found in the mathematics department and only a few manual typewriters were available for word processing. This dearth of resources was a feature of the totalitarian past where access to and dissemination of knowledge was deliberately suppressed and withheld. It should be remembered that *samisdal* publications which were secretly distributed before 1989 had to be typed

on manual typewriters with 4 or 5 carbons because access to photocopiers was heavily restricted. I was given a budget from the British Council which provided a photocopier, a word-processor, cassette recorders, a television and video recorder and £4,000 worth of book stock which made a significant difference.

I involved the whole department in the selection of titles from publishers' catalogues in order to give lecturing staff a sense of ownership on the new resources. Titles were selected from a range of modern course-books, grammar reference books, dictionaries, and EFL methodology books. Once the bookstock arrived I was somewhat distressed to find that everything disappeared into individual lecturer's rooms and it became clear to me that the books which I thought were for the students were considered by the lecturers to be for themselves. One way of resolving this problem was to establish a resource base and during this first year a plan for converting a suitable room was put into action. By the time the Fast Track students came a room had been earmarked and resources were beginning to be placed there. The arrival of more books increased the need not only for space but for someone to set up and manage the resources so a part-time librarian was appointed and suitable shelving ordered. Unfortunately access was still a challenge for the students because all the books were locked behind glass doors and only on request would the librarian unlock a specific door to allow access. Also there was a limited time when the room was available as a library since it was also used as a language laboratory. Nevertheless, this was a big step forward and it meant that students could browse the shelves and borrow books. Browsing is important because under the totalitarian system it was not possible to have open access to book stock. In order to obtain a particular book it was necessary to give the librarian the details of the book required, wait three days and then collect it. Book shops similarly discouraged browsing as the books were behind the counter and the customer had to ask the assistant to fetch each book they were interested in.

During the academic year of 1991-1992 the Czech Ministry of Education perceived the need to produce more teachers of English quickly because there was such a demand from parents. A 3-year single subject course was conceived and with advice and support from the British Council the *Bakalárske Studium* known colloquially as the "Fast Track" was instituted and the first cohort of students started in September 1992. The Fast Track was a single-subject course designed to produce teachers of English for Elementary schools. The focus of syllabus design was to move towards a more up-to-date approach to teacher education emphasising communicative methodology with a strong focus on developing classroom skills. Time was allocated for literature but staff in each institution could decide how it would develop their literature syllabus. It was hoped that the curriculum development that was taking place in the Fast Track would permeate the old 5-year course and to a certain extent it did. Discussion took place about what sort of literature course would be suitable and having expressed an interest in books for children I was given the task of developing a course in children's literature for first year students. Financial support for curriculum development

was provided by both the Czech Ministry of Education and the British Council which meant the children's literature component could be resourced with suitable titles. There were few constraints as to the make-up of the course because it was completely new and no-one felt they had any expertise in the area. It was left to me to identify areas to develop. After some consideration I developed the following rationale for studying children's literature:

- 1 The study of children's books could open up debate about children and their needs which would be important for students who were going to become teachers.
- 2 Children's books are reasonably easy for students learning English to understand and therefore would be suitable for introducing the study of literature in general.
- 3 Learning a language also involves learning about the culture of the people who speak that language and cultural insights could be discussed as they occurred in the texts.
- 4 Reading and discussing literature is another way of extending and developing the students' knowledge of English.

Although there is not an established canon in the area of Children's Literature, my Czech colleagues assumed there would be an historical survey and that "important" books would be identified. I rejected this approach and wanted instead to focus on actual texts. When planning the syllabus my main question was whether to focus on depth or spread: would many books be read quickly or would a few be studied in more detail? Depth was chosen with any historical aspects rejected until the end when enough had been read for the books to be put into some kind of context.

It can be seen from the above that the traditional methods of teaching literature at the faculty had been abandoned. There would not be an historical approach; no focus on "important" books would be given; the books themselves would be read in detail and assessment would not centre on the memorising of facts.

In the first semester emphasis was placed on the oral tradition, exploring fairy tale and myth ending with the modern myths of Ted Hughes

The second semester involved the study of the following texts in this order:

The Iron Man by Ted Hughes (Faber and Faber, 1968)  
Culture Shock a modern poetry anthology edited by Michael Rosen (Penguin, 1991)  
The Deathwood Letters Hazel Townson (Red Fox, 1990)  
Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne (Methuen, 1973)  
Collected Rhymes and Verses by Walter de la Mare (Faber and Faber, 1967)  
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carrol (Puffin, 1984)

An overview of the development of English children's literature was given in the last seminar which served to place the texts studied over the year into context and was based on John Rowe Townsend's

survey *Written for Children*<sup>4</sup>. Traditionally lectures and seminars in all Czech institutions of education from the *Základní škola* upwards are in units of 45 minutes but Fast Track seminars were timetabled for 'doubles' of 90 minutes which, with groups of only 15 students, allowed much more time for discussion and the development of ideas.

The course was perceived to be successful by the British Council in Prague and I was asked to write an article about it for their Journal *Perspectives*<sup>5</sup> and to contribute to a number of networking seminars where all Fast Track lecturers in the country met to exchange views and ideas. Indeed the idea of children's literature as an area to develop was taken up by the British Council and all Czech Fast Track Institutions and Resource Centres received books from my original list.

I taught two cohorts of students and it is this course and those students who are the focus of this study. A third cohort, the last one to be admitted to the Fast Track, was taught by another British lecturer in the academic year 1994-1995 and those students have also been included in the study. The Fast Track programme is gradually winding down after running for three years and students in future will be admitted only to the traditional 5-year course.

### **Pedagogy**

As evidenced in the study, the students' notions of Englishness were revealed not only through their reaction to the children's literature texts but also through their response to the ways those texts were taught because the methodology employed was as English as the texts. Therefore a comparison of Czech and English EFL methodology will be given in order to stress the significance of the classroom practice on the course. There are a number of significant differences between the Czech and English systems in the teaching English as a foreign language which I elicited from the following sources. By the time the Children's Literature course was being designed, I already had one year's experience at the Pedagogical Faculty teaching methodology to re-qualification teachers. Conversations with them in seminars about their practice and observing their reactions to communicative methodology was illuminating. I had also undertaken a considerable amount of in-service work for qualified teachers of English where different methodologies could be discussed. Some of these teachers had invited me to their schools where I was able to observe lessons and talk to teachers about their practice. I also taught two English lessons a week in a *Gymnasium* during my first year and in a *Základní škola* in my second. This experience gave me an insight into how English lessons at all levels were taught and how students viewed studying.

Before 1989, the country was effectively cut off from the West, not only through difficulties in travelling abroad, but also by restricted access to foreign books, newspapers, radio and film. Therefore it is not surprising to see that English was taught as if it were a dead language like Latin where a grammar-translation method was employed and reading and writing was considered more

important than speaking and listening. Importance was paid to accuracy and a great deal of rote-learning and drilling was involved with the teacher as the focus of the class. The main and often the only resource would be the one Czech produced text-book *Angličtina* with passages for comprehension, vocabulary, rules of grammar and exercises.

Such classroom practice contrasted strongly with the EFL methodology that was developing in many parts of the world where a communicative approach was considered more effective. This methodology involved the students *actively* engaged in classroom tasks which focused on speaking and listening to a real, dynamic language. Fluency was emphasised in the early stages with more attention to accuracy as the student progressed. A variety of resources were employed in addition to a core text-book such as cassette tapes, videos, magazines, pictures and other authentic materials. The focus would be as much on the students *learning* as the teacher *teaching*. Assessment procedures would vary and not be totally focused on accuracy.

Literature did not play an important role in English language lessons in schools. The traditional text book would occasionally include an extract from a work of English or American literature in a reading passage where the emphasis was on basic comprehension. In Czech lessons, stories, songs and poetry were a feature of classes for younger pupils but for older pupils the focus was on the study of their extremely complicated grammar with far less attention being paid to literature. This is in contrast to England where literature plays a more important part in English lessons in primary and secondary schools than does grammar which is not typically taught in isolation. When literature was taught whether it was English, Czech or Russian, the notion of a canon featured strongly and the students were given important names and dates and were told what was significant about the books. Evidence of this approach comes from Radek, a Fast Track student, as he describes his literature classes:

Radek: We had the classically bad literature classes

Sandra: What was the literature?

Radek: This is the author, when he was born, this was the practise, yes? (mimes writing on the blackboard).

Sandra: Yes

Radek: Born, died, close the brackets

Sandra: Yes

Radek: And the list of his works, yes?

Sandra: Yes

Radek: And that was it and we had to memorise it. We never discussed what it was about and we never even had to read it or never worked with it from the inside of the book, anything like that, just the name, born, died, and the list.

Many other students described their literature classes in similar ways and their comments are supported by Jan Culik in a lecture "Intellectuals and their Position in the Czech Republic Now" which was given on 14th October 1995 at the fourth Schwarzenber meeting of Czech intellectuals in

Tepla, West Bohemia where he observed when commenting on the struggles in the Czech education system:

“Young Czech people now hardly know the famous Czech literary and cultural tradition. I have encountered a number of young Czechs with secondary education who could not recognise even a quotation from Macha’s *Maj* or from other Czech classics. Young Czechs memorise lists of names and dates in Czech schools: literary texts are rarely read and analysed in school”.<sup>6</sup>

These contrasting styles of teaching may be placed on either end of a continuum where traditional methodology focused on rote learning is at one end and a communicative approach at the other. There are clear links to be made between classroom methodology described above and the differences between a closed totalitarian regime and an open democratic one. Education in a totalitarian regime features closed learning and rigid notions of what constitutes knowledge while in a democratic system, learning is more open and there is acknowledgement that what constitutes knowledge is negotiable. The following comment on the Children's Literature seminars from two 3rd Year students in Cohort A, Vit Kafonel and Karla Hasankova, emphasises the two ends of the continuum:

"The teacher had a different attitude towards students in comparison with Czech teachers. The classes were organised as discussions, the teacher was open and treated us like equal adult people. The Czech approach is that the teacher is dominant and the students are inferior".

It must be said here that in spite of few resources and an unsympathetic regime many Czech teachers of English before 1989 succeeded in creating a positive classroom atmosphere where their students studied hard and enjoyed their English lessons. However, in the main learning was seen as a difficult if not unpleasant experience with unsympathetic assessment procedures.

After November 1989 the country had to adjust to a completely different way of life and schools were playing their part in this time of tremendous change. Inevitably some areas moved more quickly than others and in institutions of education changes were slower for a number of reasons. While staff theoretically had the chance to change their practice there were a number of constraints. There was no extra money to buy new resources and even if there had been, it takes time to produce such items as a new history text book. There was also little in the way of funds to support in-service training and there were few people in the country with enough experience to undertake this task. It was mainly in the area of Modern language teaching that both resources and in-service training was offered through such agencies as the British Council, the United States Information Service, the Goethe Institute and Institute Francaise. Cambridge University Press gave the Czechs license to print their English Language Course book in the country on poorer quality paper at an affordable price and for a while this was the only course book available that encompassed a communicative approach to language learning.

In the light of the learning experiences described above, I knew that my teaching style would reflect an open system where fluency in speaking English was going to be more important than accuracy. As far as possible I wanted to avoid any sense of tension, anxiety or worry which was a characteristic of their previous learning experience. My objectives, therefore, were as follows:

- a To give the students as much opportunity as possible to practice speaking and listening to English
- b To encourage the students to think for themselves
- c To develop a lasting interest in children's literature
- d To enjoy learning

There were difficulties in setting up the Fast Track course with a cohort of 45 students and additional staff in a newly formed department and a building already overcrowded. There was a chronic lack of space for Fast Track classes even though classes began at 6.40 in the morning and finished at 8.00 in the evening. A solution was found by using the premises of a *Základní škola* in the area. Classes for the children finished at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and at 2.30 the Fast Track classes began which meant we were teaching in classrooms designed for small children. In one way this was appropriate for children's literature but in other ways it was hardly suitable for adults. After the first semester an Apprentices school was found with normal furniture and that became the base for the second semester and the following academic year.

There were three groups of around 15 students in each of whom the majority were females, which is a reflection of the teaching force. Some of the students had not come directly from Secondary school and had experience of the world of work or of courses in either private language schools or the State language school in Brno.

When planning seminars it was important to bear in mind that many of the students had been earning their living in the morning and would come to class tired. The shortage of teachers of English meant that already a number of them, although unqualified, were already teaching in one of the many private language schools that had been set up. This meant that the seminars would have to engage the students actively to keep up their flagging energy levels.

I was allocated an additional budget for curriculum development by the British Council for the purchase of suitable texts and ordered small sets of texts plus a variety of titles for wider reading. All books were kept in the resource centre except for the texts currently being studied which I kept in the staff room. After study they were returned to the resource centre where they could be borrowed. In addition to my allocation, a British colleague, who was sent by the East European Partnership to teach on the Fast Track, was able to provide a large selection of second-hand children's books of reasonable range and quality through the Ranfurly Library.

A brief outline of how the seminars were conducted follows. A more detailed description of how each text was taught may be found in Chapters 4 to 10 in which each text is discussed in detail. Bearing in mind my objectives, discussed above, I strove to provide as much variety in the seminars as possible. During the first term when we were exploring the oral tradition the following activities took place:

- Oral story telling by the teacher
- Teacher reading stories to the class
- Students retelling stories in groups
- Group discussion and analysis of ingredients in stories
- Reading academic articles about fairy story and answering questions
- Collecting vocabulary
- Reading stories in pairs and completing a chart
- Comparing fairy story and myth
- Matching quotations with descriptions
- Producing a shadow puppet play

Small group discussion was encouraged so everyone would be able to contribute as opposed to whole class discussion where typically only four or five students usually speak. Partners and groups were varied so the same students were not always together. I spent as much time as possible talking to the students in small groups while they were working, as opposed to addressing the whole class. In this way I could listen to their ideas, monitor their language and contribute myself in a less threatening way. I tried to accept all contributions as valid without value-judgements either to content or how they were given. I was keen to encourage the students to speak in English and not worry about accuracy. English was corrected only when comprehension was impeded either through pronunciation or grammar.

In the second semester the focus was on a number of selected texts. I encouraged predicting from cover and title in order to encourage the students to hypothesise about what might follow. I read the story to the class as it gave a sense of a shared experience offering the students a chance to hear native speaker pronunciation. At other times the students read to each other. Role play activities were incorporated so elements in a story could be brought alive then discussed. Poetry readings were also given by the students and a commercially produced tape of Winnie the Pooh stories was hugely enjoyed. In the final seminar I gave a formal lecture on the historical background of the development of children's literature.

Assessment procedures were left entirely to myself and I decided on the following criteria for a credit:

- 75% attendance
- Active participation in seminars
- Semester 1:
  - A written re-telling of a fairy story
- Semester 2:
  - Completion of a chart (first cohort)
  - Written essay (second cohort)



The introduction of written assessments was new as traditional examinations, mentioned above, took the form of an individual oral interview with the lecturer. No criteria for assessment was announced in advance and the usual routine was for the student to pick a number at random which would relate to a question the lecturer had prepared. The mark then given at the end of the interview was based on the student's ability to memorise perceived facts.

In this section I have contextualised the English department at the Pedagogical Faculty, the Fast Track course and children's literature syllabus. It will be argued in this study that the research into the students readings demonstrates that they were influenced by their previous educational experience and that their horizons of expectations concerning literature were totally different from that of an English student who was used to reading the texts and engaging in discussion. Before the ethnographic research into the students' readings of the children's literature texts is presented one more significant area should be described which will further contextualise those readings and that is Czech children's literature which is surveyed below.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Wheaton & Z. Kavan. The Velvet Revolution Czechoslovakia, 1988-1991, Westview Press, 1992, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid pp. 144/145

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 145

<sup>4</sup> J.R. Townsend Written for Children Penguin, 1974

<sup>5</sup> S. Williams "The Big Bad Wolf on the Fast Track" in Perspectives, Ed Tess Grimshaw, No.3. Winter 1993/4 The British Council, Prague

<sup>6</sup> Jan Culik "Intellectuals and their Position in The Czech Republic Now" copy of lecture on <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/Slavonic/staff.article3a.html> p. 6

### C. Czech Children's Literature

A significant part of the students' horizons of expectations were formulated by their notions about literature for children. For what the students read as children, how they read and the place of children's literature in the cultural imagination influenced their readings of the English texts presented to them on the course. Therefore an account of the development of Czech children's literature will be given to elucidate further aspects of Czechness which were embedded in the students' readings. The most important consideration to bear in mind is the dramatic changes the country has experienced in the last 100 years from being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to the democratic First Republic, the occupation under the Nazis in World War II, the Communist system under strong Soviet influence and now as a capitalist democracy. Such radical political and social changes have given writers for children a number of problems. The primary one is that of censorship, for what was considered to be politically correct in one period was not acceptable in another. Such radical changes also meant that it was difficult to build on previous work and the adult writer looking back to their own childhood as a source of inspiration found they were looking at an utterly different world.

A number of difficulties also arise when researching Czech children's literature. The totalitarian regime of the last 50 years meant that open discussion about books for children has not taken place. At the time of writing (1996) Czech academics are engaged in the process of examining the field and disseminating ideas but it is still too early for a lengthy and focused overview of Czech children's literature to be published. The main texts I have drawn on for this research are summaries in English of work produced under the "old times" and conform to the ideology of that period. On a positive side such material gives the researcher a clear picture of how texts were discussed under "normalisation" where the reader has to fill in the gaps and note not only what is said but significantly what is omitted.

The sources of information used for this section on Czech children's literature are as follows<sup>i</sup>:

- a Children's books translated from Czech into English
- b Children's books in Czech
- c English summaries in Czech publications of the 1980's mainly by Voráček and Stejskal
- d Papers in Czech delivered at Children's Literature Conferences in Brno since 1989
- d Articles in IBBY
- e Interviews with the Czech Children's Literature Department at the Pedagogical Faculty, Brno
- f Interviews with the Fast Track students.
- g Informal discussion with a variety of adults in Brno

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<sup>i</sup> This section was read on completion by Milena Vodickova, Czech Lecturer in English at the Pedagogical Faculty, Olomouc

My contribution to research into Czech children's literature has identified three significant elements which are as follows:

- Czech children's literature is closely linked to national identity.
- The main site for maintaining such a national identity is located in the Slav fund of Folk story and Fairy Tale which is used to either undermine or support the dominant ideology of the time.
- Each time there was another radical change in ideology it was the *critics* of literature who veered to accommodate it rather than the writers themselves.

These strands are discussed below by employing an historical consideration of Czech children's literature.

### **In the Beginning**

Orbis Pictus published in Nuremberg in 1658, is cited in most English surveys of children's literature and is discussed in detail by Hurlimann in Three Centuries of Children's Books in Europe. Orbis Pictus written by Amos Komenský, usually referred to by his Latin equivalent of Comenius, is often referred to as the first children's picture book and is praised for its enlightened approach to teaching languages. But while Orbis Pictus is well-known, the writer himself is less so and there is much confusion about his identity. He was born in Moravia in 1592 but Hurlimann wrongly ascribes his birth to "Bohemia near the Hungarian border"<sup>1</sup>. Some believe he was Dutch because, after fleeing his own country, he became a refugee, spent time in Poland, then visited England and finally arrived in the Netherlands where he spent the rest of his life and is buried. Further confusion arises because Orbis Pictus, designed to teach Latin, was first printed not in his mother tongue, Czech, but in German and Latin. In fact the English/Latin edition of Orbis Pictus appeared 26 years before the Czech/Latin edition, which is another indication of the minority status of the Czech language. Komenský was Czech and it is ironic that the Czechness of such a famous man is often ignored and is a significant indication of the invisibility of the Czech lands and the low status of the Czech language.

In spite of Komenský's pioneering work in creating books for children which would help them learn in a supportive, non-threatening way, there appears to have been no progression of his pedagogical ideas in his own land which is hardly surprising when the history of the country is considered. As outlined above, the history of the Czech lands is typified by violent swings from one type of regime to another. The Czechs were in the vanguard of the Reformation in the 15th century led by reformer Jan Hus. But the development of a Protestant culture was halted after the battle of the White Mountain where the Catholic Hapsburgs triumphed and for 300 years afterwards dominated. It was during the end of the Hapsburg regime in the latter part of the 19th century that T.G. Masaryk, the first President of the new Republic, wrote about children's books as follows:

“...we call ourselves the nation of Comenius, and yet we have so little children’s literature, and still less that is good!....The greater part of our children’s literature is mere dull moralising-.....we do not care enough for our children yet, though we make such a fuss of them.”<sup>2</sup>

Masaryk’s observations are supported by Voráček<sup>3</sup> and Stejskal<sup>4</sup> in their surveys of Czech children’s literature. Stejskal notes:

“Despite the fact that for a long time Orbis pictus had few equals in world literature, Czech and Slovak revivalists patently lacked Comenius’s grasp of children’s psychology.....which in its final implications, was far more progressive than any of the hamfisted ventures launched by the immediate precursors of Czech and Slovak children’s literature. The revivalists tended to emulate German moralizing fiction”<sup>5</sup>

As indicated by Stejskal above, Czech children’s literature was an important element in the period of the National Revival which reached its peak at the end of the 19th century. However, the break in continuity after the Hapsburg victory meant that the closest influence was from German-speaking sources. Voráček<sup>6</sup> categorises three types of books available for children at the time of the National Revival. These were school readers, religious literature and hymn books.

Voráček writing in the 1980’s under “normalisation” describes the contents of the above texts as “reactionary” which means they carried bourgeois religious values. It is not made clear in which language such texts were written but its more likely they were written in German as opposed to Czech. As Masaryk’s account of his upbringing demonstrates, German was the language of upward mobility and furthermore schooling took place in German. However, Voráček also mentions the significance of folklore at the time of the National Revival and this he views positively but it is not clear from his account whether such folklore appeared in a printed form or still remained in the oral tradition. For at this time Czech was still according to Voracek: “the base vernacular of the rural population - the lingua franca of the peasants”<sup>7</sup> and so he is likely to be referring to the oral tradition. It appears, therefore, that at the beginning of the National Revival folk tales and fairy stories were still part of the oral tradition and were told in Czech while the school readers and other didactic works were written in German.

Voráček notes that German moral fiction, termed “reactionary” functioned as a model for Czech moral fiction for a long period. So even though such texts began to be published in Czech as the National Revival took hold, values from the imperialist culture remained. Such writers as Niertiz, Schmid and Hofmann are regarded by both Voráček and Stejskal as “bigoted”. This is an example of the discourse of the totalitarian regime in 1980’s Czechoslovakia where “bigoted” describes religious matter and “reactionary” means bourgeois. Underpinning these comments there is a thread of anti-German sentiment which runs through Czech culture. In the 1980’s the West Germans represented all that was bad about capitalism and complied with the Soviet view of the Germans as

the “enemy”. Interestingly only West Germans were seen in a negative light for in Soviet *double-speak* the East Germans were transformed by the communist system into “good” Germans and had to be seen positively. However, whether the moralising tales were indeed bigoted or reactionary, it is clear that the Czechs needed to find their own voice, in their own language, reflecting their values, which meant producing more than translated works for their own consumption.

One solution lay in the oral tradition of the Slav fairy tale and while Vořáček condemns the moralising tale he is positive about the folk tale. A number of the educated classes, the best known being Božena Němcová and K.J.Erben, collected tales from the oral tradition and wrote them down in literary Czech. These new literary versions of the fairy tale are significant because they not only maintained a Slav tradition but also played a part in establishing Czech as a literary language. Stejskal enthuses about this

“wealth of native folklore, the treasure trove of national culture preserving the spirit of the Czech language at a time when “high” national culture was more or less non-existent”<sup>8</sup>.

He goes on to write “they entered Czech fairy land”. It is no wonder that the fairy tale is held very dear by Czechs and is still the most common genre for children. The tales of the Slav tradition are told and retold without any of the “postmodern” re-tellings found in the UK and USA. The fairy tale for the Czechs is about being Czech and is precious. Under the Hapsburgs the Czech oral tradition first appeared in print, it remained throughout the First Republic, the tales continued under the Nazis and under the Stalinist times. They were retold during the Prague Spring and continue now in the years of transition. How they changed during these times, the subtle nuances, any hidden messages must be left to a Czech scholar to research but there is a mine to be tapped. For the purposes of this study what is important is the centrality of the fairy tale to Czechness.

One significant book written at this time which is still in circulation and known by the Czech fast track students is *Broučci* by Jan Karafiát (1846-1929). It was first published in 1876 and according to Stejskal, “slithered into oblivion”<sup>9</sup> and was then rediscovered 20 years later in 1903 when, accompanied by illustrations by Vojtěch Preissig, it enjoyed great success. Karafiát was a Protestant village priest and his book about a family of fireflies (*broučci* in Czech), while seemingly heavily didactic for a modern reader, clearly captured a national spirit and, despite periods of censorship, remains part of the consciousness of the nation up to the present time. The English version *Fireflies*<sup>10</sup> published in Prague in 1994 has illustrations by the internationally recognised illustrator Jiri Trnka taken from the 1968 edition. This provides evidence that *Broučci* was published during the Prague Spring. However, Vořáček writing in 1982 when “normalisation” was still dominant does not mention *Broučci* while Stejskal in a slightly more relaxed 1987 does.

The English translation of *Broučci* (Fireflies) by Daniela Bisková is welcome even though it retains more of the structure and style of Czech than a more competent translation would. The focus of the

story is on Lucius, the youngest son in a family of fireflies. Such luminous green insects are a common feature of the Czech summer and their presence, which is inextricably linked to weekends in the country “*chata*”, is a potent symbol of the Czech countryside. *Broučci* is, like many children’s books, a *Bildungsroman* where young Lucius learns the pitfalls of disobedience, acquires the skills he needs as an adult firefly and finally gets married and has children of his own. The family of fireflies is a thin disguise for, apart from their nocturnal habits, they appear very much like a simple, rural family of the last century. It can be argued that this is essentially a Czech story about being Czech, written at a time when the Czech National Revival was in progress but when the country was still under Hapsburg domination. For the book not only charts the life of the young Lucius but also works through the yearly cycle in the Czech countryside. In June the fireflies are very busy. They sleep during the day but at night their task is to light the way for nocturnal travellers. Once the weather begins to turn cold they prepare for winter. Sticks must be collected and the windows sealed against the bitter cold. Food is collected and stored in the larder. The temperature can fall below -20C in a Czech winter and in villages, which could be easily cut off by snow for long periods, the peasants had to make preparations. This is mirrored in the fireflies’ story:

“First the peas, barley, semolina, flour, lentils and a dot of butter were brought into the kitchen so that mother had it all at hand. Then the wood was piled up in the kitchen and passage. Then they filled every crack with soft moss so that no cold could get in....and now it could freeze as hard as it liked!”<sup>11</sup>

Apart from the marking of the seasons, there are many other elements in the text which reflect a traditional Czech way of life. Food features strongly and reflects typical Czech cuisine. Cabbage soup is eaten, poppy seed cakes appear, honey is a special treat and a grape is tapped to produce “strong” juice. The illustrations by Jiří Trnka have an unmistakably Czech setting. Many of the pictures are redolent of the exhibits in the Ethnographic Museum in Brno which features rural life in Bohemia and Moravia of the past centuries. The painted wooden bed depicted at the beginning of the first chapter with its painted end is typical of folk furniture in the last century. The fireflies’ house is just like a country *chata* with its thick wooden planks, steep sloping roof, small decorated windows and pile of wood for the stove stacked outside. Godfather’s house has a large tiled stove, little wooden chairs with heart-shapes carved on the back and on the table are the familiar *koláč* which are small poppy seed buns. The fireflies themselves are dressed in clothes from the last century. Godfather has a large moustache reminiscent of Masaryk, they all wear clogs, the men have neckerchiefs and waistcoats and the women shawls and long skirts. It is interesting to contrast these illustrations from 1968 with the black and white line drawings by Vojtěch Preissig in the 1903 edition. Here the Art Deco style depicts a firefly as an early navigator and it may be suggested that in 1903 the Czechs were more optimistic about the future and the benefits of new technology while in 1968 there was a sense of harking back to earlier roots.

There is a strong religious presence in the text with frequent reference to the importance of obedience to God so it is easy to understand why it was not regarded as suitable material for children under the Stalinist period of the late 40's and early 50's and later under "normalisation" after 1968. The story begins at breakfast time and once the family are seated round the table, grace is said and in only 6 lines there are two references to the necessity of obedience to God's will:

"Heavenly Father, here we stand,  
Guide us with your gentle hand.  
Help, oh, help us every day  
All your wishes to obey.  
Make us strong your will to do,  
Make us kind and loving too."<sup>12</sup>

Not only religious values but also the different roles men and women took at the end of the 19th century are reflected in the text where the females are confined to the home and the males go out to do their duty and light the way at nights. The text also contains a story within a story which reflects some of the more overtly moralising tales discussed above and disapproved of by Voráček. During one winter hibernation, Lucius wakes up and his mother tells him a story to send him off to sleep again. The story concerns two kittens, one white and one black who quarrel and manage to set fire to their cottage and burn to death. This echoes the Puritan stories in 17th century England and the moralizing tales of the 19th century told by such authors as Sarah Trimmer, where what might be perceived today as naughty behaviour by children, was seen then more as wickedness and was severely punished.

*Broučci* is an important book because it functions as a bridge between the morally didactic stories from the German speaking tradition and the fantasy of fairy tale from the Czech. It fulfills the function of creating a Czech world and reflects an essentially Czech culture while conforming to the ideology of the times in which religion played an important part and where people were expected to know their place. The story is original and in the Czech language, the importance of which cannot be underestimated. The work of Alois Jirasek (1851-1930) is also significant during these times of a growing Czech identity as he wrote about old Czech legends, mediaeval Bohemian history and the Hussite wars which helped to re-invent a past where Czechs were in control of their own destiny. Described by Stejskal as writing in a "Walter Scott" vein it may be assumed that Jirásek was doing for the Czechs what Walter Scott was creating for the Scots.

The two female writers Ružena Svobodová (1868-1920) and Božena Benesová (1873-1936) mentioned by Stejskal are seen as being closer to a child's world and are described as fulfilling a need for writers to be able to see through children's eyes. Ružena Svobodová wrote about "the contrast between child's candour and adult hypocrisy"<sup>13</sup> while Benesová concentrated on the pangs of growing up. He goes on to say: "In the difficult pre-war years, childhood was the morning star of a

new hope”<sup>14</sup>. Stejskal’s linking of the female writers with a maternal approach reflect notions of differences between the genders in the 1980’s, in spite of the rhetoric of equality espoused by the communist regime. The sentimental approach towards children which may be detected is also pervasive.

Other writers of the period mentioned in Stejskal’s survey are Karel Václav Rais (1851-1933) who wrote realistic portrayals of everyday life, lyrical poetry and fairytale romance; Pulípan (1835-1914) whose stories depicted “the misery and hardship of uprooted proletarian childhood”<sup>15</sup> while Franta Zupan (1885-1929) contributed to a “a golden mine”<sup>16</sup> of Czech humour. There is no explanation as to what Czech humour is, but it serves as a boundary marker to distinguish it from the humour of the German speaking Hapsburg culture.

Voráček mentions the influence of English children’s literature at this time. Kramerius published a Czech version of Robinson Crusoe, a book that appears to have captured the imagination of many Europeans, while one Josef Václav Sládek who collected poems for children “looked to England for inspiration” where he “found many positive creative features in the literature, which could not be found in Czech literature”<sup>17</sup>. At that time, from the middle 1800’s, England was enjoying the first “golden age” of children’s literature led by such authors as Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald and Lewis Carroll, all of whom were breaking new ground in moving away from the moralizing tale and turning to nonsense and fantasy.

While there was no equivalent “golden age” in Czech children’s literature at this time, an indication of the interest in the second half of the 19th century is in the number of publications about the subject that were published. Frantisek Hrnčíř wrote *O dětské literatuře* (On Children’s Literature) which ran into 2 volumes published in 1856 and 1887 respectively. Jan Dolenský (1859-1993) wrote *Průvodce četby mládeže* (The Guide to Children’s Reading) which is described by Voráček as “didactic ideas about children’s literature ...without theoretical prospect”<sup>18</sup>. It is likely that Voráček writing in the early 1980’s is condemning Dolenský for not being politically correct as the “theoretical prospect” referred to above means Marxist/Leninist theories. Other writers mentioned are Otakar Hostinský (1847-1910), an art critic, who also wrote books which, according to Stejskal, while considered adult were read by older children. Jan Neruda wrote about Robinson Crusoe and the work of Jules Verne. Bartoš (1837-1906) founded *Život a literatura* (Life and Literature) and made links between folklore and children’s literature. He wrote for a Moravian Journal *Obzor* and founded the publishing House *Dědictví Komenského* (Komenský’s Inheritance) at the beginning of the 20th century. Throughout my researches into Czech children’s literature I have been struck by the amount of theoretical material published. There appears to be a focus on theory even before enough literature for children had been produced to theorise about. This may be contrasted to the situation in the United Kingdom where while much is written for children there is far less theorizing.



So to sum up the developments in the 19th century, literature for children was “born in the storm and stress of our national history”<sup>19</sup>. Didactic works translated from German into Czech were supplemented by literate versions of the Slav oral tradition of folk and fairy stories. Journals and other publications appeared which charted the development of books for children and by the formation of the First Republic after the First World War, a Czech literature for children was firmly established.

### **The First Republic**

The First Republic was a time of growth in which the Czechs began to develop their own distinct national identity in all aspects of life after 300 years of Hapsburg domination. According to Stehlikova<sup>20</sup> in her survey of illustration in children’s books, interest centred on fairy tales, poetry and nursery rhymes. However, such books are not discussed by Voráček and Stejskal who focus on issues of the time and select texts that conform to the ideology of “normalisation” in the 1980’s. Voráček focuses on the political debate concerning literature for children which was taking place in the inter-war years. Stejskal typifies this as a period of “evolution of socialist-oriented, anti-Fascist conception of literature...”<sup>21</sup>. The authors selected are termed “progressive” and Voráček’s observation indicates that not everyone viewed such books positively :

“The bourgeois critics distorted, misinterpreted meaning of these books and suppressed their social contents. These idealistic critics of children’s literature were not able to find the future development of children’s literature”<sup>22</sup>.

He cites the following as “masterpieces in the field of socialistic children’s literature”<sup>23</sup>. Two of them are Fairy Tales by Jiří Wolker and Helen Malířova. The third is Majerová’s *Zázračná hodinka* (The Miraculous Hour). Majerova appears as a key figure during these times. *Zázračná Hodinka* concerns the social evils of a young republic, *Bruno* is about two boys who swear eternal friendship and *Robinsonka* focusses on a female Robinson Crusoe and is described by Stejskal as a first girl’s romance. Apparently her articles about children’s literature provoked lively discussion. Her political correctness is foregrounded by Voráček: “she appreciated the first translations from Soviet Literature highly”<sup>24</sup>. The question arises as to whether she was described as such in order to legitimise her work in the period of normalisation or whether she was really an interesting pioneer writing creative stories for children in the interwar period.

Other books selected by Stejskal are those which reflect social realism. J.V Pleva’s *Malý Bobeš* (Small Bobes) which is still in circulation and *Hoši s dynamitem* (Boys of the Dynamite) which are described as “poetic realism”<sup>25</sup> Václav Rezáč wrote boyhood adventures such as *Hra za nim* (Boys, let’s catch him!) published in 1933. His work according to Stejskal “portrays the depressive reality of the depression years”<sup>26</sup>. Pleva also wrote *Kapka l’ody* (A Drop of Water) which is described tantalisingly briefly as surrealist fiction. However, there are three writers whose books still appear

today, who are more significant. The first is Ondřej Sekora whose stories about Ferda the Ant are still popular. He is described by Stehlíková as anticipating:

“the entertaining variety of Czech children’s literature intended to amuse and to instruct. He experimented with a medium that occupied an enclave of its own somewhere between comic strip and moralising tale”<sup>27</sup>

The second author is Joseph Čapek whose stories of *The Cat and The Dog* (*Povídání o pejskovi a kočičce*) first published in 1929 are still referred to. The third is Karel Čapek whose illustrated story about a puppy *Dášenka* is currently (1996) enjoying another reprint. He also wrote with his brother Josef *Devatero pohádek* (Nine Fairy Tales) where according to Stejskal his “thoroughly democratic outlook added a liberating dimension of humour to Czech fairy-tale literature”<sup>28</sup>.

A number of journals and articles appeared in the interwar years providing evidence that children’s literature was taken seriously. In 1933 Julius Fučík’s book *On Children’s Literature* was published. In 1927 V.F. Suk took over the editorship of the journal *Uhor* (The Fallow) which was founded in 1913 by children’s author Otakar Pospíšil. It contained reviews of recent children’s books, articles of authors, illustrators, criticism and a page for children’s contributions. Suk also established a Library of Children’s books in Prague and gave lectures on children’s literature. Stejskal notes that “children’s books became a commodity on the market” observing that books published were “pot-boiling fairy tale romance, scurrilous stories of adventure and slushy colour-print illustrations”<sup>29</sup>. Again these comments written through the filter of “normalisation” tell us more about Czechoslovakia in the 1980’s where anything connected with capitalism and popular culture was heavily criticised.

The necessity of working from biased surveys published in the 1980’s in the absence of more up-to-date sources makes it difficult to trace the full development of literature for children during this creative and potent time in Czech history. There are gaps to be filled and currently Czech scholars are reappraising this period and will be publishing a more informed view of children’s literature published between 1914 and 1938. However, what we can conclude is that there was a growth in publications for children in the new Republic and that a number of magazines and journals were devoted to the subject reflecting a scholarly interest. While there was poverty and hardship in the country, it must be remembered that the new Republic, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, was the 10th industrial country in the world and these crucial years had seen a remarkable growth in both industry and the arts. Czech cubism, for example, developed in areas unseen in other countries because not only were there cubist paintings but also furniture, ceramics and architecture. It may be concluded, therefore, that such creativity was also reflected in children’s literature. However, any development by the Czechs in the First Republic was successfully halted by the German invasion in 1938.

## Second World War

The most startling and moving work is the material produced by children themselves in the Terezin concentration camp north of Prague. Tragically the majority of the children did not survive after they were moved to such death camps as Auschwitz but their work remains and their stories and drawings can still be seen in the Jewish museum in the old Jewish quarter of Prague.

The occupation by the Germans meant that once more the Czech language was subsumed to German and Czechs had to struggle in order to retain their national identity. Writers for children played their part in maintaining a sense of "Czechness". Stejskal mentions the work of the poets Olbracht and Halas who, writing in the war years, "turned to the world of childhood, the world of hope and faith, for poetic inspiration"<sup>30</sup>. Olbracht adapted literary themes, Indian legends, Old Czech Annals that were "subtly coded moral message" and reflected "the moral strength of a small nation"<sup>31</sup>. According to Stehlíková, writing on illustration, books in the war years concentrated on fairy-tale editions which served to revive "the national and ethnic traditions of Czech culture"<sup>32</sup>. It is clear from this that fairy tales from the Slav tradition played an important role in the maintenance of a Czech identity during the Second World War for they were a potent force in the creation of Czechness. Under the Hapsburg Empire, written in Czech, they played a role in establishing literary Czech and affording it a higher status. The stories coming from the Slav tradition also served as a boundary-marker to differentiate them from the German tradition. During the war years they served once more to keep the Czech tradition alive when everything was done to eradicate the Czech language and culture. After the war the fairy stories were kept alive and could be seen to once more suit the purposes of the new communist state. How much of them were oppositional or were read as oppositional to can only be surmised. There is clearly much interesting and valuable work here to be undertaken by a Czech scholar.

## Communism

After two years of political manoeuvring the communists gained power in 1948. All major institutions were nationalised and a State Publishing House for children's literature, SNDK, later *Albatros*, was created. From this time up to 1989 all books had to be approved by the State before publication. This decade is typified by a fierce struggle for the hearts and minds of the people for a commitment to a Soviet-style communist system. Children's literature was an important site for transmitting the new ideology and in 1946 a new critical review *Štěpnice* (The Orchard) dealing with children's literature was founded where the political/cultural influences from Russia are clear:

"The aim of this magazine was to explain revolutionary context of children's literature on the basis of relation to our progressive literary heritage and of relation to criticism of the present book production including the translation from Soviet children's literature.....This magazine made our public acquainted with the Marxist-Leninist knowledge of the art for young people"<sup>33</sup>.

Stehlíková notes that translations dominated the field of children's books and it can be surmised from the above quotation that such translations were more likely to be from Soviet rather than Western European sources. Voracek typifies the 1945-48 period as the "fight against bourgeois influence" where the work of Majerová and Pleva, discussed above, are singled out as the only "high principled Marxist theorists".<sup>34</sup> Stehlíková writes about a new type of hero who is: "the young builder of socialism, a committed partisan of the cause of revolution and national defence"<sup>35</sup>. Stejskal describes how the socialist system:

"made it possible to elaborate and gradually implement on a state-wide scale a consistently progressive, ideologically committed conception of literature"<sup>36</sup>.

In addition there were programmes concentrating on publishing ideologically correct and educationally sound literary works. It is the voice of Stehlíková in discussing illustration in this period that gives us an insight into the negative aspects of those ideologically correct times and it is interesting that while she felt she could write in a critical way both Voráček and Stejskal did not. Her main criticism of work produced during this period was that standards fell. She writes:

"The drawings were slavishly reproducing trivial details of plot, character and setting. The maniacal drive for objectivity produced illustrations reeking of pedantry and lacking discrimination in choice of detail."<sup>37</sup>

Stehlíková maintains that in spite of the censorship of those times "a hard core of seasoned veterans" managed to communicate: "the artist's own vision of reality and successfully avoided the pitfalls of dogmatically simplified realism"<sup>38</sup>.

It is clear that the new political system required books for children that reflected its values. It is Stejskal who notes that this caused problems for writers as many draw on their own experiences in childhood for inspiration. However, for writers of this period, their own childhood was so very different having been brought up in the bourgeois First Republic. It was poetry, according to Stejskal, that played a more important role than fiction. Poetry managed to escape the straight-jacket of political rhetoric and according to Jaroslav Toman writing about Czech poetry in "Bookbird" it was high quality. One of the reasons given by Toman is that established poets who were unable to write for adults because of censorship turned to writing for children. One such poet was Hrubín who is described as writing about:

"The harmonising themes of home, nature, rural childhood, coupled with a cozy emotionality and the theory of folk poetry ..."<sup>39</sup>

The poetry produced may sound sentimental to English ears. For example Florian is described by Stejskal as writing "melodious verse" with "emotionally laden messages ... firmly rooted in the past bringing ancestral tradition a stage further"<sup>40</sup>. Poetry by Čarek (1889-1966) and Branislav (1900-

1968) focus on the “intimacy of maternal love, the beauty of homeland and the guileless confidence of childhood”<sup>41</sup>.

These descriptions highlight three important aspects of Czech children’s literature which are: a focus on the maternal aspects of the female; a strong sense of nationhood and a sentimental attitude towards children.

However, another feature of Czech literature, including children’s literature, is humour. Stejskal mentions the new wave of writers for children who focused on wit rather than emotion. Řiha (1907) is considered important as his work is described as emphasising the “moral values of the socialist society - humanity, honesty, loyalty to the Czech homeland...”<sup>42</sup>. Other writer’s work (all unnamed) is dismissed by Stejskal as “vacuous, superficial, sophistry-prone, frivolous, occasional”<sup>43</sup>. Clearly this was politically incorrect and it would be interesting to undertake some research on such texts as apparently they did manage to be published by the state publishing house *Albatros*.

In 1954 the critical review, *Zlatý Máj* (Golden May) was first published. It is described by Voráček as reflecting “the struggle for socialistic Czech and Slovak literature”<sup>44</sup>. This journal, which contained resumes in Russian, English, French and German, continued to be published until 1995 when State subsidy was not longer available.

### 1960’s and the Prague Spring

The early 60’s marked the beginning of a more liberal regime known as “socialism with a human face” which culminated in the Prague Spring and permeated all areas including children’s literature. Writers were released from the straightjacket of socialist realism as the “dry moralising of much socialist literature for children” was rejected because according to Stejskal

“a growing awareness that the dry injunctions of social morale and ideology could not for ever unpardonably ignore the primary requirements of the child reader - his natural interests and preferences. Writers realised at long last that the child’s mentality was incompatible with the utilitarian didactic stereotype and that simplistic presentations of reality produced a disquieting rather than unifying effect”<sup>45</sup>

This statement gives more of an insight into what was being published from 1948 to the 1960’s than the catalogue of authors and brief descriptions of their work which precedes this comment. The constraints on illustration were also relaxed:

“The artist was no longer denied his right to express his own attitude to reality, in fact he enjoyed a measure of imaginative freedom unparalleled in the past”<sup>46</sup>.

Unfortunately there is little written by Stejskal and Voráček about what was published during the Prague Spring. Stejskal discusses two developments in fairy story and two writers, Makulka and Macourek, are cited as engaging in “intellectual experiment incorporating verbal playfulness and absurd humour”<sup>47</sup>. Another strand developed by such authors as Drda, Mrazkov and Čtvrtek focused on the “timeless wisdom of folk literature”<sup>48</sup>. However, papers published after 1989 discuss work published in the 1960’s in more detail. Jaroslav Toman’s paper “*Zamlčování autorů dětské literatury 60.let Moderní pohádka*” (“Censored authors after the 60’s and their Modern Fantasies”) reveals the kind of story written for children during these more liberated times which took the form of a nonsensical type of story which featured: “fantasy, association, absurdity, own logic, order and harmony”<sup>49</sup>.

The translation from Russian of K Chukovski’s From Two-Five (first published in Moscow in 1925) resulted in renewed interest in literary theories and contains a section (published in Meek et al The Cool Web 1977) which is a critique of the lack of fantasy in Stalinist Russia. The following extract from 1956 Russian edition clearly gives a strong signal for the development of fantasy in children’s books:

“Now it is regarded as a generally recognised truth that the fairy tale develops, enriches, and humanises the child’s psyche...”<sup>50</sup>.

So fairy tales and fantasy, dismissed after the Second World War in the Stalinist period, were back in place in the more liberal 1960’s and previously banned authors were published once more including Karafiát’s Broučci, with new illustrations by Jiří Trnka.

The resurgence in national feeling which is a feature of the 1960’s may be seen in the work of Eduard Petiška (1924-1987) who was not only involved in the translation of Greek mythology and A Thousand and One Nights but also significantly wrote about Czech myths and legends. A recent edition of Charles IV. The King from the Golden Cradle<sup>51</sup> consisting of selection of chapters from A Treasury of Tales from the Kingdom of Bohemia (no date) has been translated into English and German and is now marketed for the tourist trade in Prague. Reading Petiška’s Charles IV. The King from the Golden Cradle there is a strong sense of the Czech oral tradition where folk beliefs underpin the quasi-historical stories of castles and power struggles. There is in the narrative a strong sense of the voice of the story-teller enclosing the listener in the tale which is unveiled in such phrases as “Our story begins in Prague castle”<sup>52</sup> and “But we shall now leave Prague behind and enter thick forests where the axes of woodcutters can be heard on the hills”<sup>53</sup>. The flavour of traditional Czech storytelling is also revealed in the number of stock phrases in the narrative which were used by the storyteller. For example the king’s poverty is always described in terms of the domestic situation: “In his kitchen gruel was boiled all the time”<sup>54</sup> Another phrase: “The time was ripe and its fruits

awaited a hand to pluck them”<sup>55</sup> has a strong sense of the stock phrase used in the oral tradition. Similarly proverbs are also incorporated: “But mayflowers and satisfaction have short lives”<sup>56</sup>.

Although the title gives the impression that the content is historical, the majority of the stories are more folk tale than history. For example “The Karlštejn Devils” is a tale about a poor boy who removes devils from the surrounding countryside by means of a cunning trick with salted peas while “A Faithful Friendship” concerns a man and his faithful dog. But even the more historically based stories contain folk elements. For example in “A Trick of War” about the relief of a long siege it is relieved not by bravery or military tactics but through a clever trick which again is redolent of the folk tale.

Socialist ideology may also be read into the story of Sáddek castle where after a long siege all the knights are hung including a charming young boy who pleads to be hung in the daylight and not during the hours of darkness. His wish was granted and:

“On the morning of the next day the lad ended his life in a flood of sunshine and birdsong, high in the green branches of a tree, from where the country far and wide could be seen”<sup>57</sup>

However, the ruler of Sáddek is spared and Petiška writes sardonically “which simply confirmed that a master knows how to save his life even where his underlings lose theirs”.<sup>58</sup>

Four key elements in Petiška’s stories may be identified which reflect the Czech condition which is typified by instability where kings are in constant battle for control over knights and robber barons, while outside pressures from foreign rulers are always present. This creates a yearning for stability and good leadership. Particularly relevant to the Czech psyche it is often the small or lowly person who manages to find solutions to problems. It may be these elements which made the stories suitable for oppositional readings under a variety of regimes from Fascist to Communist. Significantly, too, these elements are also inherent in the structure of the fairy story which play an important part in the Czech psyche and Petiška has cleverly combined both a strong feel for the Czech oral tradition while creating a distinct pre Hapsburg Czech history. As such they are essentially Czech. The gradual resurgence of national feeling exemplified by Petiška’s work which took place in the 1960’s led inexorably to the events of 1968 when Soviet tanks appeared on the streets of Prague.

### **Normalisation**

The traumatic events of the Prague Spring when Soviet forces invaded the country are glossed over in the accounts of Stejskal and Voráček writing under the period of “normalisation”, when any adverse criticism of the return to hard-line Soviet-style communism would mean removal from academic life. The events of 1968 are not mentioned at all by Stejskal, instead there is a break in the text between discussion of the 1960’s and the 1970’s marked by 3 stars. There are veiled criticisms of the more

liberal approach from Voráček as, carefully keeping to the party line, he observes that in the late 60's articles appeared in magazines and newspapers which contained "some negative, reactionary tendencies, discrediting the basic criteria of socialistic literature."<sup>59</sup> Books for children also were seen as having

... "subjectivism, abstractedness and in the tendency in forms without subject - here we can see the lack of basic ideology of socialistic literature. This crisis was characteristic for the prose for the youngest readers"<sup>60</sup>

The invasion of the Soviet forces with a forced return to a less liberal regime resulted in the dead hand of totalitarian research methods described by Voráček as follows:

"The restitution of the Marxist-Leninist approach to research of children's literature was characteristic for theory, criticism and history of children's literature from the beginning of the seventieth (sic) of the twentieth century"<sup>61</sup>

A paper read by Jaroslav Toman delivered at a Children's Literature conference in Brno in 1993 "*Zamločování autoři dětské literatury 60. let*" (Censored Children's Writers after the 1960's) lists the ways authors were categorised:

- a official
- b those with state functions
- c those with titles, awards and frequent re-publications
- d enduring authors with limited publishing
- e those who were completely suppressed

(literal translation by Brno Fast-Track student)

Toman observes that such division caused a "misshaping of children's literature"<sup>62</sup>

In illustration too the artists' hands were once more tied for the focus of the regime was not equality of opportunity but equality of outcome, which resulted in an emphasis on the lowest common denominator:

"The new conception stresses the need for factual information and for more lucid strategies of presentation that would sharpen the faculties of perception in even the less imaginative child."<sup>63</sup>

It must be recalled that this period of "normalisation" was when the Fast-Track students were growing up.



According to Stejskal between 1975-1985 the focus moved to books for the very young. This reached its peak in the 17th Congress of IBBY in Prague 1980 which had an early years theme and where the 5,000th title published by Albatros was celebrated. It may be that writers had more scope to be creative with censorship less severe in titles for the younger child.

Reading accounts of publications during this period is a frustrating experience because the focus is only on political correctness. A writer's date of birth is mentioned without publication dates or more information about content as it is assumed the reader knows the work. This lack of vigour is an illustration of the low levels of academic work during this period. However, now and again there are comments which perhaps give a more accurate picture of life in the 1970's. For example the poet Milena Lukesova is described as "relating her private experience of magic, the poetry rediscovers in the seemingly dreary world of modern housing estates"<sup>64</sup> which may be read as a veiled criticism of state flats. A number of poets are listed including Daisy Mrázková who both wrote and illustrated as well as Petiška (discussed above) who was engaged in producing texts for the classroom. The sentimental approach to children is revealed in the description of Martina Drijverová's work where she is described as writing "soft-hearted yet sympathetic stories of modern childhood"<sup>65</sup>.

A school text *Pohádky a Povídky Pro Malé Čtenáře* published in 1978 which Fast Track students recognised from their own school days is a good example of work of this period. The book of 60 pages contains 44 items, mainly poetry but including folk tales, fables and short dialogues accompanied by illustrations by Ota Janeček. Work by Petiška, Hrubín, Říha, Florian and Erben is included which spans the period under the Hapsburgs to the time of publication. The students told me that such books were used in "the first class" that is 6-year old pupils where teacher read out the stories and poetry to their pupils who were at the early stages of learning to read and write. The book contains many stories and poems about animals and in the poetry there is a strong sense of a delight in language. For example in *Šel kozel do Lhoty* by Bulatová is a cumulative poem focussing on the sounds animals make. The chicken goes *kokokodák*, the goose, *ga, ga, ga*, the sheep *bé, bé, bé* the cow *bú, bú, bú* and the horse *hy, hy, hy*. The young reader is implied not only by the repetition and delight in making animals noises but also because all the animals are described in the diminutive form. The penultimate verse builds up as follows:

*Šel kozel do Lhoty, koupil tam koníčka.  
Koníček: Hy, hy, hy. Kravička: Bú, bú, bú.  
Ovečka: Bé, bé, bé. Husicka: Ga, ga, ga.  
Slepička na dvore: Kokokodák!*<sup>66</sup>

In 1978 two volumes of poetry were published which are viewed as significant by Stejskal. The two authors Jiří Žáček and Michal Černík, were born during World War II and may be seen to reflect a new generation of writers. *Áprilová škola* (All Fools' School) by Žáček is described by Stejskal as "an eye-opener"<sup>67</sup> but frustratingly does not tell his reader why. There is only hint when his work in

described in relation to Černík's which is a "more introspective brand of lyricism"<sup>68</sup>. As far as prose was concerned the focus was on Fairy Story, Myth and Legend. It may be argued that this was a safer area than trying to write about the present. Hulpach (1935) wrote versions of the Arthurian Legends and Celtic Lore while Petiška continued to produce tales and legends of Bohemia.

Theoretical articles had to conform to Marxist-Leninist ideology. For example F. Tencík's monograph on writer Josef Věromír Pleva published in 1979 laid stress on "the basic values of socialistic literature"<sup>69</sup>. Similarly Zdeněk Zapletal's monograph *Jungmannův odkaz mládeži* (Jungman's Heritage to Young People) 1976 was "based on the materialistic approach to literature"<sup>70</sup>. In Voráček's own book *Kontury české literatury pro děti a mládež* (The Contours of the Czech Literature for Children and Young People) (1979) the emphasis was on "Continuity of the literary process, important changes in opinions, were stressed..."<sup>71</sup>. This description is significant because it provides evidence to support the third significant strand in the development of Czech children's literature referred to at the beginning of this section. This is that in spite of swings in ideology there is a sense of gradual development in writing for children. The site for radical changes was in the criticism of the texts so while there was some continuity in the literature itself, it was the discussion about them that veered dramatically.

What typified this period was the absence of outside influences. While some titles for children were published either as unofficial (*samizdat*) or abroad, often in German (see *Literatura pro děti v samizdatu a exilu* by Svatava Urbanová) little was published officially in translation and new perspectives on literature emanating from the West were not available and did not reach a wide audience. There was also a haemorrhage of writers from the country after '68 and those in opposition to the regime who remained could only be published in *samizdat* form. Some writers who were not permitted to publish adult literature turned to children's literature which appears to have been considered a more neutral site by those in power.

Children's programmes on Film and TV feature strongly in Stejskal's account of the 1970's and 1980's. Czech puppetry and animation are recognised world-wide and a number of TV programmes were produced for children. Plivová-Šimková (born 1934) produced "straightforward, non-stylised film stories that were "authentically pure and simple" and concerned "topical problems of the day"<sup>72</sup>. It is unfortunate that examples are not given. Markéta Zinnerová's (born 1942) multi-episodic TV serial *Tajemství proutěného košíku* (Secrets of the Wicker Basket) is described as "diagnosing society's problems, dilemmas and neuroses"<sup>73</sup>. Sci-Fi narratives are mentioned where Hofman and Macourek are described where "Everyday events are often foregrounded to bring to light the inner magic of things mundane"<sup>74</sup>. One wonders if there is a hint of criticism of the system here. A number of titles are mentioned in Voráček's survey which refer to World War II. This would be a potent time for the country where the Soviets as liberators could be seen in a positive light and the

Czech struggle against the Nazi occupation serves to mark strong boundaries between them and their German neighbours. The following titles are mentioned (without authors) which give a flavour: *Strhane hráze* (Ravaged Dams) *Potopa* (The Flood), *Čas ohně, čas šeríku* (Time of Fire, Time of Lilac) and *Kluci ze zabraného* (Boys from the Occupied Zone). Another strong theme was that of contemporary children in the process of social integration with socialist ideology. Examples given by Stejskal (again without authors) are *Šťesťi ma jméno Jonáš* (Jonah is a Lucky Name) *Léto jako když vsíje* (Perfect Summer) and *Dana a Niki Lauda* (Dana and Niki Lauda). A number of biographies were published including those of the politically correct. Věra Adlová wrote about Jenny Marx who is described interestingly as a young aristocrat. Frantisek Kozík wrote about Komensky in *Anděl míru* (The Angel of Peace), Vojtech Stekláč focused on Napoleon and Marx, while Mozart, less of a political figure who had strong links with both Prague and Brno, was portrayed by Zdeněk Mahler.

### **After the Velvet Revolution**

The overthrow of the communist system in November 1989, with a return to something like the liberal democracy of the First Republic, meant yet another huge political and social change. There was a hiatus taking place in the arts where former dissidents now had to consider what they were going to comment on in current society. There was a sense of looking outside and there was an enormous appetite for anything which came from abroad. This was reflected in the children's section in bookshops where translations of children's books from Swedish, German and English appeared, as well as many publications from the Disney Corporation. The majority of books translated from English are titles by Enid Blyton and W.E. Johns. The latest English book which appeared in March 1996 is a translation of Richard Adam's *Watership Down*. Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* has been translated as has Sue Townsend's *The Diary of Adrian Mole* and has been made into a stage version which is currently (1996) playing in Prague. New editions of Czech fairy stories are appearing but at the time of writing (1996) there is understandably yet another hiatus as the country once more settles down under a completely different system.

It may be seen from the above survey that three significant strands, referred to at the beginning of this section, run through the development of literature for children. Czech children's literature is closely linked to national identity and the main site for this is the oral tradition. In spite of the swings from one political system to another and times of censorship, many Czech writers have managed to maintain their integrity and much that was published for children shows a sensitive and caring approach. It is the critics who veer from one ideological extreme to another more than the writers. In addition another key point to note is that there is a sense of protecting children from an outside world which is so unstable. There is a strong vein of sentimentality in Czech children's literature which links to a close family structure and sense of protection. This gives weight to the argument that books

for children protected them from the harsh realities of the political system and focussed instead on the Czech language and Slav traditions in the form of fairy stories, myths and legends.

In order to further clarify the students' horizons of expectations concerning literature for children, it is important to establish which books they read as children and moreover which books they had access to considering the political climate they grew up in.

### **Fast Track Students' Reading:**

The period of "normalisation" is important for this study because that was when the fast track students were growing up and the books available for them might have been different from those who were youngsters in the more liberated 1960's. I always began teaching the Children's Literature course by asking the students what they remember reading when they were children. All the students remember first hearing fairy stories told to them by members of their family. Some had very pleasant memories of a grandparent in the village or the *chata* telling them stories when they were on their summer holidays. The authors most mentioned are Božena Němcová and K.J. Erben, collectors of Czech fairy tales from the last century. A number of other stories were mentioned included *Dášěnka* by Karel Čapek, and the Cat and Dog stories by his brother Joseph (see above).

I undertook some more detailed research on the Brno students who came to Worcester on an exchange in the Spring of 1996. I showed them a selection of Czech children's books that I had which initiated a discussion about their childhood reading. Together they listed all the books they remembered reading when they were young. Having triggered their memory I then gave them a questionnaire to complete. It was designed to discover the range of their reading, how many books from previous regimes they had access to and whether they perceived socialist ideology in what they read either at the time or now. At the end of the questionnaire I asked for any other comments they would like to make. The results of the questionnaire are discussed below.

### **Range of reading**

A number of interesting points arose from this survey. Families kept books over at least three generations, which meant that even though at certain times some new editions were not published, old editions could be found at home. This provides further evidence to the observation above that on the surface the discourse about children's books changed according to the political climate whereas the actual reading matter at home did not. There was a homogeneity amongst the students' reading because schools had a national curriculum with *recommended*, which is double-speak for compulsory reading. Also many pre-war "classics" appeared on children's TV in the form of puppets or cartoons which helped to provide continuity. All the students were unaware of socialist ideology when they read as children and now through discussions with them are just beginning to perceive the bias in

some texts. All expressed fond memories of their childhood reading and many expressed concerns about the state of Czech children's literature today.

The books read will be now be discussed in more detail. Four books were known by all students and these will be discussed first. Although out of favour under "normalisation" Karafiát's *Broučci* was read by all six students. They read old editions, two mentioning that it was their Grandmother's book. One student had been shown the story on a slide-projector and another remembers her mother reading it to her when she was very young. Blanka was aware of its politically incorrect status: *"When I was small it was difficult to get the book as it was not "recommended" to read so you couldn't buy it."* The religious elements were commented on. Dagmar observed: *"I'm not a religious person so I did not understand certain parts properly"* and Andrea notes *"I also found the parts where they prayed very interesting as this was the first time I came across religious things (it was forbidden in the Czech Republic)"*. Dagmar remembers seeing it on TV *"which differs from the book a bit"*. Clearly the religious aspects had been removed. However, in whatever form, it does appear that *Broucci* remained at the heart of a national consciousness throughout and served to maintain notions of Czechness under the Hapsburgs, the Nazis and the Soviets.

Another book read by all the students was Karel Capek's *Dášenka* which had also appeared on television in a series of bed-time stories. All were enthusiastic and many affirmed they still read it: *"It was one of my favourite stories and it still is"* (Jitka). All the students mentioned a number of TV programmes which they enjoyed as children. It is clear that a wide variety of programmes were offered to children and the significantly named *Studio Kamarád* (now renamed Studio Rosa) scheduled on Sunday mornings and focussing on fairy tales was mentioned by four of the students.

Of the authors mentioned in Voráček and Stejskal's survey all of them had heard of the author, Eduard Petiška, but were vague about exactly what they had read. *Alenčina Čítanka*, a school text, was mentioned twice and a few thought some of his stories were more difficult to read for young children. Pleva's *Malý Bobeš* was known and two students identified it as a compulsory socialist book. There is less consensus about this text as some students clearly enjoyed the book while others found it boring. Dagmar describes it as follows: *"It's a story of a good poor proletarian boy and a bad rich bourgeois girl. A lot of "socialist ideas" is (sic) included there"*. The moral points were significant for Jana *"It teaches children good morals..."* Other authors known by all six students were: Neruda, Hrubin, Jirasek, Říha, Čtvrtek and Drda.

Zinnerová's *The Secrets of the Wicker Basket* was known by five students who had seen it on TV. Only one student commented on it: *"I got it as a book as Christmas present but I've never read it, because I saw it on TV and I had enough of it."* Five students also knew Žáček's *Aprílová Škola*

which was enthusiastically commented on by Blanka: *"The poems are full of fun and even adults must laugh at them. They can be remembered easily and are very imitable also for dramatification"*. Her comments shed more light on this volume than Voráček (see above). Blanka also picks out Macourek as the author of many "nonsense" stories which she evidently enjoys and this author was also known by another four students. Other authors known by five students are Řiha and Drda. It is interesting to observe that Majerová who features in both surveys by Stejskal and Voracek is not well known to the students. Not one seemed aware of *Zazracna hodinka* with only *Robinsoka* mentioned by one.

In terms of ideology, they were on the whole unaware as children of any political correctness in their reading matter. While one student mentioned being aware of Russian poems about Lenin, Gagarin and Stalin, another felt they were not forced to read certain books. It is clear there is a strong attachment to the students' childhood reading and discussing ideology is a sensitive area as it can appear as if it is Czech children's literature that is being criticised not a particular oppressive political system. Dagmar observed that, while she was not aware of ideology during her childhood, she has an awareness now: *"now when I look at them, there are some which I have to laugh at"*.

The students were invited to add comments in the space provided at the end of the questionnaire and all made positive comments about Czech children's literature. A number recall the fairy stories they were told by their parents when they were young. Martina writes: *"Czech literature for children is really beautiful, we have lots of authors writing fairy-tales..."*

A number expressed concern about what was happening now with many books from abroad which were termed by one as *"American rubbish"*. Another adds *"When I see the foreign literature spreading in our bookshops (Disney books for example) I realise how dangerous it can be for Czech children's literature which has always been of a very good quality and has got its tradition."* This feeling of tradition in Czech literature is mentioned by several students

## **Conclusion**

The brief outline of the development of Czech children's literature and discussion of the Czech students' own reading has indicated a number of important factors which help to explain and contextualise the Fast Track students' horizons of expectations when approaching English children's literature texts. All are connected with national identity and disruption. Czech children's literature plays and continues to play an important part in the construction of a national identity. Such identity is constructed through the Czech language itself and the oral tradition of Slav fairy tale and folk story. The oral tradition has not only supported the construction of national identity but has also served as a constant during all the violent swings in the political systems. The playful and irreverent, post-modern retellings of fairy stories that appear in Britain and the USA do not appear in Czech fairy

stories because they are too precious and there is still enough insecurity about national identity to become “disrespectful” to the tradition. There is a common core of books, kept by families, which stretch from Hapsburg times that form part of the nation’s consciousness in spite of all the changes in ideology. The students are very proud of their cultural heritage and remember the books they read as children with pleasure. The harshness of the political regimes meant that books for children tried to protect them from the outside world while it will be argued later that with English children’s books the outside world is seen as a challenge to be met and very often subverted.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Czech students on the Fast Track found the books they read on the English children’s literature course unusual and often commented that they found them unsuitable for children since notions of childhood and literature for children were radically different.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Hurlimann Three Centuries of Children’s Books in Europe, Oxford, 1967, p. 127

<sup>2</sup> K Capek President Marsaryk Tells His Story Allen & Unwin, 1942, pp. 43-44

<sup>3</sup> J. Voracek Historicke a teoreticke koncepcce literatury pro mladez (English summary) Albatros, 1982

<sup>4</sup> V. Stejskal Czech and Slovak Books for Children, SPKM, 1987

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp 6-7

<sup>6</sup> Voracek op.cit.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 7

<sup>8</sup> Stejskal op.cit. p. 8

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p. 10

<sup>10</sup> J. Karafiat Fireflies, Albatros/Kralich, 1994

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 50

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p. 6

<sup>13</sup> Stejskal op.cit., p. 13

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 13

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. pp 6-7

<sup>17</sup> Voracek op.cit., p. 271

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 270

<sup>19</sup> Stejskal op.cit., p. 5

<sup>20</sup> B. Stehlikova Illustrations in Czech Books for Children SPKM, 1985

<sup>21</sup> Stejskal op.cit., p. 14

<sup>22</sup> Voracek op.cit., p. 274

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 274

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 275

<sup>25</sup> Stejskal op.cit., p. 14

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 14

<sup>27</sup> Stehlikova op.cit., p. 14

<sup>28</sup> Stejskal op.cit., p. 17

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 14

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 18

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 20

<sup>32</sup> Stehlikova op.cit., p. 16

<sup>33</sup> Voracek op.cit., p. 278

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 277

<sup>35</sup> Stehlikova op.cit. p. 18

<sup>36</sup> Stejskal op.cit., p. 20

<sup>37</sup> Stehlikova op.cit. p. 18

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 18

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- <sup>39</sup> J. Toman "Growth in an Age of Lead: Czech Poetry for Children" Bookbird Vol 33 No. 1 Basel 1995 p.35
- <sup>40</sup> Stejskal op.cit. p.21
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 21
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.22
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.22
- <sup>44</sup> Voráček op.cit. p.281
- <sup>45</sup> Stejskal op.cit. pp41-42
- <sup>46</sup> Stehlíková op.cit. p.25
- <sup>47</sup> Stejskal op.cit p.22
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.22
- <sup>49</sup> J. Toman "Zamlčování autoři dětské literatury 60.let. Poezie pro děti" Pedagogical Faculty Brno, 1994 p.5
- <sup>50</sup> K. Chukovsky "From Two to Five" in M. Meek et al (Eds) The Cool Web Bodley Head, 1977 p.403
- <sup>51</sup> E. Petiška (trans N. Hronková) Charles IV.The King from the Golden Cradle Martin, 1994
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.9
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.32
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid. p.9
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid. p.10
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.17
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.15
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.15
- <sup>59</sup> Voracek op.cit p.282
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid. p.283
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.283
- <sup>62</sup> J. Toman Zamlčování autoři dětské literatury 60.let. Brno 1993 p.8
- <sup>63</sup> Stehlíková op.cit p.27
- <sup>64</sup> Stejskal op.cit. p.26
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid. p.26
- <sup>66</sup> J. Hrebejková Pohádky a Povídky pro malé čtenáře státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1979 p.10
- <sup>67</sup> Stejskal op.cit. p.26
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid. p.26
- <sup>69</sup> Voráček op.cit. p.282
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.283
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.283
- <sup>72</sup> Stejskal op.cit p.28
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.28
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.28



# Part One: Ethnographic Perspective

## Chapter 2: Identifying Cultural Indicators

### *Empirical Research with Fast Track Students*

The aim of the research, described in the introduction to this study, was to discover which cultural indicators in the children's literature texts taught on the course were identified by the Fast Track students. The first task was to try to unpick the word "culture" and then to find out what the students had in their minds about English culture before investigating cultural indicators in the texts studied on the course. Not only the texts but also the methodology employed was significant because the way literature is taught in the two countries is quite different<sup>i</sup> The research questions were as follows:

1. The students' notions of the word "culture" and what it meant to them.
2. What the students' concepts were about English culture
3. What aspects of English culture they perceived from the methodology employed in seminars
4. What aspects of English culture they perceived from reading the children's literature texts on the course.

Before the first set of interviews I had made a number of presumptions about the outcome of the above questions. I thought that many indicators would be revealed by the students assuming that, like myself, the students would see many differences between Czech and English culture. I also assumed that the students would have an intellectual framework for discussing culture as they were attending British Studies and American studies seminars. I thought that the students would have an up-to-date knowledge about aspects of English culture derived not only from their studies, but also from the British lecturers they knew as well as experience from travelling. In fact the research revealed that cultural stereotypes proved to be particularly tenacious and it was hard for the students to detect even seemingly obvious cultural indicators in the children's literature texts. After each round of research I tried to find different ways of asking about cultural indicators in order to gain some response from the students. A solution was obtained finally after a number of different strategies were employed and this will be discussed below.

It was noticeable throughout the period of research that the students found it difficult to reflect on what they had experienced and it seemed that while they were all intelligent and lively youngsters, the

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<sup>i</sup> see Chapter 1, section B

shadow of the totalitarian system lay over them. This was evident in the way they were still looking for “right” answers to my enquiries and tended not to want to see cultural differences. This is hardly surprising since they had all spent their formative years in a system where everything was supposed to be the same. What was interesting was to see the differences between the cohorts because the youngest group who had more experience in education since 1989 were more introspective than the oldest group, making it possible to detect the changes in thinking in the emerging new democracy.

I was apprehensive before my first research visit because it is not always either advisable or easy to return to a former post and I was unsure how I would be greeted back at the Pedagogical Faculty by my colleagues as it is unusual to change posts in the Czech Republic. The three years spent at the Faculty, while a respectable length of time by British standards, was regarded by my Czech colleagues as a very short period. I also had to quickly form a professional relationship with my British Council successor who was adjusting to a new post and a new country. Finally I had to rely on the students’ goodwill as I was asking them to volunteer their time and discuss a course that they had already completed. It was therefore a relief to be welcomed back, to be given permission to talk to students in their seminars and to find many students volunteering to be interviewed in their own time. I visited the Czech Republic four times between November 1994 and April 1996 in order to conduct research with the Fast Track students and each of the research visits made were productive with even the third cohort of students, who I had not taught, who were giving up their free time in order to be interviewed. Such a supportive atmosphere is important to emphasise because it reflects the quality of the responses from the students who were all relaxed and willing to help me with any tasks I set them.

A major advantage was that I had obtained funding from the British Council, Prague to organise a study-tour to Worcester College of Higher Education for groups of Fast Track students. I therefore did not return to the Pedagogical Faculty only as a research student but also as a co-ordinator with a clearly defined role. While the students were interested in my research, the fact I was offering them the opportunity to come to England served as additional motivation.

The account of the research with the Czech students is arranged as follows. Firstly there is a description of each cohort and how the research was conducted with them after which a detailed account of the students’ response to each research question listed above is given. This is accompanied by reflection on the students’ comments, reactions and observations while the implications of the students’ readings will be provided in Chapter 3 which follows. Table 1 “Empirical Research: November 1994-May 1996”, which is located in Appendix I, page 273, provides an accessible overview of the research undertaken. Other tables referred to below may also be found in Appendix I.

## **Cohort A**

This was the first cohort on the new Fast Track course (originally 45 subsequently down to 30) who were at the time of the research in their third and final year of study. By this time memories of the seminars and the texts read in their first year were naturally fading. Therefore I did not consider it advisable to make this group of students the main focus of the research. Instead I thought it advisable to concentrate on the Englishness of the methodology and see what indicators they could identify because they had just completed a year of methodology seminars, including two weeks of teaching practice. In addition they were also asked about the texts themselves but I did not expect too much for the reasons outlined above.

### **Brno - Autumn 1994**

A questionnaire was designed to find out what the students thought was particularly English about how the seminars were organised and the books they read in them. It was to be completed in pairs and was administered to the students in their seminar time.

#### **Part One - Englishness of the Methodology**

In order to help the students recall the methodology employed, they were asked to make a list of as many of the teaching methods used that they remembered. Then they were invited to explain why they remembered these particular methods and to tick any that appeared to be an English style of teaching. Finally they had to consider what was particularly English about these methods compared to traditional Czech methodology.

The first group took a long time to do the task and even though they were working in pairs and could discuss ideas, there was a sense that they were treating the research task as a kind of "test" which they had to get right. I asked the second class to work together as a group and brainstorm all the strategies used in order to trigger their memories and make them more relaxed. This strategy helped to generate more ideas.

#### **Part Two - Englishness of the Texts**

The second part concerned the texts themselves and the following four questions were put:

Which of the stories seemed to give you the strongest impression of Englishness? Why?

Which of the stories in your opinion reflect a past English culture? Why?

Which of the stories seemed to have a universal feeling and go across time and culture?

Is there anything else you would like to add about some/any of the stories read?

The questions were designed to discover how the students felt about the texts after a period of time and were deliberately general.

The response of the students will be discussed in the appropriate sections below.

## **Cohort B**

The three groups of Cohort B (originally 45, subsequently down to 37) were in their second year of their studies and had completed the Children's Literature course in June 1994 and were then interviewed the following Autumn. This meant that their memories were still fresh compared with Cohort A. I interviewed them again in the Spring of 1995 and conducted further interviews in Worcester when nine students from this group came on a three-week study tour in May 1995. For this reason it is with Cohort B that the majority of the research has been undertaken. An outline of the research undertaken now follows:

### **First Round of Research - Interviews about Culture and Children's Literature - Brno Autumn 1994**

The first piece of research involved interviews which centred on culture. Four tasks were put to groups of students which were as follows:

- 1 The students were given a sheet of paper with the word "Culture" printed in the middle. They were asked to brainstorm all the words that they could think of that were linked to the word. This was done to help them focus on the concept, begin to talk and think in English and to assess their notions of what they mean by culture.
- 2 After they had completed this task the paper was turned over and the students were asked to consider how they would describe English culture.
- 3 Then they were asked where their ideas about England came from.
- 4 Finally the main question was asked about what aspects of English culture they picked up from the children's literature texts we read and from the way they were taught.

Groups of second year students attended group interviews at the British Council Resource Base. from Tuesday 22nd to Friday 25th November. I placed a notice on the staff room door at the school where seminars took place the previous week for volunteers to come and be interviewed. Fast Track seminars begin at 2.30 which left the mornings free for those students who were not otherwise engaged, although many already had their own private students or were teaching in language schools.

Out of a possible 37 students, 27 volunteered their services and were interviewed in groups of 3's and 4's. They had been asked if possible to place themselves in groups of either (a) those who had never been to the UK or (b) those who had been before the course or (c) those who had been after the course. Of the 8 groups, 3 groups were of mixed experience, 2 groups had never been to the UK, another two had visited the UK before and one group who had been to the UK after the children's literature course.

The venue, the British Council Resource Base in Brno, was selected for the interviews because of lack of space at the Pedagogical Faculty during the day. The Resource Base not only has a library but also office space and interview rooms. A large room was made available where students sat with me round a large table on which was placed a small tape-recorder. The first few minutes were spent chatting and getting to know the students again as I had last seen them in June. I tried to put them at their ease explaining that I was trying to find things out and was not trying to test them. It is important to bear in mind the legacy of the communist years, described in Chapter 1, where strong notions of what was correct and incorrect was inculcated. All the interviews enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere and the students were keen to help and appeared to enjoy the discussion.

## **Second Round of Research - Identifying Cultural Indicators in Children's Literature Texts**

### **Brno Spring 1995**

The aim of this second piece of research was to find out if the students could pick out specific cultural indicators from texts they had before them. Previously the students had been asked in a more general sense based on their memories. This time extracts from texts were given to pairs to work on. British Studies seminar time was given for this task which meant that I did not have to rely on volunteers.

The texts selected from the course were:

Ted Hughes The Iron Man Faber and Faber 1968 (chapter 3)  
Hazel Townson The Deathwood Letters Red Fox 1990 (first batch of letters)  
Michael Rosen (Ed) Culture Shock Penguin 1991  
A.A. Milne Winnie the Pooh Penguin 1926 Chapter Eight

The Iron Man and The Deathwood Letters were selected because they were the two texts studied in most detail in seminars. I included Culture Shock because I thought the cultural indicators would prove the easiest for the students to spot while I was interested to see what would be revealed in such a well-known classic as Winnie the Pooh.

**Third Round of Research: English Culture and Cultural Indicators with 9 students Worcester  
April 22nd-May 13th 1995**

This took place at Worcester College of Higher Education with 9 second year Fast-Track students who came on a 3-week study tour funded by the British Council. As co-ordinator for the study-tour I was able to arrange time when I could undertake my own research with the group. The two areas that were concentrated on were:

- a The student's reactions to the English culture they experienced during their stay
- b An investigation into cultural indicators in The Deathwood Letters.

I carefully designed the study-tour to be relevant for student-teachers and focused on teaching and learning in Primary, Secondary and Higher Education. The students made school visits to rural, suburban and multi-ethnic primary schools; local comprehensives and private schools in Worcester. They also attended lectures and seminars at Worcester College of Higher Education. All were accommodated on the Campus where they had a chance to experience student culture including Rag Week. A number of visits to places of interest were organised to Stratford upon Avon, Warwick Castle, Gloucester and in addition they also visited the Mayor of Worcester at the Guildhall. All the above activities ensured that the students, in a short space of time, had access to a range of English cultural experiences on which to make comparisons.

Interviews were held with small groups of students towards the end of the second week of their study tour where I asked them about their reactions to what they had experienced so far. An assessment form was given at the end of the stay which further revealed reactions to their experience.

I also gave them a different task which sought to identify cultural indicators from The Deathwood Letters. This time instead of asking them to pick out what was English in the story, which they found difficult, I asked them to turn the text round and not only consider how it could be translated into the Czech language but also what would need to be changed in order to make it culturally Czech. This proved a more successful strategy and will be discussed below.

### **Cohort C**

The third cohort, of two groups only, is the one I did not teach although the syllabus remained the same. While my Czech colleagues were interested in the Children's Literature course and were pleased to see it continue, none of them felt able to teach it themselves. So I handed over the course to a British colleague before I left who, although not highly qualified, expressed an interest in Children's Literature and was willing to take it on. Cohort C consisting of two groups was the last to take the 3-year single-subject Fast Track and with no new first year intake there was an inevitable feeling of a course being run down with a certain amount of energy leaving it.

### **First Round of Research: Culture and Children's Literature - Brno Autumn 1995**

There were three main areas that I wished to discuss with the students. I still wondered whether the previous students' inability to spot cultural indicators was due to a misunderstanding about the word "culture" so firstly I sought to find out if there were any differences in meaning between the Czech word for culture, *kultura*, and the English one. Discussion of this would also clarify to the students the particular area of culture I was interested which was aspects of everyday life. Secondly I wanted to find out what they thought about the Children's Literature course as I hadn't taught them. I hoped to elicit a broad response by open questions about what they remembered. Follow-up questions about the books mentioned would then lead into discussion of cultural indicators. I was particularly interested to discover their ideas about English culture in order to compare their responses with that of students in Cohort B.

### **Second Round of Research: Expectations about the Study Tour -Brno March 1996**

I met the six students selected to come on the Worcester Study Tour and they completed a questionnaire which was designed to examine their expectations about the study tour.

### **Third Round of Research: English Culture and Cultural Indicators - Worcester May 1996**

This research was undertaken at Worcester during the 3-week study tour. Students were given the task of identifying cultural indicators in extracts from all the texts taught on the course and then with a specific texts suggest what changes would need to be made to make the texts "Czech". They were also given the same evaluation of the study tour as the one administered to the group from Cohort B.

### **Research Outside the Fast Track**

I taught a Children's Literature course at two summer schools in July and August of 1995 which enabled me to make some comparison between the Fast Track students and other Czechs from a variety of backgrounds. The first was a British Council funded summer school for teachers of English who were not yet qualified in English many of whom were re-training from Russian. The second, run by the Jan Hus Foundation, was for intermediate speakers of English who came from a range of different professions. Reference will be made from time to time to the responses from these groups.

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Having given an outline of the three cohorts and the research questions put, there now follows an account of the responses from the students. This has been organised under the four research questions listed at the beginning of this chapter:

1. The students' notions of the word "culture"
2. The students' concepts about English culture
3. The Englishness of the methodology
4. What aspects of English culture they perceived from reading the texts.

## 1. Students' notions of the word "culture"

### Cohort B

#### *What do you understand by the word "Culture":*

A summary of the students' ideas may be seen in Table 2. In the brainstorming process two key aspects of culture were identified by the groups: *the arts* (7 groups) and *way of life* (6 groups). Five groups included *education* while a surprising number (5) for an ex-Marxist Leninist regime, selected *religion*. Representation of culture in the media was mentioned by 7 groups with such examples as *TV, film, and magazines*. Two groups included such political aspects as *minorities, human rights* and *economics*.

Key areas of the arts identified were: *theatre, literature and film* (7 groups) with music included by 6 groups, *paintings* by 2, *concerts, museums, exhibitions, and architecture* by one each.

A wide range of examples of a way of life was presented: *behaviour, houses, social standing, work, food, holidays, and family life*.

Six groups included the category of *traditions, ceremonies and customs* which might be subsumed into 'way of life'.

As discussed earlier, research revealed that the students did not readily identify cultural indicators in the texts and I wondered whether it was connected with their notions of the meaning/s of the word "culture". To the non-specialist the word "culture" triggers most strongly notions of the Arts or what is sometimes termed "High Culture" and I wondered if this was the case with the Fast Track students. Even though six groups added another sense of the meaning of the word in terms of everyday life, it could be that the former notion was held more strongly than the latter. In order to discover more about how the word "culture" is perceived I asked Cohort C about the meaning in Czech.

### Cohort C

#### *Culture and "kultura"*

A summary of the students' responses may be found in column 2 of Table 6. It appears from the answers to this question that there are a variety of responses to the term as in the UK. Three of the five groups thought *kultura* referred to the Arts and customs but did not include aspects of everyday life. However, they thought the English term did include this aspect which may reflect the fact that they are following a cultural studies (ie British Studies) in English but are not studying anything similar in Czech. Consequently their specialist vocabulary in this discipline may be developed more in English than in Czech. Jitka and Simona in group 5 thought there might be another Czech word



which referred to the everyday life aspect but couldn't retrieve it during the course of the interview. Two groups thought that the Czech word did match all the different meanings carried by the English concept of culture. It was also revealed in conversation that both the English and Czechs refer to people as being "uncultured". What is considered to be cultured behaviour is important for Czechs. They regard themselves as a highly literate and cultured nation and they react strongly to what they considered to be bad manners and impolite behaviour.

## **2. Concepts of English Culture**

### ***Cohort B***

I assumed that having triggered some ideas about the word culture that the brainstorming task would produce plentiful ideas. However, although over 70 different aspects of English culture were collected from the 8 groups, not many ideas were produced in each group. The largest number of indicators a group found were 25 and the smallest was 7. The students' ideas have sorted into 9 categories and are presented in Table 3 for easy reference. The Royal Family appeared in all groups and was the only one common to all. The class system and driving on the left was identified by five groups and three selected traditions. The political elements were suggested by one group which was all male. It should be mentioned here that three groups picked out Scottish tradition. A likely reason for this is because their British Studies lecturer was from Glasgow and at the time of interviews the focus in his seminars was on Scotland. This study, however, attends to Englishness but the inclusion provides an example of how the terms British and English can become confused.

The responses reveal a mixture of stereotypes based on second-hand information and ideas which appear to stem from first hand experience. These will be discussed under each category as follows:

### **Tourist Sites/History**

Tourist sites featured strongly and were the main items selected for the majority of the students many naming places of interest in London. Such information would be readily available in English lessons from course books, videos and magazines. It is unlikely that the presence of farm animals in English fields would be noted unless derived from real experience. The absence of animals in the Czech fields is one of the biggest differences between the English and the Czech countryside but is unlikely to be revealed in source material.

### **Habits:**

Queuing is a stereotype of the English which seems to stick although the Czechs are much more experienced at it because queuing was a way of life under Communism where frequent shortages meant much time was spent obtaining basic items. Czech queues are long and resigned. The myth of the kind, friendly policeman is revealed, as is the politeness of the English as they enjoy their high tea, carry umbrellas and talk about the weather. We are seen as conservative people who keep their

old measures, such as pints and miles, and insist on driving on the left.

Observations about English eating habits and what is watched on TV appear to stem from first hand experience. The Czech main meal is at lunchtime and most Czechs consider it very unhealthy to eat a large meal after 6 o'clock in the evening and comments were always made about my late eating habit. There is no class or regional division in terms of what is eaten and when as in the UK.

#### **Politics:**

Contemporary images in contrast with the stereotypes that appear under the "Habits" were revealed by one particular group. The class system, the British Empire, a Maritime Nation, Northern Ireland and its associated troubles are mentioned. The majority of items in this category came from an all male group which is an indicator of the strong divide between male and female in the Czech Republic where females tend to be less interested in politics than in the UK.

#### **Architecture:**

English houses typified by neat rows of brick houses with green lawns was picked out by a number of students. Such housing would have been represented in course books, seen in films and then observed on arrival in the UK. There are very few brick houses in the Czech Republic and the majority of people live in flats on "*panelak*" estates

#### **Social Life:**

Only a few aspects of contemporary culture appear and they are revealed in the category "Social life" where well decorated pubs, darts, bands and clubs are mentioned. This appears to come from actual experience.

#### **People and Characters:**

Two sets of people were selected, some real and some fictional. All groups mentioned the Royal Family who are not only represented in course-books but frequently appear in news items and magazine articles. Shakespeare came to the minds of three groups and only one included the Beatles which is surprising as their music is extremely popular in the Czech Republic.

#### **Food and Drink:**

Traditional English food is mentioned such as fish and chips and Yorkshire pudding but the additional comment about eating lots of vegetables would suggest actual experience. The difference in priority between food and alcohol is also noted. It was always a surprise to see a wide variety of cheap alcohol in a Czech supermarket compared to the meagre display of old and expensive vegetables.

**Sports:** Cricket and football are traditional English sports and Wimbledon is well-known to the tennis-playing Czechs. Golf and darts, on the other hand, were more likely to have been noted when in England.

**Weather:**

Finally English weather consisting of “rain and fog and wind” is a familiar stereotype.

**Sources of Information about England**

The students had a variety of experiences ranging from little contact with English people to a considerable amount. Many sources of information were common to all groups. In all of the groups the students mentioned text-books and teachers. Most showed a healthy scepticism for the traditional English text-book *Anglictina* used in totalitarian times but most had been exposed to it at some time at school. The Cambridge Course (CUP) was cited by a number of groups as well as Headway (Longman) which was the course book used at the Pedagogical Faculty.

Some knew English people in Brno apart from their teachers and it was interesting to hear how they defined these people as not being “typical”. Two groups cited foreigners who surprised them by not supporting the Royal Family. One Englishman was mentioned as speaking many foreign languages and could not be typically English. In fact one group suggested that any British person in Brno had to be different because they were working abroad:

*Martina: "...we don't meet ordinary British people who don't laugh at the crazy idea of going to some other country (laughter from the group) who are open so we don't actually meet any normal ones". (group 1 lines 64-66)*

Surprise was expressed at foreigners wanting to learn Czech. Another student observed that the English people she met were very critical of their country. A conclusion that can be drawn from this is that at the interface between perceived views of English people and the English people they met there was a mis-match between the stereotype and the reality. In order for the students to adjust to this they defined the native-speakers they met as not “normal”.

Two students in Group 8 were of particular interest as they both came from families who had a strong interest in England. Magdalena's ideas about England came from her grandmother who had been in England during the Second World War. During that time she married an Englishman and returned to Czechoslovakia in 1945. After the communists came to power in 1948 it became dangerous for her English grandfather and he had to flee. Grandmother had to make the decision about whether to stay in her own country with her family or escape with her husband. She decided to stay and subsequently had many problems with the secret police. Magdalena recounted a story she was told about the bombing in London:

*"Yeh, she told me that she was..waiting for tickets for cinema...in London there were many bombs and she was pregnant...but she wasn't scared. She told me that..er..when she saw "Gone with the Wind" it was in the cinema...and..that she nearly lost the baby because it was so dramatic."*

Clearly Magdalena was told many stories about England by her grandmother. In the same group Ondrej told us about his parents who were anglophiles. We learnt that Ondrej was shocked when he came to England and found people criticising the Queen because his parents had liked the Royal Family. They listened to the BBC secretly in the "old days" and read Winnie the Pooh to Ondrej in English acting it out when he was a little boy. His parents had managed to travel to England when they were in a Folk Group in Communist times as being a member of a cultural group or a sports team was one of the few ways of getting out of the country.

Daniela in group 4 told us that her parents had many English guests in their house and her sister had been in England for 6 months so she felt she had a good knowledge of English culture.

Films were mentioned by most groups as a source of information but they were thinking more of access to the English language than English culture because the majority of films in English in Brno over the 3 years I was there were American. Group 1 mentioned films and when I asked for an example Jitka mentioned a Woody Allen film Annie Hall which had been on TV a few nights before. We all laughed when I pointed out that was American and Hana quickly informed us she had recently see "Four Weddings and a Funeral to correct the "error". One cinema in Brno, the Arts cinema, showed more European "quality" films and occasional films in English with subtitles would appear on TV. The BBC World Service which is transmitted on FM to all main cities in the Czech Republic was not mentioned as often as I expected as the service, apart from news and current affairs, also offers a number of English language programmes which should have been of interest to the students.

Newspapers and videos were mentioned and I presume that these were the materials available at the British Council Resource Centre. Various tourist videos are available as are a selection of newspapers and magazines.

In spite of a range of experiences, it appears that the stereotypes about English culture were stronger even with those students who had visited England. The focus was on things English as opposed to the English themselves. Members of Cohort C, the youngest group, who had travelled more widely, also held similar stereotypes but also held a more realistic view of English society and focused more on the behaviour of the English.

## Cohort C

### *English/Czech Culture*

The students in this cohort had more experience of travelling and working abroad and were more forthcoming than previous students about cultural differences. Only a few cultural stereotypes did occur and these were in conversation with group 2. The responses came from my question

*"What sort of differences can you think of between English and Czech culture?"*

Leona, who has visited England twice immediately said: *"I think English people behave in completely different way to Czech people."*

Andrea then added: *"They are more polite"*. Andrea has not yet travelled to Britain and happily articulated this classic stereotype about English politeness. Surprisingly Leona agreed with her. Andrea also thought the English were more formal. I have to say that my experiences in the Czech Republic are the opposite. Czechs are more formal and more aware of politeness than the English. I learnt for example the phrase that is required if you want to ask for something in a shop. You have to say "I ask you please, don't you have any ....". In my block of flats everyone wished each other the time of day and in the faculty building you did the same to anyone you passed in the corridor whether you knew them or not. However, there is more public rudeness from shop assistants or waiters as a result of the communist system where there was no need to be even reasonably polite because it didn't matter if there was a customer or not. It seems that the English tend to be more polite with strangers while the Czechs are more polite with people they know.

Leona also added the information that while the English were more polite the Czechs were *"more open hearted"*. This is a favourite comment by Slavs about their renowned hospitality.

Andrea followed this up with the comment:

*"Or they show their feelings, maybe, more. English people are more close in themselves and if they show something either they don't mean it or when somebody in England ask "how are you?" it's just a phrase. It doesn't mean anything".*

This is an interesting comment which shows how easily cross-cultural misunderstanding can occur and reveals a cultural fault-line. Clearly the phatic nature of "how are you?" in English has been misunderstood. Native English speakers know that we are merely going through a greeting ritual. It would be incorrect in English to give a lengthy reply to such a question unless, of course, it was not a phatic but a real question. I now realise how often I would say *"Jak se mas"* (How are you?) thinking it was a Czech equivalent when it was inappropriate.

I discussed the grammar of Czech with the students because I have a theory that because we no longer have the formal and informal form of *you*. English speakers add more “pleases” and “thank you’s” and therefore give the impression of politeness. This led to a discussion about the use of these terms *vy* (formal you ) and *ty* (informal). It was interesting to listen to because Leona, who it will be recalled had been to England, discussed the problems of knowing which form to use:

*“Sometimes in Czech I have problems because somebody can be as old as I am and I don’t know”*

Andrea, who had not travelled to England, did not perceive any difficulties.

During their conversation, it was revealed that there was more formality in their society than now in contemporary Britain. One significant area is that of age. It was clear from their conversations that they would not use the informal “you” with an older person:

Leona: *“I’ve never asked an older man or woman if I should say “ty” or “vy”. I’m always waiting.*

At the Faculty, the Czech lecturers were referred to formally by their titles and second names while the foreign lecturers were called by their first names. Similarly foreign lecturers called their students informally by their first names while the Czech lecturers used second names. This sometimes caused difficulties at meetings when a student was being discussed because each group had remembered a different half of the student’s name and serves to highlight the different relationships between lecturer and student where attitudes about formality and informality between the Czechs and the foreigners opened up another cultural fault-line.

Apart from a picture of the formal, polite English which seems to hark back a few decades, most of the students’ comments appeared to stem from their recent experience. A theme that ran through all the groups was the key difference in attitudes towards children. As quite a few students had been au-pairs in England, they were in a position to see at least one aspect of family life in the UK.

The students in group 1 discussed the neglect of children by parents. They thought that the parental neglect of both of the children in *The Deathwood Letters* couldn’t happen in the Czech Republic. Also the independence of children in Britain was noted by nearly all groups. Lucie in group 3 observed:

*“English children are very independent of their parents. I think. They are more self-confident than Czechs.”*

This observation was supported by Lenka in group 4:

*"They are quite independent and Czech children are more dependent on their parents".*

Martina in the same group thought this was because Czech mothers stay at home with their children while in England it is more usual for an au-pair to take care of the children. In fact the opposite is true. More women go out to work in the Czech Republic but they do have a longer maternity leave, State nursery schools and an extended family nearby to offer support.

Jana also in group 4 confirmed the independence of English children but gave a different more political reason:

*"Maybe the mentality of children is different. The English children are more - I don't know how to say it - more open, more self-confident. The Czech children are not like this. They are more mainly because of the system that was here for the last 40 years"*

Market in group 1 talked about our cultures being different because England is

*"also an island without the other countries having pressure on it as much as our country which is so much smaller. And because there was also socialism, it's different than England."*

It is interesting that the old Communist system was referred to by several students in this Cohort. In my experience reference to the past is rare and I was surprised that the students were so open to someone they didn't know well. It seems that a significant period of time has passed and this group of students, who had experienced five years of a non-totalitarian system in their teens, feel able to make observations about the past to a stranger. Up to now comments about life under Communism only came from close friends of my own generation.

Jitka in group 5 also commented on the confidence of English children :

*"I think that children in England feel that they are able to change something if they want but here children feel that they are children and they are. I think, they are told by adults they can't change anything because they are such small children. In England it's different."*

In the totalitarian system where adults felt they had little power, children were seen as even more powerless. Similarly in such a totalitarian system where conformity was expected, the only place of safety was the home. Therefore children were protected more and discouraged from any independent thinking which might prove dangerous<sup>i</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1, section A

The disadvantages of the West were also mentioned. The consumerist, individualistic nature of British society was noted and it was Jana in group 4 who summed up these feelings:

*"Just maybe we have kind of, we know how to appreciate things. In England I've noticed that children when they've got a present. I used to give them presents, lots, many times. One day they enjoy it and the next day they throw it away. Because they expect something new and new all the time and they do not, are not learnt from their childhood to appreciate things but in the Czech Republic we can do it, so we appreciate our parents, appreciate our grandmothers when we are young we think towards on them, how we will treat, how we will take care of them when we are old. That's the problem actually, that's the difference".*

These ideas about the differences between Czech and English children seemed to come from two sources. Firstly from their experiences in the UK and secondly from some of the children's books they read. This seems to link with Kramsch's<sup>1</sup> view that cultural indicators can only be understood when there is already some understanding of that culture. Jana in discussing how a Czech child might read an English text made the same point:

*"I'm just thinking it's probably children when they read the books, they don't realise the culture. Actually it's the culture of their own, and maybe the Czech children reading the English books will not realise the culture. It's not very explicit from the book. The culture needs to be explicit."*

Jana is echoing my own thinking that the reader creates "the picture in the head" of their own culture unless they have experiences which allow them to create a picture not of their own culture. It's interesting too to consider different notions of what might be "explicit" or not. These points will be discussed in the conclusion at the end of this section.

### **English Culture in England - comments from the Nine Students from Cohort B**

The students were interviewed in groups at the end of their second week in the UK just before their third weekend when they were two-thirds through their study-tour. Apart from Jan who was interviewed alone there were two groups of three and one pair. I asked the same questions each time but followed up the different comments that were made as the interviews progressed.

I began each interview by finding out if they had been to the UK before and what other countries they had visited. Four had never been to the UK while the rest had been on holiday for a short time. Only Nada had come on an organised tour with a Czech travel agent and the others made it clear they had come under their own steam. Ondrej had hitchhiked and Jan was alone in London for around 3 weeks trying to find work illegally. All the group had been to a number of other countries on holiday. Many had been to the old Communist block before '89 - Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and since 1989, they had also visited a surprising number of Western European countries such as Austria, Germany, France, Spain, Norway and Denmark. After 1989 when Czechs were able to travel there was an explosion in the travel business with travel agents opening up on every street



corner. Czechs booked coach holidays and managed to afford to travel by taking all their own food with them. Apparently even the citizens of Venice allowed "Eastern" Europeans to eat their sandwiches in the Piazza San Marco. My friends in Brno told me that when the borders first opened between them and Austria, the authorities in Vienna allowed Czech citizens free access to all their museums. It seems that these students like many Czechs, although not having much money to spend, had invested what they and their families could afford on foreign travel. I asked one group whether foreign travel was an important aspect of the results of the changeover in '89 and they all chorused "Yes" immediately. This highlights the closed nature of society before 1989, the effects of which should not be underestimated.

My second question concerned their expectations of the study-visit. This they found difficult to answer and it is interesting to speculate why. It could be that they did not really understand the word "expectations". However their English was of a good level and they had coped with school visits, lectures, seminars and the fast colloquial language of the English students very well. It may be that the notion of thinking about what something might be like is not familiar to them and is another indicator of a passive as opposed to an active approach to their lives.

Comments were made about expectations of bad weather. In fact the beginning of May saw sunshine and hardly any rain which confounded their stereotypes of English weather. Many thought the accommodation would be bad and were pleasantly surprised

*Ondřej "...and didn't expect.....the accommodation and food would be so good. I was nicely surprised"*

This was because I told them they would be in a very old block built during the second world war and that the conditions would not very luxurious because they were sharing rooms in two's and three's with bathrooms and toilets along the corridor. However they are more used to sharing than we are in the UK and did not find these conditions so difficult.

Many expected to make friends with English students:

*Náda: "I thought that I will have some possibility to speak with native speakers perhaps of my age"*

However a few thought it might prove difficult as the stereotype about the English being reserved appears strong:

*Marketa: "and I thought people ..er..that people won't be so friendly and don't mean they don't want to make friends with us but they are polite..."*

My next question was designed to elicit more about what they observed about English culture but indirectly so I asked them what surprised them about what they had experienced so far. I asked first of all for general comments and moved on the specific areas such as school visits, seminars at Worcester and life on campus. As mentioned above nearly all the students commented on the weather which was not surprising as everyone was discussing the unusually early summer. Many were disappointed that they had not met many English people and had not made friends:

*Eva: "Although I told everyone that probably we won't be able to talk much to the British or to the English people because. I don't know what they're like but I hoped that we would meet some of the British people more than we do. Because we've only met Gary and the rest of them just talked for a while but I don't know them at all."*

Comments were made about English hypocrisy where we were polite on the outside but cold on the inside. Slav openness and generosity with visitors was compared with our Germanic nature by a couple of students. I asked what would happen if a foreign student was to come to their faculty.

*Jana: What's Germanic nature then?*

*René: I think its a little bit more aggressive*

*Sandra: Than do you mean Slav?*

*René: Slav I think we would be very friendly. There is a difference perhaps between Slavonic nature*

*René: and Germanic.*

*Sandra: We're not Germanic*

*René: Anglo-Saxon. Buts it's similar more to Germany*

*Sandra: What's Germanic nature then?*

*René: I think it's a little bit more aggressive*

*Sandra: Than do you mean Slav?*

*Sandra: What are Slavs like? What's typical?*

*Janá: More open. Have a lot of friends, but real friends not just that it's pretended.*

I found myself getting somewhat defensive about these comments denying we were Germanic. However I was not surprised that they had not made English friends. After all the students on campus had been together since September and had established friendship networks. Although I suggested to the group that they split up and did not go round together in a big group, I think they did spend most of the time together. Comments were made about the "in-jokes" of the students that they couldn't understand. It was difficult to explain to the group that talking carefully to a foreigner is quite tiring after a while as they have little experience of speaking Czech to a foreigner and are unable to put themselves in that position.

While there is demonstrably a culture of Czechs offering generous hospitality to visitors, and I have been on the receiving end many times, it is connected with notions of national identity. There is a common Slav myth about their generosity which sets them apart from other groups. Also foreign visitors were still special and exciting as in the recent past friendship with foreigners was virtually impossible so it's hardly surprising that they would be seen in a very special way. English people on the other hand are used to seeing people from other countries, travel a lot and don't feel any need to

"prove" their nationality. Visitors are treated more casually and less special effort is made. For example Jana and Rene had been invited to a Worcester lecturer's home to have an evening meal with his wife and children. He had no connections with the Brno group and I was pleased this invitation had been made. However the pair of students found the evening "strange" to them. Rene commented:

*"When we came the man said 'it's nothing special this evening'".*

And indeed it was a normal family evening. Czechs would have made an enormous fuss of their visitors and the woman would have spent a long time cooking. In this case it was the husband's turn to prepare the meal and as soon as the students arrived he popped out to the shops to buy some essential supplies.

They were all surprised that the students on campus appeared to do no work.

*Iva: "I was a bit surprised how the students like waste the time because what we do I think is something completely else"*

They felt that seminars were less demanding than they imagined and were surprised that quite often the students had not done the required reading:

*Náda: "Attitudes of the students, sometimes they don't read a book which they should read and so on, it was surprising"*

I had one copy of a children's book that was going to be discussed in a Children's Literature seminar and asked the group to try and read it and all nine of them did which surprised me very much.

They did note that the students were treated as adults who had choices:

*René "It's better because you aren't forced as we used to be to have to do something and now the students here can decide themselves".*

They observed that a variety of food was on offer in the canteen including many healthy options including a large selection of salads and vegetables. However they also noticed that many students ate "junk food" and observed that children in schools were eating such unhealthy items as crisps and fizzy drinks. A comment was made about female students being overweight and not taking care of their appearance. Conversely boys seemed to take more care and one male was even on a diet. We discussed the differences in gender where in the Czech Republic the girls do make "an effort" to look nice in order to attract men. The males on the other hand don't really bother. It appears that the opposite is true here.

Differing attitudes to alcohol were also noticed:

*Jana: "Maybe that the people are interested in being drunk. They are talking a lot about beer and how I think it's not so much a famous topic in our country."*

The most positive and thoughtful comments came from their discussions about school visits. This was an area as trainee teachers where they had some expertise and experience. There were many observations about how in English schools the children are encouraged to think for themselves and become independent.

*Jan: "it was rather co-operative atmosphere. They worked together all the children particularly in English lessons."*

*Barbora: "In primary schools the children are very relaxed and they are not afraid of...I think many children in our country are afraid to go to school because they will be examined or something and it isn't here. They are relaxed and they are playing all the day but I think they are doing serious things they study but they don't know they are learning something and they like it very much which is very important."*

Children are examined orally in front of their peer group in Czech schools. They don't know when they are going to be called and must approach the teacher's desk, stand up straight and answer the questions. The teacher then gives them their mark which is written down in a record book. Everyone views the process and the whole class know what mark is given.

The difference between rote-learning and the development of the thinking process was observed:

*Jan: "I was surprised how well they could express themselves - children at such an early age about important issues, social issues. They were reading Shakespeare and then they were comparing the way people would react in the past and in the present. I was surprised how well they could get their messages across and how confident they were"*

The relationships between pupils and teachers was also noted by Iva:

*"I was surprised by the attitude from the teachers with the students because they are able to be strict and they are able to be good friends to the children"*

and Jana:

*"I was surprised by the attitude towards children because in our country still it's that the teacher is always right and clever and the students, you know, are stupid and they must obey everything teacher says but there is much more like I can't say friends but something like mother or a father approach. Totally different and they were never angry with pupils even if they were not very good behaving and well much more free atmosphere, environment."*

And Barbora noted the relationships between the teachers:

*"I was also surprised the relationship among the teachers in school. It was very good I think. They don't hide from each other because the classrooms are collected together there is no so strict division and no door so you can hear a little bit of what the teacher is doing. They meet in the staff room and they talk and they are very friendly."*

I had noted that teachers share less in the Czech schools I worked in and visited when observing students on Teaching Practice. The culture was still more closed and teachers were still wary about discussing problems. I noted in one Grammar school in Boskovice, a town 30 miles from Brno, that one teacher of English who frequently attended British Council in-service sessions never communicated this fact to her colleagues in the department.

The amount of equipment too was noticed. Rene noted that the equipment was very good and Jana elaborated:

*"I was surprised that even in nursery schools 'cos yesterday we saw one nursery school as well so there was also a computer and the children can use the mouse and draw pictures and so from the small age of maybe four they had opportunity to use computer. Cos I saw computer for the first time when I was fourteen something like that and a big disadvantage."*

The differing status of teachers was noted by Rene. I knew that teachers in the Czech Republic were not paid well and did not enjoy a high status. But Rene noted that teachers in England

*"are bigger authorities because I've heard that what they say is taken by the parents. ....But in our country when our teacher says something and parents say something different the pupils believes his or her parents and the teacher he looks like a fool.....Sometimes the parents even say the teacher is an old communist even if it isn't."*

I remember some teachers who were retraining from Russian to English talking to me about "the old days" and how they now felt guilty for their role in upholding the status-quo. Parallels might be drawn between the status of teachers in the UK who have been on the receiving end of much criticism about supposed falling standards and whose work-load is increasing but in the UK teachers were not being accused of upholding a totalitarian regime. It made me think about the underlying currents of disaffection and feelings that are part of Czech daily life and which, although living there for over three years, I was not usually aware of.

Finally after I asked the question specifically about ethnic minorities comments were made about how such children are treated in English schools. Nada had accompanied a language support teacher on a school trip and had helped with the Bangladeshi children and was interested in how the mother tongue was spoken by the teacher as well as English. Racism towards gypsies in the Czech Republic is a big problem and at the time of writing (May 1995) laws are being passed in parliament in Prague to help the police deal with racist incidents. It was noted by Iva:

*"...the relations between the Bangladeshi children and the English children were very good and they didn't make any differences. They didn't keep their distance yes. There was no differing. Children in our country it's they're gypsies yes?"*

My final question was about whether they thought Czech and English cultures were very different.

I asked this because of a theory I was developing which was that Czechs assume we are similar while the English presume all foreigners are very different.

Jan was surprised about how different English culture was while Eva was surprised in particular about the education system. She noted that *"if you just expect the kind of "otherness" then it doesn't really strike you."* Marketa and Nāda thought there were few differences between us while Iva and Barbora noted in particular that notions of independence and family life were different. Iva picked this up in a Children's Literature seminar where the Italian extended family was discussed as a cultural indicator in an Italian book Mattie and Grandpa<sup>2</sup>. Iva was surprised to discover the differences and could relate more to Italian families than English ones: *"In children's literature as we were talking about the relationships between the members of the family so I was really surprised because I hadn't thought about it before"*. Jana and Rene thought there were little differences. *"All people in the world are similar"*.

All the observations from the interviews discussed above were also reflected in the final evaluation of the study tour and may be seen in Table 5.

The majority of the comments made by the students on the study-tour focus on behaviour and are closer to the observations of Cohort C. This is in contrast to their original comments made before the visiting the UK where the focus was more on cultural objects. It was interesting to see that, even when there are many cultural differences, the students were more keen to see these differences as small and insignificant.

### **Cohort C: Expectations about the Study Tour at Worcester College of Higher Education**

Information about the group's notions of English culture were revealed in a questionnaire which was designed to reveal their expectations about their Study tour in Worcester. The questions and responses are tabulated and may be read in Table 7. The students' ideas range from a stereotypical view to one that is based on actual experience. Those who had not visited the UK before had the more stereotypical views but interestingly such views were also held by those who had worked in the UK as au-pairs. The response to the question about life in an English university shows a split between those who thought it would be similar to their own and those who realised it would be very different. Of those who thought it would be different, it was the social life that was highlighted and not a completely different concept about knowledge. It was also noted by two students that the English were more confident and independent while another two thought that English families were closer

than Czech ones and that Czechs were “wilder” than the English whose life style was much calmer thus conforming to the stereotype of the quiet, polite English. After the study tour the students had a very different opinion.

#### **Evaluation of the Study Tour:**

The students from Cohort C completed the same questionnaire as those from Cohort B and may be seen in Table 9. Their stereotype of the quiet, polite English changed quickly and all were surprised about student life on Campus where the Worcester students were enjoying Rag Week and never seemed to go to bed. In terms of education most students highlighted similar areas to those from Cohort B: the wider range of subjects in English education, different methodology, and less stress. Their stereotype of the quiet, polite English soon changed although they noticed that outside the Campus they were treated with kindness and courtesy: it was the youth culture that surprised them the most.

### **3. English Methodology**

#### **Cohort A**

A broad outline of the children’s literature course has been given in the section on “context” and details of the methodology may be found in the section where each text is discussed in detail. Below are the teaching methods the students remembered. Those with an asterix were identified as English methodology.

- predicting\*
- retelling stories\*
- creating shadow puppet plays\*
- class discussion
- listening to stories\*
- analysing characters
- role play
- reading original English texts
- reading in groups\*
- spotting errors in a story\* (direct reference here to The Deathwood Letters)
- creating poems
- writing
- compiling charts
- exploration
- lecture

The main reason mentioned by nearly every group about why they remembered certain methods is connected with creativity. Either the word "creative" was mentioned or the students wrote about being able to be original or that they could do their own work. Some students related the methods to their own as student teachers. An interesting choice of books was also mentioned and words such as "new", "different", "exciting", "special" gives an overview of how the students remembered their

seminars. One pair's comment: *"...unusual enjoyment at the university, we still remember the myth "* indicates the effect the course seems to have had.

The features selected by the students as being English centred on creativity, enjoyment, being student centred emphasising an individual approach.

The Shadow Puppets were identified by all groups as being English and a variety of reasons were given. One pair categorised the whole process as a project work which was defined as being a typically English approach. This is not surprising as the most popular course book in Czech Basic Schools, where the students would be on teaching practice, is called Project English<sup>3</sup>. Another pair noted that the work with puppets exploited the individual talents of members of the group. A third pair focused on the different activities that were involved in the Shadow Puppet Project and added:

*"...this way isn't really used in our country, although it should be"*

Retelling stories was also identified as English. Most pairs focused on the creative elements:

*"It seems that teaching literature here does not include creativity. All teacher centred, receptive (passive) attitude of students".*

*"New way of thinking for us, creative thinking"*

Another feature of retelling that was identified was the scope for individuality:

*..."individual approach to the original material"*

An area that surprised me was the emphasis given to being read to. Apparently Czech teachers do not read stories even to younger Elementary school children and so the students identified this as being very English:

*"In Czech primary schools children read fairy tales themselves, not the teacher mostly"*

Some pairs also enjoyed the reading they did together.

One book in particular was referred to in terms of methodology - The Deathwood Letters This text takes the form of letters sent between two youngsters who have yet to master of English spelling. The students enjoyed finding the errors and correcting them. One pair commented:

*"It is not so obvious to use this method in Czech language lessons"*



It is intriguing to speculate why out of the list of teaching methods certain elements were selected as being English while others were not as all the items on the list apart from the lecture were more connected to English communicative methodology than the more formal traditional Czech methods. The following reasons may be given for this:

- Methodology seminars were given by a Czech teacher, Náda Vojtková, Head of the Fast Track, who has had extensive in-service training both in Brno and in the UK. Unlike many lecturers in the Pedagogical faculty Nada has taught for some years in a Basic School and is committed to developing sound classroom practice. She uses modern methods and as she is Czech and part of the seminars would be delivered in Czech it is likely that the methodology presented would be seen as less foreign.
- The students were teaching one day a week and they had internalised the communicative methods they were using.
- Now in their 3rd year of the Fast Track, the students had probably forgotten what the "old" methodology looked like as their school days receded in their memories.

For the above reasons it seems that new methods were no longer the province of "foreigners". This response might be viewed as a positive performance indicator for the British Council project where the central philosophy was to give support at a time of change and then hand over.

It was noted generally by the students that the language focus was on developing fluency as opposed to accuracy because it was a rare occurrence when student errors were corrected. This helped to create a more relaxed atmosphere where *what* was being said was more important than *how* it was being said. This is in contrast to the traditional Czech approach where accuracy was deemed the most important aspect and grammatical rules were discussed as if English was a "dead" language like Latin.

### **Cohort C**

The reactions and comments from Cohort A are in stark contrast to Cohort C. While both Cohorts A and B were positive about the course, the students in Cohort C were very critical. It will be recalled that I had handed over the Children's Literature course to a British colleague in the summer of 1994 giving her my detailed lesson plans and notes. We spent a couple of hours talking about the course and discussing how it might develop. She had also attended a number of my Children's Literature seminars, joined in with group work and had seen performances of the shadow puppet plays.

During the course of that year more copies of the texts had been ordered and I suggested that it would be possible for the students to take the books home as there were only two groups.. This was because the students' levels of English was higher each year and the new intake would probably manage to read the texts without as much support as in the past. In this way the course could cover more material and such texts as Kenneth Graham's The Wind in the Willows could be included.

However, while my colleague was keen to teach the course and expressed enthusiasm before and after it, she was not an experienced teacher. Her first career was in nursing and she had only recently graduated with a BA, part of which included English literature, and took a Trinity House, EFL certificate in Dublin which is an intensive course lasting just one month. She had been in the Czech Republic for 9 months and had gained some experience in teaching young children English. Unfortunately during the second semester she became ill and had to go into hospital for several weeks and apparently no arrangements were made for a replacement to cover her absence.

In my interviews with this Cohort, I did not ask directly about the methodology but a very strong response came from my question about what surprised them about children's literature. All five groups expressed confusion about the course and three were extremely critical of the way they were taught. The major problem was that they were not sure why they were taking children's literature. This is reflected in Lucie's comment:

*"At first nobody told us what was the purpose of these lessons. So we were reading children's books but we didn't talk about them very much. Just a few words. And the whole time we spent reading and maybe talking to each other." (Group 3)*

I was more than surprised to hear this because the first seminar set out to give the reasons why they were studying the course and was written clearly in the detailed lesson plans that my colleague had discussed with me. Most of the students were under the misapprehension that the books were to be used by them when they were teaching English in school. Clearly such books as Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland would be far too difficult for beginners learning English and therefore not appropriate. My colleague was also surprised at this misconception and sent me an e-mail with the following comment from Kirgystan where she is now teaching:

*"It just goes to show that in the foreign language classroom one may think one has full attention and comprehension but there one is oft times sadly mistaken vis Children Literature students thinking they were to teach the books studied. Ah well back to the drawing board".*

The students also wanted to take the books home to read and then discuss in class. It appeared that they were bored in seminars which lacked variety. The students were often the ones reading round the class and not the teacher while any discussion seemed to focus only on plot and character. It is clear from their comments that they were bored:

Marketa: *We together read the books in lessons all the time.*

Dasha: *Quite boring alot of the time. We couldn't take them home and read and then discuss in lessons". (Group 1)*

Clearly there is a difference between a native speaker reading a story in a lively and interesting way and students reading round the class in the flat monotone characteristic of such exercises.

Many of the devices that I used were apparently not taken up. For example such pre-reading tasks as predicting what The Iron Man might be about from the cover or focusing on potentially difficult vocabulary was not recalled by the students. They did not take part in a role play as farmers discussing what to do with the Iron Man. These devices not only supported the students' understanding and gave variety in class but there was also a model about the teaching of literature in the EFL classroom, the significance of which was not understood by my colleague.

Some students expressed disquiet at the amount of time they spent talking to each other which indicates that the teacher's methodology was not made clear to them. The purpose of their discussion was to afford them more practice at speaking English and to allow them to consider aspects of the texts they were studying. The whole emphasis of the course was that the students would become active agents in their learning and not passive recipients.

Two groups expressed regret that they never performed their shadow puppet plays. They were enthusiastic about writing the plays and due to illness the performances never took place. This hiatus of around 4 weeks added to the negative feelings about the course. Clearly the students had felt neglected and it serves as an indication of the lack of specialist teaching staff who might be able to cover a colleague's absence.

Leona in group 2 hoped to learn more about the authors and the period of writing:

*"I honestly think I've got a mixture in my head. I don't know which books belong to which century or..."*

She does not recall being given a lecture on the historical background to the development of children's books in England which I used to give at the end of the course in order to put the books read into some perspective. Her comment demonstrates the need for such a lecture and also reflects the traditional way she had been taught literature before with emphasis on names and dates.

It is obvious that even with detailed lesson plans, an inexperienced teacher is not going to teach in the same way as someone with 20 years in the classroom. It is easy to underestimate how much is learnt from years of experience, inservice training and studying for higher academic qualifications. This

cohort of students also had higher levels of English and more confidence in expressing their opinions about what they thought their education should be about. I certainly would have made changes in the children's literature course to reflect the higher language level and pushed the students more as it was obvious from their comments that they were often bored. These comments however, are a strong indicator of the changing attitudes in the Czech Republic where there is a growing sense of entitlement and should be viewed positively. In spite of the strong feelings concerning disappointment in the methodology, the students still expressed enthusiasm about the books they read where they showed interest in them on their level and had reasonable recall. I enjoyed the conversations I had with them and I have the feeling this was reciprocated.

More information about English methodology in general is revealed in the evaluation sheets completed by the *Brno 9* and the *Brno 6* (see Tables 5 and 9) and discussed above under the section "English Culture". It will be seen that common observations about English classrooms are connected with lack of stress; engagement in group work; project work; a sense of thinking as opposed to rote learning and an emphasis on creativity. This is in direct contrast with the Czech system of formal instruction, rote learning and the testing of facts. While changes are taking place in the teaching of modern languages, due to the influence from France, Germany, the USA and the UK, there is less impetus for change in other areas of the curriculum. Now while this outside influence may be seen like some to be cultural imperialism, it could be argued that what a healthy democracy requires is people who can think and engage with issues. Whenever my Czech students had the chance to be creative they embraced the idea with enthusiasm and produced lively, stimulating and exciting work. Their creativity had been suppressed and it only needed stimulation to bring in out. When the students were being creative, it was in their way and not a foreign way.

#### **4. Cultural Indicators in the Children's Literature Texts Studied on the Course**

All the students found this to be a difficult task. A seemingly straightforward question such as "what's English about this story?" did not produce much response and it became clear that I was asking them to do something they found extremely difficult. It does appear that the students were still looking at the world theoretically and passively. I asked the same question to the two groups of Summer school students, referred to above, and found that, even when showing them illustrations by Shirley Hughes, which are full of cultural indicators, these were not readily selected with the common response that the picture could be from anywhere. Only when attention was drawn to black people in the picture, or brick semi-detached houses was there some recognition that this couldn't at least be Czech. In the light of this response I had to find another way of asking the same question and the solution was to turn it round and ask what the difficulties might be if the text was to be translated into Czech.

A detailed account of the responses from the three cohorts about cultural indicators in the texts now follows.

#### **Cohort A:**

##### **The Texts**

It will be recalled that four questions were asked on the questionnaire about what had been read. The first: "*Which of the stories seemed to give you the strongest impression of Englishness? Why?*" elicited the following response.

Nine pairs named The Deathwood Letters mostly because English class system was strongly portrayed but other reasons given were the unusual form it was written in and the spelling mistakes in the letters. Other stories mentioned were Winnie the Pooh 3 pairs, The Iron Man 3 pairs, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland 2 pairs, William's Version 2 pairs, Tales of the Early World 1 pair.

Humour was an element considered to be English in Winnie the Pooh and Tales of the Early World. The Iron Man was selected because it was unusual with one pair describing it as "grim". Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was picked either because it is unusual or because it is a well-known classic English text. Finally William's Version was considered English because the boy in the story displayed rude behaviour <sup>i</sup>.

The second question was "*Which of the stories in your opinion reflect a past English culture? Why?*"

Six pairs did not put down any titles under this question. One pair thought that "in each story read there was something" but did not elaborate. Balder and the Mistletoe <sup>ii</sup> and Tales of the Early World were selected by two pairs with How the Raven, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Winnie the Pooh selected by one pair each. The first three were identified as relating to past times, Balder and the Mistletoe being described as "a myth made up by Germanic ancestors". The last two, classical texts, were considered to reflect the social differences and mentality of the British.

The third question was "*Which of the stories seemed to have a universal feeling and go across time and culture?*" Ten pairs selected fairy stories, five How the Raven, three for Winnie the Pooh, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and The Iron Man two for Balder and the Mistletoe and William's Version.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 4

<sup>ii</sup> Given as an oral retelling by the teacher

Few reasons were given for the selection. Of those that did try to explain their choice The Iron Man was viewed as carrying a strong message and was about people in danger solving their problems.. The values in How the Raven were seen as still valid with one pair explaining their perceptions of this myth as follows:

*"Written in order to raise nation's confidence during hard times and to have heroes as examples worth following"*

This is an interesting example of how the student has taken the myth and applied it to a Czech setting because it appears they have identified with a nation such as their own which has experienced over many years a loss of confidence.

A final question *"Is there anything else you would like to add about some/any of the stories read?"* had some response with students either naming stories they liked or disliked or writing about how much they had enjoyed the course.

#### **Cohort B**

The following is an account of the student's comments from the first set of interviews. It will be recalled that they had been discussing the different meanings of the word "culture" and had collected ideas about English culture. The students were asked to suggest what they considered to be English about the texts they read on the course. The purpose was to gain some idea of their thinking and to compare their notions of the Englishness of the texts with mine. It should be remembered that they were working from memory and did not have the texts in front of them.

#### **Specific Texts**

The Deathwood Letters was identified as containing a variety of indicators. It was noted that it gave a picture of children's lives, how they were growing up and their developing independence. Class was picked out as a significant element. Magdalena mentioned above, who had an English grandfather, commented that there were no illusions about status in the text:

*"Deathwood, Deathwood Letters there was differences among the social classes, they showed, I mean it was strong...and er I think they don't want..I mean the English people their children keeping dreaming because it was showed that if you are the low..er low class you can't change it at all... I mean maybe you can but it would be difficult."*

She observed that children reading the book could lose their illusions about life.

The poetry anthology Culture Shock was another text cited by many groups. Experiences of black people seemed to be remembered and it was noted by one student that some of the poems were also American.

Hana in Group 2 thought it inappropriate for children's literature to deal with such issues as racism:

*" .....it's not so good for such a small children because it was really, of course it depends but there was some poems about blacks*

*Sandra: Yeh*

*Hana: And its, it was a bit strange*

*Sandra: Were you surprised?*

*Hana: Surprised yes."*

In the discussion that followed Dita and Iva in the group thought it was interesting and useful for those children who lived in multi-cultural societies. Hana was still unconvinced.

Martina in Group 1 had visited London and identified Culture Shock as a source of Englishness for today's society. This is an example where a cultural indicator has been identified retrospectively after the experience as she observed:

*It's surprising that you meet so many nationalities in England, especially in London....It sort of reflects in those poems the problems...racially*

Similarly Jana (Group 3) identified a specific indicator in The Iron Man which was the picnic:

*"...we were reading the part when the ..er..they're having a picnic on a hill (laughter from the group) so I mean the idea of the picnic because I saw it with some in Twickenham...*

*Sandra: Oh yes*

*Jana: The people it was like the people were moving their houses (laughter)*

*Jana: Chairs and tables"*

But Marketa, who had been to England before the children's literature course, did not recall the picnic as an indicator but firmly agreed when I triggered her memory:

*" ....Do you remember the bit with the picnic?*

*(pause)*

*Marketa: With the family?*

*Sandra: Mmm*

*Marketa: Yes..that's English*

*Sandra: Is it?*

*(laughter)*

*Sandra: Why is that English?*

*Marketa: Because they always keep carrying those baskets of, taking everything, blankets, everything, why do they do it*

It may be assumed by many that A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh stories would be seen as quintessential English. However this was not the view of the Czech students. This is because the stories were translated into Czech with Czech illustrations and a cartoon version has also appeared on television.. Those students who knew the stories in Czech from when they were small had no idea at the time that they were English.

Ondřej, mentioned above, enjoyed the stories in English read to him by his parents. His comment is interesting:

*"E r..these four characters, I don't know, Winnie the Pooh, and Rabbit, Piglet and so on, Eeyore, they are like basic for human characters, which we can see in each society...and er...the events or the humour is rather English."*

Marketa in group 7 thought the humour was very different from Czech humour (line 71) I pointed out that in spite of any perceived differences we all laughed at the same jokes while Martin thought that perhaps the humour was universal for children:

:

*It's maybe humour for children - all the same the world.....It's closer than humour for adults*

Magdalena in group 8 thought that the character of Winnie the Pooh himself reminded her of Dr Watson in the Sherlock Holmes stories which shows that she is beginning to make some links between the English texts she has studied and is a sign of active engagement. A number of students observed that they enjoyed reading the stories in English on the course more than when they read them in Czech as children. This may be an indication of delight in enjoying and understanding the text in English or a sign that Winnie the Pooh is enjoyed more by adults than children.

Although some interesting points were revealed in the conversation, the students found it difficult to pick out specific cultural indicators which may be due in part to the distance in time from the texts. Those students who had experience of life in England were more able to detect indicators than those who hadn't. What was revealed more covertly in the interviews was a significant cultural indicator which is concerned with the different attitudes towards children in the two countries. The students were more inclined to be protective towards children and were concerned about whether the texts might be suitable for what they regarded as vulnerable small children. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

### **Second attempt with Cultural Indicators**

This time the students had the texts with them to work on and so I presumed that this would make the task of identifying cultural indicators much easier for them. I was once more proved wrong and still the students found the task difficult.

### **Cohort B: Procedure**

#### *First Group:*

I reminded the group about their contributions to the first round of empirical research in the Autumn. The majority of the group had volunteered to be interviewed but there were a few for whom the research was new. I then asked them to work in pairs and make a list of the cultural indicators in a



text that I would give them. I explained the term "cultural indicator" and as they worked spoke to each pair individually to make sure they had understood the task. It was obvious from the beginning that the group found this task difficult. Although I was able to explain the task in several different ways, the pairs tended to concentrate on linguistic areas rather than wider cultural ones.

### **Second and Third Groups**

In the light of the difficulties experienced by the first group, I decided to change tactics for the second and third groups. As before I reminded the group about the contributions made by the students in the Autumn research but this time I encouraged them to tell me what their ideas had been. I began by drawing the word "Culture" on the blackboard and eliciting from them their notions of what would come under this category. They were slow to respond at first but I managed by asking each student individually to contribute to build up a useful list on the board. In this way I hoped to engage their interest by making sure everyone had participated in the introduction to the task.

I continued by explaining the task which was to pick out cultural indicators in some of the children's literature stories they had read last year. But this time I organised the task more specifically.

I asked the pairs to think about *three specific areas* to consider if the passage was going to be translated into Czech. These were:

- 1 Anything about English culture that might need an explanation for a Czech reader perhaps in the form of a footnote.
- 2 Any major changes that would have to be made in order for a reader to make sense of the story.
- 3 Problem words and phrases

Once more I talked to pairs as they performed the task and confirmed that what they were doing was "correct". I was keen to help with the understanding of the task but not to give my own ideas about what might be written under the three headings. However, I found that I had to give some examples as they really were unsure of themselves.

The following two examples of the support that needed to be given to the students will illustrate some of the difficulties experienced by them.

A pair who were looking at the poems from Culture Shock seemed unsure of what would be difficult. I talked about the poems concerning racism and asked about either explanations that might have to be given or changes made to give the poem its import. When I suggested that the West Indian voice in "Stereotype" by John Agard:

"I'm a fullblooded  
West Indian stereotype  
See me straw hat?  
Watch it good"<sup>4</sup>

might be changed to a gypsy there was an enthusiastic response. They could see immediately I made the suggestion how the poem might need to be altered in order to make it work for a Czech setting.

Another group were looking at a passage from The Iron Man<sup>5</sup> where spring is described and daffodils are mentioned.

"So the Spring came round the following year, leaves unfurled from the buds,  
daffodils speared up from the soil, and everywhere the grass shook new green points".

I heard the Czech word *pampeliška* (dandelion) mentioned and went over to the pair to see what they were doing. When I discovered they were discussing a different flower I talked to them about *narcis* (the equivalent Czech word) and how there are many daffodils in the spring growing wild or in public parks and private gardens. I had just come from England where I was enjoying the spring flowers for the first time in three years and recalled that I hadn't seen any daffodils in the three spring seasons I was in Brno. Daffodils with echoes of Wordsworth have strong cultural resonances as they are a part of the English literary heritage and are embedded in our notions of an English spring. I would imagine that such aspects of Englishness would be very hard to pick out without prior experience.

Similarly the sheep mentioned in the spring description did not register with the pair. Animals are kept indoors in the Czech Republic because the winters are too cold and there is not enough annual precipitation to provide the necessary quality of grass. Sheep meat is not common, these animals being kept more in mountainous Slovakia. The few Czech sheep I have seen are an unprepossessing brown colour and are very different from the white appealing sheep characteristic of the spring countryside in Britain.

It seems from the above points that two separate areas need to be explained. The first is why there appears to be no recognition that something is completely different from a Czech setting as seen in the reading of "Stereotype" and secondly where the indicators are unlikely to be picked up unless the reader already knows the country quite well as is seen in the examples from The Iron Man

The indicators that were identified by the students are presented in Table 4. I have divided the comments made by the students in Group 1 into the categories given to groups 2 and 3. The students' own words have been kept as well as the categories selected by them. Any additional comments by myself are in brackets. A commentary on the results now follows:

It appears that there was some confusion in the students' minds with the categories. In terms of "*explanation*" it seems that some of the students thought this meant explanation for the child reader and not an explanation concerned with culture. For example one pair listed the change of the Iron Man's eyes from blue to red when happy or angry as needing explanation. Now this is linked more to their notions of what a child would understand and is a strong indicator of the differences in attitude towards children where the Czechs are more protective towards children.

Many items listed under "*explanation*" were connected to "*problem words and phrases*" and again there was some confusions in the student's minds as whether the problems were caused by their own lack of knowledge of particular words or whether the words and phrases were intrinsically difficult.

Another area of confusion appears to be whether some students thought the problem words and phrases may be for a Czech reading the text in English. For example such words as "unfurled", "buds" and "stove" are not necessarily difficult to translate.

The students found it hard to identify cultural indicators in some of the texts they studied during their Children's Literature seminars. While it is clear from the first empirical research in November that they have ideas about English culture and remember the stories they read, certain connections are not being made. While there is a long list of cultural indicators for Deathwood Letters it must be born in mind that each student only picked out a few indicators: the list is a summation of *all* their ideas.

Once more it appears that the students are presuming that our cultures are similar even when it is clear as in the case of Culture Shock that there are enormous differences. The students were still viewing England and the English language from a theoretical viewpoint and focus largely on linguistic elements. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

In the light of the above, I decided to have another try and would formulate the task differently for the nine students who were coming to Worcester on a study-tour at the end of April.

#### **Cultural Indicators in The Deathwood Letters<sup>i</sup>**

In previous enquiries with the second year students I found that they identified only a few cultural indicators in a variety of texts known to them. In general discussion the students commented on whether the books were suitable for children and were surprised at the topics. It was clear from these comments and from the reactions of the study-tour students that there are differences in notions of childhood and independence. However, even the surface level indicators which seemed clear and

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<sup>i</sup> For a detailed analysis of the text see Chapter 7 "The Deathwood Letters".

obvious to me were not picked up by the students. I decided this time to change the question and ask them to look at a particular section of a book and write down all the things that would have to be changed if they were going to translate not only the *language* of the book but also the *culture*. In other words they were going to make the book Czech.

The task was given to the students during the last week of their study-tour. By then they had visited a number of schools, had attended lectures and seminars, taken part in Rag Week and visited local places of interest. Although they were in small groups, I asked them to work on their own but they could discuss matters or ask each other questions if they wished. We discussed one area first as an example. I chose the difficulties of translating the two schools the children go to because one is a State Middle School and the other is a Private Junior School. Each group came up with suggestions and it served to trigger their thinking.

Each student was asked to read through the first batch of letters and they began to work quickly and were engaged for over half-an-hour. As soon as they started they were absorbed and busy writing picking out many factors that would need to be changed. They seemed to be working in a different way to how they approached the task in March in their seminar. They found the task interesting and were happy to continue for another fifteen minutes and even take their papers away to complete later.

The question arises as to whether I had found the right way of asking for what I had wanted or whether the experience of being in the UK had made them realise the differences because what had happened was that finally the theoretical had changed to the practical.

The question also arises about how differently they were reading this time. The task allowed them to overtly reflect on their own culture and apply what they know about English culture. It may also be surmised that if they were automatically creating a Czech template from the text without realising it, then this task allowed them to stand back and defamiliarise their reading. Whatever the reason the number of and quality of the cultural indicators that were unearthed will now be discussed starting with a consideration of linguistic features.

There are many spelling errors in the letters the two children write and this was addressed and suggestions were made about how this could be dealt with in Czech. Although Czech is easier to spell because it is virtually phonetic, the students noted that Czech children confuse "i" and "y", "z" and "s", "f" and "v" and "k" and "g" and this could be incorporated in the Czech edition. It was noticed that there would be problems in the misreading of "goal" and "gaol"<sup>6</sup> "Deathwood" could be directly translated without problems but the pronunciation as "Deethwood"<sup>7</sup> would probably have to be left.

It is interesting to note that this time some discourse features of the text were identified. Colloquial expressions "spooky" and "yuck"<sup>8</sup> were considered difficult to translate as was "posh"<sup>9</sup> which has strong colonial connotations as it originates from the voyage to India where the best cabins were on the port side going out and the starboard side going home. Phrases such as "a right bully"<sup>10</sup> were identified by two students as a problem while to be "legless"<sup>11</sup> was easily translated to "na mol" (like a moth) an equivalent Czech expression. Apparently there are many expressions for being drunk in both our cultures. The colloquial expressions "Had a fit" and "keeping an eye on me"<sup>12</sup> were considered not to be so very different in Czech. The students, however, did not pick up the different "voices" of the two children as they wrote their letters as it would require more skill and knowledge of the English language to do this.

A large number of cultural differences were identified. A fundamental aspect of the story is the differing social classes of the two letter-writers. The girl Francis is from the disaffected working class and the boy, Damian, from the upper classes. This is fundamentally different from a Czech situation where up to 1989 there was little difference in the salaries between rich and poor. All private property had been confiscated in 1948 and became state-owned. After 1989 a number of changes occurred, including the restitution of properties to their owners. Also both large and small businesses developed and salaries increased. Conspicuous consumption began to appear, more restaurants opened up and on the roads Skodas, the low status state national car, were replaced by BMW's and Mercedes. Some of this "new" money is suspect as a certain amount of "black money" is around and "laundering" is taking place. What is much more obvious now is the gap between the "have" and the "have nots". The housing market too is gradually changing to reflect the new circumstances. However, the majority of Czechs in towns still live in flats (*panelák*) on housing estates built in the early seventies.

In the plot Damian's father is wealthy, a member of the House of Lords and his uncle receives invitations to Royal weddings. His parents give dinner parties, employ staff, including a chauffeur, and enjoy expensive holidays in places like the Bahamas. Francis, on the other hand, lives in a run-down semi-detached house with a damp cellar. Her mother has left home and she lives with her unemployed father and older brother

A number of solutions for making this situation Czech were offered. "Deathwood Hall" became for Jan *l'ila u Mrtveho Lesa* with *vila* being seen as an appropriate word to describe a large house. Nada also noted that Czech houses with a lake, a big garden and walls are called *l'ile*. "Deathwood" could be translated literally without problems. Marketa thought Damian would live in a large new house with a high fence around it:

*"I think clever rich people (and I think Damian's parents are clever) would show off that they are well-off. The house wouldn't have to necessarily look like a castle".*

The word "castle" needs some explanation. In Czech there are two words used *hrad* meaning a fortification which is the close to the English word "castle" and *zamek* which is equivalent to a stately home, grand house or palace. Czechs invariably use the word castle when referring to both *hrad* and *zamek*. I think that what Marketa means is that Deathwood Hall does not have to look like an historic stately home. Because of the change of circumstances described above, all rich people in the Czech Republic are nouveau riche and its interesting to see her reaction to these people who want to show off about their money. This may be contrasted to the English "old rich" who are likely to be more circumspect about their wealth.

Some interesting theories about where Father's money comes from were expounded. Rene thought that:

*"Damian's house probably is inherited (maybe thanks to restitution) or bought from money made by his father who utilises a gap in the law".*

This is very delicately put as there were and still are "gaps in the law" which is not surprising with the changeover from a communist system to a capitalist one.

Many found it difficult to come to terms with the staffing in Deathwood Hall as it is still unusual for people to employ staff apart from foreigners in Embassies. Eva's comment on staff "*we don't have it, I think*" indicates that employing people in the home is still a new concept. Constance, the housekeeper, plays albeit unwittingly, an important part in the plot and is also Damian's main adult contact. Ondrej thought "housekeeper" would be difficult to translate and either "servant" or "au pair" would be used. Rene changed the housekeeper into an old aunt.. Nada suggested that instead of using the word staff their actual jobs were described such as "maid" or "cardriver". It was also noted that it was not usual for Czech families to employ staff to keep an eye on their children.

The Royal weddings mentioned above were changed to Presidential functions. Ondrej found a problem with the stables:

*"Not even high society own horses there would be a garage instead of stables".*

Expensive cars such as BMW's are enjoying a very high status although there is an equestrian interest in the Czech Republic in terms of sports and events. It appears that owning a horse doesn't have the same status as it does in the UK.

Constance is from New Zealand and the students noted the Commonwealth link Jan observed:

*"...doubtful if a New Zealander would come to the Czech Republic to work as a housekeeper. There are historical and hereditary ties between Britain and New Zealand"*

Austria was suggested as an equivalent referring back to the times when Bohemia and Moravia were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire although the Austrians were the dominant group the opposite of the relationship between the "colonies" of the British Empire. Another suggestion was that Constance was from Slovakia, now a separate country but once connected. Ondrej thought some other country of ex-eastern Europe origins would be suitable.

Damian's father is Sir Edmund Drake and is a member of parliament. The problems of this title were addressed. Ondrej thought the title would have to be changed to a count or an earl. He noted that "Titles are becoming used again and some even buy them". Three other students noted that there was no equivalent to "Sir" in Czech and another suggestion using the term Duke. Sir Edmund Drake has many political friends and there were some suggestions that business friends should also be added. The notion of holding "dinner parties" was discussed as there are apparently cultural differences. Eva wrote "*Dinner parties - not common here*". Nada felt a description of their purpose would have to be included such as a special celebration.

At the other end of the social scale there is Francis' family and some suggestions were made about where she might live. Some students thought a *panelak* on a housing estate would be suitable while others suggested an unmodernised house in the country.

The notion of unemployment was discussed as both Francis' father and brother are out of work. Prior to 1989 there was officially no unemployment in the Czech Republic. Now there is some unemployment but at 3.3% (1993 estimate CIA briefing paper) it is still low compared to the UK. On the other hand in Prague there are many opportunities for work but there is a chronic housing shortage. The students picked out unemployment as an indicator but disagreed about how to deal with it. Ondrej wrote:

*"lost his job 3 years ago"<sup>13</sup> would translate the same; however it's not very usual for a man in our country to be unemployed for such a long time".*

On the other hand Jan thought the phrase "if my dad gets a job"<sup>14</sup> should not be changed because *"unemployment is a reality of our life, too."*

There was great confusion about what "the Welfare"<sup>15</sup> meant. Presumably before 1989 with full employment there was less need for social support services. Jan suggested the term *socialka socialni urad*, social services, while Ondřej wrote

*"not a single word equivalent though could be described as an organisation for supporting children's rights. I don't think there's something like that in our country. There might be something against child abuse".*

Others also focused on the notion of welfare as a support group for youngsters. *Modra linka* (blue line) was mentioned which is an organisation where children and teenagers can go and tell their problems. Others just wrote that they didn't understand what it meant.

Marketa had problems with Francis living with father and not mother (mother has run off with another man abandoning her family) and it was suggested that Francis should be living with her mother who is not unemployed but has a low-paid job. While this may conform to a Czech setting, it would change the plot enormously because it is Francis father and brother who plan to kidnap Damien.

In terms of education not only was the difference between state and private schools picked out but also that the schools were both named after Saints and were Christian. They had all visited Church of England primary schools as well as the two Worcester private schools were able to identify these indicators easily. Both private and religious schools are beginning to appear in the Czech Republic and the students were able to find equivalents after a little bit of thought. Damian plays in goal in the second eleven which proved a difficult concept for many of the students although this had been explained when the book was read for the first time. This is because, while some Czech schools are designated sports schools, not all schools automatically have teams. Football is played but is not a major sport ice-hockey being the more popular winter game.

Many students noted that project work which is referred to by Francis is less likely to occur in Czech classrooms and suggested changes to essay writing or preparation for an exam. Other smaller cultural differences were noted and changed by the students such as substituting coffee or tea, changing Scrabble to another game such as chess and finding an equivalent of the television programme "Blue Peter". However there were areas that proved more problematic.

The most difficult one was the reference to "Sir Francis Drake"<sup>16</sup> where Francis asks whether Damien's family is related. Further humour is generated with reference to father's lack of ability at playing bowls. The students were unable to pick up this reference to a mythical episode of English history which is embedded in the English psyche. Ondrej suggested changing bowls to tennis or golf. Jan noted that it was "...impossible not to refer to English history". Rene suggested that Sir Francis Drake should be changed to Jan Hus the Czech Protestant martyr. Barbora was baffled: "'play bowls' what does this mean in the context?" Iva noted it would be difficult to translate while Marketa helpfully suggested using Emil Lohm a Czech explorer who went to Africa.

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<sup>16</sup> I remember going to an exhibition at the "Muzeum Anthropos" in Brno which was organised to coincide with the anniversary of the "discovery" of America. There were large panels with maps, routes and explorers. I noticed Sir Francis Drake's name and went over to read about him only to discover that he was described as "a famous English pirate". A salutary experience about the writing of history.



The dog food vouchers Damian is given proved a sticking point for some. Before 1989 these items did not exist and pets were fed on scraps. Tins of cat and dog food are now appearing in Czech supermarkets and dog ownership is increasing due in part to heavy advertising of western brands of dog food such as "Pal". But there are also differences in attitudes about animals between the two cultures. This is reflected in one student's comments about the newspaper story concerning Damian's rescue of his dog from a well:

*"Many people wouldn't be interested if a boy rescued a dog. It wouldn't be printed even if the boy was from a rich family".*

There is now an equivalent of "The Sun" in the Czech Republic. This newspaper *Blesk* prints sensationalist stories but apparently even *Blesk* may not be interested in dog rescue bids. Apparently the Czechs do not have the same fascination with animals as the English. It may also be true that students don't read such newspapers and are unaware of their contents.

Both Damian and Francis are keen readers of children's books and write to each other about what they are reading and recommend books to each other. Such writers as Raymond Briggs, Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl and Helen Cresswell are mentioned. These were all identified by the students and changes were made to well-known writers of Czech children's stories with no perceived problems. However, they are unlikely to have come across the work of Roald Dahl as he was not included in the Children's Literature course I taught and is only now being translated into Czech. Similarly I doubt whether the students knew Raymond Briggs' Fungus the Bogeyman so were unaware that finding equivalents would be somewhat difficult as both authors have their unique styles and black sense of humour.

The notion of a Christmas list <sup>17</sup> proved difficult. Father Christmas does not deliver presents on Christmas Eve in the Czech Republic instead it is *Jeziček* (little Jesus). Instead children are given small presents by Sv Mikuláš (St Nicholas) in early December if they have been good. Children can ask their parents or offer hints about what they would like from the infant Jesus but it is unlikely that they would submit a list.

It can be seen from the comments above that each of the nine students was able to identify a large number of cultural indicators compared to results in Brno in March where students in all three groups were able to identify only a few indicators each. The quality of thought put into this task and the amount of detail unearthed is on a much higher level than previous attempts. The students were this time actively engaged with the text and were really applying all their knowledge of both cultures. This is due to the following:

- The students had been in England for three weeks on a study programme where they had the opportunity to visit schools and experience student life. The quality of this experience is different from coming to England as a tourist as the students had the opportunity to see and reflect on aspects of English life not normally afforded to the average tourist.
- The students were away from the Pedagogical Faculty and were more relaxed about expressing their ideas and giving their opinions as the atmosphere of testing for the right answer was removed.
- The revised task was successful because when the students were asked to make the story "Czech", it made the boundaries visible giving them a chance to reflect on the taken-for-granted aspects of their own culture which they could then apply to the text.

### **Cohort C**

Attitudes towards the texts read on the course was revealed in my initial interviews with this cohort. Below are the students' comments which are discussed under each text recalled.

#### **The Deathwood Letters**

This was the most popular book with all groups saying how much they enjoyed it.. Dasha in group 1 said *"It was the most interesting book we read"*. Leona in group 2 read the book twice and commented on the style: *"because I like the style how it was written. Like it was in letters. Not a normal book but letters"*. Blanka in group 3 also commented on the style *"The idea of organising the book was very different from other books"*.

Cultural indicators concerning social class were immediately picked out by the students and it was noticeable that some of the students began to relate this to their own rapidly-changing society. Simona in group 5 observed how fast Czech society was changing and was worried about the loss of values and changes in relationships between people which are increasingly centred on the acquisition of material goods:

*"If I can think of, you know, I'm still looking back to Communism. But I think it's a good example to compare it because in that system almost all the children were at the same level so they didn't make friends according to the class or to the money of their parents or the clothes they are wearing so I think it was for me a great experience to judge my friends not according to these things but according to the activities of behaviour and now it's really bad because the children sometimes cannot really make these, judge, in a good way. So maybe they are confused."*

Both students thought the book should be translated into Czech as it showed friendship across the class divide and demonstrated that money was not the only criteria in leading a happy or fulfilled life.

The relationship between the two children is picked up by Blanka in Group 3

*“And there we learned something from the English culture about life of rich people. About life of poor people also about the children’s friendship. How it can be”.*

Andrea observed that *“...rich people, they show their riches.”* And then wondered how it would affect her life if she became rich: *“I just can’t imagine what my behaviour would be like if I was to inherit something”.* As mentioned above, one of the ways Czechs have become rich is from restitution where land and property confiscated in the late 1948 is being restored to families.

Cohort A read this text in 1993, only 3 years after the fall of communism while the Cohort C’s reading was 5 years after when changes in society were more obvious. Differences between rich and poor became visible during the last year I was in the country with a growing culture of conspicuous consumerism. This last group of students read the text in a different way because they had more experience of travel abroad and because of the social changes occurring in their own society. However, while there were aspects of The Deathwood Letters that the students could relate to, most of them could not make a connection with The Iron Man

### The Iron Man<sup>i</sup>

The students remembered the book when I asked them about it and most of them thought it was not suitable for children. From their comments about how the text was presented in seminars by my colleague, discussed above, it appears that some of the devices I used, such as role play, were not incorporated into the lessons. This left the students outside the text rather than becoming more involved with the issues inside it. It must be said that the cohorts I taught also were not sure about its suitability for children, as did some of the adults in summer schools, but these groups at least had enjoyed reading it at their own level.

Petra in group 1 thought it was a *“modern fairy tale which has meaning in modern life”*. Blanka in group 3 observed *“It was quite modern fairy tale.”* Here are examples of the slippage of meaning between fairy tale and children’s story which has already been observed with students in the previous cohort. I asked group 1 what they thought that meaning was but they were unable to answer. It appears that they hadn’t really discussed the book.

Leona in group 2 did not enjoy The Iron Man because *“I like classic fairy tales and it was like Science Fiction”*.

Andrea in the same group didn’t think it was suitable for children : *“The imagination of something so big and so iron and so cold and if I was a child it would scare me maybe.”*

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 5 “The Iron Man” for an analysis of the text.

Both students were surprised it was a book for children. *"It was like horror for me. So I wouldn't recommend it to my child"* (Leona).

Andrea appeared to enjoy it at her level

*"It was a good story about the dragon and so on. It was interesting for me to read when I came to a certain point but the beginning was really not, not nice. I wouldn't read it to my children"*.

Lucie in group 3 did not take to the book

*"I didn't like it. I don't like modern fairy tales. A strong man might frighten children a lot. Compare it with Arnold Schwarzenegger, Iron Man"*

Simona in group 5 didn't like the book but was able to talk about the issues raised in the story:

*"Maybe The Iron Man had some improvements in ecology, should be done in improving the environment."*

I asked her about the independence of the boy Hogarth in the story and she observed that:

*"British children are more independent than Czech children so maybe sometimes they wouldn't quite understand the activities or the things that a small boy is doing so maybe they think it's in a different country or somewhere else."*

She is saying is that Czech children would have more difficulty identifying with Hogarth because they are not used to either having such independence or being able to help adults solve problems. Now the question arises as to what extent English children can really put toward their views to adults. But whatever happens in reality the idea of independence is certainly strong and is reflected in such notions of children becoming responsible for their own learning which permeates the education system. Moreover, English children's literature is packed with independent, adventurous children who manage to achieve what adults cannot

### **The Oral Tradition and The Paper Bag Princess<sup>1</sup>**

I had already gathered from previous interviews with students that fairy stories are very dear to them. I was interested to find out if the students remembered The Paper Bag Princess in particular, if they liked it and whether there were similar retellings of Czech fairy stories.

Petra in group 1 was clear about her feelings *"Well I don't think we like it because we are used to our traditional fairy tales"*

However many of the students recalled it and appeared to enjoy it on their level but they were not sure about its suitability for children. This is reflected in the following conversation with Leona and

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 4 "The Oral Tradition" for an analysis of the texts

Andrea in group 2. I had asked them if they remembered this feminist version. They both laughed and said yes then Leona said:

*"I remember...oh I think of the illustration (pause) The Princess and..."*

Sandra: *Did you think it was a good idea to change or modernise the fairy tales?*

Andrea: *I think it was more funny for adults.*

Leona: *Yes, we had really good fun for us but for children they are used to the classics and the good princes and even better princesses and this princess says "OK, I don't want you and...."*

Sandra: *Too shocking for you?*

Leona: *It seemed to me more like children's story for adults than fairy tales for children."*

In group 3 the response was different. After asking if they remembered the story Blanka said:

*"I feel myself to be a feminist. We appreciate it" (laughter).*

So it is not surprising that Blanka thought it was a good story for children to read but in my experience this is a rare comment. The reasons for this are discussed in Chapter 1, where it will be recalled that the rights of women were discredited under the Communist system. The ideology asserted there was equality for women whereas in reality this was not the case and celebrations such as International Women's Day were seen as a sham. The Women's Movement years in the West over the last 30 has not permeated the country because it was so isolated. While a gradual change is happening in this area, women were only just beginning to assess their position in society.

Lenka in group 4 thought it was suitable for older children but not younger ones before they knew the originals because *"they might be disappointed by the original version"*

Jana agreed with Lenka and recalled a task they were given which was to write their own modern version of a fairy tale which both of them enjoyed.

Jitka's comment shows her unromantic view of the world :

*"I can remember that it had a strange ending because the boy or prince didn't appreciate her help so it was a similar to like in real life...."*

But there was a sense when talking to the students about this book of them wishing to protect children from the politics of the outside world where a strong feeling of retaining notions of childhood innocence is maintained. However, I was interested to hear Simona in group 5 talk about subversion in the traditional stories as it is another example of a student referring to communist times. She made

a couple of points which are embedded in her discourse. Firstly she thought that there were hidden comments on the system in the stories:

*"I think there were the kind of things the authors could do and that the Communists didn't pay much attention to fairy tales so they could even put some hints you know in their. Some hidden hints ..."*

I asked for some examples of these "hidden hints" and so did Jitka: *"What do you mean about these communist things?"*

Simona found this difficult to answer and she thought these hints would not be picked up by the child reader but for her *"maybe it's kind of my imagination but I see something like they are saying that communism or a dictator is bad."*

I suggested that in fairy stories there is often a small person winning over the powerful by some means and that could be used as a metaphor for their situation. Both students readily agreed with this idea.

Her second point is also interesting because she talked about how well the stories were presented in the past on TV as cartoons or animation. She expressed concern about what is happening now to fairy stories:

*"...they can still make good fairy tales and film but its more becoming the American way of making films and I'm afraid they are losing that kind of traditional Czech fairy tales."*

The book shops are full of Walt Disney products and the cinemas are showing his films. Simona is echoing Czech her fears about "Disneyfication" in particular and the Americanisation of her culture in general. It is ironic that while under communism the Czech tradition of producing fairy stories was left alone and the quality of the product was high now there are constraints which are financial. With a new form of imperialism developing, it will be interesting to see how the Czechs resist this as I am sure they will.

### Winnie-the-Pooh<sup>i</sup>

I was interested in the students' comments about Winnie-the-Pooh because it is so well-known having been translated into Czech as *Medvídek Pu*<sup>18</sup>. (Little Bear Pu). A Czech cartoon has appeared on TV as well as the Walt Disney. While Winnie-the-Pooh may be seen by some as quintessential English because the students know it in Czech they regard it as their own.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 8 "Winnie-the-Pooh" for an analysis of the text.

Winnie-the-Pooh was the first book mentioned by Petra in group 1: *"Well some of the books were interesting. Books like "Pooh" and "Alice in Wonderland". I think they are not just for children ..."*

Dasha in the same group knew the stories from cartoons. On the other hand Andrea and Leona in group 2 had not come across the stories in Czech so their first reading was in English. Andrea has some insightful comments on the way the stories work:

*"It was written in such a nice way. And its really like if children wrote it because Winnie the Pooh was talking in a funny way and thinking like a child. So I think it must be close to children because it's so simple and if there are any strange word the Pooh makes fun of it and it's really like a children's world".*

Her comments show why it might be popular with Czechs as it appears to reflect a childhood innocence that they are keen to preserve.

Lucie and Blanka had not read the book in seminars. I don't know if their class had not read it or whether they were absent when it was being studied. I didn't really want to pursue the reasons in the short time I had for interviews. However, Lucie knew the book in Czech from when she was a child and also came across it again when she was in her Grammar school where the text was used in her philosophy class. Unfortunately Lucie could not remember what she had been taught in that class. She repeated a sentence in Czech but could not translate it, even with the assistance of Blanka. Both students had good levels of English so I can only imagine that this was an example of rote-learning without understanding. However, this indicates that Winnie-the-Pooh is part of Czech consciousness as well as English and it would be difficult for Czechs knowing the stories in their own language and with their own illustrator to pick out cultural indicators.

This is reflected in Jitka's comments from group 5:

*"I liked Winnie-the-Pooh. I think it was quite similar to Czech fairy tales from that time. So I liked it because the time when it was written about. I don't think it's typically English fairy tale. I personally didn't find anything English."*

I failed to ask Jitka what period she thought it was. Jitka knew the stories in Czech and had seen a Czech cartoon version. Simona in the same group also couldn't think of anything English about the stories and was curious: *"Maybe you can suggest something. I didn't think about it"* She also really enjoyed the stories: *"I really enjoyed reading that and I was even reading it with my friends you know"*.

Simona knew two versions of the stories in Czech, one with Žápal's illustrations and one with Shepard's.

While A. A. Milne's stories were enjoyed by the students, indicating perhaps universals in the stories that may be identified by many different cultures, anything specifically English was not evident. Another well-known children's classic was mentioned by several students this will be discussed next.

### Alice's Adventures in Wonderland<sup>i</sup>

This is well-known in the Czech Republic and these students appeared to have enjoyed reading it. When I taught it, I did not have much time left to spend on it and was not sure how much the students were getting from it as the language is difficult and the context requires much explanation. The comments from this cohort were encouraging with the majority of students enjoying the fantasy but they thought it would be too difficult to use in schools. With this misunderstanding about why they were reading the text, discussed above, it might indicate that some students may have resisted the story. While most of the brief comments made concerned fantasy and imagination and strangeness, Jana in group 4 thought there were class divisions with *"the different animals representing kinds of social classes"*. Food was another indicator which was mentioned briefly.

### Culture Shock<sup>ii</sup>

I wondered if the students would recall this anthology of poetry and while they did not initiate comment some remembered when I asked them a direct question or reminded them. Lucie in group 3 observed *"...it was something new. I've never read something like this. It was interesting"*.

It was Simona in group 5, who had been to America, who was enthusiastic and forthcoming:

*"Oh that was really a good fun. There was something about donuts and what was that?...That was great. I think there were great poems and it really, I liked that one about maybe it was about Indians or American Native Indians or something like that explaining..."*

Now this is interesting because the poem she is referring to is "Stereotype" and is a critique on white people's assumptions when they see a West Indian. Now it is clear that Simona read the poem with American culture in her mind and did not picture a black Englishman. Her experience of being in the USA gave her the experience of issues concerning ethnic minorities but did not quite manage to picture the ethnic minority in relation to England.

I asked the students if there were such political elements in Czech children's literature. Simona thought it was quite innocent and *"maybe it should stay this way"*. Jitka had a slightly different opinion:

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 10 "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" for an analysis of the text.

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 5 "Culture Shock" for an analysis of the text.



*“anyway it should be somewhere in the middle. To suggest something but not too much because then children can be confused. Maybe for the small children. I really would stick to that innocent kind of humour”.*

### **The Wind in the Willows**

I never had the time to read The Wind in the Willows with my groups so I didn't ask questions about this children's classic because I wanted to compare this cohort's comments on the same texts as the groups I had taught. However, it was mentioned by the students in group 4 as containing indicators about the English class system. But they said they would not have noticed this unless it had been pointed out by myself when I was observing the class on one of my research visits and contributing to the discussion.

Texts not mentioned during our conversations were William's Version, Tales from the Early Word the Myths, and poetry by Walter-de-la-Mare.

In spite of their criticisms of the methodology, which appears to be based on a combination of inexperienced teacher and misunderstanding about the purpose of the course, the students were happy to engage in conversation about the texts which were broadly remembered

The students in this cohort were more forthcoming in a number of areas compared with the other cohorts interviewed. They appeared more confident, had more advanced levels of English and were more widely travelled with several having worked in the UK for short periods of time. A number of students referred to the past totalitarian system and were able to make some comments about recent changes in their country. Fewer stereotypes about England were revealed with the students relying more on their experiences abroad. They were also able to pick out some cultural indicators in the texts discussed. They appeared to be more comfortable in discussing differences between our two cultures than the other two cohorts who tended to see similarities.

The most significant cultural indicator revealed was the difference in attitude towards children where Czech children are protected and encouraged to remain innocent for a much longer period than English children. This is why the Czech students often found an English book not suitable for children. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

### **Cohort C students in Worcester**

The students were given the texts to study in their own time and a task to complete, which was to identify any cultural indicators they could find in all the texts read on the course, and then to take part of one specific text to “make Czech”. The group of 6 students were interested in the task and undertook it conscientiously. A summary of the indicators identified are presented in Table 8

It will be seen that there is a combination of surface level indicators concerned with everyday life such as food, English money, and sports plus deeper level indicators about English society which involve social class and racism. Attitudes towards children are also revealed in the students' observations about children's behaviour. William in William's Version is seen as a naughty self-centred boy but it is also noted that he has more freedom and there is a focus on independence. The neglect of children is seen in The Deathwood Letters

Differences between Czech and English children's literature are also picked out. For example the manipulation of language in Winnie-the-Pooh stories and the inclusion of non-native animals like Tigger and Kanga. Links with the British colonial past were identified in Walter-de-la-Mare's poem "Tartary" where dreams of ivory, citron-trees and zebras might be part of an English consciousness but would not be according to one Fast Track student "*the sort of things a Czech person might dream*". An detailed account of the students' comments follows. The first set of comments on each text are an amalgam of all six student's ideas and the second part of suggesting how the text might be made "Czech" is the work in each case of an individual student.

### William's Version<sup>i</sup>

William's naughty behaviour was deemed typical of English children and was compared unfavourably with Czech children. English children are typified as having more freedom; behaving badly and are allowed to be self-centred. Granny was viewed by the students as "*putting up with it*" and is "*reconciled to his every whim*". One student thought that "*... the thoughts of the boy are negative to the point of sadism*".

There appeared to be little analysis of why William is behaving the way he was and when ever I introduced Jan Mark's story to a class of Czech students, it took some time to draw out why William is being so difficult.

A number of surface indicators were picked up which mainly consisted of lexical items: Sandwich, bomb-site, fire place, the address (15 Tennyson Avenue), afternoon tea, chips. The bus conductor was also identified as an English feature.

### **Changes into Czech Culture:**

The student who undertook this task made a number of changes, some minor and others more significant. The minor ones are discussed first. The cupboard by the fireplace where William finds the first aid book should be moved to the kitchen as in Czech stories grannies usually keep important things in the kitchen. It appears that there is an assumption that Granny lives with William and his parents and the books and magazines in the cupboard belong to her. An English reader may not make

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 4 "The Oral Tradition" for an analysis of the text.

such an assumption as it is equally likely that Granny lives near and has come round to baby-sit while William's mother is at the clinic. It is also suggested that the fireplace is omitted because open fireplaces are unusual in the country even in older properties. More typical, before the introduction of central heating, is a stove which may be seen in both village cottages and large Stately Homes.

Another suggestion was to change William's name ie to *Honza* or *l'itek* which are common Czech names. I wondered why the change was necessary because the Czech equivalent "l'ilem" is not so unusual. However, the name "*Honza*" would have connotations for a Czech reader because there is a series of well-loved folk tales about "*Hloupy Honza*" (Silly John). Perhaps the somewhat anarchic behaviour of William is connected with *Hloupy Honza* the mind of the student

I did wonder whether the student would notice that 15, Tennyson Avenue is named after a famous English poet. The suggestion that it should be changed to *Třesnová 15*, (Cherry Street) indicates that this was not picked up and it's likely that Cherry Street was selected as being a typical Czech name for a street.

There are no bus-conductors on Czech public transport as tickets are bought in advance or in an emergency purchased from the driver so it was suggested that the change was made to replace conductor to bus driver who also sells tickets. However, it would alter the story considerably because in the story "William Wolf" eats the conductor and the bus continue its journey. It should be added here that bus conductors are also becoming rarer in England where the driver now typically takes fares and drives the bus but the changes are more recent and are likely not to present problems to an English reader. Chips are replaced with a typical Czech meal of bread or dumplings.

The student was not sure how well known the story of "The Three Little Pigs" is in the Czech Republic. This is an important point because the text works on the assumption that the reader knows the story well. It was suggested that it might be changed into a tale well-known to a Czech reader.

The key difference between English and Czech culture was in the behaviour of William. The student observed that William also seems to be

*"quite spoilt and naughty"... " If it was to be a Czech story, I would make William less naughty or granny would tell him off a few times."*

Czech children are more disciplined, have to behave well in public and are not encouraged to behave independently. The implied English reader of the William's Version is given space to work out why William is behaving as he is and can admire the way granny resolves William's problem by letting him work out his aggression and pain.

Czech children are not only encouraged to behave well but are also more protected and this is reflected in the following comment:

*“Moreover, William has got a violent thinking, which is not so common in our country. Or, at least it wasn't when I was little. But the situation is getting worse now. I wouldn't put so much violent ideas into a Czech story”.*

The “black humour” is clearly not appreciated and certainly not considered appropriate for a child to read.

### **Winnie the Pooh**

Some of the students found it difficult to find any cultural indicators in A.A. Milne's stories because as mentioned above, they have been translated into Czech. One student thought of all the texts studied on the course this was the closest to a Czech children's book. Another thought it was similar to a Czech story apart from the choice of animals. Kanga and Tigger were identified as being foreign animals who would not appear in Czech children's stories. Another student agreed and suggested changing some of the animals. While Rabbit, Pooh, Piglet, and Owl would stay the same, Eeyore would become a horse (no reason given) Roo a squirrel and Kanga a deer. The student who made this suggestion had forgotten that Roo is Kanga's son.

One aspect picked out was the play on words like “Heffalump” and “Expotition” which are considered not typical in a Czech children's book. There is a much stronger sense of correctness about language in Czech than English and, as a minority language which virtually disappeared, there is less sense of being able to play around with it than with a powerful language like English which has so many varieties.

### **Changes into Czech Culture: *The Expotition to the North Pole***

The student who undertook with task had not read the Czech version so was not influenced by Skoumalova's translation. On the whole no major changes were suggested. Translating the play on words such as those mentioned above was considered to present problems. Eeyore's name would have to be changed because a Czech donkey says “*Eeh-aah*” as opposed to the English “*Ee-ore*”. However, the most interesting suggestion for change reveals crucial aspects of both English and Czech culture. It was considered that Czech children would find the kangaroo strange so Kanga should be replaced by a hedgehog, a mouse or a cow. This is another indication of the protection of children where it is considered that anything strange would need change or explanation. On the other hand because of our Commonwealth links, Kangaroos are not so strange to English children as associations with Australia were and are still strong. The suggested changes also support the proposition that Czech children's literature is concerned with establishing and maintaining national identity so only native animals would be considered suitable.

### The Iron Man

A number of features were identified as English, the first being linked to landscape “typical for a country by the sea”: cliffs, seamen (sic), seagull, crab, rocky beach. Other surface features picked out were: the picnic in the country, sandwiches, tea, toffee, the name Hogarth, newspapers like The Daily News, daffodils in the spring, yards as a unit of measurement.

On the whole it was considered not so different from Czech Science Fiction with one student observing “*it could fit perfectly to the Czech literature as well*”. However, two important differences are identified. One student picked up the political differences in farming: “*only rarely a farmer with such a private property will appear in our agricultural system*”. Farms in the Czech Republic are still organised as collectives and are very large. A whole village might work at one farm which would not have a name but a number so there would not be the same sense of individual responsibility for what was happening on the farm as an English farmer who owned the land would have.

A second observation from one student:

*“The author is hinting on the aggressiveness of people towards anything new or unusual that threatens to change in some way the course of their lives.”*

indicates that they have considered more than surface features of the text. It can only be surmised whether the aggressiveness referred to is linked to Englishness or is seen as a universal human trait.

### **Changes into Czech Culture: Chapter 3**

A number of lexical items were changed, the first concerning spring flowers. There were still many daffodils blooming in Worcester when the students were here and I pointed them out on their first walk into the City and we had a discussion about the absence of daffodils in a Czech Spring. The student working on this text probably remembered the conversation and changed the daffodils into the more common flower, dandelion. Tea was changed to coffee, the more popular beverage and the picnic tablecloth, which does not feature at a Czech picnic, is exchanged for a blanket. The elm tree is changed into a lime tree as the Czech national tree is the lime and is considered more typical and yards become into metres.

The phrase “to chew like a toffee” was changed to “chew like a raspberry” which is the more common Czech expression.

The farmers were changed to village people for reasons discussed above. The student also was aware of the absence of animals in the fields and picked up the description of the countryside where sheep are grazing. The student noted: “*it's rare to see sheep, cows possible but probably omit animals completely*”.

Poland, a neighbour of the Czech Republic, is referred to in the text as a far off country so should be replaced by another European country which is further from the Czech Republic.

The boy protagonist in The Iron Man has an unusual name, Hogarth, which was not picked up by the student as it was suggested that it be replaced by *Lukaš* or another similar, ordinary Czech name.

### **The Deathwood Letters**

Many cultural indicators were picked out as all cohorts found this the easiest text for the task. Surface indicators identified were Scrabble, English names, currency, food like black pudding, chips, Chelsea buns and sandwiches. The students picked up the religious schools, which are new to the Czech Republic, and the celebration of St. Valentine's Day, which is just becoming popular in their country. Invitations for tea were viewed as being very English. It was also noted that many well-known English children's books are referred to in the text

The clear social divisions were seen as a strong indication of the English class system and signifiers of upper class life styles such as VIP's and dinner parties were also picked out. Two indicators are particularly significant and these concern the how the text is presented and attitudes towards children in contemporary society. The narrative is told through letters which the two children write and are full of spelling mistakes. The Czech students appreciate the difficulties of English spelling but were surprised that such mistakes appear in the letters. Openly revealing such errors was considered to be an English trait. Similarly the neglect of the two children by their families is an aspect of modern English society and the fact that this is expressed in a children's story is seen as an indicator of English culture. Czech children, as mentioned above, are more protected within a close family network and children's stories tend to be about safety and not danger.<sup>i</sup>

### **Changes into Czech Culture**

A number of suggestions were made from the first batch of letters. In order to make the text more Czech, names of people, titles and addresses should be changed as well as currency, names of shops and places. Valentine's day would have to be omitted but there was no suggestion as to what could be put in its place.

The class differences were problematic because the socialist regime all but eradicated such differences and an interested resolution to this problem was suggested which was to move the time to that of the First Republic after World War I as class differences were wider then and the class system

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<sup>i</sup> See section C in Chapter 1 "Czech Children's Literature"

then was seen as being closer to English. An alternative was to tone down the those differences which would alter the focus of the book.

The spelling mistakes are a problem because Czech spelling is not so difficult as it is virtually phonetic and once the rules have been learned it is relatively easy. Mistakes in spelling therefore could be replaced by grammatical mistakes more likely to be made by Czech children. Czech grammar is extremely complicated with seven cases and three genders so this is a useful suggestion. However, it was noted that this might be dangerous as the reader could learn bad habits.

### **Culture Shock**

Poems dealing with aspects of everyday life were seen as an English cultural indicator. Such topics as education, poverty, relating to people from different cultures (described as “meeting other nationalities”) feelings, specially about how ethnic minorities are treated (described as people from “the East” and “poor developing countries”) and dealing with such problems were highlighted as English concerns. In particular the problem of racism was considered English as the Czech Republic is perceived by Czechs as virtually mono-cultural. However it was noted that problems could occur in the future with the ethnic minorities that are present such as gypsies and the Vietnamese.

The students were asked to identify any cultural indicators from the following four poems and these were:

- “Stereotype”: cricket, Oxford
- “War memorials” - none
- “Madman” - irreverence towards father
- “Broadminded” - about race

### **Changes into Czech Culture**

*Stereotype*: It was suggested that the character remained West Indian but would graduate with medicine and not social anthropology. It appears from this suggestion that differences between black students have not been perceived by the student. While there are a number of black students from Marxist African countries still studying in the Czech Republic, these students are usually isolated and remain outsiders. No mention is made of dialect and how the problem of representing this would be overcome. Two other minor changes were to replace cricket with football and Oxford to Charles University.

*War Memorials* - As both countries fought in the First World War it was perceived that the pacifist sentiments expressed in the poem could be felt by both cultures.

*Madman* - No reason was given for the suggestion that father should be changed to brother or sister but is a strong indicator of the difference in relationships between Czech and English families.

It is likely that the student could not conceive of father being referred to as a “madman” as it would be far too disrespectful.

*Broadminded* - A Czech setting would require selection of a different ethnic minority and it was suggested that the implied black voice in the poem is changed to that of a gypsy. Further complications in how to convey this are not discussed.

### **Walter de la Mare Anthology**

Cultural indicators were considered difficult to spot for a variety of reasons. One student mentioned that she was not used to analysing poetry and another referred to the difficult language. It is interesting that while one student thought the poems were similar to Czech poetry another mentioned that the poetry was not of a Czech convention. The students were divided on deciding whether the poems expressed universals or whether they were specifically English. These are comments made about particular poems.

*Night Swans* - The swans themselves were picked out as English. There are hundreds of swans on the River Severn in Worcester and they look particularly beautiful at night as they sleep on the water and drift gently downstream. They would have been seen many times as the students walked into the City and it is likely that reading the poem after seeing the swans would have been evocative. The poem is very sad and another response concerned the author’s state of mind which was not seen as particularly English, but as a universal: “*the state of mind of a Czech person can be the same as of the English author - people are the same all over the world*”. This is another example of the Czech student preferring to see similarities rather than differences.

*Tartary* - There were diametrically opposed views about the day-dream in this poem. One student thought the dreams could be English or Czech while another disagreed and thought a Czech person would not dream of such things as ivory, tigers, zebras and citron-trees. She thought that the poem had connections with former British colonies all over the world where such seemingly “exotic” items had entered English consciousness.

### **Change into Czech Culture**

*Tartary* - no changes because the dreams are universal

The student undertaking this task tended to see universals rather than differences so did not pick out many specific areas that were English. However, there were contradictions in her comments. She began by stating that there were no specific cultural indicators but then noted that it “*is difficult to convey the message of the poem into a Czech culture surroundings, and it actually is not possible.*”



*The Raven's Tomb* - No specific cultural indicators were selected. It was considered a " typical state of depression and sadness that appears in Czech poetry such as poems by Karel Jaromir Erben and other poets".

*The Night Swans*: The flavour of mystery was picked out as a key factor in the poem and the student felt it resembled stories by authors such as Anderson and Skelton. The student felt that as the poem reflected the author's state of mind or his imagination rather than reality then they would not reflect the culture of the author as "*people are the same all over the world*". However, she reiterates that it would be hard to transfer into a Czech cultural expression. It may be that she is referring specially to problems of translation more than culture.

### Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Food appeared a number of times as an indicator with the following items identified as English: treacle, marmalade, custard, roast turkey, cherry tart and tea-time itself. English currency and miles were also picked up. The ceremonial setting of the court with twelve jurors was seen as English as were members of the aristocracy, the queen and the duchess. The game of croquet was mentioned as was the Cheshire cat, a daisy chain and, surprisingly, a hookah.

On another level, one student focused on the character of Alice and her active engagement with the strange world round her where she "... wonders at people's false nature, at their pretending to be what they are not. She is making fun of their simplicity, foolishness and ignorance". Although unstated it is the active engagement by the child that is seen as an indicator of Englishness.

Another student considered the absurdity of the court scene and the jurors a reminder of life under totalitarian times in the Czech Republic which raises possibilities of a subversive reading of the text.

### **Changes into Czech Culture:**

The main point made by the student undertaking this task was that it could be read and enjoyed by adults but is a difficult text for children. The violence was seen as unsuitable for small children: "*the silencing of the guinea-pigs or the mentioning of someone being beheaded, as young people at that period (in our country at least) are very sensitive and insinuations like that would result in them becoming depressed*". The student suggested that the violent episodes should be cut which again demonstrates a different attitude towards young people's reading.

Interestingly this was the second student who thought the story could well be applied to the totalitarian regime in which the jury may represent the government before the Velvet Revolution. The

student thought that *"It could be made satirical by just giving indirect hints to certain individuals who were in the lead during that period"*.

The responses from the students from Cohort C echo themes which have developed throughout the research process. There is a tendency not to see differences if possible, attitudes towards children are more protective and a number of the texts were not deemed suitable for children. Cohort C, unlike those in A or B, were prepared to talk about the totalitarian past and make links with that regime to certain texts. It remains now to consider the implications of the empirical research and draw some conclusions and these will be given in the following chapter.

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- <sup>1</sup> C. Kramersch Context and Culture in Language Teaching Oxford 1994
  - <sup>2</sup> R Puimini Mattie and Grandpa London 1993
  - <sup>3</sup> T. Hutchinson Project English Heineman London 1997
  - <sup>4</sup> John Agard "Stereotype" in Culture Shock Ed. M. Rosen London 1991 p.1
  - <sup>5</sup> T. Hughes The Iron Man London 1968 p31
  - <sup>6</sup> H Townson The Deathwood Letters 1991 London p.11
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13
  - <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10, 11
  - <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15
  - <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17
  - <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31
  - <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14
  - <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11
  - <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15
  - <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20
  - <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25
  - <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28
  - <sup>18</sup> Skoumalová, H. (translator) Zápál, J. (Illustrations) Medvídek Pů, Albatross Prague 1965

## Chapter 3 : Identifying Cultural Indicators

### *Implications of Empirical Research with Fast Track Students*

The extensive empirical research undertaken with three cohorts of Fast Track students offers a window into Czech culture at a particularly potent time as the country emerges from 50 years of totalitarian rule. The research has demonstrated that to view one's own culture through the perceptions of outsiders is illuminating. In addition not only were perceptions about Englishness revealed but deeply embedded myths about Czech culture were also exposed. In spite of living in Prague and Brno for three-and-a-half years and feeling that I had come to know my students well and engaging fully in all aspects of living there, I have gained a deeper understanding of Czech identity through this research process. A wide range of issues could be selected for analysis such as tracing the changing consciousness of the students as they lived through the dramatic political and social changes which were taking place where they face a future in a completely new political system. However, the focus of this study is on Englishness and myths of national identity and it will be the implications of the students' reactions that will now be examined.

The task that the students faced in finding the Englishness in the texts they studied was not an easy one for the skills, knowledge and experience required in order to get "inside the skin" of another culture should not be underestimated. Such unstated shared meanings which are revealed in texts are hard to see unless the culture is known well. Kramsch uses the term the "cultural imagination" to describe this phenomena which has been:

"...formed by centuries of literary texts and other artistic productions, as well as by certain public discourse in the press and other media." <sup>1</sup>

It is for this reason that children's literature should be included in cultural studies because the books read as children help to form a nation's cultural imagination. Kramsch refers to Ortega's observation that:

"Each language represents a different equation between manifestations and silences...translation is a matter of saying in a language precisely what that language tends to pass over in silence". <sup>2</sup>

While it is accepted that many of such silences might not be easily observed by the students, the key point that emerged was that the students showed a marked reluctance to identify even seemingly obvious and superficial cultural indicators in texts which had been studied in some detail. Cohort 'A' were also reluctant to identify English methodology which is markedly different from Czech classroom practice. A number of reasons will be offered as to why this should be the case, some of

which are closely connected to the particular situation of the Czech Republic and others which are common to all foreign language learners.

The majority of students retained stereotypes about England and the English in spite of evidence to the contrary and this affected the way they approached the task of interrogating the children's literature texts. The stereotypes offered tended to concentrate on significant icons such as Big Ben or ancient University towns while those who were able to go beyond the stereotype were more inclined to discuss people and their behaviour. A clear distinction cannot be drawn between those who visited the UK and those who did not, as even some of the students on the Worcester Study Tour retained some of their stereotypes which indicates that experience alone is not enough to change perceptions. However, it is not unusual for stereotypes to be persistent and the Czech students' tenacity at holding onto an English stereotype is not unique. Bryam, Morgan et al<sup>3</sup> cite a number of studies of foreign language teaching and the attitudes towards the culture of the target language. These show that the process of learning another language does not automatically mean that cultural aspects are somehow automatically "digested". Byram's research reveals that:

"...young people acquire some information but very little knowledge of the foreign culture through language classes"<sup>4</sup>

He notes that stereotypes are "tenacious"<sup>5</sup> and can be deeply embedded. A significant point is made that appertains to the Czech students:

"There can be no negotiation of shared meanings and understanding of the world if interlocuters simply encode their own meanings without seeking to understand its relationship to that of others"<sup>6</sup>

This certainly applies to the Czech students who, because of the way knowledge was not allowed to be questioned, were not used either interrogating or reflecting, tending to see the world as "given". In spite of evidence to the contrary, there lurks in the students' imagination an image of Englishness which has been gleaned from early English lessons with the State course book *Anglictina*<sup>7</sup>. The significance of such publications is supported by Byram who discusses the role of the text book on learners of French in Higher Education

"They too remember as much, and perhaps more vividly, the characters and the world of their first, formative years of learning French - more than they remember or are impressed by the intellectual displays of complex articles from *Le Nouvel Observateur* or *Le Monde*."<sup>8</sup>

This supports my hypothesis that certain stereotypes were formed from the text book *Anglictina*<sup>9</sup>. It was still the most common course book used in the *Zakladni Skola* (Basic School) and for this reason I based my methodology seminars concerned with using text-books in the classroom on *Anglictina*. I also taught with it myself to *Zakladni Skola* pupils and was able to discuss changes that could be made

with my students as we analysed the problems and found strategies to make it relevant and interesting. As such I am well acquainted with it. The emphasis on the course book is the acquisition of lexical items and the learning of correct grammar where the text at the beginning of each chapter is merely a tool for language learning and nothing else. An investigation into *Anglictina* reveals such information as typical English food; English tea-time, customs and the English businessman with bowler hat and rolled up umbrella. The following quotations demonstrates the stereotype of English tea-drinkers, dated language and the idea of similarities where the English are seen as having the same habits as the Russians:

“People in England, just the same as the Russians, like to drink lots of tea...In a typically English town you will not find cafes but only tea-rooms”<sup>10</sup>.

Russian tea-drinking is different from English tea-drinking as they drink their tea black in glasses with water boiled in a samovar. Tea-rooms are redolent of the 30's not the mid 1960's when this edition was published and by the early 1960's coffee bars were firmly established in Britain.

Significant places of interest are mentioned such as Big Ben, St Paul's Cathedral and attention is drawn to University towns like Oxford and Cambridge. The conversations which make up part of the text are usually extremely stilted and totally unrealistic. Looking at *Anglictina* in the 1990's is like viewing an old black and white film from the early 50's. The text also conforms to Marxist-Leninist ideology where the only English newspaper quoted is “The Daily Worker” and reference is often made to “the workers” in the East End of London and the rich in the “West End”. This description of May Day is more like a Czech celebration than an English one<sup>1</sup>:

“In the morning the working people walk through the streets of the town, manifest their solidarity and show the results of their work”<sup>11</sup>

Reference is often made to the polite English. In the 1970's edition the following comments are made:

“When you visit Great Britain, you are pleasantly surprised by the natural politeness of people of all classes.....The English are known for their good table manners”<sup>12</sup>

The British appear to spend their summer holidays in holiday camps which are redolent of the first few post-war decades and a 1973 edition carries an ancient photograph of Piccadilly Circus where the cars and buses still have jutting out head-lamps. But no mention is made of the radical changes that have taken place in English society since the 1950's: ethnic minorities are invisible, cheap foreign travel does not take place, and youth culture does not exist.. From the research undertaken with cohort B, it can be seen that many of their ideas about English culture stem from *Anglictina* which meant that there was a mismatch of representations of Englishness between their Czech course book and the English children's literature texts.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1, section 1

Kramsch views such stereotypes as inevitable and discusses the way myth and reality contradict and reinforce each other observing that:

“...myths cannot be discarded , for they affect the way learners of foreign language see others in the mirror of themselves, despite all evidence to the contrary from ‘objectively transmitted’ facts”<sup>13</sup>

Kramsch discusses the cultural reality and the cultural imagination of a country and asserts that both are significant. Examples are given of German and American myths of each other where the Germans tend to view America as a place of desolation and alienation, quite the opposite of the American dream, and the Americans see Germany romantically as a land of castles and old traditions. Now if such myths are maintained in countries which have enjoyed open access to each other’s cultures then the myths must be stronger than the reality in a country that has been effectively cut off from the West for 50 years. It is not surprising therefore that the image of the quiet, polite English who drink afternoon tea and are slightly reserved is retained in spite of the radical changes that have taken place since the end of the Second World War. For it is at the interface of another culture that awareness of the differences are revealed and without either the experience of foreign travel or meeting foreigners in one’s own country such opportunities for reflection are more limited. It is true that since 1989 the students have travelled to a number of Western countries nevertheless the stereotypes have remained strong and there may be other deeper, underlying reasons why such experience has left little impression and these reasons are connected to a specifically Czech context.

A range of reasons for the students’ response to the texts may be given which are specifically connected to the totalitarian past. Research revealed that the students tended to see similarities rather than differences between cultures and this is linked to the political situation they grew up in which is modelled on the continuum below.

<b>Communist Totalitarian System</b>	<b>Capitalist Democratic Society</b>
Notion of the collective	Notion of the individual
Similarities significant	Differences significant
Differences not readily identified	Differences readily identified

As the students showed a strong tendency to see similarities, cultural indicators would not be readily identified because that meant recognising differences. There is a keen sense that the Czechs want to be seen as other Western European nations and are not happy to be identified as different as they have been cut off long enough from the outside world. There is no easy answer to this problem which is

raised by Byram when he refers to a common assumption that: “beneath the surface all Europeans have essentially the same culture and ‘civilisation’ ”<sup>14</sup>. How different are Europeans? Byram quotes Leach’s constant puzzle which is: “the problem of how far we are all the same and how far we are different”<sup>15</sup>. I would submit that the English are more likely to perceive abroad as more foreign than the Czechs because we have in the English Channel a clear boundary marker between us and the Continent of Europe. A large number of differences are immediately observable once arriving in Europe such as driving on the right, armed police, cafe society, road signs and the gauge of railways. A journey from the Czech Republic to either Slovakia, Hungary, Austria or the part of Germany was in the Eastern Block, reveals fewer marked differences. The outskirts of Vienna, for example, look very much like Brno, and the architecture of the village houses are the same either side of the Czech/Austrian border. The road signs are not markedly different while throughout the whole Eastern Block the trams are the same because they were made in the former Czechoslovakia. It takes a long journey in land borders before big differences are revealed while for the English such differences appear after a short journey over a small stretch of water.

Another reason, suggested above, lies with the students’ experience of schooling which, based on rote learning, did not encourage an interpretative view of the world. The students’ experience of education since 1989 did not change significantly as it takes time for new textbooks to arrive and to retrain teachers. Even at the Pedagogical Faculty where the students had up-to-date text books and contact with a variety of native speakers, the overall emphasis still was on rote-learning where much weight was placed on theory and less on practice, and analysis of grammar was rated highly. This meant that foremost for the students was the theoretical study of the English language with less emphasis on the cultural background of the speakers of that language. The continuum below summarises the above points:

<b>Education in a Totalitarian System</b>	<b>Education in a Democratic System</b>
Closed learning	Open learning
Rigid notions of what constitutes knowledge	Acknowledgement that what constitutes knowledge is a social construct
Restricted access to resources	Wide access to resources
Assessment procedures focus on remembering facts	Assessment procedures based on opinion and original thinking

Also assumptions were made by myself about the students’ ability to analyse cultural aspects of the texts studied. Although they had been attending cultural studies seminars, neither of their native-

speaker lecturers was qualified to teach either American or British Studies, and so were not likely to have much pedagogical experience about how to undertake cultural analysis in seminars. So while care was taken in the interviews to unpick the word “culture” and define a variety of meanings, it may well be that the students still had a notion in their heads of “high culture” linked to the Arts and did not really understand what to look for. Although at times, particularly from students who spent some time on the Worcester Study Tour, insightful comments were made about aspects of English culture, there was little application of their observations and experiences.

Another important factor is that of national identity. For the Czechs it is a constant struggle to maintain their identity while for the English it has always “been there”. English national identity is not about being English as a nation but about the nature of Englishness. Englishness in children’s literature is not marking large boundaries but concentrates more on the smaller boundaries within a strongly established culture. Czech children’s literature on the other hand has a strong sense of maintaining a national identity so there are larger boundary markers. This means it is likely that there was a mismatch in expectations about the nature of a cultural indicator.

There is evidence from the research undertaken that those students who had experience of the UK were more likely to pick up cultural indicators retrospectively. In other words unless the significance of the cultural indicators are understood, then they will not be noticed, and this significance comes when gaining an active knowledge of the target culture. This view is supported by Celia Roberts in her paper “Cultural Studies and Student Exchange: Living the Ethnographic Life”<sup>16</sup> where she discusses the work of Brogger in Sweden. His work on literature and the media reveals, a circular argument whereby only those who are already culturally competent in the target culture can make texts, which are designed to introduce aspects of that culture, meaningful<sup>17</sup>. Only those Czech students who were able to reflect on their own culture and had practical experience of English culture could begin to readily find indicators.

The nature of reading and bilingual reading in particular should also be considered when analysing the students’ response to the texts. Kramsch<sup>18</sup> emphasises the importance of prior textual experience and offers some examples of the significance of previous modes of reading. In comparing three groups of American children from different ethnic and social backgrounds she describes the reading of a group of working class white children and parallels may be drawn between this group and the Czech students. This group of children were taught carefully to read by their parents who emphasised correctness and asked mainly *what* questions but reading was divorced from everyday life. These children could read and at first made progress at school but, when it came to interpretation, they had problems. Similarly the Czech students for reasons given in the continuum above were inexperienced at interpreting.



With bicultural reading it is likely that as they read the texts the students created a Czech image in their head. This “secondary world” is discussed by D.W.Harding in The Cool Web where he discussed the process whereby the reader “gets into a book” and relates it to Coleridge’s notions of “the willing suspension of disbelief”<sup>19</sup>. Achieving this “picture in the head”, a term favoured by Margaret Meek, was actively encouraged and discussed by myself in children’s literature seminars. I was keen for the students to be relaxed and to enjoy the texts and did not want them to worry about understanding every word so I told them that if they had an image in their minds then that was enough. What appears to have happened, not surprisingly, is that the image formed was from their own culture and so they made the text their own. In doing this, the Englishness faded and the Czechness became strong. In other words the English signifier became a Czech signified.

This line of approach leads to an investigation into schemata and as such incorporates all of the areas discussed above. What we are concerned with here is the mind-set of a group of students emerging from a totalitarian system behind which is over 300 years of domination by other cultures. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that different interpretations or significantly sometimes no interpretation at all emanated from the students. Underpinning all the discussion above is the schemata held by the Czech students and how they were reacting or readjusting to new stimuli and information. Schemata according to Rumelhart constitute “our private theory of the nature of reality”. When reading he asserts that a text has been understood when:

“they are able to find a configuration of hypotheses (schemata) that offers a coherent account of the various aspects of the text”.<sup>20</sup>

Three ways of learning are given: accretion, tuning and restructuring<sup>21</sup> Accretion is concerned with the learning of facts; tuning is the elaboration and refinement of what has been learned and restructuring is when new knowledge is created. It appears that the Czech students were not restructuring their knowledge as much as fine tuning and were trying to fit new stimuli into old schema. Now Byram<sup>22</sup> asserts that learning another language should not involve only the fine tuning of schemata formed through one culture but new schemata should be formed but in order to do this the concept of difference is needed:

“It is if and when they recognise that the foreign language embodies a different set of beliefs, values and shared meanings, that they begin the shift of perspective which leads to reciprocity and reflection on both others and self.”<sup>23</sup>

It appears that because the students were brought up not to question and interpret for themselves that they are more likely not to form new schema but try to incorporate new knowledge into existing ones. However the advice given by Bryam<sup>24</sup> is problematic when he considers that learners need to become aware of their own cultural schemata in order to acknowledge those of a different culture. For the Czechs an analysis of themselves emerging from a totalitarian system in which they all suffered, and

to an extent colluded, is extremely painful. There are many questions about Czech identity currently, such as is it necessary to return to the values of the First Republic if the last 50 years are too sensitive. And what of the future where it is likely that Czechs will be the first from the old Eastern block to enter the European Community? At the time the Children's Literature course was taught and during the time of the empirical research, the Czechs were in the middle of revolutionary change. It is easy to be misled by the term "Velvet Revolution" because, while there may have been no deaths, the changes have been and continue to be profound. Only Cohort C are beginning to come to terms with events and begin to discuss and analyse the significance of the recent past. It is easy for a Western academic to write confidently about knowing one's own "cultural schemata" but when such knowing is so highly charged, then for many not knowing is preferable. I realise now that the questions I was asking, which seemed not so potent, were in fact profound and had more implications than either myself or the students realised. That well known adage "know your students" shows that knowing entails far more than a superficial knowledge but should include a serious study of the background of the nation and their myths of cultural identity. Clearly there are huge pedagogical implications about how British Studies course should be delivered in general and in particular how children's literature texts should be approached. This will be discussed in the final part of this work.

Having discussed at some length the reasons why the students failed to readily identify cultural indicators in the children's literature texts, such observations that were made may now be discussed. The most significant element was the method which was eventually found whereby the students were able to engage with the task and interrogate the text. It was only when specifically asked to convert a text into a Czech situation that so many aspects of English culture were identified. This was because the students were encouraged to actively think about their own culture and recognise that there were differences. However, it is important to note that significant cultural indicators were revealed covertly in conversations with the students' about children and children's literature even when overt aspects of Englishness were not being identified.

A number of surface level indicators were identified by the students and, as discussed above, far more were revealed when they were given the task of converting the text into a Czech situation. Most of these came into Raymond Williams' third aspect of culture: that of aspects of everyday life<sup>25</sup>. These ranged from differences in food, transport systems and measurements to schooling and the differences between rich and poor. Of all the texts The Deathwood Letters presented the most obvious indicators for the students to identify. On the other hand identifying anything specifically English about Winnie-the-Pooh presented problems as the characters and situations appeared universal to the students. While the many of the poems in Culture Shock represent contemporary inner city concerns, few indicators were identified probably because the issues were so far removed from the students' own lives. There were marked differences in attitudes between the first two Cohorts and the last one where these students seemed more able and willing to discuss difference and refer to

and reflect on the regime pre 1989. A few students in Cohort C were able to make insightful links between the texts and England's imperial past while others made interesting comments about aspects of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and their past totalitarian regime.

The students' comments about what was suitable literature for children revealed a marked difference in attitude towards both children and literature for them. For reasons discussed in Chapter 1, Czech children are more protected within the family and are not encouraged to be as independent as English children. This was noted by a number of students who considered many of the texts they read as unsuitable for young children to read because of the subject matter. While they enjoyed playful retellings of well-known fairy tales on their level, they were not happy about children reading such texts. Many students noticed the self-confidence of English children and the stronger sense of individuality, most of which was picked up from school visits or experience as an au-pair. This was related by some to the texts they read. It is clear that Czech and English children's literature has different functions, which may be seen in the diagram below where Czech attitudes are to the left of the continuum and English towards the right.

<b>Dependence</b>	<b>Independence</b>
protection from harsh realities	preparation for harsh realities
close family ties and support	family ties but also includes peer group
little concept of leaving the family	expectation of leaving the family
children's books about safety	children's books about surviving

Attitudes towards dependence were exacerbated by the communist system where movement was restricted and independence is encouraged in capitalist systems which requires free movement of labour.

It could be maintained that two significant differences between English and Czech culture are reflected in literature for children in both countries. Firstly Czech children are more protected and stories for them are safe. English children's books are more concerned with encouraging independent, questioning children where national identity is taken-for-granted. Secondly, as Czech identity is far less strongly established than that of the English, one of the functions of their books for children is to maintain such identity. This is particularly reflected in the enthusiasm and reverence felt for fairy stories from the Slav tradition.

Having discussed the Czech readings of the children's literature texts from an ethnographic perspective, it now remains to examine the texts from an English perspective employing literary theory and this will be undertaken in the following seven chapters.

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- <sup>1</sup> C. Kramersch Context and Culture in Language Teaching Oxford 1994 p 207
  - <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.108
  - <sup>3</sup> M. Byram, C Morgan and Colleagues Teaching-and-Learning Language-and-Culture Clevedon/Avon 1994
  - <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.3
  - <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.41
  - <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.39
  - <sup>7</sup> *Anglictina* series published by *Statni pedagogicke nakladatelstvi* Praha
  - <sup>8</sup> M. Byram Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education 1989 Multilingual Matters, p.16/17
  - <sup>9</sup> *Anglictina* series op.cit.
  - <sup>10</sup> J. Pytelka et al Anglictina pro I rocnik strednich skol Praha 1965 p.187
  - <sup>11</sup> Byram op.cit p.159
  - <sup>12</sup> J Pytelka et al Anglictina pro II' rocnik strednich skol Praha 1973 p.17
  - <sup>13</sup> Kramersch, op.cit p.207
  - <sup>14</sup> Byram, op.cit.p. 144
  - <sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.57
  - <sup>16</sup> In M.Byram (Ed) Culture and Language Learning in Higher Education Multilingual Matters, 1994, pp.11-17
  - <sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.13
  - <sup>18</sup> Kramersch op.cit., p. 126
  - <sup>19</sup> D.W. Harding "What Happens When We Read?" Psychological processes in the reading of fiction in M. Meek et al The Cool Web London p.58
  - <sup>20</sup> D.E. Rumelhart "Schemata: The Building Blocks of Cognition" in Spiro et al Theoretical Issues in Reading Comprehension New Jersey 1980 p. 37
  - <sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.52
  - <sup>22</sup> Byram (89) op.cit.
  - <sup>23</sup> Byram, Morgan op.cit. p.23
  - <sup>24</sup> Byram, op.cit.
  - <sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams Culture London p.11

## Part Two: Literary Perspective

### Chapter 4 The Oral Tradition

With the continuing popularity of fairy story in England and as fairy stories make up the bulk of Czech children's books, a study of the oral tradition seemed an appropriate place to begin the children's literature course. Indeed for the Czech students, who often referred to any children's book as "fairy tale", the two terms are synonymous. For this reason the course began with an investigation into the oral tradition which took up the whole of the first semester.<sup>i</sup> A study of fairy tale and myth was designed primarily to increase the student's fluency in speaking and listening and to develop their skills in reading more academic English. I wanted in particular to give them the feeling that they were not being continually tested and that there was space for them to make mistakes and that their own opinions and ideas were important. Similarly I aimed to present them with a different methodology for they all came to the course expecting the traditional methods of literature teaching so they were quickly disabused of any notion that they were in for formal lectures about authors where dates and the titles of "important" texts had to be remembered. For this reason a significant indicator of Englishness in the first semester is the methodology which contrasted strongly with the traditional methods the students experienced hitherto.

The methodology is described in detail for the following reasons. Firstly it is important to give the reader as clear a picture as possible of what took place in seminars and a broad brush will not do this. Secondly it is the *detail* that made a crucial difference to the perceptions of the students. This is exemplified in the reactions of Cohort C to the syllabus taught by a different lecturer who stuck to the broad outline but failed to understand the seemingly small elements that mattered.<sup>ii</sup> It will be seen in the account that there was a student centred approach which began with what the students knew about and gradually moved towards the less known. At times the teacher put herself in a learning position where the expertise of the students was recognised. The students were given the opportunity to work out structures for themselves before being given information; theory followed practice as texts were examined in detail before theory was applied and study skills were incorporated in order to support independent reading. It will be recalled that the effect of such methodology, discussed in Chapter 3, was that this had the effect of masking the cultural differences as the students took on the texts as their own.

Discussion of the content of the seminars has been arranged as follows:

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<sup>i</sup> A second more mundane reason for spending a whole semester on the oral tradition was that the book order for children's texts did not arrive until the middle of November (see Context).

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 2

- An account of how fairy story was introduced
- An analysis of the different meanings given to fairy story between the two cultures
- An analysis of two contemporary texts The Paper Bag Princess<sup>1</sup> and William's Version<sup>2</sup> and the construction of Englishness revealed
- An account of how myth was introduced
- A discussion of the 'Englishness' of the methodology.

I have not divided the commentary into what happened in each individual seminar as each one flowed naturally into the other. While the main literary perspective taken was Structuralist, as this approach lends itself to the investigation of texts in the oral tradition, reference was also made to Feminist, Freudian and Reader Response theories in seminars.

### Fairy Story - Methodology

In the first seminar the students were invited to recall their own childhood reading. They were asked to discuss in groups of 3/4 the first story they remembered and whether it was told to them and if so who told it. Then they were asked if they remembered the first book they read on their own and what was their favourite story when they were young. Finally, I asked them what they were reading now. This opening encouraged speaking and listening in English as well as focusing on children's books. I wanted to establish a routine where group work was established as it allows everyone to be able to speak and there is less passive listening to teacher. I also gave me the chance to monitor their language level. Each class and in each year the reactions were similar: the students had fond memories of their childhood reading and most had been told Slav fairy stories by members of their family, usually grandparents. It was clear they enjoyed discussing, remembering and sharing. Many recalled summer holidays in the family *chata* where the family shared stories with each other. Here is evidence that the oral tradition was passed on in families avoiding the censorship that prevailed in published texts<sup>i</sup> (see section on Czech children's literature). There was less enthusiasm for books they read although many recalled the *Hloupý Honza* (Silly Jack) stories, Karel Čapek's *Dášěnka*, his brother's *Cat and Dog* tales as well as reading Slav fairy tales written by Božena Němcová and K. J. Erben.<sup>ii</sup> I was pleased to hear that the majority of students were reading adult literature and some were already reading in English. This was interesting because the Czech lecturers in English literature on the traditional course told me that students "didn't read". This is an indication of the negative attitudes that were often held about the students.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1, Section C: "Czech Children's Literature"

<sup>ii</sup> For more details see Chapter 1, Section C "Czech Children's Literature"

I then told "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" asking them beforehand to listen out for any differences between my version and the Czech one. I knew the tale was in circulation because I discovered a copy in Czech in my Prague flat and read it on numerous occasions in an attempt to extend my vocabulary in Czech. This text had been translated from the Russian as "Tatania and the Three Bears" and apart from the name "Goldilocks", which is replaced by a Russian first name, there appeared to be few differences. "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" is often listed as an English Fairy Story in anthologies and the Opies<sup>3</sup> trace its origins to the English nursery tradition and cite its first appearance in print in 1831. However, Peter Hunt<sup>4</sup> informs us that "Goldilocks" appeared in the French Countess d'Aulnoy's collection "Diverting Works" published in 1707 but as with all such stories it is a hard task to trace the origins. What is important in this case is that it was a fairy story recognised by both cultures.

Once the students recovered from their surprise at experiencing an oral rendition of a fairy story they appeared to enjoy it and many commented on this in their end of term evaluation and subsequently when interviewed. They found few differences in the retelling apart from the name "Goldilocks". In order to trigger their memories they were then asked to write down as many fairy stories as they remembered and titles were collected on the blackboard listing them under three headings:

Czech	English	Common to both cultures

This was a useful exercise for me because it was an introduction to Slav stories which were completely new to me. It will be noted that the teacher changed position from the one with all the knowledge to one who wanted to know. This removed the notion that teacher has to know everything and served to legitimise the students' knowledge. I also discovered that when Grimm was translated into Czech, the names of the characters were given Czech names, unlike translations into English, where the German names were retained. This gives the Czech reader less of a sense of reading something foreign. The students' lists were revealing because they had many suggestions for the first and third columns but struggled with the centre. Common to both were stories collected from the oral tradition by Grimm and Perrault and those created by Anderson. Of the few titles listed under the English column were stories by Oscar Wilde and I added "Jack and the Beanstalk". The list drew attention to the fact that the most well known fairy stories in England are foreign. We discussed why the English had not such a wealth of known traditions such as stories and folk-song. Two main

reasons were given which was the influence of the Puritans and the effects of the Age of Reason when fantasy was viewed as mere primitive superstition. Most significantly it revealed to the students that there were cultural differences in the meaning we give to stories from the oral tradition and these will be discussed below.

In order to begin to explore the structure of fairy story groups were asked to select a fairy story they knew well and write down the key ingredients. These were compared with other groups and the students began to note what they had in common. Having begun to discuss the structure of fairy story, which would be returned to later, attitudes towards fantasy were examined. The piece in The Cool Web called "The Inevitability of Storying"<sup>5</sup> seemed appropriate as it centres on Moscow in the 1920's when, in tune with Stalinist ideology, social realism was enforced and fantasy censored. I wondered if the same sort of attitudes towards fantasy prevailed in Czechoslovakia in the 1940's and 1950's where a particularly hard-line Stalinist regime prevailed. The article concerns an expert in child-rearing who refused to let her son read or be told fairy stories. She kept a note-book of the child's development for professional purposes and the notes reveal the child's fantasies that he made up for himself. The introduction to the article begins "Once upon a time there lived in Moscow..."

I introduced this article to stimulate debate and introduced reading skills in order to help the students tackle more academic material. I wrote the title "The Inevitability of Storying" on the board and asked the class to predict what they thought the article might be about. I followed the same procedure with the subtitle "There is no such thing as a shark". This was the first academic article in more formal English they had to tackle and I wanted to encourage them to take an active mode in reading and to encourage predicting and guessing as they tended to believe that unless they understood every word they would not understand anything they were reading. I then read the article to the group as they looked at the text then gave them the following questions to answer in pairs:

- What style of writing is used in the first paragraph?
- Which type of fairy tale did this mother consider the most harmful?
- What reasons did she give for this?
- Give some examples of the fantasies the little boy invented
- What point is being made?

This task gave them a chance to read the article again slowly, talk about the meaning, consult their dictionaries, and discuss the import. In the plenary we discussed historical periods when for a variety of reasons fantasy was considered unsuitable for children. The students had no knowledge of fairy tales being out of favour in their country. I discussed the notion of relevance with the students and drew their attention to the climate in Britain in the 1960's where fairy stories were not so popular and instead realistic stories of working class children tended to be promoted. I also informed them that the concern about fantasy in an earlier period of English history would be discussed at the end of the course when I would give a lecture about the development of children's literature in England.



We then returned to the structure of fairy stories and recalling the stories they remembered were asked to make lists under the following headings:

Characters	Animals	Places	Events

A larger list was completed on the blackboard with ideas from all the groups. In this way a number of common ingredients in fairy story were revealed and attention was drawn to the work of Propp<sup>6</sup>. I was pleased that the term "Supernatural transformations" which appeared in the article from The Cool Web cropped up which indicated that the students were extending their vocabulary

Exploration of the structure of fairy story continued where a number of tasks which developed the student's fluency also offered a practical example of how stories change according to perceived audience and dominant ideology. I began with a classic EFL warm-up activity called "Find Someone Who" but used it to refocus on the topic. Students were given this list and had to pick some of the following questions to put to everyone in the group:

**Find someone who:**

- Likes the Big Bad Wolf
- Would like to go to a ball and meet a Prince or Princess
- Wishes they could find a pot full of gold
- Would like to kiss a frog and see what happens
- Knows where The Three Bears live
- Is frightened of witches
- Believes in fairies

Having given the students and opportunity to talk, listen and focus back on the topic, I asked them to sit down and prepare themselves to listen to *Little Red Riding Hood*. I gave them a tick-list of the main phrases used in the story which would help understanding. However as this is so well-known in Czech, I didn't envisage any major problems. Before embarking on the story I told the students that by the end of the seminar they would all be able to tell at least one fairy story in English.

After the story (my version retains the moral element of obeying Mother; Granny and Red Riding Hood are consumed by the wolf, and I dwell with particular relish on the cutting up of the wolf's stomach, the placing of the stones and the subsequent sewing up) the following tasks were given which were designed to help recall the sequence of events and some of the vocabulary. In particular,

I wanted them to acquire such phrases as "basket of goodies" and "stray from the path" as they give a sense of the narrative style. First pairs were given sentences from the story and had to decide if they were true or false, then groups were given the story cut into chunks which they had to put in the correct order. Finally pairs were asked to recreate the dialogue between:

Little Red Riding Hood and Mother  
Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in the forest  
Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf disguised as Granny (a chance here to practice "Oh what big ears you have".....)

Then the retelling began. The students were put in groups of 4, still retaining the tick-lists which helped those whose English was weaker, and were told they had to take it in turns to tell the story changing when I gave the signal, each student given about a minute to speak. In order to encourage them to spin out the story, a competitive element was added where the winning group were ones who could make their version last the longest. This encouraged a less conservative and more creative approach.

After about 10 minutes of story-telling I stopped the groups and found out which group had managed to spin out the story the longest and collected examples of what they did to lengthen the story in order to give ideas to groups who were less inventive. They were then asked to do the same but this time tell the story in the first person as if they were Little Red Riding Hood. The competition to make the story last was still running. A third re-telling was then given where the students took on the roles of the characters and selected one in the group to be narrator. This time there was no competition but they could retain any innovations they enjoyed in previous retellings. In each case each group's retelling changed considerably from the one they heard from me and often they were convulsed in laughter as they listened to other's inspired improvisations. A favourite ploy for spinning out the story was adding details of what was in the basket of goodies and how the child kept forgetting crucial items and had to return to the cottage. This led to a final retelling where consideration was given to why the story was being told and who was the audience. I explained to the students how such stories were changed and refined as they changed from oral to written form and for a different reader. Then I gave some examples of how the story might differ if the story was being told to Young Pioneers under a Marxist-Leninist regime:

"Once upon a time there was a bourgeois little girl who was very rich. One day she met a poor proletarian wolf who was starving..."

I also put forward the idea of how the story might be told from the perspective of the Wolf's wife who has to tell her cubs why Daddy would not be coming home.

After some time for practice the groups presented the openings of their version while the rest had to

guess audience and purpose. The point was made that stories in the oral tradition change over time and that originally they were not designed for children but were adult stories which often were violent or vulgar. Later when collected they were refined for the middle classes to read and later moralising elements were added because that was considered suitable for children. I also reminded them of the structure of fairy story in that whatever they did to the story: modernise it, embroider it or change the audience, there remained the core of the story and often changes were due to changing perceptions of the implied listener/reader.

Having listened to fairy stories and retold fairy stories the students were ready to *read* fairy stories. The aim was to continue to search for patterns but also to focus more specifically on the language of written forms. I gave them four to read from my own childhood book of fairy stories collected by the brothers Grimm<sup>7</sup> which benefits from a linguistically rich translation. While no author or translator is given in the title, the publisher's notes (anonymous) supply more information on the origins of the text. This collection is based on a selection made by Marion Edwardes first published by Dent 1910 which originated from the original collection translated by Edgar Taylor, published first under the title Household Tales in 1824-6 and then as Gammer Gretel in 1839. Such an early translation accounts for the archaic feel of the language. The publisher's note goes on to say that a typical English Grimm is a collection of 50 stories taken from the original 250. Such a selection was based on what was deemed suitable for children and the publisher's notes further add:

“And nowadays, to the rather long list of stories which the nineteenth century banned on account of impropriety, must be added those that the twentieth century rejects for their horrific or brutal qualities, or even for anti-Semitism.” p. x.

This last reference firmly places the text in 1949 when the atrocities of World War II were still at the front of people's consciousness.

Photocopies of four stories (*The Frog Prince*, *King Thrushbeard*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Musicians of Bremen*) were distributed for pairs to read. The selection of these particular texts was based on a combination of brevity, richness of expression, well-known and less known tales. For example in *The Frog Prince* a complicated opening sentence has many typical ingredients of fairy story. Firstly it involves a princess, secondly the location is in a wood, and thirdly contains such slightly archaic language such a “in the midst of” and the reflexive “she sat herself down...”:

“One fine evening a young princess put on her bonnet and clogs, and went out to take a walk by herself in a wood; and when she came to a cool spring of water, that rose in the midst of it, she sat herself down to rest awhile.”<sup>8</sup>

As the students read they were asked to collect examples of arcane language and phrases they enjoyed. They completed this chart after each reading:

	<b>Main Characters</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Supernatural Events</b>	<b>Talking Animals</b>
<i>King Thrushbeard</i>				
<i>The Sleeping Beauty</i>				
<i>The Frog Prince</i>				
<i>The Musicians of Bremen</i>				

This was a quiet period where students read together in pairs, completed their charts and collected vocabulary. While they read I talked to pairs, answering questions, discussing the language and showing them the original illustrations by Charles Folkard from my book.

The plenary focused on the charts and highlighted again the patterns that are to be found in fairy stories. We also discussed the language and noted the use of the old familiar form of "thou, thee, thine"; phrases such as "the greenwood shade", and the ubiquitous "Alas" and "Alack".

The table was revised in the second year because I had more texts for the students to study including some modern versions:

<b>Title</b>	<b>Old/New?</b>	<b>Opening phrase</b>	<b>Closing sentence</b>	<b>Animals</b>	<b>Magical events?</b>	<b>Characters good/Bad</b>

Some time was spent examining how males and females were represented where females were usually either wicked and ugly or beautiful and good. Males were usually represented as active while females passive. The students told me that this is not necessarily the case in tales from the Slav tradition.

This indicates that when the tales were collected from the oral tradition by such people as Bozena Nemcova and K. J. Erben, they were not censored in the same way as Grimm and Perrault who either only selected those where men were active or changed them. Having spent some time on the structure of texts in the oral tradition, the discussion moved to their import. The first of two texts to study was "The Truth of Fables" by Michael Hornyansky<sup>9</sup> (first four pages only) who writes about the grip fairy stories still have on children in spite of such other appeals as modern stories and cartoons. I read the text with the class stopping at times to offer explanation as it was not easy for the students to understand because there were a number of references to taken-for-granted aspects of American culture and some sentences were long enough to make meaning hard work. After the first reading, the following questions were put for pairs to answer:

- What do children read about?
- Which fairy stories do children remember?
- What are these fairy stories full of?
- Does the author consider fairy stories to be an escape into dreamland?
- What does the author think these stories reflect?
- What significant number is mentioned?
- What is the Cinderella syndrome?
- What lesson is learned in "Beauty and the Beast"?
- How does the author define a myth?

The Freudian analysis offered by Hornyansky in his article are not too surprising for a Western reader but for the Czechs such comments were new because Freud's theories were not taught under Marxist-Leninism<sup>i</sup> and consequently the students only had only a vague notion of them. It is important to remember the crucial difference between an ideology that operated on collective values and one that celebrates the individual

After some discussion arising from the questions, a second article was given for the class to read: "The Fairy Tale: the reader in the Secondary World" by W.H. Auden<sup>10</sup> in which Auden argues against Freudian readings of fairy tales. As well as offering a different perspective this text also introduces the notion of Primary and Secondary worlds, a useful distinction between different types of children's text, which the students could return to in the second semester. Again I read through the text with the class and commented and elaborated on the points made.

These two texts were the most difficult in terms of language and concepts. I was anxious for the students to remain confident about their ability to handle English at the same time I wanted to push them on both in terms of their thinking and their language level. The main aim was to expose the students to differing views about fairy story for them to consider and give them practice at reading more difficult, academic texts.

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<sup>i</sup> There is a certain irony here because Freud was born in Moravia after which the family moved to Vienna, a city only 2 hours away from Brno.

At this stage in the semester investigation into fairy tale was completed and I took the opportunity to remind the students about how they were going to be assessed at the end of the semester. They were asked to re-write a fairy story they knew well in any way they wished. I had had experience of examining a number of such retellings when attending Harold Rosen's London Narrative Group meetings and had experience of my own pupils' retelling as part of GCSE English coursework. In most cases new, innovative and often highly satirical retellings resulted. While the Czech students enjoyed this innovative form of assessment, most of them, with a few exceptions, faithfully retold stories they knew well from the Slav tradition. At first I was disappointed but on reflection came to realise that there were fundamental differences in the way the two cultures viewed fairy story and these will now be discussed.

### **Cultural Indicators of Englishness**

The significance of strictly adhering to traditional retelling demonstrates a difference in attitude towards fairy tale and as such is a significant cultural indicator for there is a crucial difference in meaning given to stories from the oral tradition between the two cultures. For the Czechs, their fairy tales are significant because they are about Czechness. A student, Lucie Nerachlova in her end of course essay emphasised the importance of Bozena Nemcova's stories in the 19th century:

*"...when the Czech nation needed to get self-confidence and the feeling of hope for better life because we lived under Habsburg's control".*

She notes that in many of her stories a poor but clever character wins over their master and considers that these stories *"...strengthened the national consciousness"*.

Significantly she goes on to assert that:

*"... these stories should be read by today's children because they could play the same role as in B. Nemcova's days".*

Another student, Radka Bedrichová enthuses over fairy tales and mentions in a list of favourable points the importance of the Czech language:

*"...encourage fairy tales, read or tell them to children; then they will enlarge and work with their fantasy and imagination, discover how rich and beautiful their mother tongue is..."*

For the English, who have an abundance of literature in the mother tongue, the best known fairy tales are largely foreign and therefore are not tied up with cultural identity. Furthermore throughout the development of children's literature in England there has been contention about fantasy and realism and for a long period tales from the oral tradition were not part of the dominant ideology. They were

passed on orally by the uneducated and appeared in Chap Books, cheaply produced texts sold by travelling salesmen, which had a low status. Examples from such texts are “Jack the Giant Killer”, “Dick Whittington” and “Tom Thumb”. Harvey Darton<sup>11</sup> refers to such texts as belonging to the people of England because they played an important part in preserving traditional stories and rhymes over a period of time when such things were rejected by the dominant society. Puritans fulminated against fantasy and Hugh Rhodes in Book of Nurtures published in 1554 gives an insight into what was considered unsuitable for the young to read as his book was to keep children from:

“reading feigned fables, vain fantasies, and wanton stories, and songs of love, which bring much mischief to youth”.<sup>12</sup>

Later in the Age of Reason in the 18th century such tales were seen as a return to the superstitions of the dark ages. According to Townsend the writer of Goody Two-Shoes (thought to be John Newberry) complained that:

“People stuff Children’s Heads with Stories of Ghosts, Fairies, Witches, and such Nonsense when they are young, and so they continue Fools all their Days”.<sup>13</sup>

As such fairy tales for a long period were seen as subversive. Fairy tale only began to gain a higher status when Perrault was translated from the French in 1729 for while Perrault’s tales originally came from oral sources, they were told to the ladies in the French court and were written in literary French and thereby gained higher status. Similarly the Grimm brothers, published in English in 1823 performed a similar favour for stories from the German oral tradition. In this way, it was stories from abroad which began to gain favour in published material and deemed as acceptable by the dominant culture in England. In addition, since the Second World War, many fairy tales first appear to English children through the American lens of Walt Disney. Meanwhile there remains a sense of the subversive in the English tradition for Fairy Tales form the basis of Pantomime which is a highly irreverent medium and currently they are frequently the basis of knowing post-modern retellings exemplified in Snow White in New York<sup>14</sup>, The Frog Prince Continued<sup>15</sup> and the Ahlberg’s The Jolly Postman<sup>16</sup>. So while on a universal level we can say that fairy stories have a similar structure and both cultures have many stories in common (Grimm, Perrault, Anderson) and both feature strongly as texts for children, the *meaning* given to them is entirely different. For the English, because fairy tales are not linked to cultural identity, there is scope to subvert and be playful and the Englishness of fairy tale lies more in the form of production such as Pantomime. For the Czechs, their own tradition of the Slav tale, written during the time of the National Revival for the first time in literate Czech which was struggling for survival, these texts are too important to be treated with anything but reverence.<sup>i</sup> In the light of this it is not surprising that the following two texts created interest and discussion.

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<sup>i</sup> For further information see Chapter 1, section C “Czech Children’s Literature

### William's Version<sup>17</sup> and The Paper Bag Princess<sup>18</sup>

Having examined aspects of the fairy tale from a number of viewpoints two contemporary texts were presented: William's Version and The Paper Bag Princess<sup>i</sup> both relying on the reader's knowledge of fairy tale. The Paperbag Princess embraces a feminist perspective operating on role-reversal where the female is the active agent and the male passive. It is the princess who is practical and rescues the hapless prince from the dragon. However, she does this not by a show of strength but by cunning, tricking the male dragon into showing off his powers until he is exhausted. At the end of the story, instead of Prince and Princess marrying and living "happily ever after" she rejects him and is pictured dancing off into the sunset.

I read the text to the groups as there was only one copy, after which I asked the following questions of the students.

- Who is this story written for?
- Why do you think it was written like this?
- Is it a children's story?
- What aspects are primary world?
- What typical characteristics of a fairy story does it contain?

I was interested to hear the reaction of such a feminist retelling. As each class had a majority of females with only two or three males, it was likely their voice would be heard. But although the notion of female equality was a strong propaganda point under Communism, questions concerning feminism had to be handled gently as anything connected with that ideology tended to be viewed with intense suspicion. (See section on Czech History and Life Under Communism). The students, on the whole, were intrigued by the text and many considered it suitable only for adults not small children. We discussed what the reader had to know in order to understand the irony in the text and then they perceived that it was not for very young children but for those who already had a knowledge of more traditional texts. There was division about whether the ending was a happy one or not and this retelling did invite animated debate.

It will be noted that the semester began with the student's knowledge and although the methodology was different, they were not surprised that a children's literature course should begin with fairy story and discussion of Slav fairy stories was incorporated in the syllabus. However, it can be seen that as the course progressed the students were taken further from what they knew and William's Version<sup>19</sup>, an intriguing example of a contemporary treatment of a well known tale from the oral tradition, was the most unexpected text they tackled during the semester. Reactions to this text and

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<sup>i</sup> While Robert Munsch, the author is Canadian, the book is in common circulation in the UK



the cultural indicators underlying it will run through all the subsequent texts discussed in this work. For this reason William's Version will be analysed in some detail.

Before reading I told groups the "Three Little Pigs" and encouraged them to join in with the repetition. This served to prime them for William's Version as it concerns the power struggle between Granny, whose attempts to tell her grandson the traditional version of "The Three Little Pigs" while Mother attends ante-natal clinic, is constantly thwarted by William's interventions with his version of the tale. From his re-telling it can be deduced that he is anxious and jealous of the new baby. I read the story to the class and then asked some straight-forward comprehension questions. To my surprise virtually all the groups I taught found it difficult to understand the boy's behaviour and thoroughly disapproved of it and this will be discussed below.

William's Version was first published in a book of short stories Nothing to be Afraid Of in 1977. It is a popular collection appearing in the Penguin edition in 1980 and by 1985 had been reprinted 3 times. It subsequently appeared in How Texts Teach What Readers Learn<sup>20</sup>. The collection of stories focus on the young person's struggle to cope with the adult world and how often adults are in ignorance or misunderstand. There are ten stories which in which the first four show the largest discrepancy between the view of the adult and the child and gradually moves to a more sympathetic depiction of adults who are in closer touch with youngsters. Although only one text "The Coronation Mob" is clearly set in the period after World War II, all have that distinct feel of the 1950's. This was a time when Jan Mark, born in 1947, grew up which lends support to the view that writers for children often trawl through their own childhood for inspiration. However, while the setting is the 1950's, the structure of the texts is contemporary. For there are a number of significant metafictional allusions in the stories which culminate in William's Version. In fact the underlying thrust of the collection is the important role that imagination and fiction play in a child's development.

Jan Mark's first novel Thunder and Lightnings won the Carnegie Medal in 1976 and was praised for its sensitive and subtle portrayal of the relationship between two boys. David Rees in his study of Jan Mark observes a theme which runs through all her novels which is that life is unjust and unpleasant and is "a struggle of the fittest"<sup>21</sup>. The first stanza of her own poem "Unfair, Unfair" also demonstrates her less than romantic views of childhood.

"You must believe me children when I tell you that however  
Good and lovely you may become, and clever,  
Success will light on some of you and on others, never."<sup>22</sup>

William's Version is not a cosy story of Granny and grandson rather it depicts a power struggle between the two where tension and humour is carefully balanced. At the beginning of the story William is left with his Granny while Mother is at the clinic. He is restless and Granny does her best

to entertain him. After a few suggestions it is decided that Granny will tell William the story of the “Three Little Pigs”. Intertextuality is an important ingredient:

“ ‘Tell me a story,’ said William. ‘Tell me about the wolf.’  
‘Red Riding Hood?’  
‘No, not *that* wolf, the other wolf.’  
‘Peter and the wolf?’ said Granny.<sup>23</sup>

This dialogue indicates William’s mood. He is demanding “Tell me about...” and treats Granny with contempt: “No, not *that* wolf,....” but the next line confirms what was suspected when the word “clinic” was mentioned in the first sentence.

“Mummy’s going to have a baby,’ said William.<sup>24</sup>

At this stage the more savage elements in the text are introduced where William’s aggression is revealed as he equates babies with pigs:

“Three babies looks like three pigs”.<sup>25</sup>

At the mention of three pigs Granny brightens and launches into the story of “The Three Little Pigs”. However, William’s anxieties about the new baby and his angry feelings about his mother create a tension between the traditional version that Granny endeavours to tell and William’s ego-centric, angst-ridden retelling in which he identifies with the wolf who, appallingly, finally succeeds in eating the little pigs which represent in William’s unconscious both the sibling to be *and* his mother. The tension in the story is held because it operates in both the primary and secondary worlds. William’s retelling is located firmly in the primary world and is revealed through the secondary world of the fairy story. Consequently the primary world constantly impinges on the secondary and this is often amusing and also disturbing. A number of changes are made by William and the authority he uses is a book which he has found in a cupboard, the identity of which is only revealed at the end (it is a book on first aid). This demonstrates that William already perceives that the written has power over the oral. However he is only a beginner in reading and this is implied in the following dialogue:

“ ‘I didn’t know you could read,’ said Granny, properly impressed.  
‘C - A - T, wheelbarrow,’ said William.”<sup>26</sup>

William changes the gender of the pigs insisting that the little pigs are “Lady pigs”

A megafictive discussion takes place about the names and gender of the pigs. When Granny tries to negotiate with William: “ ‘.....My pigs have names’.”<sup>27</sup>

William's response is sure: " 'They're the wrong pigs' ". and when asked why Granny's pigs will not do he asserts that: " 'They won't know what to do.' " <sup>28</sup>

William's vehement insistence that the pig's mother is dead indicates his feelings for his own mother:

" 'She was dead. You make bacon out of dead pigs. She got eaten for breakfast and they threw the rind out for the birds.' " <sup>29</sup>

Similarly there are clues about William's feelings about the baby:

" 'Will that baby have shoes on when it comes out?'  
'I don't think so,' said Granny.  
'It will have cold feet,' said William.  
'Oh no,' said Granny. 'Mummy will wrap it up in a soft shawl, all snug.'  
'I don't *mind* if it has cold feet,' William explained...." <sup>30</sup>

Woven into the retelling are aspects of William's daily routine in the primary world. When asked if the book is the one his Mother reads from his reply echoes his mother's voice: " 'If she says please' " <sup>31</sup>  
We learn later that William has a tricycle, his address is 14 Tennyson Avenue; there is a bomb site next door; there are buses that he catches and the cemetery that is in the vicinity. One little pig is eaten in a sandwich with bread bought in the bread-shop. This is an urban story located in the primary world which impinges on the pastoral secondary world.

It is suggested through William's interjections that he has changed the subject position invited by the traditional story because he is identifying not with the three little pigs but rather with the wolf. Granny, however, does not pick this up and quickly tells the last part of the story without allowing any interruptions from William. But when William hears that the wolf is eaten by the third little pig, he has a tantrum and has to be picked up "all stiff and kicking" <sup>32</sup>. Granny sits William on her lap and asks him to tell her the last part. He proceeds to relate how the wolf puts the pig in the saucepan and eats him up - "with chips" <sup>33</sup>. Reconciliation as well as catharsis is ultimately achieved as William recounts how the wolf did the washing up "...and got on his tricycle and went to see his Granny, and his Granny opened the door and said, 'Hello, William,' " <sup>34</sup>

This is a tight piece of writing where the reader has to fill the gaps in order to understand the motivation for William's version. The reader is placed in a subject position apart from the two protagonists where they are invited to see both perspectives. They are able to stand back from the story in a Brechtian *verfremdung* effect and observe how William copes with his feelings and how Granny does her best to deal with her difficult grandson.

There are a number of cultural references to everyday life revealed through the primary world many of which are listed above. These refer to such aspects as food and transport. Reference to the bomb site

locates the text in the post-war period when they were a familiar part of the landscape. The address "Tennyson Avenue" is named after the canonical Victorian Poet Laureate. However, more significant cultural aspects are revealed through the assumptions made about the implied reader. The intertextuality presupposes that the stories mentioned are known: Little Red Riding Hood, Peter and the Wolf and The Three Little Pigs. Secondly the reader is able to pick up the clues about William's concerns and why he is behaving like he is. It is assumed that the reader will have some notion of a first child's feelings about the arrival of a second sibling. Furthermore it presupposes that it is not unnatural for the only child, the first in the family to be jealous of a new arrival. Similarly, there is a presumption that some ideas from Freud have percolated the national consciousness. The reader is also expected to work out the feelings of both Granny and William by what is implied as the reader is not told this explicitly. This implies an experienced reader who is willing to actively engage with the text. Also implied is a reader who enjoys the game that the author is playing and enjoys the black humour that arises from William's angst. William's Version as in all the texts in this anthology mark the concerns of young people; the tensions between the generations and between each other. Many texts highlight class differences and invite the reader to reflect on the realities of the world and prepare them for the future.

The Czech students brought to the text very different horizons of expectations. They were surprised at how much the reader was expected to work out for themselves and many missed the clue about the clinic in the first line. Crucially, they did not take it for granted that William would be experiencing jealousy and found his response unlikely. Therefore they could not understand why he was allowed to be so rude to his granny and why she tolerated such bad behaviour. It must be remembered that the students spent their formative years where representations of the family were as an ideal with no sense that there might be underlying tensions. It is all part of a society where criticism was not tolerated and where in the socialist state everything was perfect. For example it was only after November 1989 that handicapped people began to appear in public because previously they were hidden away as such people subverted the notion of "perfection". It must be also recalled that they were not equipped with even a vague Freudian perspective. My own experiences of teaching Czech children, spending time with Czech families and observing Czech children in the streets, on public transport and on holiday in the country that they behave in a very different manner from English children. For example Czech children are very quiet and they are expected, even when very young, to sit still. I remember noticing how quietly the summer camp children were lining up to get into an open-air swimming pool one hot day in July. A similar group of English children would more likely be running about, shouting, asking if they could buy ice-creams, quarrelling, and generally drawing attention to themselves. It is not surprising therefore that William appeared to my students as a very naughty boy and could not empathise with him. In fact they took a different subject position to that invited by the text which was, as discussed above, to analyse the tensions between the two protagonists and not closely identify with one or the other. A more realistic representation of life and the assumptions

made by the author on how the reader will approach the text are two elements that divide Czech and English children's literature. This division will be discussed when the other texts from the second semester are analysed.

### Myth - Methodology

The study of William's Version marked the end of time devoted to fairy story and the remaining part of the semester continued with an exploration of myth. It can be argued that while Greek, Roman and Norse mythology constitute part of the national consciousness and appears in many forms from children's stories to references in novels, poetry, drama and opera, they too, like the fairy story, are foreign. In fact it is only in the area of legend that English figures, such as Robin Hood appear. Even the well-known figure of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table belong to a British, Celtic king and is not English. There were two reasons for selecting myth. Firstly it allowed myth to be compared to fairy tale and secondly because myth gives the opportunity for a multi-cultural perspective. Such a perspective was an important part of the curriculum in the London schools I was involved in and I was keen for the students to have an idea about multi-cultural education in the UK. I began by telling them the Norse myth of "Balder and the Mistletoe" because links can be made with early British history and Viking influences. Balder's Mother, Freya, gives us the fifth day in the week, Friday, and because it is about the inevitability of death and makes a strong contrast with fairy story which usually enjoys a happy ending. The only preparation I gave them was to put up the following names: "Balder, Freya, Hod, Loki" and checked that they knew what mistletoe was.

After the telling I asked groups to discuss what they thought the myth revealed and most groups were able to identify the import. Groups of five were then asked to prepare a version of the myth in mime and perform it to the rest of the class. There is much scope for movement with Freya sitting spinning the clouds; her mission to all the potential dangers on earth such as fire, water, air and earth; Loki climbing up and up the winding stairs of the turret, Balder's friends testing his invulnerability by such dangerous actions as throwing rocks, shooting arrows and pouring on boiling water. I pointed out that this technique was useful in checking student's passive understanding in an interesting manner.

In the next seminar I asked them to write down as many myths as they remembered because I wanted to know what sort of knowledge they had. They knew Slav myths and some Greek ones. We then read two myths from very different cultures: an Aboriginal and an Inuit<sup>35</sup> in which although completely different geographical locations both offer explanations about the movement of the sun. The aboriginal focuses on the world before the sun and the arrival of dawn and the Inuit on the disappearance of the sun in Winter and its subsequent arrival in Summer. Students were asked to compare and contrast the two.

After they were given time to discuss their thoughts, I put two further questions to them which were as follows:

1. What do these myths tell us about these cultures?
2. What do they seek to explain?

I wanted to focus on the essential differences between fairy tale and myth and in order to trigger thinking the following quotations were presented for consideration.

“...fairy tales (I’m not talking now about invented ones) come straight out of myth; they are, as it were, minuscule reaffirmations of myth, or perhaps the myth made accessible to the local folkly mind.”

“One might say that fairy tales are the myths fallen into time and locality. For instance, if this glass of water is myth and I drink it, the last drop - or the lees of the wine - is the fairy tale, the drop is the same stuff, all the essentials are there; it is small, but perfect. Not minimised, not to be made digestible for children”.

“Only Connect” P. L. Travers Only Connect Oxford 1969

“For what distinguishes the story, the fable, the allegory from the myth is this: that whereas the former take an already existing shape, and embellish and enrich it with the writer’s individuality and skill, the myth is the original pattern”.

“Where is fancy bred?” Helen Lourie Only Connect

“A myth is a true story presented symbolically or indirectly instead of literally”

“The Truth of Fables” Michael Hornyansky Only Connect

“The myths and legends, which Plato proposed as the ideal educational material for his young citizens, can be seen as large-scale accounts of negotiations between the powers of the inner world and the stubborn conditions of the outer world, under which ordinary men and women have to live. There are immense and at the same time highly detailed sketches for the possibilities of understanding and reconciling the two”.

“Myth and Education” Ted Hughes Writers, Critics and Children Heinemann 1978

I gave the students some time to mull over these differences and unpick the meaning of the quotations and then decide which statements they agreed with.

We then began a major project which was to turn the stories into playscripts for a shadow puppet performance. The idea behind this was to further develop and extend the student’s oral fluency in English (particularly pronunciation) and develop their written abilities. For in converting the text

they had to discuss what they would do, write a script in correct English and when recording the script produce as accurate a pronunciation as possible. Re-writing and rehearsing would give plenty of opportunity for practice. The preparations took three seminars, the final one involving groups showing each other their plays. As mentioned in the section on “Context”, there was much enthusiasm for this project. Many groups put in extra practice out of seminar time some making elaborate scenery which could be unrolled to show different scenes as the Raven flew on his long journey. Others found suitable background music to accompany their dialogue. Many students remembered their shadow puppet plays when they were asked to discuss the course and a large number found it the most enjoyable aspect. I was particularly pleased that many groups took their shadow puppet plays in schools where they entertained *Základní Škola* pupils just before Christmas.

Ted Hughes Tales of the Early World, modern creation myths, neatly provided a bridge connecting the oral tradition to the written as the second semester was given over to the study of six longer texts the first being The Iron Man by Ted Hughes. Two short stories “The Invaders” and “The Trunk” were read and as usual there was a pre-reading task where groups were asked to think about any creation myths they knew from Bible stories to Greek, Norse or Hindu myths as it would give me an idea about how familiar they were. Most knew some Bible stories, some had an idea of Greek myths, no-one knew about Hindu or Norse creation myths. The texts were read quickly just before the end of the first semester and while apparently enjoyed at the time did not feature strongly in students’ recall when subsequently interviewed. The system where the Christmas break divided the last part of first semester meant that what was covered in the two weeks following Christmas was often forgotten in the preparations for the forthcoming four-week examination period. Is it because of this that the two texts from Tales from the Early World will not be discussed for the work of Ted Hughes is examined in detail in the section on The Iron Man.

### **The “Englishness” of the Methodology**

It will be observed from the description of the way the course was devised and the how the texts were approached with a student-centred focus where meaning could be negotiated, that the methodology was an important factor. It will be argued that the methodology is itself a strong cultural indicator of Englishness. Unlike students’ previous experiences of literature where they were told about texts<sup>i</sup>, the texts themselves were experienced, examined and discussed.. Opinions about how important they were or how good, were not asked for. The main driving force was for the students to actively enjoy their children’s literature seminars, to be fully occupied, to begin to form their own opinions and through the activities develop fluency in English. Much of the methodology employed derived from my experience of teaching English literature in Comprehensive schools in the UK with recognition of the added support required for learners of English as a second language<sup>ii</sup>. In identifying the

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<sup>i</sup> See students’ comments in Chapter 2

<sup>ii</sup> See Appendix II

Englishness of this approach it will be fruitful to look at attitudes towards the teaching of English in school. Arguments about English as a subject and how it should be taught have ranged over 100 years and the following continuum demonstrates the polarised approaches:

<b>Utilitarian</b>	<b>Progressive</b>
Puritan notions of childhood	Romantic notions of childhood
Vocational education	Liberal/Humanist education
English as a discipline of the mind	English as civilising/humanising
Subject centred	Student centred
Imitation	Creation
Maintaining standards	Developing the personality
Literature: cultural heritage in the "Great Tradition"	Literature: relevance, enjoyment

The ideas on the utilitarian are discussed by Shayer<sup>35</sup> and verge towards Puritan beliefs where the child has to be rescued from evil by strong discipline. This attitude is reflected by Roberts and Barter in 1908:

"To lay too great a stress on the original and imaginative treatment of the subject-matter results in formless, chaotic exercises which provide no discipline at all in clear and logical sequence of thought"<sup>36</sup>

Similarly in 1906 James Welton notes:

"It should be remembered..that imagination grows out of imitations: There is no value in letting the children simply produce the rioting of untrammelled fancy"<sup>37</sup>

However according to Shayer, the Romantic notion of the child, innocent, creative, spontaneous was present in Philip Hartogs' The Writing of English published in 1907. In it he emphasised that children should be allowed in their compositions to have opinions and ideas of their own. He reminded teachers that all children can talk enthusiastically and fluently enough when they have something they really want to say. As early as 1910 Circular 753 The Teaching of English in Secondary Schools made the point that teaching the history of literature should give way to the actual reading of texts. Similarly F.H. Haward in Lessons in Appreciation also recommended the actual reading of texts. In 1931 the Board of Education's report of Primary Education used the words "for pleasure" and "for enjoyment"<sup>38</sup> with regard to reading literature. Comparison may be made here to the Czech experience where names and dates lingered for a long time. This is not surprising because



names and dates are far less contentious and the last time pre 1989 that Czechs had a democratic government and an open attitude to education was 1938<sup>i</sup>. On the other hand debate has raged about education and standards over a similar period in the UK, and even when a National Curriculum has been established (some would say imposed) educational practice has remained closer to the right hand side of the continuum. In English in the National Curriculum the emphasis on reading is understanding where pupils should be taught to:

- read accurately, fluently and with understanding;
- understand and respond to the texts they read;
- read, analyse and evaluate a wide range of texts, including literature from the English literary heritage and from other cultures and traditions.<sup>39</sup>

More specific details are given in the Programmes of Study for reading and at each level the following words indicate the overall approach when they describe what pupils are expected to be able to do:

**Level 1:** “establish meaning”, “express their response to poems...” **Level 3** “read independently” **Level 5** “show understanding” **Level 7** “articulate personal and critical responses to poems, plays and novels”<sup>40</sup>

As such I would maintain that the methodology described in detail above represents a style more typical of English teaching than the Czech methodology over the last 50 years. . It will be recalled that the Czech students comments from their school visits in England<sup>ii</sup> were that they had a strong sense of children being creative, were allowed to form their own opinions and the relationship between teacher and pupils was less authoritarian. If we consider Stomka’s typography of agents for change, it may be seen that the students were moving from a period of Total Stagnation (Passivism 1) to a Released Activism (Activism 2)<sup>41</sup>. I would maintain that the methodology employed exemplifies a democratic approach to education as opposed to a totalitarian one

In conclusion there are four indicators of Englishness, three of which will re-occur as the texts in the second semester are investigated. The first, distinct to the oral tradition, is the different meaning given to fairy story. The indicator of Englishness is playfulness and subversiveness for while the tales themselves are not essentially English, the way they are produced is. Secondly there is a different attitude towards children where Czech children are more protected from the outside world.<sup>iii</sup> Consequently the Englishness of the texts is indicated by a tendency for a more critical, some would say harsh approach, to the adult world. Finally, and linked to the last point, a reader is implied who

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1, section A

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>iii</sup> See Chapter 1, section C and Chapter 2

is not protected, is able and willing to fill the gaps and is ready to ask questions and be critical. Finally underpinning the course as a whole is the way the texts were presented using English methodology which was designed to give the students a sense of ownership on their learning and, as has been discussed in the conclusions to the empirical research, had the effect of avoiding a fruitful exploration of the fault-lines between the two cultures.

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  - <sup>2</sup> Jan Mark, "William's Version" in Nothing to be Afraid Of Puffin, 1980 (first published 1977)
  - <sup>3</sup> Iona and Peter Opie, The Classic Fairy Tales OUP, 1997, p. 199
  - <sup>4</sup> Peter Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature OUP, 1994, p.41
  - <sup>5</sup> K. Chukovsky, "There is no such thing as a shark" in Meek M et al The Cool Web Bodley Head, 1977, p.48
  - <sup>6</sup> V. Propp, The Morphology of the Russian Folk Tale Texas University Press, 1968
  - <sup>7</sup> Grimms' Fairy Tales (illustrations Charles Folkard), Dent, 1951 (first published 1949 no author))
  - <sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 268
  - <sup>9</sup> M. Hornyansky, "The Truth of Fables" in Egoff et al Only Connect, OUP, 1969, p.121
  - <sup>10</sup> W.H. Auden "Afterword-George Macdonald" in Meek et al op.cit. p. 103
  - <sup>11</sup> F.J. Harvey Darton. Children's Books in England CUP, 1996, (first published 1932)
  - <sup>12</sup> J.R. Townsend, Written for Children Penguin, 1974, p.19
  - <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 47
  - <sup>14</sup> F. French, Snow White in New York OUP, 1994 (first published in 1986)
  - <sup>15</sup> J. Scieszka (paintings Steve Johnson) The Frog Prince Continued Puffin, 1992
  - <sup>16</sup> Janet and Allan Ahlberg, The Jolly Postman Heinemann, 1986
  - <sup>17</sup> Mark, op.cit.
  - <sup>18</sup> Munsch, op.cit.
  - <sup>19</sup> Mark, op.cit.
  - <sup>20</sup> M. Meek., How Texts Teach What Readers Learn The Thimble Press, 1988
  - <sup>21</sup> "Jan Mark" by David Rees in "Children's Writers" School Library Association, 1982, p. 30
  - <sup>22</sup> Signal 53, May 1987, p.116
  - <sup>23</sup> Mark, op.cit., p. 68
  - <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.68
  - <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.68
  - <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.69
  - <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.69
  - <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.69
  - <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.69
  - <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.70
  - <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 69
  - <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.74
  - <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.74
  - <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.75
  - <sup>35</sup> Foreman, M, World of Fairy Tales, Pavilion, 1990
  - <sup>36</sup> D. Shayer, The Teaching of English in Schools 1900-1977, RKP,1972, p.23
  - <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 23
  - <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.23
  - <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 103
  - <sup>40</sup> Department for Education, "English in the National Curriculum" HMSO, 1995, p.2
  - <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 28
  - <sup>42</sup> Sztompka P, Society in Action (The Theory of Social Becoming), Polity Press, 1991, p.134

## Chapter 5 The Iron Man by Ted Hughes

### Introduction

Ted Hughes, currently Poet Laureate, is acknowledged as one of England's most uncompromising contemporary poets. A central theme in his work, encapsulated by West as "a struggle of opposing forces"<sup>1</sup> may be seen in the stark tale of The Iron Man<sup>2</sup>. Described as "a children's classic"<sup>3</sup> The Iron Man, first published in 1968, is a popular book with 150,000 copies sold in the UK by 1985<sup>4</sup>. It could be argued that this text, which has little background detail and seemingly universal concerns about the survival of the planet, will not prove to be a fruitful site for representations of Englishness. Yet, while the text has few surface level indicators, it will be argued that a significant aspect of English culture is revealed through an investigation into the implied reader. The Iron Man also represents the Northern Englishness of Ted Hughes and is a product of its time: the late 1960's.

Born in the Calder Valley in Yorkshire in 1930, Hughes completed two years of National Service before taking up an Open Exhibition to Cambridge to read English. He changed from the English tripos in his third year and instead read anthropology and archeology - disciplines which engendered an intense interest in myth. After graduating he took a number of jobs, including teaching, then met the American poet Sylvia Plath in London. They were married in 1956 and a year later his first volume of poems The Hawk in the Rain<sup>5</sup> was published. In 1958 they moved to the United States, returning to Britain a year later. Tragically, Sylvia Plath committed suicide in 1962 leaving behind two children. A fallow period followed in which Hughes began :

"the central experience of a shattering of the self, and the labour of fitting it together again or finding a new one"<sup>6</sup>

This act of fitting the parts together is echoed in The Iron Man where the iron giant topples from a high cliff, breaks into pieces and reassembles himself. Hughes explained that he wrote The Iron Man: because of the failure of American children's books to reflect :

"the collision with the American technological world and beyond that, the opening up, by physics and so on, of a universe which was completely uninhabited except by atoms and the energy of atoms"<sup>7</sup>

Hughes' work is described as having a "mythical narrative"<sup>8</sup> and myth is seen by him as playing an important role in education:

"By stories alone, or almost alone, they claim to be able to bring a man to communion with his highest powers and abilities, to communion with God in fact. The hearer needn't necessarily understand the significance of the stories, as long as they work on his imagination"<sup>9</sup>

A fundamental underpinning of his work is an exploration of the tensions between the inner and outer world. According to Fass, Hughes is concerned with maintaining the faculty which keeps faith with the world of things and the world of spirits equally :

“This really is imagination. This is the faculty we mean when we talk about the imagination of the great artists. The character of great works is exactly this: that in them the full presence of the inner world combines with and is reconciled to the full presence of the outer world. And in them we see that the laws of these two worlds are not contradictory at all. We recognise these works because we are all struggling to find those laws, as a man on a tightrope struggles for balance, because they are the formula that reconciles everything, and balances every imbalance”<sup>10</sup>

The enigmatic opening chapters of The Iron Man with repetitive staccato language invites the notion that Hughes’ was portraying the absence of an inner world where attention only to the outer world “is a place full of meaningless objects and machines”<sup>11</sup>. The appearance of the angel-bat-dragon monster may be seen as the separation of the inner world from the outer world “a place for demons”<sup>12</sup>. Later as the narrative reaches a conclusion the inner and outer worlds combine in the music of the spheres.

Favourably reviewed in The Times Education Supplement it is described “as a well-told tale of fantasy and imagination”<sup>13</sup>

Yet, while much critical attention has been given to The Iron Man the main focus has been on only on content. Fred Inglis, from a neo-Romantic position, writing about a new imagination of the 1980’s which would replace that of Europe after 1945 asserts:

“Nobody can draw a cartoon of this rough beast slouching across the eighties in just a sentence, although Ted Hughes’s marvellous monster in *The Iron Man*, the space-bat-angel-dragon probably comes nearest to it, able as it is to devour the world, to bump it wobblingly out of its galactic rotations, or so to fill it with the sweet, ineffable music of the spheres that wars are stopped and turmoil stilled”<sup>14</sup>

Michael Rosen as a cultural materialist is irritated:

“...no matter how much I might be irritated by, say, the beginning of *The Iron Man* where we are told that the origins of this technological titan are unknown, no matter how much I lament that this turns the technological into the mythic dominator of humankind when in reality it is the servant of dominating humans...”<sup>15</sup>

However, although undoubtedly popular The Iron Man does not conform to the usual features of a children’s text as it does not have what Aidan Chambers describes as the “English tone”<sup>16</sup> which draws the reader into the narrative in the voice of the:

“friendly adult storyteller who knows how to entertain children while at the same time keeping them in their place”<sup>17</sup>.

The differences between an adult and a children’s text posited by Myles McDowell<sup>18</sup> were discussed in seminars (described below) and will further elucidate how this text does not follow the usual conventions of the children’s novel.

There is very little dialogue, the first appearing half way through the text, with the main thrust between the Iron Man and the Space Being appearing only in the final chapter. Similarly most of the action occurs towards the end and there is more introspection than incident until the final challenge. The conventions of story are largely subverted and the plot, while simple, is not of a distinctive order as the number of closures are unusual. While the language is child-oriented in terms of relative simplicity, it is neither inviting nor friendly.

On the other hand there are a number of similarities. The Iron Man with 59 pages of fairly large print conforms to the notion that children’s books are generally shorter. There is a child protagonist but, although he serves as a focalizer, is also kept at a certain distance from the reader. There is a moral schema which is clear in the final ending where the peoples of the earth stop fighting. There is an optimistic conventional happy ending and probability is disregarded.

### **Analysis of The Iron Man**

The text is unusual and only a thorough analysis of the implied reader and subject positions will demonstrate how the text does in fact operate for a child reader albeit unconventionally. So why is it so different and what is Ted Hughes attempting to do? As referred to above in the introduction he is concerned with the materialist emphasis on the outer world in society where reference to the spiritual inner world is seemingly ignored. In The Iron Man the mechanistic outer world is represented by distanced and unsympathetic human behaviour. The language itself is often short, staccato and mechanical. Alternatives to problems are given only by the boy, Hogarth and the Iron Man. When the inner and outer worlds are brought together there is harmony and this is reflected in flowing language.

Hughes’ implied reader must be willing to live in a cold, dark and strange world until the focalizer of the child figure, Hogarth appears and first resolution occurs. While a hostile adult world is not a new feature of children’s books, and this aspect is discussed in a number of texts in this work, rarely is there such coldness and hostility to the human condition felt. In The Iron Man Hughes treads a thin line between alienating his reader by instilling fear and drawing the reader in by offering the security usually afforded in a children’s text. The ways in which Hughes combines painting a grim picture and yet keeps his implied child reader with him is a key aspect of the narrative. And this

has not to my knowledge yet been closely examined. The import has been attended to but not the text. Yet the structure of the text itself is the site for examining the nature of this narrative.

Entitled a story in five nights, The Iron Man is written in five chapters, the first three seemingly to move to closure. In the first the strange Iron Man appears, falls from a cliff is broken into pieces and the parts put themselves together again after which he walks into the sea. In the second he returns and causes panic amongst the local farmers because he is eating their fences and farm machinery. A pit is dug to trap him and finally with the assistance of a boy, Hogarth, the Iron Man falls in and is buried under a large mound. The action in both chapters takes place during the hours of darkness. Spring appears in the opening of the third chapter and once more the Iron Man reappears and Hogarth finds an peaceful and ecological answer to the problem by leading the Iron Man to a scrap yard where he is happy to eat all the scrap metal. Once more there appears to be closure, this time a happy ending but the plot changes focus to a strange dragon-like creature to appears from a star, lands on Australia and threatens to eat all living creatures in the world. After unsuccessful attempts to destroy the monster, the Iron Man is called for and he challenges the dragon to a test of fire. The Iron Man wins and the monster is sent back into the heavens where as the slave of the people of the earth he spends his time making the music of the spheres. This beautiful sound has the effect of creating harmony between people on earth who stop fighting and begin to live peacefully with each other.

Even though the tone of The Iron Man is unusual, the child reader is strongly implied in the text. A child reader/listener is implied immediately below the title where it is described as a “story in five nights” which hints at bedtime reading. This also serves to warn the reader that, although the first three chapters appear to have closure, each time there is more to come.

The narration is third person, virtually omniscient but questioning. While a bleak picture is depicted with a distinctly adverse view of human beings, the implied child reader is protected by a number of devices which will be discussed as they occur. However, it should be emphasised that the text is not in any way inviting or cosy. The narrative opens with a bald statement “The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff”<sup>19</sup>. The use of the definite article signalling that it is not any cliff implies the reader knows that particular cliff, so although the language is stark, the definite article serves to draw the reader in. There are then a series of questions to which the narrator’s answer “nobody knows” also has the function of engaging the reader. Implied is a reader who is questioning or an apprentice reader who should be questioning as a children’s text often has the function of teaching children about the reading process:

“A skillful author ... is somewhat like a play-leader: he structures his narrative so as to direct it in a dramatic pattern that leads the reader towards possible meaning(s); and he stage-manages the reader’s involvement by bringing into play various techniques which he knows influence the reader’s responses and expectations,...”<sup>20</sup>

The questions have the feeling of the eager child wanting to know so it is the child's voice, the implied reader's voice, who is encompassed in the questioning which encourages active reading. The child reader is indicated by the domestic analogies used to describe the Iron Man: "Taller than a house"<sup>21</sup> his feet the size of a single bed<sup>22</sup> homely and safe items that can easily be imagined. The iron head "shaped like a dustbin"<sup>23</sup> also serves to remove elements of fear and in this stark opening there is much to fear.

A variety of adverbs are employed to describe the fall of the Iron Man from the cliff "tumbled", "scattered", "crashing", "bumping", "clanging"<sup>24</sup>. The almost onomatopoeic "crash" is repeated creating the noise of the Iron Man falling. After the fall noise ceases and the narrative moves into a more poetic mode:

A few rocks tumbled with him.  
Then  
Silence...  
...  
Nobody knew the Iron Man had fallen.  
Night passed<sup>25</sup>

The implied reader must not be squeamish:

"His eyes fell out...and the eye looked at them. It rolled from side to side looking first at one gull, then at the other"<sup>26</sup>

The seagulls who appear just before dawn act as a small focalizer where the narrative offers a glimpse of their perspective as they try to make sense of the iron man's eye:

"The gulls peering at it, thought it was a strange kind of clam, peeping at them from its shell"<sup>27</sup>

The reader at this stage, although still having to cope with many uncertainties, is in a superior position to the gulls and at least knows what has happened and why all these pieces are scattered on the beach. The reader is then required to be able to picture the sequence of events as the eye finds the hand and working in partnership they seek and reconstruct themselves into the Iron Man. But finally as he walks into the sea and disappears into the waves more uncertainties are planted.

There is an assumption so far that the reader has some knowledge of a sea-scape, is questioning, and is able and willing to hold with uncertainty.

The heading for chapter two "The Return of the Iron Man" indicates that he will reappear at some stage and the reader is placed in the pleasing position of knowing more than the boy, Hogarth, who now functions as the focalizer in this and the following chapter. While the implied child reader now

has a boy to identify with, the name Hogarth, which is unusual and sounds like a surname, serves to maintain a distancing effect. Similarly little information is given about him - he is out in the countryside at dusk, he is fishing and he is the son of a farmer. Again the scene is at night with the ever present sea in the background indicated by the onomatopoeic "Hughes, hush, hush"<sup>28</sup>. The cliff too is ever present mentioned three times in one short paragraph. Once Hogarth sees the Iron Man he runs home frightened and the narrative takes on a staccato feel with short sentences and repetitive rhythm

"He believed his son. He went out. He locked the door. He got in his car. He drove to the next farm".<sup>29</sup>

This dialogue is puzzling because it has the feel of the dead prose of the easy reader where short, simple sentences without use of flowing connectives are deemed easier for the slower learner to grasp. Why is this style being employed here? It occurs to me that the unpleasant side of human nature is being revealed through the use of mechanical language. It is the outer world devoid of the inner world that is indicated by the staccato prose and it is fruitful to note where this occurs in the narrative and where the prose takes on a more flowing style.

Hogarth's father drives from farm to farm to report what he son has seen but there is no direct speech. The first farmer is described unpleasantly as a "fat, red man, with a fat, red-mouthed laugh"<sup>30</sup>. This serves to distance the reader from the farmers. Large teeth marks have been seen in one tractor and once more the reader is able to be one step ahead of the characters:<sup>31</sup>

"No explanation! The two men looked at each other. They were puzzled and afraid".

Finally the Iron Man does appear, confirming the reader's hypothesis and also supporting Hogarth's story. The Iron Man topples over and for the first time there is a sense of being invited to feel some sympathy for this otherwise frightening iron giant. He is knocked over by a car and subsequently is seen to have slid down the cliff and into the sea. But the farmers have discovered that their machinery has been destroyed and the reader is invited to fill in the gaps cued by such questions as:

"Who had stolen it all?" "How had it been bitten off? Steel bitten off? What had happened?"<sup>32</sup>

The reactions of the farmers are described in reported speech as opposed direct speech which again serves to distance the reader from them. The farmer's trap is described in detail and there is almost a child-like excitement in the farmers plans:

"Now they reckoned the Iron Man would come over the top of the cliff out of the sea, and he'd see the old lorry which was painted red, and he'd come down to get it to chew it up and eat it."<sup>33</sup>



The Iron Man does not reappear and the focus once more moves from the farmers to the boy Hogarth and this time the focalization is much stronger. Again it is night time and Hogarth is out in the countryside attempting to trap a fox with a dead chicken as bait. The boy is patient: "A long time he waited. A star came out. He could hear the sea"<sup>34</sup>. The reversal of a regular structure which might be "He waited a long time" serves to give a more mythic feel to the language. A fox appears but does not step out onto the trap. Again the reader is questioned "Was he too smart to walk out there where it was not safe?"<sup>35</sup>

Once more the image of the cliff rising up in the darkness is presented:

"There, enormous in the blue evening sky, stood the Iron Man, on the brink of the cliff, gazing inland".<sup>36</sup>

The reader is now drawn into Hogarth's thinking and the focalization becomes much stronger:

"But Hogarth had an idea. In his pocket, among other things, he had a long nail and a knife. He took these out. Did he dare? His idea frightened him. In the silent dusk, he tapped the nail and the knife blade together"<sup>37</sup>

The implied child reader has already had the satisfaction of knowing more than the adults and now can identify with a boy who is clever enough to think of a way of luring the Iron Man into the trap. At the end of this chapter the Iron Man has been buried and covered by the farmers but Hogarth feels sorry for him and through him so does the reader. Little sympathy is evoked for the farmers.

Once more the third chapter heading "What's to be done with the Iron Man?" creates expectancy in the reader and indicates that the Iron Man will return. The attention moves away from Hogarth and the darkness of the first two chapters is contrasted with the bright description of Spring in a long, flowing sentence:

"So the Spring came round the following year, leaves unfurled from the buds, daffodils speared up from the soil, and everywhere the grass shook new green points."<sup>38</sup>

For the first time there is direct speech but still a certain distance is maintained as the speech is not of identifiable individuals but examples of what a vague mass of people are saying:

" 'What a lovely hill! What a perfect place for a picnic!' " <sup>39</sup>

A family arrive but the distancing effect continues as they are referred to only as the father, the mother and the little boy and little girl in spite of the fact there is direct speech. Tension is created because the reader, unlike the happy family having their picnic, knows what is underneath the hill

and when the father feels the ground shake, it is the reader who might guess what is causing the tremors.

At this stage in the narrative a note of humour is introduced. While the father is giving a long explanation about what the tremor could be (and the reader has a good idea he is completely wrong) the picnic begins to disappear into a large crack that is opening up. So when the giant hand appears the subject position of the reader, which is not sympathetic to the family, negates what might be extremely frightening. Staccato language appears again as the family flee from the mechanical man:

“They all ran. They jumped into the car. They drove. They did not look back”<sup>40</sup>

For a second time Hogarth has an idea and is listened to by the farmers who want to call in the Army and destroy the Iron Man with weapons of war. At this stage the reader is left to guess what the solution might be. A clue is given in the first conversation between Hogarth and the Iron Man where Hogarth tells him that they have all the metal he can eat and finally after they arrive in town, the scrap-metal yard is introduced and the focalization moves to the Iron Man:

“He followed that with a double-decker bedstead and the brass knobs made his eyes crackle with joy. Never before had the Iron Man eaten such delicacies.”<sup>41</sup>

The Iron Man is in “heaven” and is visited by Hogarth every few days. It seems like a conventional happy ending but the reader knows there are two more chapters to come. In chapter 4, attention moves from the contented scene in the scrapyards to space where a much more frightening event takes place. The tension between fear and comfort is balanced by touches of humour. A combination of anaphora and repetition indicate the star’s growth where the word “bigger” literally does get bigger:

“That tiny star was definitely getting bigger. And not just bigger. But bigger and Bigger and BIGger. Each night it was BIGGER”<sup>42</sup>

The same effect is used for the word “grew” but then the link between printing and meaning is severed with “nearer and NEARer and NEARER”<sup>43</sup>. The star’s rush to earth is described in poetic mode:

“It was rushing towards the world.  
Faster than a bullet.  
Faster than any rocket.  
Faster even than a meteorite”<sup>44</sup>

There is danger that if this rush continues the world will be destroyed but the simile offered lessens the fear: “It would be like an Express train hitting a bowl of goldfish”<sup>45</sup>

The “black horror”<sup>46</sup> that is flying towards earth is scary but its landing and after effects add a lighter touch indicating the care taken to achieve a balance between fear and comfort. The space-bat-angel-dragon lands on Australia (a safe distance for the British reader) with a “Barrump!”<sup>47</sup>

“The shock of its landing rolled round the earth like an earthquake, spilling teacups in London, jolting pictures off walls in California, cracking statues off their pedestals in Russia”<sup>48</sup>

This is a rare case in the text of an adult audience being addressed as the satirical stereotypes assume more knowledge of the world, particularly of hero worship in the USSR. than an implied child reader. However, while the light satire may be passed by a child reader, the comic book image serves to balance the fear.

The description of the monster hints at intertextuality: “terribly black, terribly scaly, terribly knobby, terribly horned, terribly hairy, terribly clawed, terribly fanged, with vast indescribably terrible eyes, each one as big as Switzerland”<sup>49</sup> as the word “terribly” evokes the creatures in Maurice Sendak’s picture book Where the Wild Things Are where they:

“...roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws”<sup>50</sup>

A number of questions are then addressed to the reader who is returned to a position of not knowing any answers which is a similar situation to that in the first chapter. At this stage there is more of a sense in the narrative of a tale being told - a feeling of the oral tradition indicated by cohesion between paragraphs. “For a whole day” “But the next morning” “Its voice shook and rumbled round the earth....” “The people of the world got together”<sup>51</sup>.

The peoples of the world have been given one week to prepare the monster’s first meal. This too has resonances from fairy story. The reader is now encouraged to lose themselves in the text and not be as distanced as before. At the end of the chapter the focus moves back to the Iron Man and Hogarth. The dialogue between them is again Hogarth speaking and the Iron Man listening with understanding indicated by the change of colour in his eyes. He speaks but his voice is only described not reported. He has volunteered to go out “as the champion of the earth”<sup>52</sup>. Unlike the other chapters this one does not end in closure and the tension invites the reader to continue.

In the final chapter the narrative continues in story-telling mode “There was no time to be wasted”<sup>53</sup> serving to draw the reader in to the story. Now there is dialogue between the Iron Man and the space-bat-angel-dragon and this dialogue has the feel of a playground challenge:

"I challenge you, he shouted, "to a test of strength.... And if I can prove myself stronger than you are, then you must promise to become my slave...And if you don't accept my challenge...then you're a miserable cowardly reptile, not fit to bother with".<sup>54</sup>

Both the challengers act as focalizers and invite the sympathy of the reader:

"The monster gazed up at the sun. He felt strangely cold suddenly. But how could he refuse?"<sup>55</sup>

When he returns the description of his sorry state again moves the reader into seeing the creature in a different way:

"But it was hardly the same monster! His horns drooped, his face was wizened and black, his claws were scorched blunt, his crest flopped over limply and great ragged holes were burned in his wings. It had been terrible for him on the fires of the sun. But he had done it."<sup>56</sup>

The second landing is described in such an amusing way which allays fear:

"He landed so heavily that all over the world bells tumbled out of church towers and birds-eggs were jarred out of their nests."<sup>57</sup>

A second round is called for and the Iron Man's bed of fire is made hotter and last for a longer period and for the first time his feelings are described:

"At this point the Iron Man was terribly afraid. For what would happen if the flames went on getting fiercer and fiercer? He would melt. He would melt and drip into the flames like so much treacle and that would be the end of him...he was very very frightened"<sup>58</sup>

The focus moves for a short time to the engineers "...and they too thought it was the end of the Iron Man"<sup>59</sup> and then returns to the two challengers. The Iron Man just survives the second round but the monster seems to have disappeared into the sun. Questions replace the dialogue of those watching:

"But was the sun burning him up? Had he melted in the sun? Where was he?"<sup>60</sup>

The replacement of question for dialogue again helps to distance the reader who would be encouraged to identify or empathise with a human speaker. The focus remains on the Iron Man and the Monster, even Hogarth now is absent from the text, so both have the full attention of the reader.

The monster returns in an even more sorry state and the heaviness of his landing causes tidal waves and knocks down skyscrapers but the full horror of this is once more negated by humour:

"All over the world, anybody who happened to be riding a bicycle at that moment instantly fell off."<sup>61</sup>

At this stage, round three, the monster starts to weep and declares he has to submit and will become the Iron Man's slave. The Iron Man asks him what he can do and the first word of his reply, "Alas" has resonances of the language of fairy story (see section on the oral tradition). In a longer speech about what he can do, he refers to himself as a "star spirit" which has a spiritual feeling and is totally different from the threatening "space-bat-angel-dragon". So far it is clear that the reader's attention and sympathies have focused on the Iron Man, the Star Spirit and Hogarth. All other humans have been distanced and when the star spirit explains that he became so aggressive because of the sounds of war emanating from the earth the reader is able to see human behaviour from a position above and apart from the planet. The star-spirit makes music from the spheres which has the effect of altering people's perceptions:

"They stopped making weapons. The countries began to think how they could live pleasantly alongside each other, rather than how to get rid of each other. All they wanted to do was to have peace to enjoy this strange, wild, blissful music from the giant singer in space."<sup>62</sup>

Closure has finally been achieved.

The above analysis shows that Ted Hughes succeeds in exploring the mechanical and the spiritual not only through plot but also through form and while the text is unusual and does not conform to a number of aspects usually found in a children's book, the child reader is implicit. It will be argued below that the nature of the implied reader is a significant cultural indicator.

### **Methodology**

It will be observed that the methodology which will now be described, while good EFL practice, actually serves to subvert the distancing effect contrived by Ted Hughes. My concerns at the time were to encourage the students to become active readers and the time did not allow a deeper analysis of how the text seeks to do this. The focus was more on the import of the The Iron Man and less on how the effects were achieved. It will be recalled that the emphasis in the second half of the children's literature course moved away from the oral tradition and focused on three novels, one book of short stories and two anthologies of poetry. Three of the authors are contemporary, Ted Hughes, Michael Rosen (editor) and Hazel Townson and three are well-known authors of might be considered "classic" works: Lewis Carroll, A. A. Milne and Walter-de-la-Mare. The Iron Man was the first full-length contemporary novel read by the students although some contemporary writing, including Hughes' Tales from the Early World, had been studied under the umbrella of the Oral Tradition<sup>i</sup>. I selected this story because, while the language is not difficult, the issues are advanced enough for the students to consider at their level. It is also an extremely unusual story that would challenge and interest them.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 4

Before embarking on the text<sup>1</sup>, I asked the students to look at the front cover and predict what sort of story they thought they might be reading. Their ideas were written on the board and I asked them to keep notes so they could compare their ideas with what they actually read later on. The students on the whole were slow and uncertain with their predictions at first because they were still in the mode of "looking for the right answer" and had not been asked to do anything like this before. Most of the students predicted the story would be Science Fiction (the Czechs use the English phrase) and would involve a Robot (a Czech word). Some students picked up on environmental aspects from the clues of discarded cars and cranes seen in the background of the illustration.

The following vocabulary was picked out for consideration before the first chapter was read:

*"on the brink, the wind sang, head over heels, hither and thither, crab, sea gulls, clam, torso, breakers, to scuttle"*

The selection of this vocabulary was made on my guesses of what might be unknown for the students and what was needed to help them picture the scene in their heads. The Czech Republic is a landlocked country and they needed to focus on a seascape as the first chapter concerns the Iron Man standing on the brink of a cliff, falling down, breaking into pieces and then putting himself together on the seashore. I read the chapter to the students as they looked at the text. After reading I asked to students in pairs examine the text in detail and sequence the reconstruction of the Iron Man.

The methodology here was usual EFL practice of pre-reading tasks, such as setting the scene in order to help the language learners guess from context, and supporting with either difficult or unusual vocabulary. Reading to the students allowed them to hear how the intonation of the target language sounds and follow-up activities gave students space to consolidate their understanding.

After feedback from the sequencing task, I asked the students to predict what they thought might happen next. This is not an easy task because the Iron Man has just walked into the sea and it feels like the end of the story but as there are four more chapters the reader knows this is not the case. Then the second chapter was read, in which the Iron Man returns and begins to eat farm machinery and fences, up to the point where the farmers have a meeting to decide what to do. I then gave the students a role play where they were all farmers and were at a meeting to decide what to do about the Iron Man. The class was divided into two groups of farmers and each student was given a role card. These are the different roles allotted to each group:

A  
*You are aggressive and like to use force. You are often angry and the Iron Man has eaten most of your farm machinery.*

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<sup>1</sup> The edition used was the 1985 Faber and Faber paperback with illustrations by Andrew Davidson.

B

*You are clever and inventive. You like solving problems. The Iron Man has eaten only some of your machinery*

C

*You are not very clever but are good at making things. You are practical and can think of ideas. The Iron Man has eaten a lot of your machinery and you are very worried.*

D

*You are a natural leader. You like to take charge but you are also good at listening. You are keen to solve the problem of the Iron Man. You too have lost quite a lot of your farm machinery.*

E

*You have not seen the Iron Man. None of your machinery has been touched by him. You don't really believe he exists. You think everyone else is making too much fuss.*

F

*You are very frightened. You have seen how big the Iron Man is. You don't really want to do anything to anger or annoy him. You have lost some of your farm machinery but you have money to buy more*

G

*You like to try to find peaceful ways of solving problems. You are non-violent and non-aggressive. You are worried about the Iron Man and you have lost a lot of your farm machinery.*

There were a number of reasons for devising this role play. Firstly I wanted to give the students another context for language development as the students had to find the appropriate way of speaking for the role they were given. Secondly role play can often help the quieter student find a voice once they are involved in representing another character. I deliberately gave the more introverted student such roles as A or D and the extroverts G and F. Thirdly this role play was also developed to help with understanding of the situation as involved the students in the story where the problems the farmers' were experiencing could be made more concrete. Finally interest would be created in finding out what the farmers actually did when the rest of the chapter was finally read.

However, while this might be a useful technique for the language classroom, I was unintentionally subverting the effect that Hughes' was achieving through his narrative where the reader is deliberately distanced from the plight of the farmers.

All the group role-plays were lively and interesting to listen to and a number of solutions were put forward. As I remember in every class there were some students whose characters found a solution similar to the one in the story where the farmers dig a large pit and bury the Iron Man in it.

The second seminar began with a reminder of the solutions resulting from the role play. Before reading the second part of chapter 2 the following vocabulary was explained:

*"freshly ploughed, rust, bait, undisturbed, barbed wire fence, looming, wallowing, cogs".*

At the end of the chapter we compared the solution and discussed in groups why the boy Hogarth, having lured the Iron Man into the pit then feels sorry for him. We also discussed our feelings about the farmers and why they were not so sympathetic.

The pre-reading vocabulary for chapter 3 was small:

*“ to take snaps, clump of trees, brass, aluminium, chrome ”*

Before reading the students were also asked to note when the first piece of dialogue occurs.

In this chapter the Iron Man re-emerges from his pit disturbing a happy family enjoying their picnic. Hogarth suggests the solution which is to lead him to a scrap yard where he can eat as much as he likes. After the reading I talked in more detail about English scrap yards as such places are not so abundant in the Czech Republic because there was no built-in redundancy for machinery and equipment under the communist system. Cars were kept for over 20 years and spare parts for them and most domestic appliances were available. As there was little concept of fashion, there was little innovative design and styles did not go out of favour. I had an ancient Russian food-mixer in my Brno flat and when a small piece of plastic broke I presumed I would have to buy a new mixer. A helpful neighbour took the broken part and returned with replacements and was amazed that I had thought buying about a new one. The replacement parts cost around 5p. I pointed out to the students that environmentally there were some aspects of the old system they might like to consider in a favourable light.

After the reading pairs discussed how the story so far links with their original predictions and what they thought would happen next. Groups of four were then asked to take it in turns to retell the story from the Iron Man's perspective. I reminded them of how they retold "Little Red Riding Hood" in the first semester. This was another way of revising the story so far. It supported those who were not so confident with their English and gave an interesting task for those who were. This task was not so much at odds with the text as by now the reader has been encouraged to empathise with the Iron Man.

In the final seminar on the text the class was reminded of the ending of the last chapter where the Iron Man in the scrap yard is described as being in heaven. Groups were asked to brainstorm ideas for the following:

A dog's heaven, child's heaven, teacher's heaven, President Vaclav Havel's Heaven.



This was a popular task and there were lots of creative and amusing ideas. I recall that many ideas for a children's heaven involved loving parents. I have a feeling that English students might not include parents at all.

I asked the students again to consider what might happen next and once more the ending of Chapter 3 seems like the end of the story with resolution of the problem. In Chapter 4, the Iron Man is left in his "heaven" and the focus moves to a giant creature from space who lands on Australia and demands food. The students looked at the chapter heading and were asked once more to predict what they thought might follow. I assumed that on the whole by now they were automatically doing this but their ideas also gave me an insight into how they were thinking.

The text was read up to the point where the peoples of the world tried to decide what to do. I decided to create a United Nations in the class and allot each student a country to represent with the attitudes they thought might go with it. Countries selected were Australia, New Zealand, China, India, Russia, USA, France, Germany, UK, Brazil, Mexico, Iran, Zimbabwe, and the Czech Republic.

The more political of the students were able to demonstrate the alignments of various countries or rehearse old hostilities. Those countries furthest from Australia were less engaged. I recall that some of those students representing the UK suggested using the Iron Man to help. The role-play again subverted Hughes' intentions as the students could identify more with the countries they represented and so the vague mention "of the peoples' of the earth"<sup>63</sup> became more concrete. In the background of this role play was the continuing efforts of the United Nations to solve the hideous mess that was taking place in Bosnia and although not discussed openly must have been on the minds of some of the students. Discussion of this in relation to apparent human incapability in helping in such cases was discussed later when reading "The Expedition to the North Pole" in A. A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh. (see Chapter 8) The seminar ended with the reading of the rest of the chapter where the Iron Man is called in to help. We discussed what he might be able to do.

Chapter 5 is the last chapter and in it the Iron Man challenges the monster to a test of strength, wins and creates a peaceful world where the music from the spheres brings harmony to all the peoples on earth. The pre-reading tasks were for pairs to tell each other what has happened in the story so far and predictions of what the Iron Man might do were written on the board

The following vocabulary was highlighted and explained:

*"challenge, girders, echo, slave, reptile, antics, wizened, asbestos, singeing, ordeal, ponderous, squabbles"*

The final chapter was read and in each case I recall a silence at the end that needed not to be broken too quickly. I gave some space for the students to talk to each other about the ending. Then more structured questions were put for pairs to discuss:

The book is described by Ted Hughes as "a children's story in five nights"

1. Why five nights?
2. Is it a children's story?

In order to help deepen their thinking about what is a children's story I wrote the following quotation on the board:

"...a good children's book makes complex experience available to its readers; a good adult book draws attention to the inescapable complexity of experience"<sup>64</sup>

and drew up the list below from the MacDowel article which has been discussed above:

children's books are generally shorter  
they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment,  
dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection  
child protagonists the rule  
conventions much used  
the story develops within a clear-cut moral schema  
optimistic rather than depressive  
language is child-oriented  
plots are of a distinctive order  
probability is often disregarded

I discussed the criteria, clarifying and eliciting examples from The Iron Man, before the students formed groups. After a brief plenary we looked at the following quotation from The Observer which appears on the back cover: "Reckoned one of the greatest of modern fairy tales".

I asked the students to decide if The Iron Man could be described as a fairy tale. This served to link the discussions that had taken place in the first semester where both fairy tale and myth had been explored in some detail<sup>i</sup>.

### **Cultural Indicators of Englishness**

The reactions of many students were enjoyment of the text at their own level with uncertainties about its suitability for children. This was also reflected in comments by adults in the Brno Summer School where many observed that the cover illustration alone would be too frightening for a child. An example of such a protective attitude was revealed when the students were considering what aspects would need explanation for a Czech child reader and it was thought the significance of the change of

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 4

colour in the Iron Man's eyes should be elucidated<sup>i</sup>. Now this is a gap deliberately left by Ted Hughes for his reader to work out for themselves. I doubt whether a close analysis of how the text protects the implied child reader would convince them. This more protective attitude towards children which is discussed in the summary on empirical research, is a significant cultural indicator because the text reflects a different attitude towards the child reader. This is demonstrated in Mike Rosen's comment about his experience of talking to writers for children:

"Nearly everyone I ever meet in the world of children's literature holds firm to one idea above all others: children are active, creative, imaginative people who can, if they want, do almost anything."<sup>65</sup>

The investigation of the implied reader in The Iron Man has demonstrated that Ted Hughes views children in a similar vein and as such conforms to the notion in English children's fiction of a reader who can be challenged.

English children's literature does not only reveal the implied child reader but has been and continues to be a site for innovation so it is not surprising nor unusual that a children's book was selected as a site for experimentation with form. Hughes while breaking some of the "rules" for a children's book is not breaking new ground in changing the way children's books are written. Lewis Carroll placed the non-didactic fantasy firmly in the genre in 1866<sup>ii</sup>, the Ahlbergs are continually delving into intertextuality while David McKee presents the postmodern in the enigmatic picture book I Hate My Teddy Bear.<sup>66</sup>

Another important aspect of the Englishness of this text stems from Hughes' maintenance of close links to his roots in Yorkshire. The location of The Iron Man with its attendant darkness is reminiscent of the Calder Valley of Hughes' childhood:

"The Calder Valley, west of Halifax was the last ditch of Elmet, the last British Celtic kingdom to fall to the Angles. For centuries, it was considered a more or less uninhabitable wilderness, a notorious refuge for criminals, a hide-out for refugees."<sup>67</sup>

In the valley there looms a cliff:

"The valley seemed always dark, under the shadow of a huge, almost vertical, looming cliff to the north, a mere corridor between the cotton towns of south Lancashire and the woollen towns of the West Riding"<sup>68</sup>

The cliff, referred to here as a rock, fascinated Hughes in his youth

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 10 Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

“I have heard that valley is notable for its suicides, which I can believe, and I could also believe that rock is partly to blame for them. A slightly disasterous, crumbly, grey light, sunless and yet too clear, like a still from the documentary film. For one thing you cannot look at a precipice without thinking instantly what it would be like to fall down it , or jump down it”<sup>69</sup>

This is the cliff of the Iron Man which has been relocated by the sea. Another memory from his youth also appears in the text and this resulted from a recurrent nightmare where:

“a plane, which he flies in or watches, crashes in flames and often, before it hits the ground, changes into a monster animal falling out of the sky.”<sup>70</sup>

Yet this Calder Valley was the site for that great change which reconstructed British society from agrarain to urban in one of the most profound changes The Industrial Revolution:

“Then in the early 1800s it became the cradle for the Industrial Revolution in textiles, and the upper Calder became ‘the hardest-worked river in England’.”<sup>71</sup>

One reason for the bleakness is Hughes’ attempt to break away from

“our infatuation with our English past in general. The archetypes are always there waiting “the swashbuckling Elizabethan, earthy bawdy Merrie Englander, devastatingly witty Restoration blade...”<sup>72</sup>

Hughes in seeking to find an Englishness that is not southern, not establishment, that suits his own Northern roots, creates another mythic past a different construction of Englishness with a line that stretches further back than the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons towards a Celtic past. Is it a coincidence that the hill under which the Iron Man has been buried is thought to have been there for ages and could perhaps appear like a tumulus? A quick glance at an Ordnance Survey map of the UK will reveal any number of tumuli, buried mounds from the Iron Ages which act as reminders of the long habitation of these islands. While the Iron Man is set in the present, that mythic past, that cold valley, those hardened farmers reach further back in mythic time which serves to maintain the English myth of a national identity which is an unbroken line. The Englishness in The Iron Man is not the soft, southern, rich, rolling downs of Adam’s Watership Down and Graham’s The Wind in the Willows rather it is northern, harsh, cold and rugged. But while it is not the Merrie England of popular myth, the representation of the patron Saint of England, St George, is central. For the Iron Man is St George who vanquishes the Dragon using its own weapon of fire. This modern St George rescues not a damsel in distress but the earth itself from dangerous forces from outer space.

Another important aspect of Englishness which has a strong presence in the first three chapters, and may be taken for granted, is the presence of the sea. The daily shipping forecast on Radio 4 is a powerful reminder of our island status and the ritualistic naming of the sea areas serves to encircle the

British Isles four times a day. That it has significance not only to “those at peril on the sea”<sup>73</sup> but those safely on land is indicated by its inclusion in “Red Nose” week in March 1997 where radio listeners were invited to request a well-known “personality” to read the shipping forecast. The broadcasts are deemed to be essentially British by Andrew O’Hagan in his review of a recent art exhibition “The Shipping Forecast” by Mark Power:

“The broadcasts have the essential components you discern in everything classically British: it is serious about its seriousness; it is dreamily nostalgic; and, to the common ear, it is, in some small way, almost completely tonto. The 31 zones - with names such as Dogger, German Bight, Fastnet, Finisterre - are referred to in terms both enigmatic and dear”<sup>74</sup>

Mark Power photographed the boundaries of the sea intoned in the Shipping Forecast and viewers to the exhibition can hear recordings of the forecast as they look. They serve to remind us of:

“...the islandness of the British isles. Our feelings about the idea of Europe are summoned, too, by these image soft dark, dividing seas, and of coastal towns in foreign places, where our closely guarded seas end up.”<sup>75</sup>

Is a “proper holiday” not indeed one at the seaside? It was only when living in a landlocked country that the difference between being surrounded by other countries and the sea was manifest. The phrase itself, “landlocked”, with its negative overtones, as if the country is imprisoned, could only emanate from a nation which feels positive about its island status. We feel safe on our island because it makes invasion difficult and there are few negative feelings of being isolated and “sealed off”. It is a taken-for-granted aspect of living in England and was noticed by the Czech student who had the task of making the text Czech - an Iron Man walking into a lake has not the same resonance as into the “boiling and booming sea”<sup>76</sup>

There are a few surface level indicators in the text. The picnic, with English food including the primus for making tea and the tablecloth was picked up by the Czech students as a very English phenomenon. Small scale farmers with their own land were also compared to the large collective farms with state owned machinery. When converting the text into a Czech culture, the farmers would have different attitudes because it was not their personal property that was being eaten. The English spring of daffodils and lambs in the fields described in chapter 3 is a taken-for-granted aspects of our climate and again the Czechs had to see an English spring to realise that daffodils are very different from dandelions. Daffodils too have strong resonances in English culture thanks to William Wordsworth’s “golden host”<sup>77</sup>

There are also links with the Commonwealth where quietly stalk the ghosts of Empire. Is it no coincidence that Australia is the site for the arrival of the Star Spirit. It is distant so there is safety for the implied British reader but familiar enough, as part of the Commonwealth, not to be completely strange. After all we have the same Queen (at the time of writing, 1997). And as the Queen has been

mentioned, it is obvious, but nevertheless must be pointed out, that the existence of a Poet Laureate means there is a Monarch to write poems for and it will be recalled that the strongest cultural indicator picked by the Czech students was the Royal Family.

Western affluence and the capitalist idea of built in redundancy result in problems concerning the dumping of waste. Huge scrap-yards litter the landscape and Hughes ecological answer would not be needed in the old Communist states of Eastern Europe where cars lasted thirty years or more and spare parts could be obtained. The design of objects did not change so there was no urge to buy a newer model. This was why the scrap-yard had to be carefully explained to the students.

Finally, it will be recalled that Ted Hughes was writing at a potent time for English culture. The Iron Man is also of its period which is that iconic year of the 60's: 1968 That was the year of Soviet tanks on the streets of Prague; revolutionary movements in Europe; protests against the Vietnam War; the Peace Movement incorporating alternative live styles; flower power and hippies. The Beatles hit "All You Need is Love" recorded in 1967 was the first to be transmitted round the world by the new technology of the satellite. The solution of the music of the spheres seamlessly fits in with that period. The optimistic ending of The Iron Man reflects the political naivety of those times and as Britain emerges from the 1960's backlash in the late 90's, Hughes' sequel The Iron Woman (1993) reflects Hughes' current concerns about ecology and the future of the Earth

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<sup>1</sup> T. West, Ted Hughes Methuen, 1985, p.15

<sup>2</sup> Ted Hughes, The Iron Man (Illustrations George Adamson) Faber & Faber, 1968

<sup>3</sup> T. Gifford, N. Roberts, Ted Hughes: A Critical Study Faber & Faber, 1981, p.45

<sup>4</sup> West, op.cit. p. 37

<sup>5</sup> Ted Hughes, The Hawk in the Rain Faber & Faber, 1957

<sup>6</sup> Ekbert Faas, Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe Black Sparrow Press, 1980, p.15

<sup>7</sup> Gifford and Roberts, op.cit., p.63

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.45

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.45

<sup>10</sup> Faas op.cit p. 37

<sup>11</sup> Ted Hughes "Myth and Education" in Writers Critics and Children Eds, Fox G et al, Heinemann, 1978, p. 92

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.92

<sup>13</sup> The Times Education Supplement, Friday March 8, 1968, p.794

<sup>14</sup> "The Lesser great tradition: carry on, children" in Children's Literature in Education, Number 29, Vol 9.No.2, Summer 1978, p.73

<sup>15</sup> Signal No. 76, January 1995, p.41

<sup>16</sup> A. Chambers, "The Reader in the Book" in Signal No. 23, May 1977, p. 82

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 69

<sup>18</sup> M. McDowel, "Fiction for Adults and Children: Some Essential Differences" in Fox G, op.cit., p.142.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes, op.cit., p. 1

<sup>20</sup> Chambers A., op.cit., p. 76

<sup>21</sup> Hughes, op.cit., p.13

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.21

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## Chapter 6 Culture Shock Edited by Michael Rosen

### Introduction

The title of the anthology Culture Shock<sup>1</sup> serves to encapsulate the Czech students' reactions to many of the texts read on the course with this selection of poetry in particular providing the largest gap in understanding. The anthology contains 106 items, the majority of which are poems but also included are jokes, graffiti and epitaphs. There are poems by well-known authors published by major printing houses as well as lesser-known writers, small community imprints, and work by young people themselves. While serious issues such as race, gender, and class predominate, there is an overwhelming sense that poetry can be accessible and fun. The majority of the poems were not necessarily conceived as specifically for young people originally but now placed together in an anthology such a readership<sup>i</sup> is implied. However, identifying the implied reader is not a straightforward task for there are a number of implied readers who can be investigated. Apart from the implied reader for the anthology as a whole there is also an implied reader for each particular poem. For the interest of this piece of research, it will be the implied reader for the anthology which will be the main focus but reference will be made to the implied reader of each separate poem when they are discussed below.

Fifteen poems were selected for the students to study in detail and these will be discussed first, after which the anthology will be placed in context. Then the methodology will be described and this will be followed by an analysis of the implied reader and cultural indicators. It will be argued that it is the implied reader who is the most significant indicator in this text because the anthology is closely linked to a particular readership which emanates from a post-colonial position.

### Analysis of the Poems Selected from the Anthology

I have divided the selected poems into four categories for ease of discussion, although they were not read by the students in this order. The first category concerns race and the following four poems deal in some way with the issue.

*Stereotype* by John Agard originally published in *Mangoes and Bullets* (Pluto Press)

*Broadminded* by Ray Durem from *Take No Prisoners* 1971

*Sho Nuff* by Nilene O.A. Foxworth from *Bury Me in Africa*, Mambo Press

*He Had a Dream* by Sam Greenlee from *Ammunition!*, Bogle L'Overture

### Stereotype (page 1)

The poem is written in 7 stanzas in a colloquial, conversational manner of a black man talking to a white man. The opening lines give the reader an idea of who is speaking:

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<sup>i</sup> "Readership" is used in this section to include the listener, as poetry is not only read silently but often listened to.



“I’m a fullblooded  
West Indian stereotype”

These lines are repeated at the beginning of the first five stanzas and are followed each time by an example of the stereotypes: always wearing a straw hat, having natural rhythm, drinking rum, limbo dancing, calypso singing, happy-go-lucky, chasing white women, keen on steel bands, and good at cricket. A tongue-in-cheek feeling of a generalised West Indian dialect is indicated through grammar and lexis. An example of a non-standard grammatical constructions may be seen in the section on cricket:

“Put de willow  
in me hand  
and watch me stripe  
de boundary”

Such words as “Riddum”, “ah”, “yuh” are also employed to indicate dialect.

The white man’s fear of the potency of the black man is hinted at:

“if yuh think ah lie  
bring yuh sister”

Having established all the stereotypes the last stanza then subverts them:

“Yes, I’m a fullblooded  
West Indian stereotype  
  
that’s why I  
graduated from Oxford University  
with a degree  
in anthropology”

**“Broadminded”** by Ray Durem from *Take No Prisoners* 1971 (page 31)

As this is such a short poem it can be reproduced in full:

Some of my best friends are white boys.  
When I meet ‘em,  
I treat ‘em  
just the same as if they was people”.

The assumption here is that the reader knows the cliché that some white people will insist they have black friends as evidence that they are not prejudiced. And this the poem turns on its head in a nicely ironic way. The poem is located in an urban setting indicated by London dialect features such as “‘em” and the third person singular form of the verb “to be”. There is a strong sense of spoken

language of the vernacular - it is meant to be heard and not read. As in "Stereotype" the voice is of a black character but the identity of the listener is less clear.

**"Sho Nuff" by Nilene O.A. Foxworth from *Bury Me in Africa*, Mambo Press (p.34)**

This too is written in the first person but in this case it is the voice of a black woman:

"Cold soft drinks  
quenched my thirst  
one hot and humid July day  
after a cool drive  
to a mountain store."

The narrative continues and we learn that many women in the supermarket are wearing halter tops and the main topic of conversation involves comparing their sun tans. Such discussion implies these women are white and it is established that for them the darker the tan the higher the status, which is linked to the amount of leisure these women enjoy. Then the narrator hears a voice behind her emanating from "A tall dark and handsome Black dude" who whispers:

" 'Sister, if those two  
are ladies of leisure,  
you must surely be  
a lady of royalty.' "

The narrator then responds:

"And in a modest tone, I replied,  
'SHO NUFF?'"

Indicators that this is not English but American are revealed quickly. The title "Sho Nuff" which is not an English dialect form, is opaque until the final line. The hot weather might just be English but it would be rare. While there are technically mountains in England they do not have shops on them and "store" is the American word for shop. Further evidence is revealed by the word "Sister" used by the black "dude" to address the black female.

**"He Had A Dream" Sam Greenlee (from "Ammunition" Bogle L'Overture) (p.37)**

The title informs the reader that the subject of the poem is Martin Luther King, the Civil Rights leader who was assassinated in 1968 because his most well-known speech began with the rhetorical device of punctuating the beginning of each idea with "I have a dream". The poem, written in the first person, is in the form of a question where the writer considers what was in Martin Luther King's mind just as he was shot. The questioner considers the pacifist admonition to which King subscribed which was to "turn the other cheek". The tone is deeply cynical and the description of the shooting is harsh as he describes King as being:

slapped  
by  
a .30.30 slug..”

The use of American slang in such words as “slapped” and “slug” to describe the shooting serve to emphasise the violence of the act and also indicates that the poem emanates from the USA.

In each poem there is a strong sense of voice and a direct address. The first three poems discussed above are written in conversational form between an implied speaker and an implied listener. And in each case the speaker is black. The listeners, however, vary. In “Stereotype” the listener is a white male, in “Sho Nuff” it is likely to be a black woman and in “Friends” the listener is a black friend. In “He Had a Dream” the speaker and listener are ambivalent. Now this raises a pertinent question about audience for if the implied reader is black there will be a different reading from that of a white reader. In the first three poems the white reader is asked to recognise that there is a lesson to be learned while for the black reader there is the enclosing feeling of a shared experience. Thus the poems cater for a double-audience. “He Had A Dream” is different, the tone is not playful and does not have a double address for black and white rather the addressee is an implied liberal.

All four poems are deeply embedded in a particular context and it is implied that the reader has a knowledge of this. It is essential to have an idea of the West Indian stereotypes in order to enjoy the humour of Agard’s poem. The implied reader in “Sho Nuff” is aware of the irony, where in a world of racial prejudice where black is the at the bottom of the social scale, many white people endeavour to acquire a tan. “He Had A Dream” is culturally dense and requires knowledge of the event as well as of American slang.. Useful too is knowing the significance of a .30-30 bullet which perhaps is more likely in a gun-owning culture such as the USA as opposed to one where private ownership of guns is less common as in Britain.

There is a double-audience for the poems on feminism, this time the division being between male and female.

**Feminism:**

*Eve* by Kate Llewellyn from *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* (p.58)

*Me Auntie Connie* by Terry Lee from *Down to Earth and On Its Feet*, Bristol Broadsides (p.54)

*Nostalgia* Iain Chapman from ITV English Programme Poetry Competition 1982

“Eve” subverts the Judeo/Christian myth of the expulsion from The Garden of Eden in which traditionally it is the female who is tempted by the fruit of knowledge. In this poem, Eden is depicted not as perfect Paradise but as a dull place:

“Let’s face it  
Eden was a bore  
nothing to do  
but walk naked in the sun  
make love  
and talk...” (58)

It is Eve who “bored witless by Adam” (59) decides to take the apple because she

“...hungered  
to know  
the clever thing  
she wasn’t kicked out  
she walked out.” (p.59)

It was not necessary for Eve to be seduced into eating the fruit of knowledge by the snake because she had made up her own mind.

Kate Llewellyn subverts the myth by first of all portraying Paradise as restricting and secondly showing the female as the active, intelligent decision-maker. The poem is written in three stanzas in a relaxed informal style with a strong sense of immediacy as if a friend was explaining the situation. Humour is provided by the juxtaposition of the stereotypical image of Paradise with the deprivation of such important 20th century needs such as tea, wine, the radio and books to read.

It is implied that the reader knows the Christian myth and has also experienced the relaxed idleness of a holiday in the sun. Although the poem is Australian, where in some parts, the listless days of sun and sea are more common than in the UK, cheap package holidays since the 1960’s have allowed even Britons to experience the sybaritic life.

While “Eve” has a middle-class, intellectual feel “Me Aunty Connie” which is set on the production line as “Carsons” cake factory is distinctly working class. This is immediately indicated by the grammatical construction of the non-standard “me” in the title. The poem describes the hideous boredom of work on the production line:

“Me Aunty worked at Carson’s,  
On the cream button.  
She put the dollop on the cake  
As it passed along the conveyor belt.” (54)

We are told that she had been there for fifteen years when she was promoted to

“..Senior Cream Dolloper”

Her new position involved ensuring that no cakes were eaten and that there was no laughing and talking on the production line. Having established the situation Terry Lee then describes what Aunty Connie did on her last day at work after she had been offered a better-paid job elsewhere. Not only did she put cream on the wrong buns but also in a moment of great effrontery to the manager:

“She picked up a cake  
And ate it in front of him”

the poem ends with the proud boast of the narrator:

“Everyone at Carson’s  
Knows me Aunty Connie”.

There is an informal narrative style to the poem as if a friend was recounting a story about his aunty. It is accessible and humorous and has a strong sense of spirit. The implied reader is invited to share the joke and take the side of Aunty Connie against management. It is assumed the reader has some sense of a production line, knowledge of cake varieties and can pick up the “voice” of the non-standard.

Of the three poems in this section “Nostalgia” is the bleakest and most opaque. Unlike “Eve” and “Me Aunty Connie” where the women are actively creating their own space in “Nostalgia” the female is thoroughly downtrodden. The poem is in the form of a conversation between father and son and begins with the well-known question:

“daddy daddy  
cried the child  
what did you do  
in the war?”

The longer second stanza is the reply from father. He has not fought in a war:

“but for the usual one”

and the reader is left to surmise whether he is referring to the war of the sexes.

We learn that father began a fine career and built a home and family but instead of a happy mood there is a disturbing end:

“since then  
I have been  
slowly strangling  
your mother  
with it.

The reader has to recognise the opening question which emanated from recruitment posters in the First World War and is now embedded in the cultural imagination both in the UK and in the USA. Implied in the question is that father will be able to tell his son something heroic. The reader is left to fill in the gaps about what exactly father has been doing. It is an ambiguous text which requires a number of readings.

**Politics:**

*Poem to Help Unemployment* by Liz Loxley from *Hard Times*, Faber & Faber (p.61)

*Midas' Art* by Sir John Byrom (no publishing details given in the appendix) p.16

“Poem to help Unemployment” is humorous and plays on the idea of poetic form itself and ends with a stunning political punch line. The first 5 stanzas appear to be painting a picture of an English summer. Alliteration is the main form employed where reference is made to:

“crinkly crisp lettuce  
on freshly buttered brown bread” p.61

Alliteration and sibilance is a feature of the second stanza:

“in slices  
in summer  
in silence”

The poem continues in this dreamy way until the poet’s voice breaks through in the last stanza:

“and what is this poem doing  
to help unemployment you ask -  
about as much as the Government ...”

“On Midas’ Art” although a one stanza poem of only four lines is linguistically dense and demanding:

“Midas, they say, possessed the art of old,  
Of turning whatsoe’er he touch’d to gold;  
This modern statesmen can reverse with ease;  
Touch them with gold, they’ll turn to what you please.” (p.16)

The poem has an AA, BB rhyming pattern which plays its part in the satisfaction of the conceit expressed. The reader is able, having absorbed the significance of the name “Midas”, to anticipate “gold” once “old” has been offered in the first line.

The poems express dissatisfaction with politicians, the first because of the state of the economy and the second expresses a cynical view of those in power. The implied reader for the first is invited by the title to expect a political poem but is then led along a path of alliterative sensuality. However, the break of the mood and the question implies that the reader is not going to be happy until the promise held by the title is fulfilled. This reader expects a political answer. The implied reader for the second knows the Ancient Greek myth about Midas and is able to cope with an elegant construction.

**Pacifist:**

*War Memorials* 1914-18 by John Dixon, from *Agitpoems* (p.30).

John Dixon in the first four stanzas deconstructs the language written on war memorials where the following euphemisms are discussed : “fell”, “lost their lives”, “gave their lives”; and “made the supreme sacrifice”. The final verse makes a strong point:

“But, you would never think,  
from reading these memorials, that anybody desperately wanted to live,  
and then got killed.” (p.30)

The implied reader is aware of the language of war memorials and is familiar with the carnage that took place in the First World War.

The next group of poems focus on the personal and the emotional.

**Love:**

*Goodbye* by Carol-Ann Marsh from *Let's Hurry Up*, Bristol Broadsides

*Celia, Celia* by Adrian Mitchell from *Adrian Mitchell's Collected Poems 1953-79*, Allison & Busby

*Bertha's Wish* by Judith Viorst from *If I Were in Charge of the World and Other Worries*, 1981

“Goodbye” is written in the voice of a female whose partner is leaving her. She explains to the reader why she is hanging her head while he speaks and does not answer. She doesn't look at him because:

“I didn't want him  
to see  
the mess mascara  
makes when it  
runs.” (p.64)

“Celia, Celia” is more lighthearted and as it is short will reproduced in full:

“When I am sad and weary  
When I think all hope has gone  
When I walk along High Holborn  
I think of you with nothing on” (p.69)

“Bertha’s Wish” is a short poem written in the first person and is in the form of a plea. The first three lines begin with the line “I wish that...” and are followed by adolescent concerns about body shape and unrequited love. The last wish is punctuated by an amusing punchline:

“I wish that he would stand on top of the tallest building  
and shout,  
‘I love you Amanda.’

one more wish: I wish my name was Amanda.” (p.91)

The final two poems have been placed together because they are amusing.

### **Nonsense/Humour**

*Snake* by Wilbur G. Howcroft

*Madmen* by Paul Durcan from *Jesus and Angela*, Blackstaff Press

“Snake” is a joke in verse with an AA, BB rhyming scheme (just!):

“A weak-eyed adder known as Alf  
Would curl up on the pantry shelf  
And ogle, with he greatest hope,  
A coiled-up piece of two-inch rope”.

The second “Madmen” is also a joke and is written in the voice of a child who is making a satirical comment about their father:

“Every child has a madman on their street:  
The only trouble about our madman is that he’s our  
father.” (p.31)

### **Context**

Having introduced the texts and made some reference to the implied reader it would be useful at this stage to place Culture Shock in context. First published in 1990 Culture Shock has its roots in the political debate that began in the 1970’s concerning issues of race, gender and class in children’s literature. A number of socio-economic factors were instrumental in the development of what became an acrimonious debate by the late 1980’s. In the 1970’s the rise of comprehensive education and the raising of the school leaving age to 16 raised concerns about the failure of the working class pupil. Recognition of the multi-cultural nature of many British schools was developing together with growing awareness that both syllabi and resources were anglo-centric and not relevant for contemporary life. Finally the feminist movement brought attention to the invisibility of females in much of the curriculum. As a result many English teachers were involved in the debate and were



finding material which gave another perspective other than that of the “Dead White Male”. Polemics from such writers as Bob Dixon helped to fuel the debate. His comments now may appear extreme but he was writing against a certain amount of complacency:

“Most children’s literature...has the overall effect, whether conscious or not, either on the part of the writer or on that of the reader, of indoctrinating children with a capitalist ideology”<sup>2</sup>

There is a strong concern about the effect such material might have on young minds:

“...much of the material in children’s books is anti-social, if not anti-human and is more likely to stand and warp young people than help them grow”<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to say in an alarming way that the role of the psychologist might be:

“...to help us to understand more about racism and fascism as mental diseases”<sup>4</sup>

Such polemic does serve to give a flavour of that period. In my library copy someone has written in the margin “and what about communism?” which gave this reader some pause for thought having experienced some of the inherited absurdities of a communist state<sup>i</sup>. However, as a teacher in a multi-cultural school in Hounslow, West London and as a member of what was the “multi-cultural working party” which later became, as the debate developed, the anti-racist working party, I can recall as the debate developed, some of the difficulties in developing awareness of the issues involved and Bob Dixon’s observation does have a resonance:

“...many people - and amongst them, depressingly, a great number of teachers - are reluctant to admit that small children are affected by racism and more reluctant still to admit that racist attitudes can be transmitted via literature”<sup>5</sup>.

Literacy skills and the reluctant reader were a major concern and according to Robert Leeson, there was a significant move in the debate from “the reluctance of the child to a consideration of the inadequacy of the literature”<sup>6</sup>.

Leeson notes that over 100 series were produced for the reluctant reader but unfortunately, at the same time Government cuts began to be felt on the publishing industry which relied on institution support and once local authorities had less money to spend on resources, cutbacks were inevitable. On the other hand new technology allowed minority publishers to produce titles with short print runs thus allowing local communities to publish.

Change can be extremely painful and much acrimony developed between what Peter Hollindale

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1, Czech History

called “book people” and “child people”. His intelligent essay “Ideology and the Children’s Book”<sup>7</sup> put the debate into perspective and acted as an antidote to much of the often ill-considered polemic that was aired. An example of this is Dixon’s assertion that that the middle classes use more Greek and Latin words than the working class which creates problems for the working class child in school. He contrasts this state of affairs with more ideal situation where in Slavonic languages (remember these were all Communist countries at the time) basic pure Slav words were used. He gives an example from the Czech where “theatre” and “microscope” uses Slav roots as opposed to words of Greek origin<sup>8</sup>. Now, I am in a fortunate position with my knowledge of Czech of being able to refute this as while *divadlo* is indeed the Czech word for theatre, there are in fact many Greek and Latin words in Czech because that country was also part of the Renaissance. Apart from *mikroskop*, such words as *matematika*, *seminar*, *fakulta*, *pedagogicka* and *filosoficka* immediately spring to mind. However, not all the polemic was so unhelpful. The Journal “Children’s Book Bulletin” sought to provide teachers with information about children’s books:

“...for the multi-ethnic society and children’s books which reflect the history and present day contribution of working people as well as other areas not covered by mainstream children’s book journals”<sup>9</sup>

Another helpful publication was The English Curriculum: Race which, with local authority approval (the GLC prior to abolition), gave guidelines and recommendations to teachers of English. Throughout, it is acknowledged that English teachers should be engaged with issues outside the classroom for literature is seen as:

“...the means of understanding the world and *changing it*”<sup>10</sup>. (my italics)

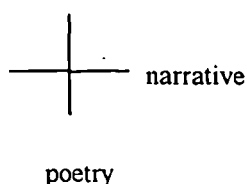
It can be seen that Culture Shock encompasses the concerns which have been aired since the 1970’s. It is overtly political and there is a strong sense of intention to change the perceptions of the reader. And it was the political nature of the material that surprised many of my Czech students.

### Methodology

I was keen to debate issues raised in the anthology with my students in order to highlight to them the multi-cultural nature of British society and for them to begin to reflect on their own situation. While the Czech idea about their society is that they are a homogeneous group, they are not. One cultural group in particular suffers from a great deal of prejudice and these are Czech and Slovak gypsies. Notions of political correctness had not reached the country during my time there, and gypsies were often referred to in extremely negative ways which are becoming more unacceptable in the UK. It is debatable whether people actually are less prejudiced but openly racist remarks are less common in the UK in equivalent social settings. Apart from the indigenous gypsies, there are also a number of black students from Marxist African countries who are completing their studies. Such students appear to lead a completely separate life away from Czech society. Another ethnic group are

Vietnamese market traders who are in general not regarded positively. I recall an article in the English language newspaper “The Prague Post” about the racism experienced by an Asian American in Prague because she was thought to be Vietnamese. A colleague of mine who brought a group of sixth-formers from a Hounslow Comprehensive on a study tour to Prague experienced problems in shops because people thought the Punjabi youngsters were gypsies and might be shoplifting. Once they were heard them speaking English the suspicions receded. In the light of this, I felt that in the process of reading and discussing the poetry the students might begin to consider issues both from a British perspective and their own and these included feminist concerns. However I was careful not to push the point too strongly because I did not want to create a negative atmosphere in class. I had had enough experience in the UK of the difficulties that arise when people are confronting their own prejudices without wishing to inflict this either on myself or on my students. I was, after all, a visitor in their country.

Two seminars were spent investigating poetry in the anthology which I had selected after reading a review of Culture Shock in Books for Keeps (No. 73 March 1992). The main aim was to gently introduce the students to the anthology, give them plenty of time to read and discuss some of the poems and then to focus on three or four to explore in more depth. The majority of the poems are short which allowed a number to be read giving the students an idea of contemporary work. As this was the first time the students had studied poetry since secondary school, I began by asking them to think about the differences between prose and poetry. After discussion in pairs, their ideas were written on the board and I added a simplified theoretical perspective. Meaning in a story is held in a narrative which moves in linear fashion synchronically, while meaning in a poem moves downwards dychronically where words are loaded with semiotic thickness. I drew the following diagram to illustrate the point that reading a poem is a different process from reading a novel:



I gave out the anthologies and explained that they contained the sort of material that English pupils might read in their English lesson in secondary schools. It will be recalled that studying actual texts is unusual in Czech literature lessons<sup>i</sup> and I wanted to emphasise that it was common practice to have the texts in class. The students were given the task of reading the following poems from the anthology in pairs and completing the chart below:

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1

Stereotype (p.1). War Memorials (p.30). Madmen (p.31), Nostalgia (p.20), On Midas' Art (p.16), Broadminded (p.32), Sho Null' (p.34), He Had a Dream (p.37) Snake (p.46), Me Auntie Connie (p.54), Eve (p.58) Poem to Help Unemployment (p.61), Goodbye (p.64) Celia. Celia (p.69) Bertha's Wish (p.91)

Title	Topic	Rhyming Scheme?	Dialect?	Funny?	Language Level?

I then worked with individual pairs answering questions and explaining where necessary as the task was being completed. The poems were challenging for the students, for two reasons. First of all they presented difficulties linguistically mainly because of the amount of non-standard English. Secondly, students were not experienced at addressing such issues as class, race and gender. Some examples of the difficulties experienced are now described.

Whoever John Agard had in mind when writing "Stereotype", it is unlikely that Czech student teachers in a post-communist central European city would have been his implied reader. This was a difficult poem for the students and understandably I had to place it in context as they did not have a stereotype of a West Indian. Not only did I discuss the stereotypes revealed in the poem but I was able to talk about the multi-cultural then anti-racist movement in London schools from my personal experience and describe the racial make-up of the school I taught in for a number of years in West London<sup>i</sup>.

"He Had a Dream" was not immediately accessible but majority of them had heard of Martin Luther King and once the context and the lexical items had been explained were able to get to grips with it.

Another area that required explanation was where there was reference to Christian or Greek mythology. For example "Eve" is a feminist perspective on the myth of the Garden of Eden in which Eve walks out of paradise of her own free will because she is bored. I checked to see if the student knew the original myth and as not all were sure, I retold the bible story. When reading "On Midas' Art" I discovered that while some students knew the Greek myth, others did not so I took the opportunity of telling them the story of King Midas. Once they understood the reference they enjoyed working through the language and making sense of the poem. With political corruption common in their country and knowledge via their parents of corruption in totalitarian times, the general response was a wry smile of recognition.

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<sup>i</sup> See Appendix 1

The Czech students found “Madman” difficult as they were more used to literature which extols the ideal family under an ideal state consequently the students found it difficult to believe that a father could be referred to in such a way. The student who was asked to turn this into Czech culture changed the father to a brother because it was just too irreverent<sup>i</sup>. “The Poem to Help Unemployment” confused the students because they were less sure of poetic devices and had no experience of living in a country with high unemployment. Although “Snake” is short it has a number of lexical items which required explanation: “adder”, “pantry” “ogle”, “coiled-up” and “two-inch”. Once these were made clear and the joke was revealed, it was hugely enjoyed. The strong rhythm of the poem made it a useful one for practising intonation.

It was necessary to explain not only the language of “War Memorials” but also to describe what a military cemetery looked like. The first world war has enormous resonance in Britain with the horrific slaughter of young men in the trenches in Northern Europe. The national imagination has been captured by the war poets and later in Joan Littlewood’s play *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963) which was subsequently made into a film by Richard Attenborough in 1970. For the Czechs the first world war has different connotations. For the British the events that triggered World War I seem far away but not so for the Czechs living under the Hapsburgs (see section on Czech history). Arch-Duke Ferdinand, whose assassination in Sarajevo sparked off the series of events that cumulated in World War I, spent a large part of his time in Konopiste castle just outside Prague and his familiarity is reflected in the opening of Hasek’s *The Good Soldier Svejk*<sup>11</sup>:

“ ‘So they’ve killed Ferdinand,’ said the charwoman to Mr Svejk”.

Svejk knows a number of Ferdinands in Prague and as he ruminates about which one the charwoman interrupts:

“ ‘No, it’s the Archduke Ferdinand, the one from Konopiste, you know, Mr Svejk, the fat, pious one.’ ”

The aftermath of the war resulted in the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the creation of the First Republic (see section on Czech history). The Czechs, being overrun by foreign armies many times, have a different perspective on war to the militaristic English. Subsequently the students found unpicking the language and looking at the euphemisms interesting but were not so engaged in the subject matter.

The cultural gap closed when poetry concerning love was read. After reading “Goodbye” many students responded immediately with a long sigh. While not stated overtly, the sadness and despair are to be inferred where there is a total breakdown of understanding between two people.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 2

No explanation appeared to be required. "Bertha's Wish" was also popular with the students and was immediately understood. However light in tone and short "Celia, Celia" has one particular linguistic constructions and a cultural references that makes it potentially difficult for the learner of English to understand without explanation. It does not matter that "High Holborn" be identified as a particular area of London, the initial capitals should indicate that it is a name of a place. But the Czech students, who had been taught that they should understand everything, needed to know. I was brought up in Fleet Street and knew the area very well so was able to furnish them in a vivid description although unnecessary. The phrase "with nothing on" however requires explanation and was considered a useful addition to their lexical repertoire and they enjoyed the poem hugely. The students were able to identify with adolescent insecurities and many chose the above three poems for their group readings.

After the students had had a chance to read a number of the poems and familiarise themselves, I talked to them as a whole group about some of them picking up points that had been raised as I listening to them working. I read some of them to the class in order for them to get a "feel" about how they might sound and discussed some aspects in more detail.

At the beginning of the second seminar the group completed their reading and I continued to answer queries and read some poems read aloud. The students were then invited to get into groups of four and select three or four of the poems they had read which they found interesting and then arrange a poetry reading. They had to decide how to read the poems as a group and while the students selected and then practised, I helped with any further explanation that was considered necessary and worked on their pronunciation. Finally each group gave its poetry reading.

In this way the group had the of opportunity to get to know a few of the poems well and had the time to consider them and to practice reading them. My main aim was, as ever, for the students to have pleasure and enjoyment from literature. During the course of the seminars many read other poems in the anthology and I recall that the graffiti page was very popular. Graffiti, which we take for granted in the West, was new and still rare at the time of teaching in Brno.

I was interested to see which poems were selected by the students for their group presentation and on the whole they chose either those with humorous plays on words such as "Snake" or those concerning love. The more political ones were less popular. It seemed to me that they were choosing material they could relate to as much of it was outside their experience. It will be recalled from the section on empirical research that the students were surprised by the political nature of the poems and thought them unsuitable for young people to be studying. Others, however, did recognise that it was time that such issues should be discussed in class. Many students also enjoyed reading the poems at their level and had previously regarded poetry as difficult.

## Cultural Indicators of Englishness

Radka's comment encapsulates the general experience of the students:

*"It is still a little bit unusual to read poetry. In contrast to fiction - poetry is mostly the privilege of a small group of people"*<sup>i</sup>

In this aspect the Czech students were close to the reader implied in the anthology for the reluctant reader is clearly signalled by Adrian's Mitchell's poem which is placed on the first page before the title:

"Most people ignore most poetry  
because  
Most poetry ignores most people."

The introduction then continues with a direct address to the reader in an informal friendly manner:

"If you've always thought this was true you're in for a shock, because Michael Rosen has uncovered a huge range of poetry spanning different ages and cultures, which deals with the issues confronting all teenagers today..."

The issues cited are Love, hate, racism, sexism, poverty and peer pressure.

From the introduction we can deduce that the implied readers for this "informal and accessible" anthology are likely to be secondary age pupils both black and white, male and female for whom the contents aim to provide a way in to discussing major issues such as racism and sexism. Implied in the introduction and revealed in the style of the poetry, which is on the whole both accessible and amusing, is a reader who would not naturally turn to poetry and who needs to be encouraged to enjoy this form of literature. The anthology is firmly located in the multi-racial inner-city and as such the concerns of that milieu, one that editor Michael Rosen knows very well, are strong indicators

After examining the poetry in the anthology one is left with a strong sense of an agenda which seeks to construct a different reader after reading the texts. Firstly there is a sense that the reluctant poetry reader now has enjoyed the experience. Secondly there is the political polemic which seeks to create a more enlightened reader whose views may be shifted. For the black reader and the female reader many poems offer a recognition of their experiences. Another implied reader is the English teacher who will be introducing the anthology in the English classroom. Implied is a teacher who is not bound to a fixed canon, who can deal with non-standard English and who is not afraid to raise difficult issues with their pupils.

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<sup>i</sup> from an essay by Radka Novakova, second cohort, group C.

Having discussed the implied reader it now remains to consider the cultural indicators in the anthology and the most significant indicator is the implied reader. For Culture Shock is firmly located in the urban, culturally mixed classroom and the text is an indicator of a country in a post-colonial period where issues of class, race and gender are high on the agenda. In “Stereotype” the voice in the poem is a cry for black people not to be viewed in an inferior position. In it can be traced Britain’s colonial past and in particular the role of Britain in the Slave Trade. The instruments in the Steel bands referred to in the poem were formed from oil drums because there was no money for “proper” instruments while at the same time huge fortunes were made from slave labour on the sugar plantations in the West Indies. The African rhythms of the steel band serve as a reminder of the starting point for the Slave trade. Pervasive English influences are seen in the reference to the game of cricket and the ironic twist at the end is achieved because of the continuing high status of Oxford University. The implied reader also signals that the culture is involved in a debate about the changing status of women. “Eve” and “Me Auntie Connie” concern women who do not accept male authority. The voice of the non-standard speaker of English pervades many of the poems and positively celebrates language variety.

The whole debate concerning race and gender emanated from the United States. While geographically and historically the British Isles are close to the European mainland, it is the USA which has a great influence albeit geographically further away. In Culture Shock poetry from America is naturally included and is taken for granted. The British are used to representations of American culture through television, film and popular music so there is a familiarity with many aspects of American life. Similarly American children’s literature is part of English children’s reading. Little Women<sup>12</sup> is as well known in Britain as the USA both through reading the original text and film versions. Francis Hodgson Burnett, while born in England, also lived in America, and her writing often encompasses both countries Little Lord Fauntleroy<sup>13</sup> being the best example. When Richmal Compton’s William plays Red Indians, the American influence is taken-for-granted:

“ ‘Now we’ll be Red Indians,’ he said, ‘an’ go huntin’. I’ll be Brave Heart same as usual and Ginger be Hawk Face and Douglas be Lightning Eye’.”<sup>14</sup>

Daily reading on a Children’s Literature Listserv has shown that many English titles are discussed by American students and academics without special reference to their coming from another culture. A good example arose at the time of writing this section when, in response to an enquiry about up-to-date children’s texts that address issues of gender from a group of students at the University of Florida, a list was provided by one Jerry Diakiw of the University of Toronto that included amongst the many suggestions Culture Shock which he described as containing: “Lively, entertaining, anti-sexist, anti-racist poems”<sup>15</sup>

The anthology also reflects an attitude towards education and the teaching of English in particular.



where the tradition that the English classroom is a site for discussion of issues has been long established. The overwhelming sense in Culture Shock that poetry should be enjoyed, that it can be easily accessible, the use of non-standard forms, that it does not have to be in “the cannon” to be legitimate in a classroom all serve to indicate an attitude towards education which is child-centred and open.

Finally and most significantly Culture Shock provides a strong indicator of the complex relationship and the tensions between dominant and oppositional values currently in English society. According to Horne writing on how the superiority of sex or race are legitimised states:

“The appropriate views of males and females, for example, in any society are likely to be enacted in all drama, all fiction, all poetry, all history, all sculpture and painting and all stored knowledge except that produced by ‘deviants’ -...”<sup>16</sup>

Now Culture Shock may be considered a ‘deviant’ text because it does not reflect mainstream views as it is in opposition to the dominant culture where prejudice is still institutionally sanctioned. As Halsey notes:

“Social inequality, conceived as differences in power and advantage, is the basic condition of the Black British. There is overwhelming evidence that the coloured population suffers discrimination on grounds of colour in employment, housing, leisure activities, and over the whole range of social relationships.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet this ‘deviant’ text has been published by a major publisher, Penguin Books, and it intentionally focuses on young people who are likely to be reading the text in their state secondary school. As such it is an indicator of current tensions in society between the status quo and a significant proportion of the population whose views are different. It may seem an obvious statement to make but such a text could only be published in a non-totalitarian society. It uses non-standard forms of English, it is non-reverential and it addresses topics that are still controversial. Its anti-authoritarian stance sides with the reader against the dominant ideology. However, it should be borne in mind that such radical ideals are in the rhetoric of the inner city and do not necessarily reflect the discourse taking place in the shires.

The construction of an implied reader who will change having experienced the ideas in the anthology provides a link with a tradition in English children’s literature from the 17th century. For underlying the selection is an inheritance from Puritan times when children’s literature was seen as an important factor in the moulding of young minds. In fact Brian Alderson draws parallels between what has been known as the “politically correct” camp and sees them as the “new Puritans”<sup>18</sup> and links them with writers such as Maria Edgeworth and Mrs Sherwood who were anxious to win the hearts and minds of young readers. Each in their own way thought they were doing their best.

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- <sup>1</sup> Michael Rosen (Ed), Culture Shock Penguin, 1991
  - <sup>2</sup> Bob Dixon, Catching them Young 1 (Sex, Race and Class in Children's Fiction), Pluto Press, 1977
  - <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. xiv
  - <sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. xiv
  - <sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.118
  - <sup>6</sup> Robert Leeson, Reading and Righting Collins, 1985, pp.129/130
  - <sup>7</sup> Peter Hollindale, Ideology and the Children's Book Thimble Press, 1991
  - <sup>8</sup> Dixon, op. cit p., p.44
  - <sup>9</sup> "The Children's Book Bulletin" Eds Rosemary Stones, Andrew Mann, No.6. Summer 1981, p.2
  - <sup>10</sup> "The English Curriculum: Race" ILEA, M. Raleigh, J. Richmond, M. Simons (Eds) English Centre, (no date), p.40
  - <sup>11</sup> Jaroslav Hasek, The Good Soldier Svejk translated by Paul Selver, Penguin, 1958 (first published 1930) pp11,12
  - <sup>12</sup> Louisa May Allcott, Little Women (first published 1868), OUP, 1993
  - <sup>13</sup> Burnett, Frances Hodgson Little Lord Fauntleroy (first published 1886), OUP, 1994
  - <sup>14</sup> Richmal Compton, "The Sweet Little Girl in White" from Still William, Macmillan, 1995, p.43
  - <sup>15</sup> Jerry, Diakiw on "child\_lit@email.rutgers.edu", 18th February, 1997
  - <sup>16</sup> Donald Horne, The Public Culture Pluto Press, 1994, p.79
  - <sup>17</sup> A.H. Halsey, Change in British Society Opus, 1995, p.84
  - <sup>18</sup> Leeson op.cit., p.130

## Chapter 7 The Deathwood Letters by Hazel Townson

### Introduction

Of all the texts studied on the Children's Literature course The Deathwood Letters<sup>i</sup> contains the largest number of cultural indicators which mark current concerns of everyday contemporary England. Social class features strongly, as do one-parent families, the neglect of children, unemployment, crime, different education systems and the vast contrast between rich and poor. The discourse largely features the language of the two young protagonists and is replete with colloquial expressions and informal patterns of English. For this reason there was more focus in seminars on the cultural aspects than with other texts apart from the poetry anthology Culture Shock<sup>i</sup>. The students enjoyed reading The Deathwood Letters and were involved in the characters of Francis and Damian and picked aspects of their lives that they had in common in spite of the vast social differences between them. It was this text, that I thought would reveal the most cultural indicators from the students because many surface level aspects of English culture had been discussed and explained in seminars. It was to my surprise, therefore, that while the students remembered the text well and were clearly involved with it, they were unable to identify much that was English apart from social class. However, once the appropriate question had been asked which was to convert the text into not only the Czech language but Czech culture, then many differences in life between England and the Czech Republic became visible<sup>ii</sup>. The task really encouraged the students to consider their own society and the rapid changes that were taking place in their country and of all the texts, this was the one that highlighted major differences between the two countries. For apart from the surface indicators of everyday life, lying underneath is a critique of family life and adult values which reflects current concerns with the state of the family and level of morality in English society as at the time of writing April 1997, the country gears itself up for a General Election. The majority of Hazel Townson's work was written during the Thatcher years from 1980 onwards mirroring a changing world of rising unemployment and an increasingly selfish society and it will be argued that Townson is being quietly subversive about many aspects of English society. Her work will be discussed in general first and then a more detailed analysis of The Deathwood Letters follows.

### Hazel Townson

Hazel Townson has currently more than 20 titles in print which include the Lenny and Jake Adventure Series for Anderson Young Readers. In common with A.A. Milne<sup>iii</sup> she began her writing career by contributing humorous article to the magazine *Punch*. However, unlike Milne, whose social sphere was London and the Home Counties, Townson comes from the North of England, attended school in Accrington and then University in Leeds. She later became a librarian specialising in

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 6, Culture Shock

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 2, Empirical Research

<sup>iii</sup> See Chapter 8, Winnie-the-Pooh

children's literature. According to the authorgraph in Books for Keeps Hazel Townson decided to write for children when as a librarian she:

“conducted her own surveys and found two-thirds of her borrowers never reached the end of a novel”<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently she drew up a formula for what she terms “the Manageable Book” which was reproduced in “Books for Keeps” in 1990<sup>3</sup>. Her notions of an ideal book for a reluctant reader are important to investigate because they give an insight into what drives her writing and her implied reader. She places much emphasis on the attractiveness of the cover and how the book is displayed in order for the book to be picked up in the first place. Once the book is opened the book should appear immediately accessible with short texts in large print with lively illustrations and containing little extraneous description. However, unlike many “easy” books for reluctant readers, Hazel Townson does not presume that such readers should be patronised with an over-simplified vocabulary. She understands that the opening should draw the reader in and the end of each chapter should contain enough suspense to entice the reader on. Although not stated directly in the article, the implied reluctant reader is implicitly male because it is boys who read less than girls and have more problems with literacy.

When examining Hazel Townson's work they do indeed conform to the “Manageable Book” formula. Her stories are full of humour with a fast moving plot which verges on the farcical but with language that challenges and moves the reader on. However, there is more to her writing than merely a prosaic text for a reluctant reader. A careful investigation into Hazel Townson's work reveals a fascinating juxtaposition between a comic book fantasy world and a more sombre realistic picture of Britain in the 1980's and 1990's. Both aspects offer a rich vein of information about English culture.

The majority of her texts are narrated in the third person but with the focus typically on one youngster who battles with either hostile or incompetent adults in a seemingly insane world. The setting usually takes place in an implied small Northern town indicated by such fictional names such as “Smelby”<sup>4</sup> and “Cleckhampton”<sup>5</sup>. However, while the location is urban, the countryside is readily accessible. Most families are either working class or lower middle class with the occasional appearance of the upper echelons of society. The fantasy elements are a major driving point of the narrative and provide the excitement. Plots usually include some sort of criminal activity, usually robbery. In Danny Don't Jump<sup>6</sup> there is a pair of cigarette thieves; in The Choking Peril,<sup>7</sup> two crooks are trying to steal the bust of the town philanthropist and in The Sign of the Crab<sup>8</sup> there is a jewellery robbery. But all the criminal activity has an unreal flavour to it and resembles more the world of comic books such as “The Dandy” and “The Beano” than the more sophisticated world of crime in the late 20th century. The robbers in The Choking Peril even dress up an archetypal costume of striped jersey, mask with a bag marked “Swag” in order to move unnoticed during the town's fancy

dress carnival. Punishments for misdemeanours also are closer to the comic book than reality: “He deserves the sack and at least ten years in the Tower of London”<sup>9</sup> remarks Tim sourly after his plans have gone awry.

Exciting exploits are the foundation of the plot. The adventures in the series concerning the two boys, Kip and Herbie are triggered by the inventions of the eccentric Arthur Venger. Here it is the mysterious world of Science that enjoys comic book treatment. Vengar’s chemistry is closer to the test-tube and Bunsen burner world of the Junior Chemistry Set than the high tech world of “real” science. Each invention is designed for the good of humankind and each time the trio’s hopes and aspirations are thwarted. In The Speckled Panic<sup>10</sup> Vengar invents a special toothpaste, called “truthpaste” which, as the name implies, encourages users to speak the truth. This has disastrous and hilarious consequences when the Headmaster decides to tell the truth about his school at a parents evening. A weed which is supposed to discourage litter in The Choking Peril<sup>11</sup> causes more chaos and grief while in The One-Day Millionaires<sup>12</sup> a special potion designed to make people more generous and kindly almost triggers all out conflict.

However, underneath the farcical there is more to the text than a fast moving, entertaining narrative. Hazel Townson acknowledges that while her main aim is to encourage the reluctant reader, she also includes what she terms a “second layer” and this is where her more acerbic view of the world is revealed. An example is given by Hazel Townson herself about The Shrieking Face where she writes:

“...besides being the simple tale of one boy’s dilemma when he wins a prize by mistake, is also a send-up of the Art World which callously allows artists to starve in garrets, then sells their pictures for millions as soon as they’re dead. This discovery of the ‘second layer’ may take its time, but its revelations will crate, however unconsciously, a deeper sense of satisfaction in the reader, even triumph at his discovery”<sup>13</sup>.

Underlying all her work is a polemic against the adult world. The anti-authoritarian stance of the comic-book world is brought to bear as Townson sides with the point of view of the young protagonist. Criticism is implied of Jason’s father in The Moving Statue where he is forced to do a paper round for his newsagent father because he:

“...didn’t see why he should pay somebody else’s boy to do the round when he now had a perfectly healthy lad of his own (albeit still legally under age) who could do it for nothing.”<sup>14</sup>

Angus in The Shrieking Face is constantly nagged by his teacher while his mother, over-concerned with his younger brother Kevin, virtually ignores him. This is noted by his father who observes:

“...I notice there’s always enough money for Mars bars for our Kevin every time he falls over. You’re spoiling that lad rotten, and I don’t just mean his teeth”.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Danny's mother in Danny Don't Jump likes to think of herself as a "caring Mother"<sup>16</sup> but in spectacularly fails to understand her son's problems.

Many authority figures are debunked. There is veiled criticism of an inadequate vicar because, when Danny appears to be on the verge of throwing himself off the roof of his school, all the Vicar can do is shout:

"Now, keep still, Danny my boy, and perhaps if we were to sing a little hymn it would help? What about "All things bright and beautiful"? In his best Harvest Festival voice, the vicar began to sing, through the sound was completely lost among the sirens and the shouts".<sup>17</sup>

Adult males are often hostile and vary from the bullying father, the sarcastic teacher to the blundering crook. Only occasionally is an adult portrayed as a kindly ally. While the majority of the protagonists are male, when a female youngster does appear, they are often portrayed as strong. Connie Kellow in Danny Don't Jump is a disaffected pupil who is thwarted in her attempt to set fire to the school by the hapless Danny. When she sees the Headteacher appearing on the horizon she:

"said several unprintable words, two of which Danny had never heard before, then she grabbed Danny's arm and started dragging him towards the door"<sup>18</sup>

Current political concerns are present in all the texts where sometimes they lurk in the background and sometimes an intrinsic part of the plot. There are references to Unemployment (The Shrieking Face), the Welfare (The Deathwood Letters), the Peace Movement (The Moving Statue), Nuclear Research (One Green Bottle), Terrorism (The Sign of the Crab), and the Environment (The Choking Peril).

In One Green Bottle the young protagonist, Tim, hopes to make his fortune by inventing a game called "Redundo" in which the winner is the first player to get a job. Tim fantasises about his game being commercially produced:

"The chessmen were gone, and there instead lay his REDUNDO board with intricate carvings of the characterful unemployed plodding their way to salvation across brilliantly-coloured squares"<sup>19</sup>.

While current concerns are embedded in the texts, there is a period feel which echoes the unchanging world of the children's comic where teachers wear mortar boards and children queue up to get the cane. The school office in Danny Don't Jump still has typewriters when one would expect a computer and in One Green Bottle the family are anxious about flying for the first time whereas cheap package holidays, including air travel, have been part of English life since the late 1960's. The local family owned shop where someone serves behind the counter is redolent of the 1950's as opposed to the supermarket which is a feature of the 1980's and 1990's when the texts were published.

### The Deathwood Letters

While The Deathwood Letters has many features typical of Townson's work, it is not written in a simple third person narrative but is epistolary. The text is organised into 3 batches of letters, the majority of which are between two children who are about 11 years of age: Francis Bond, nicknamed Frankie: "Frankie the Frank that's me"<sup>20</sup> and Damian Drake. The correspondence begins after Francis has read a news story about Damian, who has rescued his dog from a disused well. Damian replies to Francis and during the first batch of letters information about their lives is revealed. It should be added here that both children are very poor at spelling and a warning is given at the beginning of the text: "Good spellers please note: these letters have been reproduced exactly as written"<sup>21</sup>. Damian comes from a wealthy family, goes to private school, lives in a large house and is mainly looked after by the housekeeper, Constance, who is from New Zealand. Francis lives with her unemployed father and older brother in a run-down terraced house and goes to the local Middle School. Her mother left home when her father lost his job and the only female relative is an Aunt who lives on a nearby council estate. Damian is overprotected because of parental fear that he might be kidnapped as father is not only extremely wealthy but is also an important politician. Francis, on the other hand, is often left to her own devices. While they come from opposite ends of the social scale, both are neglected by their families and appear isolated. Most of the first batch of letters concerns plans about how they are going to meet. Also revealed in their letters is their interest in reading and many well-known children's authors are mentioned such as Roald Dahl, Helen Cresswell and Enid Blyton as well a comics such as The Beano, which Francis reads, but is banned in Damian's house. Other information may be gleaned which does not seem important but is relevant to the plot that develops in the second batch of letters. Constance has a very friendly relationship with the postman while Francis' brother George and his friend have acquired an old car and appear to be involved in strange nocturnal activities with a new acquaintance. George is also, unusually for him, interested in Francis' new penfriend.

In the second batch of letters, the pair continue to plan meetings and Francis suggests that Damian makes an excuse for being late home. He decides to tell his parents that he is in the school play, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* which involves late rehearsals. His parents are delighted because he is an introverted character who they consider needs "bringing out". Damian's parents are totally focused on the forthcoming visit by the Prime Minister and Damian tells Francis that all the best silver is being brought from the bank and the house is being redecorated just for this special occasion.

Finally in the last batch of letters, which include letters from Damian's parents to his school, Francis' Aunty, the Chair of the Board of Governors and Damian's Headteacher, a series of events are unravelled which involve George's plans to steal Damian's family's silver and kidnap the boy. This has been managed through the offices of the postman who was so friendly with Constance but is also

in league with George. For it is the children's letters, read by both the postman and George, which reveal all the necessary information about the family silver and Damian's moves.. The final letter is for Damian from another girl who has read about the attempted kidnap in the paper and would like to correspond with him.

The epistolary form is an ingenious narrative device for as the letters go back and forth an ironical situation is constructed whereby the reader is encouraged to work out what George is up to while the two young letter writers are innocently developing their friendship and making plans to meet. The final batch of letters written in a variety of appropriate styles from the formal Chair of Governors to the chatty, colloquial style of Frankie's Aunty invites the reader to piece together the chain of events.

While many common threads in Hazel Townson's work may be identified in The Deathwood Letters, there is a crucial difference which rests with the implied reader. Most of the texts discussed above employ a simple third person narrative which is from the perspective of a young person. While the reader is encouraged to anticipate what might be going to happen next, there is not much more work to do. Three of her books imply a different reader. Along with The Deathwood Letters, two more texts offer a further challenge to the reader who might be moving from her more conventional stories to something more demanding. The Secrets of Celia is in the form of school essays written by a teenage girl, while Two Weird Weeks consists of diary entries from two teenagers in which their perceptions of reality are vastly different. In all of them the reader has the pleasure of enjoying the irony where they know more than the characters they are reading about. As such the implied reader is less the reluctant reader and more an emerging skilled reader. It is for this reason that The Deathwood Letters was a suitably satisfying text for the Czech students to study. However, while the narrative is more challenging, the plot still revolves round robbers, kidnappings and mishaps. It remains a comic book world with darker undertones of child neglect.

Further discussion of the text, the Czech students' perceptions and its cultural indicators will follow after an outline of how it was delivered in seminars.

### **Methodology**

This particular text was selected because the intriguing narrative style is challenging while the relationship between the two children would be interesting for the Czech student teachers to discuss. There are also many colloquial expressions which would support the Czech student's understanding of informal English. The letters are written in short units which could be easily analysed and therefore would be suitable for students developing their skills in English.

I began by asking the students if they had ever read a story that is written in the form of letters. None of them had and I told them that we would be reading a children's book consisting of letters between



two young people. I asked them in pairs to consider the technical problems that might face an author writing in this style. The reason for this was to alert them to the unusual narrative and enable them to match their ideas with how they were solved by the author. Most were able to suggest that it would be hard to maintain the narrative thrust, background description would be difficult to include and involving other characters might be a problem. After discussing their ideas they were keen to read the first batch of letters and see how the problems were resolved. Before reading I asked them to prepare their note books as follows so they could keep a record of information they gathered about the two main characters:

	<b>Frances</b>	<b>Damian</b>
Age		
School		
Teacher		
Family		
Pets		
Type of house		
Likes and dislikes		
Parents and their occupation		
Books they have read		

Add any information you discover about George and Constance:

I warned the students that both children are poor spellers and then read the first two letters to them. I used my own London accent for Frances and advanced RP for Damian. I then gave the students a few comprehension questions to answer to check they had understood how the correspondence had started:

- 1 Why is Frances writing to Damian?
- 2 Does she know Damian?
- 3 What other letters has Damian received?
- 4 How many spelling mistakes can you find in the two letters?

Pairs were then asked to take a character each and read aloud to each other the first batch of letters, collecting as much information as possible to complete their sheet. They were also asked to make a note of spelling errors and write down any words or phrases they didn't know. While the language is not difficult as the sentences are short, there are many cultural references that I predicted would need explanation. While they were reading I was able to listen to pairs and monitor their pronunciation.

During the plenary information gathered from the students' notes was written on the board and the following words and colloquial expressions which the students had identified were collected and cultural aspects explained. Below is a selection of words which I noted from one class:

*"Blue Peter, Staff, Dog's Home, To put your foot down, The welfare the dole, loony bin To hog, Housekeeper, Scrabble, Legless, Second sight, To be hard up, To be sweet on someone, The Beano, To nick, Barrows"*

Many lexical items were colloquial such as "loony bin", others concerned cultural artefacts like children's TV programmes while Dog's Homes and Housekeepers apparently were unknown in the Czech Republic and the rest were just unknown words such as "barrows".

At the end of the seminar I asked the students to discuss the relationship between the two children and how they think it might develop.

The second seminar by looking at the information that had gathered so far and the students were asked to think about what might happen next. While there is an exciting plot, an important element is the relationship between the Damian and Francis and the students usually included both aspects in their predictions. I read the next two batches of letters to the students while they continued to update the information they were gathering in their note-books. They were also asked to think about what Francis' brother was plotting.

During the reading I stopped to explain cultural aspects as they appeared. For example it was necessary to remind the students of the English education system which involved differences between Primary and Secondary, Private and State and to clear up understandable confusion about Middle Schools. Intertextuality abounds as the children tell each other about the books they enjoy reading and it was necessary to try to explain such children's books as Raymond Briggs' Fungus the Bogeyman in terms of content and visual style as, unfortunately, there were no copies to be found in Brno. At that time the only English children's books to be found were translations of Enid Blyton and W.E. Johns. The game of Scrabble at that time was unknown in the Czech Republic, a Czech version appearing in a large Prague department store two years later. As is indicated by the list above there were many colloquial expressions and cultural references that required explanation.

Before reading the final batch I elicited more predictions about what might be happening. This was to ensure that the students had understood the plot so far and to alert them about what might happen next. I wanted to encourage active reading and for them to appreciate the irony in the text.

The final batch of letters involves a variety of correspondence from Damian's parents, the Headteacher of his school, George, Constance and a number of others. The end is complicated with attempted kidnaps, escapes, misunderstandings, letters that go astray and a surprise final letter. I

## Chapter 8 Winnie-the-Pooh by A.A. Milne

### Introduction

A.A. Milne's four books for children, two poetry and two prose, are amongst the most popular children's books ever written<sup>1</sup>. The first publication, a collection of poems When We Were Very Young, published in 1924, was written almost by chance during a dull, wet holiday in Wales. They were an instant success both in England and the United States and the book of children's verse was followed by a collection of short stories based on his son's nursery toys. The first Winnie-the-Pooh story was written for the Evening News and was broadcast by the BBC on Christmas Eve 1925. The Winnie-the-Pooh collection was then completed and, published a year later in 1926, was a phenomenal success. Two more books followed, a collection of verse: Now We Are Six (1927) and The House at Pooh Corner (1928). Milne's work is seen as coming at the end of the first "Golden Age" of children's literature which began in 1846 with Edward Lear's A Book of Nonsense and was followed by the fantasy of George MacDonald, Lewis Carroll, Charles Kingsley, J M Barrie and Kenneth Grahame. It was because of the enormous popularity of A.A. Milne's stories and because so many words and phrases are embedded in the English language that Winnie-the-Pooh was one of the texts selected for the children's literature course for Fast Track students.

Milne's stories and poetry are viewed as quintessentially English yet, translated into over 25 languages, they appeal to people from diverse cultures all over the world. Milne's work has been ruthlessly parodied, his words and phrases have entered the English language and the personalities of the characters are as Peter Hunt observes universally recognised:

"... 'Pooh' books remain a potent cultural symbol, and that many adults, as well as many children, have an uneasily intimate relationship with them"<sup>1</sup>

Similarly Wullschlager declares "no children's book since has approached Pooh's mythic status" and goes on to state that the books have "folkloric power in British culture".<sup>2</sup> Her comments are supported by Crouch who writes that A.A. Milne:

"in his creation of Pooh he proved himself one of the supreme myth makers, for Pooh has proved to be one of those rare characters who develop an existence apart from the books in which they are born"<sup>3</sup>.

Thwaite observes that: "Milne's animals have become part of the English language"<sup>4</sup> and finally Wullschlager again asserts that:

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<sup>1</sup> First print run of Winnie-the-Pooh 32,000 in green cloth, 3,000 in leather plus other limited editions. Now We Are Six first print run, 50,000 and The House at Pooh Corner 75,000. "Within a remarkably short time the worldwide sales of Milne's four children's books, in a multitude of languages, would be counted in millions" (Thwaite 1990)

“Since “The House at Pooh Corner” in 1928, no world evoked in a children’s book, with its own language, settings, tone, has entered the collective imagination and remained part of the English culture in the way that Wonderland the Hundred Acre Wood have done”.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned above the books, published in the 1920’s, were instantly popular both in Britain and the USA and according to Thwaite, Pooh had become an industry as early as the 1930’s, with the merchandising of such items as Pooh calendars. The parodies also came thick and fast “Vespers” in “When We Were Very Young” was easily parodied the most well-known is by J. B. Morton:

“Hush, Hush  
Nobody cares  
Christopher Robin  
Has fallen downstairs”<sup>6</sup>

Dorothy Parker in New York similarly reacted strongly to the poetry and Richmal Crompton parodied “Vespers” in “William the Bad” where, instead of Christopher Robin saying his prayers, “Anthony Martin is doing his sums”.<sup>7</sup> . Wodehouse also could not resist and created the children’s writer Rodney in “Rodney Has a Relapse”, who much to his brother-in-law’s chagrin is:

“Up in the nursery, bending over his son Timothy’s cot, gathering material for a poem about the unfortunate little rat when asleep”<sup>8</sup>

But such parodies are, as Thwaite points out, an indication of how well known the originals were: “Milne’s children’s books had remained so much part of the English tradition that you could use them, taken for granted that everyone (...) had heard of them”<sup>9</sup>

Milne’s work was and still is viewed by some as smug, bourgeois and whimsical - the latter a description that Milne disliked intensely and it is interesting to see how since the 1920’s his poems and stories have been read as representing, if not supporting, the English Establishment. A typical response is from Chris Powling in the following diatribe on Christopher Robin on the 60th anniversary of the publication of Winnie-the-Pooh:

“Every inch of him exudes smugness - from the top of that curious, bobbed haircut to the tip of those tiny-tot sandals (and the smock and shorts in between are just as irritating). Okay, so we shouldn’t take him at face value. Maybe there is deep irony in this twentieth-century version of the Victorian Beautiful Child. In Christopher Robin’s case, however, we must certainly heed the advice of Oscar Wilde that it’s only a superficial person who does not judge by appearances. With Milne’s prose (..) reinforced by E.H. Shepard’s superb line-drawings, Christopher Robin must surely be what he seems. And what he seems is a serious affront to anyone who believes children are simply people who haven’t lived very long”.<sup>10</sup>

However, Milne was not a member of the Establishment and he had realistic not sentimental views about children. Although he was a leading successful playwright and was a prominent member of Society, he had a Scottish non-conformist background, was a Pacifist and enjoyed an enlightened

early years education at his father's unorthodox school. In addition he wrote humorous pieces for the satirical magazine Punch and subsequently became deputy editor which indicates some opposition to the status quo. Nevertheless, his plays which enjoyed huge success in the 1920's and 1930's, tended to be viewed as merely light comedy. But they also had serious points to make. Thwaite quotes the critic from the Chicago Tribune on one of his successful plays "Mr Pym" who observes that:

"under the somewhat fantastic and sparkling dialogue runs the threads of a perfectly sane and serious study of marriage"<sup>11</sup>

The critic of the TLS also notes that Mr Pym:

"slight as it is supposed to be, you can hear, if you listen, tremendous implications - a whole philosophy of life and love"<sup>12</sup>

But many did not listen and continued to regard Milne's work as "light". Indeed John Rowe Townsend assured his readers that: "The Pooh stories are as totally without hidden significance as anything ever written..."<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand Carpenter agreeing that the characters are one-dimensional goes on to observe that the stories are:

"...a continuous exposition of Milne's favourite themes: the selfishness or 'ruthless egotism' of childhood, and humanity's dependence on a God made in its own image"<sup>14</sup>.

Milne's view of children was certainly not sentimental for he wrote that children have a: "natural lack of moral quality, which expresses itself...in an egotism entirely ruthless"<sup>15</sup>. And this ruthless characteristic is revealed in all the characters in the Hundred Acre wood.

As with other well-known writers for children, Carroll, MacDonald and Kingsley, Milne rejected conventional religious views. In his introduction to a long poem "The Norman Church" he distinguished between God as a creative spirit and man's construction of God - his anger is felt in the following extract from the poem:

babies dying unbaptized  
Were damned in Hell. Was God surprised  
To hear that this was what Himself had authorized?!<sup>16</sup>

It should be born in mind that, his son, Christopher Robin was never christened.

Milne had been in France in World War I and as a signals officer on the Somme it is impossible to believe that anyone who experience of the trenches could possibly return unscathed. He wrote about his feelings: "For it makes me almost physically sick to think of that nightmare of mental and moral degradation, the war"<sup>17</sup>. Milne became a Pacifist after his experiences and wrote a pacifist

polemic “Peace With Honour” a non-fiction title which sold over 12,000 copies. His one-act play “The Boy Comes Home”<sup>18</sup> (first performed in London in 1918) although described as a comedy, has a strong point to make about those who stayed behind during the First World War and made large profits from increased trade.

He was also not a loyal supporter of the Royal Family. His attitude is apparent from his account of a conversation with Queen Victoria’s granddaughter:

“I talked to her for about an hour after dinner, said ‘Ma’am’ as little as possible, put my foot in it once or twice probably, withdrew it with a loud sucking noise and continued cheerfully”<sup>19</sup>.

Perhaps his analysis of the problems of England reveal more than anything his views. He likened England to :

“a beautiful house crammed to the ceilings with furniture and books, some valuable, some rubbish, all of it in hopeless confusion, crowded in anywhere without taste or method. You feel vaguely that you might do something about it some day, but it will be a tiring job (and you think you have, or think you have a weak heart). You wake up one night to find the house on fire. Frantically you throw out of the windows or dig out of the doors as much of its contents you can. You save most of them, and in saving them make two discoveries: Your possessions have been brought into the light, and you know now exactly what things of value you have and what of rubbish; moreover you realise that exertion is not so fatal as you had supposed. If the fire brigade can conquer the flames, your house, when restored, will be as beautiful as ever outside; but now, for the first time you will exert yourself to see that the inside is in keeping with it”<sup>20</sup>.

Before a consideration of Englishness in Winnie-the-Pooh, an account of the methodology will be given which will be followed by an analysis of the Czech translation.

### **Methodology**

Winnie-the-Pooh, the first well-known children’s text that the students were familiar with, many knowing the Czech version from their own childhood in translation, was read more than half-way through the second semester. I reminded the students of the two children’s texts already studied this term and pointed out that A.A. Milne’s stories were usually read to younger children by an adult as opposed to the other texts studied which were likely to be read by the children themselves. We began by looking at the map at the beginning of the book which served as an introduction to the setting and to the characters. I pointed out the spelling mistakes and made links to spelling errors in The Deathwood Letters.

Cohort A had the advantage of listening to a professionally produced tape of the stories which I played to them and although the tape is read at a faster speed than I usually adopt, the students were able to follow and were clearly enjoying them. Cohort B listened to me reading the stories to them as

the tapes could not be located in the Department library. When I read the stories myself, I also enjoyed a warm audience response which indicates that Milne's humour is not confined to the English.

I selected three stories for the students to study, the first being "In Which Piglet Meets a Heffalump". It will be recalled that Pooh and Piglet decide to catch the Heffalump casually mentioned by Christopher Robin. They dig a "very deep pit" and put in it a jar of honey as bait. Piglet as usual is extremely anxious about meeting such a fierce beast while Pooh, experiencing the need for a little something in the middle of the night, returns to the trap and gets his head stuck in the jar of honey. When Piglet hears his horrible howls he scampers off to Christopher Robin crying :

"a Heffalump, a Horrible Heffalump!...A Herrible Hoffalump! Hoff, Hoff, a Hellible Horalump! Holl, Holl, a Hoffable Hellerump!"<sup>21</sup> (a challenge here for the translator)

During the first reading I asked the students to focus on what was happening in the story and to consider the characters of Pooh and Piglet. After this we recapped on the plot and pairs discussed the characters of Pooh and Piglet giving examples of the text to support their points. This story involves only Pooh and Piglet with a brief intervention by Christopher Robin while the second one selected "In which Eeyore has a Birthday and Gets Two Presents" introduces two more characters, Owl and Eeyore. I followed the same procedure of recapping on the plot and discussing the new characters. The seminar ended with a final question concerning the character of Eeyore. I asked the students if they knew anyone like Eeyore and most of them did which has implications for the universality of the character.

The second seminar focused in more detail on a third story "The Expedition to the North Pole". The main reason for selecting this one was that nearly all Milne's characters, with the exception of Tigger, are in it. Before reading I checked if the students knew the word "expedition" and what it involved and also checked if they knew "North Pole" as these were key elements in the story. After the reading detailed comprehension exercise was given in order to encourage close attention to the text which was undertaken as usual in pairs.

After going over the questions we debated why these stories written in the 1920's are still popular. I asked the students which character was most like them. Each then constructed a pie chart where they thought about themselves and divided it up according to the bigger and smaller elements of the characters they thought they possessed. I made one as well on the blackboard and recall that Rabbit and Owl featured quite strongly much to the students' amusement. They enjoyed the stories and I was surprised because I had considered Winnie-the-Pooh to be particularly English and thought the students might not be able to "tune in" to the humour. This was clearly not the case and quite a few

students commented that they had enjoyed reading the original English text which they found funnier than the Czech version.

I recall discussing the “exposition” in the late Spring of 1994 and made a link a connection with events in the former Yugoslavia where it appeared that no-one really understood the situation but where the negotiators did not realise how little they had grasped. All three groups found this an interesting point to discuss at that time and made us reflect that there might be more to Milne’s stories than merely light humour.

It will be seen from the above account that any cultural aspects of Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh stories were not the main focus of the seminars. Instead the methodology was designed to encourage the students to reflect on aspects of human behaviour with close attention to the text as a way of developing fluency and building up vocabulary.

### **The Czech Translation**

The cultural indicators identified by the students have already been discussed in Chapter 2 and may be summarised as follows. Most of the students considered that the stories concerned universals reflecting aspects of human nature. The main suggestions about changes into Czech culture involved the “foreign” animals Kanga and Roo. (We did not read any stories from the second collection The House at Pooh Corner so it can only be surmised that Tigger would be identified as another alien animal.)

Clearly the ways the seminars were conducted did not overtly encourage consideration of the “Englishness” of the text. But another reason why the majority of the Czech students did not see anything particularly English about the stories may be due to their familiarity with the Czech translation. The copy I have was published in 1984 (since reprinted in 1993) with copyright given for Hana Skoumalová’s translation as 1965 and illustrations by Jaromír Zápál, 1978. This indicates that the text was translated during the time of the “Prague Spring”<sup>i</sup> while the illustrations were produced under the different conditions of “normalisation” in 1978. However, there is a Skoumalová translation from 1948 with a different illustrator so it could mean that Zápál’s illustrations were in existence before 1978. However, the most important point is that this is the edition that the Czech students were the most familiar with and this is a version which has not merely been translated into the Czech language but has also been transformed into a culturally rich Czech version.

At first glance the book looks to the English eye utterly unEnglish and very Czech. One reason might be because the illustrations are in the style of Josef Lada whose depictions of the iconic Czech anti-hero, Svejek, are likely to be familiar with English readers. The majority of the illustrations are in

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1, *Czech History*



bold colour with a dark line round the edge and while they contain some detail, they are far more simplified and stylised than Shepard's more naturalistic and finely drawn illustrations. Further analysis of the illustrations reveal more aspects of "Czechness" and these will be discussed first. The illustrations certainly tie in two aspects of Czechness which are the legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the need to maintain a strong Czech identity. This is revealed in the depiction of interiors which resemble a combination of bourgeois Austro-Hungarian style before the turn of the 19th century combined with Czech folk artifacts. For example Kanga's kitchen has a 19th century iron stove which was typical for many Czech village houses while her living room has heavy fringed curtains, table-cloth and light shade redolent of middle class Viennese apartments. Cuckoo clocks appear in a number of interiors and Czech folk ceramics feature strongly. The jar in which Piglet is rescued, when he was entirely surrounded by water, is a Czech ceramic. Owl is depicted as an academic in the Austro-Hungarian period indicated by his medal strung round his neck with a ribbon. Christopher Robin himself looks somewhat Austrian and the period seems to have slipped back from the 1920's to the turn of the century.

Czechs are very fond of collecting mushrooms; it is a national hobby and they are therefore adept at distinguishing different sorts and know which ones are poisonous. This interest is reflected in the illustrations where mushrooms feature in many of them. The first illustration in the first story depicts two different types of fungi - one growing on the tree and others, which resemble a type known as St. Vaclav's because they appear on that Saint's Day, are below the tree trunk on the ground. In a later story where Eeyore loses a tail, the illustration of Owl's tree house has a platform before the door which is in fact a large flat fungus. The depiction of the characters are fundamentally different from the Shepard illustrations. Firstly only Pooh resembles a toy and secondly the expressions on their faces rarely change and all of them, including Eeyore, spend most of the time looking happy. Even Rabbit appears benign. In short a far cosier world is represented and nothing appears very serious.

While I am unable to undertake a close linguistic analysis of the translation, at a superficial level the following may be observed. Winnie-the-Pooh is actually translated into "Little Bear Pooh" (*Medvídek Pí*) and for some reason Edward Bear becomes "Michael Bear" (*Michal Medvěd*) which has different connotations to Edward Bear from which we get the name "Teddy". Piglet becomes "little pig" (*Prasátko*) which is fine but Rabbit is translated as "little Rabbit" (*Kraliček*) which does not suit the bossy character at all. There are no problems with Owl ("*Sova*") and Eeyore successfully becomes "*Iacek*" which is also based on the noise a donkey makes. "Kanga" is just Kangaroo (*Klokan*) and her youngster is "little Kangaroo" (*Klokanek*). The translator also elected to change proper names into Czech ones so Pooh does not live under the name of "Sanders" but "*Novotný*" and Trespassers Will which Piglet believe is short for "William" is changed to "*Stanislav*". Christopher Robin almost remains the same but the diminutive used makes him "little Christopher" ("*Kristufek*").

It can be seen from the above that the translation has been imbued with a strong sense of Czech culture. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Englishness of the text was not perceived by those already familiar with the Czech version. It remains now to investigate what exactly is English about Winnie-the-Pooh.

### **Cultural Indicators of Englishness**

What has been established so far is that four internationally famous English children's books have entered the national consciousness but have been described by many as bourgeois and whimsical based on perceived notions of Milne as a member of the English Establishment. However, it has been argued that A.A. Milne was not such a person and although writing light comedy was nevertheless satirising much of English Society of which he was both part and yet not part of. So the question remains how quintessentially English are these books?

Firstly, as they have undoubtedly entered the English language and consciousness and as such they can be seen as a part of the country's cultural imagination. However, at another level, it is not necessarily so easy to see more specific representations of English culture through the texts if for example we compare the Pooh stories to Alice's Adventures I Wonderland which are replete with references to Victorian culture and values<sup>1</sup>. So what exactly is English about them?

It has been written that they evoke the English pastoral. For example, Wullschlager describes the stories as marking the "seasons of an English pastoral dream"<sup>22</sup> while Lurie discusses the English countryside which has a "lost paradise of childhood"<sup>23</sup> but there is little description of the pastoral in the text and it rests with Shepard's illustrations to fill the gaps. Certainly while the seasons are marked; the search for the Woozle takes place in the snow, there is rain and even flood and the setting is rural and not urban and all the characters live in trees, neither the surroundings nor the interiors of their homes are described in detail as they are, for instance, in one of Milne's favourite books Kenneth Graham's The Wind in the Willows. For the focus of the stories is not on arcadia but on character.

The arcadian elements are provided instead by the illustrator Ernest H. Shepard whose delicate sketches fill in the gaps left in the text. He visited the Ashdown Forest in order to "get the feel of the countryside which Milne hardly ever described in print"<sup>24</sup>. Both men were brought up in the same area of London, St. John's Wood and both fought in World War I but here the similarities end. For while Milne was a Pacifist, an unbeliever and anti-establishment, Shepard had "a contented belief in the established church"<sup>25</sup> and was happy to assert that he wasn't interested in politics. There are a number of reasons why the illustrations are so successful and Milne acknowledged that they made a

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 10, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

major contribution to the popularity of his children's books. It could be argued that there is that a tension between the text and illustration where the acerbic elements lie in the text and the idyllic elements in the illustrations. For, while the characters are portrayed with sensitivity to the text, the pastoral setting seduces the reader away from Milne's sharp depiction of the human condition. The sentimental reading of Winnie-the-Pooh and the accusations of whimsy arise from the illustrations and not the text. Similarly the reason why Pooh has now entered the world of English heritage is due more to the images which are to be seen from pencils to tea-towels are from Shepard and not Milne. Chris Powling's comments concern Shepard's depiction of Christopher Robin with no reference at all to Milne's writing.

While it can be argued that the illustrations represent an English arcadia, the task that remains is to uncover such aspects of the *text* which indicate Englishness. Is there something intrinsic within the text or is the Englishness extrinsic because of the ways they have been read? In order to answer this question it is crucial to focus on the texts and ignore many comments about Milne's stories which are not actually based on close textual analysis.

A fruitful area to begin is to consider the implied reader. A number of implied readers and implied listeners are suggested. Firstly there is the younger child who hears the story read to them by the adult bedtime reader. In the first story "In which we are introduced ...." the implied reader and listener is directly addressed in the first paragraph:

"Anyhow, here he is at the bottom, and ready to be introduced to you."<sup>26</sup>

In the second paragraph a dialogue between implied reader, listener and narrator is established:

"When I first heard his name, I said, just as you are going to say, "But I thought he was a boy?"<sup>27</sup>.

Then another dialogue also takes place between the narrator, Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh. who, along with the implied reader and listener, are also listening to the stories. And these stories concern adventures that they themselves took part in. The implied reader and listener is placed somewhere in the nursery listening to the story being re-told. This is a complicated, sophisticated construction where there is an implied adult, reading a story to an implied child about an adult telling a story to two characters who took part in it. This sets up a veracity because it appears the adventures actually happened and are now being written down.. There are analogies to be drawn here to the move from Orality to Literacy which took place in the 15th century with the invention of moveable type. The absence of an actual audience presented problems for both writers and readers and Ong notes that "early writing provides the reader with conspicuous help for situating himself imaginatively"<sup>28</sup> He gives some interesting examples of how this was overcome. Chaucer in The

Canterbury Tales employs the device of creating fictional groups of men and women who tell the stories that are read. This is described by Ong as a “frame story” and it can be seen that a similar device is used by Milne. Even nineteenth century novelists used the term “dear reader” and often addressed the implied reader directly. The move from orality to literacy is experienced by every child who learns to read and this may be seen in the construction of the opening chapters of Winnie-the-Pooh where Milne attempts to embed in the text: “... the old oral, mobile, warm, personally interactive lifeworld of oral culture”<sup>29</sup>. The narration not only serves to give the adventures a powerful veracity but Milne is also metafictional about the nature of story because, as Christopher Robin points out, when the adventures are retold “... then its a real story and not just remembering”<sup>30</sup>.

The implied reader is one who can enjoy the irony and plays with language and also can feel superior to the antics and be one step ahead of the characters. Such a sophisticated text could only come after an inheritance of multi-layered children’s literature which marked “The Golden Age” beginning with Edward Lear and closing with Milne. However, it is argued that Milne also marks the beginning of modernism, indeed his metafictional devices may be viewed as distinctly post-modern. Now this sophistication may be taken for granted as a regular aspect of literature for children but when the Czech translation is examined, it is revealing to see what has been omitted. And what is omitted are such metafictional devices. The Introduction is not included in the Czech version, the use of italics to separate the story being told and the dialogue between author and audience is ignored and significantly the dialogue between narrator and Christopher Robin about the origin of Pooh’s name and the ambiguity over Pooh’s gender has been cut. This may be due to the Czech translator wanting to make it simpler for children because the implied Czech child reader would be viewed differently. The implied English child-reader is treated as sophisticated and independent while the implied Czech child-reader is protected and has a more simplified world to explore.

The relationship of the text to the illustrations is also highly sophisticated and serves to create gaps for the reader to fill. For example in the first story where Pooh attempts to take some honey from a bees nest the text tells that there is a loud buzzing noise.

“Winnie-the-Pooh sat down at the foot of the tree, put his head between his paws, and began to think.”<sup>31</sup>

There is now an interruption in the text where Shepherd draws a line of bees which serves to halt the reading process as the eye follows the line of bees to the next piece of text (presumably the adult bedtime reader will show the listener the illustration and there is a pause in the reading). This serves to give Pooh time to think and for the implied reader to know what the buzzing noise emanates from and to have the satisfaction of being one jump ahead of Pooh. Milne then provides a whole paragraph of Pooh’s thought processes before placing the word “bee” at the very end of the last sentence.

In the same story, when Pooh climbs up the tree to reach the bees' nest, the illustration of the climb is on one side of the page leading the reader's eyes up and then the text on the right hand side describing the climb bring the reader's eyes back down and onto the next paragraph. Once more the illustration serves to hold the narrative while the eye takes in the climb. Such sophistication does not arise from nothing and it can be argued that this will only come at the end of a long period of productive literature for children<sup>i</sup>. As such this is an English cultural indicator

Another area to explore is aspects of everyday life and a strong indicator that may be picked up is in the dialogue. For the way the characters speak to each other is redolent of Society in the 1920's which appears to be populated by confident yet not terribly bright young things. While Pooh is a Bear of Very Little Brain he speaks in that curiously diffident style of the upper classes:

"I wonder if you've got such a thing as a balloon about you?"<sup>32</sup>; "And as I say, you can never tell with bees"<sup>33</sup>; "...it would help the deception which we are practising on these bees"<sup>34</sup>.

Many characters utter remarks carelessly. Sometimes it is a throwaway line as when Christopher Robin: "finished the mouthful he was eating and said carelessly: "I saw a Heffalump to-day, Piglet."<sup>35</sup>

Speaking carelessly is also a signal that a character may not be sure of themselves. After Owl's attempts at spelling have produced "HIPY PAPY BTHUTHDTH THUTHDA BTHUTHDY the casual comment reveals an unease:

"I'm just saying 'A Happy Birthday', said Owl carelessly"<sup>36</sup>

It signals that Christopher Robin is unsure of what or where the North Pole is:

"It's just a thing you discover," said Christopher Robin carelessly, not being quite sure himself."<sup>37</sup>

Somewhat elaborate language is used when discussing the catching of the Heffalump "I shall do it by means of a trap"<sup>38</sup> and oft repeated expletives such as "bother" and "quite so" give a period feel.

Much time is spent making social visits which only Rabbit appears to dislike. It seems taken-for-granted that Christopher Robin would have a gun. He uses one to shoot down Pooh and his balloon and takes it on the "Expotition to the North Pole". Pooh does not merely go to bed but has "made his preparations for bed"<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> See reference to Bakhtin in Chapter 7, The Deathwood Letters

It is well known that Pooh is a Bear of very little brain but no stigma seems to be attached to it. Owl pretends he's clever but really is merely pompous and his spelling is just as wobbly as Pooh's. Similarly we know from the map which is drawn by Christopher Robin that he also has difficulties with spelling. This signals an ambivalent English attitude towards intellectuals.

England's Colonial links, seen in the characters of Kanga and Roo, were picked out by the Czech students. These toys were bought in Harrods toy department by Milne especially to add characters to the tales as the other toys were already in Christopher Robin's nursery and Rabbit and Owl had already been invented. An English view of foreigners is demonstrated in the story "In which Kanga and Roo come to the Forest, and Piglet has a bath" where, led by Rabbit, Pooh and Piglet try to get them to leave the Forest because they are "Strange Animals". Rabbit's warped logic about Kanga:

"An animal who carries her family about with her in her pocket! Suppose I carried *my* family about with me in *my* pocket, how many pockets should I want?"<sup>40</sup>

is redolent of the bigoted and offers further evidence of Milne's acerbic view of human nature. Similarly "The Expedition to the North Pole" and the attempt to trap a Heffalump are redolent of colonial exploits. The Czech illustrator has picked up the colonial links in one unusually English depiction, that of the expedition where Christopher Robin is wearing a pith helmet.

While the arcadian elements rest more with Shepard than Milne there are some aspects of the text which reflect the English countryside. For example the bees that cause Pooh so much grief are lodged in an Oak tree, a potent symbol of Englishness. An unusually detailed piece of description appears in the story "Eeyore loses his tail" which depicts an English Spring:

"It was a fine spring morning in the Forest as he started out. Little soft clouds played happily in a blue sky, skipping from time to time in front of the sun as if they had come to put it out, and then sliding away suddenly so that the next might have his turn. Through them and between them the sun shone bravely; and a copse which had worn its firs all the year round seemed old and dowdy now beside the new green lace which the beeches had put on so prettily. Through copse and spinney marched Bear; down open slopes of gorse and heather, over rocky beds of streams, up steep banks of sandstone into the heather again; and so at last, tired and hungry, to the Hundred Acre Wood."<sup>41</sup>

The setting of the forest itself has resonances in an urban society that looks back to a time before the Industrial Revolution. Faint resonances of other texts may be felt in the text. For example the phrase "In another part of the forest"<sup>42</sup> has links with the setting for many an English pantomime whose roots go far back into the oral tradition and the setting of many comedies of Shakespeare which are often located in a forest. There are resonances too with the language of Shakespeare in such phrases as "...just as the night was beginning to steal away"<sup>43</sup> ..

Milne also appeals to the implied adult reader and this is where his more jaundiced view of human nature may be examined. There is a running joke about Rabbit and his many relations. No-one is ever quite sure how many he has but certainly it is implied that someone reading the text knows that rabbits are prolific breeders. Rabbit surely is based on the officer class that Milne must have experienced during his military service. Rabbit is bossy, likes to appear organised but really is as unsure as any one about what to do. However, he will not admit this and manages to convey authority and confidence. This may be seen in the Expedition where Christopher Robin who is leading the expedition with Rabbit pulls him to one side and says:

“It’s - I wondered - It’s only - Rabbit, I suppose you don’t know. What does the North Pole look like?”

“Well,” said Rabbit, stroking his whiskers, “Now you’re asking me.”.

Christopher Robin goes on to say:

“I suppose it’s just a pole stuck in the ground?”

And Rabbit is very quick to catch on to his idea and the following remarks are just confirming in a more long winded way what has just been said:

“Sure to be a pole,” said Rabbit, “because of calling it a pole, and if it’s a pole, well, I should think it would be sticking in the ground, shouldn’t you, because there’d be nowhere else to stick it.”<sup>44</sup>

When baby Roo falls in the water it is Rabbit who issues orders:

“Get something across the stream lower down, some of you fellows”<sup>45</sup>

In conclusion it may be seen that the Englishness of the texts lies in the construction of a number of implied readers and listeners; the metafictional devices employed, and the relationship between text and illustration. It has been argued that such a text is likely to appear only after a long tradition of literature for children has been established. The implied child reader is sophisticated and able to enjoy irony, word play and can cope with reading about a world populated by characters as ego-centric as themselves. While the English pastoral ideal rests mainly with the illustrations, Milne selected a rural location in the English tradition of creating a world far away from the urban reality. The language of the characters and some of their habits have a strong flavour of the 1920’s while Rabbit has characteristics of the officer class.

Yet in spite of these aspects of Englishness, there may be universals, which are part of the human condition, exemplified by its popularity world-wide. When Winnie-the-Pooh is trapped in the

Heffalump pit and blinded by a honey jar lodged firmly over his head, all he can do is utter “a loud roaring noise of sadness and despair” . Such a feeling I suggest is universal.

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- <sup>1</sup> P. Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature Opus, 1994, p.115
  - <sup>2</sup> J. Wullschlager, Inventing Wonderland Methuen, 1995, p.178
  - <sup>3</sup> M. Crouch, Treasure Seekers and Borrowers The Library Association, 1970, p.44
  - <sup>4</sup> A. Thwaite, Milne His Life Faber & Faber, 1990, p. 486
  - <sup>5</sup> Wullschlager, op.cit., p.203
  - <sup>6</sup> Thwaite, op.cit., p.240
  - <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.449
  - <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.447
  - <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.449
  - <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.300
  - <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.207
  - <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.207
  - <sup>13</sup> J.R. Townsend, Written for Children Penguin, 1977, p.172
  - <sup>14</sup> H. Carpenter, Secret Gardens Unwin Paperbacks, 1987, p.202
  - <sup>15</sup> Wullschlager, op.cit., p.186
  - <sup>16</sup> Thwaite, op.cit., p.477
  - <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.161
  - <sup>18</sup> J.W. Marriott (Ed) One-Act Plays of Today Harrap, 1928
  - <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.273
  - <sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.430
  - <sup>21</sup> A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh Methuen, 1992
  - <sup>22</sup> Wullschlager, op.cit., p.178
  - <sup>23</sup> Thwaite, op.cit., p.172
  - <sup>24</sup> R. Knox (Ed), The Work of E.H. Shepard 1980, p.112
  - <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 230
  - <sup>26</sup> Milne, op.cit., p.1
  - <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.1
  - <sup>28</sup> W. Ong, Orality and Literacy Methuen, 1982, p.103
  - <sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 80
  - <sup>30</sup> Milne, op.cit., p.18
  - <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.4
  - <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.8
  - <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.12
  - <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.12
  - <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.51
  - <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.74
  - <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.101
  - <sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.52
  - <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.57
  - <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.83
  - <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.42
  - <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.7
  - <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.58
  - <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.110
  - <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.112



## Chapter 9 Poetry by Walter de la Mare

### *England*

“All that is dearest to me thou didst give -  
Loved faces, ways, stars, waters, language, sea;  
Through two dark crises in thy Fate I have lived,  
But - never fought for thee”<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Walter de la Mare's short patriotic poem not only demonstrates his sentimental feelings for England but crucially identifies those aspects of Englishness which are significant to him. Reference to water and the sea draws attention to our island status, the word “ways” for roads has hints of the past, the English language itself is an important element. The two world wars which blighted the first half of the century are understandably the main focus. Yet de la Mare does not hold the doubts and uncertainties that emanated from the horrors of the First World War and his somewhat naive sentiments may stem from the fact that, unlike his contemporary A.A. Milne<sup>i</sup>, he never had to experience the realities of the front. He not only looked at war as an outsider but his patriotism too may stem from an outsider's view for he came from Huguenot antecedents who fled from France to seek a safe haven in England. Of all the authors and texts that were investigated on the Children's Literature course, Walter de la Mare could be seen as the most complacent and least acerbic. The other writers discussed engage with the world whether through fantasy or realism and are in opposition to the status quo. While de la Mare mixed in literary society often with radical thinkers, he remained throughout his life apolitical. His poetry for children presents a past world, firmly pastoral, populated with fairies and often the voice of the oral or folk tradition. The four poems by Walter de la Mare which were selected for the students to study could not contrast more with the Michael Rosen anthology Culture Shock explored earlier in the semester<sup>ii</sup>. Michael Rosen, poet of the inner city, recalling school anthologies of his school days, does not respond well to de la Mare. He criticises him for his avoidance of contemporary concerns of children:

“All the poems seemed to be about sad faraway place: the sea-side, the Romans, a palace, a tomb, a river, a battle.”<sup>2</sup>

However, not everyone is as negative as Michael Rosen. Peter Hunt asserts that:

“...while his verses often seem slight, ... there is no sentimentality, no compromise, and they very often have an unsettling and threatening feel about them”<sup>3</sup>

Rosen attended school in the 1950's where de la Mare's poetry, first published in 1902, remained

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 8, Winnie-the-Pooh

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 6, Culture Shock

popular and moreover his work is still found in anthologies up to the present time. Crouch writing in the 1960's supports this:

"His work is always found on the shelves of children's libraries, and librarians continue to recommend successive generations to children to read it. His poetry - if not his stories for children - is firmly established in the schools of this country, of the Commonwealth, and of America"<sup>4</sup>

McGrosson also comments on his continued popularity:

"What anthology of recent British poetry has not included "The Listeners"? What school child has not, at one time or another intoned ' "Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller...'"<sup>5</sup>

Although de la Mare became less popular from the 1970's onwards, his poems are ubiquitous appearing in modern editions and anthologies. It was because de la Mare's poetry is embedded in the national consciousness that a small selection of his work was selected for the Czech students to study.

Before further discussion of de la Mare's poetry some context for his writing will be given. He was born in 1873 in Woolwich which was then on the fringes of London. As mentioned above he came from a family of French Huguenots who fled three generations before from Bolbec in Normandy. His father died when he was only four and was brought up by his mother who was twenty six years younger than her husband. According to his biographer, Theresa Whistler, she was a strong influence and he heard many rhymes from her as a little boy. The family were not well-off and he was fortunate in winning a scholarship as a chorister in St. Paul's Choir and attended St. Paul's School. However, because of family circumstances, he had to complete his education at 14 in order to earn a living. Subsequently he spent the next eighteen and a half years working as a clerk for an American oil company in the City of London. At the same time Kenneth Graham was fretting away in the Bank of England.

It was Henry Newbolt who helped to rescue de la Mare from his low-paid office work. He succeeded after much effort to procure for him a grant from the Civil List of £200 a year. This served to release de la Mare from office drudgery and from then on he made his living from writing. However, most of his life was spent in constrained circumstances and he lived for many years in cramped conditions in the London suburbs. He survived the tedious years of work in the city by living in his imagination and the romantic view of the country can be explained because he never actually lived there. His view is that of the suburban dweller living on the edge of country and city.

There are conflicting opinions about where to locate de la Mare's work. While he is best known for children's poetry he also wrote short stories, novels and poetry for adults. His first collection of verse for children Songs of Childhood was published in 1902 and Peacock Pie followed in 1913. The

two were put together as Collected Rhymes and Verses in 1944. It is this collection for which he is best known although he wrote also fiction and plays for children. The Three Mulla-Mulgars published in 1910 is considered an overlooked work of considerable interest. Although the bulk of de la Mare's children's poetry was written and published before the first World War, John Rowe Townsend describes him as a "...major twentieth-century poet"<sup>6</sup> and observes:

"De la Mare always rings true emotionally; he is never self-conscious, saccharine, coy or condescending - all of which are ways of being out of true."<sup>7</sup>

McGrosson's too considers that his poetry does not reflect his age and is not topical:

"...he is not Romantic, Victorian, Georgian; he is not even metaphysical although W.H. Auden suggests that in his later work there are suggestions of metaphysical wit. De la Mare's finest poetry - and a great deal of it is fine - is above, or beyond, topicality".<sup>8</sup>

So where should his poetry be placed? He published adult poetry as part of the Georgian group; his formative years and most of his children's poetry was produced in the Edwardian era; he was influenced by those great Victorian children's writers Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald and he enjoyed the nonsense of Edward Lear. An admirer of Coleridge, his emphasis on the innocence of childhood, of the imagination, the centrality of the self all link him to the English Romantic tradition. Moreover, it would be difficult to divorce him from his Edwardian world because as Butler points out:

"The writer takes in words, thoughts and structures from a babel around him, and his text is a giving back into the same discussion, part, in short, of a social process"<sup>9</sup>

This is supported by empirical evidence from Whistler who describes how much de la Mare was influenced by work around him:

"He set out to learn his trade by direct imitation, aiming at a definite contemporary market, and teaching himself every skill he could learn from those successful in it. Like the apprentice artists of earlier centuries, he simply examined his masters and discovered in practice how the trick was done. The influence upon him of writers of the Nineties was thus considerable, and it did not pass; for much that he copied from them he later modified, and made his own, with permanent effect on his style. He was very much a child of his time."<sup>10</sup>

Such imitation moved beyond his contemporaries for de la Mare's work is deeply intertextual. Shakespeare among others was a strong influence and the ideas for The Mular-Mulgars, according to McGrossen, are virtually "lifted" from Purchas His Pilgrimes a record of an Elizabethan sailor. While there are resonances from Shakespeare, another important influence is the poetry of Emily Bronte. According to Whistler:

"Her genius affected him as an artist more profoundly than did any of those other Romantics - Poe, Christina Rossetti and Coleridge - whose works most immediately resembled his"<sup>11</sup>

Reading through her collection a similar feeling is felt with melancholy, moonlight, hints of the past, a sense of isolation as strong features. Whistler observes:

“De la Mare placed the same paramount value as she did on earliest experience, dreams, human communion with nature, death an integral part of living, passionate family affections, the lures and the risks of “the shadowy region”<sup>12</sup>

It will be argued below that de la Mare’s poetry places him within the English Pre-Raphaelite movement and the following commentary on his poetry serves to identify potential characteristics.

### **The Work of de la Mare**

De la Mare’s poetry is located predominantly in the world of fantasy where such figures as fairies, elves and witches feature strongly. Many poems are set in moonlit nights evoking a dreamlike quality. “The Fairies Dancing” is a good example:

“I heard along the early hills,  
Ere yet the lark was risen up,  
Ere yet the dawn with firelight fills  
The night-dew of the bramble-cup, -  
I heard the fairies in a ring  
Sing as they tripped a lilting round  
Soft as the moon on wavering wing”.<sup>13</sup>

The representation of fairies have a close affinity to those of Shakespeare in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The “I” in the poem, a watcher, hides behind a hawthorn-bush - and it may be no coincidence that it is a hawthorn bush that Bottom retires to before he is “translated” into a donkey by Puck. Titania mentions fairies dancing twice in Act II scene ii

“And never, since the middle summer’s spring,  
Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,  
By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,  
Or on the beached margent of the sea,  
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,…”

Later she exorts Oberon to join her:

“If you will patiently dance in our round,  
And see our moonlight revels, go with us;”

Fairies dance in a ring in de la Mare’s “Bluebells”<sup>14</sup>

Where the bluebells and the wind are,  
Fairies in a ring I spied,  
and I heard a little linnet  
Singing near beside.”

While the Fairy poems are light and fanciful, those concerning witches are much more frightening. The heavily rhythmic “The Little Creature”<sup>15</sup> with its incantatory opening:

“Twinkhum, twankum, twirlum and twitch -”

and repetitive second line repeated seven times in 14 lines:

“My great grandam - She was a Witch.”

is powerful and fearsome. The granddaughter has been called “a child of sin” by her Nannie and reflects:

“Snared is my heart in a nightmare’s gin;  
Never from terror I out may win;  
So dawn and dusk I pine, peak, thin,  
Scarcely knowing t’other from which -  
My great grandam - She was a Witch.

One recalls here Shakespeare’s three weird sisters who talk about a spell they have put upon a sailor:

“Weary sev’n nights, nine times nine,  
Shall be dwindle, peak and pine:” (Macbeth Act I sc iii)

Similarly superstition and magical numbers are evoked in “As Lucy Went A-Walking”<sup>16</sup>

“As Lucy went a-walking one morning cold and fine,  
There sate three crows upon a bough, and three times three are nine:  
Then ‘O!’ said Lucy, in the snow, ‘it’s very plain to see  
A witch has been a-walking in the fields in front of me.’

Shakespeare’s Macbeth is recalled again in Act I Scene ii where the three weird sisters encant:

“Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,  
And thrice again, to make up nine: -  
Peace! - the charm’s wound up”

Witches ride on broomsticks in “The Ride-By-Nights:”<sup>17</sup>

“Between the legs of the glittering Chair  
They hover and squeak in the empty air.”

Resonances again from Shakespeare:

“Fair is foul and foul is fair  
Hover through the fog and filthy air” (Macbeth Act I, scene i)

Many poems revel in the English seasons and countryside. “O Dear Me!”<sup>18</sup> for example tracks the four seasons from Spring to Winter:

“Here are crocuses, white, gold, grey!  
‘O dear me!’ says Marjorie May;  
Flat as a platter the blackberry blows:  
‘O dear me!’ says Madeleine Rose;  
the leaves are fallen, the swallows flown:  
‘O dear me!’ says Humphrey John;  
Snow lies thick where all night it fell:  
‘O dear me!’ says Emmanuel.”

Other poems in his first anthology Songs of Childhood, such as “Come-Gone” and “Apple Fall” focus on the flora of a particular season, the former the spring and the latter autumn. Animals also feature strongly. “The Mother Bird”<sup>19</sup> told in the first person describes the bravery of a sparrow defending her nest:

“...  
‘Twas not a chirp, as sparrows pipe  
At break of day; ‘twas not a trill,  
As falters through the quiet even;  
But one sharp solitary note,  
One desperate, fierce, and vivid cry  
Of valiant tears, and hopeless joy,  
One passionate note of victory.”

Never far from evocations of countryside and the seasons is reference to the ever present sea and many poems refer to ships and journey either to or from foreign parts.

Occasionally a beautiful woman appears. “Lovelocks”<sup>20</sup> concerns not only such a woman but is also located in the past where mention of the songs of the Waits lends an early English flavour. The first verse describes the woman, tells us her social background and places her actions at evening time:

“I watched the Lady Caroline  
Bind up her dark and beauteous hair,  
her face was rosy in the glass,  
And ‘twixt the coils her hands would pass,  
White in the candleshine”. p.13

“The Sleeping Beauty”<sup>21</sup> refers to the fairy tale where in four stanzas a vivid picture of the young woman is created and ends:

“In heat, in snow, in wind, in flood,  
She sleeps in lovely loneliness,  
Half folded like an April bud  
On winter-haunted trees”

Aspects of childhood are invoked in a number of poems that explore imagination, wishful thinking, secrets and private thoughts. “The Buckle”<sup>22</sup> told in the first person describes the secret hiding places of the speaker. In “Bunches of Grapes”<sup>23</sup> three children are fantasising about what they would like:

“ ‘Bunches of grapes,’ says Timothy;  
‘Pomegranates pink,’ says Elaine;  
‘A junket of cream and a cranberry tart  
For me,’ says Jane.”

Many poems have echoes of the folk song or the oral tradition of the nursery rhyme. For example “Fol Dol Do”<sup>24</sup> has resonances with English folk songs welcoming in the early summer where traditionally May is always described as “the merry month”.:

“Fol, dol, do, and a south wind a-blowing O,  
Fol, dol, do, and green growths a-growing O,  
Fol, dol, do, and the heart inside me knowing O,  
‘Tis merry merry month of May.”

Similarly “Off the Ground” has resonances of the oral tradition:

“Three jolly Farmers  
Once bet a pound  
Each dance the others would  
Off the ground.”<sup>25</sup>

There are, however, darker aspects, alluded to by Peter Hunt above, are strange, mysterious and often frightening. “John Mouldy”<sup>26</sup> is a poem in four verses where an onlooker (a child?) describes the eponymous figure sitting in a cellar “Smiling there alone.” The middle two verses describe the rats that are in the cellar and one “..slim brown rat of Norway” actually creeps over him. The surname “Mouldy” has an unpleasant decayed feel to it and the whole poem is unsettling. Similarly “The Ogre”<sup>27</sup> tells the tale of a creature who creeps into a house and appears to be about to take away two small children:

“Then, stooping, with an impious eye  
Stared through the lattice small,  
And spied two children which did lie  
Asleep, against the wall.”

The children are saved by the sound of a woman in the kitchen singing a lullaby about Jesus which defeats the evil Ogre. The child reader in “The Phantom”<sup>28</sup> is similarly comforted at the end but before that there are some frightening images. The narrative poem charts the journey of a child through a dark house in search of a Bible that she has been asked to fetch. The child enclosed in darkness with only a taper sees a ghost but as it is of a child she is less afraid. When the ghost-child disappears the human child is bereft:

“Gloomy with night the listening walls  
Are now that she is gone,  
Albeit this solitary child  
No longer seems alone.

Fast though her taper dwindles down,  
Though black the shadows comes,  
A beauty beyond fear to dim  
Haunts now her alien home.

Ghosts in the world, malignant, grim,  
Vex many a wood and glen,  
And house and pool, - the unquiet ghosts  
Of dead and restless men” (stanzas 20, 21, 22)

A number of poems feature a wolf which resonates with stories from the oral tradition. However, unlike “Red Riding Hood” in “The Grey Wolf”<sup>29</sup> there is an unhappy ending:

“ ‘I ran, O, I ran but the grey wolf ran faster,  
O, Mother, I cry in the air at thy door,  
Cry Shoo! now, cry Shoo! but his fangs were so cruel,  
Thy son (save his hatchet) thou’lt never see more.’ ”

Further discussion of de la Mare’s work will continue below but before that the four poems the Czech students studied will be examined in more detail after a description of how they were introduced in seminars.

### Methodology

By this stage in the course, towards the end of the second semester, the students had made progress with English and had gained experience in reading and discussing children's literature. This was the moment I felt they could tackle the more linguistically challenging texts of de la Mare and Lewis Carroll.<sup>i</sup> While Culture Shock had indeed been surprising, de la Mare’s romantic poetry seemed to appeal more to the Czech imagination and conformed more to their ideas of what was suitable for children.

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<sup>i</sup> There was, unfortunately, no time to include Kenneth Graham’s The Wind in the Willows an important text in Edwardian children’s literature.



Four poems by Walter de la Mare were selected from Collected Rhymes and Verses: “Tartary”, “The Raven’s Tomb”, “Night Swans” and “Bookworm”.

I began by reading the poems to the students as they looked at the texts so they could get a feeling for how they sounded and then we began to study them in more depth. I wanted to look at form as well as content and began by asking the students to read the selection of poems in pairs and complete this chart:

Poem	One verse or many?	Rhyming scheme?	Metaphors?	Similes?	Alliteration	Assonance?
Tartary						
The Raven’s Tomb						
The Night Swans						
The Bookworm						

The second task, looking at content, was to examine the same poems and place them on these continua:

Country \_\_\_\_\_ City

Peace \_\_\_\_\_ Noise

Past \_\_\_\_\_ Present

Sad \_\_\_\_\_ Happy

Secondary World \_\_\_\_\_ Primary World

In the plenary each pair placed their poems on a large continua written on the board we tried to arrive at a consensus using the text as evidence to support points of view. There was general agreement that the poems were rural, set in the past, were sad and very much in the secondary world. However, while the verse could not be described as “noisy” all of them were full of sound. Finally groups of four selected one of the poems and rehearsed a group reading. In this way they had a chance to examine the language in detail and to internalise it by rereading and repetition.

At this point the four poems in question will be analysed.

### Analysis of “Tartary”, “The Raven’s Tomb”, “The Night Swans” and “Bookworm”

In Tartary<sup>30</sup>, which is written in the first person, the narrator enthusiastically fantasises about what they would do if they were Lord of Tartary. Each stanza begins with “If I were Lord of Tartary” and follows with examples of what the narrator would do. Tartary is an exotic place full of gold and ivory, peacocks and zebras, flashing stars and scented breezes. There are hints with words such as “scimitar (third stanza line 6) that the mysterious Tartary may be in Arabia. But there are echoes too in the word “Tartary” with the Tartars of the steppes of Russia. An image of India is conjured up in the line “and in my forests tigers haunt”, while the “great fishes” have echoes of the golden carp of China. Tartary is rich in sound and colour. There is music, not only in the “harp, and flute, and mandoline” (2nd stanza) and the trumpeters which will summon the narrator to his meals, but also hinted at in the “trembling lakes” and “bird-delighting citron-trees”. The ivory bed is white, the throne gold, there are multi-hued peacocks, lamps “Yellow as honey, red as wine,” a robe of beads “White, and gold, and green..”. Tartary’s landscape is made up of “dark glades”, vales of purple and rivers “silver-pale”. There are resonances of Enobarbus’ description of Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s Anthony and Cleopatra where her barge is described as “...like a burnished throne (Act II scene ii line 197) . Tartary’s “scented breeze” may be compared to “A strange invisible perfume” (line 218) and Cleopatra’s robe “cloth of gold” (line 204) has resonances in the robe described above.

The Raven’s Tomb<sup>31</sup> follows in the long tradition of the fable which stretches back to Aesop in the 6th century BC . One aspect of the fable is to explain aspects of the world and this poem tells us why the Raven is black. It is written in the voice of a Raven who is giving orders for his burial arrangements and begins with the imperative “Build me my tomb,” It continues with four more requests each of four lines. The final four lines offer the explanation about the blackness of the Raven:

“And you, dear sisters, don your black  
For ever and a day,  
To show how true a raven  
In his tomb is laid away.”

The location may be in a churchyard because yew trees, referred to in the second line, are common in such places. Images of night and darkness are conjured up in such words and phrases as the “dark yew tree”; “sad lamps”; “twilight”, “dusk”, “glow-worms”, “bats” and the “grey cock at night”. There are also sounds - drones, whistling, whispers and the call of grey cock “though his silver horn” (line 16)

There are echoes of Shakespeare’s Macbeth ; a play suffused with imagery of darkness and evil First there is the raven:

“The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements...” (Act I scene v)

and also other black birds:

“... the crow  
“Makes wing to the rocky wood :” (Act III scene ii)

Secondly the “haunted beetle” who “drones” a “gloomy dirge” has echoes of

“The shard-born beetle, with his drowsy hums, “ (Act III scene ii)

The nocturnal bat described by Macbeth as he conjures up an image of nightfall:

“... ‘ere the bat hath flown  
His cloister’d flight;” (Act III scene ii)

is also referred to in “The Raven”:

“Where the small, flickering bats resort,  
Whistling in tears my name.” (lines 11,12)

The Night Swans<sup>32</sup> is a sad poem concerning the death of a child, Evangeline, which is revealed in the last stanza.

A picture is painted of a lake at night where three swans arrive to escort the child into Fairyland. In the last verse the setting changes to a house where the child “answers not again”. The colours are of night - “.dark with trees and stars between”, the “starry sheen” and contrast between the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the swans. While the emphasis in the first two lines is on serenity:

“‘Tis silence on the enchanted lake,  
And silence in the air serene”,

the sibilance and the tiny noises that are described serve to add sound to the picture. Little noises are indicated such as the child’s heart beat and the sound of the swans moving through the water is hinted in the fourth stanza:

“And softly, in the glassy pool,  
Their feet beat darkly to and fro.”

There is music too for:

“She sings across the waters clear  
And dark with trees and stars between,  
The notes her fairy godmother  
Taught her, the child Evangeline” (second stanza)

The peaceful atmosphere is broken in the final verse where the child's name is called:

“Evangeline! Evangeline!”

There are similarities with Tennyson's The Lady of Shalott<sup>33</sup>

“Lying, robed in snowy white  
That loosely flew to left and right-  
The leaves upon her falling light-  
Thro' the noises of the night  
    She floated down to Camelot :  
And as the boat-head wound along  
The willowy hills and fields among,  
They heard her singing her last song,  
    The Lady of Shalott.”

The final poem Bookworm<sup>34</sup> was selected with the students in mind as they were nearing the end of the semester with examinations and essays looming because the poem conveys a strong sense of someone trapped who is dreaming of escape. As with many de la Mare poems it is written in the first person. In this case the speaker is Jack who begins with the complaint: “I'm tired - oh, tired of books,” and ends with the same line. In between there are descriptions of the country and the seaside which convey a deep sense of longing. Each pair of lines depict a clear image from the peaceful:

“And woods where shadowy violets  
Nod their cool leaves between;” (lines 2/3)

to noise for beyond the countryside there is the ever present sea.

“To hear the hoarse sea-waters drive  
Their billows 'gainst the shore; (lines 7/8)

The sense of longing for release, which must have been felt by de la Mare when he was working in the City for the Oil Company, was also felt by the students.

The short space of time and the sparcity of the verse examined meant that de la Mare's poetry did not feature strongly in discussion with the students about the Englishness of the texts<sup>i</sup>. Only those who were subsequently given specific texts to work on were able to make comments and these were divided between feelings that the emotions aroused were universals and a sense that the daydreams were dreams only those the English might dream. The swans in particular were identified as being a particularly English phenomenon. As mentioned above at the time the students enjoyed the poetry and for them it was closer to what they considered suitable for children than many other texts they were introduced to. The Czech students also could identify with romantic notions of the countryside

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 2, Empirical Research

and the sense of melancholy was not too distant from the Czech psyche. In this sense the implied reader was not so distant from the actual reader. But who is the implied reader in de la Mare's poetry?

### **The Implied Reader**

In the tradition of many writers for children such as Lewis Carroll and A.A. Milne<sup>i</sup> de la Mare began writing for a specific group of children which were his nephews and nieces and then his own. They were middle class Edwardian children who enjoyed the increased attention that adults gave to them in this period. The implied reader, like de la Mare himself, must be prepared to enter a world of imagination and wonder. According to Clark:

“The de la Mare child has fears and uncertainties but unusual joys and pleasures. He dwells with common things but is never far in spirit from the supernatural. He is at one and the same time in an England of fields and seas, and in a Nowhere of dreams and sleep. This child is a complex being, very imaginative and always listening”<sup>35</sup>

De la Mare not only took great pains in writing his verse for children but was also enthusiastic about encouraging children to enjoy poetry. He compiled two important anthologies of poetry and in the preface to his anthology Tom Tiddler's Ground<sup>36</sup> he gives the following advice

“Let your eyes, mind, heart and spirit feed on it, and see what happens”<sup>37</sup>

He does not expect his reader to understand everything but instead emphasises the pleasure of the feeling for a poem:

“We can, too, and particularly when we are young, delight in the sound of the words of a poem, immensely enjoy them - the music and rhythm and lilt, feel its enchantment and treasure it in memory, without realising its full meaning”<sup>38</sup>

In Come Hither<sup>39</sup> de la Mare takes even more trouble to introduce the child to poetry for he sets out to explain the purpose of poetry and how to read it. But instead of a formal introduction the reader is presented with what at first appears to be autobiography:

“In my roving and ramblings as a boy I had often skirted the old stone house in the hollow.”<sup>40</sup>

But, intriguingly it is fiction and the narrative takes on a dreamy quality. The narrator, a young boy called Simon, ends up in a circular room in the house which is full of collector's items: works of art and books from round the world; all owned by a mysterious Mr Nahum Tarroone. The boy finds a book called “Theotherworlde” which:

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapters 8 and 11

“consisted chiefly of rhymes and poems, and some of them had pictured capitals and were decorated in clear bright colours like the pages of the old books illuminated by monks centuries ago ... Occasionally Mr. Nahum had jotted down his own thought in the margin.”<sup>41</sup>

This is an ingenious piece of foregrounding because Simon selects his favourites and eventually these become the contents of the subsequent anthology. Advice about how to read poetry is embedded in the story and the following extract indicates that de la Mare was critical of the teaching of poetry in school:

“When first I opened its pages I had had a poor liking for poetry because of a sort of contempt for it. “Poetry!” I would scoff to myself, and would shut up the covers of any such book with a kind of yawn inside me. Some of it had come my way in lesson books. This I could gabble off like a parrot, and with as much understanding; and I had just begun to grin out a little Latin verse for my father”<sup>42</sup>

The boy perseveres with the poetry and finally he learns:

“But the more I read, the more I came to enjoy them for their own sakes. Not all of them, of course. But I did see this, that like a carpenter who makes a table, a man who has written a poem has written it like that *on purpose*.”<sup>43</sup>

An example follows using the traditional nursery rhyme “Old King Cole” where the replacement of one word for another changes the rhythm and meaning completely. This introduction is a lesson in how to read poetry and demonstrates that de la Mare’s implied reader is learning about poetry by reading it. This is the apprentice reader that Margaret Meek refers to in How Texts Teach What Readers Learn<sup>44</sup>. De la Mare’s implied reader is a child who is imaginative, open and ready to learn. The child also is innocent in the Romantic tradition and is content with immersing himself in the secondary world. William Walsh identifies that child as follows:

“One can picture him, the chief persona of de la Mare’s poems, stinky and pale, with thin bones and fine hair, inclined to lassitude, occasionally shaken with the tremors of curious fears, inhabiting with a subdued happiness a private world and resenting the intrusion of bumbling and uncomprehending adults. It is this child, ‘perplexed and still’ like the Traveller in *The Listeners*, as he faces a massive and indifferent universe whose experience is the substance of de la Mare’s poetry”<sup>45</sup>

It may be seen from the above discussion that the implied reader is learning about poetry and is keen to inhabit a dreamy, imaginative world. As the Czech students themselves were being introduced to English poetry, they too could be seen as apprentice readers. Similarly they also had a predilection towards *schadenfreude*. It appears that the gap between the implied reader and the actual reader is narrower in de la Mare’s poetry than in other texts on the course and indicates a universal appeal. However, the darker side of his verse does imply a reader who can cope with more distressing aspects of the human condition which may be less universal and more particularly English.

### Cultural Indicators of Englishness

The task of locating de la Mare's poetry for children and identifying their Englishness remains. It has been established that de la Mare's poetry dwells primarily in the world of the imagination and while beautiful it is often sad with a strong sense of longing. It is essentially pastoral ignoring the city and describing the English countryside. Because of this de la Mare can be positioned within the Romantic tradition and moreover I would also suggest that his work shows strong influences from the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, an essentially English phenomenon. Ironside's description of Burne-Jones paintings might easily describe the poetry of de la Mare:

"The insubstantial region that he created out of legendary history provided a retreat rather than a romantic contrast; his art seems to solicit its admirers to cultivate their dreams and allow the grass of the earth to grow weeds under their feet."<sup>46</sup> . He goes on to talk about the "melancholy beauty" of Burne-Jones work<sup>47</sup> .

The Pre-Raphaelites were formed in 1848 and were influential until the turn of the century. Led by Millais, Rossetti and Hunt they turned towards painting, as the name suggests, before Raphael. According to John Dixon Hunt<sup>48</sup> they were inspired by the Middle Ages; were interested in introspection; investigated the dialect of symbolism and tried to accommodate to a world of photography by means of realistic description. English literature was a source of inspiration particularly the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Keats, Scott and Tennyson. Edgar Allan Poe was a cult figure and Mallory's Morte d'Arthur was much admired while the figure of St George, patron saint of England, was revived by the Pre-Raphaelites. They also followed in the footsteps of earlier artists in depicting the particular beauties of the English countryside and its seasons. Literature was also included in the Pre-Raphaelite movement and became known as "word painting" in which a spiritual element was also woven into the form.

In Pamela Didlake Brewer's paper on "Lady Audley's Secret"<sup>49</sup> she describes in detail Pre-Raphaelite literary technique and it could be argued that these points may equally apply to the work of de la Mare. Firstly each poem was a picture where careful attention is given to descriptive use of colour and detail. She asserts that the poet calls on the imagination to "see" the subject of the poem. References are made to the more mysterious aspects of Christianity and "pagan" religions. There is an innate morbidity or poignancy. Overall there is the "union of the material and spiritual"<sup>50</sup> . One aspect not so strongly present, and this is not surprising in poetry for children, is the highly sensuous and the use of obscure symbolism. Pre-Raphaelite novels include Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights while poems cited are Coleridge's "Christable", Keats "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott".

Andrew Lang called such poetry "romantic supernaturalism", "visualised poetry of fantasy" and "fantasy crossed with realism"<sup>51</sup> Andrew Lang, editor of the Blue Fairy Book was also de la Mare's editor of Songs of Childhood, which indicates that de la Mare would have been well aware of Pre-

Raphaelite ideas. Apart from Andrew Lang, de la Mare also had personal links with others who followed the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Holman Hunt came to paint the choir boys when de la Mare was at St. Paul's school. In that painting "May Morning on Magdalen Tower" de la Mare thought that one of the dark choristers in the picture was very like himself<sup>52</sup>. He shared the Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Morris passion for the Middle Ages. He was also strongly influenced by Pater who considered that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music"<sup>53</sup>. And as discussed above, sounds and music are firmly embedded in de la Mare's poetry.

De la Mare was part of the "aesthetic movement" and as such helped to publish and contributed to the magazine "The Basilisk" which included illustrations by Horton "in the Beardsley manner"<sup>54</sup>. According to Hunt the terms "Aesthetic" and "Pre-Raphaelite" were used interchangeably in Walter Hamilton's The Aesthetic Movement in England published in 1882<sup>55</sup> and Pre-Raphaelite works remained "...immediate and important to the 1880's and 1890's..."<sup>56</sup>

It is Newbolt who detected de la Mare's Pre-Raphaelite quality describing the "ecstatic intensity of pictorial detail"<sup>57</sup> in his work. De la Mare, like the Pre-Raphaelites who "authorised the reality of the dreams themselves"<sup>58</sup> was engrossed in the nature of dreams and edited a book of collections of descriptions of dreams. An important poet who was part of the Movement was Yeats and both moved in the same social circles. The following description of his poetry could equally apply to that of de la Mare:

"...full of pale thrones, far-off valleys, wharves of sorrow, forgotten beauties, sad Roses, shadowy pools and the continual presence of the meaningful sea."<sup>59</sup>

Yeats admired de la Mare's work and pronounced with some insight about the Epitaph "Here lies a most beautiful lady":

"There's is not an original sentence in this poem, yet it will live for centuries"<sup>60</sup>.

In turn de la Mare "...though he found the Celtic twilight rather a bore, did not underestimate Yeat's art".<sup>61</sup>

The most interesting place to locate de la Mare's links to Pre-Raphaelite philosophy is in his novel The Master which was worked on in 1895 and focuses on the correspondence of the senses. In it a picture has been painted of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" and a globe portrayed may be read as a musical score. The art gallery in the text is described in detail and Whistler reports that:

"Yeat's description of Horton's drawings so exactly fits this that de la Mare's whole story must have its origins in his friendship with Horton".<sup>62</sup>



It has been established that a number of Pre-Raphaelite preoccupations are to be found de la Mare's poems. In the poems discussed above, the following areas have already been identified: the influence of Shakespeare; a setting somewhere in the past; the presence of music and sound; and vivid word-painting.

For this reason an important cultural indicator is the period in which de la Mare's poetry for children was written. I see no reason why de la Mare should not be included in period of the "Golden Age" of children's literature at a time when: "...no other generation in English history produced so many children's classics as the Edwardians."<sup>63</sup> He was a product of the Edwardian era which was a time of creativity where the middle classes with smaller families and more leisure time could spend it with their children. As de la Mare grew up he read the works of the great Victorian writers for children Lear, Carroll and MacDonald. The influence of the English Romantic tradition and de la Mare's interest in children as innocent, whose senses are at their height, reflects changing views on the nature of childhood. However, the confidence of the early Victorians was shaken with the discoveries of Darwin and the hitherto unquestioning beliefs were challenged and uncertainties were reflected. As mentioned above there is a darker, Gothic side to much of de la Mare's poetry which significantly reflects this age. Although many of the poems are fantasy, set in the past and appear escapist, there are some tough and frightening ones that hint of the difficulties of life or of inner doubts, fears and even terrors. The child is neither cocooned nor protected but is warned and this is a feature much of English children's literature for it is *preparing* children for a difficult world and not *shielding* them from it.

His poetry which both appears close to home yet includes seemingly distant and exotic places stems from a nation with a large Empire many of whose treasures found their way to London bringing the remote close to home. Such places may appear exotic for the English but they are also not so distant because the British Empire was also part of "home". It is interesting to reflect on the source of de la Mare's inspiration because he only left the British Isles three times, once on a lecture tour of the United States of America and twice to the Netherlands so his imagination must have been fed from secondary sources. One location for "Tartary" for example might be the Victoria and Albert Museum where objects from round the world have been collected. Another site might be the "Eastern" paintings of Pre-Raphaelite painter, Holman Hunt.

Embedded in de la Mare's writing are the works of others. Shakespearean language pervades as does the language of traditional nursery rhymes inherited from the oral tradition. Similarly the voice of English folk song permeates many of the poems, both in form as well as content. Fairy-lore also emanates from the English tradition developed by Shakespeare.

The Englishness of landscape is reflected in many poems : English birds, flowers, trees and seasons. This nostalgia for the countryside and rejection of the town is a feature of English attitudes towards town and country discussed by Raymond Williams in Country and City. He observes that in spite of the Industrial Revolution:

“...English attitudes to the country, and to ideas of rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature, for a generation, was still predominantly rural; and even in the twentieth century, in an urban and industrial land, forms of the older ideas and experiences still remarkably persist.”<sup>64</sup>

The effects of the Industrial Revolution and subsequent Pre-Raphaelite recreation of Medieval England with an attendant resurgent interest in the Arthurian legends shows a move towards a reinvention of an Englishness. De la Mare as the children's Pre-Raphaelite poet played his part in this Movement and because he remained popular up to the 1950's and is still in circulation his influence still permeates.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Clark, Walter de la Mare, Bodley Head, 1960, p.21

<sup>2</sup> 'Is There Anybody There?' in Books for Keeps No.75, July, 1992

<sup>3</sup> Peter Hunt Children's Literature an Illustrated History OUP, 1995, p.202

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, op.cit., p.11

<sup>5</sup> Doris Ross McGrosson, Walter de la Mare Twayne Publishers Inc, 1996, p.47

<sup>6</sup> John Rowe Townsend, Written for Children Penguin, 1974, p.194

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp.194/195

<sup>8</sup> McGrossen op.cit., p.49

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaires OUP, 1981, p.9

<sup>10</sup> Teresa Whistler, Imagination of the Heart - The Life of Walter de la Mare Duckworth, 1993, p.65

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.282

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p 282

<sup>13</sup> Walter de la Mare, Collected Rhymes and Verses Faber & Faber, 1944, p.110

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.108

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.153

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.151

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.150

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.76

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.101

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.45

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 178

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 25

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.17

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.21

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 145

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.143

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.62

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.88

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.204

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- 31 Ibid., p.210  
32 Ibid., p.210  
33 Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poems of Tennyson 1830-1870 With an introduction by Sir Thomas Herbert Warren  
(with ninety-one illustrations by Millais, Rossetti, Maclise and others). OUP, 1950 (first published 1912)  
34 de la Mare, op.cit. p.204  
35 Clark, op.cit. p.44  
36 Walter de la Mare, Tom Tiddler's Ground Faber and Faber, 1961 (first published 1931)  
37 Ibid., p. 17  
38 Ibid., p.17  
39 Walter de la Mare, Come Hither Kestrel, 1923  
40 Ibid., (1957 edition) p.xiii  
41 Ibid., p.xxvii  
42 Ibid., p.xxix  
43 Ibid., p.xxix  
44 Margaret Meek, How Texts Teach What Children Learn Thimble Press, 1988  
45 William Walsh, The Use of Imagination Peregrine, 1966, p 173  
46 Robin Ironside, Pre-Raphaelite Painters Phaidon, 1948, p.19  
47 Ibid., p.20  
48 John Dixon Hunt, The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination (1848-1900) RKP, 1968  
49 Pamela Didlake Brewer "Pre-Raphaelitism in *Lady Audley's Secret*" in Arkansas Philological  
Association No. 19. 1-10, 1993  
50 Ibid., p.4  
51 Ibid., p.4  
52 Whistler, op.cit., p.42  
53 Hunt, op.cit., p.161  
54 Whistler, op.cit., p.70  
55 Hunt, op.cit., p.6  
56 Ibid., p.6  
57 Whistler, op.cit., p.318  
58 Hunt, op.cit., p.23  
59 Ibid., p. 165  
60 Whistler, op.cit., p.210  
61 Ibid., p.210  
62 Ibid., p.76  
63 Jonathan Rose, The Edwardian Temperament 1895-1919. Ohio University Press, 1986, p.181  
64 Raymond Williams, The Country and the City Hogarth Press, 1985, p.2

## Chapter 10 Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

### Introduction

Harvey Darton refers to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland as a "spiritual volcano"<sup>1</sup> and first published in 1865, it has never been out of print. As Cohen observes both Alice books are:

"...firm bulwarks of society, both in the English-speaking world and everywhere else. Next to the Bible and Shakespeare, they are the books most widely and most frequently translated and quoted. Over seventy-five editions and versions of the Alice books were available in 1993, including play texts, parodies, read-along cassettes, teacher's guides, audio-language studies, colouring books, pop-up books, musical renderings, casebooks, and a deluxe edition selling for £175."<sup>2</sup>

W.H Auden wrote of Lewis Carroll's fiction for children:

"I have always thought one might learn much about the cultural history of a country by going through the speeches made by its public men over a certain period, in legislatures, in law courts, and at official banquets, and making a list of the books quoted from without attribution. So far as Great Britain is concerned, I strongly suspect that, for the past fifty years, the two *Alice* books and The Hunting of the Snark have headed it."<sup>3</sup>

As such Alice's Adventures... is one of the most famous children's books in the world and is part of the English cultural imagination. It was the first children's novel in England without any moralising elements and gave rein to an exuberant exploration of fantasy that has continued up to the present time. Of all the texts examined so far in this work, Alice's Adventures... provides the richest seam of cultural indicators to mine. There is also a plethora of information about Carroll himself (7 biographies) and innumerable analyses of the text from a wide variety of literary perspectives. The writer of the Alice books, Charles Dodgson, is an intriguing character whose relationship with pre-pubescent girls is questionable and it was his relationship with Alice Liddell that triggered the first telling of the tale. He emphasised that he wished to give pleasure to children and did not want to burden them with the constraints that were part of their everyday lives. Therefore it is not clear how conscious he was of subversive elements in the text. Carroll's reply when he was asked about the meaning of his long poem "The Hunting of the Snark" reveals that he too was aware that there was more in the creative process that a writer might at first apprehend:

"As to the meaning of the Snark? I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them: so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer meant. So, whatever good meanings are in the book, I'm very glad to accept as the meaning of the books. The best I've seen is...that the whole book is an allegory on the search for happiness. I think this fits beautifully in many ways."<sup>4</sup>

However, it is important to keep in mind the focus of this study and not to become involved in questions about the creative process itself. The text arose from a combination of the persona of

Dodgson and the Victorian world in which he lived. This discussion focuses on the external forces and not on the psychological. For whatever Carroll's original motives when creating the narrative, an examination of the text does reveal his perspective on the Victorian world. References to Carroll's audience from the first oral telling and "in jokes" which only they knew about were retained from the first oral rendition and coexist with his satirical view on Victorian values in general.

That Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is a culturally rich text is affirmed by the comment made by Boris Zakhoder, a Russian children's writer, who when asked why he had not translated Lewis Carroll's famous children's story replied:

"It would be easier to transpose England".<sup>5</sup>

Yet, in spite of this, Zakhoder did manage the translation and he is not the only one to succeed as it has appeared in over 70 different languages<sup>6</sup>. So even though there are many references only a few readers would pick up as well as puns and nonsense, the text, deeply embedded in Victorian culture, has been successfully translated and read by a wide variety of people for over a hundred years. This presupposes that as well as the particular there are universals in which the non-Victorian reader is left with the freedom to add their own meanings. Bakewell discusses such other readers and offers a reason for the text's continuing popularity:

"Far from being confined to the 'happy time of pinafore, treacle and innocence', the Alice books have been read by explorers, prisoners of conscience, distraught politicians and harassed surgeons, providing them with a still centre of reasoned unreason, a core of sanity in a world where nothing else makes sense".<sup>7</sup>

While acknowledging that it is possible to bring a range of meanings to the text, this work is an exploration of the Englishness of Alice's Adventures... and in order to discuss this five areas have been selected. While such divisions help the organisation of the argument it must be born in mind the text is multi-layered where the narrative operates on many aspects at once. Furthermore it is not possible to discuss every single indicator in the text therefore examples have been selected which serve to indicate way the text might be analysed.

The first most powerful indicator of the Englishness of Alice's Adventures... is its place as a landmark text as the forerunner of the development of fantasy and a particular form of humour - nonsense. It has influence beyond the British Isles and along with other texts from the "Golden Age" of children's literature marks England as a country where literature for children is embedded in the national consciousness. As Hurlimann asserts about both Lear and Carroll:

"..., they raised the whole of English children's literature to an extremely high level of wit, fancy, and language, and because of this, English children's literature, more than that of any other country, has become a firm branch of the country's literature as a whole".<sup>8</sup>

Secondly an investigation into the implied reader reveals not only attitudes towards the child reader but also the assumptions made about what that reader will know. A third aspect is how and why the text came into being at that particular time and it is attributed to a number of factors such as England's historical position, changes in the family, and developments in printing. A fourth important area to explore is the window the text opens on Victorian norms, values and beliefs which concerns both surface levels of Victorian everyday life and underlying tensions, fears and anxieties. A final indicator is the English language itself - the puns, the parodies, the nonsense words which is why the text offers such a challenge to the translator. However, before further discussion takes place, this is an appropriate place to describe how this culturally-rich narrative was approached on the children's literature course.

### Methodology

It was because of the cultural density of the text that Alice's Adventures... was the last to be studied and, as only two seminars remained, superficially at that. There were a number of problems with working with this text. Firstly it is long and the language is difficult for the foreign reader as there are many puns, long complicated sentences, and unusual vocabulary. Secondly there are many cultural references to the world of England in the 1860's which require explanation. In spite of this it was selected because it was so well-known and I thought that some introduction would assist the students in returning to it later. It has been translated into Czech, and if the students hadn't actually read it, they certainly knew something about it. They could also go to the theatre and see a Czech stage version. Having thought about how to teach Alice... for some time I decided to make the two remaining seminars an *introduction* to the story in order to help the students approach the text which they might return to later.

I began by introducing the book and told them that like A.A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh, it was originally created for one particular child. A brief description was given of the now famous boat trip from Oxford where Carroll began to invent the tale which was first called Alice's Adventures Underground. The students were then put into groups and asked to tell each other anything they could remember about a recent dream and to make a list of the sorts of things that happen in dreams. After their ideas were then written on the board, I either added to or highlighted the following examples according to each group's contribution:

Strange things could happen but would seem perfectly logical at the time  
There would not be a clear sequence of events  
People might behave in outrageous ways  
There were often feelings of frustration in not being able to do what you wanted to do.

I explained that some of the aspects of a dream could be found in the way the story was written which helped the students to be prepared for the way the text would move. Another way of helping to orientate them was to give the students the following features to pick out in the first chapter:

- Jokes with words - puns etc.
- Extraordinary creatures
- Extraordinary events
- References to school and learning
- Rude or argumentative discussions
- References to other books
- Kafkaesque situations

As we were in the native land of Kafka (he was born and lived in the capital city Prague) there was no necessity to explain about him even although his work was not considered politically correct in totalitarian time. I recall the students being interested how in English we adapted the writer's name and turned it into an adjective.

I read the first chapter aloud while they followed in their books and asked the students for examples of the above and then followed the same procedure with the second chapter. Then I asked generally their impressions of Alice so far and elicited that she is a strong minded child who is managing to hold her own under trying circumstances. I related the portrayal of Alice to the stereotypical passive princesses we read in some fairy tales earlier in the course. The students then were given the opportunity to re-read the chapters for themselves and pick out more of the features from their list. This also gave them some time to look up unknown words in their dictionaries.

There was no time to read the whole book together with the class so I decided to construct a jigsaw activity in the second seminar. I divided the students into groups of four and each group read one of the following chapters:

- Advice from the Caterpillar
- A Mad Tea-Party
- The Queen's Croquet-Ground
- The Lobster Quadrille

After the chapter was read and the students had tried to get a sense of the order of events, new groups were formed comprising one member from each of the other groups. They then took it in turns to tell the others about their chapter and what had taken place.

Finally I read the last chapter aloud to them. I explained that they had only superficially examined Alice's Adventures... but I hoped they would return to it and enjoy it at a later date. The books would be returned to the resource centre where they could be then be borrowed.

In the final seminar of the semester, I gave a lecture on the development of literature for children in England and was able to locate Alice's Adventures... as an important work which legitimised fantasy and was not didactic. The other texts read were also put into context and the students, finally, were given the names and dates that they associated with the traditional literature class. But this time they had actually read a number of texts and could make more sense of what they were being told.

The students' reaction to Alice's Adventures... was similar in that the majority, understandably, found it difficult and in ideal circumstances they would have had their own copy to study before and after seminars. However, as they knew it was a famous book, they felt the need to be positive about it. In later interviews<sup>i</sup> most emphasised the fantasy, viewing this as positively helping to develop a child's imagination. There was a sense of the universality of the imagination of children which could be tapped in such an extraordinary tale. The satirical elements were not readily recognised by the majority of students.

### The Czech Context

Ironically, the satirical aspects of both Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear were visible in Brno at the time of teaching in the form of two theatre productions at one of the most famous theatres in the country *Husa na Provazku* (Goose on a String). The director of the company, Petr Oszsly, led the company under the years of "normalisation"<sup>ii</sup> and together they managed to produce a number of plays which criticised the regime without being censored. Their strategy was to create ensemble performances without a dedicated author so in this way a single person could not be isolated and arrested. An indication of the importance of this company was the choice of Petr Oszsly as President Havel's cultural advisor after the "Velvet Revolution" in 1989.

*Alenka v Říši dvou zrcadlem* combined both Carroll's *Alice* books. The director, Eva Talska, is interested in English nonsense and also produced *Příběhy Dlouhého Nosu* ("Long Nosed Tales") which was based on the limericks of Edward Lear<sup>iii</sup>. It is interesting to consider how the idea of nonsense which was developed by two writers, Lear and Carroll in a particular time in England could be transferred to another country under vastly different circumstances. Yet Vaclav Havel often wrote about the absurdity of the totalitarian regime under "normalisation" and the world Lewis Carroll creates, where such arbitrary judgements as "Sentence first-verdict afterwards"<sup>iv</sup> and frequent commands of "off-with their heads" can be given by powerful figures, touches that absurdity<sup>iv</sup>. In a Czech context the fact that it is the Queen of Hearts who issues such orders is particularly potent for red is the Communist colour. Similarly the promise of a better life under the totalitarian system could

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 2, Empirical Research

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 1, Czech History

<sup>iii</sup> See Appendix I for the researcher's involvement in this production

<sup>iv</sup> During Charter 77 activities (see historical background) Vaclav Havel used to carry a toothbrush and toothpaste with him in the case of sudden arrest.



not be summed up better than the immortal phrase: "The rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday - but never jam today"<sup>10</sup>

## Cultural Indicators of Englishness

### 1. The Implied Reader

A discussion of the text will begin with an examination of the implied reader and how this reveals aspects of Victorian culture and consider the Czech readers who in some aspects may be closer to those Victorian children than at first might be supposed. After which the other cultural indicators, introduced above, will be dealt with in more detail. With such a rich text many lines serve to encompass both the Victorian world picture, the satire as well as the implied reader but for the sake of clarity these will be dealt with separately.

An examination of the implied reader invited by the text demonstrates that, in spite of the adult satire, the child reader remains firmly in the mind of the author. As mentioned above there was an actual listener to the first oral telling, Alice Liddell, who having heard the story, then asked for it to be written down. It appears Lewis Carroll still had her in mind when writing as there remains a strong sense of an oral retelling in the written text. At the same time he does bear in mind a wider audience of children, evidence of which is both in the text and in his address to the child reader, which preface later editions. In spite of the appalling situations that Alice finds herself in, however rude and nasty the characters are to her, there is the gentle voice of Carroll explaining and helping the reader which mitigates against the harsh and cruel world portrayed. This creates an interesting tension between the reader implied in the narrative and the unsettling plot which may account for the way the text has been often read as pure fantasy for children with the acerbic elements remaining unnoticed. The word "Wonderland" too may subliminally appear to mean "wonderful" creating expectations of a place that is anything but the nightmare it actually is. The original oral rendition called "Alice's Adventures Underground" avoided such connotations.

Two examples of direct address establishes that the implied reader will need help in understanding some areas of the narrative. Here is where Carroll takes his younger reader into consideration and guides them:

"(If you don't know what a Gryphon is, look at the picture.)"<sup>11</sup>

Similarly Carroll helps the reader to understand what happens in a court and again guides them with pictorial support:

"The judge, by the way, was the King; and, as he wore his crown over the wig (look at the frontispiece if you want to see how he did it), he did not look at all comfortable, and it was certainly not becoming."<sup>12</sup>

There are also explanations concerning vocabulary which have the sense of a kindly schoolteacher:

“...(she was obliged to say “creatures” you see, because some of them were animals, and some were birds,) ...”<sup>13</sup>

Another hilarious example is the cool explanation of the word “suppression” which is in juxtaposition to the savageness of the act in which animals are stuffed into bags and sat on:

“(As that is rather a hard word, I will just explain to you how it was done.)”<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand the text is full of assumptions about what the implied reader *will* know. The most obvious of these are the parodies of songs and poetry that Victorian children would have been subjected to. The sweetest example is the parody of Isaac Watts’ Puritan poem “How doth the little busy bee” which becomes “How doth the little crocodile”.<sup>15</sup> . However, it is not only the Puritan notion of the child that is undermined but also that of the Romantic in the change from:

“Speak gently to the little child  
Its love be sure to gain;  
...”

to

“Speak roughly to your little boy,  
And beat him when he sneezes: ...”<sup>16</sup>

Reference is also made to schooling. The languages children were taught, Latin and French, are revealed through Alice’s first conversation with the mouse where she decides the vocative case, last seen in her brother’s Latin primer, to be the most suitable and then decides to try French with a most unfortunate phrase:

“Ou est ma chatte?” p.18<sup>17</sup>

Mindless classroom tasks are satirised when the Jurors add up dates on their slates then reduce the sum to pounds, shillings and pence. Pompousness is ruthlessly attacked when the Dodo makes a suggestion:

“ ‘In that case,’ said the Dodo solemnly, rising to its feet, ‘I move that the meeting adjourn for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies----’  
‘Speak English!’ said the Eaglet. ‘I don’t know the meaning of half those long words, and, what’s more, I don’t believe you do either!’ ” p. 22

One is reminded here of Owl in Winnie-the-Pooh<sup>i</sup> who also pretends to know and understand more than he does.

The “dry” history lecture given by the mouse in order to dry the wet creatures successfully plays on the meanings of the word “dry” and also reveals the tediousness of that particular form of discourse:

“ ‘William the Conqueror, whose cause was favoured by the pope, was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders, and had been of late much accustomed to usurpation and conquest. Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria \_\_\_\_\_ ’ ”<sup>18</sup>

A metafictional element is introduced where Alice when trying to decide whether to drink the liquid as invited looks to see if it has been marked poison or not:

“ ; for she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they would not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them:...”<sup>19</sup>

It is implied that the reader will be familiar with such didactic texts and enjoy the satire.

Many references are made to manners and politeness where Alice often has to think about the most appropriate way to behave - all revealing Victorian attitudes to social relations. After Alice's *faux pas* in talking about her cat to a group of birds they make polite exits:

“...: one old Magpie began wrapping itself up very carefully, remarking ‘I really must be getting home: the night-air doesn't suit my throat!’ And a Canary called out in a trembling voice, to its children, ‘Come away, my dears! It's high time you were all in bed!’ On various pretexts they all moved off, and Alice was soon left alone.”<sup>20</sup>

Alice constantly talks to herself about what is appropriate and is often very surprised at the rude behaviour she experiences which is much at odds with her upbringing. On encountering the Duchess for the first time:

“ ‘Please would you tell me,’ said Alice, a little timidly, for she was not quite sure whether it was good manners for her to speak first, ‘why your cat grins like that?’ ”<sup>21</sup>

She is surprised at remarks that come from the Mad Hatter:

“ ‘Your hair wants cutting,’ said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech. ‘You should learn not to make personal remarks,’ Alice said with some severity: ‘it's very rude.’ ”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 8, Winnie-the-Pooh

Although the text is written in the third person where the voice of the narrator is ever present, there is another technique used by Carroll which identifies the child-reader and this is through focalisation. The text invites the reader to identify with Alice and see the world of Wonderland through her eyes - the eyes of a well brought up middle-class Victorian child. The chief technique used is Alice's conversations with herself which reveal her feelings. An example which indicates her social station in life as well as how the reader is drawn in may be seen in the episode in Chapter II, The Pool of Tears, where she first has to cope with sudden changes in size and begins to wonder who she is and fears she has been turned into the less well-off and not so bright Mabel:

“... ‘I must be Mabel after all, and I shall have to go and live in that poky little house, and have next to no toys to play with, and oh, ever so many lessons to learn!’ ”<sup>23</sup>

Sympathy is drawn when she has feelings of being very much alone:

“ - ‘but, oh dear!’” cried Alice, with a sudden burst of tears, ‘I do wish they *would* put their heads down! I am so very tired of being all alone here!’ ”<sup>24</sup>

However, on many occasions, Alice does manage to pull herself together and often scolding herself prepares to try to keep her end up under the most trying circumstances:

“ ‘The first thing I’ve got to do, ‘ said Alice to herself, as she wandered about in the wood, ‘is to grow to my right size again; and the second thing is to find my way into that lovely garden. I think that will be the best plan’ ”<sup>25</sup>

This technique not only serves to focalise the reader and allows feelings to be revealed but also provides dialogue in which to break up the narrative. A feature of many children's texts identified by McDonwell and discussed earlier<sup>i</sup> is that a children's text carries a large proportion of dialogue. Carroll knew this too and this is revealed in Alice's comments on her sister's book:

“...but it had not pictures or conversation in it, and where is the use of a book, thought Alice, without pictures or conversations?”<sup>26</sup>

Discussion on the role of Alice as focaliser also leads to consideration of the character of Alice. Unlike many females particularly those who are represented in fairy tales, Alice is active, often strong-willed, a survivor and is not afraid to assert herself. So the reader is presented with a strong character with which to identify which may be one of the reasons why a wide variety of people have read and continue to read Alice's Adventures... . It has been suggested that Alice represents not the original listener Alice Liddell, but the teller himself Lewis Carroll. Wullslager sees Alice as:

“a comic, nonsense version of a Victorian Everyman, bewildered by change, tormented by religious doubt, terrified of an empty, godless cosmos.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 4. The Iron Man

Yet while the character of Alice may not be typical of the young Victorian girl, it remains true that the implied reader is. And this reader is intelligent, questioning and alert. Although they are helped to understand certain strange or unusual points, they are never patronized and there is little sense of having to protect the reader from unpleasantness.

It might at first be assumed that the Czech readers would be markedly different from Carroll's implied reader. Yet there are points of contact. Firstly didactic texts would not be unknown to the Czech students who were brought up under a strict totalitarian period. Similarly the memorising of poems and other aspects of rote learning familiar to the Victorian child was also not unknown to them. Also there was much strong moralising and strict public norms of behaviour were held including a puritan attitude towards sex. Moreover, the country was run under absurd lines where nonsense was to be found in many aspects of everyday life.<sup>i</sup> Some students from Cohort C identified that the animals came from different social classes while one thought the activities in the courtroom in Chapter XI "Who Stole the Tarts" could be read as a satire of justice under "normalisation". However, many students were doubtful about Alice's Adventures... as a suitable text for children. Mention was made of the violence such as the suppression of the guinea pig and the threat of execution as being too frightening. Once again the differences in attitude towards children between the two cultures can be seen where even as early as Victorian times, the English implied reader was able to cope with reading about a harsh and difficult world, albeit disguised as fantasy.

## 2. Important Changes in Victorian Society

While an investigation of the implied reader reveals a number of features of Victorian life, another indicator is the time of the production of the text itself as a number of important changes in Victorian society had an influence on the development of children's literature. Significantly there was a change of attitude towards children themselves due to the influence of the Romantic movement<sup>ii</sup>. The Romantic notion of the child was a considerable influence on Lewis Carroll who spent many hours entertaining children and finding ways of teaching them mathematics in an enjoyable way. Another reason was due to a decrease in family size which gave more opportunities for parents to become closer to their children. So from the turn of the century there was a move from didactic stories for the improvement of children to a lighter touch where there was more emphasis on the entertainment and amusement of them. Such texts as "The Butterfly's Ball by W. Roscoe, published in 1807 and its sequels are described by Harvey Darton as "pieces of levity"<sup>28</sup>. However, more puritan notions of what was suitable persisted and was satirised by Charles Dickens in Hard Times. An important text from the period was Catherine Sinclair's Holiday House published in 1839 which at least allowed jolly, naughty and adventurous children. Significantly this book was given to Alice Liddell by Lewis

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1, Context

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 4, The Oral Tradition and Chapter 9, Walter de la Mare

Carroll at Christmas 1861<sup>29</sup> a short time before the first telling of Alice's Adventures... Charles Kingsley created a fantasy world under water in The Water Babies published in 1863 but retained a strong moralising element.

There were also more readers as the middle classes expanded and the effects of the 1870 Education Act began to be felt. Also book production became cheaper with the invention of the Hoe cylinder press, cardboard book covers, inexpensive pulp paper and colour printing.<sup>30</sup> However, it must be remembered that Alice's Adventures... sold for six shillings, which was about one-third of the average worker's weekly wage<sup>31</sup>. Later Carroll persuaded Macmillan to publish a cheaper version at 2/6d in 1887. Publishers also began to set up Juvenile departments including Carroll's publisher Macmillan which is another indication of the growing interest in books for children. This was also the age of great children's book illustrations. Jane Doonan writes of Alice's... illustrator:

"Tenniel reaped the benefit of picturing Alice in the decade that is the high watermark of British imperialism, the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and British book illustration. The period from 1855 to 1870 was the golden age of illustration in Britain."<sup>32</sup>

The influence of the Pre-Raphaelites<sup>i</sup> may be seen in Lewis Carroll's original hand-written copy with its own illustrations.

### 3. Aspects of Victorian Social Practice

It has been seen that an exploration of the implied reader opens a window on Victorian culture but there is more about Victorian everyday life in the events that are described. A new interest was the seaside which is mentioned by Alice after she has fallen in the into the pool of tears. A few sentences sum up the English seaside holiday an almost taken-for-granted aspect of our island status.<sup>ii</sup>

"(Alice had been to the seaside once in her life, and had come to the general conclusion that wherever you go to on the English coast, you find a number of bathing machines in the sea, some children digging in the sand with wooden spades, then a row of lodging-houses, and behind them a railway station.)"<sup>33</sup>

The Victorian period was a time when many games were formalised such as Cricket, Football and Lawn Tennis. Croque too was popular and in 1870 the All-England Croquet Club was established. Alice is invited to an absurd game of Croquet which is played with flamingoes, playing cards and hedgehogs reflecting the Victorian enthusiasms for games yet subverting them at the same time. Alice is very unhappy about the lack of rules and complains to the Cheshire Cat:

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<sup>i</sup> For further comment on the Pre-Raphaelites see Chapter 9, Walter de la Mare

<sup>ii</sup> See Chapter 5, The Iron Man

“ ‘I don’t think they play at all fairly, ‘ Alice began, in a rather a complaining tone, ‘ and they all quarrel so dreadfully one ca’n’t hear oneself speak - and they don’t seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them - and you’ve no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive: ...’”<sup>34</sup>

Not only outdoor games were formalised but indoor games and pastimes were an aspect of Victorian family life. Lewis Carroll excelled in such entertainments; he could not only tell stories but also conjure and invent games and puzzles. Both Alice books feature games: a pack of cards in ...Wonderland and Chess in ...Through the Looking Glass.

Food is a feature in many children’s books and apart from the alarming results of bottles of liquid and pieces of cake and mushrooms which alter the size of Alice, other more conventional food items appear, beginning with the jar of marmalade that Alice deals with as she is falling down the rabbit hole. Perhaps the most famous tea-party in English literature is that of the Mad Hatter. Afternoon tea which was just coming into favour in Victorian times seems now to be quintessentially English. One is reminded of the cucumber sandwiches much beloved of Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde’s play The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) and the suppressed anger between Gwendolyn and Cecily in a later scene in the same play. It will be recalled that the White Rabbit falls into his own cucumber frame.

Aspects of tea-time discourse appear but don’t quite work and Carroll subverts polite conversation with rudeness and acts of violence. As Alice approaches the large table set out under a tree, she is told there is no room but ignoring this obvious lie takes a seat. Politeness appears to return:

“ ‘Have some wine, ’ the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.”<sup>35</sup>

But this does not last long:

“Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. ‘I don’t see any wine, ’ she remarked.

‘There isn’t any,’ said the March Hare.

‘Then it wasn’t very civil of you to offer it,’ said Alice angrily.”<sup>36</sup>

The dormouse is not treated well. He is leant on, tea is poured over his nose to keep him awake and finally he is stuffed into a teapot. The Hatter offers Alice a riddle that has no solution and the Dormouse attempts to tell a story, in which treacle plays a part, but is constantly disrupted.

Carroll uses not only table manners to subvert but also the food itself. A Victorian favourite, Mock Turtle Soup, is parodied in the shape of a creature called a Mock Turtle who with great sadness remembers the time when he was a real turtle. The origins of the character of the Cheshire Cat originates from Cheshire cheeses which were shaped in the form of a grinning cat, an image which

later was transferred to Inn signs. Whiting also are mentioned and Alice pictures this popular Victorian dish where the fish was breaded and served with the tail in its mouth. Finally the central piece of evidence in the court-room is a plate of jam tarts.

A feature of English discourse is polite, phatic communication<sup>i</sup> which is used to fill gaps or begin conversation with a new acquaintance. A typical topic is the weather and this appears a number of times in the narrative. The White Rabbit opens a conversation with Alice at the Queen's Croquet ground with:

“ ‘It's, it's a very fine day!’ said the Rabbit in a low hurried tone.”<sup>37</sup>

Later when the Duchess meets the Queen of Hearts her opening gambit concerns the weather:

“ ‘A fine day your Majesty!’ ”<sup>38</sup>

Dances of that period are satirised in the Lobster Quadrille where the language used is typical of a set dance: “ ‘Two lines’ ... ‘advance twice, set to partners \_\_\_’ ‘\_\_\_change lobsters, and retire in same order ’ ” is typical of a set dance, the only bizarre lexical item being “lobsters”.<sup>39</sup>

Proverbs, features of everyday English discourse, such as “Birds of a feather flock together<sup>40</sup>”, are subverted by Carroll. In the above example although the proverb is quoted correctly, its irrelevance renders it nonsensical. Other proverbs are made up and to suit any occasion (further discussion appears below).

Social class is ever present in the text and the characters may be placed in a hierarchical social order. Both Alice books feature forceful Queens perhaps inspired by the indomitable figure of Queen Victoria<sup>ii</sup>. It can be conjectured that Carroll was familiar with the following poem which appeared in school books at the time:

“Beautiful England - on her island throne -  
Grandly she rules, with half the world her own.  
From her vast empire the sun ne'er departs:  
She reigns a Queen - Victoria, Queen of Hearts.”<sup>41</sup>

Carroll's Queen of Hearts constantly abuses her power with the summary justice of “Off with their Heads”, a form of execution in England for the nobility which is in itself a cultural signifier). However exaggerated the queen's behaviour is, it does reflect the power relationships at the time

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<sup>i</sup> It will be recalled that the student's had a notion of English politeness (see Chapter 2)

<sup>ii</sup> Lewis Carroll witnessed the palaver that surrounded royal visits when Queen Victoria came to visit her son, the Prince of Wales, at Oxford in 1860.



Moving towards the other end of the social scale, Alice, as mentioned above, is concerned that she has turned into Mabel a girl of lower social standing than herself while an investigation of the character of Bill reveals a somewhat cavalier attitude towards ranks much lower than Mabel which may be less deliberate social satire than Carroll's unconscious middle-class perspective. Alice has entered the White Rabbit's house and has grown so large she is trapped inside. The events are told through Alice's perspective so the reader only hears what is going on. It is clear, however, that a group of workers has arrived and are giving each other orders. They have been ordered by the White Rabbit to remove Alice's arm. Evidently Bill is a younger member of the group:

“ ‘Bill! Fetch it here, lad!.....Here, Bill! Catch hold of this rope.....Mind that loose slate....Now, who did that? It was Bill, I fancy\_\_\_Who's to go down the chimney? ’”<sup>12</sup>

No one at this point seems keen and it's the unfortunate Bill who is selected. As he scrabbles about in the chimney, Alice puts her foot in the chimney and kicks him out. What happens next is told humorously:

“The first thing she heard was a general chorus of ‘There goes Bill!’ then the Rabbit's voice alone \_\_\_‘Catch him, you by the hedge!’ then silence, and then another confusion of voices\_\_\_‘Hold up his head\_\_\_Brandy now\_\_\_Don't choke him\_\_\_How was it, old fellow? What happened to you? Tell us all about it!’ ”<sup>13</sup>

Bill recovers and Carroll imitates working class speech habits:

“ ‘Well, I hardly know\_\_\_No more, thank ye; I'm better now\_\_\_but I'm a deal too flustered to tell you\_\_\_all I know is, something comes at me like a Jack-in-the-box, and up I goes like a sky-rocket!’ ”<sup>14</sup>

The hapless Bill makes a reappearance in the court scene where he has problems with a squeaky pencil which is summarily removed by Alice leaving him to write with his finger which left no mark at all. Later he is placed upside down in the jury box by Alice after she had upset it. She observes that it probably wouldn't make much difference whichever way up he was. Finally he narrowly misses a flying inkwell and covered in ink uses it to write on his slate.

Both episodes are unsympathetic to the lower orders and follow a rich literary inheritance of making fun of them. Such characters as Bottom and company in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream and Dogberry and the Watch in Much Ado About Nothing come to mind.

According to Bakewell Carroll was very class conscious:

“He had a strong sense of the Victorian hierarchy, and felt ill at ease in company with what he considered to be the lower classes”.<sup>15</sup>

When Carroll went up to Oxford in 1851 people still sat by degrees with the elite at the High Table. Significantly he wrote about Alice's Adventures. : “ It isn't a book poor children would much care for”<sup>46</sup>

But while the aristocracy is criticised and the working classes ridiculed, there is an acceptance of different stations in life from a middle class perspective. One is reminded of the second verse of the well-known Victorian hymn “All Things Bright and Beautiful”

The rich man in his castle  
The poor man at the gate  
God made them, high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate.  
(C.F. Alexander 1848)

The Irish too are viewed with humour by Carroll. Large numbers of refugees from Ireland came to England after the great famine of 1840 and consequently were a visible ethnic group. Pat appears in the same episode as Bill and Carroll sets up the first Irish joke where in response to the White Rabbit's question about his whereabouts replies:

“ ‘Sure then I'm here! Digging for apples, yer honour!’ ”<sup>47</sup>

Carroll makes sure the reader notices the Irish accent:

“ ‘Sure, it's an arm, yer honour!’ (He pronounced it ‘arrum’ .).”<sup>48</sup>

When told he has to have the arm removed, Pat has to obey orders but mutters:

“ ‘Sure, I don't like it, yer honour, at all, at all!’ ”<sup>49</sup>

Carroll was unsympathetic to the notion of Home Rule for Ireland. His grandfather, a Captain in the 4th Dragoon Guards was killed by Irish rebels at Philipstown in 1803 and he hated Parnell (who incidentally apparently read Alice with great pleasure)<sup>50</sup>. Cohen reports that Carroll, somewhat naively, thought that the “difficulties” in Ireland might be solved if only Queen Victoria would go and visit “her people” there.

Cohen favourably comments on Carroll's abilities in reproducing dialects:

“...he toyed with double meanings, used foreign words and phrases for amusing effects, imitated dialects, captured the speech and more of tradespeople and Cockneys with diverting results. He could laugh with them at the absurdity of the adult world in which they were compelled to live and mature”<sup>51</sup>

An example of this is the Gryphon's cockney accent complete with double negative:

“ ‘It's all her fancy that: they never executes nobody, you know. Come on!’ ”<sup>52</sup>

However, it could be argued that he is laughing at and not with the lower orders. There was a fear of the potential power of the working classes in Victorian times and one way of overcoming or displacing such fears is by negating any potential power through humour. A similar tactic is used on the Irish.

It can be seen from the discussion so far that the text is replete with details of everyday middle class Victorian life but there are also undercurrents of anxiety where Carroll, whether conscious of it or not, mirrors many of the doubts and anxieties of the period. The year of the Great Exhibition 1851, which Carroll visited, marks the watershed of imperial Britain and afterwards that great confidence began to decline. The 1860's and after were times of doubts, uncertainties and undercurrents of these may be read in Alice's Adventures... The most significant event was the publication of Darwin's The Origin of Species in 1859 which served to fuel an already more sceptical time. That Carroll took a great interest is shown by his collection of 19 volumes of works by Darwin and his critics as well as five works by Herbert Spencer, who was the founder of social evolutionary philosophy.<sup>53</sup> The influence of Darwin in Alice's Adventures... may be traced in a number of episodes. Jan B. Gordon observes:

“The menagerie that moves through Alice's Adventures in Wonderland exists in a post-Darwinian tent, and new species can be called into existence merely by a mutation in the child's imagination or as a function of her size.”<sup>54</sup>

The pool of tears is a fruitful site for Darwinian images. It is seen as the primeval swamp from which life emerges. William Empson calls the tears “amniotic fluid” and observes that:

“...a whole Noah's Ark gets out of the sea with her”.<sup>55</sup>

Wullschager also links the “...prehistoric menagerie in the pool of tears” to the new theories of evolution<sup>56</sup>.

Empson notes that in both Carroll's own illustration and in Tenniel's there is a head of a monkey, which he describes as “disturbing”. The notion that the human species is descended from apes was fiercely debated. A heated debate between Thomas Huxley and the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, took place at a British Society meeting in Oxford in 1860 in which the Bishop asked Huxley if he was descended from the monkey through his maternal or paternal line. He was swiftly brought down with the comment:

“...he would not be ashamed to be descended from a monkey, but that he would be ashamed to be connected with a man who used great gifts to obscure truth”<sup>57</sup>

It is not unlikely that if Carroll was not present at the debate, would certainly have known of it.

As well as the monkey appearing in the illustration, one of the creatures is a Dodo, a bird that had been extinct since 1681.<sup>1</sup> Two other episodes, one where the baby turns into a pig and the other, the Caucus race, may be seen as references to natural selection. Another area which has connections with the implications of Darwin's theories is the question of identity which pervades the narrative. Alice's constant changing of shape and the way she is addressed by a variety of creatures who do not treat her as a young child results in her questioning who she is. When the Caterpillar asks Alice who she is, she can only reply:

“ ‘I-I hardly know, Sir, just at present - at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning....”<sup>58</sup>

The pigeon insists she is a serpent and when she denies this asks:

“ ‘Well” What are you?’ ...

‘I-I'm a little girl, ‘ said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through, that day.

‘A likely story indeed!; said the Pigeon, in a tone of the deepest contempt....”<sup>59</sup>

By the time Alice meets the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon she knows she is a different person.

Cohen holds the view that Carroll was interested in Darwin's theories but did not shock the core of his faith as happened to many of his contemporaries. He reports as evidence that Carroll sent one of his photographs to Darwin and suggested that he would be happy to supply more as illustrations in any future publications<sup>60</sup>. Carroll also invented a board game which was first called “Natural Selection” (subsequently becoming “Lanrick”)<sup>61</sup>. It is left to conjecture how aware Carroll was of the effects of Darwin's theories on his creative imagination but it could be argued that such references are connected more with playfulness than angst. For Lewis Carroll had liberal Christian views which differed from those of his more authoritarian High Church father.. According to Cohen, Carroll was influenced by religious liberalism and followed a central thesis that God is love. However he remained extremely conservative about such things as blasphemy. Nevertheless the most important point is that whatever Carroll's motives, there is evidence in the text that it is post-Darwinian.

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<sup>1</sup> The Dodo could also refer to Carroll's own nickname for himself “Do-do-Dodgson” echoing his stutter.

Another important aspect of Victorian times were the consequences of the Industrial Revolution. Among the many changes was the necessity for strict time-keeping:

“Time measured out by the machine, not that dictated by the sun or the seasons, had come to impose a different and totally new discipline on the British people”<sup>62</sup>

Major Victorian buildings had large clocks and factories used hooters to mark significant hours. Carroll had a strong interest in time and wrote a paper “Where Does the Day Begin” which was well before 1870 when Greenwich mean time, time zones and the date line were discussed.<sup>63</sup> It will be recalled that the White Rabbit is in a constant state of agitation about being late:

“ ‘Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!’ ”<sup>64</sup>

and then looks at his watch. Later is he heard to mutter:

“ ‘Oh! The Duchess, the duchess! Oh! *W'o'n't* she be savage if I've kept her waiting!’ ”<sup>65</sup>

while The Mad Hatter succeeds in stopping time completely..

Carroll too was preoccupied with time in his own personal life and often resolved to use his time more fruitfully. It has been suggested that the White Rabbit represents aspects of Carroll himself.

A significant undercurrent in Victorian times was sexual repression. Whatever Lewis Carroll's sexual orientation, his diaries show he was concerned with “wicked thoughts” and did his best to keep them under control. The tragedy is that apparently he had no-one to talk to and nothing to read that might have helped. Wullschalger compares European art in a similar period which was more liberal where women for example were allowed to have sexual feelings and cites Tolstoy's novel Anna Karenina, Bizet's opera Carmen and Manet's painting of Olympia. She goes on to observe that:

“In fantasy, unconscious or repressed desires could be expressed, and this is why strict and sombre Victorian England inspired so great an outburst of anarchic, escapist, nonsensical children's books”<sup>66</sup>

Certainly Freudians have had enormous scope with Alice's Adventures... beginning with the fall down the rabbit hole. This aside it may be conceded that prim Victorian values and sexual repression had a part to play in the author's psyche. However James Walvin cites Peter Gay who debunks the Victorian stereotype of:

“impotent husbands, frigid wives, young men and women innocent of the most elementary facts of life; and scandalous reports of homosexual establishments or the illicit traffic in prepubertal girls...”<sup>67</sup>

As Walvin points out “similar examples could be cited from throughout the western world in the 1980`s”.<sup>68</sup>

He goes on to argue that although the Victorians did not appear to openly discuss sexual matters, there was an interest in the rising birth rate, sexually transmitted diseases and prostitution. Their pornography offers insights into Victorian life which shows that Carroll was not the only one who had an interest in young girls:

“In the fantasies of the Victorian pornographer, lower-class women, especially servants and country girls, and even children, figure as the objects of primarily middle and upper-class male desires”.<sup>69</sup>

Whether Victorian society was as repressed as the stereotype, and whatever Carroll’s private torments were, it remains likely that the constraints of Victorian society had some influence in the production of the nonsensical world created by Carroll and contrasts with a more liberal Europe at that time.

There are also references to English history which should not be ignored in the quest for Englishness. The painting of the white roses with red paint may be an oblique reference to the Wars of the Roses between the houses of Lancaster and York. The Norman invasion of 1066, a potent date in English history, is referred to twice. The mouse informs Alice that he came over with the Normans and the “dry” lecture (see above) which follows also discusses the political background to that invasion.

While it is Lewis Carroll’s middle class perspective and his world picture from the enclosed world of Oxford which predominates, there is a hint of the radical side to Englishness which occurs occasionally. Each time the small rebellion is against the nobility. The first occurs in Chapter VIII “The Queen’s Croquet Ground” where the King is being unpleasant to the Cheshire Cat and Alice says:

“ ‘A cat may look at a King’ ...”<sup>70</sup>

This is a well-known proverb and has the sense of the rights of an individual whatever their station in life. Similarly later when the Duchess is being particularly obnoxious, Alice finally announces:

“ ‘I’ve a right to think, ...’ ”<sup>71</sup>

Once more Alice maintains a strong sense of personal freedom in spite of the chaotic and seemingly arbitrary world that surrounds her. One of her strongest moments is in her questioning of the King

about his arbitrary rules in the trial scene. This sense of individual rights may well be a potent indicator of Englishness.

#### 4. The English Language

The fourth area to discuss is that of playfulness with the English language which is another element in the text which makes demands on the translator. W.H. Auden considers this an important feature of both “Alice” books:

“In both worlds, one of the most important and powerful characters is not a person but the English language.”<sup>72</sup>

Puns are an important aspect of the comic in Alice’s Adventures... and were a popular form of comedy in Victorian England<sup>73</sup>. Chapter IX, “The Mock Turtle’s Story” provides the richest seam of puns which build up from why a school master, an old Turtle was called “Tortoise”:

“ ‘We called him Tortoise because he taught us,’ ...”<sup>74</sup>

to the explanation about why there were fewer hours at school everyday:

“ ‘That’s the reason they’re called lessons,’ the Gryphon remarked: ‘because they lessen from day to day.’ ”<sup>75</sup>

In the following chapter “The Lobster-Quadrille” the punning continues relentlessly. Particularly enjoyable is the sage remark from the Mock Turtle that:

“ ‘No wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise.’ ”<sup>76</sup>

Walvin notes that the Victorians were great moralisers and significantly gives the reasons for their continuing presence today:

“their words survive in greater profusion than from any earlier period. Victorian life came to be influenced by the printed word, thanks to the revolutions in printing and distribution, and to the development of mass literacy.”<sup>77</sup>

The phrase “To grin like a Cheshire Cat”, which Carroll takes to comic extremes, was well-known in Victorian times and remains today. The great moraliser in Alice’s Adventures... is the deranged Duchess who has a moral or proverb for everything. Some appear in their original form but are rendered nonsense by their application while others are complete nonsense. Kingsley’s Mrs Do-as-you-would-be-done-by in The Water Babies might be Carroll’s object of satire in this superb piece of nonsense from the Duchess:

“Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise that what you had been would have appeared to them to otherwise”<sup>78</sup>

Both puns and proverbs are embedded in the English language and as such are particularly challenging for the translator and this brings us to a discussion of the Englishness of the nonsense in the text.

De la Mare quotes M. Cammaerts about the famous “English sense of humour” :

“ The English...speak, in an off-hand way of “possessing a sense of humour” or of not possessing it, little realising that this sense, with the meaning they attach to it, is almost unique in the world, and can be acquired only after years of strenuous and patient effort. For many foreigners, Einstein’s theories present fewer difficulties than certain limericks”<sup>79</sup>

Bettina Hurlimann views nonsense itself as an English trait and identifies it as a major contribution to children’s literature. She notes that ‘nonsense’ verse stemmed from the popular oral tradition of comic rhymes and folk-song and where in other countries children’s verses tended to become more sentimental and lyrical in England the path of nonsense was maintained. She asserts that Alice is: “the touchstone” for nonsense literature<sup>80</sup> But there is a sense that it is not quite understandable to outsiders. Referring to the journal “Mischmash” produced in the Carroll home, she observes that it contained:

“...some remarkably crazy ideas, often quite incomprehensible, but very attractive to English children”<sup>81</sup>.

There is much debate about the nature of nonsense and to what extent it is used to subvert the Victorian world or whether it constitutes Carroll’s conscious aim of entertaining his young reader. Whichever it is, it appears that the popularity and recognition of such nonsense is a mark of Englishness.

It has been established that Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is a dense multi-layered text where virtually every line reveals both surface levels of middle-class Victorian culture as well as underlying currents of confusion and angst. The method of dealing with such problems is humour. While the implied reader is a child, the content may be read on a variety of levels and as such it appears to have universal applications. Its status as an iconic text was established finally when the original hand-written copy of Alice’s Adventures Underground given by Lewis Carroll to Alice Liddell and subsequently sold by her to an American was returned to Britain by the Americans:

“...to show their appreciation of the courage of these islands in protecting liberty during two great wars”<sup>82</sup>



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A question remains which is whether the indicators identified are transferrable to today's England and in many cases they can be. The country remains a monarchy and the class system, though not so rigid, is still embedded in English society. Children's literature is thriving and fantasy is still popular. As discussed in previous texts the implied reader is treated with respect and intelligence where the harshness of the adult world is not hidden. Similarly that adult world is subverted through a satirical or at least a questioning about many features of a child's life such as norms of behaviour, schooling and the cupidity of adults. Finally, Alice's influence is also pervasive today as she has reached the status of a cultural icon.

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<sup>1</sup> F.J. Harvey Darton, Children's Books in England CUP, 1966 (first edn 1932), , p. 267

<sup>2</sup> Morton N Cohen, Lewis Carroll A Biography, Macmillan, 1995, pp.134/5

<sup>3</sup> W.H. Auden, “Today's “Wonder-World” Needs Alice” in R. Phillips, Aspects of Alice, Gollancz, 1972, p.8

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409

<sup>5</sup> Maria Nikolajeva, Children's Literature Comes of Age Garland Publishing Inc, 1996, p. 27

<sup>6</sup> Cohen, *op.cit.* p.135

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bakewell, Lewis Carroll A Biography, Heinemann, 1996, p. 337

<sup>8</sup> Bettina Hurlimann, Three Centuries of Children's Books in Europe OUP, 1967, p.73

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland Ed. Donald J Gray, W.W. Norton & Co., p.96

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Alice's Adventures Through the Looking Glass p.150

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.10/11

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.16/17

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>27</sup> J. Wullschlager, Inventing Wonderland Methuen, 1995, p. 50

<sup>28</sup> Darton, *op.cit.*, p.98

<sup>29</sup> H. Carpenter, Secret Gardens Unwin, 1985, p.9

<sup>30</sup> Peter Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature OUP, 1994, p.60

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62

<sup>32</sup> J. Doonan, “Realism and Surrealism in Wonderland: John Tenniel and Anthony Browne” in Signal 58, Jan 89, p.13

<sup>33</sup> Carroll, *op.cit.*, pp.17/18

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- <sup>41</sup> J. Walvin, Victorian Values Andre Deutsch, 1987, p.154
- <sup>42</sup> Carroll op.cit., p. 30
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 31
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 31
- <sup>45</sup> Bakewell, op.cit., p.174
- <sup>46</sup> Cohen, op.cit., p. 301, (March 4, 1887)
- <sup>47</sup> Carroll op.cit., p.30
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 30
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 30
- <sup>50</sup> Bakewell, op.cit., p.2
- <sup>51</sup> Cohen, op.cit., p. 279
- <sup>52</sup> Carroll op.cit., p. 74
- <sup>53</sup> Cohen, op.cit., pp. 350/1
- <sup>54</sup> Jan B Gordon. "The *Alice* Books and the Metaphors of Victorian Childhood" in H.Bloom (Ed) Lewis Carroll Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, p.18
- <sup>55</sup> W. Empson, "The Child as Swain" in Carroll op.cit., p. 345
- <sup>56</sup> Wullschlager, op.cit., p.44
- <sup>57</sup> Carroll, op.cit., p. 345 (Editor)
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.35
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 43
- <sup>60</sup> Cohen, op.cit., p. 350
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.352
- <sup>62</sup> Walvin, op.cit., p. 139
- <sup>63</sup> Cohen, op.cit., p. 27
- <sup>64</sup> Carroll, op.cit., p. 7
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 14
- <sup>66</sup> Wullschlager., op.cit., p. 27
- <sup>67</sup> Walvin, op.cit., p. 121
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 121
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 123
- <sup>70</sup> Carroll, op.cit., p. 68
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 72
- <sup>72</sup> Auden, op.cit., p. 9
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.75 (Editor's note)
- <sup>74</sup> Carroll, op.cit., p. 75
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 77
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 81
- <sup>77</sup> Walvin, op.cit., p. 137
- <sup>78</sup> Carroll, op.cit., p.72
- <sup>79</sup> Walter de la Mare, Lewis Carroll Faber & Faber, 1932, p. 66
- <sup>80</sup> Hurlimann, op.cit., p. 65
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 68
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 65

## Chapter 11: CONCLUSION

### Myths of Cultural Identity, Cultural Indicators of Englishness and Children's Literature in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

#### Overview of Ethnographic Research

The aim of this study has been to analyse readings of cultural indicators in children's literature texts and draw out myths of cultural identity that are embedded therein. The readings investigated were in the first instance those of three cohorts of Czech students in which their meanings were identified. The second reading applied literary theory to text. Conclusions from the empirical research into the Czech readings of children's literature texts were given in detail in Chapter 3. It will be recalled that there was a reluctance from the students to identify cultural indicators in the texts for the following reasons. The students retained a stereotypical view of the English and, because they did not find such stereotypes in the texts studied, were unable to identify other aspects of Englishness. In addition students tended to see similarities rather than differences and the reasons for this were linked to the recent past of being educated under a totalitarian system where access to the West was denied and interpretation firmly discouraged. To support this point there was evidence that those students who had had more access to the West were able to identify more subtle indicators of Englishness. Differences in attitudes towards national identity also arose where it was seen that for historical reasons Czechs were more likely to try to maintain a strong sense of national identity and culturally marked the boundaries between themselves and others more noticeably. Therefore the more subtle boundary-marking of Englishness in the texts was not identified. Although the students were attending British Studies seminars, the inexperienced British lecturer was not able to give them the tools for analysis but had adopted a more factual approach. Consequently the students had little experience of analysing either their own culture or a foreign culture. Crucially the methodology (and this will be discussed further below) also encouraged the students to use their current schemata whereby the English signifier became the Czech signified.

However, through discussion in interviews a most important cultural indicator did emerge. This was the difference in attitude towards children which markedly affected how books for children were viewed in the two countries. For historical reasons Czech children are more protected from the outside world than English children. Furthermore Czech children's literature had a stronger role to play in the maintenance of national identity against exterior forces whereas in English children's literature the overt maintenance of national identity was less important. Thus a space for an interrogation of culture and subversion of culture was created.

It remains now to identify myths of national identity, which up to now have not been discussed, and consider relevant points concerning Englishness from the analysis of the texts in order to suggest a paradigm for the investigation of culture in children's literature texts.

## Myths of National Identity

During this study the largely taken-for-granted aspects of Englishness have been exposed by the “outsider’s” view, that is those of the Czech students. Similarly my view as an “outsider” to Czech culture has given opportunities to consider their meanings. One important aspect of the research has revealed the legacy of the last 50 years of totalitarian rule in the former Czechoslovakia as well as other meanings which have existed in Czech culture for a longer time. While all of the above has been discussed and comparisons made in the body of this study, what has yet to be examined are two differing myths of national identity which underpin such meanings. And it is through a comparative analysis of Czech meanings that the English myth is revealed

Running through Czech culture is an image of “the little Czech man” who, almost unseen, is surrounded and dominated by bigger countries. The reference to “that far off country” by Chamberlain after the Nazi invasion in 1938 is a good example of the invisibility of the country. Prague is nearer than Rome, less than two hours away by air from London but is perceived to be more distant. The British media still tend to call the country “Czechoslovakia” and recently I have noticed the invisibility of the Czech lands in the way the 1997 summer floods were reported in British newspapers. There was very little reporting on the first flooding in the Czech Republic but once it reached Poland and then Germany there was much more in the news. Similarly a recent circular from “Friends of the Earth” on the Kyoto Climate Change Summit refers to the “..recent floods in Germany and Poland”<sup>1</sup> once more rendering the Czech Republic invisible. Although there are fewer Swedes than Czechs, the Swedes have a much higher profile and, because they promote themselves internationally, are not perceived as a small nation. The Czech negative sense of being a small nation is further propounded by what Robert Pynsent terms the national myth of “the suffering Slav” or the martyr. He quotes the first President Masaryk who also identified the Czech martyr complex and observed that Czechs were:

“...far too fond of exhibiting their suppurating national wounds to their audiences at home and abroad”<sup>1</sup>

Czech Decadent writer, Prochazka writing in 1912, is also condemnatory:

“We are shallow and flabby. We love feebleness; we take pleasure in torpor, we protect and tend our feebleness and torpor like flowers in a greenhouse”<sup>2</sup>

Macura writing in 1992 observes that Czech “heroes” are invariably tragic heroes and how Masaryk’s observation above still continues: “It is truly striking how much strange masochism there tends to be in Czechs’ self-evaluation.”<sup>3</sup>

Macura significantly observes that that Czechs feel insecure about their ‘conscious identity’:

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<sup>1</sup> Received week of 22nd September 1997

“...we are not Czechs because we exist....our closest neighbours, the Slovaks, with whom we shared a state for three quarters of a century, have no problems with their identity: they are Slovaks because they are Slovaks”<sup>1</sup>

And this lack of confidence is supported by Pysent:

“The Slovaks appear to have a self-confidence about what a Slovak is which one might compare with that of the English, Scottish or Welsh. They do not appear to need the endless self-defining ‘philosophies’ of national history that the Czechs have”<sup>5</sup>.

Such a lack of confidence serves to encourage Czechs to resolutely maintain cultural boundaries and consequently much boundary marking is still present in the culture. Czech food, for example, is more than what is eaten for it is a marker of Czechness. Consequently, the traditional dumplings take on more significance than merely as a filler. Similarly the traditional Czech cakes, *buchtí*, that are baked on Saturday mornings, are a tradition that is still maintained and it is considered heresy to go to the shop to buy them. The bottling of fruit from the summer and salting and pickling vegetables for the winter still is an important element of the yearly cycle. Festivals are marked in traditional ways and, unlike in England, have not had to be revived and reinvented. St. Nicholas with his Angels and Devils appears in early December; Little Jesus gives presents at Christmas; in the early Spring the Winter is ceremoniously and satirically buried and at Easter fertility rites continue to be practised. In short the yearly cycle described in the 19th century children’s book *Broučci*<sup>1</sup> is in some ways very similar to what I witnessed during my time in Brno.

Although the story the Czechs tell is of disruption where one after another nations came to conquer, in contradiction, underneath many aspects of Czech culture remain the same. There is a stoical defiance, a Svejik-like<sup>ii</sup> resistance which has maintained a Czech identity through adversity. Another perception is that, unlike England, Czech society is more homogeneous and consequently identity is not so much marked by class. It is significant that the aristocracy were foreign, German speaking Hapsburgs<sup>iii</sup>, and the gap between town and country is less marked because links to the family in the country and the weekend *chata* ensured that town was never too far away. The philosopher, Patocka, supports the traditional notion that the Czechs are descended from peasants and smallholders when he talks of:

“..an elemental democratism that is derived from the fact that Czech society is basically composed of the common people”.<sup>6</sup>

However, under the Communist regime, a gap between those who had access to privileges and those who did not, existed. Fowkes reports that those former workers and peasants who had reached the top:

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<sup>1</sup> See *Czech Children’s Literature*

<sup>ii</sup> Svejik is the infamous character created by Jaroslav Hacek in *The Good Soldier Svejik*

<sup>iii</sup> See Chapter 1, *Czech History*

“...these members of the formerly oppressed classes made sure they stopped there, and passed on their privileges to their descendants.”<sup>7</sup>

In contrast the English national myth is of an unconquered nation secure in its island fortress which has a long history of smooth development into a democracy beginning with such significant events as Magna Carta in 1215. Robert Hewson in the space of 6 pages furnishes us with evidence of how pervasive this myth is. With reference to the effect of the Monarchy in creating a people who are disciplined and defer to authority he writes:

“These characteristics of a subject people have been reinforced by the failure of either the execution of Charles I in 1649 or the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to register as breaks in a continuous royal, and so national, descent from the Norman invasion in 1066”<sup>8</sup>

A short time later he compounds the myth:

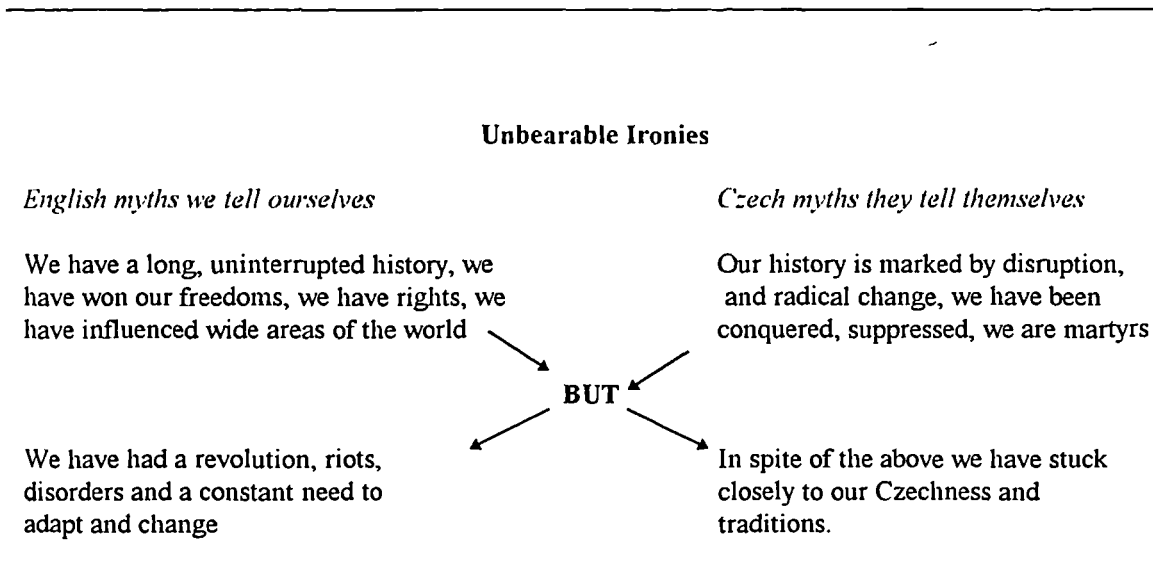
“...and Britain with its long history of gradual rather than bloody revolutions can be said to have been governed by a form of consensus since William and Mary”<sup>9</sup>

In a recent speech “Creative Futures: Culture and our Sense of Identity”<sup>10</sup> given by Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, he discusses the multi-cultural nature of British society and then goes on to say:

“Nearly every piece of ground in our country has been worked on lived on, loved and changed, over the centuries. Nearly everything we do has gradually evolved from things that have been done before”

But if another view of English history is taken, it could just as easily be described as marked by rebellion and revolution. The English Revolution where the King's head was removed and a Republic proclaimed is termed “The Civil War”. While the excesses of the subsequent French Revolution are highlighted, what took place in England has been played down and sanitised. Although the Wars of the Roses have been chronicled and maintained in the national imagination through Shakespeare's plays, the ruptures created by civil war are glossed over. Moreover, these are not the only significant events. The Industrial Revolution created the expansion of cities with mass migration from the country. Since the Second World War tremendous changes have taken place from the speed of technological advance to domestic sphere. The advantage of comparatively cheap foreign travel has influenced life style. For example much more international food is eaten and only the vestiges of what might be called traditional English cooking remains. Each time the changes have been radical and the English have adapted. Moreover, while the English may not have been conquered they are by no means homogenous. Significantly from early times the history of the country is marked by immigration from Vikings, the Norman French, then such groups as Huguenots, East European Jews, the Irish, Poles, West Indians, Hong Kong Chinese and East African Asians. The Scots and the Welsh also are a visible presence of difference. The English are a mixture

and, while by no means without prejudice, are used to and are aware of a variety of cultures. The Empire has also provided many English with experiences of abroad which has changed eating habits and entered the vocabulary of English. *Pyjamas, veranda* and *kiosk* have come from the British in India and the London colloquial expression “cha” for tea stems from *chai*, the Hindi word for tea, used the British Army in India. Thus while the English myth is of tradition and continuity, in truth it is of constant change and adaptation. The two opposing myths may be presented in the following diagrammatic form:



The Czechs feel they have to explain who they are because of their story of conquest and suppression so literature is concerned with marking out Czechness; it is a cry for recognition. Because the English feel they do not have to explain who they are, there is space in literature to explore the tensions and differences within society. Consequently none of the texts are overtly about English national identity or notions of Englishness. The texts examined in this study range from iconic works from the first “Golden Age” of children’s literature to contemporary texts which are less well known. If we hold with the notion proposed by Peter Hollindale<sup>11</sup> that writers reflect the world they live in, then obviously there will be differences over time which may be revealed in the subject matter, the style of writing, the genre and the implied reader. However, what is interesting to explore is not so much such obvious differences but to pull together the similarities and see what kinds of Englishness are embedded in these texts.

### **Cultural Indicators of Englishness**

#### *A National Myth of Continuity*

There is covert reference to historical figures and events as well as allusions to myths and legends in the texts that have been discussed in this study. In this way the national myth of that long interrupted

history is firmly maintained. The Norman Conquest figures in Alice's Adventures..., Sir Francis Drake and the approach of the Spanish Armada is mentioned in The Deathwood Letters, the battle between St. George and the Dragon is reinacted in The Iron Man, bomb sites from World War II are alluded to in William's Version (and remember William lives in Tennyson Avenue), Walter de la Mare's poetry has resonances of the Pre-Raphaelites with their interest in the medieval Arthurian legends. Such allusions to English history are not unusual in English children's literature. Badger's set in The Wind in the Willows<sup>12</sup> is built on ancient foundations, possibly Roman; Harthover Hall in The Water Babies has been added to over the years:

“...For Harthover had been built at ninety different times, and in nineteen different styles.....  
 For the attics were Anglo-Saxon.  
 The third-floor Norman  
 The second Cinque-cento.  
 The first-floor Elizabethan.  
 The right wing pure Doric.  
 The centre Early English, with a huge portico, copied from the Parthenon.”<sup>13</sup>

In the opening of Tom Brown's Schooldays the history of the Brown family is recounted:

“With the yew bow and cloth-yard shaft at Cressy and Agincourt, with the brown bill and pike under the brave Lord Willoughby, with culverin and demi-culverin against Spaniards and Dutchmen, with hand-grenade and sabre, and musket and bayonet, under Rodney and St. Vincent, Wolfe and Moore, Nelson and Wellington, they have carried their lives in their hands;...”<sup>14</sup>

Later in the same chapter the historical landscape of White Horse Hill is described beginning with the Roman Camp and Roman road moving to Ash-down where “Alfred won his great battle,...”<sup>15</sup> ending up at “Dragon's Hill” where St. George is reputed to have killed a Dragon. Hughes then goes further back in history to describe the Neolithic Wayland Smithy. Kipling's Puck of Pook's Hill<sup>16</sup> is an obvious example of the teaching a history of England but in more subtle ways such myths are embedded in many contemporary texts. The school project or pageant is such a vehicle. In Gene Kemp's The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler<sup>17</sup> for example the pupils reinact a battle between Normans and English after the Battle of Hastings, a potent date in English history.

### *Traces of a Colonial Past*

Reminders of England's Colonial past and Post Colonial status pervades. The poetry anthology Culture Shock is a post-colonial text both in its content and its implied reader. The first poem “Stereotype” exemplifies the uneasy relationship of ethnic minorities to the white status quo. It is also fascinating to see how often references to countries in the Commonwealth are embedded in the texts. Alice wonders if she is falling towards New Zealand or Australia; the 100-acre wood has Australian “Kanga” and Indian “Tigger”, the Space-Bat-Angel-Dragon falls on Australia; Damian's housekeeper



is from New Zealand, while de la Mare's "Tartary" conjures up images of lands that while exotic are also not so far from home. Harthover Hall also bears traces of the Raj:

"...The back staircase from the Tajmahal at Agra. This was built by Sir John's great-great-uncle, who won, in Lord Clive's Indian wars, plenty of money, plenty of wounds, and no more taste than his betters"<sup>18</sup>

### *Social Class*

If the English do not see the need to boundary-mark their nationality, they are certainly aware of social class. In the texts studied there are class differences in the implied reader which reflects the changing nature of English society. Both Lewis Carroll and Walter-de-la-Mare assume a high level of literacy and a reader who is comfortable in a middle class English world. Similarly A.A. Milne's language is that of middle-classes in England between the wars. On the other hand, reflecting current concerns with literacy, both Townson and Rosen assume a more reluctant reader who has to be persuaded that reading might be fun and relevant. In the texts themselves social class is ever present. The hierarchical nature of Victorian society, from the powerful Queen to the humble Lizard, is represented in Alice's Adventures... The speech patterns of the upper middle classes in the 1920's are evident in conversations in Winnie-the-Pooh while The Deathwood Letters and much of the poetry in Culture Shock is written in contemporary colloquial English. Since the second world war, as with adult literature and drama, the working classes and ethnic minorities have become more visible. Hogarth in The Iron Man is the son of an ordinary farmer while Frankie in The Deathwood Letters comes from the bottom end of the social ladder. Similarly the women's movement influenced the way girls are perceived. The ironic The Paper Bag Princess provides an example of a fairy tale which takes a feminist perspective.

### *Aspects of Everyday Living*

Much may be gleaned from the texts of everyday life of the period of production. We learn in Alice...of rote learning in school, what is deemed suitable behaviour, the manners of Victorian times. The Deathwood Letters has rich in information of daily life in England in the 1980's albeit the two social ends of the continuum being somewhat exaggerated. Food figures highly in children's literature and has a place in all the texts examined from the disrupted picnic in The Iron Man to the treats that Frankie and Damian enjoy at their secret meetings in The Deathwood Letters And one can think of many more from the midnight feast in boarding-school stories to riverside picnics in The Wind in the Willows. As children spend much of their time in school it is not surprising that a school location and attitudes towards education are common in children's literature. A strong anti-intellectual attitude towards education runs through English society and may be seen in the way this is represented in books for children. The "scholar" Owl is ridiculed by A.A. Milne and the reader is encouraged to sympathise with the "bear of very little brain". Walter-de-la-Mare's "Bookworm" is full of yearning for escape from the classroom. The private and state sector are compared in The

Deathwood Letters and both are undermined by the children's poor spelling. Anne Fine locates a number of her books in a school setting and is not afraid to portray scenes of hopelessness and chaos.

### *Attitudes towards Childhood*

One important aspect that runs through all the texts is the construction of the implied reader. In all the texts, the implied child reader, while often recognised as an apprentice reader, is seen as active who is encouraged to fill in the gaps left in the text. The reader is not protected from the adult world and indeed is often invited to criticise that world. The protagonist in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland finds herself surrounded by madness and mayhem created by adults; Hazel Townson's adults are often inadequate; the 100-acre wood is populated by ego-centrics where the adults pretend to know more than they actually do; Ted Hughes discusses the human effect on the environment; Michael Rosen selects poems which point up prejudice while even the less acerbic Walter-de-la Mare is not afraid to write of death. Children too are not portrayed as ideal role models. Jan Mark's William is "playing up", Townson's letter-writers disobey their parent's wishes and are quick to tell lies, Hogarth asserts himself to the adult world as indeed does Alice - to a King no less. What we witness here is that aspect of Englishness which is radical, in dissent of the status quo. While, undoubtedly books for children are seen as agents for socialisation - the examples given are more likely to encourage critical thinking than normalising.

### *Metafiction/Intertextuality*

There is another significant element in the texts investigated which is the notion that many children's texts are metafictional and concern the nature of fiction. This is powerfully present in Winnie-the-Pooh where the implied reader/listener is an apprentice moving from orality to literacy where the process of the creation of the text itself is made visible. For in the conversation between narrator, Christopher Robin and Pooh, A. A. Milne is writing about the very nature of fiction itself. In Alice's Adventures... children's stories are alluded to in the beginning and there are a number of parodies of existing poems. In fact the whole text may be seen as metafictional in that it is opposition to the didactic, moralising texts considered suitable for children in mid Victorian England. William's Version is intertextual, and through William's retelling, he is able to resolve some of his feelings of angst and jealousy. It is a psychological story about the psychology of literature. In some of the texts the metafictional is seen in the attention the author gives to the reading process itself. Ted Hughes punctuates The Iron Man with questions to trigger his apprentice reader into active reading which encourages speculation and prediction about what might happen. Lewis Carroll points his readers to the illustrations to help them understand or picture what is happening in the story. "The Poem to Help Unemployment" draws attention to a stereotypical view of the reluctant poetry reader about what poetry is - flowery language and little meaning. Robert Munsch in The Paper Bag Princess plays with the form of the traditional fairy story in order to examine the representation of the female.

### ***Subversion***

Crucially, much of English children's literature is subversive. The nonsense of Lear and Carroll was in opposition to the utilitarian notions of knowledge epitomised in Dickens Hard Times. Ted Hughes in The Iron Man criticises the waste of the earth's resources and the inability of adults to resolve differences peacefully. Hazel Townson along with her contemporaries Jan Mark and Anne Fine point up the fractures in family life and the treatment of children by adults. English children's literature is full of brave children fighting against the odds and the implied reader is also required to be brave and able to confront, work out and deal with difficulties. This is supported in a recent article in The Guardian when Anne Fine talking about writing for children asserts:

“And you have to write to the level of their bravery as well as to the level of their comprehension”<sup>19</sup>

Consider David McKee's picture book Not Now Bernard<sup>20</sup> where the sad little boy is completely neglected by his parents so much so that they don't even notice when he has been consumed by a large monster. In the two “Shirley” books by John Burningham<sup>21</sup> the child's fantasy is compared to the prosaic parents who have no idea where the child is in her head. the toys in Milne's Winnie the Pooh are not sweet but utterly self-absorbed.

Now the question arises as to what is significant about this in the quest for Englishness? If an active, questioning reader is implied who is reading what might be termed subversive material and if we assume that children's texts have a socialising function then it does have some bearing on views of the society they are growing up into. And in spite of the constraints and imperfections of the democracy we live under, there is a sense of individual rights that have been fought for and will continue to be fought for. Such heroes of the past Watt Tyler, Robin Hood, the Tollpuddle Martyrs exist in the national consciousness alongside the great and the powerful. Stemming from the oral tradition and finding a voice in Chap Books then comics there is space for subversiveness in these “low status” texts. Because children's literature has also slipped by the official gaze it too may be seen as a site for less than normative views. It is the iconoclastic nature of English children's literature which is a marker of Englishness and what makes it a rich site for investigation.

### **A Paradim for Investigating Culture**

From the research undertaken into cultural indicators of Englishness in this study it is now possible to suggest a paradigm for identifying cultural indicators in any English children's book. In addition such a paradigm may be used as a tool for comparative studies. It is unfortunate that few children's texts are translated from other languages into English but in partnership with children's literature specialists in other countries, comparative studies might be established with a view to researching into national identity and indicators of culture. For emerging post-communist countries, such as the Czech Republic, there is an urgent need to research into the development of their own children's

literature to map through the changes that have occurred and how the representation of the child changed over different political regimes. The outline of the development of Czech children's literature made in this study is a small contribution to the field.

Raymond Williams provides a useful working model of how the word culture may be defined<sup>i</sup>. The most appropriate literary theory is the implied reader for such an analysis of the text should show a culture's construction of childhood and moreover provides information on what it is assumed the child reader will know. The status of children's literature in society is important to establish in order to see if children's texts play a significant part in a nation's consciousness and whether children's texts are a site for subversion. Identifying national myths and whether such myths are embedded in a significant number of texts will also show a relationship between dominant values and children's texts. For it is important to note whether children's texts are a site for establishing or maintaining a national identity or whether that is taken-for-granted. Children's texts reveal a wealth of detail concerning surface level features of a particular way of life while also disclosing tensions within society. The paradigm may be put in the form of a set of questions.

- Is national identity overt or covert?
- Is a common myth of national identity embedded in the texts?
- Are there traces of a colonial past?
- What attitudes towards childhood are implied?
- Which social tensions are revealed?
- What aspects of everyday life are represented?
- Are metafictional devices and/or intertextuality present?
- Are the texts subversive?

### **Children's Literature in English as a Foreign Language**

Unfortunately, children's literature has been a neglected site in teaching English as a Foreign Language. While it is recognised that literature provides a rich source for both language development and insights into the culture of the target language, the difficulties of coping with adult literature for those learners below intermediate level is recognised. Simplified readers have been provided and often the short story is advocated as a first step. Sadly, children's literature has not been considered an option. However, the detailed examination of a number of texts in this study demonstrates that children's literature texts provide a rich and stimulating source for both language development and moreover provides a potent site for the investigation of culture. Crucially, and bearing in mind the language levels of the learner referred to above, children's literature, above all else, offers authentic texts which may be interrogated from *Beginner* level upwards. The picture book provides a rich source of information and with a format of few words and many illustrations they

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 1. Introduction

support the Beginner who, while not yet able to discuss the import in the target language, will be able at least to read the authentic text in English. In picture books there are many surface level features of a culture to be both read and compared such as housing, furniture, food, pets. Such aspects of English life-style may be seen in Shirley Hughes' fine detailed drawings. Peter Hunt describes her work as providing: "almost a guide-book to Victorian-house urban life:..."<sup>22</sup> The illustration of the "rec" in Helpers<sup>23</sup> encompasses a very English scene of Victorian brick terraced houses, with neighbours talking over the fences. One man is keeping pigeons and in the "rec" a variety of children and parents from different ethnic groups are talking and playing. However, there is more to Helpers than pictorial representation because of the dynamic relationship between picture and text. For the pictures tell the truth of what is happening while the words cleverly manage to not quite convey the chaos being caused by the children as they "help" their child-minder. Helpers provides an example of English children's literature which avoids a sentimental attitude towards children both in the portrayal of them as well as the challenge offered in discovering that there is a meaning to be worked out by filling the gap between text and picture.

Current concerns about the family are reflected in a number of picture books which reveal lonely, isolated or confused children who are coping with such difficulties as divorce. And as such these books are by no means confined to the younger learner. I Hate My Teddy Bear by David McKee<sup>24</sup> is a complex text where a simple, straightforward narrative is contrasted with pictures that are extremely challenging. Underlying the seemingly surreal pictures is a tale about divorce and the child's confusion. Gorilla by Anthony Browne<sup>25</sup> shows, with great delicacy, the life of a young girl in a one-parent family where her Father has been too busy to realise her needs. John Burningham has also produced a number of texts which are worthy of examination. Many contrast the prosaic attitudes of parents with the imagination of the child. The "Shirley" books have been referred to above but there are many more. In The Shopping Basket<sup>26</sup> a boy on an errand for his mother, order to take the boredom out of the task, creates a series of confrontations in which he wins by cleverness and not strength. Courtney<sup>27</sup> is the dog the children want, against their parents wishes, and although he is a wonderful animal: he can cook, clean the house and entertain the children, he still is not good enough for the parents and eventually leaves. Aldo<sup>28</sup>, a large grey rabbit, is a lonely child's imaginary friend. Where's Julius?<sup>29</sup> strikes a more optimistic note where the parents positively enjoy and encourage their son's imaginative adventures. In all these texts there is a dynamic relationship between picture and text which is challenging for the reader. Such texts need not be confined to the Beginner because for those who have reached a level of proficiency in English there will have much to discuss about the relationship of text to picture, the implied reader and what may be seen as indicators of Englishness.

In addition to picture books which concern the family, there are many texts which could be offered at an intermediate level of English. Anne Fine is an ascerbic observer of the condition of the contemporary family. Madam Doubtfire humorously exposes the difficulties faced by estranged

parents with humour while Crummy Mummy and Me<sup>30</sup> explores the generation gap between punk mother, daughter and more traditional granny. Michelle Magorian tackles a delicate subject in Goodnight Mister Tom<sup>31</sup> which, while set in the second world war, concerns a current issue of child abuse.

While the family and notions of family values are a current concern in the UK another even more controversial is that of education. Texts which centre on the education system provide a site for investigation which can include both an historical perspective as well as raise issues of class and gender. An obvious text would be Tom Brown's Schooldays<sup>32</sup> (for advanced readers of English) which could be combined with Angela Brazil's Girls Boarding School stories. Contemporary representations of schooling may be found in such texts as Gene Kemp's The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler<sup>33</sup>, Anne Fine's The Flour Babies,<sup>34</sup> Jan Needle's My Mate Shofiq<sup>35</sup> as well as the many Hazel Townson stories which have been discussed earlier.

The above texts might also be included in a selection which overtly address such important tensions as race, class and gender in contemporary Britain. In addition Anne Fine's Bill's New Frock<sup>36</sup> about a boy who wakes up one morning to find himself a girl and his reactions to the way he is treated during the day offer an acute insight into the culture of girlhood. My Mate Shofiq<sup>37</sup> concerns the treatment of a Pakistani family and has been the subject of debate because of its negativity. Culture Shock, discussed above, provides an insight into multi-cultural Britain crucially through the implied reader as well as the content of the poems themselves. An introduction to stratification in English society may be provided by Anthony Brown's picture book A Walk in the Park<sup>38</sup> where the lifestyles of Mr Smith and Mrs Smythe are depicted against a surreal background of images. Underpinning the text is the unnecessary isolation between the two adults caused by class divisions.

There are many children's books which have an historical setting and as such they fuel the myth of continuity discussed above and provide a site for an investigation into how the English represent their past. Rosemary Sutcliffe's historical novels range from the Bronze age through the Roman period to the Norman period in which according to John Rowe Townsend "the story of Britain is being told"<sup>39</sup>. It is up to the English language student to deconstruct which story of Britain is being narrated. If not aiming for historical accuracy there are many texts which have a period flavour. Much of Leon Garfield's work is set in the 18th century where Smith<sup>40</sup> is perhaps the best known. A much earlier setting is provided in Clive Kings' Stig of the Dump<sup>41</sup> which explored a relationship between Barney and "Stig" who is still living in the Stone Age. Alan Garner uses myth and landscape to construct a bridge between past and present. In The Owl Service<sup>42</sup> he takes the Welsh legends of the Mabinogion to explore Welshness and Englishness. Tom's Midnight Garden by Phillippa Pearce<sup>43</sup> concerns a link between the present and Victorian England while in L. M. Boston's The Children of Green Knowe<sup>44</sup> children's voices from the time of the Great Plague in 1665 are heard. And there are other

innumerable “ghost” stories which connect past with present. All such texts serve to maintain the myth of continuity

The relationship between the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the mainland has not been discussed in this work yet it would be difficult to exclude the effects the “troubles” have had on the national psyche over the past 100 years. A selection of texts which deal with this would make an interesting site for investigation. References to the Irish occur in The Water Babies and Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland but more recently a number of texts locate Ireland as the main focus. Opposing families of Catholic and Protestant are represented in Joan Lingard’s Across the Barricades<sup>45</sup> and in Peter Carter’s Under Goliath. Martin Waddell locates much of his work in Northern Ireland. Wolf by Gillian Cross<sup>46</sup> is a multi-layered text in which a young girl comes to know that her father is an IRA bomber. Such texts might then be compared with constructions of Irishness in contemporary Irish children’s literature published in the Republic of Ireland.

For those students who have gained some “insider” knowledge of English children’s literature, the work of the Alhbergs will provide interesting texts to study as they are richly intertextual and metafictional. The Jolly Postman<sup>47</sup> and its sequels, The Jolly Christmas Postman<sup>48</sup> and The Jolly Pocket Postman<sup>49</sup> combine a variety of different discourses with reference to nursery rhymes, and characters from fairy story and other children’s fiction. The most interesting site to locate metafictional devices is in It Was a Dark and Stormy Night<sup>50</sup> which is an exploration of the creative process itself. Antonio, a boy captured by Italian brigands, is invited to tell them a story. With constant interruptions and commands to change it to suit the brigand Chief, Antonio manages to buy enough time to develop his tale in such a way that he can organise his own escape. And his tale is not plucked from anywhere but is rooted in his own situation where the audience of bandits is firmly kept in mind. By the end his narrative turns into an eye-witness account of what he is seeing. Signifier and signified are almost as one:

(Antonio is shouting through a loud-hailer as the following is actually happening as depicted in the illustrations):

“The brigands and the chief ran down the slope (‘THE BRIGANDS AND THE CHIEF RAN DOWN THE SLOPE!’ announced Antonio), blundering into thorns and stinging nettles (‘BLUNDERING INTO THORNS AND STINGING NETTLES!’) and grazing their shins and knees on the sharp rocks (‘AND GRAZING THEIR SHINS ON THE SHARP ROCKS!’).”<sup>51</sup>

Such texts, which may be read quickly and relatively easily, offer a grounding in the ways literature operates which will prove valuable when students have enough English to tackle adult material.

A socio-linguistic analysis of children’s literature texts is another approach. Contemporary texts are rich site for colloquial expressions while A. A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh as discussed earlier, provide fine examples of the upper-class discourse on the 1920’s. The Jolly Postman<sup>52</sup> offers a rich variety of

discourse patterns to analyse such as the solicitor's letter, advertising material from Hobgoblin supplies, the mini-fairy story and the holiday postcard.

### **Methodology**

However, while it may be seen from the above examples that an interesting syllabus might be constructed which, not only supports language development but also provides rich materials for cultural studies, this is only part of the picture. For the way the texts are delivered is crucial to the success of a course which aims to encourage students to take an active part in the learning process. Consequently there are considerable implications for pedagogy. As discussed in some detail in this study, it has been shown that the communicative teaching methods that I used were not wholly appropriate. For my methodology served to make the students so comfortable, and relaxed that they were able to turn everything we explored into a Czech context and in terms of my original aims for the course, this is not necessarily to be completely viewed negatively. However, it is now on reflection that a further examination of the pedagogy is needed. For if children's literature is to be a new site for investigating a particular culture where significant differences are exposed, then a communicative methodology alone will not do. While there is less of a problem about introducing children's literature as a vehicle for language development in the EFL classroom, for the purposes of an examination of culture, there has to be a different approach. It will be recalled from the work of Kramsch and Byram, who highlight the cultural implications in language teaching<sup>i</sup>, that it is acknowledged that stereotypes are difficult to remove and crucially the pedagogical methods must be such that the fault-lines are made visible. It is what Kramsch calls "Establishing a 'sphere of interculturality'"<sup>53</sup>. In order to achieve this, it is vital that discussion of children's literature from the students' culture is also included. Comparisons are essential and they should be encouraged to not only recall what they read as children but to re-read those children's books as adults. Reader response theories have been proved useful in this study and offer a way in to the construction of the child reader. Similarly locating the text in a particular period provides essential information which the "outsider" requires. Once the text is familiar with the students it will be important to locate what Lotman terms the "zone of untranslatability"<sup>54</sup> in order to show up the fault-lines. And a useful way to identify such areas, as has been demonstrated in this study, is to take extracts from the texts and ask the students to note the difficulties which would occur in translating both language and culture into the mother tongue. Such fruitful research will not only provide many examples of different attitudes but would also furnish a native speaker of English with the beginnings of an insider's view of their students' culture/s. Similarly the students will not only move on a little from outsider to insider of the target language but will also view their own culture a little more as outsiders. Literary theories will give the students the tools to examine the texts presented on the syllabus, their own children's texts and then any other texts that will confront them later. This is a different approach to

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 3



teaching English as a Foreign Language where the learner's own language and culture are often rendered invisible.

### **Practical Considerations**

It remains now to consider future outcomes for the field of children's literature arising from this study. It has been argued that children's texts should be included in the English language classroom and it remains to put theory into practice and suggest materials and methods to practitioners. Papers arising from the study have already been given at conferences for teachers of English as a Foreign Language and Cultural Studies in Vienna (1995), Castelo Branco (Portugal 1996) and Debrecen (Hungary 1997) and have been greeted with great interest. Two important avenues for introducing children's literature in EFL would be through the British Council and IATEFL (International Association for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) particularly through their Special Interest Group (SIG) for Cultural Studies and Literature. I have designed and had validated an EFL Module at Worcester College of H.E. which incorporates English for Academic Purposes with Cultural Studies. Within it children's texts were introduced in the exploration of the English Family and Education. The application of the paradigm for comparative studies could be explored with visiting lecturers from overseas at the Primary English and Children's Literature Research Centre which has been established at Worcester College of Higher Education.

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that a meticulous textual investigation into children's literature with an attendant focus on how the text is constructed as opposed to what the narrative contains is a fruitful area of research thus avoiding the pitfall of the value judgement which continually besets the field. Moreover, it has been established that children's literature is an intellectually stimulating site for the study of Englishness. It has been pointed out that a culture which has a strong sense of its national identity will have less need to maintain that identity in order to seek cohesion consequently there is space left to interrogate cultures within. For this reason English children's texts often subvert the status quo. Paradoxically, however, they often also serve to maintain the English myth of continuity. The study has also revealed, through the voices of the Czech students, the legacy of the totalitarian regime in the former Czechoslovakia and the significance of the changes that have occurred since 1989. This serves as a warning not to assume that the same meanings are in circulation as there are still huge differences in perceptions which must be taken into account and it is important to locate the fault-lines. In this sense the study has made the Czechs less invisible, which is not only important in itself but also because they are likely to be the first post-communist country to join the European Community.

Finally a value judgement. While English children's books do indeed both represent and subvert the undercurrents of everyday life, it is the author's creativity which is the most persuasive argument for

their inclusion. For the texts suggested in this study are only a few examples of rich, enjoyable, humorous books to delight and satisfy and moreover challenge the student of English language and culture.

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## Appendix I - Tables

**Table 1 - Empirical Research: November 1994-May 1996**

Cohort	Form	Research Question
<b>Cohort A</b> Whole cohort, two groups	Written response in pairs	a Englishness of the methodology b Englishness in the texts
<b>Cohort B</b> Volunteers	Interviews in groups	1 Brainstorm about the word "culture" 2 Notions of English culture 3 Where such ideas come from 4 Aspects of English culture from texts read on the course
<b>Cohort B</b> Whole cohort	Written task	Identify cultural indicators in <u>The Iron Man</u> <u>The Deathwood Letters</u> <u>Culture Shock</u> <u>Winnie-the-Pooh</u>
<b>Cohort B</b> 9 students in the UK	Interviews in two's and three's	1 Previous experience of the UK 2 Expectations 3 What surprised them about UK 4 Differences between Czech and English culture
<b>Cohort B</b> 9 students in the UK	Completion of evaluation sheet of the 3 week study-tour	Experience of visit
<b>Cohort B</b> 9 students in the UK	Written task	How <u>The Deathwood Letters</u> might be made "Czech"
<b>Cohort C</b> Volunteers	Interviews in groups	1 difference between "culture" and "Kultura" 2 Horizons of expectations 3 Notions of English culture 4 Advice for foreigners visiting CR
<b>Cohort C</b> 6 students selected for the Study Tour in the UK	Written task	Expectations of visit to UK
<b>Cohort C</b> 6 students in the UK	Written task	Cultural indicators in <u>William's Version</u> <u>Winnie the Pooh</u> <u>The Iron Man</u> <u>The Deathwood Letters</u> <u>Culture Shock</u> <u>Poetry - Walter de la Mare</u> <u>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</u>
<b>Cohort C</b> 6 students in the UK	Written task	How the above texts might be made "Czech"
<b>Cohort C</b> 6 students in the UK	Evaluation Sheet	What they learned from the study tour

Table 2  
**Notions of the meanings of the word “culture”**  
*(Second Cohort - brainstorming in groups)*

<b>The Arts</b> (7 groups)	Theatre, literature, film (7 groups) + music (6 groups) + painting (2 groups) +concerts, museums, exhibitions, architecture (1 group for each)
<b>Everyday Way of Life</b> (6 groups)	Habits, behaviour, social standing, family life, houses work, food, holidays, + traditions, ceremonies, customs (6 groups)
<b>Organisations</b> Education (5 groups) Religion (5 groups) Politics (2 groups)	minorities, human rights, economics

Table 3 Notions about English Culture identified by the second cohort of Fast Track Students

Sports	Habits	Food and Drink	Tourist Sites	People/ Characters	Architecture	Social Life	Politics
cricket (2) football (1) golf (3) tennis (1) darts (1)	queuing (1) eating late at night (1) drinking tea (1) politeness (2) kind policemen (1) being friendly (1) conservative (1) watching soaps on TV (1) talking about the weather (1) driving on the other side of the road (5) carrying umbrellas (1) keeping old measures (2) traditional (3) special humour (2) riding bicycles (1)	food (1) fish and chips (2) Yorkshire pudding (1) tea with milk (1) lots of vegetables (1) expensive alcohol (1)	Big Ben (1) National Gallery (1) Tower Bridge (1) Westminster Abbey (1) Buckingham Palace (1) Oxford/Cambridge (1) Canterbury (1) Wimbledon (1) Stonehenge (1) Blackpool (1) castles (1) museums (1) double Decker buses, taxis (3) pigeons (1) Hastings 1066 (2) Great Fire of London (1) flat countryside (1) sheep and horses in the fields (1)	Royal Family (8) The Beatles (1) Mrs Thatcher (1) G.B. Shaw (1) Shakespeare (3)  Sherlock Holmes (1) Winnie-the Pooh (1)	Victorian (1) red bricks (2) small houses (1) houses with two gardens (1) semi-detached houses (1) green lawns (2) central heating (1)	well-decorated pubs (2) darts (1) bands (1) clubs (1)	class system (4) big contrasts (1) Empire (1) maritime island nation (1) Conservative party (1) Northern Ireland (1) war (1) fighting (1) bombs (1) Protestants (1) New Age Movement (1) election (1) English language (1) American influence (1)
<b>Religion</b> English church (1) first Bible in the venacular (1)						weather: rain and fog (2) wind (1)	

Table 4 Cohort B - Research March 1995 - Searching for Cultural Indicators in Specific Texts

Text	Explanation	Changes	Problem Words and Phrases
<u>Culture Shock</u>	<p><b>General Points:</b> Topics such as race, war, family. Children's own poetry published alongside adult poetry.</p> <p><i>Stereotype</i> (John Agard p.1) The English stereotype of West Indians Location of West Indies and historical background Straw hat, full-blooded <i>Eve</i> (Kate Llewellyn p.58) afternoon tea, the original bible story of Adam and Eve <i>Poem to Help Unemployment</i> (Liz Loxley p 61) (None)</p> <p><i>Broadminded</i> (Ray Durem p. 32) (white boys)</p>	<p>West Indian into Gypsy</p> <p>in alliterative phrases such as "buttered brown bread" the lexical items would need to be changed to maintain the alliterative effect</p>	<p>dialect words and phrases such as "to pour de rum" how to give an impression of being uneducated through the language</p> <p>bliss, honeymoon highlight</p> <p>dialect words like "treat 'em, meet 'em ..if they was people.</p>
<u>The Deathwood Letters</u>	<p>Deliberate spelling mistakes, proper names, differences between social classes, English education system, school uniforms, names of sporting teams (Junior Second Eleven), name of the dog (Killer), Scrabble, Sir Francis Drake, play on words with goal/gaol, boarded up, bully, fearce, big brothers, names of authors and titles of children's books and comics, Saint Aiden's Academy (name of school)</p>	<p>more illustrations, move address to Czech system, middle school, Blue Peter Badge, Junior Second Eleven, joke with pronunciation of Deathwood (Deethwood), Welfare, scrabble, history project</p>	<p>translating the poor spelling, "rotten speller", voucher, Blue Peter Badge, Conservatory, final greeting on a letter - only one formula in Czech, pawned, "vivid imagination", spooky, dry rot, zoom lens, staunch friend, Mafia, "easy to nick off the barrers", "loony bin"</p>
<u>The Iron Man</u>	<p>toffee, picnic, double-decker bus, leaves unfurled from the buds, daffodils speared up from the soil, earthquake, eating of barbed wire, soft blue eyes when Iron Man is happy and red when he is angry</p>	<p>Yards, daffodils, earthquake because there are none in Czech Republic, picnics, the farmers meeting</p>	<p>pie, daffodils, buds, unfurled, stove, store, soil, fluid, click, "they led through the village"</p>
<u>Winnie-the-Pooh: "The Expoitioin to the North Pole"</u>	<p><b>General:</b> Nonsense not a Czech tradition colloquial language, talking animals, North Pole, foreign animals like Kanga. Eeyore the sound donkeys make in English, "hush" means "be quiet". Donkeys characters different from Eeyore in Czech stories. "nuts and may". marmalade</p>	<p>Song lyrics in order for the song to rhyme, joke on pun with Pole, Kanga to Klo (first half of the Czech word for kangaroo Klokán, Roo to Kan end of Czech word Pun with "X" and "necks" "snows/nose" in order to make a rhyme</p>	<p>plays on words: "expoitioin", provisions/pro-things, ambush/gorse-bush. nuts and may, "behind-the-ears-nonsense".</p>
"In Which Eeyore has a birthday and gets two presents"	<p>Cotelston pie, pink sugar, phrase "Many Happy Returns", knocker, rabbits as fast breeders</p>	<p>hum to mutter, bridge sugar, Czech phrases for Happy Birthday, knocker to bell</p>	<p>gaicty</p>

Table 5 Summary of Evaluation Sheets from the 9 students in the UK May 1995

	School Visits	Lectures	Social Life	Food/Accommodation	Visits to Places of Interest
Student 1	subjects not separated; teacher autonomy; teachers friendly; students taught to think; more options	feminist studies unusual	students excited about getting drunk; foreign students largely ignored	food very good even though the English complain about it	Mayor of Worcester very informal; enjoyed Malvern Hills
Student 2	children in groups doing different activities; each child has more freedom; interesting text books; they don't learn without understanding	students do not prepare for their lectures; every answer is praised	English people are conservative	Light and tasty food with lots of choice	Major informal; all visits interesting
Student 3	school doesn't have to be full of stress and memorising; students are taught to think	students must think rather than remember; more options; more time	noisy bar, focus on fun; immature behaviour	satisfied	Major informal; Warwick Castle beautiful and well organised
Student 4	stress free environment; computers in each class; subjects not separated; staff work with each other; project work motivating	academic level of discussion lower but written work may be higher; not so much pressure; lots of facilities	not so easy to get into the English students culture - need to be mixed more in order to practice English	excellent	Mayor unbelievably friendly and informal; other visits educational
Student 5	Admire teachers' tolerance and patience; pupils are encouraged to think and express their opinion	not too demanding; pace quite slow; surprised that all assessment was written - no orals; surprised by variety of choices	lots of choice of activities but of low quality; needed to mix more with English students	food excellent	English people keep their traditions in a very nice way and "are able to make money on everything"
Student 6	no stress, encouraging teachers; friendly atmosphere; children brought up to be independent and self-sufficient; creativity and thinking developed	lectures difficult but seminars more accessible; good idea to have mature students; students have chance to express themselves	hectic; students focus on socialising more than their studies	food excellent	informal friendly Mayor; clean towns and cities
Student 7	good equipment; pupils in uniforms; higher proportion of male teachers	students encouraged to learn for themselves; good facilities; many different subjects	noisy, lots of possibilities	lots of choice, kind canteen assistants	friendly mayor; Warwick Castle has many good attractions
Student 8	children encouraged to work independently and in groups	interesting to hear students' presentations	Rag week an interesting experience.	good choice of meals although not all are healthy	surprised by the level of informality with the Mayor
Student 9					



Table 6 - Summary of Interviews with Cohort C - November 1995

Group	<i>kultura/</i> culture	Differences between English and Czech culture	The Oral Tradition	<u>The Iron Man</u>	<u>Culture Shock</u>	<u>The Deathwood Letters</u>	<u>Winnie-the- Pooh</u>	<u>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</u>	Methodology	Shadow Puppets
One	In Czech the "high arts" only	Social class, meal times, family life, neglect of children	Preferred the traditional stories	Modern fairy tale which has meaning in real life	No comments	Well remembered enjoyed. mention of the style, could get ideas about culture, different lives	Known from TV cartoons not just for children	Unknown before class reading, not just for children, mainly liked the fantasy	Didn't like: couldn't take books home didn't really discuss them no confidence in teacher only seemed to discuss characters	No mention
Two	<i>Kultura</i> includes customs but used more for "high culture" in Czech	Politeness/ formality	Enjoyed <u>The Paper Bag Princess</u> but not suitable for children	Not liked because Sci Fi. Not uitable for children - scary		Enjoyed, suitable for Czech children	Czech version known, seen as from a child's perspective	Not known in Czech, imagination	Not happy with course because thought it was about teaching the books	No mention
Three	Same in Czech has both meanings	Social class, families closer in Czech Republic. English children more independent self-confident	Liked traditional ones but enjoyed <u>Paper Bag Princess</u> too	Not liked. could be frightening classed a "modern fairy tale"	Vaguely remembered	Enjoyed, class mentioned plus relationships between the children	Known in Czech, not read in class. Used in philosophy class in <i>Gymnazium</i>	Mentioned first as interesting	Very critical. bored, didn't know purpose, wanted to take books home, no real discussion	No mention
Four	Same in Czech	Cultural indicators not explicit. class, food, how children are treated	Liked <u>Paper Bag Princess</u> but "originals" must come first			Mentioned briefly in terms of class		Vague but mentioned social class	Not critical but also couldn't see how to use the books in school	Enjoyed the process, regretted not performing

Table 7 Cohort C Expectations about the UK

	Previous experience in the UK	Life in an English University Compared to a Czech one	Views about English students	Main differences between Czech and English Education	Differences between Czech and English life-styles	What you are looking forward to	What you are worried about
Blanka	10 months au pair	Similar	More hard-working - English take things seriously	More hours in school, more sports and arts, higher quality of student, more get the chance to study	Czechs are "wilder". The English spend more time at home with their families	Speaking English, meeting new people	The long bus journey
Jitka	6 weeks au-pair	unsure	Similar - perhaps more confident	classroom arrangements, length of lessons, variety of schools (eg church schools) more choice of subject	English more confident and independent	Visiting English schools	Level of English
Dagmar	No	Similar but more sociable	English more interest in their subject	Czech primary school more demanding, English secondary schools more specialised, wider range of options	Czechs more open-hearted	Speak English, meet new people	Communicating with different people
Martina	5 months au-pair	Different, more excitement and fun	More independent, lively, not scared to express themselves	Learning more a form of play in UK, secondary schools more specialised, Higher ed. students more independent	Very different, children leave home earlier in the UK	Meeting English students	Level of English, handling the unexpected
Jana	3 months au-pair in London	Rich student life, more independent	More friendly, open, free in their spirits	Czech schools more demanding and stressful. English secondary more specialised and interesting, more choice in higher Education	English more free and independent, less concerned with money	Visiting schools, Speaking English	Having enough energy to make the most of the experience
Andrea	No	Similar	Not much difference, English students may think more seriously about their future	More options and combinations	English closer to their families, calmer life style	Speak English meet new people	Journey, coping with a different way of life and people

**Table 8 Cultural Indicators Identified by Students from Cohort C during their Study-Tour at Worcester**

Text	English Cultural Indicator
<u>William's Version</u> Jan Mark	William's behaviour: naughty, independent, more freedom, self-centred, negative Granny's attitude in allowing him to be naughty, conductor on the bus, toast, sandwich, bombsite, fire place, address (15 Tennyson Avenue) chips,
<u>Winnie the Pooh</u> A.A. Milne	Playing with words: manipulating the language, typical English names, variety of animals like tigger and kanga,
<u>The Iron Man</u> Ted Hughes	Typical for a country with sea: cliffs, seagulls, crabs, rocky beach Picnic, tea, sandwiches, toffee, the name "Hogarth" Farmers with their own farms (not collectives) Daffodils in the spring, yards (measurement) The author hinting on the aggression of people towards anything new
<u>The Deathwood Letters</u> Hazel Townson	A book clearly about English children and the divisions in English society Fun with spelling mistakes; scrabble; English place names, currency, religious schools, St Valentine's Day, VIP's, dinner parties, English children's books Chips, Chelsea buns, black pudding, sandwiches, teatime, Differences between poor and rich, both children neglected
<u>Culture Shock</u> Mike Rosen	Dealing with such topics as education, poverty, relating to different cultures Dealing with the problems of racism, sexism cricket, Oxford
Poetry Anthology by Walter-de-la-Mare	<i>Night Swans</i> : Swans, the name "Evangeline", <i>Tartary</i> : Links with former colonies: ivory, zebras, citron-trees Not the sort of things a Czech person might dream
<u>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</u> Lewis Carrol	Tea-time, treacle, marmalade, custard, roast turkey, cherry tart, custard, currency, the court, ceremony, jury and jurors, game of croquet, Queen, Duchess Cheshire cat, hookah, shillings and pence, miles Alice's strong character.

Table 9 Summary of Evaluation Sheets from the 6 students in the UK May 1996

	School Visits	Lectures	Social Life	Food/Accommodation	Visits to Places of Interest
Student 1 Andrea	Group work; projects; mixed ability, different tasks; more freedom of expression; teachers less in a hurry; more polite	Wide choice of subjects; student presentations	Main objective appears to get drunk	Delicious food	historic places interesting. Mayor useful for learning some history
Student 2 Blanka	Less formal; group work; individual work; different ages together; pupils encouraged to give own opinion about literature	Women's Studies very interesting; students treated more like partners; mature students	Disaster	Good food, noisy hall of residence	Warwick Castle wonderful but also "a perfect business". Mayor of Worcester give up alot of time
Student 3 Jana	Children work in groups and help each other; less hurry; teachers have individual approach; secondary schools have different assessment	Students are taught to think; teachers are there to serve	Students know how to enjoy themselves; centred on drinking; they don't appear to have financial problems	Delicious food; hall of residence very noisy	enjoyed the architecture
Student 4 Martina	Less stress about marks and time; pupils are encouraged to think; no rote-learning; visitors encouraged to talk to the children	Students given lots of space to express themselves; to think about issues instead of being flooded with information	Seems excessive; alot of focus on pubs; students excited about being away from home	Food excellent - lots of fruit and vegetables	interesting information from the Mayor of Worcester; famous towns are made beautiful for visitors
Student 5 Dagnar	Children are taught less but are more prepared for Higher Education, more wasting of time; pupils undisciplined, more arts	More freedom of choice	Foreign students not accepted so "heartily"; lots of leisure activities	Food excellent; hall of residence noisy	Mayor of Worcester very kind
Student 6 Jitka	Classroom arrangements different; longer playtime; teachers different; less distressing than Czech schools	Choice of subjects	Lots of activities but not appreciated by all the students	Food excellent; hall of residence noisy	enjoyed the countryside

## Appendix II - The Researcher

*If you stand in the middle of the Old Town Square in the centre of Prague and look at the architecture, ranging from the golden topped spires of the Tyn church to the colourful medieval buildings and the heroic figure of the martyr Jan Hus, it is possible to believe you are in the land of fairy stories. The President, Vaclav Havel, once a dissident who was imprisoned for four and a half years, now sits high over the town in Prague castle. In the countryside outside the city with dense forests, wooden cottages and ancient castles there stalks in folk memories wicked witches, treacherous wolves and incarcerated princesses. The narrative that follows does not contain fairies, magic deeds and the granting of wishes, but there remains the ghost of such a tale.*

### The Researcher

I have a strong, emotional link to the Czech Republic and the above somewhat mawkish-sounding preface is an attempt to convey the sense of fate that led me, at the age of 45, into leaving a well-paid middle management position to teach in Prague for £80 a month and subsequently to produce this thesis. Much of what I had experienced earlier in my life seemed at times to be preparation for this “great adventure”. The following selection of biographical details are chosen in order to convey to the reader my life experience which informs the research undertaken and the meanings that I have produced.

### Family Background and Early Years

My mother left school at 14 and my father left South Wales in the 1930's at a similar age to escape unemployment. He worked in London for a while as a trainee chef and then joined the army as a regular soldier. He served in Palestine before the World War II and in Korea afterwards and during the Second World War he was based in Hereford training troops. My mother, born within the sound of Bow bells, was evacuated from London to Hereford, met my father and subsequently they married. At the end of the war in 1945 I was born. After 21 years in the Army where he reached the highest rank possible for a non-commissioned officer, Regimental Sergeant Major, my father left to become a caretaker of an office block in Fleet Street. I moved into Fleet Street when I was 10 and stayed there until the age of 19 when I left home. Although I have spent most of my life in London and I identify myself as a Londoner I remain keenly aware of the Welsh side of my family, not only through summer holidays in Brynmawr but also because my Father constantly boundary-marked his Welshness<sup>i</sup>. I attended Grammar school in Stepney in the East End of London between 1956 and 1961 having been a borderline pass in the 11+ and only gained entry as a Governors' Sponsor. During those years I changed from a somewhat withdrawn and shy pupil to a rebellious adolescent who left after one year in the Commercial 6th form with just 4 'O' levels and the ability to touch-type. At that time in my family only a Welsh cousin was preparing for Higher Education and my parents had little knowledge of University life. On reflection I can see that both my parents were

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<sup>i</sup> “Boundary-Marking” is discussed in The Introduction

intelligent but were trapped within the constraints of their social class. I did not realise my full potential at school and I still recall the boredom and frustration not realising what I was capable of achieving. This experience has driven me as a teacher to try to develop the potential of those I am working with and am determined at least to provide an interesting experience in the classroom.

### **First career move: Acting**

One of the few activities I enjoyed at school was appearing in the annual school play and with little idea about what I wanted to do after I left school I became an “extra” (a non-speaking role) in film and television. My mother was a photographic model who also worked as an extra and she was able to introduce me to theatrical agents and help me join the relevant trade unions. At the same time I attended evening classes in acting held at the City Literary Institute and found a teacher I greatly admired, Dorothea Alexander. I spent many years working in her improvisation group and her professional acting class. At one stage I transcribed some of the plays we had improvised which led to an interest in the difference between improvised drama and a written theatre text. This was to be pursued at a later date. It is rare to move from extra work to speaking parts but I was asked to audition for a role in a soap “The Newcomers” (BBC 1) and to my surprise was given the part. From that time on I relinquished the extra work and tried to focus on a “proper” acting career. The most challenging role I played was that of “Bent Sheilah” in Peter Stevenson’s film “Up the Junction” in 1968. Such experience in the theatre proved useful when at a later date I worked with a Czech Theatre Company and ran courses in English for Czech Theatre Managers<sup>i</sup>.

### **The Move towards Teaching:**

But although there were times when parts were forthcoming, most of my time was spent typing in an office in order to pay the rent. After a period of nearly two years without an acting part I asked Dorothea Alexander what I might do and she suggested that I could train to be a teacher of drama. At that time the minimum entry to a College of Education was 5 ‘O’ levels for mature students. I took a correspondence course in French and, with the aid of day trips to France, I managed to pass with a top mark for the Oral. There was also an option to sit for a Special Entry test for mature students which I took and consequently I was accepted by Maria Grey College of Education (University of London) in 1971 when I was 26.

I remember one of the first questions our education tutor asked us in our seminar group which was to think about times when we had failed at school. As an under-achiever I could pinpoint many areas of failure and so was determined to become the sort of teacher who could help their pupils succeed and give them confidence in their worth.

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<sup>i</sup> See Chapter 10, Alice’s Adventures... and Appendix II

I graduated in 1975 with a B.Ed. in Drama and Sociology of Education and began teaching Drama at Cranford Community School in the London Borough of Hounslow. I consider Drama to be one of the most difficult subjects to teach and my first few years were spent learning how to cope with a hall full of excited pupils who were there for an hour's "mucking about". I was given a blank sheet in terms of a syllabus and had to devise drama lessons from first to third year. Thankfully the CSE Drama Exam gave some guidelines for a syllabus and so there was something concrete to hang on to for 4th and 5th years. This experience has proved invaluable as, unlike many of my colleagues who teach English as a Foreign Language, the lack of a course-book and a clear syllabus does not cause me so much concern. A drama teacher's repertoire consists of many transferable skills and in later years I have felt reasonably confident in organising the games, group-work and role play which is also part of the repertoire of a language teacher. Another crucial transferable skill from the study of plays both written and improvised is the experience and insights gained in analysing conversation and drawing out sub-text. This has proved valuable when analysing the interviews with the Czech students.

#### **Interest in Children's Literature:**

At the end of my fourth year of teaching I applied for Secondment to study for the Advanced Diploma in the Role of Language in Education. I was fortunate to be accepted and spent a formative year studying at the Institute of Education, London with such significant figures in education as Professor Harold Rosen and Margaret Meek. This has been the most influential course in my career as a teacher and the two most important aspects I took away with me were (i) the importance of talk in the process of coming to know and (ii) the significance of students becoming responsible for their own learning. Under Margaret Meek's influence I became particularly interested in literacy and children's literature. I spent one morning a week in a Primary school supporting two children with reading difficulties and I became acquainted with a number of picture books as I trawled the shelves for suitable and interesting reading material for my pupils.

#### **Teaching Career**

At the end of that year I returned to Cranford Community School where I continued with Drama but also worked some of the time supporting pupils with reading difficulties. At the same time I enrolled for a part-time MA in Language and Literature in Education, again at the Institute of Education. My dissertation was an analysis of the difference between ordinary conversation, improvised drama and a written theatre text. Such a task gave me further experience of transcribing talk and engaging in discourse analysis.

While I still regarded drama as an important learning medium, I also developed an interest in language development and decided to make the change to teaching English as a Second Language. This was at a time when there was a move towards supporting pupils with language needs in

mainstream classrooms and not in withdrawal groups, so I found myself helping pupils in a wide variety of subjects. The experience of sharing classrooms and observing what happens with different teachers in a range of subjects gave me many insights into the teaching/learning process.

I was once more seconded, this time for a term to study for the RSA Diploma "Teaching English as a Second Language in Multi-cultural classrooms" at Ealing College of Higher Education. Language Support Teachers were part of a Borough wide team and after a while I was promoted to In-Service Co-ordinator where I helped to produce a journal, arrange in-service sessions for the Language Support Team once a month and provide support to mainstream staff in the 14 secondary schools in the Borough.

During this period many changes were taking place and a key area was in the field of anti-racist education. I became a member of Cranford's Multi-cultural Working Party where new policies were being produced and new syllabi written. I also acted as facilitator in a number of Anti-Racist Training Days in my local borough of Hounslow. Such experience means that I am conscious of the needs of ethnic minority groups and have experience of curriculum development which includes rather than excludes the cultures present in a school.

I spent four years as In-service Co-ordinator and began a search for promotion. After a number of unsuccessful applications for posts, I was finally appointed to the London Borough of Harrow as Secondary Phase Co-ordinator for their language support team. This began in September 1990 and I found settling into a new post in Harrow difficult. The main reason was because I was working in two secondary schools with one day allocated for co-ordinating. At that time Somali refugees were arriving and in each school I was the only language support teacher available. I found myself in a position where it was virtually impossible to do the job properly and feel any sense of achievement.

### **Interest in travelling**

During my period in the theatre I developed a taste for travel and spent many summers hitchhiking around Europe with friends. In 1964 I decided to extend my holiday and left my two girlfriends in Florence to travel to Athens with two Americans. They abandoned me in Rome and I continued my journey with a variety of people I met in Youth Hostels. Eventually I ended up in Frankfurt in late August and decided to look for work. There was not much choice because I did not have a work permit but I found someone who took me on as a chamber-maid and worked in a hotel illegally for nearly three months. I returned home in November, having become fluent in German, and took up my acting "career" once more. Such knowledge of German proved useful in my early days in Czechoslovakia as German is commonly spoken by at least the older generation.



In 1983 I joined a group of Hounslow teachers on an educational tour of Pakistan and India from where many of our pupils' parents originated. To encounter aspects of the imperialist legacy of the British in the Indian subcontinent was fascinating. I recall the Punjabi schools where the pupils were dressed in English school uniforms, the predominance of the English language and most importantly the feeling you have when abroad of representing more than just yourself but your "Englishness" as well. I re-read E.M. Forster's Passage to India on my return and was struck how astutely he had observed Indian society and how much more "The pleasure of the text"<sup>6</sup> there was to enjoy having had the experience of being there.

I also travelled twice to the Soviet Union. Once with a Sixth Form trip to Moscow and Leningrad (as it was then) for New Year and another time with a group of friends to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. I recall trying to see the positive sides of the political system because at that time, with Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister, the Communist system was heavily criticised.

A final, important holiday was a half-term break in Berlin where with a group of friends I stood at Potsdammer Platz and looked over the Wall to "no-man's land" and wondered if in our lifetime we would ever see a change. Two years later I stood at the same place and watched hundreds of East Germans pouring through the newly opened border as I hacked at the wall with a small knife and brought home tiny pieces of the Berlin Wall as souvenirs.

#### **Links with the Czech Republic:**

In addition to teaching drama, I wrote theatre reviews for a local newspaper The Middlesex Chronicle. One of my regular theatres was "The Orange Tree" in Richmond run by Sam Walters. It was at this theatre, a room over a pub, that the name Vaclav Havel first came to my notice. Sam Walters supported the Czech dissident playwright and his involvement with Charter 77. I reviewed a number of his plays and was present at the reconstruction of the "VONS" trial which put Havel in prison for a long sentence<sup>1</sup>.

On the 11th November 1989 the Berlin Wall came down. As mentioned above I flew over to Berlin for a weekend on 24th November and saw for myself what was taking place. It was tremendously exciting and for me the news of events in Czechoslovakia was even more so. On November 17th a demonstration by students in Prague was viciously broken up by the police and after a wave of demonstrations the old regime collapsed and a new one took its place. The new President was the dissident playwright Vaclav Havel, a name not unknown to me and whose work I knew well.

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 1, Context: a. Czech History

In the half-term of February 1990 I visited Prague for the first time and heard President Havel speak in the Old Town Square. I remember sitting on my own below the Statue of Jan Hus at the end of the four days and thinking that I wanted to return and do something to help the emerging democracy. As luck would have it during my trawl of jobs in The Times Education Supplement I noticed an article about the Jan Hus Foundation. They were looking for volunteers to teach in an English Language Summer School in Czechoslovakia so I applied and was selected.

I returned to Prague in July 1990 en route for Brno where the Summer School was to take place. I was collected and taken to the family in Brno with whom I would be staying. Over the next two weeks I learned an enormous amount about Czech culture and particularly about the totalitarian regime which they had been living under. I also made a number of friends including the family I stayed with. Few foreigners from the West had yet visited Brno so we were still an exotic sight. The Canadians had very quickly tried to support the new Czechoslovakia and sent many idealistic volunteers over to teach English. Unfortunately in the speed of response many of these well-meaning people proved not to be qualified teachers and some disillusionment with them set in. The Summer School I taught on had the first qualified teachers and it was clear that our expertise was appreciated. This contrasted strongly to the way teachers were being viewed in the UK at that time where they were taking the blame for "falling standards". The following comments by some of the students gives a flavour of the reactions to the students at Summer school:

Růta Kračmar recalls the excitement:

*"I felt so happy that summer. At last the fruits of 1989 revolution came: we could be in touch with the rest of the world. My English was of reading National Geographic Magazine in 80's and now I could listen to the alive language. And the teachers overcame my expectations, the lessons were so interesting, so human. I could not sleep....."*

Petr Kraus observed:

*"The summer school teachers brought along their multicultural and multiracial orientation and tolerance, which our society needed then and needs so badly today..."*

Stána Gruntová was surprised by how much we knew about their country:

*"...and surprised us all with their great knowledge of the Czech underground and dissident culture during the previous communism regime."*

Ludmila Gotfrydová was impressed by the positive thinking of the summer school teachers:

*"...which eventually changed our attitudes to our own lives. They brought us a chance to hear and a chance to speak in 'real and sometimes even correct English conversation', which chances were non-existent for us before".*

While in Brno I had realised the lack of reading materials in English and so I started a scheme with financial support from the Jan Hus Foundation to send donated books from England to the Cultural Centre where the Summer School had taken place. A room was put aside in the Cultural Centre and now it has become the International Library. It is still the only place in Brno where anyone may join for a small sum and take out novels, plays and poetry in English as well as a range of non-fiction..

I returned in the Autumn half-term of 1990 to see what was happening to the books and help classify them. The cultural organiser for English, Jirina Kotoulova, arranged a school visit for me and I was able to meet with enthusiastic pupils who were keen to meet a native speaker of English. I conducted a question and answer session and was given a beautiful bunch of flowers at the end. Native speakers of English were still very unusual away from the capital city, Prague, and I was certainly made to feel very special. This feeling of being appreciated was welcome and I was not the first teacher from England to feel the difference in attitude towards teachers.

### **Teaching in the Czech Republic:**

Meanwhile I was struggling with the new post in Harrow and by the beginning of the Spring term I knew that I wanted to work for a longer period in Czechoslovakia. I applied for a term's unpaid leave of absence in January and it was granted quickly. Through my contacts with the Jan Hus Foundation I obtained an interesting post at the Pedagogical Institute in Prague where I taught on two-day in-service courses for Czech teachers of English. A friend from Prague found me a flat, which I later discovered was a minor miracle, and I began teaching on April 16th 1991. I was earning a good salary by Czech standards of £80 a month. My rent was high as I was a foreigner, at £35 a month, so I did what most Czechs do and found a second job. Mine involved teaching English two evenings a week. Even so, while I could live reasonably in Prague provided I did not use my car too often, (the cost of petrol was prohibitive) my Czech salary did not cover the mortgage on my house in London.

I shared the teaching at the Pedagogical Institute with Simon Smith who worked for the British Council, an organisation I had hitherto known very little about. In May I attended an important conference organised by the British Council which attracted a large number of Czech and Slovak teachers of English. This key event was even "graced" with the presence of Prince Charles who in front of Professor Widdowson advocated the teaching of grammar which was exactly opposite to the theme of the conference. During the conference the plans of the British Council for a new project in

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<sup>i</sup> comments collected March 1995 at my request by Petr Kraus

the country were revealed. A number of resource centres were to be set up in key towns and various expert lecturers were to be placed in Institutions of Higher Education. Four areas were pinpointed: Pre-service Training, In-service Training, British Studies and English for Special Purposes. The advertisements for the posts appeared in "The Guardian" during the conference.

I applied for the Presett post and waited. Meanwhile at the end of May I had to decide about my post in Harrow. I telephoned the Advisor and asked if my leave of absence could be extended. He was supportive but said this was not possible so I gave in my resignation over the phone. This act in effect said goodbye at the age of 45 to a well-paid middle management job complete with pension scheme. The decision did not feel too difficult at the time because I was in a post where my skills were appreciated and my classroom techniques recognised and valued. However, I could not exist for long earning a salary lower than my mortgage.

In June I heard from the British Council who invited me for interview in Prague to save me the cost of returning to London. There were a number of Presett positions available and I was asked if I were to be appointed whether I had a preference. I said that I had many contacts in Brno and would prefer to go there. After a wait of two weeks, while the remainder of the candidates were interviewed in London, I heard that I had been given a post and that it would be in Brno. This meant not only a challenging and prestigious position but a tax-free British salary, continuation of my pension, a Czech salary in crowns and free accommodation in Brno where I had many friends.

That Summer I taught on the second Jan Hus Summer school and was in Prague preparing to return to England for a holiday when an early phone call from England informed me that President Gorbachev had been kidnapped. I turned CNN on the TV and the BBC World Service on the radio and spend a few hours assessing the news. I already had my flight booked for two day's later and have never been so eager to return home. The atmosphere in Prague was electric that day with the first sign of panic showing as long queues formed for petrol<sup>i</sup>. President Havel spoke to the country in the afternoon and informed everyone that there were no Russian soldiers on Czech soil. These events really brought home to me what it meant to live in the comparative safety of an island which has a stable and relatively democratic government and has led me to consider the taken-for-granted aspects of Englishness. It moved me from a position of being in opposition to many aspects of English culture to being able to see positive sides and this has clearly affected the meanings I have brought to and taken from the texts examined in this study.

Events in Russia were resolved with a rescue initiated by Boris Yeltsin and the Czechs and Slovaks breathed easily again. I returned to Prague in September 1991 to attend two day's briefing by the British Council where I met my new colleagues. After two days we were sent off to our faculties

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<sup>i</sup> The pipe-line came from the Soviet Union and could be easily stopped

in different parts of the country and I returned to a Brno where I was hardly a stranger. My feelings about teaching and learning remained the same in Brno as they had been in England. I focused on the importance of talk in the classroom and used as many strategies as I could to encourage my students to become responsible for their own learning. Experiences in the field of anti-racist education prepared me in some way to constantly reflect on my role as an agent for change.

It may be seen from the above brief account that I arrived in my position from an untypical route. I did not go to Higher Education straight from school where I was an underachiever. My teaching career was in English Comprehensive schools, unlike many British Council lectures who lecture to adults in Higher Education in various parts of the world. Some have an expertise in the field of English literature but many are graduates in linguistics specialising in such areas as phonology or lexicology. Few if any would have any specialist knowledge in children's literature. The newly created British Council posts were promotion for many and while most of my colleagues had a growing interest in the Czech Republic, their route there was driven by career prospects first. I had a more emotional attachment through knowing Vaclav Havel's plays, making close friends after my first Summer school and subsequent experience of teaching in Prague. This is not to say that either my professional experience and reasons for being in Brno were superior but merely different.

It may seem from reading my account of the ethnographic research undertaken and the subsequent analysis that I have negative feelings about Czech people and their culture. This is not so because I have positive feelings about the country where I never before experienced such kindness, hospitality and patience. The criticism is not of the people but the effects of the totalitarian system and the legacy of that regime. I admire the strength, perseverance and good humour of my Czech friends who have had to live under a system, only a fraction of which might just be understood by those of us fortunate enough to be born and brought up in "The West".

## Appendix III

### Example Transcription

#### Cohort B Group 4

Daniela Pokorna (b), Jana Krumlova (new this year) Lucie Neradilova (b)

(The students had discussed their meanings of "culture" and had written down all the things they could think of concerning English culture)

Sandra: I'm now going to ask you where did you get your impressions of Englishness from? Before you went, for example What sort of picture did you have in your head? Where did that come from?  
(pause)

Lucie: Literature, from magazines

Sandra: Literature and magazines

Daniela: Guests

Sandra: TV films

Daniela: Guests because we had alot of guests in our house and we.....? their English

Sandra: So you, you've met quite a few English people?

Daniela: Yes

Sandra: So fewer, there weren't so many surprises when you were in England

Lucie: Not so many because my sister had been there for a half year so/

Sandra: She gave you alot of information. You were well prepared were you?

(pause - laughter)

Lucie: Yes I was

Sandra: There are still surprises though aren't there? So where else have you got your impressions?

Books, films, people you met

All: Teachers

Sandra: Native teachers. Right now is the difficult one. Ready? What sort of impressions did you get about English culture from the children's literature course that we did? you might want to remind yourselves of what we did and what we read/

Lucie: I think that they are bringing up in a rather different way than we are/

Sandra: mmm

Lucie: We've read, I don't know, The Iron Man it was really strange and I think that children who read are reading or who read such a book must be in a way different from us.

Sandra: Mmmm

(sounds of agreement from the others)

Lucie: because we are brought up with things like princes and kings and fairy tales and such like and/

Sandra: When you children stop reading fairy tales here in the Czech Republic? What sort of age?

(pause) roughly, I mean/

All: 12/13

Sandra: Ah ha, and when they get to 12,13 what sort of things do they read then?

(pause)

Daniela: More

Sandra: So they sort of go on, they go from sort of reading children's fairy stories to more adult stuff.

Daniela: To fairy stories for adults

(laughter)

Lucie: And girls read er books er with/

(laughter)

Sandra: Oh yes, romance

(laughter)

Sandra: And the boys are reading what Science Fiction?

All: mmmm

Sandra: So that sort of area of that age group the sort of books that we were reading probably there aren't such books here. (pause) Would there be anything like The Deathwood Letters here?

Jana: I don't know it  
Sandra: You haven't done the course yet - you will, you will  
(laughter)  
Lucie: Well maybe there are but I don't know anything.  
Sandra: Did that give you quite a strong impression of England? The Deathwood Letters?  
Lucie: Not an impression of England but England with literature for children  
Sandra: Yes, you got more of an impression of what children are given  
Lucie: Yes  
Sandra: Did anything else surprise you? Any of the other stories that we read?  
(pause)  
Daniela: Maybe about the bear Pooh. Because er I realised it was strange when I was reading that when I was young but I liked it also as English children read it too Pooh, it was very important  
Sandra: Did you enjoy reading it when you were young in Czech?  
Daniela: No  
(laughter)  
Daniela: It was strange. I liked things in a way realistic  
Sandra: Yes..when you were reading Winnie the Pooh in Czech did you think of it, not at the time cos you were too young, did you think that this was a Czech story or an English story?  
Daniela: Czech  
Sandra: Yes, cos I remember Grimm's fairy stories as a little girl and I thought they were English stories  
Daniela: Cos everything we were taught was maybe by your parents, or if you read it even if the name was/  
Sandra: Yes, like Hans I mean there's always somebody called Hans  
Daniela: Cos it was in Czech and/  
Sandra: It was only later that I began to think, Hansel and Gretel, you know, The Gingerbread House, those names are certainly not English  
Daniela: They had Czech names  
Sandra: Oh, they had Czech names did they?  
Daniela: Jiri and Marjenka  
Sandra: Ah, ha  
Daniela: Typical old Czech names  
Sandra: Czech names, they're translated into English but we still kept the German names. So Hans I always thought perhaps his name's Hands and they'd missed the 'd' out I could never work it out.  
(laughter) as a child, What did you think about those poems in the anthology Culture Shock. Do you remember those?  
Daniela: It was very bad, I thought well is this for children?  
Lucie: It was for older maybe I like it even when I am 20  
Sandra: Yes, yes. Why do you think I chose those? For the course, I mean out of the many things I could have chosen why do you think I chose Culture Shock? Any idea of my motivation?  
(pause)  
Lucie: Because it was different styles... maybe and ...interesting and some really funny poetry because I think people don't like poetry so much as er ...?  
Sandra: mmm  
Lucie: Got to show they're being poetic and interesting  
Sandra: ...and also to ... connected with aspects of English culture now with the sorts of issues  
Lucie: mmm  
Sandra: about how women are feeling and race and there's some very funny poems too weren't there. What was that one about...there was a very funny one that people liked about being in love  
(pause)  
Sandra: I wish my name was Imelda or something/  
Daniela: Oh yes  
Sandra: Lot's of people chose that one to read  
Daniela: Yes  
Sandra: To read (to Jana) You'll get all these later because you haven't done the course yet  
(laughter)  
(Pause)

Anything else in particular you thought you got from the children's literature course or was connected with notions about England or children that you want to add?

(pause)

Lucie: The other book with the poems that we read was quite surprising

Sandra: Mmm the Walter de la Mare?

Lucie: Mmm because it was quite interesting for me but surprising about what children were reading

Sandra: mm

Lucie: If it just a school book or

Sandra: A good point. Lot's of people ask this question

Lucie: I mean I would like to know if children really are interested in Alice in Wonderland ????

Sandra: The language is very difficult and it's not for younger children but it's still around you still see it. There's lots of different versions as well. There's cartoon versions and so I think there's something in Alice that most children enjoy but they wouldn't sit down and read the original Alice/

Daniela: Mmm... When I saw it on TV when I was young and I didn't like it at all.

Sandra: Ah ha

Daniela: I didn't like it because it was not very ? it was different behaviour and I didn't understand it. I didn't like it.

Sandra: No. It's not an easy book. It's why it was the last book we read on the course.

Daniela: Hmmm

Sandra: I certainly would never start a course with that book. And there's lots and lots and lots of other interesting meanings in it and other interesting books around it but the idea of eating mushrooms and growing in size ..the Queen rushing around saying "Off with their head" . But there are many different versions of it

(pause)

OK shall I turn the tape off? Unless you've got anything else? That was lovely.

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