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An examination of children's inter-action with fiction, leading to the development of methodologies to elicit and communicate their responses

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an examination and analysis of the social contexts of children's response to fiction in order to contribute to a theoretical perspective of literary response as a continuous process. The absence of a consideration of the way that readers are socially constructed renders any conception of literary response incomplete, and a discussion of textual, psychoanalytic and cultural theories of response reveals a gap which Children's Literature must fill. The marginalisation of Children's Literature within literary discourses silences children as readers by denying the recognition of literary engagement inherent in early experiences with fiction. In addition, an investigation of the meta-discourse which surrounds Children's Literature, through criticism, education and provision, demonstrates the way that adult mediations between children and fiction frequently interrupt an innate desire for an authoritative position for the reader within the text, replacing dynamic creative engagement with static modes of reading. In particular, an analysis of the provision of children's books, including the processes of editing, selection and marketing, makes it clear, for the first time, that the social contexts of children's fiction, from jacket design to library selection, influence the construction of readers. A new method of empirical research, based on psychoanalysis, phenomenography and Chambers's 'Tell Me' approach to booktalk, provides evidence of the interplay of desire and control in the social construction of readers and reinforces the need for shared discourses. This method is illustrated by the Book Choice Study, consisting of seven individual case studies with children, their parents and teachers, which reveals the importance of an individual's reading history in the promotion of either *dynamic* or *static* modes of reading. The study shows that children who engage in a *shared discourse* about fiction are more likely to participate in a 'literary' engagement than those who experience a *divided discourse*, confirming the need for a construction of response that includes children and their books.

AN EXAMINATION OF CHILDREN'S INTER-ACTION WITH FICTION,
LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF METHODOLOGIES TO ELICIT AND
COMMUNICATE THEIR RESPONSES

DEBORAH COGAN THACKER

**A thesis submitted in complete fulfilment
of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

OCTOBER 1996

Coventry University in collaboration with
Worcester College of Higher Education

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father

EDWARD J COGAN

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INTRODUCTION

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

This thesis is about the interconnections between children and fiction and the adult forces which mediate them, with the intention of addressing the silence of children within the complex world of children's literature. Through an examination of theoretical perspectives of literary response, I will demonstrate that the absence of a consideration of children and their texts not only impoverishes any conception of literature that privileges the role of the reader, but also offers a definition of literature that marginalises children as readers.

The separation of concerns indicated by such an absence is also evident in many of the discourses which directly address children's literature. While theoretical perspectives emphasise the active role of the reader in making meaning (Iser 1978, Eco 1979, Culler 1982), the deep pleasures of literary engagement (Barthes 1975) and the origins of such pleasure in infant desires and the dawning of subjectivity (Lacan 1977, Brooke 1984, Kristeva 1986), discourses which surround the provision and mediation of children's literature reveal a tension between a view of fiction as 'a primary act of mind' (Hardy in Meek, et al, 1977) and the use of fiction as a form of control and subjugation. Through an analysis of recent developments in Children's Literature theory and criticism, and an investigation of educational policy and practice, as well as the publishing and provision of children's books, I will argue that many of the ways in which children's literature is talked about further silences the voices of children, by offering them only passive reading positions and static texts.

The problematic nature of children's literature, and the role of adults in the construction of readers and the mediation of child/book inter-actions is now acknowledged (Rose 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, Reynolds 1994, Hunt 1995a, Wilkie 1995). In particular, a focus on these adult-controlled discourses calls attention

to the relationship between adult efforts to mediate books on behalf of children and the extent to which children are silenced as active and creative readers. Attempts to re-define Children's Literature as a field of study emphasise the need to challenge unexamined assumptions of how children read, indicating the need to learn, from children, about how they respond to the texts they read.

[W]e now stand on the brink of discovering, if we want to *from children* what they think reading is good for and how they do it.

(Meek, 1990:106)

Not only is it necessary to learn what children do when they read, such information must be understood within the framework of adult mediations which control how children acquire ways of reading. In other words, in order to discover how children become the kinds of readers they do, it is necessary to place their responses in a social context.

In the attempt to gain such a perspective of the social modes of response, I will suggest a new approach to empirical research which aims to give children a voice within the discourses of literature. The non-directive methodology developed for a series of case studies with seven children is intended to provide a model for a new direction in response research. This Book Choice study, in which children talked to me about their methods of choosing books and their responses to the books that they had chosen, took place over nine months, and allowed me to test a research approach that avoided the strictures of a fixed agenda of questioning, and enabled the children as subjects to talk about their reading 'in their own terms'.

By considering the reading histories of the individual children who took part in the case studies, I have been able to go further than previous research into children's response to fiction (Fry 1985, Sarland 1991, Rudd 1992, Mackey 1995) framing response in the

context of social forces which influenced both the provision of texts (including peritextual features of jacket design and blurb) and perceptions about the purpose of fiction. In addition, the wider perspective offered by the investigation of the discourses which surround children's literature allowed me to view the ways in which these children responded to both the texts and the research situation in relation to the broader social and cultural discourses which determine both the provision of texts and the construction of readers.

In general, these studies showed that the younger children were more likely to engage with fiction in an authorial and creative way than children who had spent some time in school. What is more, there was a clear correlation between 'literary engagement' and the extent to which adults entered into a shared discourse with children about books. Because the study required me, as a mediating adult, to talk with these children about books, the research situation was found to affect the way in which children chose to respond over the nine months of the study, though this was not the original intention.

Though most empirical reading research with children has a pedagogic aim (Cochran-Smith 1984, Lewis 1995, Styles and Watson 1996), it is not the intention of this research to propose new approaches to literacy or to suggest new ways of teaching reading. As my discussion of the discourses of education makes clear, this is already being done by numerous teacher-researchers (Kimberley et al 1992, Chambers 1993, Corcoran et al, 1994). I do not have the appropriate experience of children or the classroom to take such a position. However, in the course of my research, and in particular, the formulation of the methodology for the empirical research, I have suggested that the need to give children a voice within the discourses of literature has pedagogic importance.

My interest in children's literature stems from a background in Literary Studies which has been largely text-based and previous research into the image of childhood in

Victorian fiction. As a parent, I have watched my children's involvement with fiction with fascination. I have become aware of the ability of very young children to recognise the fictionality of fiction and to respond to the authorial voice within the text, while at the same time, retaining the willingness to suspend disbelief and become submerged in a text.

At the same time, as a teacher of literature at BA and MA level, I have observed the difficulty that the majority of my students have when asked to respond to fictional text in any way other than to comment on plot and character. Their unwillingness, or inability, to engage with language and the plurality of meaning as well as their reluctance to offer personal responses or to read with any sense of pleasure has caused me to question the ways in which they have learned to read, and specifically, what they have learned about the purpose of fiction and their function as readers.

In the course of my teaching, informal investigations into the reading background of several hundred of my students, carried out over four years, has revealed a poverty and a sameness in their childhood reading experiences and attitudes to reading fiction which belie the nature of literature as transformational and central to the formation of a subject position (Rosenblatt 1978, Bruner 1986, Stephens 1992 etc.). General public concern regarding the impoverishment of reading in the majority of the population, anxiety about literacy levels and the predominance of formulaic and static texts is clearly related to the separation of expectations of the demands of fiction during childhood and adulthood. The disjunction between the active and dynamic response to fiction in very young children, and the passive and static modes of reading evident in my students is addressed in this research.

I will argue that it is the exclusion of children as readers of fiction from a theoretical conception of literary response and the separation of children's literature from an understanding of literary engagement that reinforces the silence of children within the

discourses of fiction. What is more, the absence of a consideration of children's literature as part of literature as a whole impinges directly on the ability of children to have a voice within a fictional text; to engage in a communicative exchange with an author and to take a dynamic role in the making of meaning.

The recent development of Children's Literature as a field of study (Hunt 1991, Nodelman 1992, Wilkie 1995, etc.) and, in particular, the application of contemporary literary theory concerning the plurality of texts and the role of the reader to engage actively in the construction of meaning, indicates the shared concerns that include all readers. The growing emphasis on the social contexts of response, which focuses on the 'discursive regimes' that mediate between the reader and the text (Bennett, 1982), demand a recognition of the way that the discourses that surround the role of literature in education and the system of provision of books for children impinge on the way in which any individual becomes a reader.

The status of literature as a culturally privileged art form, rather than as a communicative exchange between author and reader, has had a direct bearing on the continued marginalisation of children's literature, but I will argue that the development toward a theoretical mapping of literature that focuses on the function of language to encourage "the recreative dialectics in the reader" (Iser, 1978:30) demands a new paradigm of literary study centred on the history of response, and thus includes children as readers and the texts through which they become readers.

This call for a radical re-focus which includes children's literature is not new. While Meek attempted to shape the direction of children's literature research in 1980 by urging a consideration of literature as a continuum, her proposal has not been effectively answered.

I'm convinced that, to match the necessary new view of literacy we need a new cosmology of literature in general, that includes what children read and the texts by which they come to know literature. (Meek, 1980:36)

Although a recognition of the role children's experiences of fiction play in the construction of adult readers is clear in the work of many specialists in the field, such a project cannot be addressed solely within the realms of Children's Literature theory and criticism, as a distinct discourse. It is the intention of this thesis to propose a paradigm of literature that resists the separation of concerns, but is founded on a shared discourse that dissolves the boundaries between adult literary theory and the special case of children's literature and views literary engagement as a continuum.

Only when there is a recognition, in the mainstream of literary theory, of the notion of process which includes the ways in which children are constructed as readers of fiction, will the specialist concerns of children's literature theorists be elevated to the status they deserve. Rather than being marginalised as an adjunct to education or library studies, the study of the inter-action between children and fiction should be perceived as central to an understanding of the ways in which fictional texts become the focus of desire and control, and how the force of language includes or excludes readers from an active literary engagement with an author. Acknowledging the notion of process which includes children's experience of fiction would not only contribute to a fuller understanding of intertextuality and the relationship between narratives and subjectivity, but would also inform the discourses which mediate child/book interactions, and thus emphasise the importance both of texts and the social contexts of children's literature in the construction of adult readers.

An historicist view of children's literature which emphasises the socio-historic contexts of texts suggests a perspective which includes the extra-textual forces that control texts and thus influence their use. Watkins considers that narratives (including the stories we tell our children)

contribute to children's sense of identity, an identity that is simultaneously personal and social: narratives, we might say, shape the way that children find a home in the world. (Watkins, in Hunt, 1992:183)

More needs to be done, however, to explore the intricacies of this claim. For not only do such narratives perform an essential function in the sense implied here, they also contribute to the sense children grow to have of themselves as 'makers' of such narratives; of their own function on both personal and social levels as active participators in the construction of not only stories, but 'possible' worlds (Chambers 1985, Bruner 1986). Thus, the stories we tell our children contribute to their evolving conception of their relationship to the dominant power structures represented by language.

In this sense, the way that stories are told and delivered, and the way that the function of such fictional narratives are conceived, define relationships to language for children which either offer them a voice within the narration, or silence them. The implications of the central role of fiction in the construction of a subject position extend beyond the bounds of childhood and it thus becomes necessary to question the extent to which the innate desire for autonomy motivates our relationships with language. The thesis addresses these issues as they affect all readers.

Most of the work on the relationship between focalization and subjectivity in fiction, and its effect on the transaction between readers and texts, still remains to be done. It is, I think, one of the most important areas to be developed in the criticism not only of children's fiction, but of fiction in general.
(Stephens, 1992:82)

Thus, in the study of children's literature that I propose, I am not only concerned with the images that children are confronted with in fiction, or the utopian vision of possibility engendered by the fantastic, but with the extent to which young readers

learn about selfhood and autonomy in the process of engaging in a communicative exchange with another human being - the author. Such an exchange is at the centre of notions of literary engagement, and it is the socio-cultural mediations of adults on behalf of children that enable or, more frequently, disable such a process.

Literature expects its readers to be 'in the know' about the bond between the author and the reader.....But unless this gamesmanship is part of the initiation rite of learning to read, the author-reader relationship cannot be established, and many a potential reader is lost to literature. (Meek, 1980:35)

The extent to which readers are encouraged to look, to reflect on their function as readers and their own authority within the process of making meaning within a fictional narrative, is central to the intention of giving children a voice.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis has three parts. In Part One (Chapters One, Two and Three), I explore a range of theoretical perspectives concerning reader response, in order to describe the absence of a consideration of children as readers and the texts that they read. Chapter One focuses on theories which address the relationship between reader and text, Chapter Two considers the origins of response through an examination of psychological and psychoanalytic models of readers and Chapter Three investigates cultural theories of response and proposes a re-reading of Bakhtinian theory to incorporate childhood experience of language and text.

In Part Two (Chapters Four, Five and Six) I describe and analyse the meta-discourse which surrounds children's literature in particular. The purpose of this section of the thesis is two-fold. On the one hand, it is intended to provide a perspective of the social modes of response as they affect all readers, and thus to suggest ways in which the

special case of children's literature can fill the gap in the theoretical mapping of literature discussed in Part One. On the other hand, Part Two looks forward to the formation of a research methodology demonstrated in Part Three and provides the social context for the readings that took place during the empirical research.

Chapter Four discusses recent developments in Children's Literature theory and criticism and emphasises the incorporation of contemporary theory. Chapter Five is concerned with the discourses of education and examines the tensions between progressive educationalists who acknowledge the need for change and the pragmatics of the way fiction is used as an educational tool. Examples of reading policy documents and transcribed interviews with teachers contribute to this argument. Chapter Six provides a detailed description of the contexts of provision of fiction for children. The information presented in this chapter is largely new, and includes the results of my consultation with editors, sales managers, book marketers, library selection panel members, book wholesalers, book club managers and book sellers.

Part Three (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine) comprises a description of the development of an approach to talking to children about fiction and how they read it. In Chapter Seven, I discuss previous empirical research into children's response to fiction, and examine a number of influences in the formulation of a new methodology, including psychoanalysis and phenomenography, and in Chapter Eight, I report on the Book Choice Study, which involved seven individual case studies over a period of nine months. My rationale for choosing the books that were used during the study is contextualised within my own reading background. In particular, I describe a way of distinguishing between texts in terms of the opportunities for either active or passive modes of reading offered by the narration, and thereby suggest a new way of classifying texts as potentially static or dynamic. Each of the seven individual case studies is described in order of the child's age, and each is placed in a context of the

child's own reading history, gleaned from transcribed interviews with parents and teachers.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, I analyse the results of the Book Choice study, in order to reflect both on the success of the research method, and on the extent to which the results contribute to a theoretical perspective of response within a social context. In doing so, I discuss the implications of different modes of mediation between children and books, suggesting that there is a contrast between shared and divided discourses and demonstrating how the research method itself provided a form of shared discourse which influenced the kinds of reading that took place. In addition, I raise questions about the refinement of the method and suggest further research that can contribute to a paradigm of literary response as a continuous process.

PART ONE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

If literary theory is concerned with exploring the nature of literature and 'literary engagement', it is necessary to view the inter-action between the reader and the text in terms of a continuum. Literature for children is largely disregarded in theoretical considerations of the inter-action between text and reader. This marginalisation is marked by the degree to which children's literature is regarded as separate from the realms of 'literary engagement' and indicated by its absence within the discourses of the hierarchy of critics and commentators. The separation of discourses, presupposes an 'otherness' regarding children and their inter-actions with fiction, and thus ignores the role such inter-actions play in the construction of all readers. This exclusion, I will argue, results in the representation of an incomplete, and therefore false, picture of the complex inter-relationship between readers and texts, particularly in terms of response. This absence of a consideration of the beginnings of response to fiction - its relation to the invitation of the text, to the dawning of subjectivity and to the material reality of books - leaves a profound gap in the theory of literature. Both adult and child are poorly served by this disregard.

This thesis, which investigates the matrix of literature and children and how this is mediated by the adult world, addresses the silences around the inter-action of children and their responses to fiction. The gap in modern literary theory contributes to this silence, and the following three chapters form a framework which delineates the absence of, and suggests a place for, the consideration of children and literature. As I will make clear in Chapter Four, many theorists concerned with both a poetics and a pragmatics of children's literature are readily embracing theoretical approaches concerned with semiotics, response and psychoanalysis. However, it is clear that the inter-action between the child reader and the book is ignored in the broader view of literature subscribed to by a significant number of theorists (Chambers, 1985:133). It

is equally clear that the marginalisation of Children's Literature as a field of study within the academy is both a symptom and a cause of this separation of discourses.

I will illustrate my argument with a survey of a wide range of theories. The eclectic nature of contemporary literary theory must be admitted, and though it is impossible to encompass the wide ranging body of work labelled 'Theory', my principal concern is with the theoretical perspectives which come under the broad heading of Response Theory. By placing the emphasis on the inter-action between the text, the reader and the social mediations which determine these inter-actions, I will be able to illustrate the place that should be occupied by the theory of Children's Literature.

Eagleton (1983) traces the rise of literary theory, beginning by describing the developments of 19th century thought, which held literature to be an imaginative artefact and an alternative to the rationalist ideologies "enslaved to 'fact'"(1983:21). Belsey (1980) also places the historical beginnings of literary theory in the Romantic movement, contemporary with the rise of industrial capitalism, which initiated the process of endowing certain texts with a worth which had little to do with mere enjoyment, but depended instead on a magical and timeless value inherent in great art (Belsey: 125).

This reification of the creative spirit and of literature as an art form, coterminous with the development of modern aesthetics, is viewed by Eagleton as a process which moved from the Romantic preoccupation with the author, and culminated in the development of literature as an academic discipline after World War I. The emphasis on Liberal Humanism, and the rise of the academic critic and theorist of literature as a judge of literary value, served to mediate the text in terms of its objective qualities, and isolate considerations of literary quality from a socio-political context. The rise of English in the academy, assisted by the canonisation of key texts by F R Leavis, for instance, and the emphasis on textual analysis by the New Critics, in turn, make it

perhaps more readily understandable that the texts aimed primarily at a child audience were ignored. The formalist tendency, present in the practice of many theorists, from the New Critics to the Structuralist movement, privileged the autonomy of the text in a quasi-scientific discourse which defined and described an objective system for criticising and, therefore, privileging certain texts, as well as the role of the critic. The absence of the consideration of literature for children, and the corresponding assumption that both the texts and the readers were somehow separate and inferior, had as much to do with the concentration on development of the subject of English in the academy as it did with the growth of Liberal Humanism in the education system as a whole (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994).

However, it is more surprising that the radical shift in emphasis toward reader-oriented approaches to texts did not include the texts of childhood. The general mood of self-reflexiveness, analogous to "the principles of relativity and uncertainty as they emerged in physics early in this century" (Suleiman: 4), while proposing a rejection of the primacy of the text and a recognition of the multiplicity of meaning, has not led to an acknowledgement of process in the construction of readers. A recognition of the "relevance of context" and a re-emphasis on the role of the audience have become central to contemporary criticism in the last twenty years, and it is the focus on the reader's role in making meaning in the text which implies a view of readership as a continuum. However, as the following chapters will demonstrate, this perspective is sadly missing from the work of prominent Response theorists.

CHAPTER ONE TEXTUAL THEORIES OF RESPONSE

The perspectives offered by the rejection of the objective apprehension of the text toward an emphasis on the role of the reader suggests a transformation in the way literature can be thought about. The multiplicity and subjectivity of meaning suggested by such theoretical shifts implicate the reader as an active participant within the text, rendering the text as dependent on the reading position taken up by any reader. Such a theoretical position is true for all readers and all texts, and in particular demands an understanding of how readers are enabled to take up this creative responsibility. The role of children's literature in the construction of readers is obvious to many theorists working in the field, but remains on the margins of a theoretical perspective of the inter-action between reader and text.

It is important to point out, as many have done, that Reader-oriented criticism embraces a large and varied collection of theoretical positions. Suleiman (1980), Tompkins (1980) and Beach (1993) stress the multiplicity and divergence of Reader Response theories and categorise them variously, though all admit to an interplay among the categories. This is not, as Suleiman states "a negative eclecticism but a positive necessity." (1980:7). The diversity of theories is most plainly described by Beach who provides an organising framework which delineates them in terms of

an extremely wide range of attitudes toward, and assumptions about, the role of the reader, the text, and the social/cultural context shaping the transaction between reader and text. (Beach: 2)

In addition, he includes the work of critics from other disciplines who are not readily labelled 'response' theorists; those who offer perspectives on feminist and Marxist theory, phenomenology, rhetoric, cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis among them. However, it is his particular concern with the influences of these theoretical contexts in actively shaping the reading transaction which is of interest to this thesis in

general. Because the theoretical perspectives on response surveyed here must finally be considered in relation to interactions of real readers with the books they read, Beach's nod toward practice adds an important dimension to this work.

The absence of the child reader and the children's book as text in Reader Response theory is both surprising and dangerous. While Children's Literature critics (Meek 1988, Chambers 1980, Hunt 1991, Nodelman, 1992, etc.) recognise the relevance of theoretical constructions of the text offered by Iser, Culler, Bruner, Barthes, Rabinowitz and others, these 'adultist' theorists largely ignore the inscription of the reader in the text if the reader is a child and the text a children's book. This is particularly surprising, as the emphasis on 'intertextuality' and dependence on recognition of codes within any text derived from previous reading experiences is a common thread in theories of reception.

An investigation of these theories will reveal the common ground between the child and adult reader, and thus support the contention that the consideration of children's literature must be included in a theory which pertains to response.

One of the central precepts of Reader Response criticism is the notion of the literary text as a form of communication. Although this definition does not appear to take into account the extent to which 'literary' is a value-laden term (Sutherland, 1990, Hunt, 1991), I will argue later that it is necessary to accept a definition of literary text as a dialogue between reader and author in order to reveal the degree to which ascribing an elevated or elitist value to 'literature' affects response. It is clear that using the term 'literature' problematises the status of children's fiction, both in the academy (Shavit, 1986) and in the marketplace, in addition to functioning as a form of mediation that influences the inter-action between the child and the book.

However, a model of literature as a form of communication offers a view of the literary text which privileges the reader and suggests an awareness on the part of both author and reader of their respective roles in the communicative act and, therefore, gives responsibility to the reader in the making of meaning. This is supported by Pratt (1977), who argues that Formalist assumptions that 'literary' language is essentially different to the natural language used in ordinary speech acts is invalid.

The formal and functional similarities between literary and natural narrative can be specified in terms of similarities in the speech situation and their differences identified in terms of the differences in that situation. (Pratt, 1977:73)

This approach to literary language highlights the context-dependent nature of the literary work and thus emphasises the nature of the communicative exchange between producer and receiver of the text. Speech Act theory has been very influential in drawing theorists away from a belief in "the linguistic autonomy of language"(Pratt, 23), investing the reader with rights in a natural exchange within a socially derived context. This acquisition of the rights of the reader is central to the process by which the individual becomes a reader, and though the degree to which the context influences this communication can be seen in the empirical evidence of the child's response to fiction (Cochran-Smith 1984, Fry 1985, Sarland 1991), it is ignored within a theoretical perspective of response.

However, the concern for the rights of the reader is not a particularly contemporary one. Long before the description of the implied author and implied reader encoded in the text was posited by Booth (1961), or the intended reader was discussed by Iser (1978), the fundamental nature of the reader's role and the concomitant implications for the freedom of the individual were explored by Sartre (1947 in Lodge, 1972). In his essay, 'Why Write?', the 'literary object' is described as a top which exists only in movement, implying that it is only the act of reading that brings the black marks on the

page to life. His argument, dependent on both his existential philosophy and Marxist politics, posits a creative role of the reader.

Thus, for the reader, all is to do and all is already done; the work exists only at the exact level of his capacities; while he reads and creates, he knows that he can always go further in his reading, can always create more profoundly, and thus the work seems to him as inexhaustible and opaque as things.

(Sartre in Lodge, 1972:375)

This active and creative role for the reader is reiterated in much reader-oriented criticism, though the political implications for the reader's autonomy in a broader context is not a primary focus¹. The Reader Response theorists who concern themselves with the text itself are the subject of this chapter. The various perspectives offered by Iser, Culler, Barthes, Rabinowitz, and others, explore the ways in which communicative exchanges between author and reader are encoded in the text, and in so doing, delineate a gap in the map of a continuum of response. The 'pleasure' ascribed to a 'writerly' engagement with text (Barthes, 1974) and the distinction between the 'open' and 'closed' texts described by Eco (1979) are central to considerations of how children become readers.

By privileging the 'literary' text, and so, by implication, the inter-action between the text and the adult reader, Iser defines literature in a way that can be seen to include the child reader as well. For, if it is the active and creative participation of the reader that determines what we call 'literature', then children's literature must be included in that definition (Chambers 1980, 1993, Meek 1988, 1992, Hunt, 1991). My investigation of the recent developments in Children's Literature theory in Chapter Four persuasively supports this argument. Of course, the invitation to become an active and 'writerly' reader is not inscribed in all works of fiction, and it will be argued that the majority of

¹ Though the political implications of Sartre's remarks are not frequently addressed, the dichotomy between the freedom experienced by the creative reader and the tyranny of the text which closes off opportunities to share in the discourse of the text, raises a number of questions about how adults influence the construction of young readers that will be addressed in later discussions.

children's books published, and more importantly, many of the ways that texts are mediated for children, deprive their readers of the 'pleasures' of the literary engagement characterised by Iser, Barthes, Eco and others. This not only invites a question about the origin of the pleasure of shared responsibility for the text Barthes describes, but also leads us to ask whether the absence of children as readers from this picture of response is justified.

On many occasions, Iser makes it clear that the role of the reader inscribed in the text qualifies that text as 'literature' and so acts as a defining characteristic, although at other times the distinction is not made. Iser claims that "the reading process is a dynamic *interaction* between text and reader" (Iser, 1978:107), and though this remark appears to refer to all reading experiences, he implies a definition of 'literature' as a distinct category when he states:

A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative.

(Iser in Tompkins, 1980:51)

This view is shared by Bruner (1986)

stories of literary merit, to be sure, are about events in a "real" world, but they render that world newly strange, rescue it from obviousness, fill it with gaps that call upon the reader, in Barthes' sense, to become a writer, a composer of a virtual text in response to the actual. (1986:24)

Certainly, much of what Iser proposes for a theory of response is applicable to any text and for any reader. For though he admits that his theory is open to accusations of 'uncontrolled subjectivism' and that it is impossible to generalise how a reader will interpret a text, he does call for a theory which focuses "on that potential in the text which triggers the recreative dialectics in the reader." (Iser, 1978:30)

The role of the text in inscribing a particular way of reading depends on its function as a site for the author and reader to share discourse; to enter into a dialogue. The way in which the text implies a reader, which is a feature of the text and distinct from any actual reader, affects the degree to which the reader is able to "bring his own faculties into play." This happens in the realm of expectations, formed not only in 'world-to-text' dynamics, but also upon previous readings; previous textual constructions that affect the response of the reader. The intertextuality referred to here need not be restricted to the texts themselves. Both Culler (1975) and Fish (1980) wish to include the conventions which determine the way in which we expect to read. While Culler stresses the notion of 'literary competences' which the reader brings to the text, Fish ascribes 'the interpretive community' with the formation of the expectation with which a reader approaches a text. Though none of these theorists refer to the earliest experiences with text, constructions based on literary convention and expectation are learnt during childhood, both from other illocutionary acts, such as oral story-telling, and the earliest experiences of reading and being read to (Fox 1993, Engel 1995). It is the expectations that these early experiences set up, in terms of the particular structures which invite an active role for the reader, and consequently, of the pleasures to be gained from the reading experience, that influence the way in which any reader reads a text (Meek 1988, 1992).

This can be seen in relation to the competences required in response to narrative. Cohan and Shires (1988), in their theoretical analysis of narrative fiction, describe narrative as a system requiring its own competences, which are derived from a number of sources.

It is, moreover, culturally learned, reinforced by narratives of all sorts: short stories, and films, of course, but also newspapers, advertisements, histories, myths, letters, anecdotes, jokes, popular entertainments, and public ceremonies. (Cohan and Shires: 53)

It is interesting to note that, though this perspective extends the textual inscription of the reader's position in terms of the ideological functions of other illocutionary acts, there is not a mention of children's reading. It is a result of the marginal status of children's literature that this omission occurs. The communicative features of narration and the encoding of narrative conventions is seen here as distinct from any notion of process - of reading as a continuum - whereas both a theoretical view of response and evidence from reading practice indicate that the opposite is true. Though Cohan and Shires demonstrate the operation of these conventions through a discussion of film narrative, the importance of what they say can also be understood in relation to the picture book, one of the first sources of narrative which influence the construction of readers as active participants in the making of meaning (Meek 1988, Lewis 1990). The way in which the richest seam in contemporary picture books invites the reader into the polysemy of text is well understood and documented by those Children's Literature theorists concerned with the continuum of literature (Lewis 1994, Meek 1980, Moss (1990) in Hunt 1992), whereas it is ignored by the narratologist. The orchestration of picture and text, seen in the use of white space and the positioning of the reader/viewer suggested by the picture, is an appropriate adjunct to everything that can be said about narration and the position of the reader. This, then, must influence "the reader's ability to recognize the communicative features of narrative.....how it means as a telling." (Cohan and Shires:131) The disregard of the child's experience of narrative is doubly important when one considers the thrust of their argument, which emphasises the ideological force of narrative on the level of the signifying process.

a sign replaces something for someone. It can only mean if it has someone to mean *to*. Therefore, all signs depend for their signifying process on the existence of specific, concrete receivers, people *for* whom, and in whose system of belief, they have a meaning. Moreover, signs are only signs in their actual *process* of replacing something; in other words, being exchanged with it *by* a particular person or people. It is in the dialectic between the "for" and "by" that ideology maintains its momentum.

(Cohan and Shires:135)

It is clear that this conception of the signifying process is one of movement and change, and as such, has relevance to the way in which the reader has a history formed by the texts read throughout a reading life. However, it is also evident that Cohan and Shires regard readers as those who already have a 'fixed system of belief', rather than being in continual development. Of course, they are the first to admit that in order for ideology to be perpetuated, the receiving subject must be conceived of as fixed, and it is this fixing of the signifying system, through narrative, that continually occurs during childhood.

If we are to include a consideration of the beginnings of the inter-active reading process in childhood, it is necessary to investigate the extent to which we read for the author's intention. Though shifts in literary theory have emphasised the impossibility of revealing intention, we must question whether we are prepared to read as an 'ideal' reader through the mediations which influence the pragmatic process of reading, and the way we are required, from childhood, to talk about what we read. Not only does this suggest the central role that childhood reading has in any theory of response, it also suggests ways in which we, as adults, need to question how we learn to read 'on behalf of' children (Rose 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994).

The redirection of literary theory toward an investigation of the variety of interpretative operations (Culler, 1981) offers a perspective of response that includes 'intertextuality' and the conventions of reading derived from the text itself. The necessity of tracing the acquisition of literary competences is addressed by Rabinowitz in Before Reading, a title which suggests an investigation of early readings that is not delivered. By proposing a typology of narrative conventions which readers use to allow them to take on the role of the 'authorial audience', Rabinowitz (1987) extends Iser's analysis of the 'implied reader's' inscription in the text. This is defined as a hypothetical readership that attempts to read as the author intended. He says

my perspective allows us to treat the reader's attempt to read as the author intended, not as a search for the author's private psyche, but rather as the joining of a particular social/interpretive community; that is, the acceptance of the author's invitation to read in a particular socially constituted way that is shared by the author and his or her expected reader. (Rabinowitz, 1987:22)

An understanding of literature as an act of communication suggested here voices a recognition of the reader sharing with the author which is echoed in all response theory. Rabinowitz's shift in focus is determined by his interest in the reading conventions derived from previous reading experiences which influence the expectations, and so, the reading of any particular text.

Readers need to stand somewhere before they pick up a book, and the nature of that 'somewhere', I argue, significantly influences the way in which they interpret (and consequently evaluate) texts. (Rabinowitz: 2)

This theoretical position is well supported by pragmatic evidence in a number of studies (Halász, Asplund Carlsson and Marton 1991, Marton, Asplund Carlsson and Halász 1992) (see Chapter 7), but it is clear that Rabinowitz is restricting his discussion to an adult experience of text. The stasis implied by the image of a standing reader in this statement jars with the notion of process suggested by Rabinowitz. If each reading

experience and sense-making operation influences subsequent readings, then the use of conventions or competences or codes is part of a process that occurs over time. This *must* include early experiences of text and thus implies a formative role for those texts encountered in childhood.

Mackey (1995) supports this view

When writers like Iser and Rabinowitz talk about a reader's grasp of conventions and processes, they tend all too often to speak of this grasp as something *already achieved*. How a learning reader develops such an understanding seems to be regarded as a separate question. Yet, except for those readers either re-reading or processing highly formulaic text, nearly every reader is shifting and changing in relation to the role of the implied reader almost from page to page. The role of the implied reader may indeed be an interface which allows for flexibility and suppleness because the real reader is changing and developing. (Mackey: 64)

While it is necessary to challenge Mackey's contention that re-reading and the reading of formulaic text should be regarded as exceptions, her understanding of change and process is clear.

If children's experience of reading is to be included in an exploration of the kind Rabinowitz proposes, any description of the 'authorial audience' can serve as a measure of distinction between various kinds of children's fiction, for the majority of texts for children present a prescriptive authorial reading that carries the ideological and instructional force of the text. I suggest that the tendency of very young children to read against these limitations (Lehr 1988, Sarland 1991) and to subvert the conventions offered by even the most directive discourse applies directly to Rabinowitz's concerns.

actual readers may find meanings in a text that subvert the meaning apparently intended by the author. (37)

Beyond the fact that the focus of post-structuralist theory convinces us of the impossibility of locating the 'apparent intention' of the author, the extent to which Rabinowitz calls forth the spectre of an approach to literature which predominates in the construction of readers must be noted. The dichotomy between functional and literary ways of reading is blurred by Rabinowitz's dependence on authorial intention. The expectation of finding what the author intends contrasts strongly with the freedom of the 'writerly' reader to make his/her own meaning in a 'literary engagement' with text. The status of literature as a culturally privileged art form suggested by this assumption, rather than as a communicative exchange between author and reader, has a direct bearing on the continued marginalisation of Children's Literature. The way in which children are constructed as readers within the 'interpretive communities' of family, school and book-buying public, and the lack of recognition of the 'pleasure' of reading creatively and actively, both indicate the extent to which the split between these two definitions of 'literature' endangers the ability to read in a 'writerly' way (Chambers 1985).

Rabinowitz recognises this split and admits that most readers read for the author's intention most of the time, though he argues that this is not the object of reading. He describes these conventions, or reading strategies, within a structured framework, in a way that is reminiscent of Culler's description of 'literary competences'; the ways of reading that are learned over time.

To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for.

(Culler, 1975:114)

Again, the implication that a reader of literature is an active and creative agent of meaning is supported by Culler's emphasis on literature as a self-aware, self-reflexive process that is shared by Rabinowitz. According to Culler,

Interpretation is not a matter of recovering some meaning which lies behind the work and serves as a centre governing its structure; it is rather an attempt to participate in and observe the play of possible meanings to which the text gives access. (247)

Access to this freedom, although limited by the ideological constraints of language, is a right of every reader and the playfulness of the reader during the reading process implied by this Post-structuralist position may describe most precisely what young readers do. The connection between deconstructionist approaches to text and the natural ability of children to read against the text has been made by numerous Children's Literature theorists (including Hunt 1991, and Chambers 1993).

Rabinowitz, however, presents a much more structured and confining image of the reader's freedom, arguing that the importance of becoming aware of the conventions which govern our reading expectations is the only way of escaping from "the limitations imposed by traditional interpretive practices." (231)

The system of rules which Rabinowitz describes operates as an "assumed contract between author and reader" (43) and is acquired through particular reading experiences. The first category, Rules of Notice, includes conventions by which the reader is able to prioritise certain features of the text that shape how it is to be read. These features include the title of the book itself and the titles of chapters, in addition to endings. Use of repetition and changes in typeface also indicate to the reader where attention should be concentrated. A reader may evolve their knowledge of these conventions from their childhood reading, though it is not mentioned here, and it is my intention to explore this question when discussing the Book Choice Study at a later

stage (see Chapter Eight). However, though Rabinowitz includes title and chapter headings in his Rules of Notice, his disregard of the peri-text is surprising. The fact that the text is placed within a material object, the book, and that its production and presentation have a central function to the forming of expectation are surprising omissions in a book that proposes to deal with what the reader brings to the book before the reading takes place (McGann, 1991). Though I will discuss this more fully in an examination of the importance of the material production of texts in Chapter Three, the degree to which bibliographic features of the text determine expectations, and thereby affect response, must be borne in mind when considering the conventions through which we read.

While all categories in this system of conventions imply the inheritance of a life-long experience of reading, it is only when discussing Rules of Balance that Rabinowitz refers to the child reader specifically, albeit, using the phrase "*even* young readers" (my emphasis), suggesting a sense of surprise which indicates the 'otherness' of children as readers in any theoretical discussion of literature.

Rules of Balance are concerned with Action and Event and lead the reader to expect certain outcomes. These can differ according to genre. An example of Rules of Balance is given thus

it is reasonable to assume that repetitions will be continued until they are in some way blocked. Even very young readers get a sense of delight - of anticipation fulfilled - when the wolf phrases his request the same way for the third time.(132)

Because his whole argument rests on what happens 'before reading', it is strange that his expression of surprise is not replaced by an exploration of this sense of delight. In fact, the process by which this reaction to repetition happens is more miraculous than is the knowledge that these conventions exist. It is not merely the anticipation, but the

underlying power a child appears to feel in already knowing what will come that characterises the authorial reading with which Rabinowitz and other response theorists are concerned. The sensation of power, of becoming the 'teller and the told' (Meek, 1988) formed by the invitation to read actively, is part of the process by which the reading of any reader's past will inform readings to come. The tendency of young children to engage with the playfulness of such constructions is central to pleasures derived from the 'literary' engagement they seek in their inter-actions with fictional texts. Such responses will be explored in the examination of the individual readings that took place during the Book Choice Study discussed in Chapter Eight.

The degree to which the conventional ways of reading are subverted is equally affecting, as the novelty and surprise call attention to the nature of the event and thus increase a reader's awareness of the activity of reading.

the undermining of a convention is to be read at least in part as a critique of that convention. (163)

There are many examples of children's texts which display this undermining of conventions of reading and which challenge our assumptions about the reader's role and the expectations we form of fiction. The Book Choice studies at the centre of this thesis reveal several examples of texts which call attention to the conventions of reading, creating opportunities for their readers to question their own strategies for making meaning. The beginnings of this process can also be observed in the behaviour of very young children with story. For instance, when Max, the youngest child in the Book Choice Study, was nine months old, repeated readings of his favourite book revealed an awareness of the challenging of convention. Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown (1947) is a rhyming picture book. A pattern is set up whereby the text describes the illustration which is in full colour on the facing page, alternating with black and white on both pages with a line of text underneath. On the first few

pages objects in the room are described. Thenarration then repeats the list of objects as a way of saying 'goodnight'. It is worth repeating this section of the text in full, as the build-up of the rhyme and the pattern which is set up is important to the way in which it is finally challenged.

- 1 Goodnight room (page turn 1)
 - 2 Goodnight moon Goodnight cow jumping over the moon
 - 3 Goodnight light and the red balloon
 - 4 Goodnight bears Goodnight chairs (page turn 2)
 - 5 Goodnight kittens And goodnight mittens (page turn 3)
 - 6 Goodnight clocks And goodnight socks (page turn 4)
 - 7 Goodnight little house And goodnight mouse (page turn 5)
 - 8 Goodnight comb And goodnight brush (page turn 6)
 - 9 Goodnight nobody (no picture) Goodnight mush (page turn 7)
 - 10 And goodnight to the old lady whispering 'hush'
- (Brown, 1947)

It is the point prior to page turn 6 that is particularly interesting. At the age of nine months, and only just beginning to use the occasional word, Max would become very excited when we got to page 8, displaying this by increased movement (he was usually very still while being read to) and in particular, waving his arms and trying to turn the page. Following the page turn, he was confronted by a white page and the reader reading 'Goodnight Nobody'. He would then look up at the reader and laugh. As he got older, he would be the first to say it. 'Nobody' is not included in the first few pages describing objects in the room and it is probable that he did not know the meaning.

However, the gap left in the text, the indeterminacy Iser and Barthes speak of, on both visual and verbal levels, gave Max a physical and deep pleasure that was, I suggest, due to the undermining of a narrative convention. His need for the story to be continually re-read indicated the sense of joy, and its concomitant power that this experience gave him. This is surely a 'literary' engagement. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that this kind of experience offers a particularly powerful position for a developing reader, though the mediating forces which form the meta-discourse

around these childhood reading experiences must also be taken into account (Chambers 1991,1993).

Eagleton emphasises the reworking of previous reading experiences without acknowledging the role of childhood reading in the realm of influence.

All literary texts are woven out of other literary texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear traces of 'influence' but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a reworking of other writings which preceded or surrounded the individual work....all literature is intertextual. (Eagleton:138)

Though Eagleton is only concerned with a seemingly finite and static system of adult engagement with literature, his point invites questions about the role of children's fiction in this play of texts. We can all recognise the imagery and textual conventions which the novel has inherited from the Fairy Tale, for example, but it is also necessary to consider the linguistic features which encode certain responses in the reader. Fairy tales are a good example, for the way they are constructed, the degree to which the reader is invited to share in the making of meaning, the ambiguous language, the metaphoric use of character and location, and the typically sparse use of description, demand an active and creative approach. The degree to which the gaps in Fairy Tale language invite this active engagement can be seen in terms of the degree to which Fairy Tales have always been used to different instructional and moralising purposes. The level of indeterminacy in the original Grimm's tales, for instance, made them ideal occasions for the adult provider and adapter of the tales to use them for the moral instruction and enculturation which has always provided the ideological force of much children's literature (Tatar 1992, Zipes 1983). However, there have also always been individuals who have understood the value of the ambiguities left by generous authors. George MacDonald, writing about childhood and the power of fantasy, presents a picture of the active reader that prefigures that of Iser

Everyone...who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another.

(MacDonald, 1905:19)

Though addressing his remarks specifically to the appeal of fantasy, the dependence on the reader to contribute creatively to meaning places the reader at the centre, in a dialogue with the author. For MacDonald, and those who shared his Romantic sensibility, such a reading position is equally, if not more specifically, true for child readers, who 'find what they are capable of finding, and more would be too much.'

Iser himself stresses the importance of indeterminacy, gaps and ambiguity in terms of stimulating the reader to complete the meaning. He calls attention to the essential nature of the reader's authority in his definition of the reading act by providing a counter-example.

The real reason [that a film version is disappointing] is that we have been excluded, and we resent not being allowed to retain the images which we had produced and which enabled us to be in the presence of our products as if they were real possessions. (Iser, 1978: 139)

The distinction between these different audience positions can also be applied to texts, and it is the contrast between Eco's 'Open' and 'Closed' texts (Eco, 1979) which describes qualities of text which demand different stances for the reader.

Such a dichotomy is equally true of children's texts (Hunt, 1991), and it is the way in which the formative experiences offered by these texts define different modes of reading which is central to the concerns of this thesis. The absence of consideration of how such stances are defined and established in the inter-actions between children and fiction represents a profound gap in such theoretical mappings of response.

Though Eco admits that all texts are 'open', in that the reader must make meaning, he differentiates between 'Closed' texts which, like advertisements, are "obsessively aimed at arousing a precise response" and "eliciting a sort of "obedient" co-operation" (1978:8) and "Open" texts, which are structured in a way that appears to allow the reader a freedom to generate an interpretation as part of the reading process. This distinction cannot be integrated into an oppositional model, however, for Eco is careful to qualify his definitions to include the pragmatics of reading. In his terms, it is possible to read a Closed text in various ways in opposition to the invitation of the author, while Open texts offer only a limited, and often illusory, freedom. However, the difference in degree is enough to allow Eco to place children's literature in the category of Closed text, because, like advertisements or, for instance, the experience of film versions that Iser offers, the text itself gives explicit information about its 'model' reader, appealing directly to a defined audience and encoding a precise response (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994).

The film analogy is particularly relevant to the situation of children's fiction, and in terms of the pragmatics of the children's book industry, Eco's definition holds true for the majority of texts for children. By far the most popular and best-selling books for children are the film and television tie-ins which flood the market when a new film opens, whether it be a Disney film, or a film based on a 'Children's Classic' (information about sales was provided by the editorial and sales staff at the publishing house consulted for this research, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six). The tie-in versions are packaged to remind the purchaser and reader of the film: the cover carries a 'still' photograph from the film and the presentation of the book is designed to promote its close connection with the enjoyment had when viewing the film. The implied reader inscribed in the book text, particularly if it is unabridged, as many film tie-ins are, is overlaid with a second implied reader by this packaging and promotion. The second implied reader in some sense replaces the first, in that the supposition is that the book is read following the experience of viewing the film. The film images

which, Iser claims, exclude the activity of the reader, inform and influence the reading of the book text. This new layer of suggested imagery, bolstered by the cover and promotion of the text, offers a more restricted reading. In addition, if the text itself is a 'literary' text, inviting an active and creative role for the reader, the reader will find the primary narrative disappointing, in that the indeterminacy of the text will jar with the expectations formed in the viewing of the screen adaptation. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon in the realm of children's fiction, particularly in the re-writing of polysemic texts such as Kipling's The Jungle Book by the Disney Corporation, or Disney versions of Peter Pan which remove the irony implicit in the narrative. Evidence from the Book Choice Study reflects this sense of disappointment resulting from the conflict of expectation and experience.

The contrast between the 'Open' and 'Closed' experiences of text suggested by Eco invites a comparison with the basic typology of texts suggested by Roland Barthes, which is, again, equally applicable to children's texts. The distinction between the *lisible* or 'readerly' text and the *scriptable* or 'writerly' text suggests different positions for the reader, though when approached pragmatically, the distinction becomes problematic, because it is drawn from post-structural theorising which seeks to uncover the impossibility of tying any text down to interpretation. Famously proposing 'the death of the author', Barthes offers a perspective of text which is totally determined by the reader who is free to take pleasure in the text, to read against the rules of signification and to be free to ignore the author's intention. Pleasure results from what he calls the 'suture' - a site of contact and contrast between

an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours)...

(Barthes, 1975:6)

It is the rule-based system rubbing up against the free and open reader-based play within the text which creates the sensation of this joy. While Barthes suggests an eroticism in the pleasure he attempts to describe which is implicitly adult, the physicality of such pleasure displayed by the youngest children in the Book Choice Study implies a sense of 'letting go' which will be explored further (see Chapter Eight). In addition, the sensuality of early experiences of being read to suggest a link between the origins of desire and the role of narrative (see Chapter Two).

However, I suggest that Barthes's emphasis on the authority of the reader to 'write' the text and to be active in its creation is central to the experience of young readers. The readiness with which the younger children in the Book Choice Study engaged creatively with the texts they read, in addition to the evidence from transcribed conversations with children (Chambers 1993, Styles and Watson 1996), indicate the essential nature of such an engagement. Though Barthes's notion of pleasure can be usefully discussed in terms of psychoanalytic theory and the origins of readership dealt with in the next chapter, it is important to point out the absence of the child's experience of text in his discussion.

It is Barthes's contention that the vast majority of texts produced are of the 'readerly' kind; those that allow the reader merely to consume a fixed and limited meaning.

However, it is the 'writerly' text which offers the pleasure he seeks.

Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of meaning. (Barthes, 1970: 4)

It is important to emphasise that this kind of text is only offered as a theoretical construct - Barthes doubts that one could find such a text in a bookshop, for instance, but it is the definition of the reader's power to bring to the text his/her own inheritance

of signification and the pleasure derived from this active participation which are significant to my argument. Once again, the child reader is absent, though Barthes does refer to the power of education and culture to restrict the openness of such a 'writerly' approach.

The process by which children are admitted into the language system of any culture involves the fixing of the sign; children learn that the object with a bark-covered trunk with leaves on the top is called a tree, and when they learn to read, they learn that the letters t-r-e-e, or their phonetic equivalent, refer to the same thing. The imposition of a language system by which the signifier is arbitrarily fixed to the signified is part of the everyday discourse between adult and child, and it is the proximity of the conventional, taught usages of language to the uncontrolled, sound-based, rhythmic and alliterative play with language that naturally occurs in the babbling of very young children that can bring about a pleasure derived from the suture that Barthes attempts to define (Kristeva, 1986).

I propose that the roots of this pleasure lie in the roots of language we all experience. The location of children within the process of signification enables the transgressions of language inherent in nonsense and word-play to invite a sense of pleasure. What is more, repetitive readings of such playful texts insisted on by children allows them, as readers (or listeners) to share in the transgression, and so undermine the authority of the rule system. Such a position of playful challenge is central to the notion of *jouissance* Barthes proposes. The notion of mis-speaking, of mis-reading, of shifting consonants, for instance, implies a slippage from sense to nonsense that bring with it a sensation of rule-breaking power that often erupts into humour. I would suggest that the children's author, Dr. Seuss, often makes use of this suturing of sense with sound and rhythm.

One fish, two fish, red fish blue fish.
Black fish, blue fish, old fish, new fish.
This one has a little star.

This one has a little car. Say! what a lot of fish there are.
Yes. Some are red. And some are blue.
Some are old. And some are new.
Some are sad. And some are glad.
And some are very, very bad.
Why are they sad and glad and bad? I do not know.
Go ask your dad. (Seuss, 1960)

This passage reveals the degree to which the semantic force of the passage rubs up against the drive of rhythm and rhyme that govern this text. The proximity of words with shifting consonants (star, car; sad, glad, bad, dad) call attention to the lexical power of the words beyond sense and reflect the reader's own experience of learning to differentiate between sound and meaning. The tension between these two functions of language calls attention to itself and encourages the active response in which readers can share the telling with the author. The pleasure that this causes is most evident in re-readings, perhaps because the awareness of this suture allows the reader to revel in the rule-testing play with language encouraged by the text.

Inter-actions with this kind of text offer a way of reading distinct from that offered by more static inter-actions available in many of the basal readers which emphasise the pragmatic use of language and the tyranny of sense. The position of the reader implied by these texts reveals that the way in which we become readers influences the kind of readers we become (Meek, 1988). Yet the formation of these reading positions is not approached in any theoretical discussion of the 'pleasure' of the authoritative producer of the text.

Cohan and Shires also see the key to the reader's pleasure in Barthes's notion of the suture, placing the importance on the shifting of the signifier from an apparently stable position. Though they do not refer to it, their perspective implies the need for an exploration of the extent to which first experiences of narrative contribute to the position a reader takes in this process.

The suturing process actually increases pleasure when it allows the reader/viewer to repeat that history of previous and unorthodox suturings, not only those of earlier points in the text but those from other texts as well.

(Cohan & Shires:172)

It is important to stress that the suture that Barthes describes causes pleasure precisely because it calls attention to itself. The conflict between the rule-based system and the 'other' transgressive qualities of language is not meant to be resolved; the reader can and needs to hold onto the mystery for the effect to be achieved. This doubleness - the ability to enter into creative play with the author, and at the same time to tolerate indeterminacy - indicates a dual awareness that is essential to the role of the reader in fiction. The ability of children to take on this dual role is well documented (Fry 1985, Chambers, 1993b), and while I will suggest that this ability is influenced by mediating adults to enable or disable such a position, the Book Choice Study demonstrates that the younger children were more likely to exhibit such perceptions than those who had 'learned' otherwise.

Iser says

The ability to perceive oneself during the process of participation is an essential quality of the aesthetic experience; the observer finds himself in a strange halfway position: he is involved, and he watches himself being involved.

(Iser, 1978:134)

Though Iser refers to this as a halfway position, I would prefer to describe this self-awareness as a doubleness. Rabinowitz discusses the pretence involved in the reading of fiction and the complicity of the author and reader to agree to play their respective roles in this ruse. He refers to Kermode's notion of "experimental assent" when he says

"Experimental assent" is an activity on the part of the actual audience through which it relates the novel to reality, accepting the novel if it turns out to be "operationally effective," rejecting it otherwise. The pretence I am describing

is closer to Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief", except that I would argue not that the disbelief is suspended, but that it is both suspended and not suspended at the same time. (1987:95)

If such a dual position is a quality of 'literary engagement', then it is important to ask how such a sense of complicity evolves or whether such a doubleness is inherent. It is clear from the evidence of empirical studies with very young children that they willingly suspend disbelief and, at the same time, call attention to this activity (Fox, 1992). This ability to position oneself both inside and outside the text implies a level of authority which is defined by most response theorists as a sophisticated one, dependent on broad knowledge of different kinds of text and an awareness of the interplay between fiction and reality. Though developmental research often demonstrates the difficulties that children have in determining the difference between fiction and reality (Applebee, 1978), the willingness to explore the possibility that children have this double consciousness from the earliest moments of awareness must also be acknowledged, and some even argue that these early experiences form the basis for later experiences of fiction. Appleyard (1990) takes this position.

If the youngest child is in some sense capable of playing an evaluative role in the process of reading (even if it is only to evaluate at a minimal level the difference between the invented world and the world of pragmatic consequences), then the potential for other discriminations that are more distanced from simple reading...is right there from the beginning. (Appleyard: 149)

This double stance is seen by Appleyard as necessary for the reader of the Fairy Tale and, by extension, much of children's literature.

"Once upon a time"...signals to children that they are leaving the world where impulse and actions can have fearful consequences and entering a special time and place where they can enact their wishes imaginatively but also need experience the consequences only imaginatively. The reader can surrender to the fantasy of knowing that it is only a story and that however vivid the sense

of involvement is, the listener is always spectator as well as participant and remains in control of the level of involvement. (Appleyard: 40)

Perhaps this is the most important feature of literature; the ability to recognise and rejoice in the fictionality of fiction. The self-reflexivity implied by this awareness provides both the pleasure of contributing to the creative process and of sharing authority within the text.

the author not only knows that the narrative audience is different from actual and authorial audiences, but rejoices in this fact and expects his or her actual audience to rejoice as well. For it is this difference that makes fiction fiction and makes the double-levelled aesthetic experience possible. (Rabinowitz: 99)

If this experience is central to a definition of literature and literary engagement, and if the process of becoming a reader is in some way implicated in the development, or awareness, of these pleasures, then surely there is a need to consider the reading of fiction in a continuum which includes the literature of childhood.

CHAPTER TWO ORIGINS OF RESPONSE

In the previous chapter, I examined a variety of theoretical positions concerning the textual inscription of the reader's response and revealed the unjustified absence of a consideration of the texts of childhood. The exclusion of children's responses to fiction in a variety of theoretical perspectives concerning the origins of literary engagement is, perhaps, more curious, as the inter-actions between children and fiction are located at the site at which theorists place the origins of subjectivity and the acquisition of language which are central to the mapping of response. While a theoretical consideration of the roots of response and the importance of fiction to the development of the individual psyche must address child experience, childhood is frequently conceived of as separate and often lacking in comparison to the experience of the adult. If, as I claim, it is necessary and natural to regard response to literature as part of a continuum, then the importance of the process from infancy to adulthood through and around fiction must be part of a larger picture of both psychological and psychoanalytic models of response. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter Four, theorists who concern themselves solely with children's literature recognise this (Fox 1992, Crago 1994, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994), yet there is little evidence that the relevance of this work is considered in the mapping of the psychology of reading or in a psychoanalytic perspective of the 'fictional dimension'.

While there are areas in which their perspectives overlap, a distinction must be made at the outset between those theorists who seek to describe the origins of literary response in terms of the cognitive development of the individual and those who are primarily concerned with the roles fiction and narrative play in the construction of subjectivity and the subconscious forces that form a relationship to literature. I shall begin with an investigation of theories derived from a psychological perspective, such as those of Bruner, Applebee, Appleyard and Nell. Often dependent on empirical evidence, and sometimes concerned with pragmatic agendas, these perspectives offer a

developmental model of response which deals directly with child experience. I shall then explore various ways of theorising response from a psychoanalytic perspective, focusing primarily on the work of Brooks, Lacan, and Kristeva's re-reading of Lacan. The foundation of psychoanalytic models of the origins of response in infancy and the primacy of the function of narrative in the dawning of subjectivity further support the importance of a consideration of children's inter-action with fiction when interrogating the nature of literature.

A concern for the text, and the degree to which the reader is invited to be creative in the act of literary engagement, raise questions about the origins of this way of interacting with fictional narrative, and whether it might be a "primary act of mind" (Hardy in Meek, Warlow and Barton, 1977), or whether the invitation to read the 'open' or 'writerly' text actively, as a co-producer of meaning is acquired through experience of text. The theoretical positions surveyed in this chapter vary in the way that these questions are approached, but all privilege the reader as an individual, rather than the way in which an ideal or implied reader is encoded in the text.

If it is possible to make a connection between the 'open' and 'writerly' activity of reading discussed above, and the primacy of response in infancy, then we need to be concerned, not only with development, but with the mediations which interrupt or distort a natural way of responding to narrative, and, by extension, to fiction. We will then encounter a new paradigm of reading and reading development which calls not only for a new theory, but a new practice as well.

The following exploration recognises that the activity of reading, engaging with fictional worlds, is the main focus of study. Bruner states that it is far more important

to understand the ways human beings construct their worlds (and their castles) than it is to establish the ontological status of the products of

these processes. (Bruner, 1986:46)

The need to consider the role of fiction in this construction of the world (and the self) is at the centre of Bruner's conception of mind and the constructedness of reality. His psycho-philosophical explorations into the importance of narrative reveal it as both a primary function of the individual psyche and an active force in the shaping of that individual. Following Goodman, Bruner defines this constructivism in terms which reflect a post-structuralist position which argues against unified meaning.

contrary to common sense there is no unique "real world" that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language. (95)

This conception of 'reality' and its essential dependence on mind and language challenges the assumptions of many cognitive psychologists, Piaget among them, who conceive of development in terms of the way that the child fits into an existing, solid, real world. Bruner, with Vygotsky (1962), refutes this conception of development, and with it, assumptions of the ego-centrism of the young child, and insists that the world exists as a construction which is built up through language and social interactions from the first moments of life. He cites, for example, studies in which mothers engage in proto-conversations with new-borns, giving evidence of

jointly constructed little worlds in which they interact according to the social realities that they have created in their exchanges. (114)

The role that narrative plays in the constructedness of the world has both an individual and social orientation to the extent that it 'subjunctivizes' reality; a term Bruner uses to describe the way in which narrative and story construct possible worlds, whereby the reader can explore these possibilities within the polysemy of the text (Chambers, 1985).

The position that Bruner takes regarding the primacy and naturalness of narrative implies that the active and creative role in the making of meaning is present in infancy and that it is an essential part of our coming to be. The dialogic nature of mother/child story-reading inter-actions revealed in his research and that of other child psychologists (Cochran-Smith 1984, Meek 1978, Engel 1995) suggests an alternative to the developmental stage theories of cognitive psychology which depict the child as moving through progressive stages from a primitive, pre-operational phase to the more sophisticated stages of concrete and formal operations where abstract thought is possible (Applebee, 1978). Challenges to the assumptions of cognitive stage theory and its implications for the ability of young children to engage with complexity and abstraction come from many different areas of study (Matthews, 1994). While it is clear that both educational theory and the concomitant public expectation of what children are capable of are derived from, in part, Piaget's classification of development, alternatives to this restrictive view challenge the experimental evidence and propose a description of development which prioritises the social function of language (Vygotsky 1962, Nodelman 1992, Rudd 1994), and places narrative at the root.

The significance of a rejection of a Piagetian model of development for a theory of response must be acknowledged. For, if the implicit disregard of children as readers, and the potential of children's texts to offer sophisticated engagement within theoretical discourse are derived from such a conception of development, then the recognition of the primacy of narrative and the capability of children to deal with complexity demands a new paradigm of response that includes children's literature.

Matthews (1980, 1984 and 1994), a philosopher, argues against the wholesale acceptance of Piaget's concept of 'age-appropriate' stages of development in an effort to portray young children as natural philosophers. He presents, through dialogues with children, evidence that the abstraction of thought necessary in the consideration of philosophical questions appears to be innate, in defiance of Piaget's claim that the

distinction between thought and the external world occurs only at the appropriate stage of development. Matthews claims, however, that, though Piaget and many educational theorists are not aware of philosophical thinking in childhood, "writers of children's stories are." (1980:56). This awareness that children's fiction in some way matches a natural ability to contemplate and to question is foreign to much of what is written about children's literature, both by those critics concerned solely with children, and those who theorise a psychological perspective of response in general.

Many studies of reading which concentrate solely on children's experience (Applebee 1978, Tucker 1981) apply Piaget's ideas of progression to trace the gradual movement of children's response to fiction from the simple re-tellings of very young children to the tendency to abstract and interpret in the teen years. Admittedly, Applebee's definition of response is very different from the ways in which literary theorists define it, in the context of the textual inscription of response explored in the previous chapter.

When we write or talk about our objective response to a story, we are concerned with its publicly verifiable characteristics;...we are describing the product of the interaction of the work with our own particular presentation of experience. (1978:89)

The emphasis here, and the evidence on which his observations are based, depend largely on the developing ability of children to make 'public' statements about what they read, rather than on the responses themselves. This, in turn, is inevitably influenced to a large extent by the way in which they are questioned. The mediations which influence the way these articulations are expressed are powerful in the way that they shape expectations about what is required from readers in terms of response. Therefore, asking questions gives us very little evidence about what children are really responding to in their inter-actions with fiction, particularly if we are to define response in terms of active engagement in the communicative act of literature (see Chapter Seven). Svenson (1985) argues that, by ignoring social context and the reading

experience of individuals, the cognitive stage model cannot be useful when investigating response. He found that students who were read to at an early age, and who read for pleasure, were more likely to abstract and interpret, no matter what their age. The implications of this kind of evidence for an investigation of the origins of response are many. If the discourse which surrounds the reading experience, including social context, exposure to fiction, the value of fiction to the immediate community and its associations with pleasure, in the sense of Barthes's *jouissance*, affects the way in which we measure response, it is necessary to explore possible common beginnings from which these developments spring. While the potential of the text to create opportunities for dynamic engagement and to offer readers a dual position, discussed in the previous chapter, must influence the process by which readers develop their modes of reading (Meek 1988), any conception of origins of response will affect both the texts themselves and the mediations which stand between reader and text. In turn, such texts, and the social contexts in which they are read will influence the modes of reading that readers are able to develop.

Appleyard (1990) attempts to trace the development of the reader, and in so doing, considers the importance of children's experience of text and, though he admits that the reader "brings expectations derived from a literary or life experience to bear on the text" (9), it is clear that, in his conception, the way that children read is inferior to the experience of the mature reader.

the young child's intermittent grasp of the boundary between fantasy and actuality...*yields* to the older child's sense of control and identity. [This is] *transcended* by the adolescent's ability to see that romance is only one version of life's story....[This is] *supplanted* by the student's realization that stories are also texts. (1990:16,(my italics))

The language used here implies replacement and improvement, and in much the same way that Piaget stresses the superiority of each phase of development, Appleyard

traces the becoming of a reader as a progression. I am not disputing the notion of the development of understanding, nor the growth in experience and knowledge, both of world and text, which increase the complexity with which developing readers can deal. I am, however, questioning the extent to which this dependence on mapping development ignores and supplants the primacy of response and active engagement with narrative which is present from infancy. For, if it is possible to make a connection between the active construction of little worlds in the social context of mother-child inter-action referred to by Bruner, and the active and creative engagement which characterises Iser's description of 'literary engagement', we need a theory of reading which embraces the notion of a continuum and investigates the meta-discourse which surrounds the history of the reader. The focus of this change in perspective will echo Bruner's conception of a new theory of development, which will focus on

how to create in the young an appreciation of the fact that many worlds are possible, that meaning and reality are created and not discovered, that negotiation is the art of constructing new meanings by which individuals can regulate their relations with each other. (Bruner, 1986:149)

Appleyard displays his awareness of the need to explore how individuals evolve as readers beginning in early childhood and stresses "the debate about meaning.....should also be a debate about the evolution of the ways readers make sense of texts." (19) By characterising the child reader as Player, he is not only able to make clear the limits of the ability of children to respond, but also displays an awareness of the abilities of very young children to respond in different, though not necessarily inferior, ways to older children and adults. For instance, he cites Applebee when he mentions the tendency of very young children to pick up on one striking detail in the text, rather than dealing with the text as a unified whole. In addition, he regards the evidence that children's own use of spontaneous metaphor declines during their school years as an indication of the different nature of response (Donaldson, 1978). These factors, while indicating ways in which young readers are distinguished from more experienced and

sophisticated readers, represent a relationship with fiction in the earliest experiences of text which can be identified with the 'constructivist' truths of narrative discussed by Bruner.

The tendency to read selectively and to respond to particular details of the text is well documented (Meek 1988, Fox 1993, Crago 1993), though largely unexplained. A readiness to play within the text, to appropriate the story form and adapt it to personal experience, is reminiscent of Barthes's notion of taking pleasure in a 'writerly' relation to the text. The use of metaphor, in addition, involves a similarly creative use of language which indicates a need for very young children to use a limited knowledge of language and the world to create new meanings, and thus construct their world in language (Meek 1988, Fox 1993). The evidence that this spontaneous use of metaphor decreases as children mature may suggest it is a result of the child's growing vocabulary and recognition of the need to communicate in a socially constructed and regulated way. However, it also reveals the extent to which a natural inclination to play with language and to 'write' the world is likely to be replaced by uses of language demanded by the focus of functional literacy influenced by educational policy (see Chapter Five). By portraying the process by which one becomes a reader as a development, Appleyard emphasises progress toward a more sophisticated ability to criticise and evaluate text, while largely ignoring those innate factors which contribute to response to fiction as an active and creative engagement which is at the heart of the pleasure of the text.

The double awareness of the reader, as both participant and spectator, is central to this pleasurable feeling of control and the willing suspension of it. Appleyard, as suggested in the previous chapter, sees the roots of this process in the early moments of life and is in agreement with Bruner to the extent that story narrative forms part of the process by which children are initiated into the world by adults. In this way, he says,

the child becomes increasingly aware, in practice, of the autonomy of the story world (51)

Appleyard stresses that this awareness comes with practice, though it is not only the experience of story that influences this process. In reference to Winnicott, he emphasises the primacy of fiction and its relation to other processes through which the growing child experiences the world.

[T]he fictional world, mediating between the inner world of our needs and desires and the outer world of shared and verifiable experience, is in some sense a place familiar to us from our earliest childhood experience. (51)

By establishing a relationship between the awareness of this double nature of text and the innate needs of the child, Appleyard implies a development of the reader which runs counter to the model of progress toward the mature and reflective, critical reader, a model which emphasises the abilities or potential that very young readers already have. However, the link between this child-oriented approach to text and adult experiences of fiction is not made, and though Appleyard does identify the origins of response to fiction in infancy, he does not address himself to those innate features which remain within adult experiences of fiction, but demonstrates how each level replaces the one that precedes it.

Nell (1988), however, claims that "earlier tastes do not wither and die as more refined appetites develop" (5), demonstrating a recognition of the degree to which the needs of the child reader remain beneath those of the adult. At the same time, however, he belittles the texts of childhood, comparing the demands they make on the reader to Harlequin romances, as opposed to the challenge of Kundera, for example. This definition of children's literature as shallow and mindless is restrictive and displays an ignorance of the rich possibilities of many children's texts, particularly those offered by the modern tradition of picture books (Lewis 1990, Moss 1990, Baddeley and

Eddershaw 1994). Though his unjustified dismissal of children's literature as 'light' reading is similar to the view held by many adult critics, his attempts to explore the feeling of being 'lost in a book', though largely inconclusive, lead him toward a psychoanalytic perspective of an innate desire for narrative.

Nell refers to Freud's own conception of the gripping story operating on a regressed level when attempting to define the childlike qualities of leisure reading. According to Nell, Freud

suggests that earlier and more primitive needs and desires are not rooted out by maturation and education but are merely overlaid and that they remain active in disguised or flamboyant ways throughout life. (57)

Though Freud refers to the creative artist in this passage, the notion of the power of primal desires surging beneath the control of mature rationality is central to a psychoanalytic model of literature proposed by Lacan (1977) and echoed by Kristeva (1986) and others (Henriques 1984, Urwin, 1984) and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Nell is primarily concerned with exploring the changes in consciousness that the adult reader undergoes in 'ludic' reading, which he equates with a play activity, and though much of his study is involved with psychological testing of physical signs of response, he attempts to locate the origins of this 'trance-like fascination' that grips the reader when reading for pleasure in the reading of childhood. The desire for narrative is considered to be an innate function of mind (Meek 1992, Chambers 1993). His findings indicate that formula stories and the security they offer through fulfilment of expectation have more force in the realm of reading for pleasure than 'subtlety' does. He sees the child's tendency to re-read the same book many times as an indication of the deep-seated need for this security. This conception of re-reading is curiously

limited, and by emphasising the comfort aspect of this way of approaching fiction, he disregards a perspective which accentuates the need for the child, or any reader, to have authority over the book. Re-reading can also be conceived of as an exercise of 're-writing', or taking possession of a text in an active and open way, and thus can be regarded as part of the process by which the reader forms a relationship with the author and the author's voice (Meek, 1988). It is not merely the story which is re-read, but the way of telling, just as it is not the fulfilment of expectation, but the ways in which expectations are fulfilled that creates the pleasure and answers a need.

If the child's tendency to re-read is in fact a need to take on the authorial stance and share power in the telling (Fry, 1985), then the need for fiction and stories can be seen as a desire for telling one's own story, and the autonomy that such an authorial stance implies. In addition, repeated readings are also opportunities to read differently within the same text, to read selectively, or to read with a foreknowledge of the resolution (Mackey, 1995). While the nature of re-reading needs further exploration, and has been the subject of empirical research (Halász, Asplund Carlsson and Marton, 1991), such a view of re-reading is in keeping with Bruner's conception of the 'subjunctivizing' force of fiction and the importance of personal narratives which inform the child's conception of their place both in the external world and the internal subjective world.

Nell does acknowledge the importance of the stories we silently tell ourselves and makes a connection between the child's exposure to 'interactive storytelling' and what I shall call, 'the voice in the head.' Though he determines that the onset of shared storytelling occurs at the late age of three, the parallel he draws between storytelling in which the child contributes to a parent-initiated narrative about familiar events, or fills in the gaps in a familiar story, and the 'zero-audience' narrative, is relevant to this discussion. He regards the purpose of these narratives as protection against separation anxiety and the need to escape the consciousness that we are alone.

If the terror.....is indeed rooted in infant fears, hearing a voice from outside ourselves, affirming we are not alone, would be deeply comforting. (64)

If, as Nell suggests, the purpose of narrative is related to primary desires and needs originating in the conditions of infancy, then the individual who receives these narratives does not *learn* to be receptive, but is equipped with receptivity as an innate condition of mind. If, in addition, the self-directed inner narrative is formed as part of the process of acquiring a subject position, the need to *tell* stories can also be considered innate. This has important implications for a definition of literary engagement which relies upon the 'active' rather than the 'passive' reception of texts, and privileges the 'inter-active' relationship between teller and told as that which is more likely to answer a primary need.

Nell's investigations lead him to conclude that

the freedom to see things as one wants to, without being dictated to by the author's too-full descriptions or the illustrator's drawings, seems to be a much-prized aspect of reading sovereignty. (247)

Notions of sovereignty, authority and the self-determined nature of discourse all indicate the need to explore the reader's capacity to experience such freedoms, and like Bruner, Nell regards the reader as the primary focus of future study.

Reading is an interaction among author, reader, the book itself, and the environment. Accordingly, the book is perceived differently by every reader. In our view, when a book is being read *it is a subjective psychological phenomenon* based on impressions which the reader's psychophysical organism received from it as an external object....Therefore, the book in itself, as a phenomenon independent of the viewer, is an unknown entity. (116(italics in the text))

Nell's project, uneasily skirting the boundaries between experimental psychology and psychoanalysis, reveals the blurring of distinctions within these agendas, particularly when investigating something as intangible as response. Though many of the theorists I will discuss often err on the side of subjectivism and, thus, risk the credibility of their theoretical positions, the insights offered by a variety of psychoanalytic perspectives place the origins of response to literature in the dawning of the unconscious mind. The exclusion of children's responses to fiction is particularly curious in these theoretical constructions, as the inter-actions between children and fiction begin at this site of the origins of subjectivity and the acquisition of language.

Culler (1981) recognises the need to view reading as an historical process and the restricting nature of a concentration on any 'ideal reader'. The predominance of research with 'real' readers amongst psychoanalytic critics has, unfortunately, only allowed us to see how unsuccessful these practices are at illuminating the process of reading (Adams, 1986). While Nell's eclectic approach was only able to reveal what we cannot know about the trance-like experience of 'ludic' reading, Holland (1975), through his infamous examination of five readers with the same text, promises insights that he does not deliver. The aim of his study, to demonstrate that "readers respond to literature in terms of their own "lifestyle""(8), ignores those social forces which shape the reading inter-actions with which he deals. Much criticism has been levelled at both his methods and his narrowness of approach (Culler, 1980). Accusations that his own "lifestyle" attenuated his critical distance, and that he disregarded the influence of cultural attitudes on response reflected in his results have, to a large extent, devalued his attempts to redefine the way we perceive response. However, despite the flaws in his practice, the new approach to criticism he offered and the radical position he takes, suggest a perspective of the history of an individual reader which is not seen elsewhere, and thus imply a conception of response as a continuum that includes childhood.

Holland does disrupt comfortable assumptions about the ability of the critic to assess, or even describe, a text with any finality. The reader projects meaning onto the text according to his own 'identity theme' which is determined by his/her individual "lifestyle", which Holland defines as

an individual's characteristic way of dealing with the demands of outer and inner reality. Such a style will have grown through time from earliest infancy. It will also be what the individual brings with him to any new experience of literature. Each new experience develops the style, while the pre-existing style shapes each new experience. (8)

Thus, the text is one of the means by which the identity theme will develop. The author/reader relationship is imbued with qualities of a human relationship, and specifically with the communicative exchanges that characterise the mother/child relationship in infancy.

The literary work I read today represents the latest in the long sequence of gratifying others to whom I have related, beginning with the nurturing mother of earliest infancy who actualized in me a certain lifestyle. In particular, however, each literary work caps the sequence of literary works that preceded it and before them the mixed human and literary experience of being read to. (126)

Therefore, the history of a reader, and of each reader's individual experiences of text, which implicitly include the extra-textual circumstances of those experiences as much as the texts themselves, form the way in which meaning is made in the text. This means that, as Iser and many others have already made clear, the text will be different for each reader and at each point in a reading life. Since Holland insists that readers can only experience what their individual identity theme will allow them to, it follows that "the dynamics of any reader's mind will not coincide with the author's processes." (13) The awareness that children read against the text beyond the need for unity or

the author's intention, is one that children's literature theorists and critics recognise, (Lehr 1988, Meek 1988, Sarland 1991, Fox 1993), and invites questions about the social and cultural mediation of these inter-actions between real texts and real readers. If the meaning of the text is produced by its readers in terms of their own needs, how do the texts themselves and the meta-discourse surrounding them affect the kind of readers they become? How, in turn, does this form the identity theme and the assimilation of the text into the reader's own psychological processes?

As I have argued previously, the relevance of the inter-actions that children have with fiction, and the mediations which influence these inter-actions must be included in any theory which attempts to explore the complexities implied here. The process by which readers are constructed through their experiences with texts, which they themselves construct, and the forces that influence those inter-actions need to be understood. Though Holland does not attempt to explore such questions, the 'transactive' criticism he proposes has been taken up by Bleich and others, who recognise the need for an approach to texts which distinguishes between the reader's spontaneous subjective response and the meaning the reader ascribes in a pedagogic situation. Fish (1980) for instance, identifies "interpretive communities", rather than the text itself or the individual reader, as the determiners of meaning. In his role as a teacher of literature, Bleich's concern with the construction of real readers within an interpretive community which determines how texts are read, further problematises the investigation of individual response.

While the inclusion of children's inter-action with fiction I propose creates a new set of problems about how such a process can be investigated (see Chapter 7), the kind of detailed investigation demanded in a case study situation certainly offers the opportunity to study such a process. The Book Choice Study which forms the centre of my research is intended to answer the invitation set down by Bleich:

the next direction in research, thus, might well be exploration into the complex system of literary response. Such exploration might well employ the case study technique of exploring many aspects of the responses of a few individuals. (in Tompkins, 1980:141)

If, as Bleich and many other response theorists advocate, a subjective criticism will be centred on the way the individual acquires language, and if the processes which form the 'complex system of literary response' are to be understood, then these explorations must include the way in which children become readers through a continuum, beginning with the first communicative inter-actions in infancy.

Bleich's proposal is taken up by Steig, whose idea in Stories of Reading (1989) is to

connect readers' experiences and associations not only with interpretation and intention but more broadly with the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of texts. (xi)

Though, as I have shown, many theorists concerned with the psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives of the reader/text relationship include the child and the concept of development, and regard the acquisition of language and a subject position as key to an understanding of the complexities of response, very few refer to those texts which are read during these formative periods. Steig makes a conscious effort to include children's books, though the readings he discusses are not by children. By offering a critique of response theories, he attempts to find a position that allows individual subjective responses to be relevant to a critical position. He is particularly critical of Iser's disregard of cultural background and the way individuals are constructed as readers, and shares a view of reading as a process similar to that of Mackey (1995). In his construction, the position of the reader continually shifts, influenced not only by textual factors, but also by expectations of how texts in general are perceived. This means that

books that have been read in childhood or adolescence can provide comparisons between early, spontaneous impressions and more reflective later ones, which can be a fascinating process, revealing how a person's "readings" vary with experience and situation. (xvii)

His investigations of the reading of his college students reveals that each re-reading produces a different text, and though he does not extend his analysis as far as Holland does, he stresses the extent to which the reader's own position must be taken into account when considering their interpretations. Though his investigations do not produce anything more than a catalogue of subjective readings, the transcribed reports reveal how important it is for the students to tell stories of their reading, and in so doing, *authorise* their experience of the text. The perceptions of these readers about what interpretation involves and what it is possible to say jars with their desire to tell, and this conflict has a direct influence on what they are able to articulate. The distinction between private and school-based reading is often expressed in terms of the destruction of private pleasures by the need to interpret for pedagogical purposes (Carlsen and Sherrill, 1988). Steig explains this as the

dual nature of the need to interpret - to understand what we experience as the author's or text's meaning, and as our own - is perhaps parallel to what one might call the dual form of literary apprehension: the perception of literary works as both utterance and representation. (32)

According to Steig's model, literature as a communicative act between two individuals is only part of the reader's experience. It is the need, inscribed by the context of the pedagogic situation, to represent that utterance as something outside the self that forms the expectation of his student readers, and so affects what can be said about the reading.

in general, students were discouraged from attempting to read the texts as the utterances of a real person, or as representing a world whose very nature depended on what they themselves brought

to the text. (220)

The recognition of the duality of the experience of literary text and its dependence on the way response is conceived relates to the notion of cognitive development discussed earlier in the chapter. More importantly, it implies a relationship between the text and the reader which is continually mediated by the need to interpret and express responses, privileging, not the personal inter-action that takes place during the act of reading, the re-creation of the self, or the 'identity theme' within the reading, but the representation of a work. The resistance to this way of responding is evident in some of the responses he records; the need of his students to tell the stories of themselves in the reading act, writing their responses as a text, overtakes the need to interpret, or sometimes even refer to, the assigned text. These documents have more force and tell more about what can happen to an individual in a text than other, more directed, reports (Holland 1975, Sarland 1991, Mackey 1995).

The distancing of the notion of literary engagement as a re-enactment of desire from the pragmatic notions of textual inter-action through which our responses are formed is at the centre of the concerns of children's literary theory (Meek, 1992). It is the evidence from studies such as those recorded by Bleich which reveal how the way we are constructed as readers affects the way we read. As I have already argued, it is the denial of the child's place in the reading continuum that creates this false distance. Perhaps this has something to do with a general cultural resistance to the notion of any actual child as a site for desires and needs which are recognised by psychoanalytic theorists as forces which operate through narrative (Reynolds 1990, Rose 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994). However, the psychoanalytic model of the origins of response to fictional narrative suggests the need to include the pragmatics of children and texts in a theoretical mapping of response. The construction of a research methodology for the Book Choice Study, which forms the final part of this thesis, aims to address this need, in order to open the theoretical perspective of response to include

'real' readers, and thus acknowledge the experiential aspects of reader/text inter-action within the abstract conception of response.

Brooks (1984) is concerned with the narrowness of theoretical constructions of narrative and seeks a connection between "literary criticism and human concern."(xiv) His focus, on the previously neglected area of

the temporal dynamics that shape narratives in our reading of them, the play of desire in time that makes us turn the page and strive toward narrative ends
(xiii)

allows him to consider the child's relationship with narrative and rules of plot. It is the centrality of plot and its roots in the psyche of the individual which places it in a position of primacy. Plot "makes narrative possible" and is "the logic and dynamic" of narrative", which Brooks characterises as both a form of thought and of explanation.

Brooks views the reader's competence to make sense of narrative, not as something learned through the experience of reading, but as something motivated by desire, animated by passion for meaning in a metaphysical sense. He invokes Benjamin (1970) in his claim that the discourse of mortality is echoed in all narrative, as it is only at the end that meaning can be determined.

The desire for this end engenders the erotics of the text. This notion of desire, as a motivating force that can never be satisfied, is derived from Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective of the unattainable self revealed by language, and implicates narrative as the site of this unresolvable quest for meaning.

Narratives portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire: the need to tell as a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust

of desire that can never quite speak its name - never quite come to the point - but that insists on speaking over and over again its movement toward that name. (61)

The driving force behind this 'fictional direction' derives from the Mirror stage, which has maintained a central place in psychoanalytic constructions since it was posited by Lacan in 1936. It is at this stage of infant development, placed by Lacan between the ages of six and eighteen months, whereby the infant first encounters his or her reflection in the mirror. The "transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (Lacan, 1977:2), occurs before the infant can identify the Ideal "I" in the mirror with himself/herself as distinct from the maternal body and "before language restores to it...its function as subject." (2). The importance of this is that the "I" viewed in the mirror takes on the form of the ego in a "fictional direction", and though this fictional representation of the self comes closer and closer to the 'actual' self as the child comes into being with language, it will never cohere and 'be' the self.

It is this entry into language which reveals the loss of unity represented by the 'plenitude of the maternal body' of which the infant is a part, in what Lacan terms the Imaginary. The symbolic order imposes the law of language and, in doing so, reveals the arbitrariness of meaning embodied by the sign. Lacan regards the disjunction of the Mirror stage to be central to the loss engendered by the gap between the signifier "I" and the actual I of the speaking subject. The two can never cohere, and it is the desire for an irredeemable wholeness prior to this split which motivates all encounters with language and its relation to subjectivity. This desire for the unattainable unity of the self despite its unresolvability is continually played out in fiction, which performs a consoling function.

In Lacanian theory, it is the original lost object - the mother's body - which drives forward the narrative of our lives, impelling us to pursue substitutes for this lost paradise in the endless metonymic movement of desire. (Eagleton, 185)

The text makes this play possible in what Barthes calls the 'dilatatory space', wherein delay, postponement, and partial revelation point toward an anticipated ending. The elaborations which delay the ending, but continually move the reader forward, are a deep source of pleasure, according to Barthes.

I take pleasure in hearing myself tell a story *whose end I know*:
I know and I don't know, I act toward myself as though I did not
know. (1975:47)

Though this notion of pleasure, operating as a dialectic between the unconscious need for the text and the consciousness of its fictionality, may appear to be beyond the unsophisticated reading of the young child, it may to some extent explain the pleasures attached to the constant desire to re-experience the text that is typical of the child's experience of text.

Repetition, remembering, re-enactment are the ways in which we replay time, so that it may not be lost. We are thus always trying to work back through time to that transcendent home, knowing, of course, that we cannot. All we can do is subvert or, perhaps better, pervert time: which is what narrative does. (Brooks, 1984:111)

These models of the origins of narrative desire, derived from the pull of the unconscious against the 'illusion' of meaning, have as much to do with the reading experience of a child as they do to that of an adult. It is particularly important to consider that the inter-actions with fictional narrative during childhood, when this play of desire is most active and immediate, may be particularly influential in terms of what narrative can be seen to offer the developing psyche. Brooks uses the example of Propp's Morphology of the Folk Tale to reflect on the notion of the text as same-but-different. The need for children to re-read, or to read repetitive, formulaic text may proceed from this model, though the pleasure derived from texts which demand little in

terms of 'writerly' engagement does not approach that *jouissance* that Barthes is after. The absence of an awareness of the illusory quality of meaning which allows the reader some self-awareness in the journey undergone is a feature of the bulk of literature published for children, and it is clear from the evidence of the study carried out as part of this research that dependence on formulaic texts of this kind can disrupt the readings of those texts which call attention to this illusion.

A major part of Brooks's argument is founded on the parallels he draws between the relationship between the reader and the text and that of the psychoanalyst and analysand. During the dialogue which takes place in the psychoanalytic setting, the analyst must be perceived as an object onto which past desire is focused. In this way, the analysand can approach the dialogue as a reader would approach a text; it becomes a territory where the past can be reworked.

[W]e may conceive of the text as an as-if medium, fictional... yet speaking of the investments of desire on the part of both addresser and addressee, author and reader, a place of rhetorical exchange and transaction. (234)

This conception invests the text with the subjunctivizing power referred to earlier by Bruner, but also gives the communicative exchange that takes place between text and reader inside narrative a transformative role, creating a space where the reader can be, in some sense, re-configured. The ability of narrative to have this transformative effect is recognised by many who work with children and literature (Chambers 1985, Rosenblatt 1978); yet it is not acknowledged by Brooks, whose concern with the dynamics of narrative is limited to adult experience of text. This means that notions of process, and the way in which the individual becomes "fully engaged" with the invitation of the text, are again ignored. Thus, his attempts to define a role for the literary critic "who is concerned to connect literary texts to human experience" (322) are restricted by the omission of the child's experience of text and the workings of

desire. As I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, those concerned with both the poetics and pragmatics of children's literature (Fox 1993, Rose 1992 and Lesnik-Oberstein 1994) have engaged with this notion of process, while the hierarchy of psychoanalytic critics has disregarded the way that texts of childhood and the meta-discourses which surround them influence the development they discuss abstractly. I hope to show that this disregard, which acts as a silencing of the child's own voice, is a dangerously short-sighted view of literature as an innate function of mind.

The relevance of psychoanalytic theory to an understanding of the reader's response lies particularly in its concern with the construction of subjectivity in early life and the role fictional constructions play in this essential process. It is the centrality of what Lacan calls 'the fictional direction' in the formation of the personality which is addressed by concerns with language acquisition and the birth of self in early infancy. Numerous re-workings of Lacan's position (Henriques 1984, Urwin 1984, Kristeva 1986, Fox 1993) identify childhood as the primary site in the development of the response to fiction and place story-telling, story-reading and discursive inter-actions between parent and child at the heart of the articulation of self. The importance of this to the exploration of the child's inter-action with fiction is two-fold. On the one hand, the psychoanalytic theorist's contention that narrative is a source of identity reflects a perception of fiction that is largely disregarded by those who mediate real texts for real children. If the degree to which the forces of language determine the 'transactional' inter-actions that occur between a child reader and a fictional text are ignored, that child's ability to inter-act may be de-valued or silenced, not only in terms of the testing of reality that goes on in fiction, but also in terms of the awareness of the nature of fiction from which notions of literary pleasure derive.

On the other hand, while a perspective such as this places early childhood experiences with fiction at the forefront of development, the discourses that surround fiction, and the fiction itself, are largely disregarded. So, although the construction of the infant

psyche presents a persuasive configuration of the origins of fictional engagement, it is also a static image, concerning itself with the influence of this stage on adult creativity and readership and largely ignoring the processes by which constructions of self influence the developing reader.

Lacan's theories of identity and language have generated an efflorescence of theoretical constructions, particularly with reference to Feminist Theory, and it is the way in which his work has been re-configured by Henriques, Urwin and Kristeva which suggests a perspective which can include children. While a particularly feminist agenda lies behind these re-interpretations of Lacan, the emphasis on the imposition of the Symbolic Order can be generalised to include all children. Though I do not intend to address the question of gender here, the parallel between women's writing and children's literature has been made persuasively by Paul (in Hunt, 1990), and Reynolds (1990) investigates the gendering of children's fiction from a psychoanalytic standpoint.

Lacan's central concept of the Mirror Stage, functioning as the crux of the desires which motivate narrative, is coterminous with the period of a child's life when narrative, and specifically story, form a central part of both language acquisition and identity through subject position. Though Lacan largely ignored the role of fiction and the discourses which surround it during the Mirror Stage, his critics and advocates have begun to extend his argument.

Lacan himself regards both neurosis in the individual and the "madness that deafens the world with its sound and fury" (1977) as an inevitable result of the unresolvability of the split of the subject and the inability to fulfil the desire for the illusion of unity in the Imaginary. This implies that self-determination and authority within any subject position are also illusory, an argument forcibly stated by those espousing a feminist critique. Henriques (1984), for instance, wishes to consider the extent to which "discursive relations [are] produced by positioning within discursive practices." (217)

This emphasis is essential to a feminist position as it demonstrates the specific positioning which determines psychosexual development.

The effect of her reshaping of Lacanian theory is to decentre language as central to development and to investigate

practices, forms and positions...[which] actually help to produce the fixing and channelling of desires by virtue of their production of power-knowledge relations. (223)

Urwin (1984), in accordance with this re-emphasis, suggests that we must view the inter-actions between parents and children in the play of relations of power as various and contradictory, thereby placing language development and, thus, the subject position, in a social context.

A serious consideration of what children contribute to the emergence of language....will need both a different view of human subjectivity and a way of articulating its relation to language as it is manifested in particular social practices through which children grow up. (272)

Obviously, this re-description invites an inclusion of children's experience of fiction as a social practice which sets up, and is influenced by, particular power positions. It is necessary, then, to focus on common social practices, rather than on language *per se*, during which mutual expectation and negotiation are established through frequency and routine. Storytelling and book-based interactions are part of this process.

Urwin conceives of the Mirror Stage as the precipitating force by which structural changes in the mother/child relationship are engendered. These changes, which establish the mother as separate, begin at the time of language acquisition and, according to Lacan, it is "the attempt to master the anxiety arising from fear of loss or denial of satisfaction" which forms "the impetus behind language acquisition," (273).

As described earlier, it is the Mirror Stage which introduces the infant to the order of imaginary relations, and more importantly, to the discourses in which they can exercise and test subject positions. The illusion of control is played out within these interactions, implying that the play of authority within self-other interactions is central to the development of subjectivity.

Urwin demonstrates, through a variety of examples, the disjunction of the infant's position in relation to its mother, shown in social games where the mother plays with the illusion of control. She considers book-reading to be a site of this illusory power play and thus, central to the development of "the infant's position in relation to its mother and to his or her own use of power." (297)

Bruner's own book-reading research (with Ninio) supports Urwin's view by revealing the ways in which "the mother creates the conditions regulating book-reading, producing an illusion of control" (299) that produces the baby's own assertion of self within the activity. Engel (1995), in her study of children's narratives, cites similar research.

The connections which Urwin makes between book-reading and other ritualised procedures and communicative inter-actions provide a model which places the fictional dimension of individual development in a social context. The parent (though, in practice, most often the mother) stands in for the author in these exchanges, and, in addition to taking on the voice of the text, may to some degree play within it, adding a personal gloss to the narrative or inviting the child to share in the telling (Dombey in Kimberley et al, 1992). This may involve allowing the child to finish the rhyme, to lift the flap, to fill in the word, add to the narrative or 'tell' the pictures. Modern picture books make this invitation explicit, offering opportunities for the child to become 'the teller as well as the told' (Meek 1988, Lewis 1995). In Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are for instance, the illustrations gradually increase in size as the white space

and written text diminish and are finally removed altogether. Not only does this create the potential for the picture to draw a reader in to the dark colours and imaginative world presented, but also leaves a gap for the reader to tell the story of three double-pages of action, in which Max engages in 'a wild rumpus' with the Wild Things. The catharsis that the reader is invited to experience within the text is enhanced by this invitation to enter into the telling, to become the author of the fictional events. Other opportunities to tell are offered by wordless picture books, such as Hughes' Up and Up and Briggs' The Snowman.

The parent may also carry the language of the book-reading into other inter-actions. The use of textual allusion in everyday activities, such as adopting phrases from the text into the personal language codes of the family (in-jokes, etc.), fall into the notion of inter-action and play which Urwin describes. These communicative exchanges, and the associated physical inter-actions which accompany them, such as role play (Wolf & Heath, 1992) can offer the child a powerful position within the fictional discourse and provide an opportunity for playing with illusions of control and self-assertion.

The nature of the parent-child inter-action described by Urwin, suggests that there is a direct correspondence between the author's voice within the text and the position of the parental reading voice in these communicative exchanges. The Book Choice Study revealed the essential influence of parental story-reading on modes of reading, suggesting that a child who is offered the opportunity to read and be read to in this way acquires an active subject position and thus is enabled to take on a shared sense of authority within a 'writerly' discourse. Not only might this explain the pleasure children take in repeated re-readings of the same story, but I suggest that the ability to exert authority within the discourse enables a subject position (an "I") that signifies the speaker in this fictionalising process. In the same way that a child enters into the fictional discourse of book-reading, so he/she also enters into the narrative of his/her

own life, constructing a self through the 'subjunctivizing' force of stories in which the reader can perform the role of author (Chambers 1985, Bruner 1986).

If the connection between the reader's active position in the text and the development of a powerful subject position can be said to have significance, it is vital to consider how these early experiences of discourse operate and influence the inter-action with fiction that occurs throughout the continuum of any individual's reading life. Both the texts of childhood, and the parental and socio-cultural meta-discourses that surround them, mediate in the process through which we become readers, and if a theory of response is to be complete, and if it is to be of significance to real readers, then we must ask whether the texts and discourses on which these inter-actions are based also influence the kind of subject positions we construct for ourselves through time.

While Urwin places Lacan's theoretical construction in a social context, Kristeva extends his psychoanalytical model into a political dimension, through eclectic reference to semiotics, Bakhtinian theory and psychoanalysis. The theoretical perspective that she offers draws a bridge between the origins of poetic language and the cultural context of response which will be the concern of the next chapter. Though she declares her interest in "the moments where language doesn't yet exist such as during a child's apprenticeship to language" (in Rice & Waugh, 1992:28), she does not directly address the concerns of Children's Literature theorists. However, in the following chapter, I suggest that her concern with the socio-cultural context of discourse is relevant to an exploration of the child's voice in relation to discourse on a variety of levels.

While Lacan draws on a transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic Order discussed above, Kristeva refers to the pre-Symbolic phase as the 'semiotic', thus describing the shifts in consciousness in terms of the function of the sign, both prior to and following the infant's entry into language. The focus of her concern is the origin of poetic

language, and though she refers in the main to the creative artist's process, much of what she says has significance for the way in which any individual responds to that poetic language.

These two signifying processes: the semiotic, which exists prior to socialisation - sound without sense - and the symbolic, during which the sign is established in the entry into language, form a dialectic which reveals the origins of the creative process in the prelinguistic period which

lays the foundation of semiotic material which remains active beneath the mature linguistic performance of the adult. (Selden & Widdowson: 142)

This disorganised combination of sounds and the associated fluctuations of movement of the body in infancy characterise the semiotic and can be found in the babbling, rhythmic, alliterative, melodic play of the young infant. Later, as Urwin points out, it can be recognised in the playful testing of the limits of language by the young child. This subversive and parodic approach to language is also present in some of the most imaginative children's books, though, as I have suggested above, such texts are in the minority. Once again, the dimension of process and continuity between the child and adult experience of language is ignored. Kristeva sees a relationship between the sound and rhythm and primary sexual impulses and regards the symbolic order as a controlling force which represses the 'incandescence' of the creativity implicit in this impulsive, uncontrolled activity innate in infancy.

If what Kristeva theorises is true for the creative artist, if the semiotic material lives beneath the controlling law of language, then it can also be supposed that the process of entering into the symbolic order is a gradual layering, and that, even though the creation of poetic language might be the ultimate expression of such a process, the creative, self-determined act of reading the 'writerly' text is also present in that split.

The power of alliterative, rhythmic and playful usage of language in children's fiction, in addition to the polysemic complexities of the modern picture book (Moss 1990, Lewis 1994) and the tendency of young children to adopt these usages in their own storytelling (Fox 1993, Engel 1995) supports Kristeva's claim for the power of the semiotic,

this ultimate and primordial leash holding the body close to the mother before it can become a social speaking subject. (1986:30)

From the Psychoanalytic to the Social

The important empirical evidence which Kristeva requires to support theoretical claims is provided by numerous response studies with young children, though the aim of such research has not always been to investigate this aspect of child language. Examples of this kind of semiotic activity underlying inter-action with fiction are available throughout the transcribed conversations with the two youngest children in the Study undertaken for this research. The responses of the young readers in the Book Choice Study discussed in Part Three demonstrate the pleasure caused by interruptions of the "normative signifying line", and, in particular, the dominance of rhythm and rhyme.

The sense in which this is rule-breaking, allowing these playful usages of language to dominate, is seen by Kristeva as a parodic gesture which seeks to free the word from its signifying function and thereby defy the law of the symbolic order. This represents a subversion of order, in much the same way that fantasy disrupts the dominance of rationality (Jackson, 1993), disturbing the established order and, at the same time, calling attention to it. Her argument is extended to include a political dimension, which, in some way, urges us to look back to Sartre's notion of the reader's responsibility to 'create' with the author as an indication of greater personal freedoms (in Lodge, 1972). Both Sartre and Kristeva regard the disruption of authoritarian

discourses as a key to radical social change, thereby suggesting the political force of the poetic use of language (see also Stallybrass and White, 1986).

Kristeva outlines the danger that the revolutionary capabilities of these subversive parodic expressions of resistance to the symbolic order of language are subsumed by the forces of bourgeois ideology, which treat these challenges as a "safety valve for repressed impulses it denies in society." (in Selden & Widdowson: 142). Nowhere is this clearer than in the example of children's literature. The encouragement toward openness and subversion of adult value systems and the law of language in the most challenging, imaginative and enlivening texts of childhood is controlled and contained by those forces which relegate children's literature to the margins of culture. Texts which invite the reader to play with meaning, to question the authority of the author's voice or to think for themselves in a 'writerly' way are threatening a society that wishes to construct the child as conformist and obedient (Rose 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994). By denying these texts a place in cultural and academic discourse and by denying them and their readers a place in the model of a continuum of readership, we are part of that repressive force, and are in danger of subjugating the forces of desire which are at work in our origins.

Kristeva's re-reading of Lacan casts the shadow of cultural mediation over a psychoanalytic programme and obviates the need to consider the force of the symbolic order from within a socio-cultural context. While this chapter has attempted to describe the way that the origins of response have been theorised, the next chapter will survey a variety of cultural theories of response. These approaches, again, largely ignore the texts of childhood, and in so doing, leave a gap in the understanding of the forces that influence response.

CHAPTER THREE CULTURAL THEORIES OF RESPONSE

The process by which children are admitted into the social realm of language and the influence of social modes of reception on the way children are constructed as readers are central to the concerns of this thesis. The degree to which children are silenced within the discourses of children's literature is determined by the social mediations which surround their inter-actions with fiction, and it is the absence of consideration of children and their experiences of fiction in cultural theories of response that contributes to this silence.

The work of Urwin and Kristeva discussed in the previous chapter provided a re-orientation toward an exploration of theoretical perspectives concerned with the social and cultural contexts of response. While both the origins of response in the 'fictional direction' of subjectivity and features of the texts themselves, which invite different modes of reading, contribute to our understanding of the inter-action between a reader and fiction, a wide-ranging body of theory confronts the fact that these inter-actions do not occur in isolation. Both reader and text are formed by the interplay of individual and social forces, while *the reading itself*, the pragmatic event of inter-acting with a text, is continually mediated by the socio-cultural contexts in which reading occurs. These forces operate on the level of the sign (Volosinov 1973, Bakhtin 1981, Kristeva 1986), on the level of the production of texts (Macherey 1978, Naumann 1976, Bennett 1983, McGann, 1991) and on the level of the reader's own formation (Fish 1980, Bennett 1982, 1983), thus placing each reading act within a web of interwoven, socially mediated factors. This re-orientation of theory toward an exploration of these interweaving forces implies an emphasis on process which is largely absent from response theories which focus on the text. The social dynamics which mediate reader/text inter-actions at numerous levels act through time to arrive at each individual reading, which in turn, will influence future readings (Iser 1978, Eagleton 1978). However, an investigation of these theoretical perspectives reveals a

fundamental disregard for the texts and readers encountered in childhood, and thus ignores those textual inter-actions and meta-discourses which construct readers. The purpose of this chapter is to indicate the need for this gap to be filled, if a new theoretical approach to response (Bennett, 1983) is to be explored. While there is emphasis placed on the historicity of fictional texts and the social forces which determine their construction (Volosinov 1973, Bakhtin 1981, Watkins in Hunt, 1992) the history of readers is ignored, though the reader is an equal in the dialectic that constitutes a 'literary engagement' (Sartre, 1947).

I shall argue that a model of response that privileges the social construction of both text and reader cannot be complete without a consideration of the special case of children's literature, for the nature of a child's inter-action with fiction is always mediated by adult forces *on behalf of* 'the child', thus constructing not only the reader, but also each individual reading act (Rose 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, Wilkie 1995). These adult mediations operate as a meta-discourse which involves not only the texts themselves, but extra-textual factors as well. A consideration of the material production of texts and their provision and promotion by adults for children reveals the complexity of the nature of the child/book relationship and raises questions with which contemporary children's literature theorists are currently struggling (Hunt 1991, 1994, Rudd 1992, 1995, Rosen 1995). The individual case studies at the centre of this thesis attempt to deal with the nature of these mediations and the ways in which they influence, and, thus, play a formative role in, the inter-relationship between reader and fictional text. Though these studies are only concerned with childhood reading, I will argue that this exploration is of value to a theoretical position which proposes a continuous process of response and offers a new approach sought by many theorists (Macherey 1966, Bennett 1982, 1983, Kristeva 1986, McGann 1991, Rose 1992).

Kristeva, as we have seen in the previous chapter, considers literature to be a social practice, and describes the interplay between the semiotic, playful relationship to

language in infancy and the controlling symbolic order in terms of a socialising process, continually undermined by the force of desire revealed by her psychoanalytic perspective. The insistence, in the writings of the Bakhtin/Volosinov school, and echoed in Kristeva's position, that all "verbal discourse is a social phenomenon - social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors" (Bakhtin, 1980:259), has important implications for an understanding of response. For while the social context of the utterance through historical time is the focus of this body of theory, the history of the reader as *co-producer* of fictional text must also be considered in its social context. As the utterance is defined as a speech act (Volosinov, 1973), always shifting and dependent on context and inflection, so the receptivity of the reader to meet these socially contextualised utterances can be viewed historically. This does not mean only that response to language changes over historical time, but that the changes in response can be traced throughout the life of a reader, determined in part by the methods by which the reader comes to be a reader (Meek 1988, Stephens 1992, Engel 1995). While a Marxist perspective focuses on the social forces which determine the dialogic thrust of language in terms of the history of the class struggle (Stallybrass and White, 1986), the interplay of heterogeneous utterances can also be viewed in terms of the history of the individual entering into the symbolic order of signs (Kristeva, 1986). The explorations of the origins of response in the previous chapter suggest that, from infancy, a person is equipped to deal with a web of communicative exchanges dialogically in order to come to consciousness and to move toward the acquisition of a subject position. The 'voice in the head' described in Chapter Two, is constructed through the ventriloquizing of adult voices played out in a continuous process, influenced by the social contexts of adult/child inter-actions. Story-telling and book-reading, in addition to the meta-discourses which define and ascribe value to such experiences with language, form a crucial part of the dialogic interplay of inner and outer sign formation which is a primary focus of the work of Volosinov/Bakhtin (1973/1981). Engel (1995) in her investigation of children's narratives, points out, for instance, that

The child first internalizes his mother's voice and repeats in his own monologue phrases the mother has used in conversation with him, thus bringing to the child's narratives the ideas, meanings, and forms of the social world around her....A narrative is never only the expression of another's consciousness and identity; the speaker speaks through the voices of others. In this way the narrative is always a social construction. (1995:173)

The significance of Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia and carnival to this weave of stabilising and de-stabilising voices within a text suggests a parallel between the history of novelistic discourse as a web of socially oriented voices and the psychoanalytic model of the history of the individual. In 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' (in Moi, 1986), one of the first Western expositions of Bakhtinian theory, Kristeva calls attention to the '*status of the word*' and its socially situated articulations. Thus, the parodic challenge to the symbolic order offered by carnivalesque discourse

breaks through the laws of language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. (1986:36)

The struggle which Bakhtin observes in the history of languages and which contributes to the specific dynamic qualities of novelistic discourse can also be seen in the process by which language is brought alive and then controlled by the young child. A parallel can be drawn to Bakhtin's conception of the dynamics of language and the developing child, when he writes:

at every moment in the life of a language it opposes the realities of heteroglossia, but at the same time the ideal of a simple, holistic language makes its presence felt as a force resisting an absolute heteroglot state, it posits definite boundaries for limiting the potential chaos of variety, guaranteeing a more or less maximal understanding. (1981: 291)

The playful, alliterative, rhythmic and carnivalesque features of language which Kristeva observes are brought to conform to an image of an holistic language, just as the testing of language boundaries observed in the babbling of the infant is progressively urged into the controlling order of adult uses of grammar and pronunciation. Where the novel, or fictional work in general, is concerned, the emphasis for the children's literature critic has been, in the past, on finding the unitary forces within the novel and making the assumption that children read in a particular way (Meek 1991, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, Rudd 1994, Reynolds 1995). However, Bakhtin views the relationship with language offered by the novel as dialogic, representing the struggle between the centripetal forces of universal language systems and the transgressive forces that parodise or *carnivalise* that language system. If the reader is viewed as a kind of novelistic text, formed by the interweaving voices of heteroglossia, then the work of Bakhtin has great significance for a theory of response which includes children. The parodic features of the *carnivalesque* and its roots in 'low' culture, bodily functions and notions of the 'Other' which continually challenge notions of bourgeois social conformity (Stallybrass and White, 1986:201), resemble and include those child-like uses of language which repeatedly test the boundaries of the authority of imposed structures of meaning.

In addition to a radical re-reading of Bakhtinian theory suggested here, I propose that his view of the plenitude of meanings offered by the dialogism of novelistic discourse must include the texts of childhood. However, while some texts, and particularly picture books (Lewis, 1995) for children, possess the dialogic richness and polysemic liveliness of the novel, most fiction published for children monologises the language of the text, often unifying the underlying variations in speech types with a controlling narrative, either in the effort to 'teach' the language or to enhance the mechanics of reading ability, and thus functions as a controlling force. The need to make a distinction between texts which invite an authoritative position for a reader and those that do not must be acknowledged, as so much of the fiction available to children runs

counter to other experiences of language which a child encounters, as well as the way in which children use language to construct their own narratives, in the early years of acquisition (Tucker 1981, Bruner 1986, Fox 1993, Engel 1995). The use of nonsense, rhythm and rhyme in nursery rhymes, for instance, which enable a growing child to 'tune the text' (Barrs in Kimberley, et al, 1992) suggests a link between the playful, authority-challenging uses of language and the Bakhtinian model of dialogism.

The dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degree of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse, creates the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel. (1981:275)

The tendency of children to invest the individual word with power beyond its meaning invites the parallel between Bakhtin's history of the novel and the history of the individual reader. The sound quality and semiotic potential of a word, or group of words, orient the word or phrase dialogically whenever it occurs subsequently. In this way, young children novelise all that they read, or have read to them. In How Texts Teach What Readers Learn (1988), Meek gives an example of a child referring to her favourite part of Ted Hughes's The Iron Man as "delicacies" (37). Whereas Meek goes to the relevant paragraph to set this word in context, it is possible that the potential of the word itself and, perhaps, other uses of it, invest the word with a double value. The meaning is not important. Understanding the word or having the definition made available, fixes the word within a language system and demands a more static meaning and, ultimately, invites a less dynamic and creative relationship to language.

The same process can be observed in the context of the Book Choice Study, and most frequently in the responses of the younger children. For example, during a reading session with Max (the youngest child in the study, then aged three) from Captain Pugwash (Ryan, 1983), he began to repeat the word "bristling" under his breath. I

paused in my reading and turned to look at him. He then said, "The Black Pig was bristling with guns" several times and then repeated "bristling" again several more times, smiling as he did. I asked him if he knew what bristling meant and he shook his head, repeating it again. I did not define it, as he was deriving a great deal of pleasure from the value of the word as sound and perhaps as physical sensation (Kristeva, 1986) - the meaning it conveyed was personal to him and exciting. He had taken possession of the word and perhaps subsequent encounters with the word and with other such unfamiliar words (Beatrix Potter's usage of words such as "soporific", for instance) will have a richness denied by the knowledge of a fixed and static meaning.

The experience of encountering words and texts in this way places the reader in a position *vis-à-vis* the text which resembles the operations of language already experienced, rather than being forced into a mode of conformity. Just as the forces which seek to contain heteroglossia work "toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization" (Bakhtin, 1981:271), so efforts to socialise the child too often result in the construction of monologic texts and in consequence reinforce the ideological use and power of texts for children (Stephens, 1992).

Thus, on the level of the sign, the reader, and the inter-action with text, is formed by the social nature of utterance. This is stratified, not only in terms of class or genre, but also in terms of the individual's history within language.

In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each social level has its own language, moreover, every age group has as a matter of fact its own language, its own vocabulary, its own particular accentual system. (Bakhtin, 1981:290)

Bakhtin includes family jargon in this temporal stratification of languages and this could certainly include literary language or reference to book-oriented allusion which is a feature of parent/child discourse around fiction (Fox 1991, Hunt 1991, Wolf and Heath 1992). The pleasure and amazement evident in transcribed conversations with

children, including the Book Choice Study, when allusion to other texts is recognised, both in other texts and in conversation, indicate the extent to which its use dialogises the text which results from the inter-action between reader and book. It is these encounters with the discourse of another in fictional inter-actions which contributes to an active, 'writerly' engagement with fiction and by implication, social consciousness, as described by Iser, Barthes and others.

The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse. (Bahktin 1981:348)

The process by which children are admitted into the social realm of language and the degree to which they are either stimulated or silenced within that discourse are central to the modes of communication available to them, and thus, determine the extent to which children are given a voice. The ability of any child reader to encounter the dialogic play of voices can, in Bakhtin's terms, be seen to have direct bearing on the development of consciousness, particularly in terms of the ideological thrust of language (Cohan and Shires 1988, Stephens 1992, Engel 1995). A perspective which focuses on an innate need to establish a dynamic relationship with discourse challenges public perceptions of the relationship between children and books which, to some extent, influences not only the texts which are provided for young readers, but also the ways in which they are provided. Public debate concerning fiction's power to have a direct effect on the thinking and behaviour of readers cannot be judged in terms of content, but in terms of the relationship with discourse that is learnt through inter-actions of a communicative kind, including, perhaps most crucially, fictional discourse (Hollindale 1988, Rose 1994).

Recent shifts in the emphasis of Children's Literature theory (Hunt 1991, Stephens 1992) call attention to the need to concentrate on the forces that determine how a child reader is positioned in the discourses of fiction. The explorations of theorists concerned solely with children's literature into the formative beginnings of a reader's history offer many insights to those theorists who, while ignoring childhood, are searching for a new direction which includes not only the history of the text, but that of the reader (Bennett, 1983). These positions, in turn, impinge on pedagogy and invite questions about the way in which education and the relationships between readers, texts and teachers influence the construction of readers (Corcoran, et al 1994).

While Bakhtin/Volosinov demonstrate the primacy of the sign in the process of entering into consciousness and largely ignore questions of the reader's response, Bennett (1982, 1983) and Naumann (1976) suggest a model of response influenced by a Marxist perspective. The layers of mediation which surround the production and provision of children's fiction place the child reader in a role of 'subjection' to the controlling discourses of adulthood and society (Rose 1992, Wilkie 1995) which must influence the history of a reader. Therefore, the map of response proposed by these cultural theorists is incomplete if it does not include the reading inter-actions from which adult readings evolve.

Bennett (1982) is concerned with the limits imposed by a Marxist critique of literature which concentrates only on the historicity of the creation of a work of literature, but disregards

the historical and material determinations which condition modes of consumption. (Bennett, 1982:225)

The recognition that the reception of the text is central to its ability to mean, obviates the need to insert the reader into 'the flow of history', and thereby gives rise to a new direction for literary criticism.

an understanding of the historical determinations which thus flow into the text through the diverse forms in which it is discursively mobilised in changing relations of ideological class struggle is vital. The aim of such a criticism should not be that of revealing the truth of the text, laying bare its structures, unpicking its devices, analyzing its effects or whatever; at least not as ends in themselves. Rather, it should be that of the *strategic* mobilisation of texts in specific contexts of class struggle; not a question of what texts mean but of what they might be *made to mean* politically. (229, Bennett's italics)

Bennett's programme carries a specific political agenda, and though the ideological force of what he says has significance for an understanding of the 'subjugation' of readers, it is the broader implications of his proposal for a new form of criticism which concern me here. The need to regard response through the socially regulated, extra-textual 'determinants' of reception fills an obvious gap in Iser's theorisation of response which, as I have already observed, exhibits a general disregard for the social contexts within which both the reader and the text are constructed (see Chapter One).

Bennett (1982) takes on the terminology of Pêcheux (1982) to define *inter-discourse* as the space or inter-action between any given text and the discursive regimes which have already regulated the thoughts and feelings of different individuals. In addition, the individual's access or exposure to these discourses is determined by the individual's position in the social formation. Though Bennett does recognise the role of education in the formation of these 'discursive regimes' which in some ways echo Fish's notion of the *interpretive community* (1980), he declines to include childhood experience in his analysis. This is a glaring omission, for, if this approach is to be valid, the life of any reader must be considered as a continuum, for all readers have been in the process of

becoming readers through a multiplicity of discourses which influence response (Fry 1985, Hollindale 1988, Rudd 1992, Stephens 1992).

The significance of the *inter-discourse* can be understood as a system which operates on many levels, both in terms of the way that the parent/child relationship forms a discourse around fiction and its relation to other inter-subjective acts (Urwin 1984), and also in terms of the broader cultural definitions of literature and expectations about the reading of fiction which meet at each individual reading act (Fish 1980, Corcoran et al 1994). Therefore, this web-like system forms 1) the reader that approaches the text, 2) the text that is available to the reader and 3) ways of reading that text, all of which mediate the response to any single act of reading. In turn, these features of each individual reading act are interdependent and continually shift and change with time. The inter-discourses, particularly in the special case of children's literature, are made available through the individual's reading history within the family and within the education system as well as within the complex system which controls provision and public reception of literature. These discourses influence the continual mediation of adults, whose own readings and positions within these discourses overlay and further problematise the inter-action of the child and the book (Cochran-Smith 1984, Reynolds 1990, Hunt 1991, Rudd 1992).

The control of the semiotic forces at play in language by the structures of the symbolic order (Kristeva, 1986) and the authority games that take place in parent-child interactions within storytelling and book-reading events discussed previously, suggest a perspective of discourse which combines this psychoanalytic model with a discourse theory which would "allow for the subjects' possible *resistance* to the discursive formations which transmit ideological positions." (Selden & Widdowson, 1993:166) Though the post-structuralist emphasis on the notion of power within discourse is primarily concerned with the history of the text and its reception, the significance for a theory of the history of a reader is clear. The degree to which children need to test,

resist or read away from the unifying, monologic, ideologically weighted intention of the text is well-documented (Sarland, 1991, Meek 1992, Children's Literature Research Centre 1994). In addition, the evolution of the dialogic narratives of the youngest children toward the unifying story (Engel, 1995) indicates the ways in which the meta-discourse which surrounds the provision of texts seeks to control and socialise the child. These processes are central to the view of the reader in history posited by Bennett (1982, 1983), but once again, any mention of the situation particular to children's literature has been disregarded. Certainly, the silence engendered by this disregard must be considered as a feature of the discourses which surround the reading of fiction.

Bennett's project, therefore, must include the reading of childhood, and he appears to be implying its inclusion when he proposes

a concrete and empirically formed history of reading might be produced by inserting the text within and analysing its action in the light of its articulation with the different discursive formations which mediate between it and different categories of readers.(1982:233)

The approach suggested here is applicable to the situation of children's literature, and it could be said that a great deal of the reading research carried out by children's literature researchers provides relevant data (Sarland 1991, Kimberley 1992, Rudd 1992, Corcoran et al 1994, etc.), though the aims of this research are often pragmatic in focus. My own research, discussed in detail in Part Three, provides empirical methods which seek to reveal the influence of adult discourses on the inter-action between fiction and individual child readers. The significance of this kind of research to Bennett's programme is clear, though the general disregard for children's literature threatens to keep this kind of work separate from mainstream theoretical concerns (Thacker, 1994).

Though Bennett does not address his concerns to childhood reading, his investigation of the reading of 'untutored' or popular texts suggests an approach which can be extended to include the 'reading formations' which determine the inter-action of the child and the book. He defines 'reading formations' as

a set of intersecting discourses that productively activate a given body of texts and the relations between them in a specific way. (1983:208)

The intersections can reveal individual and aberrant readings, but also describe the way that all texts are received within historically determined social relations and the material foundations of reading. This perspective equalises 'official' and 'different' readings, thereby emphasising the formations which determine those readings.

Meaning is a transitive phenomenon. It is not a *thing* that texts can *have*, but is something that can only be produced, and always differently, within the reading formations that regulate the encounter between texts and readers. (1983:211)

Bennett's distinction between canonised texts and popular fictions rests on the way that they are read. Whereas canonised texts are 'productively activated' to coincide with the academic discourses which surround them in order to include the reader in a literary community, popular, or 'untutored', readings are not (Nell, 1988). Bennett criticises the tendency to approach popular texts in the same way as those which are ascribed a 'literary value', without recognising the "necessary disparity" between the reading formations that surround the readings of these texts. A similar criticism can also be levelled at many critics of children's literature who seek to appropriate the texts of childhood without acknowledging the reading formations within which child reading occurs (Hunt 1991, 1995).

The new approach to criticism which Bennett proposes includes both a poetics and a pragmatics of a text, yet an analysis based on structures and "the construction of the reader that is affected in the organization by the text"(1983:213), followed by an investigation of "the random and chance determinations that animate the text by way of the person of the reader" (1983:213) is not sufficient, because it holds the text to be an object to which an individual reading must in some way measure up. A full understanding of reading must conceive of the text/reader inter-action

as occurring between the *culturally activated* text and the *culturally activated* reader, [an] interaction structured by the material, social, ideological, and institutional relationships in which *both* text and readers are inescapably inscribed. (1983:216)

This proposal is particularly relevant to the situation of the inter-actions of the child and the text, in that it emphasises the cultural mediation that determines how the text, and, often, the concept of fiction itself, are provided and constructed for the individual reader, who is also culturally inscribed. However, such a radical approach to literary theory appears to dissolve the notion of the definite, pre-existing text on which so much of literary criticism is based. Thus, it represents a threat to the status quo of the academic investigation of literature and invites a re-description of the critical task. Hunt (1995) sees this threat at the heart of academic resistance to the inclusion of children's literature theory into the study of literature *per se*, and the marginalisation of Children's Literature as a field of study within departments of English Literature has only very recently been questioned or challenged (Thacker, 1994).

The authority of 'the text itself', which justifies so much academic criticism, has implications for a focus on the pragmatics of reading, for not only does it privilege particular constructions of a various and shifting text, but it also influences the way in which readers are expected to approach the text (Fish 1980, Protherough 1983, Stephens 1992).

If...one's concern is with the real and varied history of their productive activation - such attribution of any authority to the 'text itself'...becomes the means whereby readings are dismissed as distortions or misunderstandings...rather than readings that....deserve to be understood on their own terms. (1983:219)

This conception has a direct bearing on the research carried out for this thesis, for it suggests a one-sided view of reading which silences the reader in the process of demonstrating an 'understanding' of the text which dominates so much reading research. The purpose of the Book Choice Study, to explore the inter-actions that children have with texts 'on their own terms', directly addresses the situation Bennett critiques and leads the way forward toward a new approach to response for which he argues.

This perspective, which admits the innate variability of texts, is particularly relevant to an examination of the popular, as opposed to the already-read, canonised text. In his quest for the "discursive forms and institutional apparatuses through which popular reading is superintended" (Bennett, 1983:220) Bennett mentions film reviews, fan magazines, etc., but completely ignores the huge range of texts available in the field of children's literature, although such texts conforms to his needs in every way. The fact that these are, indeed, uncanonised texts, read by non-critical readers who are largely silenced, supports his central contention

...the problem is that the text the critics have on the desk before them may not be the same as the text that is culturally active in the relations of popular reading. Accordingly, analysis must start with the determinations that organise the social relations of popular reading, if we are to understand the nature of the cultural business that is conducted around, through, and by means of popular texts in the real history of their productive activation. (1983:220)

The new direction for literary criticism proposed here is echoed in Cohan's and Shires' (1988) analysis of narrative discussed in Chapter One, particularly with reference to the Barthesian contrast between the *work* itself, which calls for traditional methods of analysis, and *text*, which is plural and constantly shifting. The Post-structuralist agenda, which reveals the fluctuation of meaning, implies a new practice which takes account of the dialectic between the making of meaning "for" the reader and the process of making meaning "by" the reader and drives the ideological force of the work. The inter-animation implied here is dependent on the inter-action between "psychoanalysis, linguistics and ideology." (Eagleton, 1983). Bennett's proposals are severely limited by his inability to acknowledge a psychoanalytic model of response, for he must therefore disregard the concept of 'process' or movement inherent in the conceptual map proposed by Cohan and Shires. This intersection of concerns occurs in the theoretical perspectives of children's literature suggested in the descriptions provided in this section of the thesis, and its absence not only prevents the completeness of a theory, a "new cosmology of literature" (Meek, 1993), but also silences the reading of children within the inter-discourses of fiction to which Bennett adheres.

Through a more conventionally Marxist perspective, the East German critic, Manfred Naumann, also looks toward a symbiosis of consumption/reception and production/text. The repressive political system from within which Naumann was writing clearly influenced his aim to provide:

a methodological procedure which permits us to grasp
the complexity of the processes actually occurring in the interaction
between the writing and reading of literature, among author,
work and reader (1976:107),

offering a critique of established critical methods from a different direction, yet proposing a similar way forward.

Like Bennett, Naumann expresses the view that "author, work and reader, the literary processes of writing, appropriation, and communication, are mutually intercoordinated and form a relational structure." (107). They are "inseparably meshed".

The notion of art, rooted in the "material and ideological relationships of social being", as a humanising force is derived from Marx and forms the basis of Naumann's argument. It is the consumption or reception of a work that makes it complete (Sartre, 1947). In turn, this perspective suggests that the conditions of consumption will also permeate the conditions of production. However, Naumann problematises the interplay between the creation and reception of a literary work by drawing attention to the concrete, material reality of the work, as well as its provision.

The reader's freedom in dealing with a work has its limits in the objective properties of the work itself. (1976:116)

Thus, the individual event which is the reception to a work of literature always occurs within a social process mediated by numerous factors. Naumann lists these mediations which:

are to be found in publishing houses, bookstores, and libraries, as well as in literary criticism and propaganda, literary instruction in schools, the study of literature and all other institutions which mediate, materially or ideally, between the work produced and the reader. It is not therefore literature or works "in themselves" to which the reader establishes a relation in reading them. It is works, rather, which out of the potential stock of produced works have been selected, propagated, and evaluated by social institutions, according to ideological, aesthetic, economic, or other viewpoints, and whose road to the reader has additionally been cleared by measures of the most varied sort (advertising, book production, reviews, commentary, discussions of the work, public readings, literary prizes, popularization of the author, and so on). (1976:119)

It is immediately apparent that this view of reception, or response, implies an historical process to literary production which echoes Bennett's conception. The *social modes of reception* and the way they influence the concrete, individual response must be seen as central to the concerns of the children's literature theorist, and in turn, form part of the map which conceptualises the effects of all social mediation.

However, it is also essential to regard Naumann's list of mediations in terms of the history of the individual reader, and therefore, the conditions which determine the inter-actions of the child and the book that are only suggested by his reference to literary instruction in schools. From the point of view of the children's literature critic, it is the absence of the consideration of these texts and the marginalisation of the field which must be admitted as a mediation which thus influences reception, both in reference to the child reader and to the adult reader the child is always in the process of becoming.

In Part Two, I will provide an analysis of some of the mediating factors which affect the provision of books for children. The complexities of these inter-connections must be seen in the light of the fact that any actual child reader is also influenced by numerous adult readers, who, in terms of the social modes of reception, often take the place of the intended reader: reading reviews, attributing value through the awarding of literary prizes, buying, borrowing and selecting books. More than that, adults, as representatives of broader social forces, whether consciously or not, define the concept of the role that fiction plays in that society, and attribute 'literary' value. Whether it be on the level of Fish's 'interpretive community' of readers, in terms of choosing which books are available, or on an individual basis in the family or in the classroom, (Sarland 1991, Rudd 1992, Chambers, 1993b, Corcoran 1994, Hunt 1994) adults exert a powerful and formative influence on the growing reader. Thus, "ideas.....of what literature was, is, ought to be, can do, and must have done" (Naumann, 1976:119) are part of the *social mode of reception* and, as these *social modes of*

reception bridge the gap between the produced work and the reader, they can be seen to influence the process by which adults mediate the inter-actions between book and child. Notions of literature which include the relative attribution of value to certain texts and ways of reading are implicated in this function, so that what is said about a work affects the expectations with which the reader approaches it, influences the way in which a work is read (for instance, how carefully it is read) and what is to be said about it after a reading (Protherough 1983, Fry 1985, Sarland 1991, Mackey 1995). Thus, a recognition of the ideological function of critics and teachers of literature and the effect their commentary has on reception before, during and after the reading event must be included in an encompassing social theory of response.

The interrogation of methods of teaching literature (Protherough 1983, Corcoran and Evans 1987, Steig 1989, Bogdan 1992, Corcoran, et al 1994) implies a recognition of the power of the teacher's role to influence response. Corcoran (1994), for instance, calls for a re-examination of practice, informed by theoretical perspectives suggested by reader response theory. It must be recognised, he says, that

reading is both a private and social affair; that attention must be paid to the cultural framing of readers and readings; that reading is a distinctively intertextual event; that every reading is a rehearsal for writing, and every re-reading an invitation for re-writing; and that all forms of teacher intervention are inevitably political. (1994: x)

Naumann considers that the social modes of reception mediate the individual reception process by regulating or even manipulating response in a way which counter-acts the "qualitative make-up of the original." (120). This control prevents destabilising influences of the 'imperialist system of society', and in congruence with Kristeva's notion of the revolutionary capabilities in poetic language, establishes the subversive as marginal and thus denies the threat. However, Naumann also recognises that

individual readers can resist this controlling process by virtue of other forces which influence the history of the reader.

Acquaintance with literature begins at such an early stage of personal development - with listening to poetically colored (sic) narratives, tales, rhymes, etc. - that the capacities thus acquired for understanding poetical works appears, as it were, a "natural" characteristic of man. It is a question, however, of sociocultural capacities which the reader has acquired in the course of his life. In so doing, the social capacities, the rules of commerce with literature, are subjectively "broken" in the individual's appropriation, corresponding to his concrete sociohistorical and individual situation. (1976:121)

It is the interplay between the social and the individual components that determines the "expectations, demands and attitudes" which influence each reading event.

Throughout an individual's reading history, such an interplay overlays the 'natural' inter-action with literary language, having a deep effect, not merely on the reader's reception to the text, but on "modes of perception" in general. The recognition of these effects on the individual forms the basis of much re-examination of pedagogy (Rosenblatt, 1978).

In addition to the influence on the reader as an individual, Naumann also calls attention to the circularity of response: the extent to which individual response will, in turn, influence literary production.

Such evidences of receptive acts can sometimes change the author's image of his audience, and may operate in this intermediate fashion as an "internal motivation" for new literary production. (1976:122)

Whereas Naumann is particularly concerned with a more wide-ranging approach to literary history, to include the influence of reception on the production of new literature, his emphasis on social mediations between text and reader has immediate

relevance to the study of children's inter-action with fictional text. Not only are the influences described at work in the individual's expectation *before text*, but also, the emphasis given to the construction of a reader through time describes a process from 'natural' receptiveness to poetic works toward a mature and reflective reception which in turn influences the creation of new work.

The special situation in which children's literature is positioned must be considered in the light of this process, for it is the double audience for the texts of childhood which must be acknowledged. The adults who mediate these texts on behalf of children as readers are also readers of the text or, in many cases, the promotional material and critical writing which surround the text. Part of the function of the material production of the texts is to include both the adult and the child as audience. While Wall (1991), for instance, identifies the function of narrative address in this notion of the dual audience, the material reality of the text as object also implies a dual readership, or at least, a recognition of two audiences: the child and the adult.

The bibliographic and peri-textual features of the book as an object which holds the narrative, have a direct effect on the way in which any book is perceived, read and responded to by an individual reader. There is no available research which approaches the case of children's literature in this capacity, though Hunt (1991) acknowledges its importance and Reynolds (1990) includes a consideration of "publisher's marketing strategies" in her analysis of gendered *fin de siècle* popular children's fiction. I will argue that the social modes of reception which influence individual reception operate through these peri-textual features. The degree to which bibliographic features of the text are directed at the adult 'purchaser' of the text and the degree to which they are directed at the child reader must be investigated as a major influence in the construction of children as readers of fiction. The Book Choice Study carried out for this research reveals the extent to which the objective qualities of the books themselves accentuate the interplay of adult influence and the silenced child reader in a way that

contributes to a theoretical mapping of a continuum of response, suggested by the work of Bennett and others.

Though the shift in focus in literary theory toward the *social modes of reception* outlined in this chapter invites an exploration of the influence of the material production of texts on response (Sutherland 1990, McGann, 1991), such perspectives do not extend to the inclusion of children's texts. While there is a recognition that the material qualities of text affect individual reading events, broader notions of influence are ignored. The obvious importance of the material qualities of books for children, and the formative role such aspects of the book as an object have on the process by which the adult reader forms his/her expectations of the relationship between the material qualities of the book and its reception, must be acknowledged. This gap in theory is thus a crucial one, as it leaves unexamined the mediating function of production to construct the individual reader.

Immediate parallels can be drawn to the situation of children's literature and the way that McGann (1991) conceives of the material execution of *textual events*, which are similar to the individual reading acts discussed earlier. When he expresses the problematic nature of determining how texts are read, though, like so many other literary theorists discussed here, he does not refer to children's literature directly.

Today, texts are largely imagined as scenes of reading rather than scenes of writing. This "readerly" view of text has been most completely elaborated through the modern hermeneutical tradition in which text is not something we *make* but something we *interpret*. (1991:4)

By defining 'textuality' as an event, McGann emphasises the need to understand reading in terms of specific material conditions, arising out of changing sociohistorical circumstances which determine the way in which texts are produced and received. Sutherland, too, in his investigation of the history of the production and reception of

the literary book (1991), calls attention to the book, not as merely a work of aesthetic value, but as a commodity (Macherey, 1966, Eagleton, 1976). In this way, the socially determined conditions which surround the production of the books, from editorial influence, to book cover design, to marketing strategies, must be taken into consideration when engaging with questions of response.

Since the texts themselves are situated within the material object of a book, they are located within what McGann calls 'the editorial horizon'. This fact, echoed by a body of Marxist critics,

forces one to re-imagine the theory of text - and ultimately, the theory of literature - as a specific set of social operations. (1991:21)

Thus, the demands of the publisher are seen to modify any literary decisions, and the bibliographic factors which surround the text can be considered as determinates of response. While McGann is concerned with editing scholarly editions, his perception of the book as a commodity has relevance for an investigation of response which includes children's literature. As Rosen (1995) argues, one of the ways in which children's literature is conceived is as a lucrative part of the book trade, and this sometimes works against its other functions: as an ideological force, as a nurturing practice, or as 'part of the institution of Literature (with a big L)'. The degree to which educational concerns impinge on the commercial perceptions of children's book publishers adds another level to the complex systems which determine the 'textuality' of the children's book, and in turn influence not only the individual reading event, but the construction of readers over time (Hunt, 1991).

The omission of children's literature from the theoretical approach to textuality posited by McGann is perhaps the most glaring one. For, if we are to admit the degree to which response is socially contextualised, and if we are to investigate the forces which

construct the reader over time, then the material qualities of the book itself must be central to our concerns. The extent to which the bibliographic features, such as cover design, and objective reality of the book influence response, reveals the degree to which peri-textual features mediate the inter-action between the child reader and the author. This 'white noise' of numerous adult voices contributes to the subjection of readers and silences the subversive forces which are inherent in a literary engagement with text (Rose, 1992). The role these socially constructed reading inter-actions have on the formation of adult readers, and thus on their response to literature in general, must be acknowledged by the many literary theorists who seek to provide a fully integrated theory of response. Just as the social context of literature is revealed through the history of the novel, so the social construction of the individual reading event can be revealed through the history of the reading individual.

The next part of this thesis will be concerned with describing the various mediations which directly influence the reading events which occurred during the Book Choice Study. Surrounding all these mediations, however, is the absence of the particular case of children's literature within the discourses which attempt to theorise response.

PART TWO

THE META-DISCOURSES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The next section of this thesis describes and explores the contextualisation of children's literature. The ways in which the subject is spoken of and written about arise from a number of inter-related areas, all of which form a web of discourse which influences the relationship between children and fiction. These areas include the academic study and criticism of children's literature, the place of children's literature in education, the provision of the books themselves, through publishers, libraries, suppliers and bookshops and the representation of the subject in the media.

I argued in previous chapters that a theoretical perspective of literature as a whole must take account of the first experiences of fictional text. It is equally true that each of these experiences, the *individual reading acts*, is influenced by the way in which the text is perceived, the act of reading fiction is conceived and the way the discourses which frame the reading act mediate the reader/text interaction itself. In particular, the social dimension of response discussed in the last chapter is revealed in part by the voices which describe, criticise and make use of children's literature in various ways, together forming a mass of perceptions which not only influence how books are chosen and promoted, but also contribute to the formation of readers, and thus, affect the way that texts are read.

It is by now a commonplace that the texts that children read are, unlike peer texts, set within a web of adult mediations (Hunt 1991, Meek 1987, 1990, Chambers 1985, 1993, Rose 1992, Nodelman 1992, Reynolds 1994, Rosen 1995, Webb 1995, Wilkie 1995, etc.). Within this web, children as readers are often silent recipients of taught reading practices, anodyne and restrictive texts which keep publishers afloat, and social practices which place emphasis on verisimilitude. In other words, children as readers are absent from the discourses about the literature they are given to read (Paul, 1990).

What is more important is the fact that the multiplicity of voices which speak on behalf of the child in the world of literature often mediate between author and reader in ways that disrupt opportunities to experience the *jouissance* derived from the 'writerly' engagement with text celebrated by Barthes (1974, 1975) or the 'transformational' experience described by Chambers, as

literature which, if read creatively, reader and author making the story together, ha[s] the effect of transforming us as readers and as people. (Chambers, 1985:15)

Disruptions of such ways of reading also impinge on the subject positions readers are able to adopt in relation to fictional texts, often operating to efface the possibility of an authoritative position. In this way, readers are more likely to be at the mercy of the ideological force of the text (Hollindale 1988, Stephens 1992).

The extent to which theoretical perspectives have influenced our perceptions of literature in the past twenty years, particularly in the area of the reader's role as meaning-maker, has had a direct effect on what can be said about children's literature. As I have made clear above, these shifts have brought about a new kind of discourse about the subject, crossing the boundaries of psychology, philosophy, education and literature to produce a lively and varied blend of voices, often challenging and sometimes destructive (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994). In addition, this academic efflorescence around the study of Children's Literature makes more obvious the gap in theory described in the first part of this thesis. The lack of attention paid to the reading of the young in the formation of response within the academy must be interpreted as one of the contexts, albeit a negative one, which influence the perceptions of the relationship between children and fiction. Such a silence must be considered as a part of the marginalisation the field has suffered, suggesting a separation of concerns, whereas the inter-relationship between mainstream theory and Children's Literature

theory is complementary and mutually dependent (Chambers 1985, Hunt 1991, Rudd 1994).

In addition to the new, adventurous voices in Children's Literature theory, I will investigate those meta-discourses formed by education, publishing and the public. The way in which children's literature is perceived within these contexts has, perhaps, a more direct bearing on the books children are given to read and how they are expected to read and talk about them. Again, the last decade has seen a shift, also influenced by new theoretical perspectives, in the way in which fiction is talked about in educational contexts (Nodelman 1985, Corcoran, et al 1994, Reynolds 1994, Wilkie 1995), though the dominant forces which control education systems are slow at recognising the importance of these new perceptions. The market and the public are perhaps the last to be influenced by transformations in the academy, and it is the astonishing power that these forces wield over the silenced child reader that is, perhaps, the most destructive.

My examination of the discourses arising from those forces which mediate on behalf of the child reader will show the extent to which the contexts which frame the inter-relationship of literature and children serve to render the common experience of fiction as closed and static (Meek, in Styles, etc. 1992). Hunt goes further to suggest that

It is quite possible, then, that in playing the literary/reading game, children are progressively forced to read against themselves as children. (Hunt, 1991:192)

It is this situation which truly silences children's voices, for not only are children removed from the processes of provision and criticism, but the mediating voices of the adult world, represented by education, publishing, the media and the academic hierarchy, restrict the voice of the child reader *within* the text, reducing opportunities

for the open and creative relationship with literature, the dynamic dialogue between author and reader that offers the deep and abiding pleasure of the text.

The description and analysis that follows will also form part of the context of the Book Choice Study that will be discussed in Part Three, just as the investigation of theoretical perspectives is a further way of contextualising the readings that took place. The Reading Histories of the seven readers who took part in the study must be seen, not only in terms of the individual circumstances which have contributed to their perceptions of themselves as readers of fiction, but also in terms of the broader forces which have formed them as readers and made available the books from which their expectations are formed. These wider contexts have also been considered when analysing the way in which the books for the study were chosen, and the individual readings which took place.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORISING AND CRITICISING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

This chapter describes the recent development of critical and theoretical discourses which address themselves specifically to Children's Literature as a field of study. The vast range of approaches and emphases available in the history of children's literature criticism cannot be encompassed in an investigation of this kind and so I will refine the focus to examine those approaches which address the nature of the field. This means that less attention will be paid to the historical and bibliographic writing that contributes so much to children's literature scholarship. Rather, I will address the shifting concerns of theorists while attempting to define the status and situation of the field within the academic hierarchy.

The contrast between these new perspectives and the tradition of much past criticism, draws attention to a redefinition of the relationship between the reader and the book which encompasses readers of all ages. The willingness to question the nature of Children's Literature as a field, and to engage with the complexities of its involvement with adult concerns, creates a discourse which complements the strands of mainstream theory examined in Part One, allowing Children's Literature theory to fill the gaps described. By focusing on what child and adult readers have in common, many contemporary theorists demonstrate the degree to which children have been silenced by the assumptions of the past (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994), and locate the reasons behind the marginalisation of the field. The trend examined in this chapter obviates the need to transform the separation of concerns into an holistic approach to theories of response which encompass an understanding of the conditions of childhood as a period of life during which an individual forms a relationship to fictional language, thus demanding the inclusion of the inter-action between children and books.

While most discussion is derived from within the work of the Children's Literature specialist, whether from historical, bibliographical or educational bases, a number of approaches have been made from the academic mainstream (Rose, 1992), indicating the degree to which consideration of the subject has changed in the last ten or fifteen years. During the course of the three years of this research project, the shift in emphasis has continued to gather pace, suggesting that the adoption of mainstream theoretical thinking is transforming what it is possible to say about texts written for children. These radical re-descriptions of the subject are derived from both educational and literary contexts, and while there is much that is shared between the two, the history of the subject within the bounds of education has a direct influence on the tensions which surround the subject within the academy (Shavit 1986, Hunt 1991, Rose 1992, Reynolds 1994, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994). Though there is some evidence that the number of English Departments offering BA level courses in Children's Literature is growing (Webb 1994, Wilkie 1995, Hunt 1995), and it is possible to study the subject at MA and PhD level, there remains a great deal of suspicion about the relevance of studying literature for children alongside the more acceptable subjects, such as The Novel, Literary Theory or, perhaps, Post-colonial Writing. The frequently hostile attitudes expressed within the academy can be interpreted as a fear of the cross-disciplinary nature of the subject which appears to threaten the way in which Literature is traditionally taught (Hunt, 1995a, b).

The willingness of the new breed of Children's Literature theorists to test the boundaries of the subject and to question its nature is a factor which may contribute to the continued marginalisation of the field, perhaps because such questioning implies a challenge to dominant definitions of literary study. Recent developments in Children's Literature theory have been contiguous with the direction of much post-structuralist thought, to which there is resistance. However, the perspectives offered by contemporary theorists illuminate the significance of the socially constituted reader's role in the making of meaning, drawing attention to the similarities between adult and

child in relation to 'literary engagement'. Challenges to the assumptions based on the difference between child and adult readers have contributed to a poetics of children's literature that invites a conception of the continuum of readership.

To some, this is precisely its strength and challenge; books-for-children, books-and-children, adults-and-books-for children (and so on) form a complex matrix which is not merely fascinating in itself, but which encapsulates the central concerns of language, literature and society. (Hunt, 1995:10)

However, the discourses which concern themselves with children's literature as part of a broader view of literature are often devalued through lack of recognition, and are separated from the academic mainstream by, for the most part, keeping the study of Children's Literature firmly in the world of teacher education and librarianship courses. This, in itself, is not the problem - the theoretical perspectives which have contributed to the expansion of the field have also presented a radical face to educational debates about definitions of literacy and the way fiction is taught (Chambers 1991, Meek, et al 1992, Corcoran, et al 1995), and thus perform a vital role. Yet the marginalisation of the subject at BA level indicates the degree to which the relationship between children and fiction is regarded, within the academy, as essentially different, and more importantly, separate from the adult relationship to fiction. Such an attitude influences much of the discourse around children's fiction, devaluing child/book inter-action in terms of defining a 'literary' experience of text. This, in turn, influences social perceptions of such inter-actions and so contributes to the kinds of texts which are available to children and the ways in which they are read and talked about.

Though, as I have said, the boundary that separates the field of Children's Literature from the academic mainstream has begun to dissolve, it must be admitted that a great deal of what has been written and said about the subject reinforces the perception of Children's Literature as less insignificant and thus endangers the progress that has been

made (Rudd, 1994). While Hunt is affronted by the narrow-minded attitudes of the resisting academic hierarchies, he does not appear to recognise that the reputation of Children's Literature has rested, in the past, on critics who devalue the literary importance of the subject from within. Lesnik-Oberstein (1994), who is destructively critical of the limited criticism of children's literature she has read, is clearly justified in her diatribe against a great deal of specialist criticism which rests on a series of bland assumptions and commonplaces about the value of books for children. This trend in criticism is partly due to a resistance to, and a rejection of, the language and deliberate obscurantism of much academic writing, but it is also due to the mistaken conviction that children's needs, and the pleasures that children derive from fiction are, in essence, separate concerns and have no relevance for the adult or literature student. While such a separation of concerns may derive from a tradition of literary criticism which has been challenged by the recent developments in theory described in Part One, the denial of shared concerns contributes to the marginalisation of children's literature within broader literary discourses.

However, the adoption of critical language and theoretical perspectives does not guarantee that the traditional view of children's literature has been re-examined. The growth of interest in the subject in recent years has revealed the extent to which writing for children has been co-opted as virgin soil in which to sow the seeds of the academic publishing crop. Children's Literature criticism is already a major industry in the USA and Canada, where ChLA, which mimics the style and status of the MLA, produces one of several journals which have " become merely another area where those who must publish or not be promoted can generate more solipsistic wordage." (Hunt, 1995:4). A plethora of articles may pay homage to the complexities of much children's fiction, yet such products of scholarship further silence the children who are the readers of these texts by leaving them out of the equation (Rudd, 1992). Critics such as Shavit (1986) and Wall (1991) may struggle to arrive at a definition of children's literature through poetics or narratology, and we may learn a great deal

about the 'implied reader', but without the child, this kind of critical reading still rests on assumptions based on adult readings which continue to speak on behalf of children, and so cannot contribute to an understanding of reading and response as a continuous process. Though Stephens (1992) includes children in his multi-faceted investigation of ideology and the construction of subjectivity in children's fiction, "to gauge their reactions to the values and attitudes expressed in the texts" (1992:60), their responses to specific tasks were reported and interpreted by adult researchers in a way that might be seen to silence them further. While his studies revealed the importance of social values in the determination of subject positions available, the mode of reading was defined by the research question, further constructing the readers who took part.

It may not seem surprising that children as readers are not included more often in such approaches to text, for it is often the inclusion of children and their needs that marginalises the subject. Even when the educational pedigree of the critic is more openly admitted, investigations into response to children's literature remain separate, ignoring the dimension of continuity which places the roots of adult response in childhood (Sarland 1991, Styles, Bearne and Watson 1992, Bearne 1995, etc.).

This is not always the case, however. In recent years, educational theorists and practitioners have been re-defining literacy and providing evidence of children as natural, as opposed to taught, deconstructors of text (Meek 1987, 1992, Chambers 1993, Styles and Watson 1996), suggesting that what we learn from children's responses to fiction can contribute to an holistic picture of readership. Though many of these studies have pedagogical agendas, transcripts of book-oriented conversations reveal the willingness of very young children, particularly, to play within the text and maintain a powerful position in relation to the text - welcoming distancing strategies which place them in a 'dual orientation' (Stephens, 1992), and taking on an authorial role (Chambers, 1993b). However, because there is often an adult-oriented agenda constructing these child/book inter-actions, interpretation is targeted to a research

question, often ignoring evidence which would contribute to a fuller understanding of response (see Chapter 8).

It is a feature of the confusion surrounding the nature of the field of Children's Literature that this evidence is disregarded, while the academic community is offered 'critical' texts which rely on the unexamined assumptions of the child as an unformed clean slate, to be constructed as a 'real' reader. May's Children's Literature and Critical Theory (1996), which has appeared on the list of a major academic publisher, celebrates the adoption of critical theory by teachers of Children's Literature, and though the treatment of theoretical issues is simplistic in the extreme, the author provides a kind of primer for those who wish to adopt "critical theory" when discussing children's books in an attempt to help children become 'critical readers'.

In the broadest sense, literary criticism establishes a way of reading. It contains systematic approaches to the texts we read. In a more narrow sense, it becomes a way of justifying our own readings of the texts we read. (May, 1995:17)

The disappointment which arises from such a publication is due, not only to the poverty of scholarship which is revealed in its pages, but also to the fact that a major academic publisher has considered it to be a representation of the best in the field. The goals outlined are admirable. The encouragement for teachers to learn to read critically and within an analytical framework is pertinent, as is the aim of acknowledging the importance of children, as readers, actively finding meaning, rather than having a teacher's meaning imposed. However, May wants to create 'ideal' readers, re-orienting the teacher's role from imposing meanings to imposing a set of literary terms on young readers. This might be fine as far as it goes, yet this realignment remains a silence - starting not from a consideration of the complexity of children's readings, but from an assumption that there is an 'ideal' reader who will evolve with the correct critical language and knowledge of structures. Her description

of theory, and the examples of its use, reveal a constriction of response, rather than opening out. This is taken at random from her chapter, 'Reader Response in Children's Literature':

I was pleased to see that we also shared some interests in similar stories. I liked repetitive stories for their natural rhythm and predictable outcome. Heather liked *Goodnight Moon* for the same reasons, and in no time she was "reading" that book along with the reader. I liked books that related to the child's real world, and so did Heather. *The Snowy Day* became a favourite because she liked to go out in the snow and do the same things that Peter did. I was beginning to discover that Heather had definite preferences. She liked books that invited the reader to actively relate to the story. (May, 1995:158)

It is easy to be very angry with a book such as this, which, while espousing salutary aims, does so little to advance the discussion of children's literature as part of a continuum of readership, but instead grafts the language of critical theory onto the children's book without understanding its complexities. May's work adds conviction to the view that Children's Literature as a field of study has very little academic weight and represents the lowest form of criticism. Though, as Hunt (1995) suggests, these complaints are often unjustified, or made in terms which point to a kind of linguistic arrogance, books such as these reveal the tendency to be simplistic and render banal considerably problematic notions of response which belittle a great deal of excellent work.

In recent years, a number of theorists, some from educational backgrounds and some from departments of Literature and Cultural Studies, have criticised the ways in which Children's Literature has been conceived, and in so doing, reveal the problematic nature of the subject and the need to examine the assumptions on which definitions of the field rest. While some argue for the impossibility of children's literature because of the impossibility of quantifying 'the child' posited by its existence (Rose 1992, Lesnik-

Oberstein 1994, Wilkie 1995), others attempt to re-define the subject, admitting that, without a consideration of how children respond to the fiction they read, any theory is incomplete (Sarland 1991, Thacker 1994, Rudd 1995, Hunt 1995). Though many of these theorists argue for the importance of acknowledging the need for evidence from children, attempts to define a research approach to gather this kind of evidence have not been wholly successful. While the interviews conducted by Fry (1985), Sarland (1991, 1994a,b), Rudd (1992) Watson and Styles (1996) and others, contribute to such an approach, their pedagogical emphasis is restrictive not only in terms of the questions they ask, but also by the fact that their conclusions are limited to the reading experience of children, rather than extending the pertinence of their findings to a general understanding of response in general. Further discussion of such studies in Part Three will be used to define an open-ended approach to talking to children about their reading of fiction, which will contribute to an understanding of response within a continuum. The Book Choice Study which forms part of this research offers an approach to talking with children that reveals aspects of their responses to fiction that have not been provided by existing methods. By placing the evidence from this study within the contexts of adult mediation, in addition to the theoretical perspectives discussed in Part One, I will posit a new direction for children's literature research which takes into account the problematic nature of children and fiction. In this way, the knowledge of the Children's Literature specialist will show itself to be valuable to a theory of a continuum of response, and the voices of children will contribute to an understanding of 'literary engagement'.

While there is still much to justify a disregard of the subject, the majority of recent developments demonstrate an awareness of the complexities inherent in talking or writing about books for children. These explorations contribute, not only to an understanding of the texts in the light of theoretical perspectives, but also to a multi-dimensional view of children's literature, its place in relation to social mediations surrounding it and its importance in the power relationships between adults and

children (Sarland 1991, Stephens 1992, Rudd 1992). Though there are exceptions, these new critical discourses are characterised by their generosity and the degree to which the critics question themselves and consider the fluidity and elusive nature of the inter-relationship of any reader and text.

The publication, in 1984 (a revised edition appeared in 1992) of Rose's The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction, was welcomed by those who wished to see the subject of children and literature acknowledged beyond the realm of the Children's Literature specialist. Though Rose has indicated no subsequent interest in the field, her approach both to the texts and the issues of control signalled a re-evaluation of the role of children's literature in the hierarchy of texts. Her attempts to describe what "the adults, through literature, want or demand of the child" (1992:137) revealed the difficulties of defining a body of work that is controlled and mediated by non-peer readers with their own agendas. The adult/child relationship at the heart of these difficulties can be seen in terms of desire or seduction (Rustin and Rustin 1987), or notions of colonisation, which Reynolds (1995) derives from Said's definition of Orientalism and the fear of the 'Other'. This analogy suggests that the central problem in any exploration of children's literature is the fact of the unknowable nature of children - our inability as adults to be 'where the children are' - in the face of the need to mediate the world for them. The motivation to introduce children into the social realm, and to control and direct growing children into the 'adult' structures of morality, rules and norms often works against the subversive, playful and desire-oriented forces at work in 'literary' involvement. Thus, a definition of the child as 'Other' and unknowable masks notions of continuity, enforcing a separation of concerns. Rather than considering childhood as the beginning of a psycho-social process which pertains to adult experience of fictional text, the power relationship portrayed by Rose devalues both child readers and children's texts.

The mediation of children's fiction in this 'colonisation' process must be examined in order to understand the extent to which it influences reception of texts and how the relationship between children and books fits into an holistic view of literary response. The power relations at work in such inter-actions, particularly with reference to education and the public conception of the influence of books on the 'demonised' 90's child, are becoming a major concern expressed in the discourse which surrounds considerations of children's literature, and the current emphasis on the 'effect' of fiction reading on children will be dealt with in more depth in the following chapters (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, Rudd 1995, Styles and Watson 1996).

The problem for many theorists interrogating the nature of this field rests on the emphasis many children's literature critics place on notions of 'identification', most often encountered in newspaper reviews and commentary which focus on 'child-centred' issues, such as racism, sexism and classism (Dixon 1977, Leeson 1985, Hollindale 1988). A concern for, and a privileging of, such a direct relationship between readers and characters oppose the conception of the importance of language in the construction of subjectivity and the world, and its relationship to the unconscious. At the heart of Rose's argument is her conviction that if

children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book. (1992:1)

This claim, of course, makes a nonsense of many of the ways in which children's literature is discussed and perceived. The connection between the conception of the innocence of the child and its entry into language is central to the concerns of those who have close relationships to children (parents, teachers, etc.), and children's fiction is implicit in that relationship (Rosen, 1995). The psychoanalytic model which frames Rose's analysis, and also contributes largely to Lesnik-Oberstein's argument, accentuates the extent to which children's fiction is most often defined, not in terms of

the relationship to language formed by inter-actions with fiction, but with the need to contain the unknowable within the child.

We need to ask why interpreting children's fiction - reading it *for* the child - seems to be untouched by the idea that language itself might be unstable, and that our relationship is never safe. (Rose, 1992:20)

Both Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein (1994) are extremely critical of critics such as Townsend (1965) and Crouch (1972), who celebrate the self-contained nature of children's literature and express the commonly held judgement that writers who successfully provide the reader with a world that is 'real' and a child within the book with whom to identify are the best. May (1995), who does not appear to have read Rose or questioned these widely held assumptions, continues the tradition.

The pre-school child best identifies with a character about his own age. He wants that character to react in ways that seem familiar. He is looking for vicarious experience in his stories, and he appreciates characters who act and talk like he would. (1995:40)

The emphasis on 'identification', particularly expressed in this direct and unequivocal way, is a dangerous one, and both Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein are correct to criticise its supremacy as a defining factor in children's literature. Not only does such an emphasis imply a way of regarding the 'child' reader as somehow knowable, it also leaves unconsidered the dialogue that develops between the reader and the author, or the author-voiced-through-the-narrator. Stephens (1992) points out that the emphasis on verisimilitude in children's literature suggests a direct correspondence between fictional representation and truth and that "a mode of reading which locates the reader only within the text is disabling." (1992:4)

In other words, modes of reading and narratives which encourage readers to align themselves solely with the character force them into a position of 'textual subjection' and therefore make them more susceptible to the ideological forces of a text.

The tendency to define the subject position of the child as direct and unmediated implies a disregard for different ways of reading suggested by the work of response theorists investigated in Part One (Iser 1978, Cohan and Shires, 1988, Beach 1993), as well as many contemporary Children's Literature theorists (Chambers 1985, Meek 1988, Hunt 1991, Nodelman 1992, etc.). The degree to which the reader can enter into a dialogic relation with the author, to exercise some degree of authority within the text, is certainly a determining factor in the pleasure that can be derived from reading. The dual orientation suggested by Stephens, offered by "narratives which incorporate strategies which distance the reader" (1992:68) not only offer the pleasure inherent in self-determined meaning, but also contribute to the "process whereby the self negotiates its own coming into being in relation to society" (1992:69), rather than subjugating the self to received ideological forces.

In this, there is no difference between the way that the relationship to language is revealed through fiction for a child or an adult. More than that, as I have discussed above, it is the contiguity of language acquisition and early encounters with children's books that implies the formative role such readings play in creating readers who either engage actively or passively with fictional texts. Therefore, the modes of reading which are offered to children are more likely to perpetuate in adult readings of fiction, either enabling or disabling the inter-action between readers and texts.

It is the supremacy of the 'realist' tradition of the absent narrator that troubles both Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein, in part because of its pedagogic function. A child's ability to identify becomes a measure of competence and development as a reader of fiction, which in turn influences the way books are read subsequently. The pervasiveness of

these assumptions leads to a confused situation in which it is difficult to ascertain what children are doing when they read. Nodelman admits this.

The important question is, why do so many children demand identification with the characters they read about? A distressing answer to that question is that we work hard at teaching them to do it. (1980, cited in Hunt 1991:148)

It may also be that the sense of living with the characters which has been labelled 'identification' is, in essence, an authorial stance (Fry, 1987). The ability to perceive oneself during the process of identifying can be seen in terms of the double role of the reader discussed by Iser (1978) wherein the reader becomes involved in the world of the text, but at the same time observes himself/herself being involved (Meek, 1987).

By re-interpreting 'identification' in this way, much of the mis-apprehension of what children might be doing when they read fiction must be re-examined. The assumptions of the past, based on an unmediated relationship between children and fiction, must be re-assessed to reveal the complexity and sophistication implied by the observer role, particularly in relation to a Lacanian mapping of the acquisition of a subject position (see Chapter 2). In addition, it must be acknowledged that the critical discourses themselves, which mis-represent the inter-action between readers and their texts, have determined, in part, the ways in which adults mediate the way books are read (Stephens, 1992). A dependence on unexamined assumptions of what children do when they read has led to the construction of a false 'child'; a reader from whom all such assumptions derive, and for whom the children's literature industry promotes its wares. The division between competing conceptions of children as readers implies the need for a re-appraisal of the relationship between children and fiction.

Though the problematic relation of adults and children which surrounds child/book inter-actions renders the notion of children's fiction impossible in Rose's opinion, some Children's Literature specialists are willing to continue to question the way these

relations are revealed both in text and in response, attempting to encompass the web of possibilities in an holistic theory of children's literature (Chambers 1985, Crago 1990, Hunt 1991, Nodelman 1992, Rudd 1992, 1994, etc.). A new discourse has arisen out of this need to consider children's literature as significant to literary studies in general, one which emphasises the use of literary perspectives to

provide adults with contexts and strategies of comprehension to help them understand and enjoy children's literature....to suggest that children too can be taught - and would benefit from learning - those contexts and strategies.
(Nodelman, 1992:1)

The emphasis on literary theory in these discourses suggests a need for an analysis of the texts themselves to establish the omni-presence of codes which rely on the skills of an experienced reader. Hunt (1991) argues that our access to the potential meanings within any fictional text

depends on our decoding skills. If we are to understand what children tell us about texts, it is important that we know just what the codes are, and what skills we actually need to unravel them. (1991:90)

While such a stance appears to justify a 'literary-critical' reading of such texts and, at the same time, acknowledges children as in some way privileged, it also implies that children's literature provides excellent opportunities for demonstrating theoretical principles.

I have often wondered why literary theorists haven't yet realized that the best demonstration of almost all they say when they talk about phenomenology or structuralism or deconstruction or any other critical approach can be most clearly and easily demonstrated in children's literature.
(Chambers, 1985:133)

Yet the attitudes expressed and the methods adopted here, however enlightening and important in itself, demonstrating as they do the potential for a 'literary' engagement within children's fiction and the richness of its discourse, often ignore the dimension which includes the child reader, the intended reader of such texts. Whatever we can say through these critical positions, offered by Nodelman, Hunt, Wall or Shavit, among others, might encourage us to question the nature of children's literature and the role of adults in its construction and its delivery, but the absence of the voices of real children reading renders adult readings static and thus, less significant to a picture of reading fiction as a continuum (Rudd, 1995).

Dealing with this absence is problematic, and though many recent theorists have begun to acknowledge the difficulties, the incorporation of the voices of children in these discourses has not yet been satisfactorily achieved. Hunt (1991), for instance, suggests that there "can be no single definition of children's literature", and attempts to define "a distinctive kind of criticism..., called 'childist'" (1991:89) which does not rely on a unified conception of meaning or response. Rather,

Childist criticism is something that we have seen in practice. It is based on possibilities and probabilities, not in the absence of empirical data, but in the face of the immense difficulty of dealing with that data. It is thus no different from adult criticism, except that in adult criticism it is rarely, if ever, admitted that there is a problem with the data. (1991:194)

The problems which arise from a proposed 'childist' perspective do not detract from such radical methods of reading and analysing text, but challenge the way in which we are accustomed to look at literature. Though such a perspective acknowledges the contexts of reading and encourages us to consider the degree to which we are constructed as readers (this applies not only to children, but to all readers), it is necessary to question how it is possible to read from a child's point of view, as Hunt suggests.

In her dismissal of Children's Literature criticism, Lesnik-Oberstein, while her invocation of the psychotherapeutic relationship has contributed to the method of research with children proposed for the Book Choice Study, never goes far enough to propose an alternative to a 'childist' approach. Labelling Hunt, along with Townsend, Wall, and others as a 'literary pluralist' and thus "committed to the individuality of children's responses to books" (1994:103), she argues that

The attempt to read children's fiction as an adult involves a self-created paradox.....this criticism claims to remove the 'child reader' from its writings without removing an extra-textual 'real' child. But it cannot be done: relying on a distinction between textual and non-textual narratives- seems to allow a separation of 'child' and 'adult' reader/critic to leave only an 'adult'. But the 'child' stays, albeit under cover of being a 'real' child outside the 'adult' critic, rather than the 'adult' critic being the 'child' by seeing through the eye/I of the child. Children's fiction criticism still cannot do without some 'child'. (1994:140)

The convolutions of this argument place this critic in a position where she is able to dismiss all children's literature criticism on the grounds that it is based on a construction of the child, encompassing Rose's influential view. Though she generously acknowledges that Hunt is willing to question the position of the critic of children's fiction, and admires his attempts to challenge and explore that nature of the subject, Lesnik-Oberstein dismisses his efforts, claiming that, without the 'real child', children's literature criticism has no reason to exist. Such an attack, while impressively well-referenced, is not thorough enough in its exploration of the field to summarily close it down. In her effort to devalue children's literature criticism as a field, she may be unwilling to admit that the accusations she levels at the critics can equally be levelled at any form of criticism or, for that matter, methods of psychoanalysis which she celebrates. She has not considered the work of those who talk and work with children and their books, such as Chambers (1985, 1992), Kimberley, Meek and Miller (1992) or Crago (1993), or Fox's work with children's narratives (1993). She has not

considered the extent to which much of the theoretical reflection she criticises arises out of practice (Fry 1985, Sarland 1990, Meek 1995). While much of what she says about the difficulties of speaking 'on behalf of the child' is true, as is the notion that adult-child power relationships are played out through fiction and its discourses, she has nothing concrete to offer as a way forward. Her arrogant dismissal of children's literature criticism is merely a device to allow her to establish psychoanalysis as a paradigm for adult-child relationships (Meek, 1995). However, it is possible to derive, from her claims for the psychoanalytic practice of Winnicott, a way of talking to children which allows them a voice, a practice that can be carried forward into research into children's responses to fiction. This work has been influential in the construction of the research method used during the Book Choice Study and will be discussed more fully in Part Three.

Rudd (1992), too, attempts to redefine the field with the proposal for the adoption of a communication studies approach, privileging the readings of individual children in relation to a discourse analysis of the texts themselves. The extent to which empirical evidence demonstrates the ways in which children read against the assumptions of critical writing of the past obviates the inclusion of evidence from children (Fry 1987, Sarland 1990, 1994a,b). Though Hunt has, in the past, rejected the notion of talking directly to children, his most recent work calls for an approach to Children's Literature research which might lead the way for mainstream Literary studies in general.

In short, our theory, and our subject, must, quite in opposition to traditional literary thinking, be committed, engaged, of the female rather than the male, and perhaps above all, empirical. In Britain there has been some work in this area: Chambers's "Tell Me: Are Children Critics?" and Benton's *Young Readers Responding to Poems*. Both suggest a fundamental interactive role for those practitioners - teachers and parents - who have previously been outside the circle of theory. (Hunt, 1995)

The current direction of contemporary children's literature theory has been toward the empirical and the recognition that theory must be informed by practice is a conception which has its parallels in recent developments in critical theory (Kristeva, in Rice and Waugh, 1992). However, this evidence must be considered within the context of how the children who take part in future empirical studies have been constructed as readers within the discourses of the family, education and provision. In addition, consideration must be given to the ways in which any method of gathering evidence from children might further mediate the experience of reading being examined. The method developed for the Book Choice Study discussed in Part Three takes account of the complexity of these inter-actions and indicates the categories of evidence that contribute to an understanding of children's relationship with fiction as part of a re-examination of response to literature as a whole.

CHAPTER FIVE

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS AND THE PUBLIC DISCOURSES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will describe the discourses surrounding children's literature in an educational context and argue that both educational policy and practice, while intending to enable a development of primary skills through the reading of fiction, disrupt the innate desire of children to experience a 'literary' engagement with text. Both policy and practice influence perceptions of fiction in the wider community, and so, not only directly affect the kind of readers children become, but also inform theoretical, commercial and public discourses through which adults mediate the inter-relationships between books and children. The interdependence of education and children's books serves to separate the concerns of children as readers from a consideration of response as part of a continuum, and thus silences the voices of children in the process of constructing them as readers.

Although I will be principally concerned with the tensions between pragmatics of teaching reading and recent re-definitions of literacy, I will also refer to public and parental pre-occupations of children's literature as a learning tool, where it contributes to the meta-discourses which surround and affect the inter-actions between children and books. Recent interest in the picture book genre and the development of 'Booktalk' (Chambers 1985, 1993) and related approaches will be discussed as exemplars of a radical new strain which challenges the traditional role for children's books within education. Such attempts to redefine the relationship between children and fiction raise questions about the efficacy of current practice in addition to informing a theoretical understanding of response.

The inextricable link between children's literature and education is recognised, not only by the majority of critics and theorists discussed in the previous chapter, many of whom work in education or teach courses in Children's Literature to trainee teachers,

but also by the media, the publishing industry and the public. The two major sources for journal articles in this country, *Signal* and *Children's Literature in Education* both offer a wide range of articles from scholars, teachers, children's authors and librarians, but are both firmly oriented toward the exploration of children's literature within its educational context, often deliberately avoiding the purely academic approach more evident in journals such as *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* and Yale University's *Children's Literature*. The recent development of a monthly Children's Book page in *The Guardian* is placed in the Education section, rather than the Book pages, and the Young Book Trust, a charity which disseminates information about children's books, carries out its work in schools and libraries. Perhaps the most influential factor is the proliferation of school book clubs, such as the Puffin Club, which have become one of the most lucrative sources of sales for children's book publishers. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, the provision of children's literature is strongly influenced by its educational function, and many of the tensions which arise over the preponderance of pulp fiction for children revolve around anxieties about low levels of literacy, for which teachers appear to be to blame. All these factors interrelate to form a complex web of inter-dependent discourses, all of which mediate not only the kind of books children read, but also the way in which these books are read.

The domination of the use of children's fiction in the teaching of reading within the education system, and the anxieties about poor levels of literacy, informs mediations between the reader and the text which frequently act to interrupt a 'literary engagement' as described by response theorists in Part One. I will suggest that the educational context, while intending to promote a development from functional literacy toward critical appreciation of fictional texts, in reality un-teaches, or covers over or interrupts a natural propensity toward fiction and narrative which is implicit in a young child's first encounters with language and the dawning of subjectivity (Bettelheim and Zelan 1981, Fox 1993).

The worst aspect of the way reading is presently taught is the impression the child receives during his earliest years in school that skills such as decoding are what reading is all about. (Bettelheim and Zalen: 22)

While these comments are directed at the American system, a similar situation is described by Fox.

[F]or many children the consequences of not starting with forms and contents that are already deeply embedded in their imaginative play must be serious... For some children these arduous encounters with lifeless texts will be their *only* experiences of literacy, for I am well aware that not all children come to school from the kind of literary practices at home that I have written about in this book. (Fox, 1993:192)

As I suggested in Chapter Two, the playful testing of authority in the first interactions with story and other parent/child language acts is devalued in the effort to control children through their entry into the symbolic order, to impose upon them a rule-based, signification of language. Whilst some progressive educationalists attempt to retrieve this loss of shared authority exhibited in those open, transformational encounters with text and encourage the reading child to have a voice within book-centred interactions (Chambers 1985, 1993, Meek 1987, 1988, 1991, Corcoran, et al 1995), the aims of the educational system to achieve measurable levels of functional literacy frequently silence the voices of reading children, replacing creative interplay with the quantifiable and testable activities such as decoding and explanation. This means that the 'pleasures' derived from the power of sharing the making of meaning are left behind in the effort of introducing the 'habit' of reading, no matter how well-meaning that effort is.

Could it be that the processes of trying to manage the syntax of sentences and the logic of letters did some kind of violence to Ann's [six year old learning to read] ability to spin subtle narrative webs out of pictures?

(Watson, in Watson and Styles, 1996:161)

While much of the debate revolves around the effectiveness of reading materials involved in learning to read (Bennett 1979, Bettelheim and Zelen 1981, Meek, 1982, Moon, 1985, Fox, 1993, Hunt, 1994), I am more concerned in this discussion with the way in which any material is mediated, and how the act of reading is defined, both by the invitation of the text and by the educational discourses which surround children from the beginning of their relationship with fiction. Though it is clear that recent debates which oppose notions of 'functional literacy' and the reading scheme to the pleasures of literature and 'real books' (Hunt, 1994) are relevant, it is not merely the material itself which guarantees the pleasures of more 'literary' ways of reading. The 'bond with the author', held up as a measure of difference between schemes and 'real books' (Meek, 1983b, 1988) must be recognised in the discourse which surrounds children's literature in an educational context, and although there are examples of progressive teaching methods and a great deal of theoretical writing which deals with such inter-actions, neither policy, nor the public at large, pays heed to it.

In some ways, teaching the skills of reading through fiction is, in itself, detrimental to 'literary engagement', as the discourse which surrounds the teaching of reading: the pressure to achieve measurable 'success' from home, peers and teacher, the need to learn the 'right' way to reach the 'right' interpretation, the growing awareness of the difference between what one should read and what one wants to read, all come into conflict with engaging with "the potential in the text which triggers the recreative dialectics in the reader" (Iser, 1978:30). This tension can also be extended to include a great deal of the way that fiction is dealt with in schools.

In schools, perhaps we would do best to withdraw Literature as a core subject to be examined, and then to encourage reading, and the exploration of response in a range of written forms....

(Fry, 1985:108)

Though voices such as Fry's are occasionally heard, the formation of education and, particularly, reading policy pulls further and further away from suggestions such as these, demonising 'progressive' theories which threaten notions of education as control.

The conflict between the vocational use of fiction within schools and the concerns of the literary theorist arises, as I have argued before, largely from the marginalisation of children's literature by the academy (Shavit, 1986) and its inseparability from the world of education, and thus, the marginalised populace: women and children (Reynolds 1990, Barrs and Pidgeon 1993, Rudd 1995). This is not difficult to understand. The history of children's literature and the growth of a specific industry for children's books are firmly grounded in the evolution of educational philosophy (Hollindale 1988, Rose 1992), and these circumstances result in the marginalisation which remains today.

(T)here were significant social constructions attached to literacy and these were mirrored in the educational reforms of the late 19th century. Together they attempted to make a distinction between the working class's ability to read and the familiarity with literature and literary language which came about through the extended education received by their social betters. The result of this effort was to designate children's literature as pre-literary. It quickly came to be associated with popular culture and uncanonised writing.

(Reynolds, 1990:15)

The assignation of a cultural, and thus, a socially stratified value to one form of fictional discourse over another has, over time, been disrupted by both social change and recent developments in literary theory, yet the division between Children's Literature and Literature remains. Rose (1992) points to the fact that the emphasis on 'natural' language in the education of elementary school children exists in opposition to the links between language and the understanding and appreciation of literature, and thus, aesthetic concerns, in secondary schools.

Literary language therefore becomes the fully internalised model of the child's own mental processes. (Rose, 1992:120)

These processes supposedly evolve from the communication of everyday experience toward an emphasis on structure and style, whereby "the child's consciousness is directed at the language of the author." (Rose, 1992:123). Whilst, like Reynolds, Rose assigns these differences in part to the social divisions obvious at the end of the nineteenth century, this developmental view is available in current National Curriculum documentation, too. Whereas the restrictive book lists of earlier versions of the National Curriculum are gone, and there is recognition that "Pupils should be introduced to the organisational, structural and presentational features of different types of text" (14) and "language with recognisable repetitive patterns, rhyme and rhythm" (6), the emphasis is on testable and quantifiable goals, such as word recognition and grammatical and phonic knowledge. This emphasis is also available in the Reading Policy documents of schools which took part in the Book Choice Study and thus form part of the context for the readings to be discussed in Part Three.

The needs of the growing child as defined within an educational agenda are based on establishing language as a stable system into which children are introduced (Rose, 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994). "In responding to fiction and non-fiction [pupils] show understanding of the main points", and they must learn to "identify different layers of meaning and comment on their significance and effect." (National Curriculum Guidelines: 19) These goals suggest a stability of meaning which is supposedly available to the child who learns how to read, but display an ignorance of the instability of meaning embedded in the nature of language, a reality which is available to children long before they encounter reading schemes at Key Stage 1. It is not until Level 6 (Age 10/11) that pupils "identify different levels of meaning" and "give personal responses to literary texts" (NCG:19).

Definitions of Literacy

The voices of education that define the way reading, and finally, literature, are taught determine, in part, the value of reading fiction in any interpretive community, and by influencing the way that children become readers, construct the kind of readers they become. By considering the understanding of literature as a sophistication of skills taught at primary level, those who construct educational policy largely disregard what very young children are capable of, and the 'literary engagement' they take pleasure in at the earliest stages of development. This is due, in some senses, to the difficulties of separating what children do when they read and what they are taught to do by the ways in which they must demonstrate their ability to read as a decoding process.

we have no academic understanding of what children *do* when they read, or how they discover what is the nature of the text before them.

(Meek, 1987:105)

Meek, along with other progressive educationalists, acknowledges the need to re-define literacy. Through a dialectic process of practice and theory, definitions of literacy are being proposed which privilege those aspects of the text/reader relationship, celebrating the instability of the word and emphasising a creative and dynamic relationship between reader and text. Young readers (designated as 'emergent' readers by Meek), learn ways of reading from the texts they read and, therefore, it is not merely the ability to decode the words on the page which defines literacy, but the more complex activity of becoming both the 'teller and the told' (Meek, 1988). In turn, this suggests that both the texts themselves and the way that they are mediated by adults for children can determine the way in which these emergent readers will read. The ability to become the teller as well as the told requires an awareness of the authorial voice within the text (Wolf and Heath, 1992:50), and an ability to share in the dialogic interplay of voices which contribute to a 'literary' engagement with text. Involvement of this kind may take more effort, and certainly requires more of the adult

mediators, but is necessary if emergent readers are able to recognise the pleasure of authority - of hearing their own voices within the texts they read.

children learn to read when they discover that some of the voices they can learn to do are those of storytellers. Then they discover what reading is good for, that learning to read is worth the effort.

(Meek, 1992:174)

The concept of narrative or authorial voice, and the reader's role within the text, is ignored in both National Curriculum documentation and in school policy documents consulted for this research, indicating the relative lack of value attributed to this facet of reading. The utilitarian approach to reading promoted by policy and supported by parental and public anxiety about levels of functional literacy continually fails to attend to notions of literary engagement as an act of communication. As Rose points out, using the example of Peter Pan, school rewritings of sophisticated texts are likely to remove the narrative voice altogether, and thus, expunge the identifiable narrator from the experience of fiction for younger readers;

that narrator who uncomfortably forces on the reader's attention the question of who is telling the story (with all the instability of language that this implies).

(Rose, 1992:126)

Assumptions that the appreciation of the dialogic, open, ambiguous, indeterminate experience of literary language represents a development which children reach after having encountered language as monologic and stable are false - it is more likely that something other is true (Bettelheim and Zalen, 1981:22). The case studies conducted for this research reveal the playfulness of the youngest readers and their tendency to take on the voice of the author in both book-oriented inter-actions and other social and private discourse. Awareness of ways of telling and the eagerness to 'authorise' fictional texts becomes less evident with older children, who are concerned with re-telling and definite meaning, though the personal reading histories of these readers

influenced the ways they read. This evidence, along with results from other studies (Fox 1991, Chambers 1993, Engel 1995), suggests that the beginnings of language and the birth of subjectivity position children, as readers, in an authority-sharing, authority-testing relationship vis-à-vis language. The social mediations which control this process impose ways of reading which, while allowing literacy to be measured, remove the value of fiction as an integral part of social and personal growth. Such modes of reading also impinge on the ideological force of texts and the inculcation of dominant values, which play such a vital role in socialising and controlling children (Stephens, 1992).

Identification and Ways of Reading

The content-bound discourses which mediate the experience of reading for children display a failure to recognise the integral role of the reader/author relationship at the heart of the dialogical function of literature and impose static ways of reading. The interdependence of the media, schools, libraries and booksellers allows such discourses to dominate, thus imposing ways of reading through the education system and reinforcing them in the marketplace. By emphasising the importance of the content of children's fiction and assumptions that children need, for instance, familiar characters and situations, and focusing on the recent fascination with political correctness, the differences in the way in which books can be read are often ignored.

educational debate has always focused on the content of the books....the selection (and censorship) of books in libraries and curricula, never on the ways that those same books are received by children.

(Crago, 1993:278)

By disregarding the potential for dynamic engagement offered by some texts more than others, this dependence on context can 'close' off the 'open' involvement with which very young children begin. The emphasis on 'identification' discussed in the previous chapter, or the occasionally obsessive attention paid to racism, classism and sexism

(Dixon 1977, Leeson 1985), may have some merit, yet are often privileged at the expense of the way in which texts teach ways of reading and of allowing young readers to be active or passive within the text (Stephens, 1992).

A desire on the part of the child people for a particular set of social outcomes has led to pressure for literature to fit them, and a simplistic view of the manner in which a book's ideology is carried. In turn, this inevitably leads to a situation where too much stress is placed on *what* children read and too little on *how* they read it. (Hollindale, 1988:7)

Thus, the educational context through which Children's Literature must operate imposes not only a value, but also a way of talking about fiction which further encourages particularly closed and static ways of reading.

[W]hat is oppressive in our teaching is not finally the knowledge or culture it conveys - but the discursive forms through which we propose them. (Corcoran, 1994:x)

The oppressiveness of these discursive forms, in combination with the fact that teachers often choose the books that children are to read in school,

pays scant regard to what has most interested or seemed significant to the student readers. It is about the readers discovering the book the teacher wants them to find. (Chambers, 1993b:75)

Thus, children's literature becomes a site for control, in terms of inscribing a way of reading which confirms the ideological force of texts. Sarland (1991) recognises that education, as part of Althusser's 'Ideological State Apparatus' exercises a further level of control over children's reading, restricting choice with either prescribed lists of approved texts, or the imposition of financial restraints which restrict availability of a variety of material. Yet it is not only the restrictions implied by educational policy that

influence the inter-actions between children and books, but also the realities of the classroom. Protherough (1983), for instance, addresses the problems that busy teachers have assessing the available books for selection, and their feeling that they are inadequately trained to deal with the responsibility of making such choices on behalf of their pupils. Though most of the primary schools which took part in the Book Choice Study provided reading policies, and some of these record a progressive attitude toward the use of fiction in the classroom, discussion with the teachers revealed a gap between policy and practice. The policy of one Junior school states their aims to be, for instance:

Carefully allocated periods for reading at regular times
To help children encounter a wide range of literature - poetry
fiction and non-fiction
For teachers to read aloud from a variety of books which are chosen
because they reflect a particular style or criteria.

However, the teacher who contributed to my research stated that the opportunity the children in his class have to read is limited by the pressures of time and the requirements of the National Curriculum.

The main time that we would try and read is first thing in the morning as part of the reading policy,....but it' s - very much geared towards the curriculum and when our maths starts.....we concentrate more specifically for one half term out of the two of each term, on having a set half an hour three times a week - if possible - but, again, it does tend to get crowded out.

When asked if he read to his class, he stated

Again - that tends to be squeezed out - when I first started teaching, I would read without doubt - I would have something on the go - now its just short stories - its for curriculum purposes, I know I won't get through the whole story with them, because it will get crowded out.

Another teacher at a different school stated

[structured free reading time] is something that we've all thought of doing, but we've so many more demands on our time that, you know, you find, I must finish this first and I must finish that first and it does actually slip by - the children are having to read a lot anyway, to do the rest of their work, but it is something we'd like to do if we had less demands.

Though these reports demonstrate how the restrictions on classroom time make it difficult for some teachers to fit in either free reading or reading to the children, it is also clear that reading fiction is, to a certain extent, considered to be interchangeable with other school-based reading. While some of the teachers interviewed for this research indicated their recognition of the importance of reading beyond vocabulary skills and information, others expressed a restricted view of reading, and in fact, several were not, themselves, readers. It becomes necessary, then, to question the attitudes teachers bring with them to the classroom about the value of reading fiction and how their own reading histories have contributed to the attitudes they will pass on to their pupils.

The lack of recognition that an active and 'literary' engagement is possible with children's books is also evident at Secondary level. While there is a clear separation between what is read at school and what is read for leisure, it is generally recognised that the approach to fiction at this level is focused on literary concerns. Aims stated in one English department document go beyond mere fluency and accuracy, to "encourage pupils to take an active role in constructing meaning and respond to a wide range of material". It must be noted that this is a very recent change - this year (1996), the phrase 'take an active role in constructing meaning' replaced the word 'read'. This encouraging shift in attitude creates an important opportunity for development, but it is also worth noting that Recommended Reading Lists given to students were made up of adult fiction only, while those texts that would normally be considered as 'children's

literature' were absent. Whether this practice is derived from the hierarchy of University English Departments, or whether it is derived from the perception that Secondary School children would not be willing to read 'kiddie lit', it remains that this division further marginalises the subject. By belittling the complexity and challenge of much that is written for children, teachers wishing to stimulate response and encourage active ways of reading are imposing a restriction on the way children's books can be read, rather than exploring the opportunities offered by authors such as Briggs, Chambers, Garner and many others.

The implications of this disregard for ways of reading within educational policy are further complicated by the restrictions placed on teacher training and In-service training. Student teachers who arrive on Children's Literature courses have come from an educational system, and a community of readers, influenced by those discourses which ignore ways of reading and privilege content. The low status of teaching in our society and its separation from more academic, and so, more supposedly intellectually demanding subjects, such as English Studies, contribute to a situation where the inclusion of literary concerns within an education course is regarded as suspect. However, the growing recognition of Children's Literature as a suitable subject for study (Thacker 1994, Wilkie 1995, Hunt 1995a) has led to the development of courses which encourage student teachers to encounter different ways of reading. Exposure to texts which make available a palpable author and offer shared telling, and talk which encourages an engagement with ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning, enable students on these courses to interrogate different ways of reading and how these are inscribed in the text. It is often only then that these individuals encounter the pleasures to be had from dialogic inter-action with a writerly text (Nodelman 1992, Rudd 1994, Hollindale 1996). Until teachers of the future discover this *jouissance* in their own experiences of text, it is difficult to expect that, even if provided with the challenging texts now available for children, they will be able to transmit that pleasure to the children in their care, or to enable those emergent readers to form 'a bond with the author'.

The distinction between these two groups - one particular kind of "framing" of readers - seems to lie in contrasting expectations of what "reading" actually means, and of the kinds of pleasure that it can give. Their attitudes embody different views of the reading process: as active engagement with the text creating a unique response each time, or as a mechanical translating of a text's given message.

(Protherough in Corcoran, 1994:115)

Yet, even at this stage, government policy, influenced by near-hysteria over literacy levels, places its emphasis on the teaching of reading skills, based on phonics and decoding. As I write, media coverage about Labour's new educational policies indicates that even a change of government will not cause a shift away from this position. (*Blunkett urges reading crusade for under-11s*, The Guardian, 30 May 1996:8). Attacks on poor teaching will be answered with an intensification of the training of teachers in the 'use of phonics to teach reading' rather than an emphasis on promoting an active engagement with fiction.

If, rather than concentrating on developing reading skills, educational efforts from the very beginning were concentrated on developing the desire to become literate - essentially, an inner attitude to reading - then the final result might be that a much larger segment of the adult population would be literate. (Bettelheim and Zalen, 1981:21)

In other words, those aspects of 'literary engagement' which adults and children have in common, and which contribute to an understanding of response to fiction as a continuum, need to be addressed if literacy is to be understood, and helped, rather than hindered, by the education system. The public accusations levelled at 'poor teachers' who take the blame for poor reading standards do not take into account the way in which those teachers have themselves been constructed as readers, nor do they acknowledge that success at reading demands an underlying motivation. The influential role of teachers within the education system implies the perpetuation of passive reading processes (Chambers, 1991). Again, at the centre of this dilemma rests

the marginalisation of children and literature within the world of education, rather than a recognition of the formative role that early experiences with fiction play in the continuum of response.

Picture Books and Active Reading

Recent interest in modern picture books has brought to the fore discussions about the importance of creative engagement in texts which illustrate the influence of theoretical considerations within an educational context. These considerations have shifted the discourse away from content and focused it on ways in which texts invite open and dynamic inter-actions. Research into the way in which picture books are read (Bennett 1979, Meek 1988, Doonan, 1990, Lewis 1990,1995 and Watson and Styles 1996) provides evidence that the richness and playfulness of many contemporary picture books welcome their readers into dialogues with authors and illustrators who play with convention and transgress the normal power relations of the storybook. These texts call attention to the constructedness of fiction, echoing the meta-fictional qualities of the post-modern novel (Lewis, 1995).

The lessons these picture book authors teach (John Burningham, Maurice Sendak, David McKee and Raymond Briggs, for instance) is one of inter-action with the author, of filling in the gaps between the picture and the text, and of reading irony and metaphor. Such books welcome numerous re-readings and exude a carnivalesque quality which both entertains and challenges the reader to exercise authority and test the boundaries of meaning making codes, as discussed in Chapter Three.

[B]ecause they welcome divergent readings, picture books are subversive both of narrative expectations and cultural orthodoxies. Consequently, they are inevitably political - they tend to be concerned with rule-breaking, mischief and challenge. (Watson and Styles, 1996:2)

The recognition of the importance of picture books as dialogic texts, together with evidence of child/book inter-actions with such texts (Lewis in Kimberley, et al, 1992, Chambers 1993, Lewis 1995, Towlson in Bearne 1995, Watson and Styles 1996) support the evidence from my own case studies, which display the capacity of meta-fictional picture books to invite and encourage dynamic inter-actions between readers and books, and the deep pleasure evident in these sensitively mediated encounters. The dimension of challenge displayed by readers who engage with such texts can be seen as a political one, for the position of power offered to the young reader of picture books militates against the power relations inherent in the adult/child relationship reflected in much children's literature. The *jouissance* derived from the authorial stance of real readers encountering picture books may in some senses be viewed as a threat to the dominating voices of the adult world.

However, these notions of pleasure, and the extent to which the semblance of authority might create, or enhance a love of reading, are beyond the concerns of the constructors of educational policy. The National Curriculum guidelines only mention picture books in very general terms, for Key Stage 1, suggesting that they are merely the first step of a development, and are then left behind. Reports from the teachers in the Book Choice research provide further evidence for this attitude: picture books are regarded as simplistic and fit only for the pre-reader, to be discarded as children acquire the necessary testable decoding skills. The insistence from parents that children should leave picture books behind once they become readers is widespread, indicating an ignorance of the complexity of much that is available (Tucker 1981, Chambers 1993, Baddeley and Eddershaw 1994). These views are recognised by book buyers in the publishing industry (to be discussed more fully in Chapter Six), who have difficulty selling picture books for the 5-8 year old range. The perception of reading as a development from functional literacy toward the sophistication of a 'literary critical' response at secondary and tertiary level is typified by the situation of picture books as

an educational tool, rather than a literary form. The Reading Policy of one of the Primary Schools that took part in my research, states

Pictures are used as clues for guessing the meaning of words; informal guessing, based on the context of the other words in the sentence, is also encouraged.

The use of picture books to enable word identification, and to sugar the pill of reading lessons largely ignores the challenges of the meta-fictional work of Burningham and Briggs, as well as the depth of the pleasures experienced, perhaps partly because these are not testable (Watson and Styles, 1996:2). Not only did the youngest readers in the Book Choice Study show an ability and a joy in sharing authority within the text but, in addition, the active engagement experienced and the pleasure derived from picture books chosen by some of the older children far surpassed that derived from the more conventional texts chosen.

Many metafictional picture books prise open the gap between the words and the pictures, pushing them apart and forcing the reader/viewer to work hard to forge the relationship between them. (Lewis, 1990:141)

However, it is not merely a recognition that these texts provide this kind of relationship, it is the way in which those reader/author inter-actions are mediated by the teacher which has the potential to promote or interrupt ways of reading, either enabling or disabling a dynamic inter-action with the text.

The ways in which picture books are used and talked about in the classroom indicate an emphasis on word recognition and the tendency of the teacher to interpret gaps, often deliberately left by the author, on behalf of the children, in order to construct a meaning, and at the same time, demonstrate how such a construction is achieved. The same process occurs in parent-child inter-actions with picture books, though there has

been very little research directed at this activity. Such mediation can close off the openness offered by the page, restricting the opportunity for a child to respond to the invitation of a writerly engagement, to have a voice within the text, as well as promoting a way of reading in which the reader must conform to the telling the teacher does on their behalf. A classroom observer notes that "children are trained almost to let others do the thinking for them." (Koeller, 1988:4).

Koeller finds that there is a difference between the ways that adults mediate texts for children and suggests that that difference is founded primarily upon "their beliefs about how literature study enables children to grow intellectually" (1988:6). These beliefs must surely be derived from their own reading histories and the mediations which constructed them as readers and, though there is more research needed in this area (Vandergrift, 1990), it must be acknowledged that these influences are crucial to the future of readers. As I have already pointed out, the educational system does little to break the cycle of static reading through an emphasis on testable and quantifiable skills, whereas those who are currently attempting to re-describe literacy recognise the importance of unmediated response.

Children must realize that their own response to literature is significant if they are to have the interest, the ability, and the self-confidence to include it in their lives. (Koeller, 1988:12)

Cochran-Smith's studies of classroom reading practice reveal how adults socially construct children as readers through observations of adult mediation in action.

Transcripts show that the storyreader in group readings

transformed the usually internalized and automatic process of the literature adult readers [read]...into an outwardly explicit and gradual sense-building process for its literary apprentices. (Cochran-Smith, 1984:184)

However, while this mediation is helpful in engaging the story listeners in the interpretative act, it was repeatedly evident that the teacher, by imposing her own 'right' readings on Sendak's In the Night Kitchen, denied the children the pleasure of the inter-action, particularly in defining the divide between fantasy and reality.

This same mediational effect was observed in casual storyreadings in a local library. During a storytime reading of Alfie's Feet by Shirley Hughes, the reader continually used the pictures to fill the gaps left in the text. When we first see Alfie in his new wellies, there is no written reference to the fact that they are clearly on the wrong feet. This information is not available until the end of the story. However, the reader paused in her reading to tell the listening children that his wellies were on the wrong feet, pointing this out in the picture. Not only does this technique of reading fill in the gaps which Hughes has left open for her readers to fill, it disrupts the pleasure the readers have in making that discovery for themselves, returning to previous pages to search for clues, and becoming active in the telling of the story.

The extent to which teachers and other adult mediators shape responses by modelling the children's feelings imposes both a way of feeling and a way of reading, both denying individual rights and silencing the voices of children. While the texts encountered may acknowledge the indeterminacy of meaning and draw attention to the constructedness of fiction, the discourses which define ways of reading restrict and close off interpretation, offering a directive 'right' way.

The stress placed upon the retrieval of 'meaning' in the educational context of children's literature often means that what children, particularly very young children, do with stories is over-looked, though these less measurable features of response may have more to do with enabling individuals as readers, or 'literary' readers, than the mere exercise of "[using] strategies appropriate to establish meaning" (NCG:19).

Fox's study of children's narrative demonstrates the fact that children, well before independent literacy is achieved, "internalize the patterns and structures of written language" (Fox, 1993:2) and that those who have been exposed to stories since infancy adopt the language of these stories into their own narratives, displaying an understanding of uses of language beyond its denotative meaning.

Play with words employs all kinds of linguistic knowledge, and because it's play, there are no 'right' and 'wrong' consequences. Children need this if they are to discover the pleasure of making language do what *you* want it to do. (Fox, 1993:49)

Evidence such as this makes a nonsense of the way that reading is most often portrayed in educational discourses. The awareness of the ability of very young children to use deeper story structures in their own spontaneous stories (Engel, 1995) along with metaphor and intertextuality, suggests that these are not skills which require the understanding of abstract operations which develops in later childhood. Rather, observations of what children actually *do* with stories suggest that these skills are commensurate with the conditions of childhood and the acquisition of a subject position (Fox, 1993). If this is the case, and surely it is, then both the lifeless texts of many reading schemes and the lifeless way in which they, and more dynamic texts, are handled, disable a potential in children who may come from communities of readers that do not acknowledge the power within the reading of fiction.

Challenges to the perceptions of the use of children's literature within an educational context, informed by theoretical models of response, continue to influence the classroom practice of some individuals and the fortunate minority of trainee teachers, yet there is a long way to go before the new perspectives offered by, for instance, Chambers' 'Tell Me' approach to booktalk (Chambers 1985, 1993b) are widely accepted. It has already been pointed out that it is not only exposure to books that determines the kind of readers children become, but it is also the discourse that goes on

around books. The degree to which children are able to have a voice within these discourses has a direct influence on how they define themselves as readers and how fiction can be valued.

Just as recent developments in Children's Literature theory and criticism militate against the dominant strain in criticism to include the voices of child readers, so several contemporary educationalists seek to transform the experience of fiction in schools in order to capitalise on the capabilities of very young children to engage with fiction in a 'literary' or 'transformational' way. These progressive trends emphasise the importance of the authority of readers to make meaning within the text, to become 'the teller as well as the told' (Meek 1988, 1990, Kimberley, et al 1992, Corcoran et al, 1994).

"Booktalk", as conceived by Chambers and his colleagues, "should follow 'the dynamic process of recreation' Iser describes" (Chambers, 1993b:47). Whereas in much school-based conversation about books children learn, through a perceived need to reach the 'right' interpretation, "to distrust their own experience of the text" (1993a:45), the 'Tell Me' approach privileges the responses of the pupils. The teacher or guide holds back, allowing the children to reveal what happens to them as they read or listen to the story being discussed. Not only does this allow the child a voice in the discourse of fiction, but it also frees them from the restrictive practice implied by educational policy which emphasises the establishment of meaning and admits them into the flexibility and truth about language.

it is wiser to act on the assumption that children are potentially all that we are ourselves, and that in telling their own stories and their reading of other people's stories they 'talk themselves into being'.

In telling their reading they activate their potentialities, but only when that reading is truly their ownand is not someone else's reading imposed upon them. (Chambers, 1993b:43)

The work of Chambers and many other educationalists reveals the success of approaches which place literature within a discourse which respects the validity of individual response. While transcripts of 'Tell Me' sessions are a testament to the skill of teachers who understand the importance of both the 'transformational' qualities of fiction and the ability of children to inter-act in an unmediated way, they also provide evidence of the deep pleasure these children experience on discovering their own power within the process of booktalk.

Anxiety about reading is misplaced. Rather than investigating those methods which turn children into efficient decoders, research is needed which addresses the reasons why children want to, or don't want to, learn to read. It may be found that those children who have experienced the power of sharing with the author in the act of telling, know.

Conclusion Listening to the Voices of Children

Studies which attempt to investigate the link between early exposure to fiction and reading success in school often reveal more than they intend about the role of the mediating adult.

The sharing of books is a source of pleasure and satisfaction to infants and adults and positive early experiences lead to success in literacy and schooling. (Wade and Moore, 1993:6)

While the results of such research are measured in terms of 'success in literacy', it is the nature of the 'sharing' which should be investigated. As educationalists become willing to question how the encounters between children and fiction are mediated by teachers, new kinds of evidence are needed.

The learned and socially constructed nature of reading styles acknowledged by many contemporary researchers contributes to a theory of response, in addition to overshadowing any research which provides evidence of what children 'like' to read, because responses are distorted by the mediations which construct those readers. While the Roehampton studies, among others, claim to describe contemporary trends in children's reading habits, and to question whether "the power of reading is being fully and wisely fostered" (Reynolds in Children's Literature Research Centre, 1995:1), the preliminary evidence merely presents a picture of what children have been led to prefer through myriad social mediations. Studies like these may reveal the comforting statistic that children are reading more than ever, yet say little about what that reading constitutes. A new methodology is needed, one that helps us

know much more about children's previous reading history; not just *what* they have read but *how* they have been reading.

(Protherough in Corcoran, 1995:118)

Though the call for this kind of research issues from many other sources (Meek 1987, Halász, Carlsson and Marton 1992, Hunt 1995, Mackey 1995, Rudd 1995), the aim of most research is towards measurable educational criteria, whereas the kind of observations that might be made would also contribute to a mapping of a continuum of response discussed in Part One. The approach to research developed for the Book Choice Study and discussed in Part Three offers a new perspective - one which places response within the reading history of each individual child and takes account of the discourses which mediate the inter-actions between book and reader. Though the most pervasive influence on children as readers must be said to be the discourses of education, the way in which the provision of books for children is mediated also forms part of the meta-discourse which impinges on all reading acts. The context of provision, through editors, book suppliers, booksellers, bookclubs and libraries is

interwoven with the educational concerns which surround children's literature, and that will be dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX THE DISCOURSES OF PROVISION

Introduction

The tensions that exist between the different discourses which surround children's literature are particularly evident within the context of provision. The central paradox of children's literature, that it is created, published, marketed and often bought by adults *on behalf* of children is cited by many theorists in the field as a key to the way in which the subject must be approached (Rosen 1995, Webb 1995, Wilkie 1995). Much of the re-definition of criticism about children's literature in the past fifteen years has focused on the suggestion that "children's books are always and inevitably adult books" (Watson in Style, Bearne and Watson, 1992:14) not only providing justification for the close scrutiny to which texts are subjected, but also emphasising the central function of such texts in the power relationships between adults and children. As the last two chapters have shown, the discourses which surround the individual reading acts of children construct definitions of literacy and literary value which largely silence the child. While I have indicated the extent to which progressive individuals have expressed the need to give the child a voice within these discourses, the separation of children's literature from other discourses of literary theory must also be considered. The division between educational policy and the desire for literary engagement in the teaching of reading are more likely to construct static and disinterested readers, whose engagement with fiction cannot reach the heights of *jouissance* offered by the sharing of authority in a 'writerly' communication with the authors of generous texts.

Any consideration of children's literature which seeks to demonstrate the continuity of literary experience from child to adult must include, and perhaps, privilege the role that adults play in constructing both readers and the relationship between readers and their texts. While educational practice and policy reveal a great deal about these processes, adult mediation of literature for children is most openly available through an examination of the systems of provision (the network of publishing, editing, marketing, selling and selection) which help define both what children's literature has come to be,

and what children, as readers, want. Macherey (1966) and Bennett (1982, 1983) may ignore the case of young readers, but they recognise the importance of the conditions of publication and provision to their emphasis on the social modes of reception. Yet, since it is these conditions which play a formative role in the history of the reader, an examination of the forces of provision which construct the young reader is crucial to an understanding of adult response.

To make sense of children's texts, critics are obligated to look beyond the texts themselves to those cultural and social forces that help produce and generate their sales. (Susina, 1993: vii)

In order to examine these forces it is necessary to understand that the network of provision works in a circular way (Hunt, 1991:155-162, Rosen, 1995); the reactive nature of the publishing industry influences what comes to be published, just as the effectiveness of promotion influences future promotion. This circularity can also be viewed in terms of the interdependency between educational discourses and those of provision. Marketing representatives sit on Library selection panels to test out their product and to receive feedback. The National Curriculum is influential in what is to be published, what is to be stocked in bookshops and what is selected for libraries, and larger retailers advise publishers on cover design. Parents who buy books for their children are confronted with pre-selected choices in bookshops and bookclubs, and it is the buying strategies of parents, teachers and libraries which determine the direction of the market. This complex web of mediating voices impinges on the books which come to be published and thus on what is written for children. Much of the commentary which addresses this situation comes from author/critics (Walsh and Townsend 1990, Hunt 1991, Rosen 1995) who have had direct experience of the powers of the editor. However, there is no study which attempts to map the interstices of the provision process as a way of contextualising response, though this process has a direct effect on the texts that children receive and the way they are encouraged to read them.

Therefore, much of what I will discuss in this chapter is new, and is supported by evidence taken from interviews with editors, marketing managers, bookclub managers, wholesale book dealers, bookshop managers, librarians and parents. The interviews were conducted with the intention of providing a context for the selection of books for the Book Choice Study and defining the discourses in which the readers who took part in the study are embedded. The history of these individual readers and the individual reading acts which took place during the research must be considered within the discourses which surround provision, for it is then possible to describe the web of influence that impinges on the development of response as part of a continuous process, beginning in childhood.

The examination of the systems of provision and the interplay of commercial, social and educational forces that come to bear on them, reveals a situation which, on many levels, serves to promote a closed and static approach to reading fiction. The pervasiveness of market forces and the commodification of books place both the books and their readers within a relationship which is frequently at odds with the dynamic inter-action with fictional text defined by response theorists and sought by those educationalists and Children's Literature theorists and critics who challenge the traditional conceptions examined above. By investigating those forces which determine the publication, distribution and purchase of children's literature, I will describe a map which denies the reader authority regarding what to read and, more importantly, how to read it.

The ways in which fiction is promoted and provided serve to define its purpose, which in turn defines the reader's expectations, both in terms of the next book read and in terms of the rewards of fiction reading in general. Though many of the texts read for this research, and the majority of books published for children, invite merely a readerly inter-action (Barthes, 1974), the design, promotion and placement of the books, as consumer goods, often interrupt invitations for creative interplay, closing off

ambiguity, or denying the child reader access to the experimental and the challenging. The commercial pressures which motivate the market often misrepresent what fiction is, and inevitably influence the kind of readers children are invited to become.

we are doing books and children a disservice just now in our anxiety to sell more books and promote reading by trying to transfer onto books the easy popularity of a different kind of object: toys as a pastime entertainment. The danger is that it doesn't actually work. Books don't provide the kind of fun that toys do, and to suggest to children that they do will lead to disappointment because it raises the wrong expectations.

(Chambers, 1993a:13)

Notions of fun and play conceived by the market frequently conflict with an understanding of fiction as 'deep play' (Meek, 1988:34) and notions of pleasure in the text (Barthes, 1975). The confusion that results from this conflict also influences the perceptions of parents, who, as those who most directly represent the 'interpretive community' for child readers, are also embedded within the discourses which surround provision.

The realities of the marketplace confirm the place of children's literature as part of the Ideological State Apparatus (Sarland 1991, Rosen 1995), as a means of education and as part of "nurturing practices" (Rosen, 1995). The *Puffin Parent's Guide to Children's Books* (1995) states:

All parents want to prepare their children for life in the best way possible. As a parent, you teach a variety of essential skills including walking, feeding, talking and **READING**.

while Waterstone's Guide to Children's Books (1995) makes it clear that "fostering an enthusiasm and love for books in your child" is part of good parenting practice. The 'Books for Children' Book Club rests its promotion on the conception that if you buy

their selected books, your child can be one of 'tomorrow's winners' while their advertisement on the back of a Sunday supplement reads 'Help your child toward a bright future!'. The pressure on parents to turn their children into readers is recognised as a primary force in the marketing and promotion of children's literature. By staking "their ethical appeal on the insecurity of the customer" (Shaloo, 1993:5), representatives of the children's book industry engage in a battle to persuade parents of the necessity of reading books which are valuable to the child's social and personal development. Yet guides and clubs such as these, which aim to choose on behalf of parents from the many thousands of children's books published each year, misrepresent the true situation of the children's publishing industry. For, while publishers seem to adhere to practices founded in the juvenile publishing industry of the nineteenth century (Reynolds, 1990) which promoted the 'improving role' of literature, contemporary publishing practice is pulled in two directions. On the one hand, the same forces come to bear: the literary text is recognised as a crucible of deep meaning and a 'civilising influence', teaching the aesthetic power of language and the imagination, but also functioning as a socialising force. Through such texts as The Secret Garden (Burnett 1911), Charlotte's Web (White 1952) and Tom's Midnight Garden (Pearce 1958), the promotion of solid middle class values are espoused, while at the same time the superiority of childhood and the imagination are celebrated at the expense of the dulled and corrupted world of adulthood. While many of the 'classic' texts are criticised for their lack of contemporaneity and suffer from the slings and arrows of the forces of political correctness, the experimental, challenging and often subversive power of fiction is frequently found in these texts (Lurie, 1990). The authorial voice can be individual and ironic, often addressed to both children and adults (Wall, 1990), and narrative strategies which have an estranging force, encouraging readers to 'watch themselves being involved' (Iser, 1978:134) are also present in many of these texts. This is the proactive side to provision, and though many theorists find the status of these texts as 'Children's Literature' problematic (Rose 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994), in pragmatic terms, these are the texts that "appear on the children's list of a publisher"

(Townsend, 1976) and are promoted as necessary reading if children are to be admitted into a cultural elite.

On the other hand, however, publishers exist within a market (and nowadays are more likely to be part of a multi-national conglomerate than an independent publishing house (Webb, 1995)), and admit that these proactive practices must be balanced by the reactive tendency which fills the coffers of large national bookstore chains selling 'what children want to buy'. These are the series books, the anonymous, repetitive and derivative texts which are classified as 'static' reading. Included in this category are the TV and Film tie-ins which are top sellers, the game book, the joke book and the impoverished sequels which exploit the power of character to attract buyers, such as Babar or Thomas the Tank Engine. The dichotomy between the volumes purchased by grandmothers which sit on the shelf or books that their parents and teachers 'make them read', and the fiction bought with book tokens and traded on the school playground, positions the developing child readers within a world of divided reading practices and the cacophony of competing discourses. Theorists who bemoan the sheer volume of this 'pulp' are not alone.

In all this, it may seem that the author is indeed dead, and that the restraints of genre (including style, structure and content) in terms of what is acceptable in the marketplace dominate over the original and the individual.

(Hunt, 1991:161)

They are joined by media commentators, only rarely given an opportunity to discuss children's books in the pages of broadsheet newspapers.

But although I can see the need for variety in children's literature today, my feeling is that the newest plantings have rather lost sight of one essential function of the Child's Garden of Literature: its role in locating the child in the society in which he or she is growing up; the part it traditionally played in *civilising* the child.

(Hardyment, 'Babar on Roller skates with a Walkman', The Independent, 10 April 1993:28)

If these critics function as defenders of the humanist values of literature, then there are also those who are concerned with defending the rights of the child to exercise choice in their reading matter (Eccleshare, 1991). Rudd (1995) proposes that we must investigate response starting "where children like to read" (95) and many critics and researchers claim that, despite the restrictions of the majority of what is available for children, children read in ways that transcend the poverty of narrative, which is positive and encouraging for the future of literacy (Dickinson 1970, Sarland 1994a, 1994b, Children's Literature Research Centre, 1995). Media commentators are also concerned to defend the bulk of children's books by challenging the middle-class assumptions upon which much literary criticism is based.

Educated grown-ups revere words; children who read good books, the theory goes, acquire rich vocabularies.... On this score they are probably worrying needlessly. Oldthink can't bear a classic to be replaced by a potted version. Newthink has realised that the characters (in the old sense) and plots, raised from the dead electronically, can change and live forever.... To a young child, a book is not a work of art but a friend, a beguiler and secret teacher. Until puberty, it's not the words but the plots that really matter.
(*Calling the Shots*, Ann Barr in *The Independent* on Sunday, 9 January 1994:28)

The distinction between what children and adults do with books implied by this statement is reflected by the separateness of the children's book market, enforced by contemporary pressure to gain children as direct consumers against the competing attractions of screen-based narratives and computer games (BML, 1994). It is clear from Barr's comments above, however, that a profound misunderstanding of the ways in which fiction works informs her defence, and it is the ignorance of the nature of literary response gained from theoretical perspectives examined in Part One that defines the most significant separation at work in the provision of books for children. By voicing the opinion that books as art can be opposed to the role of the book as 'a

friend', Barr demonstrates her lack of understanding of literature as communication, and of the relationship between the author and the reader which occurs within a 'literary' experience (Meek, 1990). While the 'transformational' qualities of a text, the symbiotic relationship between the generous author and the creative reader, might define 'literature' in theoretical terms which should include all readers, the socially rarefied context in which the term 'art' is used implies a cultural exclusivity which is denied by the evidence supplied by children reading. The implication that children are not only naive readers, but also a 'lower class' of readers, belittles both literature and children (Paul, 1990).

In addition, the relationship between the author and reader which gives the reader a role in the making of meaning is formed by words which, according to Barr, don't matter. It is the function of words to allow the reader a voice within the narrative that is largely ignored in the discourses of provision, emphasising what is read, rather than how it can be read. These perceptions, or mis-perceptions, of the ways in which different ways of telling invite different ways of reading, contribute to publishing choices, editorial and design strategies, marketing plans, library and bookshop selection and media promotion.

The disregard for different modes of reading has also contributed to the public mood which expresses increasing anxiety about the influence of fiction (in both printed and screen-based forms) on behaviour. Concern over the 'uncontrollable' child is often directed at levels of violence in both books and films/video. Whether this is reflected in the uproar over the awarding of the Carnegie medal to Stone Cold (Swindells, 1994) or in conflicts over the placement of the Point Horror series in libraries and classrooms, the degree to which books influence behaviour is central to the forces which influence provision. The fact that it is important to know that one of the killers of Jamie Bulger was an avid reader of Roald Dahl (Thacker, 1994) reflects a widespread concern for what children read, rather than how they read it. The lack of awareness of the

importance of narrative strategies which call attention to fictionality and offer a choice of subject position places readers at the mercy of what they read (Hollindale 1988, Meek 1990, Stephens 1992). In addition, such limitations contribute to the discourses of provision and influence the way in which books are promoted and chosen. The dependence on direct 'identification' discussed in Chapter Four is at the heart of this problem and can be seen at all levels of provision, from cover design to character-based publishing. The pressures on publishers to conform to social needs and anxieties about what should be read (Hunt, 1991:159) has a direct influence on the poetics of the literature that is ultimately read. The principally reactive nature of the book publishing industry (and this is true for adult publishing as well) means that not only editorial choice and influence, but cover design and marketing strategy are designed to meet the publicly expressed assumptions based on modes of reading which are static and closed, and thus, disabling (Stephens, 1992).

This means that, in order to contextualise response, it is necessary to take account of the *peritext*, "the written (and graphic) material that 'surrounds' the story: the publisher's 'blurb', the typeface, the layout..." (Hunt, 1991:4), in addition to the placement (where and how books are displayed), the availability (how books are selected) and exposure (how books are advertised, reviewed and information about them disseminated). These features make up the *social modes of reception*, bridging the gap between the work and the reader as expressed by Naumann (1976), Bennett (1982, 1983) and others discussed in Chapter Three.

Attempts have been made to map out the lines of communication and feedback systems by Hunt (1991:158,160) in an effort to illustrate the multiple pathways which influence the writing of a book. Rosen (1995), too, amusingly describes the commercial concerns and pragmatic forces which ultimately disrupt the author/reader inter-action underlying the author's motivation to write. The commercial concerns which dominate the children's publishing industry, in combination with the pedagogical concerns of the

community, form a complex maze of inter-relationships which stand between the reader and the author. The linearity of Hunt's map, however, does not go far enough. For though he acknowledges the circular nature of the system

the author makes the text makes the readers makes the response
makes the author *ad infinitum*. (Hunt, 1991:155)

his description fails to convey the extent to which each step in the process is embedded within a web of discourses defining both literature and readers which loops back on itself. A three-dimensional map is necessary, if the complexity of the directions of influence are to be understood.

Both author and reader are embedded within defining discourses which are determined by a variety of social forces. These mediating forces - the academic community, education policy, publishing, editing, marketing, provision and the media - in addition to more individual influences, such as parents, teachers and peers, can also be seen to derive their controlling and defining discourses from the interplay resulting from perceptions of these forces.

Figure 6.1 (below) represents three interlocking rings with a section cut away, illustrating the multiple forms of mediation involved in child/book inter-actions. The child and the author/book can be seen at the centre of each cross-section of discourses, some of which can be seen to intersect. These intersections represent shared concerns between forms of mediation, so that parental mediations share concerns about Literacy with Education, while at the same time concern for entertainment and enjoyment are shared with the forces of Provision. Similarly, both the discourses of Education and Provision are concerned with children as readers and buyers of books, so that Book Sales can be viewed as a mutual concern.

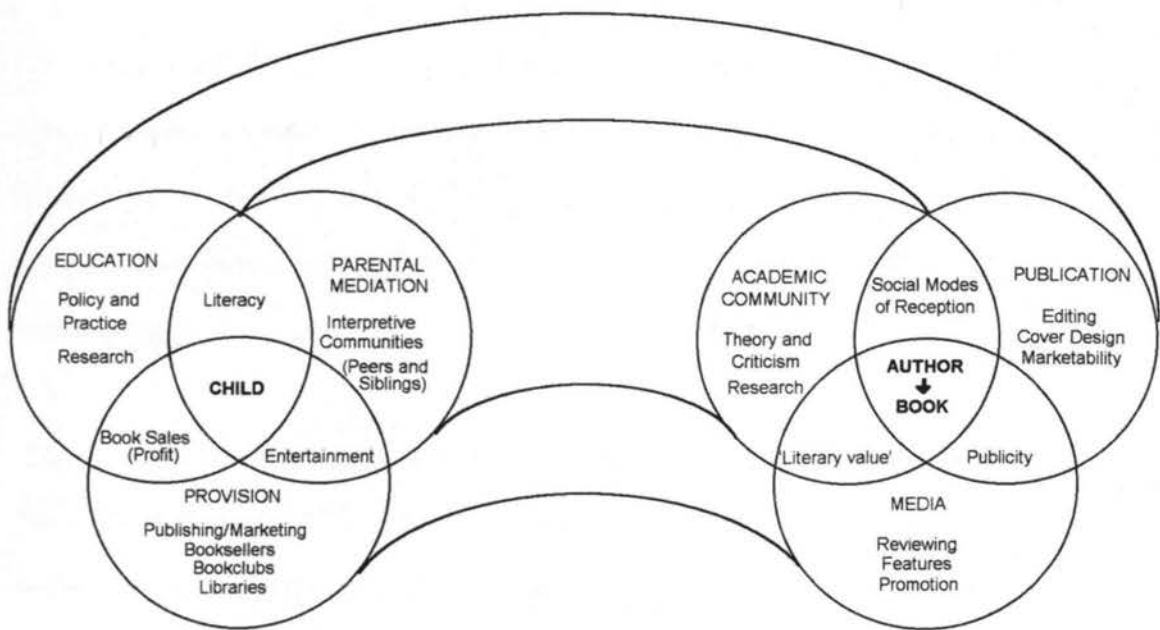


Figure 6.1 Map of Mediating Discourses

Obviously, the discourses which influence the author/book conjunction also impinge on Education, Provision and Parental Mediations. However, while it is possible to imagine the figure above as a closed system, I will argue that a separation of the concerns of the academic community and 'literature as a value' and the child/book inter-actions described in this chapter characterises the discourses of children's literature. In this way, the joining of the two faces represented above is merely an ideal. In reality, the interruption in the spheres of influence illustrated above suggests an analogous interruption in communication between children as readers of fiction and authors who speak to them. The intention of the work conducted for this thesis is to bring these two faces closer together.

A description of these various discourses, gleaned from numerous interviews conducted for my research and a variety of other sources, will portray the competition of market forces and literature as a value, with the child at the centre. While all of these mediating voices express a wish to create readers, this battle either marginalises the child's voice, or controls it, placing the potential for an active relationship with the

text within a set of monologising discourses. The parallels with a Bakhtinian model of the relationship between the 'carnavalesque' and dominant discourses discussed in Chapter Three can be extended to include this mediating interplay, as the cultural dominance of class (Stallybrass & White, 1996) can be extended to the adult-child relationship.

The acknowledgement of the importance of 'ways of reading' (Hollindale 1988, Meek 1988, 1990, Hunt 1991, Stephens 1992, etc.), made available by a theoretical understanding of response, is often absent from these *social modes of response*, so that the silence of the child within these discourses perpetuates their silence within the text. The lack of authority within the texts, in addition to the peri-textual dimension of fiction, diminishes the reading act, and so diminishes readers.

The pressures of the children's publishing industry are often persuasively documented by children's authors (Hunt 1991:162-174, Galef 1993, Rosen 1995) who have struggled with the requirements of editors and the need to change their work to meet the demands of the market. While these writers often acknowledge that editors find the pressure to sell as frustrating as writers do (Galef, 1993), the need to simplify, to 'dumb down' for the children's market, is often seen as a direct interruption of the creative interchange that goes on between author and reader.

Far better to placate than to challenge...: keep it simple, repeat whenever possible, and for God's sake, don't offend anyone (Galef, 1993:22)

The need to make books 'suitable for children' often requires the simplification of vocabulary (so that 'Oregon blueberries and Georgia peaches' became 'fruit'), the removal of simile and metaphor and the expunging of the subversive or the different.

(I)t is easier and more profitable if we produce books that suggest that the world is an unchangeable sort of place. (Rosen, 1995:34)

The perception of the tendency for publishing for children to be 'safe' and 'inoffensive' runs counter to the desires of many authors to challenge and liberate through fiction.

Children's literature is a marvellous institution if for no other reason than that, in general, by taking children's desires and abilities seriously, it tends to defy dominant notions of children's supposedly innate feebleness and vulnerability. (Rosen, 1995:40)

While Rosen perceives this defiance in terms of the portrayal of children as characters within works of fiction, he agrees with those who admit that the notion of taking children seriously is a utopian view in the light of the commodification of the children's book (Hunt, 1990). The increased buying power of children, and their ability to influence the purchases their parents make, place pressure on publishers to interchange the concept of 'what kid's want', with 'what kid's want to buy'. The child as a consumer of books is as much a construct of the industry as the child in children's book criticism is a construct of the critic. Parents and teachers who choose books for children, and the children themselves, appear to be at the mercy of the commercial constraints of publishing, rather than liberated by choice.

The overproduction of children's books (publications estimated at between 7000 and 8000 last year) is an indication of efforts of competing publishers to hold onto their market share and provide their multi-national father company with a profit (Eccleshare 1991, Watkins and Sutherland in Hunt 1995a). Though the market in children's books is buoyant (BML Report, 1994), there is increased pressure to produce books which sell quickly, as most publishers no longer keep extensive back-lists (Webb, 1995). Books must compete for the child's 'spend' with computer games, and so, some argue, must deliver similar rewards. The unusual, the challenging and the enduring are lost in a plethora of repetitive and often sensationalist trash.

The pessimism with which the children's book market is described from the perspective of children's authors, educators and critics is tempered by the optimism in the market that children continue to read and buy books. Yet those who are concerned with what they read and how they read it retain the conviction that those who decide what is available are so in thrall to the market that they are no longer able to be proactive, relying instead on what is easy, safe and profitable. It is necessary to question whether those books which have 'kid appeal' *are* the books that 'kid's want', or whether they are wanted because they are what is most visible and most energetically promoted. These questions cannot be answered without asking children, and it is one of the aims of the Book Choice Study discussed in the next section of this thesis to describe an approach to talking to children which might answer these questions.

PUBLISHING - EDITING, SALES AND MARKETING

An investigation of the children's publishing industry from the inside illustrates both the extent to which editors are aware of the direct influence they have on children's reading and the degree to which this is affected by commercial forces. This level of mediation confirms all others, perpetuating a situation where marketing potential and the intrinsic merit of books come into conflict (Reynolds in Introduction to Children's Literature Research Centre, 1994). The following information was gathered through my liaison with staff members of one major children's paperback publisher, who provided me with their fiction output from 1991-1994, which accounts for 40% of all children's paperbacks sold in the UK. Interviews were conducted with the Editorial Director, Sales Manager, Marketing Manager, Rights Manager and Bookclub Manager, during which they were asked to describe their roles within the company, and their perceptions of these roles. In addition, I observed meetings where cover design and future planning were discussed. The perspectives offered by these individuals within the children's publishing industry reveal the extent to which the pragmatics of providing

books for children influences the way we all become readers. In an effort to preserve confidentiality, I have referred to these individuals by their titles, and italicise their quoted remarks without named acknowledgement.

The job of editor is considered to be one which "*juggles commerce with literature*". While some editors come from a background in literature, often studying Humanities at University, others have moved up to the rank of editor from a teaching background, or by virtue of being a parent and working for a publishing company. However, literature is not 'studied' in any form, supporting the idea that the concerns of children's literature are separate, and inferior to, mainstream publishing and more akin to popular fiction. It is a commonplace that editing children's books is a step along the ladder toward 'real' editing, thereby marginalising children's editors within the industry, as children's literature specialists are often marginalised within academic institutions. Such a situation reflects the "general impulse to isolate children's reading and the reading of children's books by adults from adult life." (Hand, 1973:7)

The majority of children's editors are women, as are most other members of sales and marketing staff, confirming the perception that there is an inextricable link between children's books and female nurturing practices. At the meetings I attended, the only male participant was a Sales Manager. The perception of children's literature as a predominantly female concern may be a contributing factor in its marginalisation (Paul 1990, Rudd 1992).

While emphasising that individual editors have their own criteria in their search for books "*that children need*", it was stressed that there are legal restrictions on what can be published for children, concerning defamation, obscenity and endangerment to the 'user'. Beyond that, "*the liberal tendency current in the publishing industry in general*" means that publishing tends to be reactive, rather than proactive. The concern over content indicated by this tendency is also reflected in the importance of

the international market in regard to profit margins. If books can sell on to other countries, the print run can be larger and each book cheaper to produce (Webb, 1995). As the American market is the most profitable one, the need to be answerable to American standards of 'political correctness' and translatability does influence what is produced.

In addition to the need to address an international market, there is a widespread recognition that to some extent, editors must "*play to adults*", though they do not want to publish *for* adults. This particular editor is always aware that she must "*justify [herself] to parents*", not only in terms of quality, but also in terms of a kind of unspoken 'censorship'. Adults want to feel that those who provide books for their children are making them 'safe', based on assumptions that fiction has a direct influence on behaviour. The publication of a horror series similar to *Point Horror* has led to similar anxieties being expressed. The widespread assumption that the violence and darkness within such texts are dangerous and unhealthy is related to notions of 'identification' dealt with by many contemporary Children's Literature theorists (see Chapter Four).

The error that adults make is to confuse these entertainments in the form of written fiction with religious tracts, and to mistake the discerning spectators for willing acolytes in some sort of religious indoctrination. But this is not the case. (Sarland, 1994a:61)

The general disregard for different modes of reading is demonstrated most directly in extreme cases such as this. However, the publishing industry in general does very little to break the cycle of assumptions which informs parental buying practice. Although this editorial team made the decision to remove such books from bookclub lists, this was an attempt to maintain their long-held reputation amongst customers as conservative and trustworthy; an affirmation of such beliefs in passive modes of reading, rather than a decision to excise 'pulp' from their list.

The perception that children's literature is in essence different and 'lower' than adult literature contributes to a view of child readers as the 'inferior' or 'lacking' class of readers already investigated in regard to educational discourses surrounding children and fiction (see Chapter Five). In a relationship that is analogous to the dichotomy between aesthetic and popular forms described in a Bakhtinian model of the development of literary forms (Stallybrass and White, 1986), the children's book industry appears to conceive of child readers as essentially less capable, but hungry for entertainment, while a few 'aristocratic readers', heavily influenced by adult readers, will engage with the highly praised material.

Though this editor claims that amongst the criteria she considers when choosing fiction for children is the uniqueness of the author's voice and the challenging of beliefs and broadening of horizons, she acknowledges that these can only be applied to the '*top end of the market*', which represents merely 1% of this publisher's output. For the majority of fiction published, the criteria rests on coherence, believability of character and dialogue, strong narrative thrust and '*a convincing interface with the child's world*'. Although these factors are essential to the consistency of any work of fiction, the emphasis on character and relation to the world of the child again reveals an absence of awareness about different modes of reading, and the potential of fiction to be 'transformational'. Thus, the perception of fiction as a communicative exchange (Chambers 1985, Meek 1988, 1990) or as a way to question or challenge the dominant world view (Hollindale 1988, Stephens 1992, Rosen 1995) comes into conflict with the need to react to what people will buy.

Again, the fact that children's books are published to address the needs and anxieties of adults is clear. The '*most cynical market*' in children's publishing is considered to be the 'classics' and 'modern classics' which, in part, account for the top end this editor refers to. These books are marketed unabashedly to parents who want to see their children reading 'quality' books, rather than more popular and ephemeral material.

Titles such as Charlotte's Web, Tom's Midnight Garden, The Mouse and His Child and Carrie's War in addition to Little Women, Alice in Wonderland and White Fang have been repackaged to be attractive as a collection, with matched coloured bindings, yet it is recognised that children are not the primary purchasers of such titles. The 'series' look created by the co-ordination of covers may be a cynical attempt to attract the reader of the *Sweet Valley Twins* series, for instance, and certainly some of the children who took part in the Book Choice Study misunderstood the nature of these collections, but it is generally accepted by the editorial staff that adults are the primary buyers of such titles. Though there is no conclusive research in this area, it is assumed that these books are not always read by the children for whom they are bought (Hardyment, 1992:34).

The Influence of Cover Design

This phenomenon, however, does characterise the perception of the editorial team that covers are a major influence on those who buy children's books, whether they be parents anxious to get their children reading *anything*, or the children themselves. Though Paul (1990) regards the arbitrariness of book covers as an indication of the problematic nature of children's literature, there is very little research available to investigate how covers influence choice. However, several studies reveal the importance of the cover in attracting both children and adults to books (Richards 1994, Children's Literature Research Centre, 1994, Wagner, in *The Times*, 22 June 1996).

the 'socially peripheral' characteristics of both books (their covers and location in the bookshop) were 'symbolically central' to their status as books for adults or for children, their critical reception and their potential status as charter members of the canon. (Paul, 1990:208)

If covers are seen to be peripheral, the attention paid to them is central to the mediating function of publishing, for any form of literature, whether it be children's books or scholarly editions of eighteenth century poetry (McGann, 1991). However,

consideration must be given to the formative function of children's books and the extent to which these seemingly peripheral features of the book as an object influence response. Fry (1985:112) for instance, records the comments his young readers make about the covers of their books and suggests that their 'readings' of the cover are a major factor in their decision to choose the book, though this tendency varies from reader to reader. In one case, in particular, Fry argues that the cover and blurb represent a kind of reassurance, diminishing the strangeness of the new. The desire, expressed by his readers, to use the peri-textual features of the book to construct expectations of the story, indicates the dependency that children have on cover art and the extent to which it influences the way in which the book is read.

Goldthwaite (1990), less concerned with notions of response, points out that because children are uninterested in the 'intrinsic value' of a book, the function of the book as an attractive object more definitely determines it as a book for children. Whereas Fry is persuasive about the extent to which the cover must be included in the reading process, the emphasis on providing an eye-catching, desirable object is certainly part of the perception which governs the marketing of children's books. In addition, the need to address both the perceptions of the adult buyer and the needs of the child reader makes the emphasis on the peri-textual features of children's books problematic.

Cover design performs several competing functions. On the one hand, the cover is intended to provide an indication of both the genre and content of the book. Market research carried out by publishers and wholesalers reveals that parents want guidance as to the suitability of a book for age group and ability. Though children often misjudge or learn to disregard this, extensive labelling is intended to provide adults with a clear signal of content, so that a Story Book is 'A book for those who have developed reading fluency'. In this sense, the cover is directed toward the adult buyer. The 'blurb' on the book, while clearly constructed to convince the child that they are in for a 'marvellous, funny story for anyone with a lively imagination and an infuriating

family', for instance, also performs a guiding function, drawing attention to 'short, easy-to-read sentences'.

On the other hand, covers, because they provide the '*spark that needs to be fired*', must have '*kid appeal*', according to editorial and marketing staff. This means that they need to be eye-catching and colourful; they need to promise fun and excitement - all the things that children know that they can get from television or the latest computer game. The use of imagery from film and television on the covers increases the attraction of the many 'tie-ins' on which the market depends. The tendency to identify the book with the screen-based version, and the way this influences the reader's response, demand investigation, as the expectations readers form are largely influenced by their perceptions of the cover.

There is an essential difference, however, between the majority of children's books and the relationship between the cover and the text of picture books. Until recently, this particular publisher placed the blurb for picture books inside the front cover, allowing the force of the full colour picture on both front and back to attract potential buyers. As the cover is frequently perceived as an extension of the picture book itself, and thus an unmediated communication between author/illustrator and reader, this meant that readers were urged into the book by the artwork, encouraged to engage with the semiotics of the picture and invited to construct a possible story from the cover picture, in much the same way that reading a picture book involves a more creative and self-determined interpretation (Meek, 1988). However, it was discovered through market research, that the adults, who are the primary buyers of picture books, could not find the written synopsis or blurb, and it has been proposed that the blurb be moved to the back cover. The adult need to be given a signal, to know what the story is about before reading the book, closes off the child's potential for discovery, and the opportunity to construct one's own story. What is more, the blurb interrupts the direct

communication between author/illustrator and reader, filtering the inter-action through the need to address children only through adult criteria.

The short paragraphs which occupy the back cover of most of the paperbacks provided by this publisher are not written by the authors of the books, and editors generally resist their demands to write their own copy. Blurbs are written by copywriting or editorial staff who have read the book. These individuals receive no training, yet they are in an extremely influential position. The synopsis of the plot and the claims they make for the book are not only akin to advertising copy in their intention to persuade buyers, but they are also based on one individual reading of the book, influenced by assumptions of 'what children will buy'. While this means that the description on the cover is sometimes misleading, something that the children in the Book Choice Study were quick to point out, it also means that the copywriter's interpretation of what is most interesting about the book does not necessarily match that of young readers.

This is particularly evident in the gendering of covers (Children's Literature Research Centre, 1994). The use of colour and the tendency for cover art to portray a central character(s) rests on notions of 'identification'. The frequency with which the covers of children's fiction provide a realistic 'portrait' of principal character(s) in the story indicates the assumptions that children will be attracted to the individual portrayed. Thus, books with a portrait of a girl on the cover are often perceived as books for girls. Market research indicates that parents will not buy a book about girls for a boy, though they will buy books about boys for girls. However, the peri-textual focus on character often masks features of the book which would be attractive to readers of either gender, demonstrating how adult mediation of children's books within the publishing industry, based on assumptions of 'what children buy', closes off choice in subtle ways. The extent of the influence such disjunctions have on the way in which children become readers can only be judged with direct evidence from children. The approach to research used in the Book Choice Study provides the kind of evidence which

demonstrates the power of the peritext to affect not only readings, but perceptions of what being a reader of fiction means, in general.

The influence of cover design on sales has led to a situation where the interdependent forces of the children's book market exist within a self-perpetuating loop which depends on an implied reader, not in terms of what is read, but what is 'read' from the cover. Recently, disappointing sales of Philip Pullman's Ruby in the Smoke series led the editorial team to approach their major customer (a large High Street chain of bookshops) for advice about revamping the cover. A photographic image of the main character was decided upon and this retailer then stocked the titles in large numbers. Though the books did not sell well to the public, and the children in my study considered the cover 'off-putting', the importance of covers to major retailers is evident, and reflects the way in which such enterprises construct their children's book customers.

According to the Sales Manager, whose task it is to present the product to the market, each facet of the market is very predictable in terms of what is purchased from the publisher. [The High Street chain consulted for this study], which accounts for 45% of sales, stocks many series books and its buyers are generally conservative in their selection, only choosing what they know will sell. This is mass market publishing at its most reactive, and though this Sales Manager occasionally suggests more adventurous titles, they rarely sell. The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales (Scieszka & Lane, 1992) provides an interesting example. Although the reaction of readers to this book will be discussed in more detail in relation to the Book Choice research, the status of the book within the market demonstrates how children are silenced by the discourse of provision.

This book is an example of a text that transgresses boundaries and calls attention to

what it is that makes a book, where our conventions come from, how they work, what demands they make on the reader, and particularly, the way in which texts get their meaning from what readers bring to them.

(Reynolds, 1994:59)

Not only do Scieszka and Lane subvert the fairy tales which are their starting point, but they play metafictionally with notions of narrator and book format, providing a self-conscious and sophisticated reading experience which liberated the readers who came across it during my study, in addition to other adults and children who have read it in my sight.

By calling attention to the form of the book through an adventurous use of typeface and design, the author and illustrator provide an opportunity, through parody, for the reader to examine story convention, in addition to the peri-textual features which surround the book. The blurb on the back cover quotes the Little Red Hen

"What is this doing here? This is ugly! Who is this ISBN guy? Who will buy this book anyway? Over fifty pages of nonsense and I'm only in three of them. Blah, blah. " (Scieszka & Lane, 1992: Back cover)

This subversion of the cover blurb provides the reader with a parodic transgression of the convention of book buying and calls attention to the inflated status of the cover blurb. A book such as this invites a dynamic reading experience and a dialogue with playful authors who rely on intertextuality in both form and content to allow their readers to engage creatively with the text. Yet this book was not purchased by this publisher's largest customer, although it was placed in a few selected 'top-end' stores, because they knew it would not sell. Again, consideration of the cover, in particular, its dark colours and 'oddness', was paramount. Thus, rare opportunities for reading experiences such as this are denied to children who, instead, are given the choice of series books and classics, often packaged in 'series' format.

Luckily, there is also a great deal of interchange between librarians and teachers and publishing houses, so there are opportunities for grass roots movements to develop a readership for books such as this. However, the forces of the market still exert a stranglehold over children's reading choice, and the ignorance displayed within the children's publishing industry regarding the importance of ways of reading constructs children as consumers of 'book objects', rather than readers.

The inter-relationship between education and children's literature and the influence of educational discourses on the children's publishing industry are recognised as crucial to the survival of the industry. Though mass market publishing accounts for 45% of sales, School and Library suppliers and school bookclubs also provide a major market. Individual trade sales through small bookshops are, according to the Marketing Manager, negligible.

The role of teachers, school librarians and specialist librarians in bringing books to children and influencing their reading habits is central to the marketing approach of this publisher (and others). In discussion, the Marketing Manager stated

I feel that the most important and influential development would be in making Children's literature courses part of the core curriculum for trainee teachers, and recalling specialist children's librarians (who are our best customers).

It is evident, then, when examining the perceptions of children's books from the point of view of marketing and sales staff, that the role of the mediating adult is seen as central to resolving tensions between wishing to provide children with 'the best' and selling it. The provision of brightly coloured free information leaflets advise parents on how to encourage the reading habit by sharing books and establishing regular bedtime reading (First Steps to Reading, Babies Love Books), clearly acknowledging current research when promoting creative reading.

CREATIVE READING? This is what we call books that use different styles and interesting formats, designed to stimulate interest and intrigue children.

Though the definition of creative reading is limited and the choice of fiction equally so, the task of providing guidance and information for parents, and the attempt, perhaps, to match the books to the children, are considered to be part of marketing policy.

While parents may rely on the reputation of this publisher to provide suitable reading material, the publishers want to market their wares to an informed public. However, as parents are equally influenced by the web of discourses which surround young readers, the ideal of reciprocity is unreachable.

The Marketing Manager's direct responsibility to the company - "*to maximise the potential of books*" - is to match the product to the market, and this market is influenced primarily by the mediating discourses which define children's literature. Clearly, the marginalisation of Children's Literature as a subject in the Academy, and the role of the educational context in constructing readers discussed above, are implicated in the "*balancing act*" involved in the process of providing children with books.

The need to take account of the complex interplay of discourses and, in particular, the role of adults in helping children to become adult readers is recognised in the wider context of the children's book trade. Recent research commissioned by the Children's Book Circle (BML, 1994) pointed out that, although the children's book market is thriving and profitable, there is a great deal to be discovered about the way that children choose books, how their attitudes to reading develops, and the way that the reading history of the adult affects the choices they make on behalf of children. The acknowledgement that this kind of information is necessary suggests that children's

publishers have a commitment to regarding children's reading as part of a continuum, though if one were to take a cynical view, it is in their commercial interest to do so.

The aspect of the promotional role that is exclusive to children's literature publishing is, perhaps, the need to promote not merely the books themselves, but a perception of books which will "make children into readers" (Gritten, 1991). The book club run by this particular publishing house were originally founded to involve children directly in 'a living relationship with books'. The strong reputation of this particular publishing house was largely due to their Bookclub, which was founded with the intention of selling directly to children.

'It takes a long time for books to reach children. Books have to go through five lots of adults: the editor who chooses, the traveller who sells, the bookseller who buys, teachers, parents. The whole point of the club, was to cut out one or two sets of grown-ups.'

(Gritten, quoting Kaye Webb, 1991:20)

The nature of the Bookclub, which made palpable the notion of a network of readers, has, however, changed since its inception (Meek 1988). The direct contact between the club members and editorial staff, through outings, parties and excursions, which characterised the club, has gone, though some indirect contact remains through the letter page of the magazine. The current club, now divided into three age-related sections, operates through schools in direct competition with other school-based clubs. A magazine, designed to promote reading in general, is directed at children and includes articles and interviews about authors and illustrators, children's letters, competitions and games. The blending of entertainment with books is clear - although there are two pages spreads taken from The Minpins (Dahl, 1993) and Mr Majeika (Carpenter, 1993), most pages in one of the issues I looked at included games, competitions and puzzles. While this is welcoming and amusing, the perception of

books as 'fun and nothing else' comes into conflict with notions of communication and creative interplay (Chambers, 1993a).

The choice of books offered by the club also emphasises books as fun. The Book Club Manager states that the emphasis is on leisure reading, though the aim is for "*good books*" - *books with some educational worth*". Though again, she admits that there is "*a tension between beliefs of what children should have available to them and marketing*", the concern for educational value and reading levels implicit in the division into three clubs ignores notions of language and creative engagement. Rather than proactively promoting challenging and dynamic reading experiences, the club reacts to the twin demands of the market: books which attract the 'reluctant' reader, and books that parents and teachers will 'approve of'. While children buy film and TV- tie-ins, joke books and horror, teachers and parents favour Dick King-Smith, the Ahlbergs and award winners. Because the book club provides feedback on sales, it perpetuates a definition of books, and particularly fiction, which has little to do with the deeper pleasures of play inherent in a 'literary' engagement.

So, though children have a voice in choosing (from an adult-selected choice of books), and they are invited to voice opinions about the books they read in the letters page of the club magazines, they remain silenced as readers in this discourse of provision. This is due, in part, to the fact that while parents and teachers trust editorial and publishing staff to make the right choices on behalf of their children, publishers are dependent on "*how the books are used with children*", each devolving responsibility to the other, and each feeling at a loss to understand how to make children into adult readers.

This situation is further exacerbated by the poverty of children's book reviewing in the media. All of those interviewed for this study, including publishing and marketing staff, bookshop suppliers and managers, librarians, teachers and parents, complained about the lack of informative and readily accessible reviews of children's books in the

media. While the most committed can subscribe to one of several magazines (*Books for Keeps*, *The School Librarian*, etc.), become members of the Young Book Trust and listen to BBC Radio 4's 12-minute programme *Treasure Islands*, the disregard for children's books in daily and Sunday newspapers is another indicator of the marginalisation of children and their concerns. Not only are reviews infrequent and often excluded from the Book pages, they are usually either composite reviews, including several recently published texts, or extremely brief plot synopses, so that there is little opportunity to do more than describe and enthuse. Phrases such as 'a powerful and thought-provoking book', 'gripping' and 'unputdownable' become abstract counters, sounding more like advertising copy than an exploration of the text seen in adult reviews. On occasion, the publication of a children's book, or the awarding of a book prize, will provide an opportunity for children's books to be discussed at length, and the debate about the nature of children's literature is brought out into the open; yet this is a rare occurrence. Thus, the public perception of children's fiction is formed by its absence and its silence.

BOOK SUPPLYING

The inter-action between the different mediating forces which dominate the children's book industry and which contribute to the *social modes of reception* is also demonstrated in an examination of the next level of provision - those that buy from the publishers and sell to libraries, schools and retailers. An interview was held with a member of the promotional staff of one of the three major wholesalers in this country, with the intention of contributing to the map of provision which influences the way in which children are constructed as readers. I found that the wholesaler, while providing another layer of mediation, performed a similar function to the marketing and sales staff of the publishing house, often merely passing on the promotional materials of the publishers to their customers, for which the publisher has to pay.

The wholesaler buys everything from the larger publishing houses, but is more selective with smaller independent publishers. This selection is then sent out to libraries for approval, to schools through either a catalogue or teacher's visits to the showroom, and direct to children through book clubs or school bookshops. Thus, while the wholesaler provides a useful service, there is a selection process involved which closes off opportunities for customers to select from the full range of children's books available, so that the individual, the unusual, and the less heavily promoted offerings of small publishing houses are unlikely to be considered.

Catalogues are often published before the books, and so choices are made on publisher's synopses, or, most often, merely on the attraction of the cover. Judgements are thus made on appearance or content, rather than the literary merit of a book, although author loyalty must be seen to have a role in selection.

In addition to acting as mediator between publishers and libraries, schools and bookshops, the wholesaler provides feedback information on sales statistics for the publishers. There is also more informal feedback from schools and libraries which influences what the supplier will buy or promote more heavily. For instance, at the request of libraries, this supplier has recently increased its stock of Graphic novels.

As another arm of the book promotion industry, the role of the wholesalers involves promoting reading in general, rather than merely the books themselves. The catalogues and magazines directed at teachers demonstrate the market's dependence on teachers as effective promoters of reading, while the majority of articles are similar to publisher's promotion material, enthusing about the current range. Reviews are brief and content-based. These magazines are also directed at children and include both competitions and reviews by children. The opportunity for children to review books is an interesting one, as it appears to go some way toward giving children a voice in the

whole process of choice. However, a consideration of the reviews themselves indicates that this is clearly not the case.

In the promotional material consulted for this research, the reviews of younger children's books are interspersed with children's responses, revealing the fact that the younger readers focus, not so much on the story content, which is usually the concern of the adult reviewer, but on specific images and 'bits', single events, for instance. This is similar to the child whose favourite part of The Iron Man (Hughes, 1968) was 'delicacies' (Meek 1988), and to the responses of the younger children in the Book Choice Study. This changes as children learn, enabling them to take on the reviewing style they recognise as 'adult'. This applies to the vocabulary and tone, as well as the focus of the review. So, whereas Sarah, 7, says of Potter's The Tale of Jeremy Fisher, "A great water beetle came up underneath the lily leaf and tweaked the toe of one of his galoshes", taking on the alliteration and pace of Potter's narration, Lucy, also 7, is congratulated for 'nicely summing up' when she writes "A very good gentle book with excellent characters and a good storyline." While the first tells us something about what it is like to be a reader of the book, the second demonstrates that Lucy has learned how to talk about books in the way adults do. The editorial comment which celebrates this achievement demonstrates the need to place children within a critical discourse which establishes them as adults, rather than building on where they already are, sensitive to sound and image, and ready to play with language. The limiting discourses of education and conformity are thus confirmed by the way books are promoted.

LIBRARIES

The books provided by the wholesaler go to libraries, where they are selected for purchase, most often through a committee process. Though every County Library operates a different system, most work on the basis of a monthly selection panel with a revolving membership. For the purpose of mapping the contexts of provision, I

attended two such meetings, one in a large inner-city Library authority and the other in a provincial city, serving a more rural and suburban population. The former panel was made up of a broad base of library staff, while the latter was principally made up of children's specialist librarians.

The general depletion of specialist librarians and the changes to the Schools Library Service, in addition to swingeing cut-backs to library budgets, has done a great deal of damage to the provision for Children's Libraries. The combination of economic factors and the government's destruction of children's library services can be seen to have a detrimental effect on the quality of provision, which is uneven and plainly unsatisfactory in many places in the UK (Streatfield & Davies, 1995). These factors also contribute directly to children's experience of books, for while researchers, authors and publishers recognise the role of specialist librarians to bring the right book to the right child, their absence contributes equally, leaving a gap in provision which is filled by mass market promotion (Chambers, 1993a). Additionally, an emphasis on libraries as centres of information and the role of librarians as facilitators of information skills interrupts the connection between librarians and fiction. The information technology revolution has thus redefined the use of libraries, both in terms of funding and the training of librarians.

One reason that the relationship between libraries and children's fiction has reached this situation may be that very little research has been done to investigate the role of libraries in children's reading habits.

there is a sad lack of research at a national level generally, but even more so in relation to children and young people. Sometimes, because of the nature of the child, any research which is carried out tends to concentrate more on the views of the adults connected to the children rather than the children themselves. (Everall, 1993)

Though children's librarians are beginning to develop methods which invite children to respond to the services they provide or to comment on books, the results of such exercises are fragmentary and need thoughtful analysis if they are to contribute to either an understanding of the library needs of young people, or the role library provision plays in the construction of readers. An approach to research suggested by the method used for the Book Choice Study would answer this need, by acknowledging the degree to which reader's responses must be understood to operate within a set of socially determined contexts.

However, it is frequently acknowledged that the loss of the specialist librarian has a detrimental effect.

In Britain now, young librarians leave their training institutions with little if any knowledge or understanding of the history of literature for the young, with an inadequate knowledge of even the contemporary books, and with no preparation in dealing with children or how to mediate books to them. They have to learn on the job. Learning on the job means learning at children's expense. A child who needs help needs it now. (Chambers, 1993a)

However, while such a view argues for the importance of adult mediation, the nature of that involvement is questioned by librarians.

children's books are stalked by interference and by selection - a good deal of it censorial - from their inception to the moment they reach the young reader's hand. (*Children's Book Bulletin*, Editorial, 1980: 1)

The difficulties of selection, surrounded by the discourses of reactive publishing and the anxieties of the public and the media over the 'dangerous' influence of books, were obvious when sitting on the selection panels, though the panel with a general membership appeared to be more sensitive to these anxieties, and thus more reactive in

their selections. However, members of both panels expressed the opinion that the primary concern was serving their readers with limited resources. This meant, in several cases, that books are often chosen because they support National Curriculum topics. The need to reject 50% of the books offered by suppliers meant that even picture books were sometimes judged in this way, so that, Trivizas' and Oxenbury's The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig (1993), which relies on intertextuality to subvert the well known tale and transform the expected closure, was chosen because "*it could be used to teach about Houses and Buildings.*" Again, because Library selection panels provide feedback to publishers' representatives, either through direct communication at Selection meetings or through the supply chain, the choices made influence future publication and so close off choice and create a situation where books that can be used in this way are given priority.

Both panels rely on reviews written by a variety of readers who are given guidelines about the procedure for selection and about how to evaluate fiction. The definition of 'The Value of Fiction for Children' which headlines the guidelines for one of the panels states expected and salutary aims, emphasising emotional growth and the development of literary taste, and reviewers are asked to judge, at least in part, on 'literary merit', though this is not defined. An understanding of the sophisticated nature of picture books and the different modes of reading suggested by such texts is clear from this document, as is a natural suspicion of publisher's efforts to categorise their books.

Although picture books and non-fiction are surveyed on the day of the selection meeting, novels are sent out for review, and it is the review that is considered by the panel. Books must be reviewed quickly, before they go out of print. Reviews are variable, and if they are considered to give a poor impression of the book and its suitability for young readers, it is sent for re-review, as are books about which the panel disagrees. Occasionally, reviews by children are submitted, but are not considered, as some merely say "I enjoyed it". The recognition that children need to be

heard in this process must be set against the way children have learned to think and talk about the books they read, demonstrating the interconnectedness of these mediating forces.

Despite attention paid to literary concerns, the decisions of the panel made up of non-specialists often displayed a lack of understanding of the purpose of fiction. Perhaps the concerns of an inner-city library were necessarily focused on content and 'political correctness' at the expense of literary merit, but the tendency to avoid the ambiguous and latch onto the conventional was, at times, troubling. In one case, The Fish of the World (Jones, 1993) was rejected because there was no clear message. Though this fairy tale is playful and engaging, the lack of closure or moral was regarded as a deficit, and so the children in this library authority will not have the choice of a book which they will be able to interpret for themselves, and from which they can make their own meanings.

The reactive tendency was further displayed in the rejection of books which portrayed a dangerous act. Mahy's Underrunners (1992) had been withheld the previous month because of a scene where two characters exchange blood. As the author was unwilling to remove the offending section and the publisher did not wish to include a warning preface, the panel regarded the book as potentially dangerous. The fact that the book might receive a complaint from parents was seen as justification for excluding it from the library.

Another function of the Selection panel is to respond to complaints received about books already in the Library. Several books were discussed in this way, and in most cases it was decided either to remove the book, or in one case, not to re-order it - to 'let it die a natural death'. Though there were members of the panel who objected to doing so, the degree to which parents need to 'trust' their library to 'protect' their children was admitted. Whether children share these perceptions or not, this practice

must be seen to reflect false assumptions about the nature of fiction. In turn, such assumptions influence the way in which children are constructed as readers. The fact that such a reactive tendency contributes to the system of provision through the multiple feedback systems of publisher, editor, provider and reader demonstrates how the adult mediations of provision enclose children as readers within a web of discourses which silences them.

BOOKSELLERS

A comparison between the buying process of a large High Street bookseller and a small independent bookshop reveals the different ways in which children are conceived of as readers, and the widening gulf between a conception of child readers as consumers of product and a more proactive approach to selling books to children and parents. It is clear that book sales through the independent bookseller are negligible, and are thus less likely to be influential in terms of marketing and editorial policy, but, as I have already discussed, the relationship between buyers for the mass market chain, and the sales and marketing staff of publishing houses is symbiotic. Wholesale buyers, through retail statistics and market research, know what their customers are more likely to buy, and so purchase from publishers accordingly. At the same time, these professional buyers are aware that most adults purchasers of children's fiction "*want the decisions made for them*", so that the market is self-perpetuating.

The buying department is made up of one buyer for younger children's books, one for older children's books, two assistant buyers and two stock controllers. For two weeks out of every month, buyers are presented with the publication range of a number of publishers in a series of half-hour meetings with Sales Managers, and choose from that range, rather than choosing books individually. This range is often pre-selected, as is usually the case with the Sales Manager I interviewed. This process, then, restricts the choice that parents and children are confronted with, and closes off opportunities for children to encounter individual and, perhaps, more challenging, texts. Buyers argue

that the more adventurous books, like those by Anthony Browne and John Burningham, for example, do not sell, and so they are less likely to be selected.

As these presentations are made two to three months prior to publication, choices are often made merely on the basis of covers, though occasionally a hardcover of a book to be published in paperback will be made available. Thus, though the author or illustrator may be taken into account, the most influential aspect of the book is perceived to be the jacket design.

Marketing research with parents reveals not only the attention to cover design, but also the way in which the method of display affects sales. For example, a recent decision was made to reduce the number of picture books sold in each store by over 50%, and to display them so that the covers were more visible. The restriction of choice and the emphasis on viewing an eye-catching cover were considered to be the primary reasons for greatly increased sales: in one case, a book which was selling 9 copies per month increased sales to 109 per month.

The perception of the market for picture books from the point of view of booksellers matches that of editorial staff interviewed and supports the experience of teachers and parents interviewed as part of the Book Choice research. It is considered to be very difficult to sell picture books to children over the age of five and, because adults are less willing to buy picture books for children who already know 'how to read', those picture books which are directed at a more sophisticated readership (for instance, Scieszka & Smith's The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales and the work of Raymond Briggs, e.g. The Man (1992)) have difficulty finding a market. The owner of the independent bookshop shared this view.

As I have already suggested, the extent to which covers influence purchase, and thus contribute to the expectations of the reading experience, must be regarded as a crucial

mediating force in the inter-action between children and books. Therefore, research is necessary to investigate how the semiotics of the cover impinge on the text itself. As the covers are consciously designed to address children and their parents as consumers, there is less emphasis on the text itself, and more on the "*Kid appeal*" of the jacket design. While parents, who are the primary buyers of books for the under-eights, appear to be more comfortable with covers they can see, older readers who are more likely to be the primary choice-makers are, market research indicates, motivated by the attractiveness of the jackets. This means that series fidelity is influential, as is the 'adult'-style design of the Point Horror and Goosebumps series, with embossed and gilt lettering and artwork reminiscent of adult horror and romance fiction being the most attractive features (Richards 1994, Children's Literature Research Centre, 1994). The predominance of such books in bookshops which cater for the mass market creates an impression of book-buying and fiction reading in conflict with a great deal of the best children's literature, and thus contributes to a conception of fiction as escapist and sensational while marginalising the literary and transformational text. The latter are perceived to be the texts that people "*won't buy*", according to the buyer.

Marketing strategies based on popularity appear to support assumptions that these bookshops are providing what children really want to buy, and that they are the only ones listening to children and responding to their needs. Certainly, evidence based on sales indicates that this is true. In addition, the fact that award-winning books selected by adults do not sell, while those chosen by children (for the Mind-boggling Book Award, presented by W H Smith, for example) do, suggests that children's perception of what has value must be acknowledged (Rudd, 1995). The attractions of such books, described by Dickinson (1970) as 'rubbish', are the subject of much debate, both in the theoretical contexts of defining the parameters of 'Children's Literature' and in the context of education, expressing general anxiety about the need for children to read 'something' rather than nothing (Reynolds, 1994).

Popular Fiction and Control

It is necessary to comment in more detail on the special function of popular fiction within the children's book market, as the tensions which define the separation of child and adult concerns about books are most obvious in debates about such texts. Central to these concerns are questions of control implicit in the adult/child relationship and it is the 'adult' appearance of such books, as well as the impression that such reading material is not 'approved of' by parents and teachers that contribute to their attraction. Because fiction is placed within discourses of education and the inculcation of adult rules and values, the acceptance of rubbish itself becomes a challenge to that relationship, just as the popularity of pulp fiction in the adult population can be perceived as a rejection of the cultural dominance implied by the label 'literature'. Though Reynolds (1994) argues that "much which had previously been classified as 'rubbish' is now officially approved and purchased by parents" (1994:72), the growing independence of children as consumers in their own right is the focus of mass market booksellers.

However, by giving children an authoritative position within the market, the forces of provision are often disguising more insidious forms of control within the language of the texts themselves. The repetitive, monologic and 'flat-earth' reading offered by such texts does little to invite children to exercise their own powers as readers, to contribute to the making of meaning and enter into a dynamic relationship with an individual author. The modes of reading invited by a great deal of popular fiction for children may appear to subvert expected adult-child relationships, as in the work of Roald Dahl (Rudd 1992, Reynolds 1994), or challenge the norms of what is suitable or acceptable for children, as in Point Horror fiction (Sarland, 1994 a,b), but the degree of control exerted by such authors constructs readers as passive recipients of frequently dominant value systems. More than that, the appearance and presentation of such texts reinforces the sense of 'sameness' inherent in repetitive fiction (Nodelman, 1985) and

the priority of character and event over the individual author's communicative exchange with the reader.

Though there are studies which support the notion that young readers will read against these texts (see Chapter Five), it may be that if the need to exert some authority within fiction is denied by the text itself, it is deflected into a reading position that challenges the reader/author inter-action by refusing to 'play the game'. Thus, the need to read against authorial intention is a way of rejecting the dominating force of monologic texts. By interpreting the desire for this kind of fiction as an attribution of value, mass market providers of children's fiction do nothing to contribute to 'what children want' if what they want is the opportunity to exert authority. The sense of power and authority which characterises the deep pleasure of gaining a subject position within a text is made possible by open and generous texts which allow children to actively contribute to the process of making fiction happen, but denied by those books which sell and are heavily promoted.

While there is evidence that books that invite creative inter-actions and authoritative positions for their readers are being produced, particularly in the picture book genre, the circumstances of the commercialism that surrounds children's book sales marginalises those books "written and designed by artists who want to redescribe reading" (Meek in Styles, 1992).

If there are those who say it is possible to move on from static positions offered by the majority of fiction available for children to an engagement with more complex and demanding texts (Dickinson 1970, Appleyard 1990, Children's Literature Research Centre, 1994), and that the repetitiveness engenders a reassuring sense of stability, there is a more persuasive argument that claims that the opposite is true.

In short, there is no evidence that reading of easy and silly and stereotyped literature leads to better. (Hoggart, 1996)

The implication of 'better' here may indicate a conception of a hierarchy of literature which depends on assumptions of the cultural superiority of 'great works', yet it can also refer to the way in which children's literature offers different modes of reading, some of which are 'better' in relation to the degree of authority to reader has within the text.

Though this large and influential market leader "*see[s] children's literature as an important investment in the future*", it is clear that it is the consumers of the future who are their concern, rather than readers of fiction in Iser's sense, who know that "reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative" (Iser in Tompkins, 1980:51). The tension between market values and the inherent value of 'literature' as a 'civilising' force silences notions of modes of reading and, therefore, provides both the adults who buy books for children, and children themselves, with a mistaken perception of what reading can be. This situation is recognised by the independent bookseller, whose role as a provider of children's books has diminished drastically in the last ten years.

The Independent Bookseller

In a town that is host to several large bookshops and a cut-price remainder shop, this independent bookseller has a small stock of children's books, split between a 'spinner' of picture books on the ground floor, and a modest stock of paperbacks for older readers, hardback 'gift' editions and some non-fiction covering National Curriculum topics upstairs. There is little room to display stock other than spine outwards, but there is one shelf on which one or two books can be displayed. Whereas twelve years ago, her previous shop had a large choice of children's books, changes in sales patterns have meant a decrease in stock and a less prominent place in the store. The fact that children's books now represent a tiny proportion of both stock and sales is blamed on

the growth of school book clubs. The bookseller's contention that children are encouraged to buy books in this way, because it helps make money for the school and helps them stock the school libraries, is supported by the evidence of the Book Choice Study. While publishers argue that book clubs are aimed at a separate market, this bookseller's experience is that customers will not buy from both sources. This means that choice is further restricted by the criteria of those selecting for school book clubs. It also means that, rather than handling books in the bookshop, all selection is based on jacket design and twenty-word synopses, thus enforcing the power of the cover to attract readers, as discussed above.

A feature of the interview with this bookseller was the extent to which she handled the books while she spoke. In order to make a point, she would get books off the shelves and show them to me, displaying a familiarity with her stock which indicated that she had read many of them. She does not stock series fiction, though she did buy in a few copies of *Point Horror*, choosing them more or less at random. Otherwise, books are chosen by review or by author and illustrator. She will order reprints rather than books that are offered pre-publication because she knows them to be "*the better ones*". She expressed the need to put her "*own personal mark on the selection.*"

The individuality of the selection is in direct contrast to the mass market approach investigated above and, in turn, defines the customers. Her perception was that a particular kind of customer recognises the advantages of a small bookseller. However, it was clear that though customers often knew what kind of thing they were after, she was often asked for advice from parents. Again, her experiences echo the observations of publishers, teachers and the mass market buyers. Parents often ask her to recommend something for "*an excellent or advanced reader*" and grandparents were apt to purchase the 'classics'. She reinforces the impression that picture books are often rejected for children over six, though she does try to promote picture books for older readers. The need to perceive children's books as a measure of academic success

is pervasive, as is the encouragement to move readers out of the 'lower' echelons of children's books toward 'advanced', or adult ways of reading.

In general, the experience of the small independent bookseller in a market dominated by the mass market approach to children's books accentuates the power of the commercial and popular. While the individual and proactive choice of books available in this small shop shrinks with decreasing demand, the opportunity for children to find a well-informed and alternative source of supply disappears.

PARENTS

Families provide the most direct form of mediation between children and their books. Parents, grandparents and siblings provide the books themselves, but they also form part of the environment in which fiction is valued or ignored, celebrated or reviled. Numerous studies have shown that children who come from reading families are more likely to be readers, and children who come from families who visit libraries are more likely to visit libraries. As a part of nurturing practices (Rosen, 1995), narratives of all kinds are central to the relationship between adults and children, and books are a part of that process.

While the responsibility for providing books for children is perhaps the most obvious mediation of the relationship between author and child reader, the ways in which stories themselves are read and talked about within the family are vital to the way fiction is perceived within the family community. When adults read aloud to children, whether in classroom storytime or during the ritual of bedtime reading, the mediating voice of the reader can shape the children's responses to story events by modelling their feelings (Cochran-Smith, 1984). The need to 'colonise' children, or to place them as apprentices in their role as readers of fiction can also be regarded as a way of closing off their own authority within the text. The imposition of a second authorial voice

delivers a particular reading of a particular book, providing a model for the way fiction is to be read.

The places where we wince, cower, laugh, comment, whisper shriek, or engage in any of the other numerous activities that mark the sites of our rewriting of a text determine the way the child perceives the story. A child's reception and response is always heavily marked by the context of relationship and performance.

(Tatar, 1992:xxi)

However, as I have shown above, parents are also part of the continuous process of response into which they admit their children. Equally embedded in the meta-discourses which surround children's reading and charged with the responsibility of admitting children into the social domain of readership, they are surrounded by a cacophony of voices, advising, instructing, admonishing. The discourses of education and provision place parents at the centre of influence, yet these parents are often unable to resolve the conflicts that surround the need to demonstrate the pleasures of reading to children and the need to educate and, thereby, control them. Pennac (1994) powerfully expresses the need to pass on to his son (and more generally, all children) the love of reading in the midst of the pressures of 'educating' him.

Were we blinded by his enthusiasm? Did we believe that, as long as a child took pleasure in words, he would naturally be drawn to books? Did we think that learning to read was an innate process, like walking or talking - just another privilege of our species? Whatever the reason, we decided to put an end to our bedtime stories.

School was teaching him how to read, he took to his lessons with real enthusiasm, it was a turning point in his life, a new autonomy, a second version of his first step. That's what we told ourselves in our own inarticulate way, without ever saying it out loud, so natural did the process seem, as if it were another step in his smooth evolution.

He has grown up now, he could read by himself and find his way in the realm of signs.

(Pennac, 1994: 52)

This perceptive recognition of the way in which the adult and the child are divided in the discourses of reading brings this chapter full circle. The dividing line that separates and marginalises children's literature in the discourses of provision, whether it be the pressures of the market to sell directly to children, or the reactive tendency in supplying books for children that are 'safe', serves to define children as readers as powerless and defenceless. In turn, parents are placed in a position of ultimate authority; on the one hand, charged with the responsibility of turning their children into readers and so admitting them into the dominant culture, and on the other, confronted with conflicting messages about how this is to be done.

If we are to consider, as I have suggested, literary response as a continuum, and view the inter-action between children and books as the beginning of a continuous process, then we must also acknowledge that inter-actions which 'enabling adults' have with the literature that they bring to children impinge on this process.

Those who are in a position to offer books to children are often misled by their own reading experiences as children or by over-zealous application of 'literary' ideals. (Thorpe, 1988:113)

In the same way that teachers need to be aware of what 'active' and 'creative' reading is, so parents are often disabled by their own perceptions of what reading fiction involves.

without enabling adults who are thoughtful readers to give you guidance, it is all but impossible to become a thoughtful reader yourself. (Chambers, 1991:88)

Parental perceptions of what fiction might be for, formed by their own reading histories, go on to form the reading histories of their own children, often perpetuating a

cycle of passive reading practices which contributes to the impoverishment of readers rather than resisting the forces which define reading in a restrictive way. Thus, the family as 'interpretive community' often fails to take up the invitations for fictional engagement open to young readers.

CONCLUSION

While the discourses of theory, education and provision define a series of inter-related constructions of the child reader, they also impose the role of mediator and enabler on parents, perceiving them to be representatives of the larger social and cultural forces which have been described in the last three chapters. Thus, instead of considering themselves as peer readers, engaging with fiction *with* children, parents most often, like teachers, see their function from the outside.

While the Book Choice Study that follows will reveal new evidence about the way children inter-act with fiction, the role of parents in each child's Reading History provides an essential context for such evidence. The guilt and anxiety frequently expressed by the parents of these children draws attention to the complexity of the inter-relationships between the discourses of theory, education and provision, and the forces which contribute to the silence of the child's voice.

As I have argued, children are silenced, not only within the discourses described above, but also within the texts themselves. The significance of the absence of a consideration of children's literature in theoretical models of literature inhabits all discourses which surround children and those who provide books for them. However, those individuals who work with children and know that the young have the need to engage with generous authors in deep play, and use fiction to help them construct powerful subject positions, recognise that the relationship between children and books is part of the same process. If talking to children about the books that they read is to contribute to our understanding of response to literature as a continuous process, it must be

considered within the social contexts described above. The recognition of marginalisation can, in this way, give children a voice. The final part of this thesis will propose an approach to conducting research with children which will address this set of problems.

PART THREE GIVING CHILDREN A VOICE

INTRODUCTION

The next and final section of this thesis focuses on the development of an approach to talking to children about fiction and how they read it. The justification for such an approach evolves from the need to recognise the place of children's literature within a larger map of literature in terms of a continuum of response within a social context, and thus, the need to investigate the inter-action between children and their fiction from the perspective of children.

I have argued, throughout my description of theoretical models of response, that the lack of consideration of children's literature marginalises the texts, readers and specialist theorists. In addition, such disregard renders any conception of the inter-action between text and reader incomplete. While the texts of childhood must be considered as *formative* experiences which provide the framework of intertextuality of structure and language, the modes of reading that these texts invite are also formative, establishing relationships with text which influence future readings (see Chapter Two, in reference to Nell (1988)). The notion of process implicit in perspectives that focus on the reader's role in making meaning in the text must acknowledge the influence of the beginnings of inter-action with fiction in order to describe the social modes of reception (Chapter Three, in reference to Naumann 1976, Bennett 1982, 1983).

However, unlike theorists who engage with adult literature, children are not peer readers. In order to include children and literature within this notion of process, the problematic status of the child within the subject must be dealt with. I have made clear that many of the discourses which surround children's literature rest on assumptions about the nature of the inter-action between children and fiction. As Rose (1992) and Lesnik-Oberstein (1994) have argued, children's literature critics rely on constructions of 'the child' which serve their own purposes, which are, most often, to control and

contain the 'otherness' of the young. Though neither of these critiques seeks to include the voices of children in order to redress the balance, both suggest that the absence of children in scholarly writing about children's literature is the key to the problem. I have also made clear that the perspectives offered by contemporary literary theory, and the willingness to recognise that there is a problem, have opened up the discourses of children's literature, and a growing need for an empirical approach is continually expressed.

In my view, we now stand on the brink of discovering, if we want to *from children* what they think reading is good for and how they do it and what effect it has on them, more than at any time in the past. As a result, we should be able, as adults, to 'improve the range and depth and precision of our appreciation' of books for children and how they are read.

(Meek, 1990:106)

Though the desire for a new empiricism expressed above restricts its focus to children and their concerns, the knowledge gained in this endeavour must be framed in such a way that it will contribute to a mapping of response as a whole. The re-shaping of children's literature theory, which includes the voices of children, suggests a radical proposal for the way in which literature can be studied, a new paradigm which admits multiplicity and emphasises the power of language to invite a variety of readings. Such an approach aims to

get as close to the reality of the child's encounter with story; it accepts involvement and individuality, and, unlike traditional criticism, it does not impose adultist reading, but only possible readings.

(Hollindale, 1991:199)

Hunt (1995a), too, recognises the capability of the academic study of children's literature to transform literary studies, while acknowledging it is the threat this offers to the academic hierarchy which marginalises the subject.

In short, our theory, and our subject, must, quite in opposition to traditional literary thinking, be committed, engaged, of the female rather than the male, and perhaps, above all, empirical. (Hunt, 1995a: 481)

The rhetorical flourish of this declaration indicates the idealistic flavour of Hunt's campaign, and it must be admitted that such an empirical approach, while being the only way of communicating the perspective of children as readers, has not been successful at contributing to literary scholarship.

The small number of empirical studies involving adult readers reveal both a sloppy relativism and the power of the researcher to construct an agenda which controls the results (Holland 1975, Steig 1989), thereby devaluing the exercise and the evidence. While the use of response studies may tell us more about the researcher than the individual readers, some are able to demonstrate the influence of the social modes of reception on individual responses which are applicable to notions of individual reading histories, though such observations are often peripheral to the aims of these studies. When, for instance, Steig comments on the way in which educational discourses have influenced the way in which his college students are able to read a text, he invites speculation about the way in which these readers have been constructed.

in general students were discouraged from attempting to read the texts as the utterance of a real person, or as representing a world whose very nature depended on what they themselves brought to the text.

(Steig, 1989:270)

Very often, however, such observations demonstrate the need for a more authentic and scholarly approach to empirical research. Mackey's investigation of the temporal processes of reading is based on responses of numerous teenage readers to Wolf

(Cross, 1992) and in her conclusion, she raises questions about the nature of reading styles that should underpin all such response studies.

The issue of reading style merits further study. I am uneasy about the reductive potential of some approaches to studying reading: labelling readers with a ruling "identity theme" as Norman Holland has attempted, or funnelling all responses through the filter of their relationship to some political abstraction such as the concept of patriarchy offers the potential for new insight but at the same time renders much of the messiness of real reading invisible.It did seem clear that many (not all) of the readers in this project had a predilection for a particular kind of approach to the text of *Wolf*: affectively engaged, detailed and careful, oriented to the verbal arrangement of the text, or whatever. (Mackey, 1995: 272)

The need to develop an approach that allows us to observe what children do with the books they read, within the context of the forces that influence the formation of a variety of reading styles, calls for both an open-ended and a systematic method. While the way children talk about themselves as readers is enlightening, it is only when their talk is understood in relation to the mediation of adults and how response is affected over time, that the evidence can contribute to a conception of the way that social modes of reception operate as a continuous process.

The need to understand how children acquire different modes of reading (Meek 1988, Mackey 1995, Corcoran and Evans, 1987), whether through consideration of the influence of the text itself, or the various adult forces which mediate the texts on behalf of young readers, is central to the concerns of response theorists, and the construction of a research approach which demands an investigation of response within a social context will reveal a form of evidence that will contribute to an understanding of response over time. The method adopted for the Book Choice Study described in Chapter Eight aims to act as a model for a way of talking to children about their relationship with fiction which can answer the many calls for further investigation.

These calls issue, in the main, from the realm of education, from a need to create 'better', or 'more engaged' readers, and to develop more effective teaching methods. However, the questions asked within a pedagogic context and the pragmatic focus of evidence from numerous studies suggest the need to place children's inter-action with fiction within a wider framework, particularly when concerned with investigating how any reader inherits a way of reading (Protherough in Corcoran, 1994).

The acknowledgement of the damaging influence of educational discourses on the ability of young readers to respond in active and creative ways (see Chapter Four), has indicated the need to investigate response within the contexts of mediation, which my research sets out to do.

[children's responses] appear to be the result as much of the nature of the text as of that of the readers; but the mode of response seems to persist with some readers regardless of the particular text, indicating that these patterns of response warrant further study.

(Vandergrift, 1990:43)

The analysis of previous attempts to include the voices of children in reading research, and outlining research methodologies which have influenced my thinking, will allow me to define a new practice which is open-ended enough not to dictate restrictive ways of responding, yet which presents the evidence in a systematic and verifiable way. Following this introductory context, I will then present the Book Choice Study, through a description of the research process, followed by an analysis of the results in relation to the mediating discourses described in Part Two. Finally, I will suggest ways in which the results can contribute to an understanding of response as a continuum, and thus, fill the gap in theory left by the absence of considerations of children and their literature.

CHAPTER 7 RESEARCHING WHAT CHILDREN SAY ABOUT FICTION

In general, studies which focus on finding out about what children say about books can be divided into four categories: latitudinal studies carried out via questionnaires (Whitehead 1977 (and follow-up studies now in process), Children's Literature Research Centre 1994), reading research studies derived from psychological perspectives on learning (Cochran-Smith 1984, Koeller 1988, Lehr 1988), diary-based observations with individual children (Crago & Crago 1983, Dombey and Fox in Meek 1983, Wolf and Heath, 1992, Dombey, Fox, Lewis et al in Kimberley, 1992), and collections of individual case studies investigating specific aspects of response (Fry 1985, Sarland 1991, 1994a & b, Rudd 1992, Stephens 1992, Mackey 1995, Lewis 1995, Styles and Watson 1996). Studies of children's own story-telling also suggest connections with their reading which contribute to our understanding of response (Fox 1993, Engel 1995).

Many of the studies which focus on talking to children about books can be classified as a kind of Action Research¹. The exercise of questioning children about their responses to the books they read feeds back into teaching practice, either by demonstrating the relevance of theoretical constructions about the nature of 'literacy', or by proving the efficacy of approaches to literature which privilege emotional response. Both methods present evidence that children as readers are capable of more sophisticated engagement with literature than is often assumed by Piagetian models of development (Matthews, 1994) and it is the effort to match the teaching method to these newly recognised abilities that often shapes research methodology.

¹Action research is a specific research practice which depends on a continual process of observation and reflection, often in the classroom, with the intention of addressing a particular problem and putting the solution into practice (see Ghaye, A. and Wakefield, P. (1993)*The Role of Self in Action Research*, Hyde Publications.)

Because so many of these studies occur within educational settings and aim to contribute to pedagogy, it is difficult to separate the statements of children about their perceptions of fiction from their perceptions of the pedagogical relationship they have with both the books and the researchers. If we are to contextualise response in terms of the adult mediations which affect response, then the effectiveness of school-based research must be questioned. There is a danger that the results will be rendered less significant by the research setting while, at the same time, the methods of questioning will reinforce ways of reading which limit the inter-action between child and book.

The pedagogic considerations which are paramount to many of these researchers do not make their evidence any the less applicable to the map of response I am proposing. Cochran-Smith, for instance, demonstrates that 80% of the utterances made by the teacher/reader in a story-time session were commentary rather than direct reading (1984: 156) and thus provides a view of early inter-actions which influence the way children are introduced to fiction through a modifying and, occasionally, censoring force. Sarland (1991), too, points out that

as children move from school to school, or even from teacher to teacher, they will find conflicting views of what it is they are supposed to get from books. (Sarland, 1991:9)

Although I am primarily concerned with empirical studies involving children, a great deal of theoretical writing about children's literature includes evidence of children's reading behaviour (Meek 1988, May 1996). While such evidence contributes to our knowledge of how children respond to fiction, the emphasis on anecdote can detract from the conclusiveness of such observations, however convincing they may be (Thacker, 1994). However, as I have repeatedly argued, it is clear that what those who work with children know about response is deeply significant to an understanding of response as a continuous process and it is a blending of all these different techniques which can be regarded as the most promising direction for response research. Thus,

the broad overview provided by some approaches is able to complement the more detailed child-oriented studies which predominate.

In other words, all methods have something to offer, but none satisfies the demand to provide an authentic conception of how children inter-act with fiction within the social mediations which form them as readers.

The methods used by Whitehead (1977), the Children's Literature Research Centre at Roehampton (1994) and the forthcoming Nottingham studies, use questionnaires in an effort to provide a broad picture of children's reading habits. While these are frequently followed up with more in-depth interviews with a cross-section of the respondents, the nature of questionnaires and the need to express the results statistically means that such studies can only ever reveal a static 'snapshot' of what children read. In this way, such latitudinal studies have something in common with market research, providing information about what children want to see in the books they read (Richards, 1994). Such studies may demonstrate what children consider important about the books they read, and the fact that, for instance, the cover is the most influential factor in choosing a book, but the absence of follow-up means that we discover nothing about how the expectations derived from the cover influence response to the book itself.

Very little of the nature of process involved in response can be conveyed in studies like this and, though the emphasis might be to analyse the results within a social context in order to take account of the current situation, in which

children's reading has become the site of many competing social pressures which have very little to do with the relationship between the child and the book. (Reynolds, in CLRC, 1994:2)

the nature of such a project can only hope to convey a sense of the whole. It must be acknowledged that such studies are extremely important as background for case studies such as those proposed as a continuation of this research, currently in progress (CLRC, 1994).

As I have already remarked, it is obvious that the need to provide long-term, in-depth, individual response studies is widely recognised. It may be that the evidence from such studies will match or at least complement that of other studies, and thus contribute to a fuller and more detailed picture of what children do with books, either at different stages in their reading lives, or with different genres or formats. The more that can be done to break the silence of young readers, the more we will understand how children's ways of reading are related to how they will read as adults. However, questions must be asked about the extent to which most response studies restrict what children are able to say within the research setting.

It is perhaps most obvious in questionnaire-based studies that the kind of response is dictated by the kind of question that is asked. While the questions asked by the Roehampton team of researchers (CLRC, 1994) place emphasis on the social contexts of reading and clearly require information about how fiction contributes to children's thinking about social issues, it is difficult to know whether these factors are those of primary concern to these young readers. The questions dictate the aspects of fiction which are to be of predominant interest, so that not only do they suggest what is important about fiction, they are not able to address features of fictional text these children might find important, further silencing them. For instance, Question 8 asks "When reading a story in a book, magazine or comic do you like the main character to be: (a) a girl, (b) a boy, (c) an animal, (d) a machine, (e) a cartoon character, (f) an alien (g) someone with special powers." (1994:15) It is clear that this question is concerned with gender, and though the answers conclude that "boys identify with a wider range of characters than girls", the assumption that identification with character

is central to the way in which books are read reinforces a way of reading that is problematic, as I have discussed above (see Chapter Four). In the sense that the questionnaires themselves perform a mediating function in the inter-action between children and the fiction they read, the evidence they provide must be considered to give a skewed picture of *how* children read.

Sarland (1991), as well, using a conversational method of questioning, has a tendency to ask questions which restrict the responses of his young readers to fit into his own agenda. Sarland's aim, to describe response as "but an aspect of wider cultural meaning making" (1991:23) influences the kind of questions that are asked. Though his admission that his own history and politics must affect the research, his tendency to ask his young readers to, for instance, relate books to life and make comparisons between the character and themselves, may support his thesis that popular fiction allows children to 'find themselves' in the books they read, but cannot be said to give children a voice within the research process. While the conversations he has with young readers reveal the degree of authority some children exert in the texts they read, his tendency to lead the questioning, based on his own mediating gloss, silences them in another way.

Rudd's studies with children (1992) also demonstrate how children are "active participants in the whole nexus of 'textual' meanings", and their readings of Dahl support the need to "start where the children are" (Rudd, 1995:95) when investigating response, rather than where adults think they should be. An implicit rejection of definitions of a canon, or of literature as a value, informs such research projects which claim to "give children a voice", as though such a practice is equivalent to saying that children should read what they like. What is left out of the equation, however, is an understanding of how children come to like what they like. Certainly, both Sarland and Rudd suggest that the lack of autonomy within learning situations creates the perception of a divide between what should be read and what one wants to read. Yet,

because they each seek to challenge the way in which children's literature is usually defined, their methods of questioning govern the way that their subjects give voice to their responses.

Other methods of talking to children about books present similar problems. Diary based studies which involve day to day observation of book behaviour with the researchers' own children provide examples of the research situation rendering the results interesting, but largely irrelevant.

Diary studies by parents of their own children raise particularly difficult questions about bias, selectivity, and forms of persuasive rhetoric.

(Wolf and Heath, 1992: 183)

While such loving and careful studies may present evidence that children as readers are capable of more sophisticated engagement with literature than is often assumed, they say more about the way books are mediated and the benefits of talking about books with an adult who reads and values children's books than about how different ways of reading are influenced by such mediations. The tendency of such studies to ignore the dialogic nature of the inter-actions that take place between parent and child (Cochran-Smith, 1984:12), and present the story-oriented behaviour of these individual children as naturalistic, belies the fact that the child as research subject is constructed as a reader. In Wolf's observations (Wolf and Heath, 1992) of her daughter's dependence on fiction to feed her rich fantasy life, what is most obvious is the role of her parents as co-fantasists, always willing to take part in her role-playing. Thus, the use of certain book-related behaviour appears to be a tool through which this particular child can control the adult/child relationships within that family. The difficulty of separating the sophisticated responses of a child surrounded by books and booktalk from the dynamics of the family may say a great deal about the extent to which

[a] child's access to children's literature and to the routines of reading and

talking that surround it was conditioned in every society - and indeed in every family - by expectations of parental roles and values.....

(Wolf and Heath, 1992:180)

However, in terms of investigating how different ways of inter-acting with fiction are influenced by various levels of adult mediation, such methods offer very little. This does not detract from the perspective offered by a 'naturalistic' or 'environmental' (as Heath expresses it) approach, but it does call into question the extent to which such a method continues to silence the child.

Another difficulty with many child-centred studies is the tendency to ignore how children develop a perception of what stories are. Because the majority of research focuses on children who have a great deal of exposure to fiction, the degree to which the mediating environment produces particular ways of reading presents a skewed view of response.

Understanding the values, attitudes, norms, beliefs and assumptions shared by participants concerning the meaning or importance of an event is crucial for understanding the event itself. (Cochran-Smith, 1984:20)

Though Cochran-Smith attempts to place her observational studies with pre-school story-readings within the context of the 'interpretive community' in which the children she observes develop their relationship to books, it is clear that her evidence can only be understood in terms of a conception of literature as essential. While her practice of interviewing parents to ascertain how they perceive their children as readers reveals

an adult belief system in which literacy was both a primary method of access to knowledge and a major course of solitary and social pleasure.

(Cochran-Smith, 1984: 125)

the absence of counter-examples does nothing to explain how ways of reading develop for less fortunate children, and thus cannot present a complete picture of how modes of reading develop. Koeller (1988) attempts to differentiate between 'reading stances', the mediating positions offered by adults reading with children. These

stances differ primarily in their beliefs about how literature study enables children to grow intellectually, as evidenced in the emphasis they placed upon unexamined pupil response and the extent of pupil inventiveness they require. (Koeller, 1988:6)

Though Koeller has a pedagogic agenda, and focuses more on the adult role than on the responses of children, her recognition of the variety of mediating stances and their relation to what children *are able* to say about their reading, is significant here.

Again, it can be claimed that such studies present essential evidence about the role of mediational factors in the creation of literate children, and that as such they perform a function which can usefully inform practice. However, in order to contribute to a larger understanding of how children are surrounded by discourses which influence the kind of readers they become, one must talk, not only to children who have a great deal of exposure to fiction, but also to those who have not. While some research with children can be seen to explore the differences within varied communities (Heath, 1983), most either do not differentiate between the reading histories of their subjects (Sarland 1991, Rudd 1992, Stephens 1992, Mackey 1995), or focus on the experienced and enthusiastic reader (Fry 1985, Fox 1993).

Lehr (1988) attempts to differentiate between readers according to their exposure to children's fiction, in her effort to characterise the nature of a child's sense of theme in narratives. Though Lehr is pursuing psychological research, and is therefore deriving her methods from a different tradition to the research discussed above, her attempts at defining a 'naturalistic' approach need to be acknowledged. In setting out her aims, she notes that:

interpretations by children cannot be explained in terms of the reading and the text alone, but instead require a consideration of the total reading event. (Lehr, 1988:340)

In finding a high level of correspondence between ability to describe theme within a narrative and the degree of exposure to a wide variety of children's texts, Lehr challenges Applebee's developmental mapping of abstract response (see Chapter Two). Such evidence and, in particular, the fact that the youngest children "often gave responses that differed from adult perceptions with theme, but were congruent with the text" (1988:337) may have relevance to the results from my own research, but it is her admission that the children's physical contact with the books themselves must be considered as part of the research that interests me. It is disappointing, therefore, that there is very little in her analysis to support her contention about the importance of the physical 'event' of reading, for though she reveals that children with more exposure to a variety of fiction inter-acted with books more frequently, no further comment is made. Such an observation supports the results from the Book Choice Study, and suggests that child's physical engagement with the book is a factor in response that is ignored in most other research studies.

The importance of the perception of books as objects discussed in Chapter Six places the physical inter-action between book and reader in a central place in the consideration of the role of mediating discourses in response. By removing contact with the books themselves within the research setting, we are limiting the kind of responses the children can choose to express, and thus ignoring a vital element in the response process.

While many of the research studies mentioned above address the social aspects of response and give voice to children as readers, all devalue the kind of evidence children

provide, by creating another level of mediation within the research context. This can be due to the researcher's own influence, or the degree to which a research question, often deriving from a pedagogic aim, restricts the way in which the young subjects are able to respond.

In order to understand how the contexts of social mediations influence response, the research setting must provide children, as research subjects, with a degree of autonomy. While it is possible to discover a great deal about the critical faculties of children and to define good teaching practice from the evidence of studies described above, in order to discover how children respond to books we also need to know what *they* want to say about them. If it is possible to let children define their own agendas when talking about books - to determine what the meaningful factors are in their interactions with fiction - we will be better able to trace the influence of our attempts, as adults, to construct them as literate and literary readers. In addition, we will be able to gauge whether the peri-textual features, which concern the providers of fiction for children, perform an equally influential function for young readers. Finally, a method which allows the children to define their own roles within the research setting may provide us with an understanding of the way that different modes of reading influence response, and of the processes which determine these differences (Koeller, 1988).

The attempt to give children more freedom within such a research setting is problematic, yet several studies point to the relevance of such an approach for the kind of method of exploration I wish to define. Though Fox (1993) is concerned with the ways in which children incorporate their experiences of literature in their own storytelling, her research methods are exemplary in the way that they give the children, as research subjects, freedom to engage with the project in an open and flexible way. The children who provided the evidence for her fascinating studies were able to determine when and where they told their stories into the tape recorder. Though there

were often family members present, the event of the taping was controlled by the storytelling child. Fox also suggests that, as the children always listened to the stories immediately after taping them, they conceived themselves as the prime audience for these stories. Because the evidence is self-directed and directed toward the self, there is a degree of ownership which is often denied in a research setting. Whether it was the naturalistic engagement with the project that encouraged the spontaneity evident in the transcripts or not, it is clear that the children taking part in Fox's study had discovered the pleasure of "making language do what *you* want to do with it" (Fox, 1993:49). Such authority, so frequently denied by many of the mediations between text and child, comes closer to giving children a voice within the research situation than any other.

Attempts to adopt a more open approach to talking to children about the books they read are few, and can produce interesting results, but are often disappointing in their inability to come to conclusions. Fry (1985) combines a theoretical perspective with informal 'conversations' with children which offers an exemplar of a method that, to some extent, frees the children taking part from a restrictive research question, but lacks both the structure and context that would make his observations significant to a mapping of response.

Fry is careful to acknowledge the arbitrariness of his method, which allows him to justify his theoretical perspective. The fluidity of response and the multiplicity of factors which influence the inter-actions between children and books are available from the transcribed conversations, and while the claim that Whitehead's study (1977) provides a necessary adjunct to the discussive evidence presented by Fry, the lack of context is obvious, as is his difficulty in reaching conclusions.

However, there is an advantage to the flexibility of questioning which must be recognised. As Fry says:

the young readers in this study all make valuable statements about reading which I feel would not have been said in any other context but conversation.

(Fry, 1985:2)

The recognition here expressed, that the nature of the research setting imposes a particular way of responding, has already been remarked upon. While Fry's approach may result in a casual tendency and a reliance on anecdote, the notion of removing a controlling and fixed pattern of question and answer allows the child-as-subject to experience some autonomy within the relationship with the researcher. The conversational tone militates against the impression of right answer/wrong answer and, at the same time, distances the researcher/subject from the pedagogic inter-actions which occur in most reading research. In this way, Fry is able to become a peer reader, exploring *with* the children aspects of the books discussed and, although there are times when he is controlling, for instance, when he asks someone to retell a story, or pronounce judgement on a character, he is more likely to engage in a playful dialogue with his subjects, supporting the view that "genuine literature conversations are play" (Koeller, 1988:13).

The strength of Fry's approach lies in his ability to observe, through his conversations, how each individual reader defines herself/himself as a reader, using a case study method. By attempting to determine "what kind of activity is reading for each of them, and what is its place in their lives" (1985:4), he places an emphasis on different modes of reading, rather than merely recording responses. This means that peri-textual features such as cover and blurb, tendencies to re-read, or the effect of being given a book as a gift are crucial to an understanding of response (also in Meek, 1988), not only for children as readers, but for any reader.

The young readers in this study have established their routines and preferences amongst these activities, and their different personalities

as readers are partly defined by them. (1985:94)

Fry, however, appears to regard his readers as fixed within their own ways of reading in the same sense that Holland (1975) defines static identity themes, rather than in terms of the process of becoming a reader. At the same time, he clearly demonstrates that children as readers are offered the same choice of reader positions as adults.

Another difficulty with Fry's programme is the fact that all the case study subjects were influenced by teachers with a special interest in children's fiction and thus, would all be accustomed to engaging in dialogues about fiction. To a certain extent, therefore, the account we have of children's reading is biased by the fact that all conversations take place with children who are forming their reading positions within discourses which recognise that 'seeing themselves as readers' is a 'special kind of learning' (1985:97). It must be acknowledged that not all children are exposed to an environment which positions fiction in such a central role (see Chapter Five). If the reflective nature of Sharon's comments, for instance, implies the authorial position she is able to take up as a reader:

In certain parts of the book you can imagine you're the person but in others you're *with* them but not actually them themselves. (1985:99)

it also indicates a readiness to consider a variety of reader positions only available to someone exposed to different ways of telling in a wide variety of texts. Her awareness of herself as a reader characterises an observer role, suggesting a powerful relationship with the text which is denied to many (and, probably, most) young readers by the way they are embedded in the meta-discourses of fiction discussed in Part Two.

In order to gain a wider understanding of how response to fiction is influenced by the mediational forces which surround it, it is necessary to investigate those readers who have been enabled by progressive environments in addition to those who are disabled

by the circumstances by which they come to be readers. Mackey (1995), in her investigation of different readings of Wolf (Cross, 1992), attempts to encompass a wider range of reading backgrounds, though she

did not pursue exhaustive inquiries into the backgrounds of these students, the information that appears is what they chose to tell me. (1995:138)

In the case of the conversations she had with her readers, she makes significant observations about the ways in which readings of this particular text "overspill[ed] textual boundaries" (270), and notes differences in reading style, but the absence of the social contextualisation of her readers prevents such observations from contributing to a mapping of the mediations of child/book inter-actions. Though she is interested in "those aspects of the learning of reading as it informs mature reading" (1995:22), her concluding remarks imply the admission that an exploration of "the genesis of fictional understanding" (273) must include what she has omitted.

This project does not attempt to provide any insight into the social, psychological or institutional backgrounds of the readers who participated... [in addition t]his study makes no attempt to explore the ramifications of the impact [of schooling on its readers]. (1995:274)

Without a consideration of the factors which contribute to the social modes of response, we are left with only a half-developed picture, and while Mackey is able to approach her readers in an open-ended way, and engage with them as a peer-reader, the resulting conversations lack the context essential to an understanding of response as a continuous process over time, something she herself admits.

Nevertheless, both Mackey's and Fry's methods of talking give the children in their studies a kind of autonomy within the research setting which complements the observational role that is part of a literary engagement with text. The conversations

allow these children to acknowledge the importance of their responses, and demonstrate the extent to which they recognise their roles as readers to make meaning "by the imaginative activity of ...reading" (1985:98).

While Fry argues persuasively that reading is a way of seeing ourselves, he does not go far enough, for reading is also a way of discovering how much we *are* ourselves. The extent to which we are able to subjunctivise experience through fiction may be an observable factor in conversations about fiction, but what is also observable is the degree to which young readers perceive themselves as being active in the process of reading fiction - of having a self to express. Perhaps this is the basis on which we should be judging the books children read and the way in which we, as adults, deal with the mediation of fiction for children. For the awareness of authority expressed by readers such as Sharon comes from both the texts themselves and the ways in which they are dealt with in a social context.

We only notice ourselves reading when we are made to look, and these moments of recognition help us to grow further in our reading lives.
(Fry, 1985:103)

Readers can be made to look, either by the invitation of the author to engage in a dynamic relationship with the text, or by those who influence the factors which define the reading event. The extent to which readers are encouraged to look - to reflect on their function as readers and their own authority within the making of meaning - is central to those who are concerned with giving children a voice in the world of children's literature. However, in order to investigate how mediational factors influence this process, the contrast between different reading histories must be acknowledged.

PROPOSING A NEW METHOD

While the many different methods of talking to children about fiction outlined above offer useful observations about response and the social contexts which influence it, none satisfies the requirements of the aims of this study. The need to offer children, with a range of reading histories, autonomy in the research setting implies an approach to research which is both open-ended and rigorous, placing the children as research subjects in a powerful position, but at the same time providing evidence in a way that will invite the possibility of conclusions, or the tracing of links between reading histories and reading positions. Because the study undertaken here has no direct pedagogic function, results cannot be measured in terms of quantifiable successes in either the critical facilities of the children taking part, or a measurable shift in their attitudes towards fiction (though in some cases there were obvious changes in reading behaviour). Rather, the results must be judged in terms of the effectiveness of the method to allow children's responses to be recorded and analysed in relation to the mediational contexts outlined in the previous chapters.

It becomes necessary, therefore, to define a method which seeks a degree of autonomy for the research subject (the children) and a position, *prior to* and *during* the research, in which the researcher can be relatively free of assumptions of what children do when they read. Though it must be admitted that it is impossible to free oneself from all assumptions - our own reading histories prevent such self-effacement - it is possible to approach the research setting without a set of conceptions to prove or disprove. In other words, rather than posing particular questions, one must allow the children's responses to determine the questions which arise.

As I have made clear previously, a central concern in recent developments of children's literature criticism has been with the extent to which adult critics must construct a 'child' to justify their claims (Rose 1992, Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, Wilkie 1995). This fact implies the impossibility of the premise upon which much criticism is based, and

though, for some, the mere declaration of the problem acts as a panacea, allowing critics to recognise, then disregard, the essential difficulty, the need to address the children themselves still remains.

It is crucial, then, that the suppression of the difficulties inherent in self-other interactions is revealed in children's literature by the realization that the most neglected area of discussion is the issue of how adults should set about learning about children from children. (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994:13)

Although Lesnik-Oberstein's critique of Children's Literature criticism amounts to an unqualified condemnation, her comparison of the self-other inter-actions in children's literature and those in the psychotherapeutic setting suggest approaches to research which suppose a degree of autonomy for the subject as well as a kind of a 'purposeful ignorance' on the part of the researcher. Her definitions of the psychotherapeutic relationship rest on a concept of 'not knowing':

it does not refer to complacent ignorance, inattention, or carelessness on the part of the therapist, but to the use by the therapist of a form of self-restraint to ensure he does not jump to conclusions about his patient.

(1994:173)

Such an approach to a communicative exchange of any kind minimises the imposition of pre-set agendas and expectations which frequently silence the children in many of the response studies described above. The aim of achieving a method of talking to children about their responses to fiction in a way that gives them a voice is echoed in Lesnik-Oberstein's descriptions of psychotherapy:

therapy thinks about whether the patient can have a voice, and whether that voice can indeed be heard in its own right by the therapist within the therapeutic setting. (1994:188)

The relationship between the researcher and the child reader necessary in the approach I am proposing can be compared to the relationship between therapist and patient. Though my aim is to investigate response and to place it in the context of myriad mediations, rather than to change behaviour as psychotherapy claims to do, my need to prevent my own pre-conceptions from silencing the voice of the children in the study requires a degree of self-analysis similar to that required of a psychotherapist.

The researcher must be considered as a central factor of the research situation (Sarland, 1991) and, as such, must be presented as one of the mediating forces that influence the children as readers. Such a self-analysis will be presented in the form of my own Reading History. In addition, the descriptions of my own readings of the books chosen for the study provide a context to be considered when examining the readings of the children.

While this additional level of context will position me, *prior to* the studies in a state of 'not knowing', the psychotherapeutic model proposed by Lesnik-Oberstein also offers me a position *during* the course of the studies which avoids the pedagogic role of much teacher-oriented research. Additionally, such an approach will allow the children in the study to determine the way in which they wish to engage with me in the research 'space'. Whether they engage with me as a 'peer reader' or as a 'teacher-researcher', the children themselves contribute to the construction of the research setting, and in this way, are able to achieve a level of autonomy denied by most reading research. Though Klein and Axline are both referred to in this context, Lesnik-Oberstein clearly favours Winnicott's 'openness' and dependence on the 'mutual construction' of the therapeutic relationship.

Winnicott's effort to make it possible for the patient to use the therapist in any way necessary to that patient translates into the idea that a book gains whatever importance it may have to any reader at any time precisely by allowing the reader the space to inscribe the text in his own way into his

own narrative of emotional meaning - by making it possible for the reader to create his own use for the book, whatever that may be. (1994:225)

Despite the efficacy of such statements and the pertinence of the parallels she makes to a new way of approaching a research situation with children, Lesnik-Oberstein fails to extend such notions into a proposal for empirical research. This may in part be due to the fact that she has chosen not to investigate recent developments in approaches to talking to children exemplified in the work of Aidan Chambers.

While the 'Tell Me' approach (in Chambers, 1993) has already been discussed in the context of educational discourses which surround children's literature (see Chapter Five), the thinking behind Chambers' definition of the teacher's role within the booktalk setting comes close to the concept of 'mutual construction' in the work of Winnicott. The primacy of the emotional context over the cognitive in the psychotherapeutic context is echoed in Chambers' suggested first questions "What did you like?" and "What didn't you like?", encouraging children to engage with the text as individuals. Though there is a classroom setting for the booktalk, the children are clearly freed from authoritative expectations of 'teacherly' questioning, and reward the opportunity to respond in any way they wish with insightful and, perhaps more importantly, enthusiastic commentary. Action Research studies which adopt the 'Tell Me' approach record an increase in self-instigated booktalk, higher reading ages and increased enthusiasm for books (Jones, 1994).

If the 'Tell Me' approach appears to be an effective way of allowing children to express their own responses to books in a way that encourages them to "explore literature as its own story" (1993:41), it also suggests a new way of defining the relationship between researcher and subject. The notion that 'anything is honourably reportable' and the need to acknowledge children's own preferences in the choice of books, all contribute to a research environment in which the subject has authority. Clearly, the

opportunity to engage with books in such a powerful way gives children opportunities which are often denied them within the web of adult mediations in which children's inter-action with fiction is enmeshed. It is not surprising that such feelings of power will change the ways in which children respond. Jones (1994) found that, for instance, instead of describing plot, the seven-year-olds in her study

very quickly began to analyse the language and setting and the effects of these on the meaning and on themselves as readers. (1994:14)

Given that such responses challenge previously held expectations that such sophistication of response is only expected of older children (Protherough, 1983), it must be acknowledged that the research setting itself may change the way in which children choose to respond. Whether this indicates an additional adult influence, or a naturalistic preference of children in their engagement with fiction, it is impossible to determine, but I suggest that the latter is true.

The relevance of the 'Tell Me' approach to my search for a new method of researching children's inter-actions with fiction is clear, though several principle differences must be recognised. As I have already pointed out, the classroom setting and the teacher/pupil relationship at the heart of this booktalk carries with it the power relationship at the heart of most teacher/pupil communications, and talk about books differs in and out of school (Koeller, 1988). The measurement of success and failure, the need for children to conform to the hidden agenda, although minimised by the 'Tell Me' approach, still influence the degree of freedom experienced, and it is often the confidence of the individual teacher to transform the pedagogic setting into a more democratic interplay during booktalk that determines the success of such an endeavour.

By meeting the children in this study first in their homes, introducing myself by my first name, and minimising my contact with their teachers when I was at the school to meet

with them, I attempted to present myself as an interested individual, rather than a teacher. Language became an important factor in this regard, and the need to avoid judgmental terminology, like "that's right", or "very good", continued to concern me throughout the study, as did my attempts to use their language in conversation (this meant, of course, that each child in the study required a different stance for me). Although I recognise that it was not possible to erase completely the authoritative position I held as the instigator of the research, my efforts to present myself as a 'peer reader' were largely successful by the end of the project.

Related to the difficulties with the setting is the fact that Chambers' approach is designed, not only for classrooms, but also for group activity. The social aspects of response are essential to Chambers' proposal, as he considers that children arrive at meanings through the sharing of 'book gossip' and consensus.

The public effect of this conscious pooling of thought is that we come to a 'reading' - a knowledge, understanding, appreciation - of a book that far exceeds what any one member of the group could have achieved alone. (Chambers, 1993:25)

However, if such talk is intended to provide evidence of what children do when they read, group discussion creates problems of peer influence, of 'performance' - speaking in front of a group, and of 'imitative response' - taking on the position of other readers. This proved to be the case in the two group interviews I carried out when choosing the individual children who took part in the case studies. Taylor (1986) observes that the responses of pre-school children varies widely between group settings and situations in which children were given individual attention, though Mackey (1995) acknowledges that response changes as it ceases to be private. While it is impossible to gauge private readings, the possibility of arriving at an individual response is more likely in a one-to-one inter-action than in a group setting.

Another aspect of the proposed method which differs from the 'Tell Me' approach concerns the reading of the books. While the groups engaged in booktalk are read to by the teacher, in the majority of cases the children in the Book Choice Study read to themselves, and often talked about how they read: how often, how much was skipped, the speed at which the book was read, what time of day, etc. Such features of reading are part of the social modes of reception and, while absent from Chambers' programme, must be included in an investigation which seeks to contextualise fiction reading. In addition to this, as discussed in the previous chapter, the reader of the story often adds a level of mediation that encroaches on the individual response (Cochran-Smith 1985, *Dombey* in Meek, 1983b), particularly if this reader is also the teacher.

the teacher presenting the story influenced the verbal responses which children made during story time. (Taylor, 1986: abstract)

While all these factors have been taken into account in the formulation of a method which offers children autonomy in the research setting, the problem of presenting results in a significant way still remains. As the majority of reading research is conducted within an educational setting, and particular agendas are met with relative success or failure which can then be applied to practice, the search for a method which breaks away from the strictures of these agendas, but avoids the relativistic flavour of many response studies (Holland 1975, Fry 1985, Steig 1989) yields few examples. The need to come to conclusions about the way in which children inter-act with fiction in the light of the numerous adult mediations which surround their reading lives led me to Phenomenography, a recently developed methodology which challenges traditional approaches to educational research.

PHENOMENOGRAPHY

Phenomenography is a research specialisation developed in Sweden in the early 1980s with the aim of investigating the concept of learning. While traditional approaches to educational research have been limited to confirming or refuting the researcher's own conception of learning behaviour observed, Phenomenography pertains to the fact that "we cannot separate the structure and the content of experience from one another." (Marton, 1981:180). The rejection of a Piagetian model of inquiry which ignores the social constructedness of the cognition he examines, shifts the field of inquiry from analysis in relation to a fixed hypothesis toward the description, analysis and understanding of conceptions of phenomena. By focusing on "second-order" evidence,

the different ways in which people experience, interpret, understand, apprehend, perceive or conceptualize various aspects of reality,
(Marton, 1981:1978)

Phenomenography allows learning to be understood through the perspective of the learner. As the learner's own individually constructed conceptions of what learning is are crucial to the way they experience the act of learning (Marton, 1992), these pre-conceptions influence their approach to the learning event, and therefore can be regarded as determinants of the observable behaviour which is usually the object of research.

There was a choice not to describe knowledge in terms of right and wrong... The positive choice made was to describe knowledge in terms of an individual's understanding of something in terms of the meaning that something has to the individual, irrespective of the status of the experience's meaning in relation to demands for objectivity and intersubjectivity. (Svensson, 1994:12)

Though the majority of phenomenographical studies have been concerned with, for instance, the understanding of number and scientific concepts, the relevance of such an approach to my investigation of children's inter-action with fiction is evident. A method which focuses on the subjects' underlying conceptions of what reading fiction involves, allows me to place their individual readings within the social and cultural context in which they belong. By contextualising the empirical evidence within the frame of each child's individual reading history and the wider meta-discourses of children's literature, the individual reading responses can be analysed in terms of the multi-levelled mediations which form the conceptions of what reading fiction constitutes for each child. In addition, such a method of enquiry grants the children taking part in the study a voice, as it is the way that they perceive the act of reading fiction that takes precedence.

Several related studies (Halász, Asplund Carlsson and Marton 1991, Marton, Asplund Carlsson and Halász, 1992) using phenomenographical methods, investigated the qualitatively different ways that two culturally different groups of secondary school students understood two of Franz Kafka's short stories. These studies considered the relationship between how texts were read (whether the first or second reading, for instance), the readers' expectations of story outcomes prior to reading, and their ability to recall and interpret the story. Such studies increase understanding of how different reading backgrounds influence expectations and conceptions of the reading act, in addition to contributing to an understanding of how different readers constructed meaning in Kafka's text, refuting previous interpretations. Most significantly, the ambiguities and "enigmatic openness" of the Kafka text is shown to work in different ways in the two different cultural groups, and in different ways on the first and second reading. (Halász, Asplund Carlsson, Marton, 1991:24).

Clearly, a method of inquiry which acknowledges the text from the reader's perspective and at the same time recognises the socio-cultural context of these perspectives has a

great deal to contribute to an investigation of the social modes of children's response to fiction.

An adoption of a phenomenographic approach is further complicated by the fact that young readers' perceptions are socially constructed by the multiple mediations of adults discussed in Part Two. This means that not only must the perspective of the children be taken into account, but also the perceptions of significant adults who influence them as readers throughout their reading histories. Therefore, the ways in which the parents and teachers of the case study children perceive the act of reading fiction, both for themselves and for their children, must be taken into account.

Using the method of taped interviews and analysis of transcripts, a phenomenographic approach allows the researcher to investigate both *what* is expressed and *how* it is expressed (Svensson, 1994). Individual interviews are open and explorative. Questions are not decided upon prior to the event, rather

[t]he interview has to be carried out as a dialogue, it should facilitate the thematization of aspects of the subject's experience not previously thematized. The experiences, understandings, are jointly constituted by interviewer and interviewee. (Marton, 1992:8)

Similarities to both the 'Tell Me' approach to booktalk and the psychotherapeutic setting discussed above are evident here, and certainly all encompass the aim to give the research subject authority within the researcher/subject relationship. The 'not knowing' stance implied for the researcher is also central to the phenomenographic approach.

The more we can make things which are unthematized and implicit into objects of reflection, and hence thematized and explicit, the more fully do we explore awareness. (Marton, 1992:8)

Obviously, the burden rests on the analysis of these transcribed interviews, and, similar to the psychotherapeutic situation, the researcher's need to avoid assumption and pre-conception is paramount.

instead of judging to what extent the responses reflect an understanding of the phenomenon in question which is similar to their own they are supposed to focus on similarities and differences between the ways in which the phenomenon appears to the participants. (Marton, 1992:9)

The aim of the multi-layered process of analysis is to arrive at "a limited number of qualitatively different and logically interrelated ways in which the phenomena or the situation is experienced and understood." (Marton, 1992:3) Although it is expected that some of the complexity of the data must be masked in order to offer the results in categories of description, the ability to identify an ordered set of conceptions of any particular phenomena (or *the outcome space*) allows evidence from specific cases to contribute to a generalised understanding. Again, the burden rests on the perspective of the researcher who conducts the analysis.

The more extensively the role of the general in the specific case is described, the better is the validity and the basis for generalisation and theory development. (Svensson, 1994:19)

Questions might be raised about the reliability of such a method of analysis. However, since a phenomenographical approach sets out not to prove or disprove a hypothesis, but to discover the different ways in which particular phenomena are experienced, verification must be directed to the recognisability of the categories of description.

In the case of my own research, transcripts of conversations with parents, teachers and children, along with observations of book-centred behaviour of other kinds, have allowed me to build up a picture of different ways of perceiving the phenomena of

fiction. While my own analysis of the results may not be precisely duplicated by other researchers, the fullness of the framing of the inter-actions between children, fiction, education and publishing which contextualises these individual case studies within the Book Choice research allows my own process of discovery to be traced. In this way, the categories of description gleaned from these studies contribute to the development of an understanding of the place of children's inter-action with fiction in a theoretical mapping of response as a continuous whole.

A further advantage of the open-ended approach to questioning is that other researches can be directed at the same data. For instance, whereas I have not chosen to focus my analysis of the results in terms of gender difference in response, the data can be considered from such a perspective. The opportunities for subsequent studies using this method will be suggested in the concluding section.

As described, Phenomenography represents a field of inquiry which transcends previous approaches to reading research, adapting the most democratic facets of previously examined methods for the investigation of children's responses to fiction. By privileging the research subject over the researcher's agenda, such a practice gives the child-as-subject a degree of selfhood and autonomy which is absent from many child/book inter-actions described above. While I have not followed the phenomenographic programme slavishly, the methodology adopted has been strongly influenced by both the generosity of the method and the rigour with which the analysis of results is conducted.

CHAPTER EIGHT THE BOOK CHOICE STUDY

Introduction

The following chapter describes the design of the Book Choice Study conducted during two school terms of the 1994/95 academic year and reports on the individual case studies of seven children. The aim of these studies was two-fold. On the one hand, as I have argued throughout this thesis, it has become necessary to address the problems of talking to children about the books they read in a way that will give them a voice, and so contribute to a fuller understanding of a theoretical perspective of response as a continuum. Thus, conducting this research has allowed me to propose a method, influenced by a number of sources, and to test it out. In this way, the study itself is an object of study.

On the other hand, the studies were designed to reveal, through the perspective of the children who took part, the ways in which the social context of response - the web of adult concerns which mediate all child/book inter-actions - constructs children as readers, and provides the fiction to which they have access. In this case the analysis of the data will provide a mapping of how an individual's reading history, set within the wider meta-discourses of children's literature, influences individual reading events. In turn, these reading events can be understood in terms of the social context of literary response in general, as they not only demonstrate *how* these children have become readers, but also how these reading events impinge on and influence future reading, in a continuous process of response.

In general, the study was successful, both in providing grounds for testing out a new research methodology which gives children a voice in the research setting, and in demonstrating a contrast between modes of reading influenced by a sharing of book-oriented discourses and those influenced by a separation of concerns. In addition, the study revealed that, within a conception of response as a continuum, the process of

constructing children as readers of fiction serves to transform an innate tendency to read dynamically into static modes of reading. Thus, adult mediation, instead of allowing children to extend the 'passionate adventure with language' inherent in the conditions of infancy, tends to diminish an individual's ability to engage with the recreative dialectics of the text.

The Book Choice Study took place within the larger project of this research, and should be considered within the framework of the broader theoretical contexts discussed in Part One and the meta-discourses of children's literature discussed in Part Two. The study had three distinct phases, which will be presented in separate sections (see Fig. 8.1).

PRELIMINARY PHASE	INTERACTIVE PHASE		POST ACTIVE PHASE
Designing the Study	Intention	Method	Reporting to peers
Self-analysis of researcher	Develop Reading Histories	Interviews with Parents, Teachers and Children	Feedback from parents and teachers
Selection and classification of books	Observe book selection methods and effect on response	Ten Fortnightly 20- 30 minute sessions with case study subjects	Analysis of results resulting in categories of description
Selection of case study participants	Contextualise responses	Interaction with publishing, library and bookselling staff	Returning to theory
Determination of access to schools			

(Figure 8.1) Three Phases of the Book Choice Study

PRELIMINARY PHASE

Designing the Study

Prior to my involvement with this project, several preliminary studies had been carried out to address the problem of the silence of children within the world of children's literature. These brief studies were carried out by teachers in primary schools as part of a post-BEd Certificate programme, and were variously successful in their attempts to gauge the responses of their pupils to a selection of books provided by a prominent children's publisher. However, very little of the evidence presented for these studies, three of which reached completion, contributed to the design of my study, as all functioned as action research and, thus, were directed at improving classroom practice. While Jones (1994) was able to demonstrate Chambers's 'Tell Me' approach in practice, and Hellewell (1994) was largely successful in her attempts to improve children's reviewing skills, their focus on pedagogy limited the usefulness of their methods. Rastall Dee (1994) demonstrated the difficulties of attempting to carry out research in the classroom, but provided little in the way of precedent, except to supply evidence of the limitations of questionnaire-based studies.

The Book Choice Study was designed to cope with the open-ended nature of the research. In my attempt to give children a voice within the research setting, it was necessary to provide a number of case study subjects which would be manageable in the time available, but would also allow me to investigate a range of possible connections and processes. For this reason, I included children of both sexes and of a variety of ages - from 3 to 14. I chose the National Curriculum divisions as there appeared to be a logical connection between these stages and the development of reading tasks required and it seemed possible that different approaches to fiction might be observed at these different stages. Therefore, the study was designed to include one pre-reader, two 6/7 year olds, two 10/11 year olds and two 13/14 year olds.

As I was concerned with the notion of process and the ways in which reading experiences influence future reading experiences, I planned the study to take place over two school terms, so that I was able to meet with each child ten times. At each meeting, a book would be chosen from a selection (discussed below), and the reasons for choosing it would be discussed. The child then had two weeks to read the book (or books) as many times as they wanted to. The books could be read to them, and it was not a requirement that they finish the book. At the next meeting, the book would be discussed and another book chosen. In this way, the children would have time to become accustomed to me and the research situation. The observation of the process of choice would also demonstrate how the expectations of a book influenced the reading experience, and how the interplay between the two influenced future choices.

The children were also invited to make a permanent record of their reading of the book, either by writing a report, drawing a picture, providing an alternative book cover, etc. This choice was left up to them, and while some decided not to do anything, those that did contributed to my understanding of how they saw themselves as readers.

Immediately prior to these fortnightly meetings, I carried out interviews with the children's parents in their homes and met with their teachers. This allowed me to construct a picture of the child's reading history, and to describe the mediations which most immediately influenced their constructions of themselves as readers. I also asked the children general questions about fiction and their memories of earlier reading during the first meeting and at numerous occasions throughout the course of the study. They often volunteered information about their attitudes to fiction and other books they were reading, as well as to their other interests, which contributed to the descriptions that follow. Although questionnaires were not used during these preliminary interviews, I referred to guideline questions listed in Appendix i.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, although I did video-tape two Book choice sessions with the three-year-old. Each child had their own file box in which the transcripts and any work they had done were stored and to which they had access. The sheets on which I recorded their choices were also kept in these boxes, and I gave them the choice of doing the recording. The youngest children found the colour coding of the book boxes an attractive addition to the study itself.

At all times, I followed the guidelines for ethical research practice (BERA, 1992). Although it was not intended that this project should constitute 'educational research' as described in the guidelines, I have conformed to the principles of responsibility and quality control set out. As the inclusion of the complete transcripts would make this thesis unwieldy, I have included a selection as an Appendix (ii). Signed permission from schools and parents were required and kept on file, and confidentiality was honoured in all cases. Parents, teachers and children were apprised at the onset of the research of the aims of the project and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Names have been changed for the purposes of reporting the study and any future publication of this material will need the permission of those individuals who were recorded for this project.

Self-analysis of the Researcher

One of the principal aims of this study is to propose methods of talking to children in a way that gives them a voice within the research setting. I have argued that this is best arrived at through dialogue with a researcher who must take on a stance of 'not knowing' and, because the researcher should not be considered in a privileged position, it is as necessary to describe the researcher as it is to describe the children who took part in the study. While I attempted to approach the dialogic setting without pre-conceptions of how the children would deal with the books, it was, of course,

impossible to free myself from my assumptions about either children, or fiction, or the inter-actions between the two.

It is intended that a description of my own Reading History will allow me to declare the pre-conceptions that may have influenced the research setting and, thus, make it possible to filter my interpretations through the mediating gloss of my own views. My role as a researcher must inevitably be included in the web of mediations I have considered in the analysis of the results, but I have consciously set out to minimise the influence my own personal convictions might have on the children I worked with. In addition, while my own readings of the books chosen for the study should not be considered 'correct' readings, my reading history has led me to read in certain ways. Thus, I have been socially constructed as a reader in the same way that these children have.

The fact that I have become engaged in research into children and fiction is an indication of my interest in and commitment to both, and in particular, in the way that they interact. I have been surrounded by books from early childhood, when, as an only child, I entertained myself with a large collection of Golden Books, lavishly illustrated hardcover books of fairy tales and my mother's collection of books about the History of Art. Both my mother and my father read to me daily from the first year of my life, and my paternal grandmother told me Russian fairy tales (often in Russian, which I could not understand) as soon as I could talk. Growing up in America in the 1960s in an academic family meant that I experienced both the efflorescence of contemporary picture books, such as those by Dr. Seuss, and Maurice Sendak, and those of the previous decades - Virginia Lee Burton's The Little House (1942), McCloskey's Make Way for Ducklings (1941) and Blueberries for Sal (1948) and the work of Wanda Gág and Lois Lenski. My parents and their friends showered me with books and talked to me about them, so that, even before I could read, I was literate in the sense of engaging with the pictures in my own terms.

I was a regular visitor to my local library, and, perhaps because I was a solitary child, the librarian became a close friend. Most of my free time once I started school was spent with books, and as I quickly became a 'skilled' reader, my knowledge of the books I read became a source of pride, both for me and my parents. As a teenager, I collected illustrated picture books and read through 'the classics', and in my fourteenth year, I spent eleven weeks reading through the fiction and drama collections of the library in the country town where I spent the summer.

My love of reading clearly influenced the direction of my higher education, and when, after two years in an American College, I discovered that I would have limited access to literature courses in my final two years, I transferred to an English university to take a degree in English, followed by an MA in Nineteenth-Century Fiction. After several years of child-rearing, I returned to Higher Education and now lecture in an English Department, teaching Literary Theory, American Literature and Children's Literature at BA level, with some MA teaching.

While my background as a voracious reader has contributed to my academic interest in literature, it has also influenced me as a parent, and I have tried to offer my children a reading environment similar to the one I experienced. All three of my children were given books from the age of a few months, and were read to whenever they requested it, and certainly at every bedtime. The house is full of children's books, both my own collection, those I have been asked to review, and the many books bought at second-hand bookshops, bookclubs and selected by my parents from the review pages of the *New York Times*. While I have relied to a great extent on the books I loved as a child, my choice of career has given me opportunities to give my own children access to a wide range of contemporary material. What is more, as a family, we talk about books a great deal, and in a way, I have tried to be a 'peer reader' with my children. It is thus, perhaps, unsurprising that I should wish to conduct my research in a similar way.

It should also be noted that I have no experience in the teaching of reading. Though all three of my children learned to read through reading schemes, the reading environment at home contributed to the ease with which they achieved confidence with their own reading (Fox, 1993). At the ages of 17 and 15, the two eldest boys remain avid readers and now recommend books to their younger brother, Max, who was one of the participants in the study.

This brief history suggests an attitude to reading fiction which has not only influenced my interest in this research project, but also reflects my desire to pass on the "passionate adventure with language" (Chambers, 1993:41) which I have experienced through my reading of fiction. Like Chambers, and Booth (1988) before him, my fascination with fiction rests on the communicative exchange I experience with the author, and the ability of a particular arrangement of words to transform my own way of thinking about myself and the world.

However, my experience as a teacher of undergraduates and as a Children's Literature researcher persuades me that this is not the way many people read; this is not the kind of pleasure many people derive from fiction nor is it the kind of pleasure they expect. My need to question how such different ways of reading are formed has been a primary motivation in this project, as it rests on the conception of reading fiction as a process within the history of the individual. My conviction that children themselves can answer some of these questions contributed to the way in which the study has been designed.

At the centre of my concerns is an understanding of literature, not as a rarefied, elitist pursuit, but as a fundamental experience of storying (Fry, 1985). The need to feel essential in the world, to discover and examine one's own 'selfhood', is defined by social inter-actions of many kinds, including the communicative exchange that can take place during the reading of fiction. The ability to engage actively in constructing meaning in a work of fiction, to find a voice *within* the text, is an essential part of the

construction of subjectivity, and the reading environment which formed me as a reader invited me to conceive of myself as a 'meaning-maker'. This sense of authority continues to be a contributing factor to the deep pleasure I derive from reading fiction.

My own perceptions about the purpose of fiction have been derived from a process of social mediation through which I became the reader I am now. My expectations as I approach a fictional text are, in turn, influenced by the value I now attribute to the experience of reading fiction, arrived at through the experience of reading a wide variety of texts and talking about them both informally and in a literary-critical way.

In this way, my own reading history has contributed to the direction this research has taken. In addition, it has also informed the way I have chosen the books that were used in the study. The richness of my own experience with fiction has, in particular, led me to question the process by which a reader acquires the sense of power *within* the text and a recognition of the role of the reader to share in the making of meaning.

Selecting the Books

The book supply initiated for the pre-studies mentioned above was continued for the Book Choice project. Though many children's publishers were canvassed for support, only one (which will remain un-named) agreed to supply their published output since 1992. The willingness of this major source of children's paperback fiction to assist in the project must be acknowledged, for it indicates a commitment to understanding what children think about what they read in a segment of the publishing industry which is often accused of being merely profit-orientated. In addition to all paperbacks published between 1992 and 1994 (and some which were re-issued from earlier dates), a small amount of hardback fiction being considered for paperback publication was also supplied. Throughout the study, contact with the editorial and marketing staff of this publishing house was maintained and the criteria for selection was discussed.

Reading of over two hundred of these books was carried out during the preliminary phase of the research, and the categorisation decided upon. However, the books were not selected until the supply had been read and the books discussed with the editorial staff.

If it had been possible to carry out a project such as this over a number of years, it would have been desirable to present the children with a wider choice of books. The decision to provide a selection of sixty books was something of a compromise, as such a number allowed a real 'choice' to be made (though, as an adult mediator, I had already pre-chosen the selection) while making it likely that two children would choose the same book and comparisons in their readings could be made. A number such as this would also allow me to observe the way in which the books to be read were chosen in a setting that provided both familiar and less familiar texts, an opportunity not seen before in response research. While Sarland (1991) discussed books that his readers had chosen themselves and attitudinal studies such as those provided by the Children's Literature Research Centre at Roehampton Institute (1995) are informative about the criteria children use to choose their reading matter, the Book Choice Study was designed to focus on the activity of choosing, facilitating on-the-spot observation of the choosing process, including physical activity and engagement with peri-textual features of the text. Presentation of the books was an important feature in this regard and will be discussed in a later section.

The sixty books were divided into five categories, each represented by twelve books. Although within each group I was careful to select books that would appeal to the variety of ages of children taking part in the study, and was careful to balance any obvious gendering of the books, these categories were chosen to address a number of factors that might impinge on the kinds of choices and readings the children made. Because there was no defined research question, the choice of categories covered a wide range of possibilities, each addressing issues of response and the adult mediations

which influence the construction of readers and the presentation of the texts themselves.

Two of these, DYNAMIC and STATIC, were determined by a consideration of stylistics and textual criteria, CLASSICS and MIS-MATCHES were determined by editorial criteria and one was chosen as a CONTROL.

The following discussion of the categorisation of the books will only make reference to a small selection of the titles, but a full list of books in each category is provided in Appendix iii.

Dynamic and Static Texts

Throughout this thesis, I have suggested that a theoretical shift of emphasis toward the relationship between the text and the reader demands the acknowledgement of both the texts of childhood and children as readers. In the discussion of theoretical perspectives of response, in Part One, I emphasised the differentiation between texts which offer a reader an opportunity to read actively, and thus contribute to meaning, and texts which close off such opportunities. Similarly, I drew a distinction between texts which called attention to their fictionality and those which masked evidence of authorship which offers readers a dual position. While mainstream literary theorists ignore children's literature, I proposed that a similar distinction must also be made in reference to children's fiction. In addition, I suggested that attempts to explain the social modes of response, and in particular, the construction of readers, must also include children, as the process by which an individual becomes a reader impinges on the way in which they respond to a text.

My exploration, in Part Two, of the multiple levels of adult mediations that influence child/book inter-actions demonstrated the extent to which the educative demands of fiction favour modes of reading that run counter to notions of pleasure at the centre of

theories of response, closing off opportunities to read actively and denying the reader opportunities to take up a dual position. While the contrasts between Eco's 'Open' and 'Closed' text, or Barthes' conception of the 'writerly' and 'readerly' contribute to a way of describing an opposition between the potential of the text to offer active engagement, the willingness, or ability, of the reader to engage with the potential of the text defines the mode of reading. Admittedly, the contrast between texts is not clearcut - more likely the difference is one of degree, though there are stylistic features of text which offer varying degrees of creative engagement to a reader.

It is the role of the texts of children's literature, as well as the social mediations which influence modes of reading in the formation of the continuous process of response that has interested me, and the Dynamic and Static categories were chosen to provide two distinct groups of texts, those which appeared to invite an active engagement with the telling and those which are merely 'readable', in which

the writer has attempted to do all the work for the reader, to limit the possibilities of interpretation, to heavily guide understanding.

(Hunt, 1991:81)

The nature of children's literature, tied as it is to notions of control at the heart of adult/child inter-action, is often assumed to be essentially didactic - allied to 'popular fiction' and the limits of the 'closed' text (Eco, 1979). The assumption that children's literature is in some essential way monologic implies that its readership is less likely to take up the invitation of more openly ambiguous, less determinate texts, that children are somehow fundamentally unable to answer the appeal of the dialogic nature of adult literature (though, of course, the majority of adult fiction published is more typically monologic).

Whereas Hunt (1991) assumes that adults can choose to what degree they meet the potential of a text to invite an open or, what I have called, a dynamic reading, it is more likely that it is not the adult/child dichotomy that is significant, but an experiential one. While it is true that a skilled reader is in a better position to recognise and to meet the challenge of an open text, it is not adulthood that is the determining factor, but the active engagement offered by both the text and an environment which encourages such inter-actions. Though the articulation of their engagement will not be as critically informed as that of a skilled adult reader, evidence from numerous conversations with children discussed above demonstrate that they can and, what is more, *need* to engage with fiction dialogically, to become part of the telling (Meek, 1988).

The central factor in the contrast between dynamic and static texts is the issue of authority, and the way it is granted or denied by stylistic features of the text. If we can consider the telling of stories and other early experiences of fiction to be an essential part of the social interactions which construct subjectivity, as I suggested in Chapter Two, then the need to engage actively with a fictional text impinges on any definition of 'self'. The awareness of having authority, of sharing the telling with the author and engaging dialogically, is the vital relation, and the static text, which withholds that authority, minimises the role of the reader within the text and implicitly damages notions of self-hood, of "having a voice" on a larger scale. This, of course, has implications for an understanding of the way in which ideology works within a text (Hollindale 1988, Stephens 1991) for if a reader is able to read dynamically, recognising his/her role in contributing to the way meaning is made in fiction, he/she is less at the mercy of persuasive and controlling ideologies and more likely to confront and question. Parallels between screen-based narratives can be made here, and the television habits of the children taking part in the study were acknowledged, inviting the possibility for further research.

In another way, the ability to take the dual position, "to perceive oneself during the process of participation" (Iser, 1978:134), is invited by texts which I describe as dynamic, implying a position of authority for the reader, while static texts present fiction without calling attention to its 'fictionality'. Thus, while books in the Static category could be defined in terms of the slavish use of convention, those classified as Dynamic are more likely to be those which depart from the conventional and so provide the opportunity to

reconsider our assumptions about the kind of story we find ourselves in,
and how it asks to be read. (Fry, 1985:103)

Texts which have the potential to be read reflectively offer powerful reading stances, calling attention to the control that a reader has in the author/reader inter-action. While children's literature is often regarded merely as a site for adult control over children, the need to understand the difference between modes of reading is central to the problems of mediation discussed in Part Two.

By presenting these two categories, my intention was to provide an opportunity to investigate the extent to which the potential in opposing kinds of texts required different modes of reading, and thus, invited a different kind of response. Close reading of the texts available, and a determination of stylistic features which imply different opportunities for engagement with the text, allowed me to classify a selection of books. These classifications are not intended to be definitive, nor are my readings intended to be absolute. Rather, my categorisation of books must be considered in the light of my own concerns and the way I have been constructed as a reader.

Although it was possible to find some striking contrasts, because the majority of books supplied to me could be categorised as Static, finding twelve books that I could describe as Dynamic was difficult. Though this may not have been true had I had

access to a wider range of published children's books, this situation supports Hunt's contention about the assumptions made about children's literature, "very frequently perceived as being of poor quality by definition" (Hunt, 1991:83), if we interpret 'poor' as 'impoverished'. Such material may provide enjoyment, but does not offer the authoritative reading position that contributes to the *jouissance* described by Barthes.

Despite the absence of wide contrasts, a comparison of a selection of the books in each category will demonstrate the criteria used. Each box contained a number of picture books, both because three of the readers were under seven years old, and because I was also interested in the responses of the older children to reading picture books. As an immediately recognisable genre (or number of genres) within a broad definition of children's literature, picture books are often characterised as 'open' by virtue of the dialogic inter-action between picture and text which must be negotiated by the reader. However, the range of reading positions made possible by picture books is wide, from the meta-fictional and multi-layered work discussed by many contemporary theorists (Moss in Stone, 1991 and Hunt, 1992, Lewis in Kimberley, etc. 1992, 1995, 1995a, etc.), to the monologic nature of the majority of picture books which are often pleasant to look at, but rely on equivalency, rather than an "interanimation" of picture and text (Lewis, 1995).

Though the majority of picture books considered for the study could be classified as 'Static', several demanded more active readings than Blowing Kisses by Richard Thompson. The pastel-shaded pictures in this book use visual imagery to symbolise emotion - the kisses of the story are represented by floating hearts surrounded by circles of light - but they are merely there to describe the text. The words are placed in a white box which 'blanks out' areas of picture, or under a framed picture on some pages, relegating the white space and use of frames to an arbitrary function of book design. The kind of reading required of this book can be compared to the creative use of picture/text interanimation in Mahy's The Boy Who Was Followed Home, with

pictures by Steven Kellogg, which I included in the Dynamic category. Not only do the pictures exceed the written text, illustrating the loneliness of the solitary boy, through a juxtaposition of his smallness in relation to the vast spaces of his environment, but the framing of the pictures is used to convey his isolation by placing his small figure outside of the picture's frame. This use of picture to express the emotion when he is befriended by an exponentially increasing number of hippopotami, absent from the written text, suggests an interpretative role for the reader, bringing together the restrained description and the use of colour to contribute to the richness of the illustration.

In addition, Mahy and Kellogg invite the reader to become the teller in the penultimate double-page spread, by presenting pictures without text. With a generosity reminiscent of Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are, Kellogg invites, or perhaps, forces the reader to tell the story of the boy's gleeful encounter with the unnamed giraffes. The authority given to the reader of such a text requires an engagement that allows the reader to "become the teller as well as the told" (Meek, 1988:25), and also gives the reader a double awareness. By calling attention to the participation required, the author and illustrator invite a perception of the reader's own involvement in the making of the fiction.

A similar comparison can be made at the level of the text. Whereas, in Blowing Kisses, Thompson leaves fewer gaps for a reader to fill, describing emotion and emphasising a clearcut 'message' through an imperceptible third person narrator, The Boy Who Was Followed Home offers an understated narrative, leaving both the detail and the significance to the pictures.

A closer look at passages from each book demonstrates the comparison.

She foo-ed a kiss to a train. The train was so surprised, it blew its whistle twice, really loudly.

She foo-ed a kiss to a bee. The bee buzzed right over to tell a flower all about it.

She foo-ed a kiss to the river. The river was very pleased, and it gurgled softly to her.

She foo-ed lots of kisses to her dad. He liked her kisses so much, he always come right over and gave her a big hug. (Thompson, 1991)

Though the use of repetition in this passage suggests an invitation to the reader to join in the telling, the use of reported discourse demonstrates the monologic power of narrative to tell rather than to show emotion (Hunt, 1991:110) and thus to direct response. While the personification of the bee and the river may seek to imitate a child-like apprehension of the world, it also serves to fill all gaps in meaning, leaving the reader with no more than a passive position.

Mahy and Kellogg, in The Boy Who Was Followed Home, however, while expressing the emotion of the boy, still manage to offer some kind of indeterminacy, which is at the heart of both the fantasy and the humour of the book. The use of pictures as counterpoint to the narration, and the ambiguity arising from the disjunction between narration and illustration, are characteristic of much of Kellogg's other work (for instance, The Island of the Skog (1973) or The Mysterious Tadpole (1977)).

Then there was a rustling noise behind him. When he turned around, there were four hippos following him.

Robert was even more pleased and more surprised then he had been the day before. He was delighted to think that he was the sort of boy hippopotami would follow.

When he got home the hippopotami went and sat in the goldfish pool.

It was quite a big pool, but with four hippos in it, it seemed quite small.

"There are four hippopotami in our goldfish pool this evening," said Robert's mother. "That seems like quite a few." (Kellogg, 1992)

The untagged reaction of Robert's mother creates an awareness of the narrator's choice to understate the reaction to the event, assisted by the matter-of-fact narration of the events leading up to it. The line "He was delighted to think he was the sort of boy hippopotami would follow" is ambiguous and open-ended, demanding individual interpretation on the part of the reader, rather than a definitive view conveyed in Blowing Kisses. While both these books represent worlds which blend realism and fantasy, Kellogg's narrative invites a more dynamic reading than Thompson's.

The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales (Scieszka and Smith, 1992), also included in the Dynamic category, goes even farther to offer an authoritative position through the meta-fictional strategies exploited in the text. Although I have already discussed this book (see Chapter Six :160), it is important to reaffirm its status as an example of children's literature at its most challenging. Dependence on intertextuality, in the form of well-known fairy tales, places children in a position to share knowledge with the author and illustrator and, similar to several works by the Ahlbergs (Each Peach Pear Plum and The Jolly Postman trilogy), relies on the recognition of common knowledge to supply a communicative link between author and reader.

In addition, the transgression of storybook norms, both in terms of the subversion of fairy tales and the subversion of the narrator's role, creates a meta-fictional awareness that requires the engagement of the reader as co-player within the construction of the fiction (Stephens in Stone, 1991). A similar transgression, though to a lesser degree, can be seen in Van Lieshout's The Dearest Boy in all the World, for while the narrative is typical of many children's books, the use of extremely short chapters and italicised headings calls attention to what is a usually transparent form of authorial control. In addition, the unexplained narrative of the wordless progress of a growing number of snails across the bottom of the page demands that the reader attempt not only to create a narrative out of the snail pictures, but to relate it to Tim's difficulties in dealing with his father's death and his new responsibilities.

Mattie and Grandpa, another text chosen for the Dynamic category, demonstrates the way in which qualities of openness and indeterminacy provide opportunities for readers to make their own meanings in a text, offering a reading experience that is 'transformative'. Though I had not been concerned with categorisation in terms of content, I was struck by the fact that several of the books classified as 'Dynamic' deal with death and loss. Aside from The Dearest Boy in the World, Mattie and Grandpa by Robert Piumini and Travelling Backwards by Toby Forward are both fantasies which deal with the death of a grandfather. Like Burningham's Grandpa and E B White's Charlotte's Web, among many others, the attempt to deal with death in children's fiction can be seen to epitomise the difficulty of addressing children. The extent to which authors attempt to address this subject obliquely provides an example of the puzzle of communication at the heart of adult/child interactions. Such an issue is reflected in the way in which all fiction for children is written and mediated.

What determines the power of Mattie and Grandpa, and that of many other children's books that address the subject of death, is the difficulty of articulating the unsayable, of delivering knowledge to the innocent. Avoidance of the 'truth' necessitates the use of symbol, of metaphor and of ambiguity - relying on the reader to make their own personal meaning - rather than confronting the reader with difficult realities. While the indeterminacy of the empty chair on the penultimate page of Grandpa insists on a personal interpretation (which may change with time and experience) the whole of Mattie and Grandpa rests on the ambiguity of the narrative and a blurring of the line between reality and fantasy. The dream-like quality of the journey Mattie takes with his dying grandfather, who is shrinking until he is finally inhaled into Mattie, may offer a consoling picture of death, but such a message is unstated. The reader may approach the story as a fabulous tale, or may seek deeper metaphysical significance, depending on their own need. The reader's interpretation is required on a stylistic level, too, as Piumini's depicts numerous conversations between characters with minimal tagging (Hunt, 1991:112-114).

'Grandpa,' he said suddenly.
'Yes, Mattie?'
'I've got something I must tell you.'
'Must or want to?'
'Want to,'
'Tell me, then.'
Mattie was silent.
'Don't you want to?'
'Yes, I do.'
'Right, then.'
'You're getting smaller,' Mattie said with an effort.
'D'you mean I'm getting younger?'
'No, small in height. Small in size. You're becoming a little Grandpa.'
'Oh, that's good! That's why I feel so light,' said Grandpa.
'You don't mind?'
'No, I really don't'
'Really not?' (Piumini, 1993:44)

The absence of tagging in this exchange not only leaves space for the reader to attribute speech, but also minimises authorial control over the emotional content of the passage. While it is possible that Mattie is having difficulty expressing his thoughts, this is conveyed through his hesitancy and repeated questioning of Grandpa, instead of being referred to directly. Rather than being told, the reader is shown and must, therefore, do some of the telling.

If Mattie and Grandpa is an example of a Dynamic text, then the cover design and blurb provide an example of the ability of peri-text to mask its power. While many of those asked to comment on the book (Endpaper, *Signal 72*, 1993) admit to being dissuaded from reading the book altogether because of the 'tweeness' of the cover, the blurb indicates the discomfort of addressing the subject matter of the book in a truthful way. Choosing to close off the openness of the ambiguous quality of the text, the blurb states

While Mattie's family are all crying because Grandpa is very ill, Mattie and Grandpa embark on an incredible journey. A journey into the land of make-believe, where there are pirates, horses, rivers, mountains, sunflowers and plenty of laughs. But one thing begins to bother Mattie. Grandpa is changing [...] he is getting smaller and smaller and smaller.

A simple, poignant story of family love.

While Mattie and Grandpa is anything but a simple story, this précis reflects a static reading, inviting expectations of a closed and undemanding reading experience. While young readers will be disappointed if looking for simplicity and 'plenty of laughs', adults looking for a new and complex work of fiction to offer young readers will be unaware of its potential qualities as a transformational text. In this way, the cover and blurb serve to silence children as readers, by denying them the experience of dynamic inter-action with texts.

It might be expected that books intended for teenage readers would be more likely to offer challenges to the conventional ways of reading, yet most publishing for 'young adults' must be categorised as 'pulp'. Though this particular publishing house is not responsible for the most popular series fiction found in large High Street chainstores, it does publish *Fighting Fantasy* books and a series similar to the *Point Horror* series published by Scholastic. The experience of reading the repetitious plot-driven series book is more likely to be a static one, and while some may present challenges to expectations (Jackson & Livingstone's Spectral Stalkers in the *Fighting Fantasy* series uses a second person narrative, for instance), the overall effect is of 'sameness' (Nodelman, 1985). Reading series fiction is comforting; plot and characterisation conform to familiar patterns and address similar issues (Sarland, 1994a), and closure is assured from the outset. While it is possible to assert that such texts can be read in 'dynamic' ways, challenging the stereotypical characterisations and subverting the

ideological force of predominantly conservative text, the absence of palpable narration and, at the same time, total narrative control suggest a closed reading experience.

I have argued that the need to share authority within the author/reader relationship derives from a fundamental urge to exert a 'self' in the search for a subject position, beginning in early infancy. I suggest that the desire to read in series form is, perhaps, driven by this need, particularly if a powerful subject position is denied in other discourses. The silencing of children within the meta-discourse of children's literature provides such a situation. By reading repetitiously, as one must do if reading series fiction, the reader acquires a semblance of authority; because expectations are always met, knowledge of the book *as it is being read* presumes a familiarity which can be perceived as powerful.

When you have read a story many times, it is almost as though you know it as well as the person who wrote it; when you tell it to someone else, it could almost be your own story. (Fry, 1985:9)

Though stylistic features of the text are less likely to provide opportunities for the reader to contribute to the making of meaning, the uses of stock phrasing allow a semblance of 'telling', because the language is predictable and easily remembered. In the same way that repeated re-readings of a book grant a sense of ownership to the reader, so reading in series can offer a sense of control, albeit a false and ultimately, a silencing one.

Though not part of a series, Different Directions by Theresa Breslin invites a similar kind of engagement for its readers and was chosen for the Static category. Clearly dependent on an audience of female readers who will want to identify with the plucky protagonist, this book offers a wealth of physical description that is typical of much teenage pulp fiction.

Katherine sighed as she took her turn at the mirror. Spots were not her problem, not yet anyway, she thought bitterly. She stared at her face - not bad, a shade too long to be a perfect oval; complexion - few freckles, not too many, they could be covered; eyes - amber, different, but then she had decided this year that she was mature enough to know that being different could mean attractive. Her eyes travelled upwards to what should have been her crowning glory and she sighed again. Thick, coarse red hair was defiantly escaping from the combs with which she had trapped it this morning before leaving home. Two hair combs, six clasps, and a ponytail ribbon, she muttered to herself as she pulled them out and started again. (Breslin, 1991:11)

While it is clear that the implied reader is female and concerned with her appearance, the repeated use of 'could' and 'should' conveys a sense of authorial control and an implicit agreement - this is the way things are. The connection between the world of the book and the reader is made through discourse such as this, the reader must 'be' Katherine - she is seen in a mirror as if to provide a self-reflection, and the detailed physical descriptions encourage 'identification'.

Dependence on such identification, as discussed in Part Two, denies readers the necessary relation with the author, and while Different Directions is entertaining and deals with a problematic mother/daughter relationship sensitively, it offers readers no active engagement with the process of its telling.

In contrast to Breslin's novel, Swindells' Daz4Zoe challenges expectations and offers both a meta-fictional narrative frame and a double first person narrative. Swindells calls attention to the 'fictionality' of the text and implicates the reader in the telling of the story. The narrative strategy used reinforces the suggestion that the reader has responsibility for the events that may or may not take place. The first chapter, entitled 'A TRUE STORY' provides a prelude to the shared narrative of Daz (characterised by phonetically spelled and ungrammatical prose) and Zoe ("Hi. I'm Zoe. Zoe May

Askew. Or Zoe may not (Joke!)"). This prologue is supposedly narrated by the author, and the conversational tone allows Swindells to compel the reader to acknowledge the truth/fiction dichotomy.

Every night the Town Gardener switched on, and night after night the electricity ran through the long cables, warming the blankets till the cold spell was over and the palm trees were saved.

Afterwards it was on telly and in the papers, how the palm trees were saved. What a good idea, people said. What a clever man. Everybody was really happy.

Well, no - not everybody. Some of the old folks - some of them that didn't die - moaned on about the waste of electricity, but you're going to get moaners whatever you do, and the moral of the story is you can't please everybody.

Or is it?

The rest of this book is fiction but it could come true, and we wouldn't like it if it did. You'll see what I mean when you've read it. It could come true, but it won't if we're together. All of us.

There's no reason why we shouldn't be.

(Swindells, 1990:2)

While such an opening demands an authorial stance and creates potential for a resultant dynamic reading experience, it also declares a conception of the political force of fiction. A text which provides the potential for active engagement in the process of making meaning offers a mode of reading which challenges the conventional and, what is more, encourages the reader to take up a powerful subject position.

In this way, the contrast between Static and Dynamic texts represents a political dichotomy. The Static offers the normalisation of dominant ideologies, while the Dynamic invites an active engagement which gives children as readers a degree of authority within the text, and thus, encourages questioning and challenge. Children's literature is continually represented as a controlling force - 'taking the children in'

(Rose, 1992) - but it can be argued that those children's books which offer a more dynamic reading make a 'literary engagement' with fiction possible from childhood, and so allow responses to these opposing modes to be viewed in a continuous process within any reading history.

Classic Texts and Mis-Matches

These two categories were selected with the assistance of the editorial staff of the publishing house that supplied the books for the study. The first, Classics, was chosen to address both the effect of cover design on response, and the influence of adult mediations which place some children's books in a superior position to others. While it has been admitted by the publishers that such books are more often purchased by adults than children and constitute a 'cynical' approach to children's book publishing (see Chapter Six), I was interested to know whether the 'classic' status of the books affected the extent to which they were chosen and the expectations formed about the reading that took place.

It might be expected that the decision to re-publish a children's book under a 'Classic' or 'Modern Classic' imprint is based on literary criteria. Certainly, many of the 'Classics', such as Little Women, Dracula and Treasure Island are also recognised as adult fiction and so have acquired a different status from the majority of children's books. In addition, many of the Modern Classics, such as Charlotte's Web, The Mouse and His Child and Tom's Midnight Garden have become the subject of numerous scholarly articles. Many of these texts share features with the Dynamic category described above - subverting dominant ideologies, challenging conventional ways of reading and respecting the abilities of children as readers to deal with ambiguity and indeterminacy. Bawden, for instance, uses a narrative frame in Carrie's War (1993) which draws attention to the ambiguous meaning of the title. The relationship between the embedded narrative and the story of widowed Carrie, returning with her children to the site of her war-time evacuation, presents the reader with a complex task, both to

interpret the 'truth' of the events of the past and to question the 'fictionality' of adult Carrie's memories. Mary Norton's The Borrowers similarly presents a number of untrustworthy narrative frames, challenging the reader to make the choice between belief and disbelief.

However, the choice of texts by this particular publishing house is based on consistency of sales over a long period of time (in the case of the Modern Classics, this is fifteen years). Whether this means that these are the best remembered books by adults who buy for children, or whether these are the books that are most frequently read at school storytimes and appear on recommended reading lists, the granting of classic status may have more to do with the proliferation of titles, short print runs and destruction of backlists in current publishing practice, than the enduring qualities of children's books of the past.

Nevertheless, the decision to publish such books with the same imprint and with matching covers, as discussed in Chapter Six, invites speculation that, by giving the collection a 'series' appearance, these books will be more attractive to a young audience. In addition, the attractive packaging, and colour co-ordinated bindings gives them the status of desirable objects, catching the eye on the bookshop shelf, and inviting the acquisition of the whole set. The Classics imprint has a glossy cover and photo-realist artwork representing the main character, or characters, of the novel, so that Black Beauty (Sewell, 1994) has a picture of an exquisite horse, and White Fang (London, 1994), a howling white wolf. Each volume has a biography of the author on the opening page and a list of other Classics "to enjoy".

Modern classics have the same uniform appearance, although the covers are matt, the colours brighter and the cover illustrations frequently more impressionistic. However, the emphasis on character is retained. Many of the volumes have an Afterword, which provides a biographical and historical context. Knowledge about the author and

writing process imparted by these Afterwords presents a mediating gloss which imparts a scholarly seriousness to the reading of these texts, and it is interesting to note the extent to which the readers in my study rejected them.

The need to provide choices for a wide range of ages within each category meant that I needed to provide some books for younger readers. Though there were plans to publish a Classic Picture Book imprint, these had not been chosen, and so I asked the staff to suggest a few picture books which would meet the same sales criteria as the other classics imprints. While the individual tales of Beatrix Potter were an obvious choice, The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Carle, 1970), Dear Zoo (Campbell, 1982) and Each Peach Pear Plum (Ahlberg & Ahlberg, 1978) were suggested. Each would be potentially familiar to even the oldest readers in the study, and were also likely to be known by their parents. Therefore, though they did not conform to the others in this category in terms of appearance, these picture books did comply with the notion of 'adult-approved' texts.

Mis-matches

The Mis-Match category was also chosen in collaboration with the editorial staff. The Book Choice studies provided an opportunity for children to talk about why they chose particular books, and I wanted to consider how criteria for publication differed from the children's own judgements. In other words, I wanted to investigate the ways in which adult mediations of children's fiction, represented by the publishing industry, go wrong, either by misjudging their audience, or by misjudging the way in which the texts are presented or promoted. The information gleaned from the readings of these books was discussed with the editorial staff, and their feedback contributed to the discussion the discourses of provision (see Chapter Six).

In order to select books for this category, I asked the editor to choose a selection from the books I had read that were chosen for publication, but were unexpectedly

unsuccessful in the marketplace. In addition, I requested a selection of hardcover children's books which had been considered for publication in paper, but had, for a variety of reasons, been rejected. The editor discussed each book with me and provided the reasons for rejection, as well as offering possible explanations for the lack of success of the unsuccessful texts.

Most often, the lack of success of a book was attributed to a gap between content and appearance, or between text and peri-text. The Sandal, a (largely) wordless picture book by Tony Bradman and Philippe Dupasquier, for example, appears to be a book for very young readers. However, the interplay of three scenarios - past, present and future - and the need to supply the narrative through a reading of the pictures implies a more sophisticated reader. The Sales Manager agreed that it was for "*library sales only*", suggesting that it was fine for topic work in history, but was less successful as a story.

Both William and the Wolves by Kathryn Cave and The Good, the Bad and the Goofy by Jon Scieszka were also considered to be unsuccessful on similar terms. While Cave's book was seen as "*an extremely good book....well written and gives a new slant on family tensions*", the cover design was being rethought, as it did not seem to appeal to the age group to which the story was intended to appeal. Though the Scieszka book had been very successful in the USA, Canada and Australia, it was the editor's opinion that the cover design was too unusual and dark to find a place with larger booksellers.

This was also the case with Sheila Rae, the Brave by Kevin Henkes. This is an American picture book which deals with childhood fears of being lost, using anthropomorphised mice as protagonists. However, its similarity in style and intended audience to the work of Mick Inkpen meant that WH Smith's did not select it, and

because there is already a perceived resistance among adults to buy this kind of 'situational' book, sales were very low.

In the case of hardbacks that were not selected for publication in paper, most were considered to be merely expendable, rather than offering something new. The editor's claim that it is necessary "*to be brutal about paperback publishing in the current economic climate*" requires the need to justify positive selection. Thus, if a book is "*missable*", it will be missed. *Spinner*, by Anthony Masters, was originally considered to be too 'undisciplined' to be published in paper, but the fact that this dark, tense book about autism has been considered for two awards meant that it would be reconsidered. Award winners are destined to sell well, and though it would have been interesting to create such a category for the Book Choice study, this particular publisher did not supply a wide enough range of award-winning books.

Control

The final category is represented by a selection of books that were selected without specific criteria, beyond the fact that I was careful to select some books which could be read by the youngest children in the group, and some that could attract the oldest readers. While the cover design and quality of the writing did influence the children choosing them, and there were similarities between some of these books and those in other categories, they could equally have been twelve other books from the 200+ selection.

Presentation of the study

Each group of twelve books was placed in a large coloured tray and marked on the spine with a corresponding coloured label. As I wanted the children taking part in the study to be able to see the covers of the books, I chose cat litter trays, which allowed the books to be spread out and moved around, while keeping them in their chosen categories. I asked that each child read at least one book from each box, and when recording the books on the Record Sheet, they were asked to record the colour code signifying the box the book had come from. This task was met with some enthusiasm from the younger children, who enjoyed being part of the recording process, and also enjoyed the coloured pens. Though it was clear to all the readers that the colours signified a difference between groups of books, only one of the participants showed any curiosity about what those differences entailed (see Paul). This curiosity contributed to his responses, both to the research situation and to his view of himself as a reader, but this part of the research design did not otherwise seem to impinge on the results.

Selection of Case Study Participants

The children who took part in the Book Choice Study were chosen in a variety of ways, depending on their age. The decision to include a pre-reader in the study was partly due to the fact that my son was then three and I had been tracing his involvement with books since his first year (see Max). Therefore, both my knowledge of his reading history and the convenience of conducting the research with him determined his selection. In addition, evidence from previous studies with pre-readers (Dombey in Meek, 1983, Cochran-Smith 1984, Wolf and Heath 1992, Fox 1993) provided insights into the degree to which very young children were capable of talking about the books they encountered, revealing a willingness to engage 'playfully' with the telling. The proximity of a pre-reader to the possible origins of response discussed in Chapter Two suggested a comparison with the children who had already learned to read.

The other children were selected with the co-operation of their schools. Schools were contacted by letter in the Spring of 1994. The letter was brief, explaining only that Children's Literature research was to take place in the Autumn and Spring terms of the following year. Twenty schools were canvassed, most of them Primary schools and most State schools, although several fee-paying schools were contacted. There was some effort to get a balance of socio-economic levels in the initial selection, though the majority of schools replying favourably to my request came from the more middle-class areas of the town. Of the twelve replies received, only four refused, all because they were already participating in other educational studies. Only one fee-paying school replied.

The first six schools to offer children of the appropriate ages were contacted and meetings were arranged with, in one case, the Head Teacher, and in others, the Class teacher or the Head of English. At the meetings, I described the project, discussed my criteria for selection of the children and answered questions.

My intention was to select readers, within the age groupings listed above, who represented a range of reading interest and background. Though it was necessary that the children should know enough about reading fiction to be willing to take part in a study such as this, I sought to include children who were not either exceptionally skilled readers or enthusiastic readers. In this aspect of selecting the participants, I called upon the assistance of their teachers. I did request, however, that the children selected be ready to talk and that their parents were willing to be part of the study as well.

Although I had originally intended to meet small groups of children in all age groups and to select from these, it was decided, through discussion with teachers, that the 6/7 year olds would be chosen by their current teachers after conversation with parents and

that the 10/11 year olds would be chosen following small group discussions. The 13/14 year olds were also chosen by their teachers, as arranging group meetings proved very difficult. In each case, one child was selected and another was chosen to act as a stand-by. I was able to choose one boy and one girl in each age group.

Most teachers had very clear ideas about which children would be suitable and some expressed the hope that the study would 'wake up' certain reluctant readers. Following the two group meetings with the 10/11 year olds and discussions with their teachers, I made decisions based on the criteria of a willingness to talk and a general interest in taking part in such a study. However, in one case, the child chosen proved to be extremely reluctant to either talk or cooperate with the study. I attribute this to a breakdown in communication between the Head Teacher, with whom I initially spoke, and the Class Teacher, who suggested I chose by reading age. The attitudes expressed about the study and the degree of cooperation given by that particular school affected the results, and will be discussed in more detail in the following descriptions of the inter-active phase of the study (see Catherine).

Determination of Access to Schools

In addition to the agreement of parents to participate in the study, I sought the agreement of each school to 1) provide documentation of the school's current reading policy, 2) participate in an audio-taped discussion (with the child's Class Teacher) about how fiction reading is dealt with in that classroom, 3) provide general information about the child's reading background and behaviour and 4) provide a quiet and private setting for the fortnightly meetings to take place. Though all schools agreed to these terms, the fourth request was the most difficult to accommodate. In some schools, I often found that a room that had been available for several sessions had been re-assigned. Meetings took place in stationery cupboards, in hallways and in staff rooms, though this did not seem to have a serious effect on the results. In some

cases, interruptions contributed interesting evidence about the social aspects of book choice.

INTER-ACTIVE PHASE

This phase of the research will be described individually for each child taking part in the study. Prior to the start of the Book Choice study itself, I met with the parent(s) of the children in their own homes, to discuss their own attitudes to fiction reading and to talk about the reading background of their child. These audio-taped meetings were conducted as conversations, but were guided by a list of questions which encouraged consistency and, thus, comparison, between families. I also spoke briefly to the children in their homes, in an effort to minimise a pedagogic framework for the research relationship, as discussed above (see Chapter Seven).

In addition, I conducted similar meetings with the teachers in their classrooms, or in the school library. As the studies began at the start of a new school year, these teachers were often not well acquainted with the children, and sometimes I had to rely on conversations with their previous class teacher. During the first meeting with the children in school, I spent some time in general conversation about their memories of earlier reading and their attitudes to fiction, recorded in a similar fashion. The evidence from these three sources contributed to the reading histories of each child, which form a principal context for the Book Choice part of the study. The guideline questions are listed in Appendix i.

The description of each reading history will be followed by a discussion of the progress of the Book Choice study with that child. In each case, I have sampled transcripts of the ten fortnightly meetings, in order to describe how each child chose their books, how they chose to respond to them and to trace the sequential modelling of response within the context of their reading histories. These taped conversations were transcribed within two days of each meeting, so that I was able to refer to remarks

made at one meeting during the next one. This was particularly useful when attempting to make connections between expectations and response. I also took notes during the meeting regarding features of child/book inter-actions which could not be recorded, such as the amount of book-handling, and marked changes in physical activity. The transcripts were annotated accordingly, using a method derived from Cochran-Smith's recording of story-readings (Cochran-Smith, 1984).

The discussion which follows will draw together the kinds of observations that were made during the study, in order to describe the new kind of evidence that such an approach to talking to children can provide. The re-definition of the researcher/subject inter-action proposed for this study, the inclusion of reading histories and the ability to observe book-related activity over time, combine to provide evidence which allows a multi-layered contextualisation of the social modes of response. This study also provides seven individual stories of readers, which, in their own terms, contribute to knowledge about how children choose the books they read, the kind of expectations they form, and their own perceptions of themselves as readers.

A list of the participants appears below as Figure 8.2. All names have been changed.

CHILD'S NAME	AGE/YEAR (at start of study)	PARENTS TAKING PART
Max	3 /Pre-school	Mother & Father
Susan	6/ Y2	Mother (no father at home)
Henry	7/Y3	Mother & Step-father
Catherine	10/Y6	Mother
Mark	10/Y6	Mother & Father
Teresa	13/Y9	Mother
Paul	13/Y9	Mother & Father

Figure 8.2 Case Study Participants and Parental Involvement

Max - 3 years old

Although I attempted to approach the research situation with Max in a similar way to all other children, several adaptations had to be made because he is my own child and because he was not yet reading when the study took place. During the year prior to the Book Choice study, I conducted a small pilot study with him, in order to determine his willingness to participate in choosing from a selection of picture books provided for the study. I did not establish any criteria for choosing them, but two of the books in the pilot were chosen for the final selection. His response to this arrangement proved that he was willing to make choices, and that he could talk about what he liked in the books he chose. However, when it came to audio-taping in regular sessions, he was uncooperative. Therefore, I adopted a more open-ended approach, either turning on the tape-recorder when he asked to 'choose some books from the boxes', or suggesting a session when he seemed in a receptive mood. Aside from these changes, the observations made during the sessions conformed to those made with the other children.

Reading History

As I have already pointed out in the description of my own reading history, Max has grown up in a household full of books and booktalk. The fact that I began my research when he was two years old meant that he was exposed to a large range of books, including those that had belonged to his older brothers, books bought specifically for him. In addition, he also had the experience of having his opinion about these books canvassed on numerous occasions. In this way, he and I have shared a 'peer-reader' relationship and, because his father and our two older sons adopted a similar kind of dialogue when they read to him, 'booktalk' was a familiar activity.

While my reading background has obviously influenced the importance books have in our home, and thus contributed to Max's experience of stories as central to self/other inter-actions, his father is also a frequent reader and talker about books. Although he

grew up in a book-less household, he is both a book collector and a serious reader of fiction, choosing from reviews or recommendations. When asked what he considered important about fiction, he wrote:

Primarily mental transportation - the chance to experience an artificial universe in which certain abstract ideas take on a concrete form and become critical issues rather than the peripheral concerns they seem in everyday life.....[additionally] some fiction forms important cultural "landmarks" or reference points.

Such perceptions carry with them a consciousness on the part of a reader to engage with fictional text in a dynamic way, and while his father's approach to reading fiction may not appear to impinge directly on the reading life of a three-year-old, the attitudes expressed about the centrality of fiction within this particular family place Max in a reading environment which places fiction in an essential role.

In terms of the reading environment, the house is full of books. Each room (aside from the bathroom) has bookshelves and all contain a mix of child and adult fiction and non-fiction. The lowest shelf in the living room provides Max's 'Book Corner', housing a selection of picture books and library books. These books are frequently taken to his room, where he has another set of bookshelves. The bookshelves in the dining-room house a wide selection of hardback children's fiction. We call these 'Downstairs books' and Max knows they belong to the whole family. Though he sometimes has these as bedtime stories, they do not stay in his room. The attic is lined with bookshelves, and Max knows that many of these books belonged to his two older brothers and that they will someday be his to read. The books for the study were also stored there.

Max is read to every night before bed, and at most other times when he requests it. Because his older brothers enjoy reading to him, he often has a choice of reader as well as book. He takes books to bed with him, and often spends up to an hour after bedtime looking at them. He frequently props them open between his mattress and the

side of the bed and falls asleep looking at a picture. Max also has a large collection of story-tapes and listens to them daily, often repeatedly. Like being read to, though without the sensual pleasure of closeness, listening to stories on tape appears to reinforce the perception of fiction as a communicative act and inevitably impinges on Max's ability to adopt the language of stories into his own speech.

At his nursery, he is able to spend time in the book corner looking at books and the children are read to daily in age-related groups. The book selection is small and consists mainly of picture books which are renewed annually. There is also a selection of 'Teacher's books' which are read to the children but which they cannot look at themselves. These are often pop-up books of some kind and are prone to damage. Because this nursery is located at the local college, there is some contact between the education staff and the nursery staff. The Nursery Manager is a fully qualified Infant teacher. Staff are happy to give parents advice on appropriate fiction, and occasionally invite a member of the Education Department to give evening talks on preparation for reading.

At the age of three, Max was beginning to recognise a few words in print, and frequently used story language in his conversations and private play. He was often overheard constructing narratives, taking on an authorial tone, either in the use of tagging :

"*cried a voice*" or "*he said quietly*", or in direct statement to a non-existent audience:

(while playing with Duplo) the baby is up in the digger and this is her dream and she's up and up.....the dumper lorry is driving....and do you know where it is driving? it's driving to you and pretty soon they were trundling up the hill, but do you know where the baby was? She was at the swimming pool. (taped of Max, Age 4.2)

The adoption of an authorial stance here is reminiscent of the story-telling of the children in Fox's study (1993) and indicates the extent to which narrative techniques derived from story-reading are adopted by children in their own stories and private talk. As Fox suggests, the rich background of exposure to fiction that characterises Max's reading history encourages such a powerful stance.

Book Choice Study

As I have already mentioned, Max participated in pilot studies prior to his inclusion in the larger study. During these three sessions, one of which was video-taped, he was observed choosing from a selection of 15 picture books. Max demonstrated definite preferences, and though it was clear he was choosing by cover, there was no perceivable trend in criteria for choice. However, during the second and third sessions, he refused to choose new books, but asked to be read to from those he had chosen the first time. Of these, a favourite was Lester's I'm Green and I'm Grumpy, which operates as a guessing game. On each page, a door must be opened to reveal a child dressed in a costume. The answer is also the final word in a rhyme, so that both descriptive clues and the rhyming pattern contribute to the reader's ability to guess the answer. Once I had read the book to him, Max demanded a second and third reading, and each time appeared to derive a great amount of pleasure from revealing the answer before he opened the door flap.

Similarly, his repeated choice of Garland's All Gone may have been due to the use of the phrase "All gone" on alternate pages. Once the pattern of reading had been set up, Max took over 'reading' this phrase, and sometimes played with this role, hesitating before saying "All gone", as if teasing me with his ability to exert his authority in the text. I suggest that such a response is derived from the same sense of pleasure evident in his earlier readings of Goodnight Moon (see Chapter 1). While the invitation of the text provides an opportunity to share in the telling, the mediation of the adult reader influences the degree to which such an invitation is met. By allowing him to take

control of the narrative in this way, I, as a mediator, tried to allow the openness in the telling to operate without interruption.

A readiness to handle books and spend time turning the pages silently was recorded during one video-taped session, as was Max's concentration during story-readings. The depth of his involvement was similar to "the domain of trance" (77) evident in 'ludic' reading described by Nell (1988), and continued during early attempts to carry out the formal Book Choice study. In addition, when confronted with the selection of books divided into boxes, Max's tendency to choose a book quickly and indiscriminately was even more pronounced. This may have been due to the restricted number of picture books offered, or may have been due to the fact that he was interested in all the books equally. He did spend time handling many of the books he did not choose, however, and enjoyed looking at the covers, though he was quick to pronounce them "books for big boys."

Max often imposed his own readings on the books he chose, as well as giving books his own titles. Following an initial puzzlement over the lack of words in The Sandal (discussed above), he spent long periods of time looking at the pictures and then offered a telling. At times, his narration acknowledged the illustrator's use of comic book form, particularly in the transition from past to present, which was indicated through a series of framed pictures of a sandal decreasing in size across the page. Again, without words, the telling is left to the reader.

There's the sandal and da-da, da-da, da-da. They saw the sandal it got smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller. That - smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller. Done, done, done.....

The rhythmic quality of Max's narration indicates repetitious word-play reminiscent of the tendency of very young children to use language in musical ways, and here the repetitions of 'smaller' become almost hypnotic. A similar way of dealing with the

wordless nature of The Sandal was evident in the case of Henry, the seven-year-old boy (see below). The potential to use language in a playful, musical way may contribute to the 'dynamic' opportunities offered by such a text, but it is also the child's desire to construct a story which is welcomed by the absence of a written text. Max answered the invitation to tell willingly:

And [the shoe] falls in the river and goes in that tunnel - it might go to a whale, to the whale and they don't know how to get it back.

I do not know where the whale came in, though he had been read a version of Pinocchio on several occasions. However, it is the tendency to feel free, within the text, to incorporate an individual story that interests me here. The authoritative position assumed by Max, and by other very young readers, indicates the primacy of a relationship to fictional text which is open and 'writerly'. Rather than being a sophistication of a skilled and mature reader, this willingness to engage creatively in the act of reading fiction must be conceived of as an innate desire, frequently lost through monologising mediations that take place in story-reading events intended to prepare pre-literate child for reading (see discussion of Cochran-Smith in Chapter 5: 133).

In addition, assumptions that the ability to recognise the fictionality of fiction relies on the development of abstract thought (Applebee, 1978) is challenged by Max's evident awareness of his position as a reader, willingly suspending his disbelief. During a conversation at bedtime following the reading of a chapter from Peter Pan, a 'downstairs' book requested by Max, we talked about the death of Captain Hook, a character whose presence caused Max some anxiety. After a moment's thought, he said:

but when we read the book again, he'll still be alive.

This remark indicates the presence of the dual awareness discussed in Chapter One; the ability to recognise oneself in the act of being engaged with the fiction which is a distinguishing feature of a 'literary engagement' with the text. Such an awareness, undoubtedly facilitated by Max's experience of a variety of texts, and an 'interpretive community' where fiction is considered as fundamental, contributes to a mode of reading which is 'dynamic', as opposed to 'static', and places Max, as a reader of fiction, in an authoritative position.

Susan - 6 years old

Susan was selected by the Head Teacher of her infant school with the agreement of her class teacher and her mother. She was chosen primarily for her interest in reading fiction and her enthusiasm for talking. In addition to being the most avid reader to take part in the study, Susan displayed the qualities of a 'dynamic' reader from the outset, demonstrating a tendency to 'play' within the books she chose and an awareness of herself as a reader which implied an ability to 'stand outside the fictional process'. In addition to this, her reading history clearly contributed to her conception of herself as a reader of fiction and, thus, provided evidence of social factors which influence the modes of reading that children are able to adopt. While it is possible to make connections between mediating factors and Susan's ability to inter-act creatively with the fiction she chose to read during the study, the notion of process must be acknowledged. Changes in the mediation evident during the course of the study may affect the way in which she engages with the books she reads in the future.

Reading History

Susan is an only child who has always lived alone with her mother, though her maternal grandmother is involved in her care. They live in a small terraced house with a dog and a cat and Susan's mother works part-time while Susan is at school. My visit to the house was a major event - her mother made it clear that they did not often get visitors, and Susan cleaned her room for the occasion. The relationship between mother and

daughter appeared to be one of equals. It was made clear to me that Susan was used to contributing to decisions that concerned them both and that she was, to some extent, her mother's confidante.

When asked about her own reading, Susan's mother stressed that she had enjoyed reading as a child, but that she hadn't read anything other than Susan's books for at least a year. While she was apologetic about this situation, the fact that she functioned as a kind of peer-reader for Susan is significant here. At one point in our conversation, she turned to her daughter and said:

Yeah, we've always sat and read, haven't we, and had our discussions.

This remark indicates a relationship that extended beyond the reading of the texts themselves, to a kind of booktalk. While it was clear that Susan's reading played a major part in their relationship, when asked about what she thought was important about reading fiction, if anything, Susan's mother was quick to make a comparison with television

Yeah, I'm sure it has its value, and I wish I could remember something my mother has learnt me - I mean, I read them and quite enjoy them at the time, it's just that they don't stick in your head- they just don't stay there. It's almost like the difference between watching an informative programme on the television that actually leaves something with you, that you can take with you through life, or you watch something just purely entertainment, and that's it, and it has entertainment value and within a couple of days you've forgotten.

The attitude toward fiction as ephemeral entertainment expressed here contrasts with the central role fiction appears to play in Susan's own life. Though her mother hardly ever buys books for either herself or Susan, and there are no books in evidence in the front room, she is the recipient of a huge stock of second-hand books from a number of sources. At least two hundred books are kept in numerous cardboard boxes stored upstairs, and when Susan took me up to see her room, she showed me one such box.

Neither the covers nor the spines were visible, but Susan knew them all - The Best of Beatrix Potter, Children's BBC Magazine, the Beano, etc. Her mother claimed that she had no influence in the choice of books, but stated her disapproval of 'trash' books, typified by the book of the film, Aladdin. As Susan showed me her books, she picked them up and read through them, sometimes reading selections aloud, sometimes dropping her voice involuntarily as she became involved in the story. This was a pattern of inter-action that was repeated during all of our meetings.

The modulations of voice, sometimes rhythmical, often emphasising alliteration or poetic rhythms are recognisable in terms of Kristeva's notion of the power of the semiotic, discussed in Chapter Two. Often, when telling me about a book, Susan would shift into reading the book to herself, dropping into a different degree of involvement - similar to Max's trance-like concentration - less in the room with me and more in the book.

In general, Susan displayed a dynamic tendency in her relationship to fiction, and an authoritative stance which extended to her fondness for writing stories

S: Well, I like writing stories and I like reading stories.

D: When do you write stories - do you write them at school or do you write them at home?

S: I write them at home. My most popular one is Snow White.

D: Snow White - and what do you write about Snow White?

S: There are all different ones.

D: Do different things happen in the story each time?

S: Well, I just sometimes change the beginning.

Whereas Susan demonstrated a creative tendency which placed her in a position of authority, there were evident tensions between Susan's deep involvement with storying and her mother's interest in the role her reading skill plays in her achievement in school. When asked whether she preferred to be read to or to read on her own, Susan replied, "I like to be read to" while her mother answered, "You do a lot of reading on you're

own now, don't you, just quietly". Her mother's pride in Susan's ability to read books with 'few' pictures and to reject 'easy' books, indicated a tension between reading ability and creative engagement that became more evident at times throughout the study, and was more pronounced with some of the other case studies (see Henry and Mark). It was clear, however, that during the course of the study, Susan expressed more enthusiasm for the books that her mother read with her than for those she read by herself, which she was less likely to finish.

At school, Susan was considered the top reader in Year 2. Her teacher noted that she was reading 'almost from day one' and that she stood apart from her contemporaries in her ability to draw comparisons between books. In general, however, the teacher referred to the anxiety of many parents regarding reading levels, and the general rejection of picture books for confident readers (see Chapter 5). While Susan was read to by her mother (at least at the start of the study), this was not true for many of the children in her class, and the reluctance of parents to listen to their children read, or to read to them once they had mastered the de-coding skills, was emphasised during my conversation with her teacher (see Appendix ii).

Susan's infant school has an excellently supplied library, with the majority of paperback fiction placed in dumpbins and a large selection of book/tape combinations. Much of this stock is less than a year old, and frequent book sales provide adequate funding to renew the supply annually. The children are expected to borrow one book per week and to use the small classroom library, which is folded into a wooden box when it is not being used. There is no regularly scheduled free reading time, but the teacher reads to the children every day. Susan frequently mentioned the story sessions, and chose one of her books (*Stig of the Dump*) because it was being read in class.

While books for the library are chosen by the Head of English, who visits a Book supply warehouse regularly, the class teacher chooses books that she remembers liking

at the age of 6, or that her own children enjoyed. The teacher described herself as an avid reader and when asked what was important about reading fiction, replied:

I think it - the most important thing to my mind is getting the creativity working - the imagination - they sit in front of a television and the pictures are given to them - they can't use their imaginationand I think if you're reading it, then they can make up their own pictures in their own mind and I think that's the most important thing. Use of language - if you've chosen a really good writer they can learn from that writer how to use language....

It was clear that this teacher, whose views about fiction imply a recognition of the potential of fiction to invite dynamic readings, regarded Susan as special and valued the way she inter-acted with books. Other teachers who took part in the study expressed dissatisfaction with the reading habits of the children we discussed, but then, Susan proved to be quite unusual in her involvement with books.

Book Choice Study

From the outset, Susan exerted her authority over the research situation, and defined our relationship. Our meetings took place in a corner of the school library, and her conversation was frequently interrupted with readings of the books she found on the shelves, in addition to the books I provided. Though such a situation could be seen to detract from the study, it also displayed her hunger for stories and her fondness for making up stories based on the titles or covers she saw. Her tendency to take herself elsewhere when moving into a book was displayed continually, and she would talk and read to herself in equal measure, often picking up on nonsense words or onomatopoeia, and reading them in a loud and expressive voice.

During our conversations, she talked about everything, from the books she had read, to the death of her dog and her absent father's visit, to her mother's desire to kiss Kevin Costner. She often interrupted our discussions with snatches of songs and once or twice conducted the session in gibberish. Whether she was testing me, challenging the

power relationship implied by the situation, or whether she was extending her willingness to play within the texts she read to the 'text' of the research setting, I was deliberate in allowing to her to control the events, to the extent of agreeing to an extra meeting when she grew upset by the impending end of the project.

Susan was the only child in the study who asked to look at the transcripts of our conversations, although all of the children knew that I had them with me during our meetings. She often asked to read through them, and read them aloud to me, often imitating both of our voices. This, too, demonstrated her urge to take control of the situation.

Her method of choosing books appeared to be rather arbitrary, and though she only looked at the front cover initially, she often read either an entire picture book, or a chapter of a novel before confirming her decision, and only then would she read the blurb on the back of the book. She chose books from every category and she expressed no preference, though she chose only one book from the selection of Classics. This may be due to the fact that she was familiar with all the picture books in that selection and that the others looked too difficult, or it could be because she interpreted the matching covers as indicating that they were all by the same author. She handled the books confidently and often used them in her conversations, and it is clear that the reading environment to which she had been exposed contributed significantly to her desire to handle the books.

At the first meeting, she went through every book in each box, setting them in 'yes' or 'no' piles, and at the end, she had a 'yes' pile of 24 books. She asked to take two and I agreed, and this pattern continued throughout the study. Using a similar method of selection at each meeting, she chose more or less indiscriminately, and when asked why she chose any particular book, it was clear that she was constructing a story around the

cover. However, she was equally enthusiastic about the majority of books, only rejecting those which were either familiar to her, and those with extremely small print.

As I discussed above, I was interested in what the children found worthy of comment about the books they read and so I did not ask specific questions about each book; keeping instead to open-ended questions, like "what did you like/not like?" Rather than remarking on content, Susan most often responded to form, commenting on the use of thought balloons in one book or the use of unusual dialect.

S: that man...said um....[looking through The Mystery of Musket Bay] and he said 'Cap'n and he says, um, in a funny voice....

D: What did he say in a funny voice - can you find me the bit?

S: they shoot the Captain through the leg, and he says 'I've never seen the like of 'ee.'

In general, then, Susan seemed to focus on functions of language: ways of telling, rather than on character and plot. She was particularly sensitive to alliteration and rhyme, frequently adding poetic rhythms to her reading, even when they were not explicitly indicated by the text, remarking, for instance, that The Ghost-Eye Tree was "*sort of like a rhyme when the dark is so dark, when the moon.....*".

Although I did not ask her to tell me what happened in the stories, she often chose to take me through the book, though she sometimes ended up by dropping her voice so low that she was really re-reading the story to herself. However, these re-tellings did not perform the function of demonstrating that she had read the book, but allowed her an opportunity to take on the voice of the narrator, playing with me as her listener, sustaining pauses to create suspense, and taking control of the story, often subtly changing the emphasis of the stories she had read. She responded creatively to most of the books she chose, and showed no difference between her readings of the 'dynamic' or 'static' texts.

For instance, when choosing Bailey the Big Bully, from the 'static' category, she emphasised the 'b' sound when reading the title, and said she wanted to read it because *"he [the child represented as the bully on the cover] looks like a real smarty pants."*

This book is typical of the static texts I described above - there are evident no gaps, no questions, and no puzzles, though there was an occasional detail in the pictures not referred to in the text. A monologising voice provides a lesson in how to deal with bullies and it is clear that this book is primarily intended as 'bibliotherapy'. It does not display the features of a 'polysystemic' picture book (Lewis, 1995), as the pictures merely provide an illustration of the text, yet Susan created a dynamic experience of the text through her reading of it. I did not even have a chance to ask her what she liked about the book. Before I had the tape recorder on, she had pulled out a drawing of a treehouse she had made. The treehouse might be considered as a representation of the resolution to this story, as it is in the cooperative effort of building it that Bailey recognises that he needn't be a bully anymore. Though Susan may have recognised this, it was her enthusiasm for the way in which the treehouse was presented that appeared to offer the pleasure in this reading experience.

After showing me her drawing of the treehouse, she talked me through the construction of the treehouse in the book, showing her excitement physically, with quickened movements and the occasional cry of delight.

Yeah, yeah [very excited] climbing up and they go into that house and then they can go along across here and then all across here [turning through a sequence of several pages] and um all across here and all across here.....

The retelling of the story that followed was merely secondary to the pleasure she had derived from constructing the treehouse in her reading and then afterwards, in her drawing. She had, to some extent, created an active and fulfilling experience from what I had considered a passive book in an authorial way, and continued to do this

throughout the study. Her tendency to focus on certain aspects of stories often meant that her readings were aberrant, and if I had been judging her ability to retell, she would not always have conformed to expectations of a fluent reader. However, it was clear that she was ready to take an authoritative position in the text, even when it was not offered.

The depth and individuality of Susan's engagement with the fiction she read during the study was also displayed in her tendency to stop reading when a frightening episode occurred. In some cases, her mother would read the book first and tell her not to read it, and in other cases, she would read ahead and tell Susan what had happened. In each instance, adult mediation served as an interruption between the author/reader exchange, and though it is clear that her mother was protecting her and that some aspects of some books did frighten Susan, it was also evident that she had her own strategies for dealing with them.

The extent to which she imposed an aberrant reading sometimes protected her from a disturbing message, as in her reading of Mattie and Grandpa. As described in the section on Book Selection, this conforms to my criteria for a 'dynamic' text, and it is the use of metaphor and ambiguity which offer readers opportunities to find their own interpretation that distinguishes this book. While Susan appeared to have missed an implicit theme of remembrance as a continuation of life after death, her interpretation of the ending conformed to her own needs, and what is more, enhanced her enthusiasm for the book.

D: When I spoke to you last, you'd gotten to the bit when they were with the pirates. So what did you think of the rest?

S: At the end, he's really tiny and then at the very end, he turns back to Grandpa again. [and she shows me, as proof, the picture of Mattie and his father]. See? - there's Grandpa.

A misreading such as this may indicate an inability of this reader to become the 'implied reader' of the text, but it may also demonstrate the importance of books such as this to allow the reader to tell their own story within the text, for Susan's was certainly a possible interpretation. As Lehr (1988) suggests, children of Susan's age frequently mistake the theme of a story, but offer perceptions which are consistent with the text.

Mattie and Grandpa ends on an ambiguous note

'D'you mean he's still here?' said Mattie.

Dad bit his lip.

'Yes, that's it,' he said. 'Someone we love stays with us for the whole of our life. D'you understand?'

Mattie smiled and tweaked his father's beard a little, as he often did, for fun.

(Piumini, 1993:110)

Though Susan's reading of the illustration of a small boy in a man's arms at the end suggests a mis-interpretation of the message, it also displayed her readiness to take control of the text and change it to something with which she was more comfortable. Certainly, she expressed a fondness for the book and declared it one of her favourites at the end of the study.

In a similar way, her reading of The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales indicated her willingness to reject a book because it was "*horrible and creepy*", but at the same time to be attracted enough by it to offer a 'reading' of it. Four out of the seven children in the study chose this book, and though Susan was the only girl to choose it (although she did not take it home with her) she picked it up in our final session and 'told' me the story.

S: the cheeseman, the big fat cheeseman, a big fat poopy-head and he blew up and he wee'd.

D: Do you see the stories in there?

S: Oooooo- boopy-poopy. [flicking quickly through the pages] And then we have a horrible looking frog and then we have a meow cat [pointing to a picture of a fox] and then it talked - 'meow', it said, 'meow', it said [singing]. This is exciting! -

The active participation and the authority-challenging flavour of her language are part of the same process, picking up the parodic mood of the appearance of the book and using it to subvert to adult/child relationship inherent in our interchanges. By enhancing the carnivalesque qualities of the text with her own re-telling, Susan was challenging the order of 'suitable' language for such an exchange, and derived great pleasure from doing so. The transgression inherent in the use of 'toilet' language is familiar as a challenge to adult/child power relations, suggesting a parallel between child-like language and the *carnavalesque* discussed in Chapter Two.

Susan's inter-action with books, like her inter-action with me as a researcher, was based on an assumption of her own ability to exert authority, and this clearly contributed to the pleasure she got from the books she read, and from the experience of taking part in the research. Susan's experience of book-reading, from a peer-relationship with her mother and the wide variety of books to which she had continuous access, waiting in their cardboard boxes like unseen treasure, minimised the restricting mediations which often close off such creative dialogues with fiction. Her hunger for the experiences offered by any text, as well as her eagerness to handle, re-read and play with the books themselves, was indicative of her dominance in the fiction-reading process, and while this may have led to unusual readings, the evident pleasure she indicated in the 'literary' engagement she experienced may lead her back to re-readings and re-interpretations over time. It is also possible, however, that as her mother stops reading to her, and she enters into more school-based reading, that her creative and authorial involvement with texts will be diminished.

Henry - 7 years old

The case study with Henry offered an interesting contrast to Susan, and although he was a year older, it is the difference in their reading histories and the ways in which fiction was mediated for them, that best explain the distinctions between the way their choices were made and the ways they chose to respond to the text. Despite having had

a much more restricted experience of fiction than Susan, it became clear on several occasions that, like Susan, Henry needed to take up an authoritative position; to 'play' within the texts he had chosen.

Henry was chosen by the teaching staff at his primary school. Although he was in Year 3 during the project, his involvement was proposed by his Year 2 teacher the previous year. In addition to the fact that his 'troubled' attitude toward books and his gregariousness met my criteria, it was felt that he would benefit from 'helping' with the project. It was clear that his involvement with the study provided a kind of mediation which influenced the way in which he read, and may have assisted in turning him from a reluctant, troubled reader, into the confident one he became toward the end of the project.

Reading History

Henry lives with his mother, stepfather, older sister and younger step-brother in a small terraced house in the centre of town. Although the majority of comments during our preliminary discussion were made by his mother, his step-father arrived home from work in the middle of our conversation, and provided additional remarks. Though there are some books in the front room - primarily hardcover non-fiction - most of the shelves are filled with a large selection of videos, and Henry's mother admitted that television viewing is considered an 'easier' alternative to reading. Although Henry's mother has always been an enthusiastic reader, she hasn't read anything since the birth of her youngest child, 18 months prior to the study. However, she expressed a strong preference for the kinds of books she reads:

Fiction, I like something I've got to think about - I couldn't read Mills & Boon. I say any old trash - I don't like books you can pick up in the supermarket. That's not the sort of thing I like to read... A mystery or a good thriller, I like - really anything, so long as its interesting and involved and it can be quite complicated - so I have to work it out and it doesn't tell me what's happening.

Though she described the purpose of fiction reading to be "*escapism - the ability to shut right off*", she appeared to perceive reading as a development from trash to more complex and challenging work, and commented that she '*moved on*' from the V. C. Andrews books her sister-in-law reads. Her remarks about her children's reading suggested a perception of childhood reading, in general, as popular fiction, and her concern that they were reading at all predominated, rather than any distinction between 'pulp' and 'quality' fiction.

Yes, I desperately wanted to get Kate to read Enid Blyton and her grandpa sent her a lot of Enid Blyton down and she has started to read them and says, 'oh, good, Mum, this is really good', and she's quite excited by them, which is nice because I wanted her to read them.....¹

The difference between the reading needs of children and adults is also expressed in the methods Henry's mother used to choose books. Whereas children's books were chosen from book clubs, and often by subject matter (she mentioned fiction for her 10 year old daughter, but all non-fiction for Henry), she mentioned consulting reviews and visits to the library for her own reading. It is also clear that she is strongly influenced by the cover of books she chooses for herself, although she admitted:

*we've always been told we should never go by the cover.....
If they're very bright and they're very colourful and jazzy I wouldn't look at them, because that would - I don't like modern fiction, and that would indicate that is what it's going to be to me. So I like subdued - I don't want it to tell me a great deal on the cover so that I've got to read it.*

¹ Though many commentators (Fry 1985, Rudd 1991) are ready to defend Blytonesque qualities in children's fiction on the grounds that children enjoy them, it is also important to ask whether these essentially 'static' texts deny readers the opportunity to engage dynamically with text. If early reading experiences are formative, as I suggest, then the continuous reading of purely readable (in the sense of *lisible*) texts must form expectations of what reading *can* be, and so make it more difficult to approach texts in an authoritative way.

While such comments indicate an awareness of herself as an active reader, her comments about her children's reading focused on functional ability.

It took me a long time to get used to the fact that they didn't seem to read as well as I did at that age. I was really pushing my daughter, pushing her, which was wrong of me.

In general, a great deal of anxiety was expressed about the reading ability of both Henry and his sister, and it is clear that reading is a site of conflict in the household.

I'll have to fight with him to get him to read and then he'll go to school and tell the teacher one story and tell me another story as to why he hasn't read and eventually we'll catch him out.

His teacher supported these comments and also agreed with his mother that Henry was a very competitive reader, always concerned to be ahead of his nearest rival in the reading scheme. There was evidence of this during the study.

The functional difficulties that Henry had with his reading may be attributed to the tension between his desire to be read to, and his mother's reluctance to read to him. Henry was not read to as a small child, as his mother had gone back to work, and throughout the study, her reluctance to read to him directly affected his response to the books he chose. While his mother suggested that he would rather read than be read to, the evidence from the study indicates the opposite. Both his mother and his teacher commented on his tendency to choose books well beyond his ability, and it appears that his desire to be read to motivated these choices. However, the thwarting of these desires continually frustrated him.

The emphasis at school, expressed in the Reading Policy document, is on engendering a desire to learn to read. Each teacher has her/his own way of approaching free reading, and Henry's class spends the first twenty minutes of each day with their

reading book. Twice a week they can choose their own books, and often share them. These are usually joke or puzzle books. The books in the carpeted book area are chosen by the teacher, or by the children from the Mobile Library. The teacher's choices are based on what the children tell her they like, or she watches what they choose at book fairs.

The children have a storytime three times a week, either a chapter from a longer book, or a shorter book which could contribute to topic work. Sometimes story tapes are used in place of the teacher reading, leaving her time to work with children that are having difficulties. The teacher reads books that she liked having read to her as a child, and has a collection of children's books at home, and while she reads fiction herself, "*as relaxation, for escape*", she admitted during our conversation that there is a different purpose for fiction in the classroom - "*getting [children] to think about their own stories.*" However, the books she read to them during the period in which I was conducting the research were most often those that the children chose themselves. Some, like Pongwiffy and the Goblin's Revenge, were included in the 'static' category - though very popular with the children, such a text offered little potential for a dynamic engagement. Here, the need to get children to enjoy reading has been answered by a dependence on the popular, rather than a presumption that giving them more challenging fare would help them discover their own voices within the text.

The teacher estimated that a quarter of the class read as a hobby, but that many have no books at home and no-one listens to their reading. She advocates a wide range of reading matter, and often deals with problem readers by changing the kind of material they are reading. She described Henry as a problem reader, attributing his anxiety about reading to his competitiveness. Because he is so anxious to get to the end of the book, he glosses over words and cannot re-tell the story afterwards.

Book Choice Study

The background provided by Henry's reading history explained a great deal about the way in which he went about choosing the books, and about the way he chose to respond to them. The design of the study allowed me to observe his reading behaviour in a way that other reading research could not, for both the open-ended questioning, and the continuity of the study over time offered evidence of the way differently mediated readings influenced his expectations about what it was to be a reader of fiction. In addition, consideration of his readings within the context of his reading history demonstrated the effectiveness of this kind of research method to explain the way that adult mediations construct children as readers and how such contexts impinge on the ability of children to find a voices for themselves within the discourses of fiction.

At the beginning of the study, Henry did not see himself as a 'reader'. His perception of reading appeared to rest on the reading he does *to* his mother or his teacher, rather than on reading for himself. However, as his mother pointed out, he had not been read *to*, either, and continual references to this situation were made throughout our sessions together. When asked about what he used to like when he was smaller, he said "*Yeah, then my mum read me stories.*" His tendency to choose books well beyond his reading age was often justified with the promise that his mother would read to him, and it became clear after our second meeting that she would not. Occasionally, he would claim that she had read him a chapter a night, but afterwards he admitted that she only read a couple of paragraphs.

Though this desire to be read to clearly influenced his choices, the denial of that desire impinged on his confusion over reading and his competitiveness in school. An interesting exchange between Henry and one of his classmates took place during our first meeting. His eagerness to choose a book from the Classics box was interrupted by the arrival of Philip, who needed to choose a book from the reading scheme (Ginn

360). Henry ran up to him at the bookshelf and they proceeded to have a heated argument over who was ahead in that section - pushing each other in the effort to look through the books to find the one they were 'on'. After several minutes of shouting and struggling, there was a triumphant shout from Philip:

P: So I AM ahead of you!!! (Henry drags him over to the table in the Library where my trays are set out.)

H: (Showing him White Fang) See what I've got? If I asked you to choose one book from all these, what would you choose?

P: I'd choose, I'd choose.....

T: I probably think you'd choose that one (Spectral Stalkers) or this one (Cry of the Wolf) [both clearly books for older readers].

P: Probably not, I'd choose Alice in Wonderland - no, I wouldn't. (After glancing at the collection, he leaves)

Though Henry had no comment on this interchange, it was clear from his behaviour that the status of being a 'real reader' involved the thick, sparsely illustrated text he had chosen, and his inability to read it, coupled with his mother's unwillingness to read it to him, marked the frustration he experienced continually.

When it came to our next meeting, Henry admitted that, though he had succeeded in getting his mother to read one page to him, he had not understood it. His mother told him to choose something easier, and so he turned to the picture books. He was attracted to The Sandal (see Book Selection - Mismatches), and, confused by the wordless format, welcomed my offer to look at it with him. He sat close to me and put his thumb in his mouth as I turned the wordless pages. As the pictures changed size in the transition between Past and Present, Henry began to tell, often using musical tones, as Max did, to describe the shrinking and growing of the frame size,

H: It falls down, then it goes through there and then it gets smaller and smaller and beep, beep, beep. Where is that sandal?....noin,noin,noin.

As we looked through the book, he suddenly became very excited, jumped up in the chair, cried out "*Oooh, I get it!*" and rushed from the room with his book. This sense of sudden discovery in the midst of confusion clearly gave him confidence in his interpretative powers, for when he returned the following week, he had read the book five times. In addition, he asked to give me his reading, and not only was he thrilled to show me what he had discovered (using animated language and gesture and occasionally crying out when he had discovered something new), but also proudly read the written part of the text with confidence and fluency.

Well, I liked it - at the bit where - where is it? [all the time turning pages, examining parts that he has obviously become well acquainted with over the two weeks] 'cause, look, wait a minute - her - it's her - she liked the steps and running on the steps and climbing and then she does it, too. And I like, too, you see that? No, you know bikes? - look! [shows me the bike in the museum case] BIKE!!! and look at that, it is the same. Yes, the SAME!!!

His enthusiasm for this book, which I would argue was due to his own ability to become involved in the telling and to demonstrate his control over the reading experience, led him to choose another picture book. While he had previously chosen by merely picking up a book and saying "*this is good*", he began to take more time over the books and, like Susan, began to read the book during the choosing process, becoming involved in the pictures, reading the onomatopoeic words out loud, and occasionally speaking under his voice.

His response to his next choice (The Ghost Eye Tree - Control) was different again. He returned having read it "*many, many times*" and, what is more, his mother had read it to him. When asked what he liked about it, he, like Susan, picked up on stylistic features rather than content, mentioning phrases like "*horrible hat*" and saying with a swagger:

I liked it when he says "I'm tough, I ain't afraid of no ghost!"

The tendency to pick up on one phrase, or to identify particular uses of language when expressing likes and dislikes, suggests a sensitivity in younger children to different ways of telling (Meek, 1988) that is independent of a sophistication of reading skills. Though Henry had been labelled as a failure at demonstrating his story comprehension to his teacher, he was clearly captivated by the opportunity to take on the voices in the books he was reading, and enjoyed repeating phrases of which he was particularly fond. In this way, he was also taking control of the reading experience - playing the author - and his position within these two picture books brought him a new sense of pleasure. He kept The Ghost Eye Tree for a second fortnight.

Finally, he chose The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales, which provided him with further opportunities to discover different voices. He suggested that the cover attracted him to it in the first place, challenging the perception of the book buyers who refused to stock it because of its appearance (see Chapter Six):

I like these pictures - they look good and funny and I can make things about them.

Upon discovering the Blah's on the back cover, he ran off to the classroom, and could be heard reading them to several of his friends. On his return to the next session, he needed to show me what he had recognised in the books and again, his enthusiasm was expressed through a physicality that was absent from his earlier responses to the impressively adult books he had originally chosen.

At the end of the study, his teacher commented that he had suddenly 'taken off' as a reader, and had become much more confident. While this kind of change can happen suddenly, I would like to suggest that the opportunity to discover a way of reading that allowed him to experience a sharing of authority within the texts and within the non-

pedagogic setting of the study, may have contributed to his desire and motivation. It may also be that his enthusiasm encouraged his mother to be more involved in the books he had chosen, and that his need to be read to was being answered.

Catherine - 10 years old

While, from the perspective of the publishing industry, 10 year olds are likely to be more influential in the decisions made about their reading matter than infant school children and pre-readers, the evidence from the teachers and parents who participated in this study indicated a greater anxiety about their reading, either in terms of the lack of time spent reading as compared to screen-based activities, or the kind of material that was being read. The study produced by the Children's Literature Research Centre (1994) also indicated that children in this age group, now free from the strictures of a reading scheme, expressed a need for more help in choosing their books. The confusion of this position, free from the need to prove functional literacy, but still influenced by the expectations formed by pedagogic pressures, can be observed in the transcripts of both the 10 year olds taking part in the study. Whereas Mark's (described in the following study) involvement with the research and his willingness to talk about the books he had read awakened an undiscovered enthusiasm for fiction, Catherine's general disinterest in the study itself meant that it was difficult to gauge either her expectations or her responses.

An Interrupted Case Study - Laura

The tensions which surround this age group can be examined in the case of Laura, a ten-year-old who was chosen to take part in the study during the preliminary phase, but whose parents removed her before the study began. I chose Laura in order to include a child from a public school, and both her teacher and her parents (both of whom were

teachers) agreed that she could take part. However, in the week before the study was to begin, her mother telephoned me to say that she was being withdrawn. When asked what the reason was, I was told that her parents had spent all summer

trying to get Laura to read just one book and we feel that any more pressure on her to read will push her over the edge.

Although I made it clear that I would not be putting pressure on Laura, but rather, would be giving her an opportunity to do what she wanted with books, and that I was not only interested in enthusiastic readers, her parents remained adamant. What is more, they had not spoken to Laura about the study, and did not want to ask her what she thought about it.

The anxiety about reading expressed by Laura's mother is based on expectations of what a child 'should' be reading that reflects on adult/child power relations which silence the child. The pressure to conform to 'approved' reading patterns, in this case, appears to have created a common situation of conflict. By refusing to read, Laura was resisting parental efforts of control, and demonstrated an ability to exert her authority over her reading. A similar need to reverse power relations through reading was demonstrated with the older children in this study. While Mark demonstrated his resistance by restricting his reading to Point Horror and Stephen King, Catherine refused to go beyond very simple texts, although her skill as a strong reader was evident.

Reading History

Catherine is the eldest of two and lives with her parents in a modern terraced house in the middle of town. Her mother agreed to meet with me, but her father declined, though no reason was given. She described herself as a very enthusiastic reader and reads fiction daily. She has a selection of her own books in the room in which we met,

and is a frequent visitor to the library and second-hand bookshops, most frequently choosing her reading by author, by review or recommendation from her sisters, and by reading the first few pages. Books for her children are chosen in a similar way, and she mentioned a preference for buying them books which she enjoyed herself, although she was apologetic about the fact that she often tries to impose her taste without success.

CM: ...a lot of things actually I find and I say, 'Oh, this is brilliant - you must read this book and she reads it and doesn't like it, so I'll read to her then - I think it's just getting into the book, she needs to be pushed - no, not pushed into it, push to start off.

D: Do you tend to recommend things you would have liked? You mentioned Judy Blume.

CM: Yeah, I do. I think sometimes I shouldn't do that really. I'm sort of forcing my taste on her, you know. What was it I got? Oh, Stig of the Dump because I can remember reading that and The Iron Man and things like that - I think maybe I bought them for them when they were too young and expected them to read them because I thought they were great, but they're quite complicated books, really, aren't they? - but I do try not to force my opinions on them too much. I find it difficult - because I really loved reading when I was younger.

Catherine clearly does not conform to the expectations her mother has of a reader. Although she was read to from a very early age and was a quick learner, she shows very little perseverance with challenging books and often chooses the soft option, re-reading one of her collection of Roald Dahl's books, rather than reading something new. Her teacher, too, observed a disjunction between Catherine's reading level and her choice of material. She is quick to give up on a book because it is "*too difficult*".

As I have discussed above, repetitive reading is one way of achieving a semblance of authorial control, and it may be that Catherine's familiarity with Dahl's work and her dependence on easy texts allows her to 'possess' the text.

Catherine's primary school was the first to respond to my original mailing, and were also the first to provide me with their Reading Policy. This is a very impressive

document, complete with references and a list of books for parents to read with their pre-school children. The document states

At [this school], we believe that literature is of great importance in any language work undertaken at the school. "Stories and poems, both made and received are both natural and necessary to human experiences, and have a crucial bearing on how children see themselves, their world, and their part in it."

However, the situation within the school does not necessarily match the documentation, and Catherine's teacher, who was new to the school, had not seen it. The school is large and rambling, and several of the larger common areas have small carpeted sections set aside as book corners. The book stock was old and worn, and although there was evidence, toward the end of my time there, that new books had been purchased, the arrangement of books was haphazard and untended.

Each classroom also has a box of fiction books, and there is a library which holds the stock of reading schemes. While Catherine's teacher claimed that the titles were 'worthy', she had not chosen them, and intended to make what she considered a more appropriate selection when she received the funding. The class has 20 minutes of free reading every day and the teacher either reads to them daily or plays them a story tape. The children must provide a book review for the whole class each month, and rate the books out of ten. The class had reading ages varying from 6 - 14, and Catherine was considered to be at the top of this range.

The teacher estimated that approximately 30% of the children in that class read regularly out of school, and while she described it as an atypical class, she noted that only 15% of parents attended Parent's evening (Catherine's were not among them), all of which disappointed her. Like the other teachers in the study, she pointed out that it

was possible to tell a reader by what they write, and that many of the children in her class had never been read to and had no books at home.

When asked what was important about reading fiction, the teacher replied:

Why do I read it - for enjoyment, why do I read it to them - for enjoyment....um...development of language, ideas, broadening horizons, vocabulary, creativity, imagination, or good gracious me, how long is a piece of string?....It is very important - it's fun - it's using words and seeing words used.

The attitudes expressed here indicate a perception about the uses of fiction far beyond the utilitarian and suggest that Catherine's reading environment is supportive. The disappointment expressed by both her mother and her teacher, however, indicate the expectations they have of her as a strong reader.

Book Choice Study

I consider the choice of Catherine to be the only unsuccessful selection made during the study process. This was largely due to a string of misunderstandings that arose during the preliminary stages of my research, when the Head Teacher acted as an intermediary with the Year 5 teachers. Though I had stated my criteria clearly, the Head Teacher decided that I must use a strong reader, and when I met with a pre-selected group of six ten-year-olds, I found that few of them fulfilled any of the criteria. In fact, following that group session, their teacher made it clear that three of them would not be able to take part, as one was 'difficult and disruptive', one had severe reading problems and a third had 'very uncooperative parents'. At this point it was too late to start again, and as I had already chosen a ten-year-old boy from another

school, I chose Catherine, one of two girls who had said almost nothing during the group session.

She continued to be fairly silent throughout our conversations, responding in one or two word sentences, and offering very little insight into what she thought of the books she chose. In addition, she often forgot to bring books back with her, occasionally for a month at a time, so that she had forgotten about her reading of a book by the time we had it in front of us again. In contrast to the younger children, who handled the books frequently and used them when talking to me about their responses, Catherine separated herself from the books as much as possible. Either she was extremely forgetful, or she was extremely uninterested - the absence of the books made conversations about response very difficult.

When asked why she liked reading fiction, she replied that she did not know, and while she made it clear that she chose books by the size of the print and used the blurb on the back to determine how easy it would be to read, she rarely said more than, "*looks good.*" Her responses were similar - most books were "OK" or sometimes "*I didn't like it that much, but it was good.*" When asked to expand on such comments, she would shrug or smile.

In the midst of such a lack of enthusiasm, it was interesting to note that when she chose to comment on a like or dislike, it was always about the method of telling, rather than the story itself, or characters. For instance, she was taken with the double narrative of A Boy in the Doghouse (static category)

one chapter would be the boy telling the story and then the next chapter after that would be the dog. So it would be dog training for the boy and boy training for the dog. I liked it when the dog talked.

However, she found it difficult to expand on remarks about personal responses such as this, as illustrated by our conversation about Stig of the Dump. This is a book, from the Classics category, that she had started the year before on her mother's recommendation and had never finished. Another attraction may have been that it was the shortest of the non-picture books in that box. Her response was unusually full for her, and I spent a large part of a session trying to find out what her struggle was.

D: So tell me what you thought of it, because you said that you started it once before and then put it down.

C: Well, it was OK, but I didn't enjoy it as much as I thought I would.

D: Can you tell me more about that? What was different to what you expected?

C: Mmm [long pause] I don't know [makes a face].

D: Was it what happened in the story, or what it was like to read?

C: More what it was like to read? [she phrased this as a question, as though asking me whether she was right].

D: Was it disappointing right away?

C: No, it was quite good at the beginning.

D: Can you tell me where it began to get less good [Catherine looks puzzled]. I'm just trying to get an idea of why you thought it didn't match up.

This conversation struggled on for several minutes and, after talking about the parts that she *did* like, she finally found a way of explaining it.

D: Did you expect something to happen that didn't happen?

C: Mmmm. Yes.....

D: Can you tell me what you thought was going to happen that didn't?

C: Well, I thought he might take Stig home with him, from what happened in the beginning.

D: Was that something you would have liked to have seen? Would you have liked to see Stig stay and change to be like Barney?

C: Well, he could have come and he would try and he would find it difficult to do things that they did.

While my persistence may have allowed Catherine time to arrive at the key to her disappointment with the book, the struggle it took to get to this point indicated how strange talking about her own feelings about what she was reading was to her. She often gave me a written book report-style paragraph on the books she had read, but talking about what *she* thought, or what it was like reading the book was very difficult for her. Though her mother often read the books she chose during the study, or, in this case, encouraged her to continue reading, they did not discuss the books as peer-readers, according to Catherine.

Her response to Stig of the Dump fit in well with her tendency to read books aimed at younger readers and to read them only once. She frequently explained this as a preference for books "*that can be read quickly*", as well as funny books and those that had happy endings. I suggest that when her expectations were threatened by doubts about Stig's 'reality' toward the end of the book, she was uncomfortable with the ambiguity inherent in this blend of fantasy/realism. The notion of having to make her own decision about his existence challenged her usual passive way of reading. The gap that was left in the book for her to fill left her puzzled, and she did not finish it, despite her mother's cajoling.

While Catherine was a competent reader, she did not appear to be a 'dynamic' reader, and though she expressed enjoyment in her reading, there was never an indication of any enthusiasm or creative involvement in any of the books she chose when she was with me. Even when choosing picture books, which she did frequently, her responses gave no indication of pronounced preferences. Her difficulties with the research situation and her unwillingness to express her own opinion, were, I think, related to this reluctance to take on an authoritative role in her engagement with fiction. Whether this was due to her age, or because she had not experienced the pleasure of exerting authority, either within the text or within the mediations which surrounded her interactions with fiction, there is not enough evidence to determine.

Mark - 10 years old

Mark, like Catherine, was chosen from a group of six children selected by his Y5 teacher, with whom I discussed my research during the preliminary phase of the research. His group was well chosen, and while Mark was not the most able and experienced reader there, his lack of interest in anything but horror books made him a suitable candidate for the study. Throughout our casual conversation about reading interests and reading activities at school, he was not the most dominant voice in the group, but he frequently took the opportunity to challenge me and to subvert the conversation.

When asked if they remembered any picture books, Mark said "*The Beano*", and when the group expressed their general dissatisfaction with the books they read in school and I asked what they would choose, he called out "*Horror books*." The other boys in the group followed his lead in this, and though these comments were often greeted with laughter, it was clear that they were issuing me, as an adult, a challenge and attempting to get a reaction. Following our conversation, I gave them a pile of Jon Scieszka's books to look at, and then read them The True Story of the Three Little Pigs, after asking them what they expected. All enjoyed the story and agreed that they had expected a picture book to be for younger children except Mark, who said "*I didn't think it was going to be for younger kids*." However, he couldn't tell my why.

While Catherine was extremely passive in her group discussion (perhaps due to the disruptive behaviour of the three boys in the group), Mark appeared to have strong preferences, and seemed to be testing me throughout. He turned out to be an excellent choice of subject, and while he was less confrontational in our 'private' meetings, he approached the research situation deliberately and conscientiously, providing me with a written report on each book.

Reading History

Mark's parent both have degrees and also have a younger daughter, who is disabled. They live in an Edwardian semi-detached house, and both agreed to meet with me (see Appendix ii for a full transcript). Mark's father, a designer, admitted to having been an 'obsessive' reader but, due to the pressures of work-related reading, has little time for fiction now. He expressed a preference for the Russian novelists, and tends to read the same few books over and over, often merely picking up the story in the middle. Though he couldn't remember a book he had bought for himself in the last year, he liked to browse in second-hand shops for books. He prefers not to talk about what he has read, but recognises that reading fiction is important in terms of personal fulfilment.

I suppose it's a learning thingit stimulates one's imagination, things like that, but it's hard to relate to it when things you are doing are so much down to earth.....I think you do sort of drift away from it.

Mark's mother admitted that she doesn't read as much fiction as she would like to, and misses it. She chooses her reading either from W H Smith's Top Ten, or from recommendations from friends, though she could not remember a book she had bought for herself in the last year. To her, fiction is

important for relaxation, really and possibly that's why I feel I don't do enough of it - it's an enjoyable thing, picking up a book, because you can totally relax and turn off and become involved and anticipate, you know....

Both parents differentiated between the benefits of fiction for themselves and for children, in that it "*helps with spelling and punctuation.*"

Mark was read to from a very early age by both of his parents, took part in Library activities and was regularly taken to the local Literary Festival events. He picked up

reading gradually, though his mother was unhappy with the lack of encouragement for home-based reading at this last school. He was moved to his current school in an effort to find a more 'structured' reading policy.

It was clear, however, that there was a conflict between his parents about the current situation with his reading. Similar to other families in the study, both parents indicated an awareness that he would still like to be read to, and his mother expressed anxiety about whether listening to stories helped or hindered his independence as a reader.

We always read to him until a year ago, and then we thought....I started to read the beginning of the chapter, to encourage him to finish the chapter, but it didn't work - he just wanted me to read it, really. So.... yeah, I suppose I feel that I could actually still maybe read to him, but then I think, he really ought to be able to pick them up himself. I mean, what age do you carry on reading to them? Eighteen?

Similar anxieties were expressed about his fondness for story tapes, and though Mark's father clearly encouraged his use of them, his mother said "*it is the lazy way.*" It was obvious throughout our conversation that they had different approaches to his reluctance to read. While his mother bought books for him or chose them from the Library and would like him to be more like his 'bookworm' friends, his father expressed a contentment with his preference for computer magazines and comics. Recently, they attempted to counter Mark's request to read Stephen King's *It* by choosing some 'thriller-type' books for his age group for him, but he rejected them; during the course of the study, Mark's father read some Stephen King before giving it to Mark.

At school, similar anxieties were expressed about a predilection for horror books, not only about Mark, but also about a large proportion of his class. This junior school had recently begun a programme of Reading Workshops, influenced by an American programme (outlined in Corbett, Haynes and Jeffries, 1993). The emphasis is on talking about books that are chosen and read by the children in a non-prescriptive way.

These sessions create an informal and non-threatening atmosphere, and the aim is to 'give children the feeling that they are making a contribution, instead of just taking a passive role' (School Reading Policy, 1994). The aim of these workshops sessions is to increase "awareness of a writer's choice of particular words and phrases and the effect on the reader," as well as on the use of nonsense words and examples of "how words can be played with." Advice to parents in the Reading Policy document supports these aims. Parents are encouraged to talk to their children about what they have read in terms of what they did or did not like.

This approach to reading encourages the kinds of inter-action proposed by Chambers (1993) and, by giving children a voice in the discourse of fiction implied by such a setting, posits a way of reading that is 'dynamic.' However, such a dialogue depends on a particular role for the teacher (discussed above) and, like the disjunction between policy and practice evident at Catherine's school, my discussion with Mark's teacher revealed a conflict between his perception of fiction and the central role it appeared to have in the school's philosophy.

While Mark's teacher does hold Reading Workshops, and allows children to choose their own material (with some limits), the attitude toward fiction he expressed during our conversation undercuts the potential of such a progressive policy. Free reading and reading to the class are the first thing to go when there is pressure of time (see Chapter 5), and there were several weeks during the study when there was no reading because the class were working on an IT project. Because Mark's teacher is not himself a reader of fiction, his influence, both direct and indirect, cuts across any positive messages his pupils have received earlier in the school. To a question about general parental concerns about children's reading, he replied:

It's quite interesting - there's a split really, between parents who say, we can't stop them reading.....now, I think there's various reasons for that - sometimes the children genuinely love reading - sometime I think it's

because the children don't particularly mix, funnily enough, with their own family and they find books a bit of a retreat from that - and at other times you get parents who say they don't read at all, or they used to read when they were younger, but now [...] and I try to stress to the children that they will find it harder and harder to actually read because of the competition of subject homework - and it certainly happened to me - when I went to Secondary School, I stopped reading for good then [...] I read twice a year on holiday and that's it.

One must wonder how someone who does not read fiction, or children's fiction for that matter, can engage in a workshop programme which sets out to encourage children to take an active role in talking about fiction, or to offer advice on books to the 20% of his class who, he claimed, like to read. While Mark's Year 5 teacher conducted a study that revealed that most of the children in her class chose books well below their reading age, this teacher appeared to have little involvement or commitment to improving the situation, but merely a weary acceptance.

The classroom book corner had "evolved" from a number of sources, though most had been on the shelves for four or five years. A smattering of 'classics' is represented here, and a great deal of historical fiction, but Mark claimed most children never choose these. The children are sent out to make the choices from the Library van, and though the School Library stocks the Kaleidoscope collection, this teacher was not letting his students use it yet, as he felt *"they have enough to choose from as it is."* When vetting the books children choose for their reading groups, he checks the vocabulary for age suitability, and, during the course of the study, he banned the frequently chosen Point Horror books from the classroom without having read them. He commented:

there's no way there's time to read it yourself - you have to sort of rely on hope, at times, that the literature is OK.

At the same time, he admitted that fiction can be dangerous, as in the case of Point Horror which, he assumed, give children nightmares, and he attributed the growth in teenage anxieties in the past ten years on *"Judy Blume-type books."*

As far as Mark was concerned, he was considered a confident enough reader, and as such, had been more or less ignored by the teacher, who suggested that he did not need much help, though he needed pushing to read at his level. "*Shaken but not stirred*" was the phrase his teacher used.

Book Choice Study

The major difficulty with this particular case study was Mark's tendency to mumble. Even when I held the microphone up to his face, it was difficult to hear him. However, this changed as the study progressed, and as he became accustomed to me, he spoke more clearly and more openly.

Although he admitted a preference for playing with his Nintendo and reading computer magazines, Mark expressed very strong opinions and was extremely clear about why he chose particular books. He was responsive to the marketing strategies of the publishing industry, and peer approval also appeared to be important to him. He looks for "*a good cover - something that stands out - colourful, and then I read the back.*" It is the eye-catching covers of the Point Horror series that draw him in, particularly if there is a lot of blood. He was disappointed that I had nothing like it in my collection. He did latch on to Spiral Stalkers, and mentioned that he had several of this series at home, though he said he found them frustrating and has never reached the end of one.

Like Catherine, he favoured books that could be read quickly, and he found it difficult to talk about his responses to the books, other than providing a précis and a statement about his "*best character*", echoing written reports he had done for me. It was clear that his parents were very interested in his participation in the study and often expressed approval or disapproval of his choices. He obviously expected comments

like this, and it is probable that his attraction to horror, and pulp fiction generally, allowed him to challenge his parents' view of 'appropriate' reading matter. This gave him pleasure and he frequently told me about reactions of his parents and his teacher to his reading preferences with a broad and mischievous smile on his face.

In the same way that Catherine chose to talk about features of language when asked what she liked about a book, Mark frequently mentioned puns, alliteration and uses of unusual dialect. He showed a preference for books that looked "*weird*", though he was disappointed with Alice in Wonderland, which he chose for that reason. His expectations of this book were evidently based on the Disney film, and while the graphics on the cover may have reminded him of the anarchy of that adaptation, he was uncomfortable with the dream frame and the confusion between sense and nonsense.

He frequently used 'realistic' and 'unrealistic' as measurements of failure and success, and while he declared a general dislike of 'realistic' fiction, he found it difficult to make sense of the fluctuating degrees of 'unrealism' in Alice. He steered clear of the Classics box after that.

The most striking feature of the study with Mark were the changes that took place following his choice of The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales. After glancing at it a few times, and recognising it from the group session, he finally picked it, because "*it looks weird.*" His response to the book was very positive, but it was the physical aspect of his response that I would like to note here. While his written response told me that he had picked up on the allusions to fairy tales and to the subversion of the book form, his behaviour indicated a new kind of pleasure and excitement, reminiscent of Susan's reactions to many of the books she had read, and Henry's response to the same book. He spoke to me about it very energetically, and

spent a lot of time handling the book, at times re-reading it to himself rather than to me, laughing aloud. As he looked through the book, he commented on the presence of the narrator.

it was like - it's good the way Jack the Narrator kind of like comes up every so often [showing me on several different pages] and he's got his own story, I like when that happens.

In contrast to his other choices, he read it "*quite a few times*," and had shown it to his parents, his teacher (who said, "*Looks strange*"), and several of his friends. It was remembered as one of his favourite books, and he subsequently chose the other Scieszka in the collection (*The Good, The Bad and the Goofy*). What is more, from this point in the study, he became more involved in the process of choosing, spending a longer period of time and handling more of the books. He also was more animated in discussion and made more comments about the disjunction between the expectations the cover and blurbs had given him and his response to the book.

It is the power of this particular book, more than any of the other texts in the Dynamic category discussed earlier in this chapter, to subvert, not only the fairy tale texts, but the peri-textual features of a book that may have contributed to his strong response. By drawing attention to, and parodying, the cover blurb, for instance, the author and illustrator play a meta-fictional game with the reader which is at once shocking and liberating. Mark's fondness for challenging the authoritative positions of controlling adults, particularly in his rebellious attachment to *Point Horror*, has already been remarked upon, and I suggest that the possibilities of sharing such transgressions within the text of *The Stinky Cheese Man* offered Mark a sense of power which gave him a new kind of pleasure. The book had shown him what it is to be a reader of fiction; the novelty had made him newly aware of himself in the act of inter-acting with the author (Meek, 1988), drawing attention to the constructedness of fiction and the duality of his function as a reader. Though Mark still had difficulty articulating his

interested in trying books that, at first, seemed uninteresting, and then talking through the experience of what it was like to read them.

While it is perhaps too strong a claim to make for one book, it is possible that Mark's experience of reading it, in combination with the opportunity he had within the study to choose from a variety of books, allowed him to discover something about himself as a reader of fiction. His final comments about taking part in the study were about his pleasure at having "*tried other kinds of things*", and this fondness for exploration has continued since the end of the study.

His mother informed me, when I asked for feedback following the end of the project, that he had become a constant reader, and when I met her again by chance a year later, she confirmed that Mark remained an adventurous reader, and had become very interested in English at his secondary school. Although she attributed this new attitude to his participation in this study, it is more likely to be a combination of factors. However, the research setting, by providing Mark with a book-centred discourse in which he was in control, probably contributed to this transformation.

Teresa - 13 years old

The decision to include secondary school children in this study made it possible to investigate the changes in response as the educational discourses of fiction reading and social pressures surrounding readers continue to shift. As the movement through primary school, from functional literacy toward interpretation, continues, the assumption that such groundwork will provide the necessary basis for more sophisticated critical reading to take place implies a more sophisticated kind of response. While the emphasis is more likely to be on 'deep' readings of a few carefully chosen texts, the value-laden cultural supremacy of Literature is promoted (see Chapter Five).

At this time, the gap between what *should* be read and what one wants to read (or not read, since *not* reading is a frequently chosen option), widens. This, perhaps, has as much to do with the social discourses which surround notions of control, as it does with the way that 'literature' is dealt with in the English classroom and, though the development of Response theory has contributed to a focus on individual response in Secondary and Tertiary education, the imposition of a new set of rules for talking about fiction comes into conflict with a child's independence as a consumer (see Chapter Six).

While the re-emphasis on response evident in some recent commentary must be welcomed, the way in which individual reading histories influence the extent to which a more open approach to literature is welcomed must also be considered. If a child comes into this new environment with expectations derived from closed and static inter-actions with fiction, then the study of literature will be more likely to be perceived in terms of right and wrong answers. However, if a child has been enabled by a dynamic relationship with fiction and recognises that a reader has a role in the making of meaning, a teacher who acknowledges the importance of personal response can support discovery (Corcoran, 1994).

As the last two case studies show, the attitudes of those who mediate literature at this level also impinges on the way that reading fiction is perceived and, while inspirational teaching may awaken a more dynamic way of reading, dominant perceptions of the purpose of fiction only widen the gap between the excitement of personal reading and the static approach to literary study.

The two 13-year-olds who took part in the study provide an interesting contrast. While Teresa shared many of the features of Mark's reading history and found it difficult to acknowledge a place for her own opinions within the research setting, Paul,

whose background was more like Susan's, used the study to return to reading fiction, and made some sophisticated discoveries about himself as a reader.

Reading History

Teresa is the third of four daughters, and attends the local Grammar School. Her family is relatively prosperous and though her father was at home for my meeting, he declined to take part in the discussion, as he never reads fiction. While there were no books in evidence, Teresa's mother pointed out that her daughters all have their own book collections, and frequently share books. She, herself, reads fiction frequently and chooses either bestsellers or by recommendation from friends, though she admitted that she often makes bad choices.

She perceives herself to be the most influential fiction reader in the family, and defined reading fiction, as several other parents did, in relation to television viewing, though she did not go beyond stating a preference for reading. She read to all her daughters until they could read themselves, at about the age of seven. She considers it her responsibility to choose books for her daughters and oversee their reading, although she commented that she doesn't talk to them about their reading.

sometimes I will most probably ask them why they don't like it, because I think they should like it.....I don't really like what Teresa reads, but I'd rather she read than not read.

The distinction between what Teresa likes to read and what she should be reading is made repeatedly during our discussion, and a great deal of disapproval is expressed in regard to her preferences. Her mother expressed the thought that she should be reading books "*with more to them*" but only described her idea of good reading in the negative.

Oh, I don't know, really, just anything that's not Point Horror - or Babysitter's Club - we've been through those as well - that's why I think it's just a phase, I hope. But I've never read them - it's just that the covers look awful and she's told me about them and they sound awful.

It appears that the covers have a great deal to do with the conflict that surrounds these books, and it is the unwillingness of parents and teachers to look beyond the cover in their condemnation of this reading matter that may attract Mark, Teresa and many other readers to these books. Whereas Sarland (1994 a,b) emphasises the content of Point Horror and the way in which they are read, he appears to disregard the power of the peri-textual features to place such texts at the centre of adult/child battles for control. It is this aspect of Point Horror and like publications that marketing strategists exploit with great success, and I would argue that, rather than finding themselves in the books, readers of such material find themselves by exerting authority through their own reading choices, challenging parental desires for them to read 'approved' and 'award-winning' classics of Children's Literature.

While this may be true for Teresa, her mother also attributed her reading habits to laziness, and argued that she has always had to choose books on Teresa's behalf. Though they do not discuss what Teresa reads at school, she has often asked her mother to read the books she is assigned if she has to do an essay. This, I suspect, has to do with her lack of confidence in what to think about books, and Teresa indicated that, rather than considering her mother a peer-reader, she sees her as a superior and authoritative reader.

Teresa attends a selective Grammar school which has a national reputation for excellence. Despite the academic capability of the students, and acknowledgement that the entrance examination registers a high degree of reading fluency, informal research within the English Department has indicated that interest in leisure reading pursued by

the students is surprisingly low. The Head of English, who was also Teresa's teacher at the time of the study, expressed concern over the small proportion of spare time the majority of students spent reading in comparison to television viewing, in addition to the restrictive nature of what they were reading. Though he approximated that 50% of pupils still read regularly, it appears to be largely adult pulp fiction. He considered this to be one of the primary reasons for the difficulties he and his colleagues have in choosing books that the students are willing to read, as well as the fact that his students "*have little in common when it comes to fiction.*"

No written Reading Policy was made available to me, as it was continually being "*rewritten in the light of Dearing*". However, this teacher did offer an ad hoc policy - "*read as much as you can*". The department as a whole continues to challenge the strictures of the National Curriculum, and were considering setting their own exams rather than GCSEs, but at Year 9, they each make their book choices individually, based on personal preference and appropriateness for the group.

This teacher expressed a need to make "*a conscious attempt to be literary*" and thus considers it necessary to choose books which are not children's books. Although he does not offer his students recommended reading lists, other teachers do, and these are exclusively adult fiction. The belittling of children's fiction here is obvious, but not surprising, as the academic philosophy of the school echoes the predominant view of the Academy at large (see Chapter 4). Although the students are encouraged to choose their own reading for Library periods and for independent essays, teachers usually "*do it for them*", and Teresa concurred that their independent reading was carefully vetted, and 'trash' rejected.

Her teacher described himself as a constant reader:

if I'm not reading sixty pages a day then I don't know what I'm doing teaching the subject.

but he considers that this is not true of all English teachers:

It's one of the more depressing experiences interviewing, is when you ask people what the last book they read was...

His answer to my question about what he considered to be important about fiction was approached with missionary zeal, and it is clear that there is a disjunction between his beliefs and what he is able to deliver to the vast majority of the students he teaches.

[I]t's another world to get lost in. It's another element of imaginative and emotional stimulus, it's another demonstration of how potent language is, and I remain convinced that if you control the language you control the people - if you've got the language, you've got the power - and I want it in the hands of the right people.....You must have experienced this, when you read a book and you get to the end and you wish it wasn't over - that ability to participate in another world.

The emphasis in this statement on the reader's participation in fiction and notions of power and control indicates an understanding of the transformative qualities of fiction, and it is this teacher's hope that the school's involvement in this research study will address some of his concerns about the general poverty of his students' reading lives.

Teresa was recommended to him by her Year 8 teacher, and he considered her an interesting case study, as a "bright" girl who is not an excellent reader.

she'll do what she's told, but there's very much that sense of her as a reader - 'here's a book, read it.' She'll do it.

Book Choice Study

Teresa conformed to a large extent to her teacher's expectations, and although she sometimes found it difficult to make choices without consulting her mother or her friends, she demonstrated a growing interest, both in the material she chose, and in the task of talking about herself as a reader.

Teresa claimed that she reads fiction for excitement and dismissed much of what she reads for school as 'boring'. This may have something to do with the speed at which school books seem to be read. Over the first term, she had been assigned To Kill A Mockingbird, and while she often commented that she enjoyed it, the fact that her teacher expected her to read it in fifty page chunks meant that she and many of her fellow students had not finished it by the end of the term. Though she was asked to finish it, she did not, but was told about the end by a friend. However, because much of the class discussion revolved around the issues in the book and a comparison between the book and the film, she felt she had not missed a great deal.

Teresa expressed a preference for her leisure reading partly because it must be read quickly, and though she chose some books which demanded more time, she clearly practices what Mackey (1994) calls "good enough reading", missing out sections of text to get to the action.

If the object of reading something is to get it over with, a certain kind of conversation can be maintained afterwards. Enough of such experiences can create a pattern whereby a reader has no real understanding of what is "good enough" for himself or herself; the task remains something external to the mind of the reader by any meaningful account. (Mackey, 1995:167)

Mackey goes on to question whether the text invites these kinds of approaches or whether it is the reading style of the individual that determines the tendency to skip.

The evidence from these studies suggests that it more likely to be not only a combination of the two, but also a feature of what the reader expects will be required of them as a response. In Teresa's case, her perception of what was expected of her changed during the course of the study, and as she discovered ways of talking about what was happening to her as she read, she began to read differently. This enabled her to respond in a different way, and this interdependence of reading and response began to transform the kind of material she chose. All these factors contributed to changes in the way she thought about herself and her mother as peer-readers.

Her method of choice was, at first, influenced by the cover and blurb. She was attracted to Carrie's War, for instance, by the statement on the back: "Carrie does the worst thing she ever did in her life". At the following meeting, however, she expressed the feeling that she had been misled into thinking, probably by the expectations derived from Point Horror, that the book was aimed at older readers.

Carrie's War also offered her an opportunity to voice her preferences for 'tidy' endings, a theme that was to continue throughout the case study. As Protherough (in Corcoran et al, 1994) found with his students, the 'open' and ambiguous endings that suggest an involvement commensurate with the dynamic text, bothered Teresa. Protherough's finding led him to question the degree to which "reading styles are learned and socially constructed" (1994:116), and I suggest that this discomfort was due, in part, to learned perceptions of fiction reading as a passive activity, and in Teresa's case, her reliance on others to choose for her.

However, Teresa's reading of Different Directions (see Static texts) indicated another dimension to this preference. She attributed her dislike of this book to the fact that the

cover gave away the ending, showing the mother and daughter in a resolved and happy relationship and stating on the back: "But then Katharine learns something about her mother which puts everything else into perspective, and brings mother and daughter unexpectedly closer together." I asked her to explain the difference between her reaction to this book and her enthusiasm for her favourite Point Horror book, (Diane Hoh's Funhouse), which she had lent me. Teresa admitted that she knows how her Point Horror books will end, particularly when she rereads them. She clearly wants to play the game of not knowing and derived pleasure from it, whereas the cover of Different Directions made the resolution too clear.

I take pleasure in hearing myself tell a story *whose end I know*: I know and I don't know, I act toward myself as though I did not know.

(Barthes, 1975:47)

Although she had difficulty articulating the difference between these two reading experiences, it was clear that she was aware of a kind of selective 'not-remembering', allowing her to withhold her knowledge when reading within the safe assumption that the boundaries are there. Thus, she could be seen to be exercising some control in the act of reading, but was uncomfortable when she is left on her own without the safety of authorial control.

The need for safety was exhibited in her dependence on others when making choices during the study. She had clearly talked to her mother and to several of her friends about the book collection, and often, after toying with several books, she chose from the few that had been recommended to her. This clearly contributed to the effort she put into reading the books. Her friend's recommendation of Daz4Zoe (see Dynamic texts) gave her the confidence to persevere when she found the novelty of the narrative difficult, and though she was uncomfortable with the open ending her responses, both

spoken and written, indicated that the book had made her think about herself as a reader.

D: Tell me what you liked about it.

T: Yeah. Um, it, well, it was exciting, because it made you want to read on all the time, and I don't know - it was just a real interesting way of how they wrote it, because there was what Zoe thought - she wrote most of it, and then Daz - I couldn't understand his writing - but once I got into it I could - I got used to it, but at the beginning, I couldn't understand some of the things he'd written.

D: Did that make you more interested?

T: Yeah. Because it was a lot easier to read, I thought, because it was just in short bits.

Her emphasis on the unusual narrative method employed by Swindells, and her attempt at describing her own position in the reading of the book marked a change in her responses, and by the time she came to read White Fang(Classics), which her mother suggested to her, she appeared to be entering into a new relationship with her reading. She demonstrated this in her toleration of a long narrative which she sometimes found confusing, in the strength of her response, and in her subsequent choice from the Classics box (in addition to her stated intention to read more Jack London). Quoting a passage from the book which stood out for her, she wrote that it "*inspired her.*"

Round and round he went, whirling and turning and reversing, trying to shake off the fifty-pound weight that dragged at his throat. [...] At such

moments he even closed his eyes and allowed his body to be hurled hither and thither, willy-nilly, careless of any hurt that might thereby come to it. That did not count. The grip was the thing and the grip he kept.

(London, 1994:190)

The unprecedented strength of the choice of the word 'inspired' led me to question her further.

D: Can you say more about the inspiration, because that's an interesting word to use.

T: (Silence)

D: I think it's interesting when your feelings are aroused by a book like that. Did it inspire you in terms of the book?

T: It just made me think about that bit - it stayed in my head.

D: Because this is very - um, if you compare it to the kind of description in Funhouse, do you have the same feeling when things are happening - like when she is struggling with her brother?

T: Sometimes, but not as much.

Though this does not represent a drastic contrast, it does indicate a new way of thinking about herself in relation to the way different kinds of text affect her as a reader. In coming to understand this, she was also coming to understand her mother as a reader, and referred to a new tendency to discuss the books she read during the study with her. In the follow-up conversation to the study, her mother indicated that Teresa's reading had broadened considerably. While the inspirational attitude of her teacher may have contributed to this shift in her reading habits, it may also have been due to the opportunity she was given to talk about *herself* as a reader while testing out a variety of reading positions.

Paul - 13 years old

Paul came to this study as a once enthusiastic reader who had all but stopped reading, and it was clear from the outset that he was using the study as an opportunity to return to fiction. Although he had stopped reading when he left primary school, his approach to texts and his continual interest and exploration of his motivations and the concerns of my research indicated his willingness to consider what it is to be a reader. Such a double awareness, *prior to* the activity demanded of the study, implied a dynamic approach to texts which provided a contrast to Teresa's relative passivity. While it is possible to argue that such a disparity is merely the result of personality, it is also likely that the difference in their reading histories, and the discourses about fiction that surrounded them, had been influential in constructing the kind of readers they were in the process of becoming.

Reading History

Paul is the second of four sons, and lives in a large, detached house in a prosperous village. His parents, both of whom have careers in education, agreed to talk with me. Though there was little evidence of books downstairs, there is a large collection of books, both for children and adults, on the first floor landing, to which all the children have access.

While Paul's mother does not consider herself to be a regular reader, she expressed a recognition that she "*should do it, but it's just this guilt feeling that I shouldn't be sitting there reading if I've got something else to do*", and admits to enjoying it when she does find time on holiday to read. Both she and Paul's father attribute the infrequency of their reading to "*time management*" problems, though he admitted to being a more frequent reader than she. Though neither of them read as much as they

think they should, they could both described enthusiastic readers and buyers of children's fiction, and had built up a large collection over the years (all the Picture Lions, for instance). While Paul's father is often the first to read a new Dick King-Smith or Roald Dahl book, it is the concept of shared family reading times that suggests a peer-readership.

Father: I read them aloud, a chapter a night on holiday in the caravan and it [The Queen's Nose by Dick King-Smith] had captured the attention of all the boys and we've got a span from eight to sixteen and they'd all be spellbound. [Mother nods and says, "Yes"] All of them.

This practice may be reserved for holiday times, but the task of searching together for the appropriate book and the conversations that surround such readings (Paul referred to a few of such experiences during our conversations), indicate a perception of fiction as a shared activity that exposed Paul and his brothers to a variety of texts and implied an equality of readership which attributes a value to children's fiction rarely seen.

As an Education Officer, Paul's father garners recommendations about books, both for himself and for his children, from the numerous teachers or Heads he meets through work. He places an emphasis on 'broad' reading and attributed his love of fiction to the encouragement of an inspirational teacher when he was a child. Both parents try to encourage their children to read a variety of books, but expressed a feeling that Paul's interest in computers and television had taken up a lot of the time he 'should' spend reading. Books from their extensive collection are recommended frequently without success and while, like Teresa's mother, Paul's father expressed disapproval for "Stephen King sensationalism" and wished Paul would read more, he states

I don't mind him reading what he reads as long as there is a little bit of breadth to tr[y] different things.

while his mother feels that "as long as he enjoys it, that's the important thing." The contrasting views expressed here are reflected in the way they each answered my question about the importance of fiction. While Paul's mother stressed the notion of escape, his father talked about the importance of fiction by describing himself at Paul's age.

I would say that particularly when you're asked to reflect back to [Paul]'s age, there's no doubt it broadened my vocabulary and my vision of the world in some way - that's a bit strong, but because I hadn't read as much as I ought to have done - I wasn't encouraged by my parents to be honest, I realised that there was more to literature than what you were taught in school.

By characterising himself as a young reader in this reply, Paul's father indicated a perception of the influence of his own reading history which has clearly had an effect on the way he talks about fiction and perceives Paul as a reader. The notion of peer-readership characterised by the shared story-reading is further supported by this self-reflective tendency to place himself in Paul's position.

Paul was read to from an early age until the age of around seven, though holiday reading has continued. In addition, his father made up stories for him and his older brother. His mother took him regularly to a mobile library where he would choose his own books ("*they'd just look at the front covers*"), and he was quick to read once he was in school and particularly enjoyed buying his own books. Both parents indicated that Paul kept many of the books that he had when he was small and suspected that he continued to go back to them, something that Paul confirmed.

Paul attends a large comprehensive school that is currently re-examining their English policy. Therefore, the documentation was not available until after the studies had

finished, and so the discussion I held with his teacher was not informed by the policy changes. The emphasis in this school is on the promotion of independent reading, and the use of unassessed Reading records and independent reading projects in the pre-GCSE years indicates the primacy of this aim. The Head of English, with whom I spoke in the preliminary stages of the research, was emphatic about providing opportunities for a variety of responses, and had recently been awarded funding to promote reading groups for 'advanced' readers. While her proactive attitude had led to changes in the Reading Policy, shifting the focus onto the reader's role in constructing meaning (see Chapter 5) and one-to-one teacher supervision, Paul's current teacher provided further evidence of the gap between policy and practice.

Paul's current teacher admitted that, for the last two years she hadn't "*manage[d] to get any private reading into my Year 9 - that's Paul*" and, though she acknowledged the benefit of independent reading, she ascribed blame to the pressures of the National Curriculum,

I've got to do Poetry, I've got to do Knowledge about Language, and I've got to do Creative Writing and Independent Reading and I can't do all four in one term and it really depends on what I decide I want to do - and I probably won't do poetry, because it's too similar, really, to Romeo and Juliet - so, I could run my independent reading alongside my creative writing - I might do.

She attributed her uncertainty to the needs of each particular group, which also influence her choice of book for study. For instance, she considered Lord of the Flies, which Paul's class was reading, to be too difficult for a Middle band set in the previous year, though she felt that it might have been too slow for this top set. In general, her perception of the reading habits of her students clearly impinges on the way she approaches the text. Like Teresa's teacher, she is in part reliant on film versions, not only to provide subject for discussion, but to guarantee that students 'finish' the book.

Although she 'tests' them to provide evidence that they are reading, she also spends most of her class time reading aloud, and comments

I don't know why, really, that I've decided that they need it read aloud, because they won't understand it, unless I read it to them - I don't know - it's come to me by osmosis, or something.

Though the practice of reading aloud clearly has benefits, Paul commented that because so much of class time is spent with the reading, there is little time for talking about the book. Homework consists of assignments that are clearly designed to provide 'creative' opportunities to use the text, such as writing an election leaflet for one of the characters in Lord of the Flies, or writing about what Romeo and Juliet would wear if they were alive today (see transcript of Paul, Appendix ii). While his teacher indicated a recognition of the narrow-mindedness of such exercises, Paul expressed disdain for such exercises and clearly resented this approach.

It's things like that that really annoy me about English - like you concentrate on the story and then you have to do stupid things like that.

As a result of the absence of independent reading in this group, Paul's teacher had very little idea of what her students are reading at home, and though she claimed she never talks to them about reading in general, she assumed most of their reading is pulp, referring to Point Horror and Danielle Steele. She assumed that only one or two (out of a group of twenty) read regularly, but felt that they wouldn't openly say so "*because it's not the thing to do if you want street cred*". Her conception of Paul centred around this notion, and while she conceded that he probably does the reading for her class, she doesn't think of him as a reader:

I don't think it would do his street cred any good if they thought he was a reader.

The view expressed here demonstrates the way in which many adults, particularly in the publishing industry (see Chapter 6) conceive of children as readers, and while it is, perhaps, disappointing to encounter this reactive tendency in a teacher of English, the pervasiveness of such an attitude certainly impinges on the discourses which surround the reading of fiction within all mediational contexts. Paul agreed that it wasn't "cool" to talk about reading, and expressed his awareness of the publishing industry's efforts to address the teen market.

The lack of involvement in her students' reading lives is also connected to this teacher's own perceptions of the value of fiction and, admitting that "*I don't read much, actually*", she defined the importance of fiction in terms of

*escapism - it's living someone else's life through the print on the page.
Um - yes - it's escapism, really, as far as I'm concerned - to introduce me
to something that - to circumstances that I wouldn't find myself in, normally.*

In contrast to the view of Teresa's teacher, Paul's teacher offered a conception of reading as a static practice, and although she declared a preference for detective fiction, so that she can figure out what is going to happen before she is told, it is clear that her emphasis on escapism places her only inside the book, and presents no evidence of the dual perspective offered by Teresa's teacher. Though such an attitude to fiction may prevent her from aiding her students' discovery of the power of fiction, Paul's disdainful attitude toward school English appeared to enhance the dynamic involvement with both the research project and the fiction he chose to read.

Book Choice Study

As I mentioned previously, Paul approached the task of this research with a personal aim. Admitting that he hadn't been reading for the past two years, he stressed that his wish to take part in the study was due to a desire to return to reading, and to explore a variety of texts. Whereas both he and Teresa were drawn to horror books, he was more critical of his own tastes, and drew a distinction between the kind of pulp reading he had been doing, and books "*that you can go back to.*"

In general, Paul handled the books readily and frequently used them in our conversations, turning to passages that interested him, or to illustrate a point about the cover design. He was articulate about the way he chose books, and described the process in terms of both the physical aspects of the book and his self-awareness as a reader.

P: I look at the sides of the book and at the names of the authors and if anything catches my eye that, you know, doesn't look too thick, too thin, I might get that out and look at the cover.

D: So it would be the title that would get you first?

P: Yeah, and then I'd look at the book and read the blurb, and then I'd flick through and see what kind of print there was. If it wasn't too much for me, then I'd [choose] it.

The balance between the excitement offered by the title and the attention paid to the time it might take Paul to read is derived from his parent's practice of helping him to choose books when he was younger, but it is also clear that his awareness that he reads different books in different ways at different times affects the size of book and print.

if I've read a book - a big book - and um sort of like - I've read it quickly or I didn't finish it really properly, I might go back to that and just read it through and concentrate on it and that'll take me two weeks, three weeks.

Therefore, his conception of what 'good enough' reading is can be seen in contrast to Teresa's conception, in that Paul's perception of what is worth 're-reading' influences his method of choice. The view of fiction reading he expresses also suggests this double awareness.

Well, I mean, it gives you an open mind and it really prepares you for anything. Because it's not real, but, you know, at least you've got imagination there - so if you were to do something like write a story - you'd have all these ideas - they don't have to be realistic....

The distinction between the 'real' and the 'fictional' is connected, in Paul's description, to being a writer, and I suggest that his tendency to see fiction from the point of view of the writer is an important characteristic of the way he reads, indicating an awareness of the powerful position he has as a reader. His willingness throughout the study to talk through his readings, to criticise the design of cover and blurb, and his interest in the writer's own motivations and choices, implies his awareness of his own control over the texts he chooses, placing him in a position of authority in his fiction reading.

Paul frequently drew attention to the disjunction between the impression given by the cover of a book and the book itself, and expressed an awareness of the commercial aims of the publishing industry. When rewriting the blurb for *Spinner*, he rejected the tendency to say things like 'I could not put it down', and attempted to direct attention to the kind of reader this book would please:

A thrilling adventure with a realistic theme. A must for anyone with a good taste in books.

His suspicion of the aims of blurb writers and magazine reviewers to promote anything added a further dimension to his participation in the study. Observing that "*they don't criticise, it must be in their contract*", he frequently made use of the discussions we

had to reflect on peri-textual features and the way they influenced his reading. His comments on Stonewords drew attention to the gendering of the cover - "*it made it seem like a little girl's book*", and although he agreed that the cover gave him the correct impression that it was about ghosts, he indicated that the choice of description closed off opportunities for a wider audience to read what he regarded as an excellent book.

Such examples demonstrated his ability to confront the texts he chose in a dynamic way, as did his continually expressed preference for the open-ended text, and the invitations that authors extend to their readers to contribute to the telling. While Teresa was 'bothered' by the possibility of an ambiguous ending for Carrie's War, Paul's response to the book centred around the way that the ending was orchestrated.

P: OK. Carrie's War. A really good book...nice ending. Not too happy.

D: It was different to what you thought it would be, wasn't it? (he read this over two sessions, and had expected Carrie's mother to die).

P: Very different. Not too fairy tale ending. I'll tell you - I thought another twist that I thought might be in it was that it turned out that, um, Arthur (sic) Sandwich was Carrie's late husband who had just died recently, which I thought would have been a nice twist, but it wasn't.

M: Did you go back to the beginning when you got to the end?

P: I did a bit - because it's sort of like...they seemed really grim, the family - the children seem like almost the adults of the family and Carrie's still the little girl she used to be - because it said right at the end, it says - they went down to Druid's Bottom and they said Mum's still up there walking around....it was weird.

His fascination with the indeterminacy of the ending, when Carrie sees the house on fire from the train, and his enjoyment in speculating about what was left unstated in the narrative frame, led him back to an exploration of the text, while Teresa commented on the frame because she felt it contributed a sense of closure that was not provided by

the story itself. Her need to immerse herself *in* the text demanded the security of the ending, whereas Paul's reading is more about himself and his negotiation of meaning. In that sense, he is

conscious of the degree to which [he] actively intervene[s] in and even manufacture[s] [his] own reading experience. (Nodelman, 1992:215)

Paul's readiness to approach a text dynamically often allowed him to play with ideas which led him to insightful comments about the nature of fiction. His reaction to The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales may have had a great deal in common with both Henry's and Mark's initial enthusiasm for the subversion of text and peri-text, but his comments evolved into a more sophisticated realisation of the intentions of Scieszka and Smith.

P: It feels more like - in depth - when you're reading it - everyone's talking to each other - it's real - a bit weird feeling about that. So I liked that - didn't take me long to read at all.

D: Did you read it more than once?

P: Yeah - I read it again - I went through it. (He reads me the story of the Really Ugly Duckling) It's like they take these stories and take all the unreal, um, take all the unlikely endings out of it - all the good endings out of it and put in normal ones.

D: More normal ones, you mean?

P: Yeah, but it's not expected because it's a fairy tale - so you're not expecting it to be ordinary - you're expecting it to just finish - there once was an ugly duckling who grew up to be a really ugly duck. Alright - read on!

D: I suppose when you read a fairy tale, you expect it turn out...

P: (Interrupting me) Good, yeah.

While he clearly enjoyed the 'weirdness' and novelty of the book, his rich background of a variety of texts had placed him in a powerful position - he was at once able to share the parodic position of the author/illustrator, but he was also led to contemplate the nature of the stories which they parody. In this way, his active mode of reading

enabled him to approach this text as part of a larger text, made up of the entirety of his reading experience. By standing outside of the text in this way, Paul appeared to achieve an awareness of himself as a reader of fiction which gave him a voice within both the texts he encounters and the fictional discourses he engaged in. Though it is not clear that his current experience in school will encourage him to take advantage of this ability, the opportunity to take part in this study, and his interest in my own research clearly pleased him. He was excited by the prospect of being influential through his involvement with this project.

Paul was the only participant who showed any curiosity about the criteria for the different boxes, and when I explained it to him at the end of the study, he quickly picked up on the distinction between Dynamic and Static texts and demonstrated his understanding with examples from his reading.

Though Paul was not influenced by his parents during the study, it was clear that they spoke about what he was reading and his father often showed him his own copy of a book Paul had chosen, for instance, The Silver Sword and Carrie's War. But his sense of achievement at the close of the study was, in part, attributed to his understanding of his father's influence over his reading.

It gives you quite a good achievement, if you know what I mean - you could say to your Dad, 'Oh, I've read a couple of books, lately', and - cause usually it's, 'Have you read any books lately?' and I go, 'No.'

Paul's recognition of his own reading history and his parent's influence contributed to his desire to take part fully in this research, and his ability to take control of the research situation. This sense of his right to formulate the discourse about the fiction we discussed is reflected in his sense of authority within the texts he read, and while

much of his reading material may be said to include the static texts of pulp horror fiction, his ability to contextualise his own reading meant that he approached fiction in a dynamic way. In the follow-up conversation at the end of the study, it was clear that he had continued to read adventurously.

POST-ACTIVE PHASE

Following the final meetings with the seven children, I contacted their parents and their teachers to ask for feedback. Although I have referred to their comments within the reports of the case studies, there were also general comments about their children's enthusiasm for taking part in the research. On two occasions, I gave seminars on work in progress to schools which took part in the study and, in one instance, I was consulted about an application for funding for further research. I delivered several research papers to my peers, either at academic conferences devoted to children's literature, or within departments of English at two colleges of higher education. The responses to the theoretical basis of the research, as well as the research methodology, were encouraging and some of the questions raised contributed to the final presentation of the study.

The analysis of the results of the Book Choice Study and the implications for a theoretical mapping of response are reported in the final chapter.

CHAPTER NINE

SHARED DISCOURSES - REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter provides an analysis of the Book Choice Study presented in Chapter Eight, both in terms of the significance of the results to a theoretical perspective of response, and in regard to the efficacy of the research method in addressing the silence of children within the discourses of children's literature. While the results of the study reveal the extent to which child/book inter-actions are directly affected by adult perceptions of fiction, they also demonstrate the way that the research situation offered the case study participants an alternative perception of fiction that influenced the readings that took place.

The complex inter-play of social mediations which define the discourses of children's literature are reflected in the individual case studies described. As I argued in Part Two, the separation of concerns which marginalise children and their books within the discourses of literary theory, education and the publishing industry impinges directly on adult mediations of individual reading acts. By contextualising these case studies within the framework of each child's reading history, I have been able to demonstrate that there is a clear distinction between adult mediations which constitute a *shared discourse* and those which assume a *divided discourse*. The difference between adult perceptions of fiction and its importance to children appears to determine not only *what* these children chose to read, but also *how* they were able to read and respond.

As members of the interpretive communities to which these children belong, parents and teachers help to form expectations about what any particular inter-action with fiction will entail, and thus define the reader's role. Such expectations *prior* to any particular reading event, influence the selection of reading material, as well as the mode of reading adopted.

The inclusion of the history of the reader in a theoretical mapping of response, as I have suggested, necessitates the acknowledgement of the intertextuality of a chain of individual reading events over time and the mediations that surround them. Thus, the formative experiences of childhood reading, both in terms of the texts and mediations which provide the construction of readers, must be seen to play a crucial role in the 'social modes of reception' (see Chapter 3).

General Observations

As described in Chapter Seven, the phenomenographic approach to the research situation demanded a position of 'purposeful ignorance' for the researcher. My intention was to give the children, as research subjects, a voice - to allow them to say what they wanted to about their reading of fiction - and thus to provide an 'open and explorative approach to data collection', rather than working on fixed hypotheses. Thus, the analysis of the data depends on an interpretation of similarities and differences that arise out of the data, rather than answers to prescribed questions.

It is obvious from both the transcripts and the descriptions of the studies above, that each individual case study presents a different story of reading, influenced by a wide variety of different mediations and experiences. However, the aim of this analysis is to describe the outcome of the research in terms of a limited number of categories and this necessitates a reduction in the complexity and individuality of the evidence. Although it is necessary to acknowledge that the differences between individuals are valuable and provide further opportunity for study, I suggest that an interpretation of the material which allows the specific case to contribute to a more generalised picture of children's inter-action with fiction will be more effective as a contribution to a broader theoretical mapping of response.

In general terms, the study revealed a number of common features, relating both to adult perceptions of fiction, whether for themselves or for children, and to the children's own perceptions of themselves as readers. The effect of these adult perceptions on the modes of reading the children displayed in their responses to fictional texts and to peri-textual aspects of books, indicates the primacy of such mediations in the construction of reading positions available to these children. While I explored the possibility that a contrast between dynamic and static texts might provide evidence of the way stylistic features provided more or less authoritative reading stances, the studies reveal that it is the degree to which adult mediations presume a shared concern that influences dynamic or static modes of reading.

This commentary is divided into four sections. The first two sections concern adult perceptions of fiction, derived from the interviews with parents and teachers and the third section provides an analysis of the way such perceptions impinge on the children's choices and responses. Finally, I make some observations about the research method used and reflect on further research.

Adult Perceptions of Fiction

Parents

The reading histories revealed a wide variation in the way that fiction is perceived by parents, and though I shall describe such views in terms of categories, these exist along a spectrum ranging from the perception of fiction as inessential escapism to fiction as a key to the power and potency of language. Among parents, the notion of escapism and entertainment was most prominent, although this was complicated by a contrast between male and female views.

Throughout the interviews with parents, there was a clear distinction between perceptions of fiction along gender lines suggesting that, while the women were more likely to read fiction, they described it as escapism, while men, if they read fiction, referred to the transformational qualities of text. However, it must be noted that the majority of fathers in the study did not read fiction at all.

Mothers, most frequently, described their appreciation of fiction in terms of relaxation and escape, and were also most likely to choose both their own books and their children's books by the cover. They also most frequently defined the reading of fiction in terms of its difference to television viewing. While one mother likened fiction to the ephemeral nature of television entertainment, the others considered reading fiction to be the more valuable activity. Of the four fathers that took part in the study, three described reading in terms self-discovery, and most frequently chose their reading by author.

Such an observation appears to contradict Sarland's conclusion that boys seek an unquestioning submersion in the text, while girls appear to question and challenge (1991). However, Sarland also noted that the more able male readers were apt to disassociate themselves and take on an observer role. It may be that the fathers in my study were still reading because they read in a dynamic way, while those that no longer read fiction had not experienced the authoritative position that the observer role implies.

It is also important to note that the only fathers that agreed to take part in the study were the fathers of the boys. Though the size of the sample is, perhaps, too small to provide conclusive evidence, it is possible that the absence of male involvement indicated a lack of interest in reading fiction in general, or merely a lack of interest in reading fiction as it pertains to girls. Certainly, the predominant influence of mothers in the reading lives of their children was evident. Of all the children who took part in

the study, only two mentioned their fathers reading to them, and much of the evidence about the early reading history of the children was provided by their mothers. This is not surprising, and conforms to the image of children's fiction as a predominantly female preserve (Rudd, 1991), suggesting a connection between notions of 'lack' and inferiority implicit in the dominant mapping of male/female power relations.

The perception of the importance of fiction changed when discussing children and their fiction. Some parents differentiated their own reading needs from that of their children, often stressing the educational benefits of reading fiction - specifically in terms of punctuation and vocabulary. There was a correspondence between the view of fiction as an educational tool and levels of anxiety about the kind of reading matter their child favoured. The degree of force exerted by parents in getting their children to read, or not read, specific kinds of material, again, revealed a contrast along gender lines. When two parents took part, mothers expressed anxiety more often, while fathers appeared to be more content to let their children, or their sons, read what they wanted.

In some ways, this gendering of perception was reflected in the gendering of response that was observed in the study. While the absence of paternal influence may have impinged on the relative passivity of the older girls in the study, the involvement of fathers in the reading lives of two of the boys clearly influenced the active way they approached the reading they did for the study. Barrs and Pidgeon (1993) question the influence of the female culture of the primary classroom and the children's publishing industry, but it is necessary to examine further the implication of such evidence from these reading histories in order to investigate the relative influences of mother and father in the construction of readers.

Beyond the contrast in gender, the role that parents play in introducing their children to fiction must be considered as a primary mediational influence, and it is the perception of what fiction is for, transmitted through these early encounters of reading to children, that appears to have been the most influential to all the children in the study. While it was not possible to observe story-reading sessions, in order to determine the extent to which parents mediated books for their children in detail, a variety of distinct categories was available from the evidence presented.

The notion of peer-readership implied in the act of reading to a child arose out of the evidence from the studies as a key to dynamic modes of readings, as it was clear that those readers who were most likely to engage with the process of both choosing and responding to their books in an open and playful way had experienced such a dialogue. What is more, the children who met the challenges of dynamic texts and demonstrated a more authoritative position in relation to the fiction they read, were those whose parents read children's books themselves and continued to read to their children after they could read themselves.

Thus, the act of reading fiction *with* rather than *to* children defines a category of parental perception of children's inter-action with fiction that constitutes a *shared discourse*. While reading to children may assist them in their familiarity with narrative and encourage their own reading, it is the fact that adults must also read the books themselves that interests me here. Alternatively, those parents who chose books for their children, but did not read them, and those who did not read to their children or talk to them about books, reflected a perception that children and their fiction involve a separate set of concerns and, thus, constituted a *divided discourse*.

While a small number of parents did not read to their children at all (as noted above, these were all fathers), one mother read very infrequently. Of the rest, the majority

read aloud only until their children could read on their own, and it was this tendency among parents in general that was remarked upon by most of the primary teachers included in the study. The assumption that children should read on their own once they could read was challenged by both teachers and the children themselves, all of whom noted how much they enjoyed being read to. Several parents who had stopped reading to their children acknowledged this preference, but were concerned that the continuation of such a practice would be detrimental to the child's reading development. In the minority were several parents who read frequently to their children whether or not they could read themselves. These were also the parents who acknowledged their own enjoyment of children's books, and were also most likely to refer to book-related conversations with their children.

As I have suggested during my discussion of the studies, one way in which I, as a researcher, mediated in the readings of these children, was to become a kind of peer-reader, and thus, enter into a *shared discourse*. Although I read to a child on only one occasion (aside from my son, Max, to whom both I, and his father, read all the books he chose), my familiarity with the books and my willingness to talk about them paralleled a parental relationship based on a sense of peer-reading. Some of the changes in reading behaviour observed during the study must be attributed to the difference between the adult/child inter-actions around books to which the children were accustomed, and the new relationship being formed in the research situation.

Because a peer relationship suggests shared authority and an equal partnership, there are also certain apposite connections between shared discourses and the invitation of a dynamic text - to share the construction of a fiction with the author and, thus, to be able to take up a dual position both inside and outside the text (see Chapter 8). While the potential of some texts to include the reader in this way may affect this process, it

is clear from the Book Choice Study that mediating forces provide a key influence to dynamic modes of reading which define 'literary' engagement with text.

If a difference in mediation can influence modes of reading in the way that is suggested here, then the role of the reading history of any individual reader is fundamental to any theoretical account of response. While it is perhaps obvious that such an observation might contribute to a re-vision of reading practice and is significant in terms of the advice given to parents who wish their children to be readers, the implication that children do read in dynamic and 'literary' ways when encountering fiction within a 'dialogic' relationship contributes to an understanding of the social modes of response. Such evidence suggests that, rather than being a sophistication and development of elementary skills, reading in a dynamic way is there from the beginning, and is either nurtured or subdued by social inter-actions. This is not an essentialist position, and I do not wish to reinstate a neo-Romanticist notion of childhood in idealised terms. However, a post-structuralist emphasis which offers language, and the conditions of class, race and gender as the determinants of reader/text inter-actions, frequently ignores a degree of commonality which lies in the condition of becoming an integrated subject. While there may be a bio-physical basis at its centre, the potentiality for communication inherent in the conditions of infancy must be taken into account if social mediations are to be understood. Thus, the need to exert authority within the world can be considered as a starting point for each individual, rather than the special province of some kind of idealised vision of childhood.

In Chapter Two, I suggested that the predominance of theories that map development in terms of a progression ignore the active engagement with narratives observed in the earliest adult/infant inter-actions. I proposed that notions of shared telling at the heart of 'literary' engagement arise out of the communicative exchanges that occur during infancy.

[We] automatically assume [children's] thinking to be primitive. What we take to be primitive and in need of development....may actually be more openly reflective than the adult norm we set as the goal of education.

(Matthews, 1994)

The variation of perceptions of fiction among the parents that took part in the study clearly influenced the modes of reading their children were able to adopt, and it was also evident that the reading histories of each parent contributed to such perceptions. The responsibility of being a guide for their children, of assuming a position of superiority and control was admittedly uncomfortable for most parents, and such discomfort often served to distance them from their children's reading. Such a distance typifies the meta-discourses of children's literature discussed in detail in Part Two, and is perhaps most evident in the educational setting. Though the parents in this study provided more detailed and individual evidence of how their perceptions of children as readers impinged on their children's reading lives, the teachers interviewed provided more indirect, but equally important, evidence.

Teachers

The teachers included in the study revealed a similar variety of perceptions about fiction in regard to their own personal reading. While most teachers spoke of enjoying fiction, only three out of the six interviewed referred to themselves as frequent readers. Again, those teachers described their relationship with fiction in terms of self-discovery and the importance of language, while the others, two of whom read only on holiday and one who did not read at all, spoke of fiction in terms of escape and relaxation.

In terms of children's fiction, the categories were divided differently. While two of the primary school teachers mentioned reading, owning and enjoying children's books (often with their own children), the secondary school teacher who spoke most strongly

about the value of fiction dismissed children's fiction, and clearly considered it of little value in comparison to 'literature', which he celebrated.

Most striking about this evidence is the fact that only one out of the six teachers referred to children's fiction in terms of its 'literary qualities', and while the use of books in the classroom indicated a general recognition that reading fiction was 'good' for various reasons, the majority of teachers linked fiction reading to either topic work or other broad educational concerns (see Chapter Five). In addition, most teachers appeared to recognise the fact that they were held responsible for children's reading progress, and frequently described the relationship with parents in regard to reading as a confrontation. While the role of teachers in the acquisition of reading skills was accepted, the struggle teachers experienced in getting parents to listen to their children read, or to read to them, appeared to disappoint and surprise most teachers. However, the emphasis of these comments usually rested on the improvement of functional skills, rather than on any innate need of children to engage with fiction.

As I have indicated above, it is not merely stated opinions that reveal perceptions, but also the way in which fiction is delivered in the classroom. The expectations derived from these formative experiences influence the way fiction is valued and thus affect the way children see themselves as readers. Whereas educational policy is based on the development of basic skills toward a more critical and analytical approach to literature (see Chapter 5), and the emphasis on the teaching of reading can detract from the active engagement with fiction seen in transcripts of 'Tell Me' conversations (Chambers, 1993), the daily use of fiction in the classroom is also influential.

Independent reading was written into every school policy I was given, and was mentioned by the Heads of English when a written policy was not available. However, the gap between policy and practice was consistently made evident. While all schools

supported the notion of daily periods of free reading, only two teachers claimed that they kept to such a schedule. Of the others, most were able to offer two or three opportunities for independent reading during the week, while three teachers admitted it was the first thing to go. In general, the demands of the National Curriculum were blamed for the lack of time spent on fiction, either in terms of the time and energy involved in privileging free reading time, or in terms of the need to choose fiction for its relevance for topic work. As I suggested in Chapter Six, these pragmatic concerns impinge on both library selection policy and children's book publishing.

Only two of the teachers mentioned making an effort to talk about fiction in general, and although two of the written policies promoted various forms of booktalk, neither of the teachers I interviewed from those schools conducted such sessions with their classes. Similarly, although reading to the children was considered an important part of promoting a love of fiction, and most teachers remembered being read to by their own teachers, two teachers found that they had little time to read aloud to the class.¹ Of those that did, the majority chose books reactively rather than proactively, answering a need to read books that children would choose themselves, or books that informed topic work. Only one teacher mentioned choosing books that would stretch the children and challenge their expectations, while one only read the beginnings of books and then asked his class to continue "*if they were interested*".

Though these teachers claimed to recognise the value of fiction, and were frequently apologetic about the disjunction between their ideals and what was pragmatically possible, the perceptions that they transmitted to the children were often at odds with a view of fiction as central to experience. While a growing acknowledgement of the need for teachers to promote an enthusiasm for reading was evident, the emphasis in

¹ Following the study, one of the teachers reported that the Head teacher had circulated a memo requesting that teachers reduce to amount of time they spent reading to the children from twenty minutes to ten minutes a day. It can only be assumed that the pressure of time due to curriculum demands led to this situation.

the classroom on the pragmatic use of fiction influences the way in which readers are constructed. The possibility of reading and talking about books *with* children - of a peer-relationship based on *shared discourse* - is supplanted by the need to instruct and produce measurable results, whether this be the teaching of reading skills, or the efficient comprehension of a text.

None of these teachers gave their children an opportunity to talk about themselves as readers, and very few gave them experiences of reading or listening to texts that they could discuss together as peer-readers. In this way, all were promoting perceptions of reading fiction as a static experience, and perceptions of readers as passive recipients of texts and interpretations. The only exception appeared to be Teresa's teacher, who was, as I have suggested, concerned with a definition of literature that excluded books intended for children, and thus proposed an equally restrictive situation. While it is clear from my discussion of educational discourses (Chapter 5) that there are many educationalists who react against the strictures of such practice, and the policy makers at some of these schools agree with them, the children who took part in these case studies had little opportunity to experience a dialogic relationship with fiction in the classroom.

However, during the course of the study, these children were able to engage in a dialogue with me, and my interest in, and dependence on, their responses to the texts they chose, appeared to influence the way some of them talked and thought about themselves as readers of fiction. Though the older children made negative comments about their experiences with fiction in school, and appeared to reject both the texts and the reading positions demanded of them, the evidence suggests that the static reading practices offered to them merely reinforced 'closed' ways of reading. Rather than challenging these practices, the older children in the study tended to either stop reading altogether or favour 'disapproved' texts, further preventing teacher and pupil from becoming peer-readers in a *shared discourse*. I suggest that the opportunity to take

part in the Book Choice Study provided some of these children with a dialogue that enabled them to reconsider fiction and to replace static experiences with a dynamic relationship.

The Children

The studies with these seven children confirmed and enhanced evidence from numerous previous attempts to talk to children about their reading. The extent to which children are able to engage dynamically with the texts they read, to go beyond comprehension to attain a self-knowledge about what it is to be a reader of fiction, to challenge the restrictions of the static text and to gain pleasure from all these enterprises, has been documented before (Meek 1988, Sarland 1991, Rudd 1992, Styles and Watson 1996). However, the results of these conversations over time demonstrate an element of process and patterns of change, both within each case study, and across the range of ages, that has not been previously examined.

Equally, this research presents such observations, for the first time, within the social context of adult mediations, both in terms of the influence of adult perceptions of fiction discussed above, and the more diffuse, but equally influential discourses which surround children and their inter-actions with fiction (see Part Two).

In addition to making it possible for children to say what they wanted to about the books they chose, the design of the study allowed me to observe book-related behaviour which was equally valuable in illustrating the ways in which fiction had been mediated for these children. The importance of the peri-text and the handling of books impinged upon different modes of reading, adding a new dimension to an understanding of the social modes of reception, thus supporting the relevance of children's inter-action with fiction in a conception of response as a continuous process.

While the in-depth discussions of the individual case studies described in the previous chapter provide a detailed account of the progress of the study, this analysis will focus on general trends observed throughout the course of the project.

The aim of the study, which was designed to provide an opportunity for each child to define their own role within the research situation, was to give children a voice within the discourses of children's literature. The use of open-ended questioning invited a kind of response that was sometimes difficult for the older children, who were accustomed to more directive questioning about the books they discuss at school. However, because I began with questions such as "What did you like/not like?" (derived from Chambers' 'Tell Me' approach), I was asking children to talk more about themselves as readers than the books.

All of the children in the study responded to such questions with comments, not about event or character, but about stylistic features of the text. Instead of referring to aspects of the books which might have been considered in a classroom setting, these children chose to talk about the use of dialect, narrative frame, poetic language and ambiguous endings. Even the children who had difficulty with the openness of the conversations were more likely to comment on ways of telling, particularly if the author and/or illustrator had challenged their expectations of story, or transgressed dominant uses of language.

While such an observation may appear to challenge assumptions about what children respond to when they read, I suggest that this is only because they are frequently asked the wrong questions. Although it is clear that children do respond to the content of the fiction they read and are able to relate it to their own lives and concerns, this is not all

that they do. The responses of these children indicate that, by privileging content and theme in our discussions with children, we are in danger of disregarding their own perceptiveness about different ways of telling. Such an awareness indicates a dual orientation - a recognition of the author's role in the construction of fiction - which suggests an apprehension of fiction as a communication. Though the children in this study were denied opportunities to explore such observations in the classroom, I suggest that the awareness they displayed of such features of fictional text indicates a readiness to engage in literary discourses which focus on the multiplicity of meaning and the power of the reader, rather than on any circumscribed 'answer' to what a book is 'about' (Chambers, 1993).

Physical Interaction with Texts

The presence of the books themselves during the study, and the element of choice embedded in the project, gave me an opportunity to observe the children handling the books, and there appeared to be a direct correlation between those who handled the books frequently, both when choosing them and discussing them, and those who engaged more actively in the discussions. These were also, most obviously, the two children more likely to become 'authorial' within the text and to talk about themselves as readers. In addition, the children who appeared to inter-act with the books physically were also those who had been engaged in a *shared discourse* with their parents about books, and had been read to continuously from an early age.

Whether such a tendency is due to their general familiarity with handling and choosing books, or whether it implies a degree of confidence with books related to a kind of 'ownership', I suggest that the connection between dynamic modes of reading and physical inter-action with books reaches a conjunction over issues of control and the children's perception of their 'rights' within the book. In a similar way, the children who were more reluctant to handle the books were those who had difficulty talking

about what they thought of them, who most often had books chosen for them and were read to less frequently, implying a perception of books as separate and 'not theirs'. At one end of the spectrum was Susan, who picked up every book in the collection at each meeting, in addition to the books from the surrounding library shelves, and gave authorial readings, while at the other was Catherine, who regularly forgot to bring the books with her to our sessions, and struggled to say anything about them at all.

The fact that the book-handling behaviour of some of the children changed during the course of the study may be attributed to changes in their perceptions of their 'rights' as readers. Both Henry and Mark took more time exploring the books during the selection process and handled the books more consistently when talking about them, following the reading of books that in some way challenged their expectations. Such a shift suggests that the pleasure derived from a more dynamic reading, in some way, implies a degree of ownership of the book which is demonstrated in a readiness to 'know' it, to flick through the pages for a passage or an illustration that brought enjoyment, to emphasise the narrative of the reader's own reading with a display of the text over which the reader has control.

Age-related Difference in Response

The most striking trend observed throughout the study was the contrast between patterns of choice-making and response observed between the younger and older children. In general, the youngest children in the study displayed a tendency to interact more personally and actively with the books, though they appeared to be far less discriminating about the books they chose. While Max and Susan both deliberately avoided the longer books, frequently pointing out that they were for 'big children', they expressed a fondness for every book they picked. Neither child appeared to differentiate between books in terms of cover design or subject matter, but chose on each occasion with equal enthusiasm. There was no obvious difference between their

responses to the dynamic or static texts, but each book seemed to provide them with opportunities to engage dynamically, indicated by their tendency to focus on single details of the text and to develop their own stories out of them, or to reinterpret the story to suit their own needs.

Although these individual responses may not have conformed to my own readings of the text, they were always possible readings (Lehr, 1988). What was most marked, however, was the extent to which the younger children appeared to assume a natural right to share the telling with the author and to enter into a playful relationship with the text (Meek, 1988). An emphatic response to rhyme and rhythm was noted in both of the youngest children and in both cases, self-initiated play with the language of the text was a feature of their responses.

The depth of their involvement was often signalled by a tendency to drift away from the event of the discussion and to re-enter the book. Susan, in particular, and apparently involuntarily, dropped her voice to a lower register and shifted between reading the story to me and adding her own commentary in a half-heard dialogue with the text. Such physical indicators, explored by Nell (1988), though with adults, indicates a deep and sensual involvement with the act of reading, and deserves further investigation. It may be that this tendency has more to do with the concentration needed to read the words, but I suggest that something more was happening to this extremely confident reader. The depth of her involvement in the act of re-reading and re-telling the fiction indicated a mode of relaxation reminiscent of the warmth and security of the physical closeness of reader and listener during the bedtime story-reading.

The sensual dimension of such parent/child inter-actions must be considered when attempting to understand the power of being read to in the formation of dynamic

modes of reading, for although it is not possible to watch such events taking place without disturbing their intimacy, it is possible that the shared direction of the gaze, and the voice of the reader taking on the voice of the author, sets up an awareness of the personal direction of narrative that is denied to children who only encounter books through the school story time or the reading scheme.

The denial of this experience may have been influential in the difficulties Henry experienced at the beginning of the study and may certainly have affected his problems with reading. However, once he had had the experience of reading a book in which he could take part in the telling (see reference to *The Sandal*: 273), he took on the same relaxed, half-heard voice when telling me about his reading of a book, continually falling back into reading to himself. I suggest that, despite Henry's struggle to be read to, and the combined influence of parental and school pressures to achieve reading success which appeared to have separated him from a desire to read, his experience during the study contributed to a new pleasure in reading which affected his fluency.

The middle children, Catherine and Mark, displayed a more pronounced interest in the peri-textual features of the books they chose, indicating a greater dependence on the cover design and blurb to define their expectations. This often had more to do with the time it would take them to read a particular book, but, at the beginning of the study Mark was concerned to choose books that had cartoon covers, probably derived from his fondness for *The Beano*, which led him to expect a kind of anarchic humour which sometimes led to disappointment. Though Catherine did not comment on the relationship of the cover to the reading experience, Mark was frequently disappointed in the disjunction between the impression the cover gave and the reading itself.

As I have indicated, Catherine was perhaps an unfortunate choice of subject, as she did not appear to want to take part in a dialogue about the books, but both she and Mark

differed from the younger children in their tendency to read and respond in passive ways. Both appeared to require books that could be read quickly and dispensed with, and demonstrated discomfort when confronted with anything ambiguous or open-ended. In other words, they indicated a preference for the dominant trend in children's fiction, and Mark in particular was clearly susceptible to the marketing strategies of the publishing industry, choosing texts that were familiar from television, or, like Spectral Stalkers, had a game element. However, following his encounter with The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales, which demanded a more dynamic reading, he became much more involved in our discussions, and spent more time considering the books before making his choices, deliberately seeking out different reading experiences. Because his reading of this text occurred at a time when he was becoming accustomed to the research situation, the change in reading behaviour may have been due to the new opportunities to take control over the booktalk. I suggest that Mark's recognition of his power as a reader contributed to his willingness to talk about his own responses, which, in turn, led to increased involvement with fiction in general.

The two oldest children in the study approached the event in very different ways, and while it was clear that both were reading passively for the most part, attracted to horror fiction in particular, and content to talk about books in terms of plot and character, Paul's attitude to his role as a contributor to my research led him toward a position of self-awareness. His gradual discovery of his own ability to read in different ways enabled him to respond to the texts he read in a multi-layered way, questioning the author's deliberate use of language and observing the effect it had on him. Though he had not been a reader for several years, I suggest that the background of *shared discourse* with his father, and the continuation of reading aloud in the family, enabled him to return to a position of authority in relation to the books he chose.

Teresa, on the other hand, had great difficulty finding a way of responding personally to the books she read, and was dependent on others to make her choices. She, like Paul, placed a great deal of emphasis on the cover and blurb, and initially looked for books that offered similar experiences to the Point Horror books she preferred. While such a preference for static text may have reinforced the mode of reading she found comfortable (and, as I suggested earlier, may have given her a semblance of authority in the repetitive nature of such texts), it is also possible that her dependence on others for her choice of reading led to her to be controlled by the forces of the market and her peers. Her dislike of ambiguity and the gaps of the open text, in addition to her discomfort with talking about what *she* thought, were indications of the lack of authority she had within the text. Although she began, toward the end of the study, to engage with the open-endedness of the research situation, and expressed more pleasure in reading books that offered more involvement than the Point Horror books, she was still dependent on recommendations from her mother and friends.

Thus, while the youngest readers appeared to be naturally active readers, those readers who had learned to communicate about fiction in particular ways seem to have become distanced from an awareness of themselves as readers involved in a dynamic relationship with texts. At the same time, as readers become distanced from their ability to take an active part in the telling, their dependence on the peri-textual features of the text increases. Thus, the social contexts of fiction, the educational demands, the commodification of texts, and the competing pressures of parents and peers, become more dominant, enmeshing the original act of communication in a complex web of mediations, until reader is separated from author in a way that silences them both.

Analysis of the Research Methodology

The development of the method used for the research described above addresses the silence of children's voices within the *social modes of reception*, by providing a map of the interplay between children and fiction within the contexts of adult mediation. The success of such a method to examine the influence of adult perceptions on the responses of seven individual children suggests the relevance of a similar approach in further research.

The difficulties encountered during the project must be acknowledged, however. Some of these were associated with the limits inherent in the choice of books made available for the project. I had selected the books for the study with the intention of investigating differences of response to texts which offered more or less active involvement on the part of the reader (see Chapter Seven). Although there appeared to be some distinction between responses to the Dynamic and Static categories of texts, the lack of challenging and 'open' texts among the books provided by a publishing company which is a major provider of children's fiction in this country, prevented an examination of a true contrast, aside from the case of The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales. While the difficulty of finding fiction that invited a more dynamic inter-action is an indicator of the pressures on the children's book market (see Chapter 6), this conservative approach, by one of the most prominent and reputed children's book publishers of paperback fiction, belies the production of more adventurous texts by other, more proactive, publishers. Thus, the limitation of investigating the output of only one publishing house must be acknowledged.

Whereas the Book Choice Studies revealed an emphasis on modes of reading and their place in the history of the reader, the texts themselves are part of that history, and while adult mediations can render a dynamic text static, or enable a dynamic reading of a static text, the invitation inherent in the text itself must be acknowledged. The study

has contributed to an understanding of the social mediation of reading styles, but more detailed research is needed to understand how stylistic features of the text affect the modes of reading we learn to adopt (Meek, 1988). I suggest that the phenomenographic approach adopted for the Book Choice Study provides a suitable model for pursuing such research, although a refinement in practice is necessary.

In order to investigate response as a process over time, it is necessary to conduct studies such as these over a longer time-frame. Continuing such a study over several years would allow such a dialogue to yield a wealth of information about the process of response and the influence of both text and mediations. As all of the children who took part in the study have agreed to participate in further research, it will be possible to continue investigating the development of their inter-actions with fiction, but also to do more detailed work with them, allocating more time to the texts themselves.

In addition, the strictures of conducting the research in a school setting meant that only short periods of time were allocated to me. Though ten twenty-thirty minute sessions gave some of the children time to adjust to a new way of talking about books, some were just getting accustomed to the setting when the study ended. In addition, it is evident from the transcripts that, as a researcher, I missed many opportunities for the children to extend their responses. In this way, the length of the meeting restricted their freedom to say what they wanted, and although longer meetings would have increased the already unwieldy amount of transcribed material to analyse, a less hurried environment may have invited more detailed observations about response.

The importance of the peri-text indicated by this research must also be investigated in more detail. The power of the cover and blurb to influence expectation is clear, and a recognition of textuality in the construction of readers must be acknowledged when

considering the social modes of response. The children who took part in the Book Choice Study indicated the extent to which they had learned to 'read' the cover, and to use it to guide them through the books they read. Within the publishing industry, the cover is considered the most important aspect of the book (see Chapter 6), yet there is no available research on the semiotics of covers (although McGann (1991) refers to the peri-textual aspects of scholarly editions). While such an investigation should not be restricted to children's books, the formative influence of childhood inter-actions with fiction must be investigated.

In general, the observations made during this study point to a complex pattern of response over time. Though the sampling of readers provided here may be too small to permit conclusive statements about all readers to be made, the ability of such a research methodology to allow such observations to arise, suggests its effectiveness as a way of investigating the history of response. The power of such a method to allow the research subject to have authority within the research relationship provides evidence of perceptions about fiction that would not otherwise be available. By framing the remarks and actions of the children who took part within the context of discourses of fiction that surround them, I have provided a mapping of response centring around notions of desire and control.

Conclusion - Toward a New Paradigm of Response

Whereas the youngest children in the Book Choice Study displayed a readiness to exert their own authority within the text, and to take part in the telling, the older children were more likely to approach the text as something separate from themselves. This suggests that the mediating forces which surround them in their inter-actions with fiction, in an effort to control and influence their reading competency and reading habits, take away their natural inclination to play in the text.

If fiction is perceived as merely another form of entertainment, to be read for escape and relaxation, the implied role for the reader is passive, whatever the invitation of the text. Certainly many texts published for children function in this way, and while there was no clear distinction between the way the youngest children approached the Static and Dynamic texts, the four readings of such texts as The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales revealed its qualities to challenge static ways of reading. The self-reflexive playfulness was acknowledged by different readers in different ways, yet it provided both Henry and Mark with a new way of reading that influenced their future choices.

However, if fiction is perceived "in terms of the way it echoes our basic human activity of inventing ourselves" (Nodelman, 1992:99), then the interpretive, procreative act of reading may represent a way of regaining, only momentarily, that lost world of unlimited possibility that Lacan determined as pre-symbolic (see Chapter Two).

Fiction thus becomes not merely an escape, but the fulfilment of a basic human need. The authors and illustrators who leave gaps to be filled, who share the telling and allow dialogues to be formed in the communicative act shared by reader and author, enable the reader to adopt an "I" within the telling, to claim a subject position within the text. Reading fiction dynamically thereby becomes a way of experiencing selfhood in a shared discourse with the author - the reader is not alone, but involved in an activity which is essential to the development of self-reflectiveness and creative thought.

Dynamic modes of reading can be seen to derive from the shared discourse involved in the act of reading to a child. The desire expressed by children in the study to be read to can be understood in relation to the interplay of desire and control at work during infancy. Whereas the consciousness of the self as alone may be seen to arise out of the separation of mother and child, the possibility that being read to addresses the fears that ensue must be considered.

[I]f the terror [described] is indeed rooted in infant fears, hearing a voice from outside ourselves, affirming we are not alone, would be deeply comforting. (Nell, 1988:64)

Thus, the exchanges that occur around shared book-reading have the potential to support the development of a strong subject position and extend the capacity of other voices to form a dialogue between child and author. Obviously, the withdrawal of such opportunities must have serious consequences for the nurturing of dynamic modes of reading. By thus silencing the 'voice' of the author, fiction becomes less of a communicative exchange and more of an acquisition of skills. In this way, the silence of the author silences the reader within the text.

Talking to children reveals not only their ability to experience a 'literary' engagement with texts, but also reinforces the Barthesian notion of the desire that motivates the pleasure of the text (Barthes, 1975). The struggle for selfhood that is played out in fiction must be understood in terms of the degree of control and authority the reader is given. This striving for a voice occurs not only within the author/reader inter-action, but in the way that fiction is mediated. Clearly, as children, we are subjected to the authority of others - led toward the Law of the word and the control of the social. The recognition that the meta-discourses of children's literature form mediations that progressively silence children's natural desire to be active *within* the text, frequently disabling their ability to enter into a dialogic relation with the author, provides a mapping of response as a continuous process, interrupted by the need to control the unknowable forces of the *semiotic* (Kristeva, 1986).

The expectation that children must develop essential skills before they can engage in more sophisticated literary discourse is challenged by the perception of fiction as essential. However, the assumptions of the children's book publisher involved in this

research, the conception of fiction reflected in the policy and pragmatics of education, and the evidence of parental perceptions of fiction available in these studies, reinforce the developmental view. By separating literary concerns from the inter-relation between children and books, the mediation of fiction for children continually interrupts a natural inclination to engage with fiction dynamically, and reinforces static readings imposed in the effort to teach children 'how to read'.

If the capability of the youngest children to encounter the 'literary' engagement, of constructing a fictional world with an author, is regarded as an fundamental part of human activity, then the separation of the concerns of Children's Literature from the concerns of Literature in general is a nonsense. The mediations which define a divided discourse for children's fiction, whether in the Academy, Education, the publishing industry, or the family only serve to distance children from the experience of literary reading, and so perpetuate the separation of concerns *ad infinitum*.

The sharing of discourses about children's literature depends not merely on talking with children about the books they read, but on reading and recognising the value of the books themselves, and judging them, not in terms of their content or relevance to children's lives, but by their ability to offer readers authoritative positions. Such a focus, privileging as it does the relationship to language authors are able to define for their readers (Rose, 1992), implies the similarity of concerns of the literary theorist and the children's literature specialist.

As reader-oriented theory challenges the supremacy of the text and the critic, the radical developments proposed by Children's Literature theory confront the supremacy of the adult reader (Hunt, 1991). Re-focusing attention away from the unifying force

of prescribed 'meaning', toward the multiplicity of meaning inherent in post-structuralist thought, implies the necessity of approaching any text dynamically.

if we believe, with theorists like Barthes, Lacan and Derrida, that "reality" is itself a series of fictions we create, a set of artificial constructs, then the process of "deconstructing" a text becomes an act of consciousness raising, an insight into the relationships of imagination and logic, fiction and reality.

(Nodelman, 1992:107)

If there is no unified reality, all encounters with fiction demand an investment by the reader to produce a personally valid meaning from the text, and it is the social dimension of response that determines "the reading formations that regulate the encounter between texts and readers." (Bennett, 1983:211). Evidence from these studies, and many other conversations with young children, demonstrate that the youngest children approach texts in this way, while the older children have been taught, through the meta-discourses of fiction they encounter, to seek for unifying forces which disable their own sense of self-determination within the text.

The development of the method used for the Book Choice Study has provided an answer to the problem of how to talk to children about what they read. Throughout the course of this study, I have justified the need to address the silence of children in the criticism and theory of children's literature. Attempts to speak on their behalf are insufficient - they only serve to reinforce our dependence on assumptions about what children are and how they feel. Not only do such attempts mask the truth, but they perpetuate the silence.

Throughout this thesis I have argued for a shared discourse between theoretical perspectives of response and children as readers. The need to establish a mutual

construction of fiction as a fundamental component of the formation of a subject position, of literature as an act of communication in which the reader is an equal, is clear. Though the re-definition of Children's Literature theory and the adoption of response theory in pedagogy imply a recognition of the need to view response to fiction as a continuum, the prevailing social contexts of literature define a separation of discourses. The need to introduce compulsory Children's Literature courses for all trainee teachers and to facilitate in-service opportunities to read and talk about children's fiction, is obvious in the light of the evidence. Rather than placing the emphasis of such training on the use of fiction in the classroom, such courses must focus on children's texts as peer-texts, allowing trainee teachers to experience different modes of reading and interrogate the ways such reading positions are inscribed in the text (Chapter Five). In this way, the 'literary' dimension of children's fiction will be recognised and, rather than defining and controlling fiction for children, based on assumptions of children as undeveloped readers, the dimension of desire and control that all readers share will be reinforced.

However, despite recent developments in the field of Children's Literature, the subject remains peripheral to both teacher education and literary study. Over the three years of the research documented here, a radical re-shaping of the field has occurred, leading not only to the development of a scholarly agenda, but also to a degree of recognition within the Academy. The establishment of the first British professorship in the field, and opportunities to pursue the study of children's literature at BA, MA and PhD level may have gone some way to addressing the marginalisation that has characterised the field. It is not enough, however, to conform to familiar models of literary study, nor to demonstrate the relevance of literary theory to the texts of childhood, for the separation of concerns will remain.

Until those who impose a value on literature based on a sophistication of naive reading, or as a culturally privileged art form, acknowledge the extent to which the youngest readers pursue autonomy in their inter-actions with texts, there can be no shared discourse. Notions of the 'skilled' reader must be tempered with an understanding of the formation of reading positions. This cannot be done without recognising the formative role of the texts of childhood and the social mediations which play a role in the development of readers. Only a radical re-orientation of theory which defines response to literature as a continuum will give children a voice.

APPENDIX i

LIST OF GUIDELINE QUESTIONS USED IN PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

This list of questions informed the conversations which took place with parents, teachers and the case study children prior to the start of the Book Choice Study. Though I met with parents and teachers in the fortnight prior to the start of the study, the conversations with the children occurred during our first meeting.

The meetings were conducted in an informal way, rather than as an interview. Though many of the questions listed below were asked, the information was frequently given during the course of the conversation without the questions being asked.

As I have discussed in Chapter Eight, the reading histories of the children who took part in the case studies were derived from these conversations. The responses revealed both perceptions of fiction and the role of readers that each individual expressed, and described the way in which the adults mediated fiction for the children in the study.

During these conversations, I allowed my role as questioner to be determined by the interest of the individual being questioned. Therefore, there were occasions when the discussion departed from the questions, particularly during the meetings with teachers, who frequently commented on the restrictions of the National Curriculum, and made general comments about the involvement of parents in the reading of their children.

Guideline Questions for Meetings with Parents

These meetings took place in the child's home. I explained in advance that I would be asking the parents questions about their own reading, as well as the reading of their children. When meeting with both parents, questions were directed at both of them simultaneously, and each replied in turn, sometimes entering into a discussion with each other. However, in the case of Henry's parents, I questioned his stepfather later, because he had arrived after the conversation with Henry's mother had begun.

1. Do you read in your spare time? What kind of reading do you prefer? (fiction, poetry, hobbies, biography, etc.).
2. When, during the day, do you read? How often and for how long? Where? (chair, bed, breakfast table?)
3. Do you belong to a library? Do you visit regularly?
4. How do you choose what you read? (Reviews, advertisements, recommendations of friends, cover or blurb on the jacket, author's reputation?)
5. What was the last book you read? Was it a good choice?
6. Do you buy books? For yourself? For others? How do you choose what to buy?
7. Where do you buy books (large chain store, supermarket, secondhand bookshops, markets, book club)?
8. What was the last book you bought for yourself? Was it a good choice?

9. Do you talk to people about the books you read? Can you mention a book that you felt strongly enough about to tell someone?
10. What do *you* think is important about reading fiction?

THESE QUESTIONS REGARD THE CHILD IN THE STUDY

1. When did you first start to show books to _____? When did you start reading to _____? When did you stop reading to _____ (if applicable)?
2. How often do you read to _____? When? Where? Who does the reading?
3. How did you choose books for _____?
4. Does _____ belong to the library? Did he/she go to library storytimes?
5. What kind of book did _____ enjoy most (fiction, non-fiction, picture books)? Were there any particular favourites?
6. Does _____ read now? Do you recommend books to them? Can you give an example?
7. Do you think _____ reads enough? Do you think they read the right kind of thing? Do you know what they are reading at the moment?
8. Do you talk about what they read? Do you talk about what you read?

Guideline Questions for Meeting with Teachers

The meetings with teachers were carried out in the classrooms of the primary school teachers, and in the Common Room or the Library of the secondary schools. Only some of the schools had made the reading policy documentation available to me prior to the meeting, and this influenced the method of questioning. However, all teachers referred to the reading policy of the school.

I explained, prior to the start of the meeting, that some of the questions would be about the school, some about their own reading interests, and some about the specific reading of the individual child.

1. How is fiction reading dealt with in the school's reading policy?
2. Is there a regular period of free reading during the school day? How are the books chosen?
3. Is there a book corner in the room? How are the books chosen?
4. Is there a library period? Do the children visit the school library/public library regularly? If so, what do they do there?
5. Is there a regular storytime? How long is it and how often? Do you read to the children, or does someone else? What kind of thing do you read (ask for examples)? Do you talk about the book after you have read it? In between chapters?
6. How do you choose what to read to them? Do children ask you for recommendations? What kind of thing do you recommend (ask for examples)?
7. In class as a whole, how many do you think consider reading as one of their primary pastimes? How much of that would be fiction? What are the other pastimes of the children in the class?
8. Do the parents show concern about their children's reading? Do they ask for advice or recommendations?

9. Do you enjoy reading (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, biography, etc.)? When do you read? Do the children see you read? Do you talk to them about what you are reading? How do you choose the books you read?
10. Do you talk to people about the books you read? Can you mention a book that you felt strongly enough about to tell someone?
11. What do *you* think is important about reading fiction?

THESE QUESTIONS REGARD THE CHILD IN THE STUDY

Since these meeting occurred at the beginning of the year, some of this information was given by a previous teacher.

1. Do you consider _____ to be a confident reader (if appropriate, give reading age, or standing in relation to the rest of the class)?
2. Did _____ learn to read easily? Was there a reading scheme used (if known)?
3. Does _____ give any indication of the reading they do outside of school?
4. Does their written work reflect their reading?

Guideline Questions for the Case Study Children

Questions were asked during the first meeting with the children, which occurred at their school. I did not ask them all at once, and on several occasions, I left some of these questions for later meetings. Occasionally, children would offer a comment that led us back to general questions.

1. Do you like to read? What kind of book do you like reading (fiction - mysteries, horror, animal stories, picture books, humour, quiz books, non-fiction, poetry, short stories, etc.)?
2. How often do you read (daily, weekly, not often)? How many books did you read this week?
3. Are you read to at home? By whom? How often? Where? Who chooses the book (you, parent, siblings)?
4. Do you remember being read to when you were younger? When? What kind of thing did you like? Can you give an example of a favourite book?
5. Are you read to at school? Who reads to you? How often? Can you remember any of the books?
6. Can you remember when you started to read on your own (if applicable)? Was it at home or at school? Can you remember the reading scheme? Do you have any favourite books that you read on your own?
7. Do you belong to the library? How often to you visit? How do you decide on what books to choose? Do you usually read the books you borrow?
8. Do you buy books for yourself? Where (bookshop, supermarket, book club, school shop, second hand)? Do you receive book tokens? How do you choose what to buy? Can you remember a book you recently bought for yourself? Was it a good choice?
9. Do you receive books as gifts? Can you remember any titles? Who gave it to you? Did you read it? Was it good?

10. Do you talk to your friends about the books you read? Can you give an example? Do you talk to your parents or teachers about books you read? Can you give an example?

11. What do *you* think is important about reading fiction (With some of the younger children, I had to explain what fiction meant. I sometimes had to ask them to differentiate between what was important (what teacher or parent has said) and what they thought was important).

12. Do you consider reading to be a hobby? What other things do you like to do in your spare time?

APPENDIX ii
EXAMPLES OF TRANSCRIBED CONVERSATIONS
FROM THE BOOK CHOICE STUDY

Although I have used quotations from transcripts in the body of the thesis (see Chapters Six and Eight), this selection is intended to provide an overview of the research situation, and the way in which book-related behaviour was observed and recorded. There are approximately 450 pages of transcribed conversations, including both the preliminary meetings with parents and teachers, and the fortnightly meetings with the children. This appendix includes three meetings with children, one with parents and one with a teacher.

I am always represented by the letter D, and the child is represented by the first letter of their first name. Actions are recorded in italics. The audiotapes were transcribed within two days of being recorded and annotated with notes taken at the time of the meeting.

1. Susan, Age 6 - Second Meeting

After setting up the tape recorder in the library, I collected Susan from the classroom. She started to tell me about Mystery in Musket Bay as we were walking to the library, and told me that it was frightening. We sat down and put on the tape recorder.

D: (*showing Susan a copy of the transcript I made of our last conversation*) That's all the things you said last time (*I return it to her box*). So you have the two books - shall we talk about one at a time?

S: I didn't draw a picture because I didn't have time.

D: Oh, OK, well next time will you do me one?

S: (*nodding, but appearing uninterested*) OK.

D: Well, which one shall we talk about first?

S: (*holding up To Bed, or Else!*) This one's funny.

D: That one's funny - To Bed or Else! OK (*I wait for further comment, but Susan has begun to look at the book again, ignoring me*). Did you read them right away - did you read them as soon as you got them, or did you wait for a while?

S: I waited for a while.

D: Well, tell me about that one (To Bed or Else!)- tell me what you thought about it.

S: It's funny and it's really horrible - some of it (*she looks through the book continually, concentrating on working her way through it - there is a long pause on the tape*).

D: Did you have a favourite part - what did you like?

S: When, um...(long pause) Well,.. I liked these little pictures (*shows me an example of thought balloons leading from the heads of the characters*).

D: You mean the balloons?

S: Yes - because they were fun.

D What are they? What are they for?

- S: They're thinking about all the toys and they're all....(another pause - she's wrapped up in the pictures and reading the book again, pointing out the balloons in the illustrations without speaking).
- D: Did you read it a lot of times, or did you just read it the once?
- S: Um, I think I read it at nighttime and at my Nannie's when I stayed the night.
- D: Oh, right. Did you show it to your Nan, or to your Mum?
- S: Yes - (puts down *To Bed or Else* and picks up *Mystery at Musket Bay*) but this one was scary.
- D: Scary? What was scary?
- (Susan looks through the book, trying to find a particular place - silence)
- S: It was - the scary bit was - it was that I thought it was ghosts - (She points to page 32: 'Ooowwww' It was a bloodcurdling, heart-squeezing, terrifying howl that was coming from somewhere very close. It went on for ages, stopped...then started again, even louder and more terrifying.) I didn't read it all.
- D: So, you didn't finish it?
- S: No (continues to look at this page).
- D: Was that because it was scary - you decided not to finish it?
- S: (Nods while she is reading through the following pages)
- D: OK.
- S: Mummy just told me what was happening - what was going to happen - it was just that old man. (shows me the picture on page 47, of an old man with a long beard).
- D: (I read a bit of it silently, and she is doing the same). So in the end it wasn't so scary. (Susan shakes her head). So did your Mum read it to you, or did she read it and then tell you about it?
- S: I read some and that was it, really. (Still looking at the book - her speech kept drifting off as she concentrated on reading bits over) I read some and then when it came to the 'Ooooo' bit I told my Mum and Mummy came up and she told me what would happen.
- D: Oh, OK. (No reply from Susan) So, did you like the bits that you read?
- S: Yeah.
- D: Was it like any other books that you have?
- S: (Keeps reading - no answer)
- D: Are you reading the end bit?
- S: I think it's a song (shows me page 52 - a pirate song).
- D: Oh, right - pirates usually sing songs, don't they? So, was it like any books that you'd seen before?
- S: No - I've never seen it before.
- D: So, was there anything in here that you particularly liked?
- S: Mmm - well, I liked I liked this one best - that man..... said um...(looking through the book for a particular part) ...he said 'Cap'n' and he says um, in a funny voice.
- D: What did he say in a funny voice - can you find me the bit?(Long pause while she looks for it) Do you mean because he speaks in a strange way and says 'ye'?
- S: (finding the part she is looking for) They shoot the Captain through the leg, and he says 'I've never seen the like of 'ee'.
- D: Did you like that? (Susan nods).
- S: Saucy Sally was the best.
- D: Where's Saucy Sally?

S: Saucy Sally is the ship (*She shows me a picture of the ship*)' Saucy Sally comes toward the island in Musket Bay' (*reading*).

D: Right. (*There is music coming from the next room - initially this distracts Susan, but not for long - she gives me a look as if commenting on the noise*)

S: Naughty Swagg - the other pirate - his servant's called.... um.....**Bosun Billy** (*over-pronouncing it, stressing the alliteration*).

D: That's real Pirate-speak, there. (*No reply from Susan*). So you liked that one better than this one? (*She nods*) But is it something you'd want to read again (*shakes head*) because its scary? (*Nods, but is still reading through the book*). What about the other one?

S: That one was good as well , but I liked the other one best.

D: What did you think of the pictures in that one (*pointing to To Bed or Else!*)?

S: That was good. (*Shouts 'To Bed Or Else!' and continues to read it*).

D: So were they what you thought they were going to be like?

S: Yeah - I thought they were going to be funny.

D: And you said last time that you thought that (*'To Bed or Else'*) was going to be silly. Do you think it was?

S: Yeah.

D: And did you think the other one was funny at all?

S: A little bit, but not in the end (*has lost interest in this conversation*). Can we take out the books now? (*I set out the five coloured trays, in which the books are spread out so that the covers are visible*) Oooh, Mrs Tiggywinkle!

(*Susan sings and talks at the books, almost, going through the same process as last time, going through the boxes very thoroughly - picks up Alice in Wonderland. I ask if she's heard of it and she laughs and says yes and identifies the picture of the Cheshire Cat on the cover as The stripy cat*)

S: (*Shrieks*) 'Stig of the Dump' I've got to show Richard this one - he came to the party as Stig of the Dump!

(*She appears to be fascinated by Mattie and Grandpa, and I'd ask her if she'd seen it before, but she hadn't - she was again interested by Robin's Country and asked if it was really about Robin Hood - but I explain that it was about a child at that time.*)

S:(*picking up The Sandal*) This has only got pictures in it - well, I'm not having that one - it doesn't have a story!

(*Looks at the The Stinky Cheese Man 'Woweee! it huge!'. Picks up Alice - I ask if her Mum will read it to her- she nods, then puts it back. She narrows it down to a few possible choices -she has placed all the books in two piles at the side of the table, talking and singing to herself. This process took 15 minutes. She then proceeds to put the books back in the right boxes. She seems to like manipulating the books, tossing them back into the boxes in which they belong, makes them fit. Finally, she narrows it down to two, and I'm quite happy for her to take two - one is a picture book - Bailey and the Big Bully and the other is a storybook - The Witch that Wasn't.)*

D: So you're picking two again. You're sure, now?

S: *(Singing the song that's going on in the background.)*

D: So can you tell me why you chose those two?

S: Because this one, Bailey the Big Bully *(mumbles the title, emphasising the B sounds)*.

D: So why did you choose that one, then?

S: Because I like this one.

D: Why do you like that one?

S: Because he *(pointing to the boy on the cover)* looks like a real smarty-pants.

D: Do you like smarty-pants?

S: *(laughing)* Yeah.

D: And what about this one *(pointing to The Witch that Wasn't)*?

S: Because I like witches.

D: You like witches. OK. So, do you know what its about? Do you know what kind of story it is?

S: *(starting to read it)* It's about a witch that wasn't a witch.

D: Do you think that's going to be scary?

S: A little bit.

D: Shall we write these down and you're going to do me something for it this time, so I can put it in this box.

S: MY box?

D: Your box.

S: *(appears to be pleased with this idea - says in a sing-song voice)* My box, my box.

(Susan helps me list them books and finds then pens for me to mark the boxes - she reads me the author's names)

D: Now tell me - why did you put Alice back after you said you were going to choose it?

S: Because I wanted the other two.

D: Have you written any stories since I saw you?

S: No.

D: Don't forget, I'd love to see one when you do.

(Susan then notices a book on the floor of the library - Tom Tiddler's Ground - and expresses disgust at the cover, which has insects on it. I walk her back to the classroom and she stops to put her new books away in her bookbag. We say good-bye).

END OF INTERVIEW (30 minutes)

2. Mark, Age 10 - Fifth Meeting

We were unable to use the classroom as usual, and so we sat in the library. We had to wait a long time while groups of students used it as a thoroughfare. While we wait we talk about the fact that the term is almost over and that they've been doing art in class, something which Mark enjoys. One of the teachers came over to the table and made a joke into the tape recorder. After five minutes it was quiet. Mark is carrying The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales).

D: So, what did you think?

M: Its really - its good (*He hands me his written report, which has a drawing of the Stinky Cheese Man, a description of his favourite tale (Chicken Licken) and a score of 8/10*).

D: You like it? Can I see what you did? - that's pretty good, 8 out of 10. Well, tell me about Chicken Licken, then.

M: It's quite good. When the Table of Contents falls on her head.

D: Were all the fairy tales ones that you were familiar with - do you know them all?

M: Um, yeah, I think so (*handles the book a lot - looks through it*) Sometimes there are like two fairy stories in one, sort of like Cinderumpelstiltskin.

D: Let's look at Chicken Licken. (*he opens it to the right page*).

M: yeah, liked it when the print was funny.

D: Did you think it was something suitable for your age?

M: Maybe a bit younger - I'm not sure, though.

D: Can you say tell me more about what you liked? What about the pictures?

M: Yeah, they're good because they're different - I think they're quite good.

D: How many times did you look at it?

M: Quite a lot of times.

D: Did you show it to your folks? What did they think?

M: They thought it was quite good.

D: So, you like the idea of the table of Contents falling?

(*Long pause while Mark looks at that page again, chuckles to himself*) How did you read it - like a story, when you start at the beginning and read through to the end, or did you skip around?

M: First time I read it, but then I just read the ones I liked again.

D: So what were your other favourites?

M: Chicken Licken, um, the Giant's story was quite good, (*looks through it after asking permission*) oh, yeah, the tortoise and the hare was quite good - I like that and the Ugly Duckling was good (*laughs as he looks at it*).

D: Have you showed it to [*the teacher*] at all?

M: Um, yeah. He thought it looked a bit strange.

D: What do you think about, say people who read this book who didn't know the stories? Do you think that they would like it as much?

M: No, I don't think they'd like it - because they might kind of like think that it wasn't making sense.

D: Was there anything about it that you didn't like

M: No, not really - it was like - it's good they way Jack the Narrator kind of like comes up every so often (*shows me*) and he's got his own story.

D: Do you know of any other books where when the narrator talks to you - do you like that kind of thing?

M: Yeah, I like it when that happens.

D: Can you remember any?

M: *(long pause - then shakes his head)*

D: Because sometimes really old books, old fairy tales have the person who tells to story says things - like in Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll often tells you things like that. *(Pause)*. Is it something that you would read again?

M: Yeah, mmm.

D: Did you tell any of your friends about it - did anyone else know it?

M: Noone knew it.

D: Have you ever seen it in a bookshop? *(Mark shakes his head)* Have you seen the Nightmare Before Christmas? Because the characters reminded me of this - sort of big balls on sticks.

M: Yeah, it's really good. Was it the same person who did Wallace and Gromit?

D: No, it was Tim Burton, who did Edward Scissorhands and Beetlejuice. So, was it frightening, at all?

M: No - there was a little cartoon thing before it and that was quite good, as well - it was in black and white. When we went it was in the littlest cinema and there was hardly anyone there and there was someone behind us who was really noisy. but it was good. *(He picks up the book again and is looking through it)*.

D: They're not very pretty drawings, are they?

M: I had trouble figuring out which bit is which sometimes.

D: What about the back?

M: Well, lots of people look at the back.

D: Well, I'm glad that you enjoyed that.

(Mark then goes about the process of picking another book - I tell him he can pick two for Christmas break. He goes right to the red box (where he got The Stinky Cheese Man) Looked at Cry of the Wolf again. I mentioned that he didn't have anything on his list from the dark blue box (Classics) yet. Quickly picks Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and The Tale of Christine Pristine after about six minutes.)

D: Can you tell me about picking them?

M: That one (Tale of Christine Pristine) because it's kind of short and like a cartoon.

D: Have you seen any of these before - there's a series of them - Doug Smug, I think, is one.

M: Mmmm, yeah, I think so.

D: Have you ever read Alice, before?

M: Yeah, no...I think I have, I can't remember.

D: You may have read a different version.

M: Yeah, probably.

(We chat a bit about Christmas and his new puppy. He is more at ease with conversation that he has ever been.)

D: Have you been reading anything else at school?

M: Yeah, there's this book called Rescue about this boy who, uh, who liked going hunting when he was little and then his dad takes him hunting and he doesn't like it and his dad shoots this bear and it dies and the bear cub's left, so he takes it and looks after

it, and I finished reading another Point Horror, because I lost it and found it again - Nightmare-something.

D: Did you think about what the ending would be when it was lost, and were you right?

M: Yeah - there were quite a lot of deaths at the end - someone strangled, someone fell off a cliff, someone drowned.

D: (*laughing*) Did anybody make it at the end?

M: Yeah, there was one person - it's quite strange, really, at the end, because it was kind of like these people who were in the 90s and these people were from the 60s - one of them was put in the electric chair, but they're still alive for some reason - well, they're not really dead. One of them died when one of the other one's were born and she's the one who survived, because they were, like, the same people. The person went inside her and made her do stuff she didn't want to do, like kill people and stuff.

D: It was good, you thought? Was it different to the others you have read?

M: Yeah, kind of.

D: So, is there a narrator in this one - is it told from the girl's point of view?

M: No, just like telling a story.

END OF INTERVIEW - 20 minutes

3. Paul, Age 13 - Second Meeting

(We had to wait around while the door to the interview room was unlocked and in the course of small talk he started to discuss why he had drawn the alternate book cover for *In Black and White*).

P: The actual story of Black and White isn't that story (*pointing to the picture on the cover*) so I did that one instead - its supposed to be like an old photo - I drew like a frame there - right.

D: Oh, well done.

P: Its not that good, but....

D: So did you think that story stood out then?

P: Yeah, although that is quite good, a nice picture and it catches your eye, but... I suppose because of it being the first story as well - because that's what you read to try and judge the book, so that's why I did that...

D: Thank you - what did you think about that particular story, In Black and White?

P: That was good (*interrupting me*) I read that one and that's what made me read on, really, like, I was enthusiastic, then.

D: Is it like things that you'd read before?

P: Yes and no - its not like really, really, really scary, and keeps playing on your mind, but its creepy and things happen that .. and doesn't end it properly or something like that - and so it's got a thrilling sentence at the end - but it's really good.

D: So, do you like that when something doesn't finish?

P: Yeah, so you can make up - you can think what happened next or think how it ended or things like that.

D: Cause... do you mean, some of them it's not clear whether its supernatural or explainable?

P: Yeah - so if it ends without explaining it, then you can make up your own mind.

D: Did you have a favourite story in there?

P: I liked a lot the last one, called Efflorescence or something.

D: Can you remind me, because its been a long time..

P: It's a story about a girl and a boy - the boy's called Dennis... I should remember this - I read this two days ago (*he flicks through the book*) that's actually one thing that surprised me - I read most of this book in the first week.. right, every night for about, I actually finished my homework early to read it and finished more than half of it in one week. And then the second week I read less, like bits of it - large bits over the last few nights - and I read this story not last night but the night before that, and it's about a girl called - it doesn't actually say, because it's her that's telling the story (*Paul says this as though realising something he didn't understand*).

D: Maybe you don't get to know her name?

P: Maybe!... (*laughs as though he is pleased with this idea*) Anyway - it's about a girl and a boy and they walk to school together through a tunnel - a disused railway tunnel - and they walk - that's a shortcut for them and then the boy, um, these two younger twin brothers come up to his school and then he has to walk with them every morning, so they don't get to see each other, so they find a loose brick at the end of the tunnel and they put a note behind the brick and so they can see if one or the other's been there, yeah? And then these bullies, called the Rains brothers - there's three of them - they find this note and they start putting prank notes in there - like Meet me at 6.30 - things like that and they start bullying them - jump on them when they go there. And

then they decide that they've got to work out a code or something like that so they use - Dennis works out a form of like Morse code but using letters - and they start writing that with chalk on the bricks and there's a special way of using brick by brick to decipher and then, about a week later, because they worked out that it was Rains-proof and stuff like that, so that the bullies couldn't read it, but they could, and then one day, she goes down to the tunnel with a torch, because it's like early winter, late winter-yeah, it's this time of year, and she goes with the torch to look for the markings, because there's loads of them now, except she looks this one that's quite high up - up in the arc and it says like 'Eight days to go'. And it's in a different like substance, called Efflorescence and it comes up through the rock and then she goes to him and says 'Did you write it?' and he says, 'No' and she says 'Well, someone's cracked our code then' so they try to work out who it is, then the next day 'Seven days to go' and she looks at her calendar when she gets home and she says 'Seven days to Halloween' - and that's when it starts to get really (*I remark on my memory of that bit*) and then one day they both go down there and see it and it says 'Six days to go' and they - the girl gets up on Dennis's shoulders, because it's about ten foot high and then she reaches up and touches it - they realise it's not chalk and what it is, and then when it's the day, like when it's Halloween, she goes over to sleep the night at Dennis's house and then her parents and her little sister are out at a party - that's why she had to stay there for a bit - and then when she gets home the next morning - she um she comes home - it's quite cold, but not that cold - but she goes in the house and it's freezing - all the pipes have frozen and pulled out and burst and her room is just so cold - everything's iced over - and then on the window - in the condensation it's like the code and it says 'Tonight'. (*Paul pauses and grins as he accentuates the eerie atmosphere.*) And that's like the end of it. It's really good, that.

D: Do you think that having her tell it made it any different?

P: Yeah - because - most of them are like that - it's like when they're older and say, something really strange happened to me when I - things like that - yeah. I always thought - when I was reading it - I thought that Jan Mark had been born or brought up somewhere near where I used to live, in Kent, because in a lot of stories, she uses places in Kent, like Maidstone, where I used to live.

D: Oh, it might be - she live in Oxford now, but..

P: Hm, because I was wondering, she mentions it a lot. (*Pause while he looks at the book again*) There's another one called Birthday Girl which was good - about the girl in the bath - it's very good - it's pretty creepy the first time she sees it, but then the second time - you know, when the old woman comes round - it's really nice.

D: The one that really struck me when I read it was the one about the Bus Stop and the little girl...

P: (*interrupting*) Oh, yeah - that's a good one.

D: Is it the Colonel, or something, who doesn't go out? - the guy who sits in the window...?

P: Oh, yeah - it's like she can see people but the rest of the family can't - the man with no head (*we both laugh*) - the whole estate round there was built on an old graveyard and they brought up all the tombstones but left the bodies there. (*Does the Outer Limits theme tune*)

D: (*laugh*) Oh, good - were there bits of it you didn't like?

P: Yeah, there were a few stories that were, just a bit, they weren't long, but they were just a bit boring - Who's a Pretty Boy Then, Grow Your Own and Welcome Yule those three in a row, I didn't like..

D: What, you thought they went on too long?

P: No, not that it's just the theme of it - like *Who's A Pretty Boy* was about some budgerigars they were - and they put them on a patch in the garden that nothing would grow on and they put it down there and the man - the Dad built an aviary and they started saying things and said 'I don't want anyone teaching them how to speak and I want them to live as naturally as possible' and then they started to speak on their own, things like 'Oh, I'm so cold' and 'Pity, pity me' and things like this and he had to get rid of them in the end - it was something to do with that patch, I think. *Grow Your Own's* about a compost heap that comes to life - a bit far-fetched, and *Welcome Yule* was about this whole community that had this Reverend and it was Christmas time and they were going to do carol-singing and it was like a little village and everyone knew everyone and they said '20th of December, some people called the Waites, which is what carol-singers used to be called, they came round to carol sing and everyone knew they were ghosts in the community, but this new Reverend that had just come in - he was almost like a Sergeant Major in the army, and said this is our day for carol singing (there were different parishes in the area) and when these people came up in their cloaks, like the grim reaper wears and he had a go at them and everyone was looking at him (*Paul makes a supercilious face*).

D: Right, so - you were saying that the one that was far-fetched - they're all, quote, supernatural - strange things happening - but do you think that the ones that are closer to what you might experience were creepier?

P: I mean, some things - although they were quite far-fetched, I could imagine them happening - but not as dramatic, or anything - like that one (*points to the cover*), I could definitely believe that happening, but not like, you know.... Like the girl having a sixth sense and everything..

D: So did that make you interested in reading more by her - she has other collections of stories.

P: No, she writes things just normal, but they are still quite fictional.

D: Yes

P: But she's good at writing these because she puts a funny twist in it.

D: So, this was a successful choice, I guess. Did you talk to anybody it - did you tell anybody?

P: Yeah, cause, um, Ian came round and I said 'This is the book I got' and he said 'Is it good' and I said 'Yes'.

D: Is that the kind of thing he would like?

P: Yeah - but it's not something he would talk about - I mean now it's all videos and computer games - but that was a real good, though.

D: So you mean, generally, you don't talk about books?

P: Not really - you know, it's something you do at home on your own. I think there was one point where Ian bought the book of *Jurassic Park* and kept saying it's nothing like the film and I think my brother bought it and I read it when Ian said that and I said to him 'Yeah, you're right'.

D: It was a very popular book for awhile - we had it around our house, too. Did you tell your parents about it?

P: Yeah.

D: Did either of them read it?

P: No, I did tell 'em, but, that I'd almost finished it - I used to say 'Just going upstairs to read my book, alright, Mum- I'll come down for a cup of tea' (*laughs*).

D: What about - I mean, because they're short stories - did you feel that you really had

to finish it?

P: Yeah, because one night I got in quite late, I think it was about 9 o'clock, and had to quickly finish my homework - so it was about 10 o'clock when I went to bed, and I thought, well, might as well read in bed, and it was the last one, and I started to read it and I got half way through and I thought - oh, I can't keep going, put it down, went to sleep, the following night, I had to start at the beginning again to read it all the way through - I couldn't start - you start of like lose the feel of it and have to start again.

D: Yes, I suppose...

P: It - I did, one afternoon, read it as soon as I got in and I didn't find it as good - it's better in the dark room (*laughs*).

D: What did you think about this one? (*Indicating the cover story*)

P: That one was good, but it was over too quickly - it was all quick - like it went from someone putting the hat on, and then it was only one night when he started to come up the stairs and he ran back in his room and that was then end - it just felt real quick. Something should have actually happened and it should have moved around the house and they found it in a different place or something, or the clothes - but it was quite good.

D: So, did you think the description on the back was fitting?

P: Yeah, that's what I couldn't get - because there it explains In Black and White and there it doesn't - that's the other thing that didn't make sense to me.

D: Cause, do you think when you started reading In Black and White you weren't looking for an explanation of the cover? You said seen that story elsewhere.

P: Yeah, because I'd seen that and then I thought I'd read the book and when I read that (*points to the blurb on the back*) in like confused me, especially with the title there. But it was quite good.

D: I'm glad you enjoyed it - so you think it would have better to have seen that photograph - you did it well - I suppose it would be quite easy to produce that kind of photograph.

P: The other thing was there was a lot of J's and Jenny's and Gemma's and things like that in it - but that might be a...

D: Well, her name's Jan..

P: Mm, yeah, that's a thought - I just thought it might be for Jenny.. You see, it starts out like this 'Jenny Fielding is Mrs Sanderson now' or 'Now I'm twenty years old' or 'I'll tell you what happened when I was young' and that gives another ring to it, it's like, I'm never going to go back to that house again, or something like that, at the end. It was really good.

D: Oh, good. I'm really pleased you liked it - it was a good first choice. You'll have over a month next time, so you can....

P: (*interrupting*) So shall I take a big one?

D: So you can either take a big thick book or two short ones, it's up to you.

P: Shall I take a different colour?

D: You can take a different colour - I mean the only - I just want you to have all five colours by the end of the thing, but we'll meet about ten times, so you'll have plenty of opportunities, so you can take a different colour or not.

(*He starts looking at the books, which are laid out in the coloured trays on a table - he has to get up from his chair to look at them - he starts picking them up.*)

P: So what are they graded in, like?

D: Ah, ha, ha - you're the first person to ask.

P: What - subjects, or genres?

D: No - I've made certain estimations about the books and put them in five categories and I'll - when we're done I'll explain to you what the difference is. Did you like the idea of doing an alternative book cover ?

P: I do a lot of drawing at home, which is good if I finish my homework too early, or something like that..... *(he is picking up books in the Classic box and looking at the blurbs on the back)*.

D: You should just tell your teachers, and they could give you more. *(Paul laughs)*.

P: *(holds up Stig of the Dump)*. This is one book I've always wanted to read.

D: What, Stig of the Dump?

P: Is this a new version?

D: The words are the same - it's just a new editions to go with the Puffin Modern Classics.

P: It's one we've got at home but - our is a very old one.

D: Yes, quite a few of those were written quite a while ago. Have you had it read to you?

P: Stig of the Dump? No - my dad's got it on the - I think my younger brother's had it read to him - *(He is now looking at the mis-match books, and picks up Spinner)*.

D: Do you ever read to your younger brothers?

P: Not really.

D: They're not that much younger than you.

P: The youngest one's eight, but Sam's only two years younger than me.

That looks good *(Spinner)* Shall I look for another one?

D: You can if you like *(He picks up The Stinky Cheese Man)*. Some of the books that are picture books aren't necessarily for the younger readers.

P: Yeah, I've read a lot of Raymond Briggs - Fungus the Bogeyman and Gentleman Jim- it was - Fungus the Bogeyman was really complicated - like all the little labels - comparing things in their world to

D: Have you seen his new one ?- he's got one called The Man.

P: Yeah, oh what?.. I think that was read on like a Jackanory thing.

D: On the telly?

P: Yeah - they narrated that and that was good.

D: You know the Literature festival's going on at the moment?

P: *(suddenly remembering)* That's where I also saw it - they did a review of it on Blue Peter and said it was quite good.

(After looking for awhile - he changed his mind and said he'd just take Spinner)

M: OK, what kind of impression do you get of it?

P: Well, it's a more serious book, and I thought I might have a change, but I've always been a bit one-sided so I thought I might try this - I don't know- the cover looks inviting - it's like a boy shut off from everyone else

D: It's quite dark isn't it? - in a way.

P: 'Cause they say, *(Quotes back)* - he's looking for his father.

END OF INTERVIEW 25 minutes

4. Meeting with Parents of Mark, 10

(I am represented by the letter D, Mark's mother by M, and his father, by F.)

This was carried out at 9pm on a weekday night in the kitchen. It turned out I already knew them, having taught them in childbirth classes before Mark's birth. They also have a mentally handicapped daughter, age 8.

D: What kind of thing do you read in your spare time, if you do? I want to know whether you read for work or pleasure and what kind of things you do read.

F: Well, I do a lot of reading for work, reports or whatever. It tends to be perhaps predominately technical because it falls in line with what I do. I tend to read newspapers obsessively and this drives [Mark's mother] crazy, and I will read any newspaper. I do tend to read the Independent, and then at work I'll quite happily read the Telegraph or the Times or the Sun or whatever. I do tend to read a sort of general background information to what I do. I do tend to read a lot of sport as well.

D: Do you read any fiction out of choice?

F: I will read fiction, but very limited these days. I used to read obsessively.... but nowadays it tends to be maybe for fifteen or twenty minutes at the end of the day, that tends to be more or less it.

D: What kind of thing would it be - do you have a preference for.....

F: (*interrupting*) I do have a habit of reading things again and again and again (*He looks at M and she laughs*) I suppose that has a lot to do with because I can pick it up and can open a page practically anywhere and read it. It will vary, I suppose. I will quite happily read thrillers, I suppose, John Le Carre or Robert Ludlum or even Forsyth occasionally, I sort of have a soft spot for Dostoevsky. I quite like Russian novels, but that tends to be from when I was a lot younger. I seem to end up liking Russian novels quite a lot. It's just the way they write. But I went through all those typical - Kafka and various sort of things like that. I will read anything, but it tends to be lighter these days. I'm not reading for a long enough period of time, so therefore I need to absorb it fairly quickly - which falls in line with my newspaper reading - its sort of short and factual. That would be an outline. (*To M*) Would you say that was fairly...?

M: Yeah, I suppose so, the newspaper reading is pretty obsessive really, isn't it? (*They both laugh*) I'm totally different, because I don't very often read. I read articles in the newspapers, but I'll never pick it up and read it from front to back cover. I don't read a lot, really. I read articles in magazines, sometimes. Being at College I've done a lot of reading to do with that, but I'll be doing that in the daytime and then at night I'll just read anything - a novel that I've got, the top ten at WH Smith, or something like that (*Laughter*) that type of thing. So, I don't do a tremendous amount of reading but I suppose I have done over the last few years because I've been at College.

D: But your fiction reading stays pretty steady?

M: Yeah.

D: What about holiday reading?

M: Yeah, I'll always take a book, but whether I get to read it is another thing. Because we never seem to have time, do we(*to F*)?. I mean, we tend to have to have our eyes on [their daughter] because we have a mentally handicapped daughter, so we're always watching her, so I don't very often relax. That probably has got quite a lot to do with it, in a way.

F: With Mark, as well, if we're away we tend to do things with them and in the evening, kids don't go to bed when you're on holiday until 10.

M: We'll play games together and all that, rather than sit down and all read together. Yes, if [their daughter] would sit down and read books, but she doesn't.

F: I think we'd happily sit down and read books while the children played with a Bacardi on the side.

M: That would be ideal. I often take them away with me, but very often bring them back.

D: Do you belong to a public library?

M: Yes, but I don't use it for the sort of novels I read - they're usually passed on from friends or whatever, I use it for something specific - I use the College library. And we use the children's library in town and sometimes [a smaller branch library] as well.

D: Say you're choosing a book to read, how do you choose? Do you go by the author, or wait for a recommendation from a friend?

M: I usually go by the author, very often things I've read before.

F: Lots of people give us books occasionally.

M: Other people pass them on and recommend them.

F: I think less and less of that goes on, because you personally lose so many books that way and your friends do, so I suppose you do tend to get..

M: (to F) I mean you'll go and get them from bookshops - secondhand books.

F: Or Car boot sales.

M: I sometimes pick them up from places like that, yeah.

F: Books are so expensive.

M: The criteria why we actually buy them - it's usually we read them before or they are recommended....

F: Well, yours tends to be recommended by your family, isn't it?

M: Yeah.

D: Do you buy books as gifts?

M: Yes.

D: How do you make those choices? You mentioned top ten books.

M: Yes, sometimes. I'll buy my mother books like that for...not really fiction, but something they'd be interested in - history.

D: What about for the children?

M: Yeah, I tend to .. I have done in the past... tend to buy a lot of books for the children (*lots of laughter*) that comes very often from people who have recommended them - and we'll start off with an author and find out that we like that particular author and then read the whole lot. You know, so that's how I've always bought books for Mark, anyway. For [their daughter] it's a little bit different really. I buy her lots and lots of books, but they're all at a similar level. She really enjoys them, but the type of book is very different - much more simple - more picture books, and something she can relate to rather than something that's fantasy. With Mark I would go the other way - I would try to make it much more fantasy, like the Lynne Reid Banks ones - The Indian in the Cupboard - we read all of those and Roald Dahl. He knows them all off by heart.

D: Can you think of a specific book that you've bought for yourself or as a gift, recently?

F: Yeah, but they're not fiction. I found a dozen in the house the other day. (*He couldn't think of fiction*)

M: I think the last book I bought was about watercolour techniques, but I haven't bought any fiction for possibly about a year, I don't think - not for an adult.

D: I'm really trying to determine whether you're happy with the choices you make. When you choose a book to read do you read it and then say I made a good choice or do you stop after 10 pages?

M: Very often it takes me a long time to get involved in a book. Because I read it late at night, if I can't get past the first 10 or 20 pages or however many pages it takes to be interesting to me, then I can actually have a book by the side of my bed for three months before I'll actually have got past.... then once I do get involved in a book, then I very often can't put it down - I'll just carry it around with me, really and just snatch .. but I haven't done that in such a long time and I think that's partly because I've been reading College books and I know I keep thinking I'll take a book that has something to do with what I'm doing to bed with me and then just fall asleep. That's possibly why I haven't gotten involved with a lot of fiction books lately, really.

F: I bought a few books recently, but they were all related to what I do, reference and I don't sit down and read - I often go for the pictures.

M: The last one I read, and I don't have a very good memory for titles, *The Vicar's Wife* or *The Rector's Wife*. So I'm like - well, I've read that one and I'll probably read some more of hers now, because I quite enjoyed it, but I think there's probably better one's that she's written, so that's the type of thing.

D: What about talking to people with books?

M: Yes, sometimes I do with friends, especially if they've given me one, or.....

F: (*interrupting*) Nora gave me that (*couldn't hear title*) that I had to read and I had to talk to her about it, even though.... I mean I read 800 pages and then I'd just had enough of it - it took me nearly three months to read that.

M: Yes, that was quite ambitious

F: Mmm, but now I'll have to talk to your mother about *Wild Swans* that she's given me. It looks sort of autobiography - the trouble is she'll be wanting my opinion soon, I should think.

D: What do you think, if there is anything, is important about reading fiction? Is it an important thing to do?

M: I think its important for relaxation, really, and possibly that's why I feel I don't do enough of it - it's an enjoyable thing, picking up a book, because you can totally relax and turn off and become involved and anticipate and you know - it can be quite exciting, getting involved in fiction, can't it (*to F*)? I think it can - I feel I've missed it - possibly now I'll get back into it.

F: Well, I suppose it's a learning thing, as well. I suppose it stimulates one's imagination, things like that - but its I suppose hard to relate to it when things you are doing are so much down to earth. And when most of your reading tends to revolve around your work and that type of thing - I think you do sort of drift away from it. Helps your spelling as well and punctuation.

M: Yes, I mean, but that's something you feel more for a child, as well, isn't it - that it's an enjoyable thing for them and helps them in so many other ways.

D: Thanks for that. The rest of the questions are really about Mark, because I'm trying to build up a picture of his reading history, if possible. When did you start to look at books with him? Or did you do nursery rhymes and things like that?

M: It's a long time ago, but I think books always figured from very early on... due to the amount of books we've accumulated. He started - I couldn't exactly tell you when - I mean....

F: Two?

M: Oh, no, before then. He could actually, by 18 months he could actually say anything, he could string sentences together - he would have been before he was a year, but that depends on the type of book. He'd go from board book and then alongside that I would say we'd be looking at Nursery rhyme books and saying nursery rhymes... I'd say quite early, but I couldn't say exactly.

D: That's fine. Did he have a bedtime story - did you do that kind of thing?

M: Always, always - that always been a part of the routine, really. We tended to take it in turn.

F: He'd quite like us to do it still

M: He would like us to do it still, and because of you actually coming - I had a conversation with somebody today about it and I started to think, well, yeah, maybe I ought to still be doing it - but that's something else. But he always had that and really enjoyed them.

D: When he was first small, how did you choose those books you accumulated?

M: Pictures and stories - mostly they'd come from bookshops, I'd say.

D: Did you belong to any book clubs?

M: Not from very early on. I do now - I belong to Red House Books and have done for quite a few years, but mostly bookshops and libraries.

D: Did you go to things like library storytimes?

F: I didn't.

M: I didn't go with Mark, but I've tried with [their daughter] for a while.

F: I'm sure I went, didn't I?

M: We used to go to things at the library - all the activities in the holidays, but... we went to the Festival things and there was often somebody reading from their books or reading poetry - we went to quite a few things like that. We haven't been to so many, as they get older, as well.

D: What kind of things did Mark enjoy most - can you remember any favourites when he was smaller?

M: I think probably the Alfie books were sort of the favourites - (*asks F*) I can think more about sort of series we read when he was older - Lucy and the Bad Wolf series and Danny Fox - he liked those. I've actually given a lot of books away to friends. It's hard to think back too far - we read Roald Dahl when he was very young - he still got an awful lot from them.

D: Would there have been occasions when you might have given him something you remember?

M: He went through a phase when we read the Secret Seven and Famous Five - he quite liked them, but he wasn't that interested - I don't know that it was exciting enough and they did seem extremely dated, as well - I mean it's quite amusing reading them.

F: I read Just William or Biggles and he didn't really enjoy them.

M: He does have tapes of the Enid Blyton stories and he'll play those. But tapes is also something that has taken over from books. He will listen and listen (*looks disapproving*).

D: Did he read Treasure Island? No, he didn't.

M: So we'll get tapes out of the library (*this is said with a resigned air - she is obviously not happy about it*) There aren't many books on tape and I also feel that if I carry on getting tape after tape after tape, am I discouraging him from actually picking up a book and reading it, which I think I am, so I tend not to get them out. But he does have his tapes and that's why he knows the stories so well. It's the lazy way - you don't have to make the effort.

F: Reading books - you only have to turn the page. I'm quite interested in what the difference is (*this is directed at M*).

M: Well, he can do something else - he loves drawing, so he can draw while he's listening to a tape.

F: Drawing is a substitute mother... (*M and F both laugh.*)

D: He doesn't read books now, then?

M: No, not really - we still get books occasionally - I'll go to the library and bring a few books which might be interesting, which have been recommended from children of a similar age, or older children, and bring them back and leave them lying around, but no, he doesn't really pick them up and he'll read his comic, which is *The Beano*, which he always has done, and he'll read magazines, computer magazines - Nintendo system, not a computer.

F: Football magazines

M: But he doesn't tend to pick them up.

D: Does he read football stories?

M: No, there are probably some up there by his bed (*referring here to the magazines*).

D: Well, that was going to be my next question - do you think he reads enough?

M: No.

F: I don't know if it's just a phase at this age - I mean, he has a lot of outside things he does.

M: There have been a lot of things happening - he's moved to a different school. I suppose at the moment I'm taking a laid back approach rather than trying to push it too much, because I think that maybe at some stage when he just was overloaded with, well, not really - we always read to him until a year ago, and then we thought (*a short interruption here where I changed the tape*) and then we read one of the Indian in the Cupboard books he really could read. I started to read the beginning of the chapter, to encourage him to finish the chapter, but it didn't work - he just wanted me to read it, really. So... yeah, I suppose I feel that I could actually still maybe read to him, but than I think well he really ought to be able to pick them up by himself - I mean what age do you carry on reading to them? 18?

D: Do you talk to him about reading?

M: I've tried not to make a big issue of it, but I've suggested he go and read a book, but I'll go up and find he's reading a comic.....usually.

D: So, he's particularly interested in illustration and drawing?

M: Yes, he does actually like..... he produces drawings that are comic-like as well.

F: Graphic.

M: He produces his own characters and they are quite comic-like - he doesn't do it so much now, but for a couple of years ago he made a phenomenal amount of comic-type..

F: Well, he was doing that until quite recently and I expect he'll still carrying on doing it.

D: What about when he learned to read?

M: He didn't learn to read at home. I know I tried - I had a go - we did all the.. sticking the words around the room and....., but he didn't want to do it with me and so I left it and when he went to school he had a really exciting teacher in the first year - she was very Steinerish in her approach and she did lots of really nice things with them and she sort of introduced reading, she didn't labour it too much, you know, and he basically started by the end of his first year at school and he was pretty fluent by then. He picked it up fairly quickly, there was never any problem, with reading.

D: Do you know what he's reading at the moment?

M: Well, he read books at school last year. At the beginning of the year [his Yr 5 teacher] made a journal book and she explained it, it seemed a really good idea. He did bring them home for a while and we actually made him read and ticked him off and then as the year went on we didn't and he didn't bring them home. [The Yr 5 teacher] said it was up to them. They got a sort of reward for reading for half an hour. The incentive really wasn't enough. He kept that at school. I think he read quite a few books at school - at one stage I thought he was picking up books that he'd read before. (Pause)

Something interesting that happened when he was at his previous school was that he was always very quick at reading and he almost never - he read a reading scheme for a while - I can't remember, it was possibly *One, Two, Three and Away*, I think it was, but it seemed to me that he jumped from that onto free choice - they almost let him just read whatever he wanted to read right from a very early age. Now, I never felt that was right - I'd never felt that he'd progressed at the right pace and he was choosing things that I would be reading to him at home, because he knew them from reading them at school, rather than picking something that was the right level. Things are coming back - we went through a phase of getting lots of - he was quite keen at one stage of reading lots of books from the library that were shorter stories - hardback, larger print - he did actually read a lot of those at one stage - but they run out - there were only so many of those - they never encouraged, never let them bring books home from school - and there was no communication between reading and school, which was a bit sad really, because that carried on. 'It's alright at school, but not at home.'

F: I was thinking about the obsession he had with reading Stephen King, this is fairly recent.

M: That was influenced by a friend's older brother - he wanted to read Stephen King, but we got him that type of thriller type book, because we thought that would actually - we spent ages in the bookshop trying to choose - I think we chose three in the end that we thought he might be able to cope with, but he didn't like them. I think it was because he was thinking those would be more exciting to say you were reading a book like that, but he still needed to read books at his level.

(The taping finished at this point, but we did have a short conversation about the Point Horror series. I mentioned that there were some books like that published by the publisher who supplied books for the study. M was very much against the idea of there being books like that in the study. I assured her that there were none in my selection. M also referred to Mark's two best friends, and said that they were both bookworms. She had hoped that this would rub off on Mark, but it hadn't.)

END OF INTERVIEW - 40 minutes

5. Meeting with Susan's Teacher

(The classroom is large, with five sets of tables where the children sit. At one side is a large wooden box, which is the book corner. This was folded up when I was there, so that the books were not visible. The library card board was near the teacher's chair and I noticed that Susan had a Just So Story out from the library. All the children, except one, had a library book out. This meeting took place at the end of the school day, following my meeting with Susan's mother. I am signified by the letter D and Susan's Teacher, by the letter T.)

D: I have a few general questions about the school and books in the classroom and then a few questions about Susan. [The Head teacher] is going to give me a copy of the Reading Policy when it is completed, but I wanted to get some idea of how leisure reading is structured into the day, at all.

T: It isn't timetabled, as such. But the children do have lots of opportunity to go and read books and also, in Y2s we're encouraging children to use reference books, so we'll be sending children down to the reference part of the library, to say find me a book about snails or whatever, so they're learning reference skills.

D: What about the... because I see you have this Book Corner - when do they use that?

T: Often first thing in the morning they'll use it - when they've finished their work, they can go and choose a book - anytime, really.

D: But you don't have a structured free reading time?

T: No, it's something that we've all thought of doing, but we've so many more demands on our time that, you know, you find, I must finish this first and I must finish that first and it does actually slip by - but then we think, well, the children are having to read a lot anyway, to do the rest of their work, but it is something we'd like to do if we had less demands (*laughs*).

D: What about - do they have a specific time that they go to this library?

T: They go as they want.

D: Are there visits to the public library?

T: Yes, we go to the [local branch] library - only once a year. We have - we use the Schools Library Service. When we go up to the Library, the librarian talks to the children about the books, and about referencing skills and things like that - we have an afternoon there.

D: Do the librarians ever come here?

T: No.

D: Do you read to the class?

T: Yes, every day.

D: Is that structured? At a particular time?

T: I like to do it at the end of the day or at milktime.

D: How do you choose the books you use?

T: It's what I like (*laughs*).

D: Do you choose them from the library here or...

T: No, I usually have my own.

D: Can you tell me about the kind of thing that you like?

T: With this age group, I like to use things like Roald Dahl. I'm using Beverly Nicholls at the moment - The Tree that Sat Down - I read that when I was their age, and I loved it and I found it when I was at College and I bought it, I read it to my own

children and I read it to Y2s that I have. I think it's probably out of print now - it's a very old book, but...

D: So, do you read them a chapter a time, or...?

T: It depends on how much time, and sometimes there's a story that I want to read that is geared to what we've done during the day, so I'll use that.

D: And do they do work on that afterwards?

T: They can do. Or sometimes I just read it for enjoyment.

D: And when you read for enjoyment, do they talk to you about it afterwards?

T: Yes, what do you think is going to happen next and what do you think - do you think Charlie's going to get the golden ticket? (*laughs*)

D: What about the books for the book corner - how do they get chosen?

T: [Another teacher] chooses those - she's the Head of English and every so often we get people round, selling us books, and she will choose things for English, just as I will choose things for History, Geography and RE. So we do tend to choose books for our own areas.

D: So she does it for the whole school (*she nods in agreement*). Do children come to you with requests for you to recommend books? Or are they quite happy to choose themselves?

T: Yes. No, I give them a totally free choice when it's the library or home readers. I do get parents coming in and asking. (*Pause, she has difficulty saying this*) I really feel that the children should choose their own - it's up to them - they've got to learn to be selective and they've got to learn that sometimes, a book that's got particularly bright pictures might not necessarily be the most exciting story, you know. I really do think that they've got to be exercising their own critical faculties, really, to choose a book. And I encourage the parents to talk about it with them. And often, the children will choose a - even the very best readers - will choose a picture book and the parents come to me and say 'She chose a picture book - it's far too easy' and I will say, have you actually looked at the vocabulary underneath and there might be some very very difficult words, and I'll say 'Why can't a child choose a picture book? and just enjoy the illustrations' because they are a very important part of the book.

D: Do you find this a lot - this anxiety about picture books?

T: Yes, yes, and I'm afraid that parents will push their children onto books that are far too hard for them because it's got lots of print in it. And this is the sort of book you should be reading now because you can read and it's not always suitable. I mean, I had somebody trying to get their very good reader reading Watership Down, and I said 'Look, adults find Watership Down hard.' Just because it's about rabbits doesn't mean to say that it's a children's book. I find it very hard going myself.

D: It is difficult to sell picture books to the parents of over fives.

T: It's a shame - and yet children even at this age, six, seven, will go for a picture book.

D: Well, Susan certainly seems to go for them, and gets a lot out of them.

T: Yes, yes and we say to the parents they can get so much language just talking about the illustrations and asking the children 'do you like them?', 'is that how you think the bear would look?', or 'is that how you think Goldilocks would look?', you know 'How would you draw it if you were doing this book?' - but the parents just don't seem to see that - they think that that's easy. When you see those Pienkowski books - I think they're wonderful - I mean, I enjoy those. Lots in them.

D: In the class as a whole, how many do you think are interested in reading? How many read in their spare time?

T: I think probably the bulk do - the parents are very keen that their children should read, and I think that probably the bulk read a lot. Whether a lot of this is coerced I wouldn't like to say. The Indian boy that I was having trouble with this morning - very bright boy, but there is a lot of pressure on him at home to do work and when he comes to school he's just not motivated to do anything, because he has his arm sort of twisted behind his back at home so much to work and that's a case in point, where he is quite a good reader, but Mum will not allow him to have picture books and even though I talk to her like I've talked to you just now, about picture books, she won't have it at all. Picture books are baby books and he is not allowed to have baby books - he has got to go home with, you know, proper novels - well, he's not ready for that - and certainly it's taking any enjoyment of reading away from him. And I cannot get that through to her - no matter how I explain to her, she just won't have it - no, no he mustn't have picture books.

D: Are they readers in the family, do you know?

T: I'm not sure, I'm not sure. I also find that parents will say to me, 'Oh, yes they come and read their book to me while I'm doing the ironing' or 'while I'm cooking dinner' and I suggest if perhaps they gave all their attention to the book and the child that it would all be a worthwhile exercise, at bedtime, perhaps. I mean, I find again, another boy is having problems with reading and I said to his mother 'What about when he goes to bed, sharing a book with him then?' and she said 'That's a good idea!' and I thought 'don't you do this anyway?', because I don't think they do.

D: Do you think that a lot of the reading that they do at home is fiction?

T: Yes.

D: I'm assuming (I think I know the answer to this question) Do you enjoy reading fiction?

T: Oh, I do.

D: And do you read in class - do you bring books of your own - do the children get to see you read? (*She shakes her head*).

T: But... I do tell them the books I have been reading and what I have enjoyed and I shared with my own daughters, who the children know, and I say well, when they were your age, I read them these, and when I was your age I read books like this, so that they do know that I read.

D: What about - how do you choose the books that *you* read? Do you have time to read for yourself?

T: Oh, I do. I read a lot. I usually have three or four books on the go. And it can vary from Biographies right through to, um, sloppiest romantic novel - depending on what mood I'm in.

D: Do you buy your books?

T: I buy them - our house is held up by books.

D: What would you say is important about reading fiction?

T: For me, personally, or for the children?

D: Well, I suppose, both.

T: I think it - the most important thing to my mind is getting the creativity working - the imagination - they sit in front of a television and the pictures are given to them - they can't use their imagination to think, well, what do these people look like, what do the scenes look like? and I think if you're reading it, then they can make up their own pictures in their own mind and I think that's the most important thing. Use of language - if you've chosen a really good writer they can learn from that writer how to use

language - humour - listening to humour, having to listen carefully to get the humour from what I'm reading.

D: Thank you for that. The other questions are about Susan. Do you consider her to be a fluent reader?

T: (*We both laugh*) Yes. I think she was reading more or less from the word go, when she started school.

D: Do you have measurements? - I assume you mean this in a wider sense than in going through the reading scheme. She seems a very creative reader.

T: Yes.

D: Is there a particular scheme that would have been used?

T: Yes, we use the Ginn, the Ginn 360, but then we have other books from other schemes to give breadth to the reading, so that it's not just going upwards, but giving them a whole variety of reading.

D: Once she had finished the scheme she would have gone on to free reading?

T: Yes.

D: Does she get a chance to talk about the reading she does outside of school?

Do the children do anything with the reading that they do outside of school?

T: No, not really - I can't say that that's a regular thing, no. But the children chat informally about what they read and they do say, 'Oh, I've got a good book from the library' - but it's not a regular set thing that I would do. And they also bring books in for me to read, so a really good book that they've enjoyed they would bring in.

D: Has she talked about the study at all?

T: No - she's a very private girl.

D: I'm assuming that she's quite strong in other areas.

T: Yes, she's very bright all round. I would say she'd be one of our level four readers - she's gone beyond interpreting a story - she's reading beyond that, which is what we want for level four.

END OF INTERVIEW - 30 minutes

APPENDIX iii
CATEGORISED LIST OF BOOKS USED IN THE BOOK CHOICE STUDY

This list presents the books as they were categorised for the children to choose, and the children who chose them. This does not mean that they completed them.

Author/Illustrator	Title	Max	Susan	Henry	Cath	Mark	Teresa	Paul
DYNAMIC TEXTS								
Forward, T	Travelling Backwards		✓					
Hill, S&Lamont,P	Suzy's Shoes		✓					
Jennings, P	Unmentionable!					✓		
Lester, A	I'm Green and I'm Grumpy	✓	✓					
Mahy,M & Kellogg, S	The Boy Who Was Followed Home	✓	✓		✓			
Piumini, R	Mattie and Grandpa		✓					
Rayner, M	The Echoing Green							✓
Schami, R	A Handful of Stars						✓	
Scieszka, J & Smith, L	The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales		✓	✓		✓		✓
Swindells, R	Daz4Zoe						✓	
Van Lieshout	The Dearest Boy in All the World				✓			
Westall, R	Stormsearch							
STATIC TEXTS								
Boyd, L	Bailey the Big Bully		✓					
Bradman, T	Mystery at Musket Bay		✓					
Breslin, T	Different Directions						✓	
Burgess, M	The Cry of the Wolf					✓		
Duffy, B	A Boy in the Doghouse				✓			
Jackson, S & Livingstone, I	Spectral Stalkers					✓		
Offen, H	Nice Work, Little Wolf	✓						
Pullman, P	Ruby in the Smoke							✓
Rodgers, F	Can Piggles Do It?				✓			
Secombe, H	The Nurgla's Magic Tear							
Thompson, R & Fernandez, E	Blowing Kisses	✓	✓					
Umansky, K	Pongwiffy and the Goblin's Revenge					✓		
CLASSICS								
Ahlberg, A & J	Each Peach Pear Plum							
Alcott, LM	Little Women						✓	
Bawden, N	Carrie's War						✓	✓
Campbell, R	Dear Zoo	✓						
Carle, E	The Very Hungry Caterpillar							
Carroll, L	Alice's Adventures in Wonderland				✓	✓		
King, C	Stig of the Dump		✓		✓			
London, J	White Fang			✓			✓	
Pearce, P	Tom's Midnight Garden							
Potter, B	The Tale of Mrs Tiggywinkle							
Serraillier, I	The Silver Sword							✓
Sewell, A	Black Beauty							

MIS-MATCHES

Author/Illustrator	Title	Max	Susan	Henry	Cath	Mark	Teresa	Paul
Akkerman, D & Van Loon, P	To Catch The Moon							
Bradman, T & Dupasquier, P	The Sandal	✓	✓	✓				
Cave, K	William and the Wolves		✓		✓			
Conlon-McKenna	Under the Hawthorn Tree							
Furlong, M	Robin's Country			✓				
Henkes, K	Sheila Rae, the Brave		✓					
Hughes, S	It's Too Frightening For Me!				✓			
Kirkbride, J	Thank You for Your Application							
Krailing, T	Marlene the Monster		✓					
Masters, A	Spinner							✓
Pittau, F & Gervais, B	Phil and Fred The Tightrope Walkers							
Scieszka, J & Smith, L	The Good, The Bad and the Goofy					✓		

CONTROL

Beaumont, L	The Tale of Christine Pristine				✓	✓		
Blundell, T	Beware of Boys							
Conrad, P	Stonewords							✓
Conrad, P	Taking The Ferry Home						✓	
Donaldson, M & Gliori, D	Margery Mo		✓					
Dunlop, E	Finn's Island							
Gébler, C	The Witch That Wasn't		✓			✓		
King-Smith, D	The Mouse Butcher							
Lipniaki, E. & Bogdanowicz, B	To Bed or Else!		✓					
Mark, J	In Black and White							✓
Martin, Jr, B & etc	The Ghost Eye Tree		✓	✓				
McCall Smith, A	Marzipan Max		✓					

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