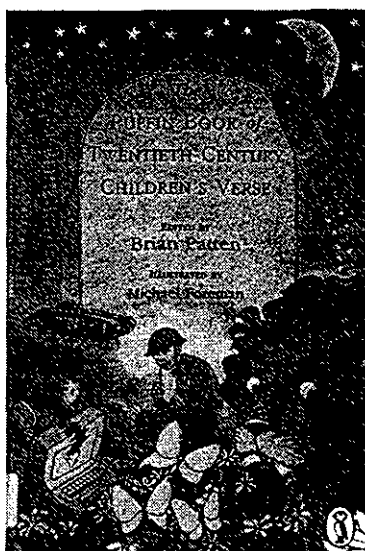


## Parallel Ideologies: An Exploration of the Ideologies of Childhood and Poetry

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Children are born but childhood is constructed; the birth of children is a 'natural' event, while the idea of childhood is a result of a complex matrix of social demands. Childhood, in the later part of the twentieth century is a compromise between the reality of the life of children today and the memories of adults. In the time of one generation, or in as little as twenty years, the possible experiences and society's expectations of children have changed greatly. The rate of this change has meant that there is considerable tension between the world and their own childhood that is only able to be remembered. Nevertheless childhood is created by adult society, not by the child. It is the adult who recollects and recreates experiences from the past, tempers them by idealised expectations for the present generation of children and establishes a notion of childhood.

One factor that the child and childhood have in common is education. Children spend most of their childhood in school, and the primary school years are a useful means of defining the lower and upper limits of childhood. For society the childhood years are a time when the younger generation is educated at school, at home, and in the wider world, into the manners and mores of the real adult world. Not all this education occurs in a formal setting; children learn empirically from all their experiences in all places.



Literature written and selected for children is a significant part of their learning experiences, both in and out of the classroom, and as part of their formal education it is expected that children will become literate and be exposed to a variety of literary experiences. Outside the school it is obviously society's expectation that children will be involved in the range of discourses available to them in libraries and bookshops. Zipes (1990) sums up the role of literature for children as 'basically an institution in which the various genres are constructed by adults to manage the socialisation of the child without offering the child the means through which he or she can question society and language as they are'.

The whole range of books for children not only educate them in the explicit knowledge deemed

necessary by society and laid out in the school curriculum but each discourse carries an implicit ideological weight. The use of 'discourse' affirms the wider cultural and structural elements of 'story'. Stephens (1992) in discussing children's fiction emphasises the pervasiveness of implicit ideologies as having a 'potentially powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes'. This implicit ideology is seen 'usually in the form of assumed social structures and habits of thought' and it is an integral part of every discourse. Stephen focuses his discussion on fiction while the intention here is to examine the parallels between implicit ideologies concerning childhood and poetry within poetry itself.

Poetry is perceived as being an integral part of childhood. Children respond to rhythm 'naturally'; word games, jokes and riddles are an important part of their experiences from nursery rhymes to the playground. Alternatively, poetry may be seen as the elite member of the literary canon, a subtle and complex discourse where meanings are often ambiguous and understanding may be difficult. This poetry may be avoided except as a compulsory part of the school English curriculum. Nevertheless the idea of poetry, the understanding that anyone may respond to, or imagine, something as 'poetic', is entrenched in western society.

Poetry may be important to society

but there is a lack of discussion of poetry in critical discourses on children's literature. As Hunt (1992) asks; 'Why is it when we speak of children's literature we mean fiction and exclude poetry?' (p.127). In his introduction to a collection of essays on contemporary criticism of children's literature Hunt (1992) noted that he was unable to find any work which 'adequately explores the problems of discussing - or even defining - verse and poetry for children' (p.14). Thus poetry is part of us all, and it is necessary that children be 'exposed' to it but it is seen as obscure by educators and ignored by scholars.

The cultural positioning of poetry is similar to that of childhood. The conjunction of the two reveals much about the creation of the ideology of both poetry and childhood. In focusing on poetry as the discourse whereby an ideology of childhood may be created it becomes necessary to confine poetry in some way.

Children are usually first exposed to written poetry in the form of separate poems in a magazine, newspaper or as a collection in an anthology. The use and influence of anthologies in the classroom is beyond the scope of this discussion and it has been largely ignored in the critical literature. Gough (1984) suggested that anthologies may work to discourage the reader by not allowing the expression of a

single voice, and by usually excluding narrative verse. He argues that the anthology format denies the reader the possibility of a 'consistent point of view or a coherent sense of the poet's persona' (p.207). If, as Gough suggests, anthologies encourage a short attention span, and a reading habit of browsing or 'dipping into' the text, they fulfil little purpose other than convenience. Gough also challenges the appropriateness of a thematic anthology, suggesting that they do not resolve any problems of coherence or continuity. Gough is a single voice and in comparing the use of anthologies for children to how adults read poetry (if they do at all) he does not consider that children may not read poetry in the same way as an adult, or that the potential disharmony of different voices and conflicting styles may not worry the child reader/listener. Gough has no empirical research to support his concerns about anthologies but his work is important in suggesting an alternative to the 'anthology trap'. Nevertheless, given the preponderance of anthologies published and used in the classroom it is felt that this was a valid means of exploring the parallel ideologies of childhood and poetry.

Anthologies are 'key' discourses for children because that is what they are exposed to, or presented with. Anthologies are selected because it is felt that they give the

reader a variety of poetic ideas and forms, that within any one anthology there will be 'something for everyone'. The assumptions underlying the use of anthologies have not been subject to any formal investigation, except by the demands of the market place.

I have selected *The Puffin Book of Twentieth Century Children's Verse* (1991) edited by Brian Patten for sustained investigation for several reasons: it claims to represent the poetry of the twentieth century, suggesting a wide base from which the included poems were chosen; and that it, in some way, surveys and defines the poetry for children of this century. Puffin, under the aegis of Penguin, is a significant publisher of books for children. Their children's list, established under the guidance of Kaye Webb, has a deserved reputation for quality. Thus Patten's anthology was seen as being a definitive poetic voice for children.

In the introduction Patten is elusive in explaining or justifying his selection of poems. The poems were chosen because they are among 'the best verse written in the English language this century by poets who wrote especially for children' (p.19). He also chose poems not written especially for children and others that children should know or 'adopt'. These criteria cover almost every possibility.

There are certain problems implicit in any anthology of poetry.

Firstly, being made up of a number of discrete units, poems, the implication is that each is of equal worth or interest. Thus significant points about the ideology of childhood may be made with reference to what is an essentially light, superficial or simple poem. Obviously the more complex poems allow for a greater degree of relevant analysis. Secondly being a 'collection' means that a linear approach is not necessary. The reader may enter, and leave, the text where ever he/she wishes. The form of the discourse as a whole does not have an essential beginning or end. This is despite Patten imposing a chronological structure on the order of the poems.

Thirdly, a collection creates 'dialogues' within itself. In some anthologies this is recognised by thematic groupings but Patten imposes no overt order beyond chronology (the exact basis of the ordering of the poems is not explained, whether it is a function of the date of first publication, or the date of birth of the poet). The reaction of one poem against another may be illuminating or serendipitous but it is dependent upon the whim of the reader.

Fourthly, there is no absolute consistency in the implied reader. An anthology of children's verse has an implied child reader and the title of Patten's collection emphasises this. But these poems may well be read to a child and

many of them may require explanation or elucidation by an adult or older person. Thus each poem may have more than one implied reader as does the collection as a whole.

Finally although a poem is the effort of one person, an anthology is a collaborative work and it raises all the questions associated with publishing and marketing. From gaining permission to include a poem to pleasing a potential market (teachers, parents?) the presence of a poem may well be due to factors other than those stated by the editor.

It is expected that an anthology, especially one specifically collected for children may be examined for what it says about childhood. When the child reader 'meets' the anthology not only are poems being read but particular ideologies are being constructed about childhood, and about poetry. Thus Patten's anthology which overtly sums up poems for children may also define a (poetic) ideology of childhood for this century. It may be argued that the anthology not only reveals aspects of childhood but that it actively constructs an ideology of childhood.

In investigating the creation of an ideology of childhood, through an anthology of poetry where the implied audience is children it becomes important to consider the role of poetry as such in creating

this ideology. The similarities between childhood and poetry seem to be more than just coincidental. Both poetry and childhood are concepts that society deems essential and the manner of their construction and the ways in which they are seen, or presumed to be important to the whole society, show the strong connections between the two.

Both poetry and childhood are often conceived of in terms of absence and alienation. Richard Flynn (1993) examined the possible parameters of the relationship between poetry and childhood, being interested in their parallel contradictions. He says that 'like childhood, poetry is thought to signify universal, even inarticulate truth' (p.37) but the similarities in the ambiguity of their relative positions can be extended further than Flynn does in this article. His focus is more on poetry than on childhood and in so doing his argument becomes rather blurred by the lack of distinction between poetry written by children, that seen as appropriate for children and poetry written specifically for children. These distinctions are also skated over by Patten in his introduction to the anthology. Flynn centres the notion of ambiguity on the marginalisation of poetry, seeing that it is similar to what happens with childhood. These similarities will be the focus of this discussion.

If a concept is marginalised by

society several implicit factors occur in conjunction. Firstly the differences and unique qualities of the concept are emphasised. For something to be put on one side the parameters of the concept have to be relatively clearly defined and understood. For poetry it is only certain types of the total 'poetic' experience that may be thus categorised. As the work of the Opies (1988) shows, poems, rhymes, verbal tricks and games are a vital and intrinsic part of children's verbal world. Significantly these works are not marginalised in the same way as 'poetry'. They are often inscribed as 'verse', 'songs', or 'nursery rhymes' and it is not possible to separate them from the voice of childhood. Thus the position of these lesser 'verse' works is demeaned by the terms by which they are described and also by their integral association with childhood. This is not because they are necessarily created by children, most were not, but it is more to do with some notion of aesthetic quality which is embedded in 'poetry'. It is this ambivalent 'otherness' of poetry that enables it to be marginalised. The actual process of marginalisation is itself ambivalent. It separates out and in so doing what has become separated is both put to one side and emphasised. Poetry is marginalised by being seen as elite and different and the process emphasises its arcane nature. It is seen as a discourse that is difficult

to read, its forms obscure and its meanings multi-layered and ambiguous. The exact nature of this 'otherness' of poetry links it to childhood. Marginalisation is implicit in the idea of childhood because, for the adult, that time is always in the past. Every adult has been a child and the events and ideas are remembered to define that experience. But childhood does not only 'belong' to the adult; it is also part of on-going daily life for present-day children; in itself a time shaped by all members of society. Furthermore these generations of experience are not mutually exclusive; the adult memories are tempered by the observation of today's children and the experiences of these children are, to some extent, made possible by the past experiences of the adult generation. Thus childhood is a concept imagined, re-constructed and based on reality.

Secondly, marginalisation implies a state of stasis rather than one of flux and change. Something defined, distinctive and then removed to some degree from the whole range of verbal and written discourses becomes more isolated, encapsulated and restricted. This is not to say that poetry is not changing but that these changes are often resisted by poets themselves and not necessarily accepted by readers. Similarly, because childhood is always in the past, it is contained by time as well as corrupted by selective adult memory and by society's

ambivalence towards the nature of children. That children are seen as either innocent or amoral means that childhood is perceived as a time either of joy or of chaotic and possibly destructive behaviour.

Thirdly, the process of marginalisation is itself a pointer to the significance of both poetry and childhood. These are not concepts which society wishes to distinguish in order to discard or forget. They are essential concepts, inevitable to the final product of a literate human, but they are not perceived as part of the real, that is adult, world. This is, to some extent, supported by the position which emphasises that the experience of reading or understanding poetry is qualitatively different from that necessary for prose. Rosenblatt (1985) sees the poetic experience as being (an aesthetic) one where the poem 'is not an object but an event, a lived through process or experience' (p.35). This position is further emphasised by Benton (1992) for whom poetry is where 'feelings are embodied in verbal form, not merely indicated by verbal reference' (p.78). Thus the experience of poetry and of childhood is of something whole and integral to the reader/adult; while at the same time both are to be outgrown, or experienced in moments of nostalgic indulgence.

The position of poetry as essential but marginalised is also reflected in the literary criticism on discourses for children. The two

volume 'Touchstones' collection of essays, edited by Perry Nodelman in 1987, was meant as a means of seeing exactly the range and type of significant work on children's literature; the subtitle being 'reflections of the best in children's literature'. Nodelman's collection demonstrates an all too common gap between intention and practice. The whole of the first volume is concerned with fiction while the second encompasses 'Fairy Tales, Fables, Myths, Legends and Poetry' (title vol.2). That poetry is part of this grouping immediately identifies it as occupying a particular place in the discourses for children. It seems to suggest that its creative origins and historical source are similar to those of legend rather than of fiction. This is then qualified in the introduction for while these works are 'the foundation of the traditions of children's literature' what they are supporting is fiction. It is not the purpose here to discuss the significance of fiction but simply to make the point that the poetry essays are seen as essential but not, perhaps, in their own right. Of the six essays on poetry only two go beyond what is essentially a nostalgic review of the importance of early writers of poetry for children. By focusing on the work of de la Mare, Lear, A.A. Milne and Mother Goose, poetry seems to belong to the past; it is being made to occupy the same time as childhood.

This collection has not been

singled out because it is unique. Within Australia, with the establishment of **Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature** in 1990, the editor Alf Mappin commented that 'the role of criticism is to place pieces of literature into some sort of perspective, to assess and reassess their place and position'. Nevertheless in all the editions not once was there an essay on poetry. This may have been because none were submitted, none solicited, or none deemed necessary. Whatever the reasons, it is not an uncommon attitude to see poetry as part of literature, but, ironically, a silent member of the group.

That poetry is necessary but absent is seen when Inglis (1982) chose to discuss 'value and meaning in children's fiction' but felt compelled to begin his substantial work with an extract from a poem by Yeats. He also uses Yeats' 'politics' to illustrate the importance of story telling as 'the natural way we all have for speculating about the world, or for not speculating' (p.39). Clearly to Inglis poetry has special purposes but these are outside the mainstream of criticism. It is significant to the work but not essential, it is used to fill in the gaps. This is a more subtle positioning of poetry than simple marginalisation.

Peter Hunt (1992) confirms that poetry is 'an aspect of children's literature frequently neglected'

(p.26) and he asks the fundamental question: 'Why is it when we speak of children's literature we mean fiction and exclude poetry?' (p.127). In examining the parallels between poetry and childhood possible answers to this question become apparent. Hunt goes on to state that 'poetry *survives* (my italics) in the gaps' (p.128). This revealing comment, while pertaining directly to teachers of English, reinforces the 'otherness' of poetry. Childhood is also a 'gap' in the spectrum of a life. It is a time for learning and change, separate from but creating the adult; much of it may be forgotten but it is an intrinsic part of what comes after. Just as childhood becomes an absence to the adult, as something valuable, lost and although searched for, never to be regained; so too is the position of poetry within literature.

This is the ambivalent position of poetry as the epitome of the literary canon. That poetry is perceived as essential to and often the highest part of an elitist canon may be associated with a patriarchal view of society and literature. Davies (1993) discusses the 'impressive power' (p.173) of traditional forms in asserting the pre-eminence of the male, the powerful and the elite. One has only to see the list of poets studied at universities or those set for study at secondary school level to realise that the poetic canon focused on male poets. The female poet was regarded as an aberration

and her work of a lesser value. The high value of poetry also reflects upon the poet. In an echo of the ancient idea that the rhetoric of poetry and speech was such that to be skilled was to have grace bestowed upon one, today poets are somehow more worthy, in character, and more deserving of respect, because of their ability as a poet. Thus Les Murray is able to express a range of opinion well beyond the concerns of poetry in a column in the *Independent Monthly* and because of his poetry these are seen as important. The special position of poets and poetry is summed up by Scannell (1987): 'If this great art is neglected or grossly misrepresented, humanity will be diminished and the barbarians will have won yet another, perhaps the final, victory' (p.207). Against all these notions of the elite art of poetry is the strong assumption that poetry is a part of every person. This is most evident in the media, presumably aimed at a wide audience, where the use of 'poetry' and 'poetic' indicates its assumed nature. It is associated with the best of something, from wine to pens, from jazz to justice; while at the same time it relies on the commonality of the 'poetic' experience. Thus poetry represents not only the highest quality but also something that is innate and universal to the human condition.

This position of poetry is parallel to that of childhood. The universality of the latter is obvious,

but the terms in which the experiences and memories of childhood are expressed indicate that this is often seen as 'the best years of your life'. The number of cliches associated with poetry and with childhood are perhaps a measure of the ambiguity with which these concepts are regarded. For something to be cliched it seems to require both a universally recognised position and/or character and to have some quality which needs to be controlled or defined. The cliché allows the concept to be known but also categorised and thus distanced. It does not have to be understood. Attempts to reconcile the complexity of poetry and childhood with their 'universal' nature mean that they are the common recipients of the 'slippery formality' of the cliché.

Just as poetry may be seen as an elite art as well as belonging to all, so too is childhood often remembered, and idealised, as a time of perfection, ease and innocence. The idea of childhood as a time of innocence, a time when there is something precious but unrecognised until lost or changed echoes the idea that poetry somehow contains, or is a worthy vehicle for 'truth'. This 'truth' of poetry is often seen as relevant to the expression of emotion. This obviously relates to the elitist view of poetry but it is not an uncommon response that one's most important feelings are best expressed in a poetic voice.

This is instantly apparent, on a mundane level, with 'poetry' being the accepted vehicle for the sentiments of greeting cards.

Society's ambivalence to poetry is also apparent when poetry is placed in an educational context. Teachers are often reluctant to 'teach' poetry. It is seen as challenging or difficult as is evident from the whole body of critical material on poetry with its overwhelming bias as to expediting the experience of poetry in the classroom. Poetry is seen as an important part of the literary curriculum set for schools, but the nature of attitudes of teachers and students and the exact processes that are part of a poetry lesson is an area that does not seem to have been researched in Australia. In the U.S.A. Terry (1974) found that most of the students surveyed had very little exposure to poetry, with 50% of the teachers reading poetry to the class less than once per school month. Nevertheless the work of those such as the Opies and, within Australia, June Factor, the appeal of performance poets and the occasional report of children's enthusiasm for poetry within the classroom suggest that there is a certain affinity between children and poetry.

These similarities may be summed up by plotting the ambiguities and complexities of both concepts along a continuum, from artificial to natural. Poetry may be seen as a natural means of expression, from

bouncing rhymes to passionate declarations of love, while childhood, at the same end of the continuum, is a time when people are most uncontrived, whether innocent or unruly, being free of society's constraints. Both must be controlled and restrained as the continuum is travelled; poetry by the demands of form and childhood by the requirements of society. These controls may differ and change but the tension which results from loss of freedom is seen in society's ambivalence to these concepts: poetry is essential but 'hard', childhood is wonderful but it must be abandoned.

It may be necessary to affirm that these concepts are abstract, created by society which has a certain common understanding of the broad parameters of what is meant by each. The similarities, thus explored, are made concrete when discussed within Patten's anthology. Here it is not the presentation of ideas but the reality of the interrelationship between the two that makes it possible to see how poetry may reveal and create aspects of childhood.

The structure and organisation of Patten's anthology as well as the particular choice of poems offer several indicators as to the notion of childhood. The poems within the anthology seem to present certain assumptions about childhood. The type, length and thematic concerns of the poems as well as factors outside the poems

themselves but within the anthology bear closely on the parallels between childhood and poetry.

Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, is the role of the illustrations. This anthology is not a picture book where there is an integrated and symbiotic relationship between text and picture; but it does contain a number of black and white drawings, all by Michael Foreman. The exact nature of the relationship between a particular drawing and its associated poem may approximate what happens within a picture book but this cannot be applied to the anthology as a whole. It seems the assumption is that not only does a discourse, ostensibly for children, require some sort of illustrative element, but so also does poetry, even if only to give relief to the visual density of the print within a book of poetry. The fact that poetry needs to be mediated by illustration may guide the reader to this secondary 'meaning' but it may also restrict the potential of the poem to be read in other ways. Nodelman (1987) felt that illustrations may act as a means of 'a flattening of their mystery' (p.200) but it is obvious that publishers see some sort of illustration as a necessary part of a book for children. The exact role of the illustration for each poem will be different but whether it will illuminate, explain, restrict or temper the reader's response there

is an associated underlying assumption about childhood.

Foreman's illustrations seem to fall into three broad categories. Firstly there are realistic drawings, often of something from nature: bird, butterfly, animal or grass. These accompany specific poems but their decorative function is emphasised when they are separated from the poem, as is the butterfly on the first page of the contents list. All the illustrations on these contents pages are copies of those to be found accompanying poems. They seem to be the visual equivalent of the list of titles, that is they hint at what the text contains. The 'nature' illustrations usually relate to only one element in the poem and occasionally the connection seems tenuous as when a posy of flowers and leaves decorates a poem of nostalgic memories of friendship (p.369). When one element is the subject of the illustration it dominates the poem, especially if the illustration is a whole page. Thus, 'Snow in the Suburbs' (p.367), depicting the encompassing effects of snow is illustrated by a full page drawing of the cat. Although the illustration includes the tree, bird and house, the foregrounding and movement of the cat means that the 'black cat ... wide eyed and thin' of the second last line dominates the drawing. This conjunction emphasises the sentimentality of 'we take him in', perhaps weighting the poem rather too heavily in this direction. In

'Spells' (p.214) the wheat, the first of eleven spells, provides the illustrative element and in a similar manner the short, rather slight, poem 'The Grizzly Bear' (p.358) is given greater importance by the full page drawing of a bear with a rather quizzical expression looming over bushes and a pair of shoes. Most of the drawings of natural elements are simple line drawings and seem to be a decorative appendage to the poem.

Secondly, many of the illustrations are associated with humorous poems, which perhaps more readily lend themselves to being illustrated but it may also be that the assumption is that the child reader needs to have the humour in these poems reinforced visually. These illustrations are associated with poems that depend on the absurdity of an event or situation, rather than a verbal trick or dexterity of language, but it is just these poems that should be able to 'speak for themselves'.

The third category of illustration is those depicting people. It is significant in that very few of these illustrations are drawn in a realistic mode, as are most of the 'nature' illustrations. The possible exception is that of the soldier with 'Soldiers Dream' (p.267). It is as though the combination of war and nostalgia means that it would be ideologically unsound to show a soldier in any way which would challenge the propriety of the representation. Nevertheless the

same restriction does not seem to apply to the two illustrations of black children. That accompanying 'Don't Call Me Alligator' (p.26) seems to reinforce a 'humorous' stereotype with a running child distorted by very thin arms and legs and a rather odd positioning of a large head. The boy of 'Dreaming Black Boy' (p.143) also has a head out of proportion to the rest of his body, and here the poem does not allow for a humorous justification. The ideological ambiguity of the latter illustration is of some concern as it seems to be drawn in a realistic manner. If the assumption is that soldiers and black people are outside the usual experience of the assumed child reader these depictions reinforce a particular ideological position.

To sum up the impact of the illustrations it seems that for children words are not enough, and that the effect of the illustrations is not that of unifying the whole discourse. Thus there is a tension in the discourse as a result of those forces which create (an illusion of) unity and those forces, such as the selective illustrations, that reinforce the parts. The very nature of anthologies means that there will be tension between the whole and its parts; and the manner in which anthologies are used reinforces the poems as discrete units. Terry (1974) found that 78% of teachers in her national survey used anthologies as their main source for obtaining

poems to read or teach to their classes.

Thus it seems that some poems 'need' to be illustrated and the assumption is that children need illustrated texts. This assumption may be particularly valid with reference to poetry as, generally, it is approached as something different and potentially difficult to understand. It is assumed that a poem is often about more than what it is actually saying. If this is so an illustration merely reinforces this opinion but, as shown above, the poems selected for illustration are not necessarily those which require a guide to understanding. Selective illustration also raises the whole question of those poems that are not illustrated. Is it that these required no illustration or was it simply that they were less easily illustrated and thus in some way perhaps 'better' poems?

The second factor that illuminates the relationship between poetry and childhood refers to a particular type of poem. If the illustrations suggest that childhood is a time when a guide to poetry is needed, but that perhaps the reader is not visually very sophisticated, the poems themselves suggest the opposite. The poems in this anthology imply that childhood is a time of considerable verbal and cultural sophistication. This is seen most clearly in those poems which are self-reflective. No doubt children think about themselves but it is a point of debate as to



whether they ever consider the idea of childhood, and its relevance to themselves. One suspects not. Nevertheless, the choice of poems does assume that they are interested in poems that examine the role of language and meaning. Thus poems such as 'The Word Party' (p.21), 'The Limbo Dancer's Soundpoem' (p.27) and 'Catch a Little Rhyme' (p.179) play games and tricks with what children see as the essence of poetry: rhyme (Ford 1987). These poems are doing more than just making obvious what poetry might be; they also suggest the continually elusive and changing nature of language: 'then it grew into a kite/and flew from out of sight' (p.179).

The third factor that explores the connection between poetry and childhood is related to the length of the poems. Most of the poems in this anthology are short, less than two pages in length, while many of these (p.119) are less than one page. With the exceptions of the riddles and games these short poems are all lyrics, what Flynn (1993) sees as the 'dominant twentieth century mode' (p.37). He points out the essential ambiguity of this form: 'lyric poetry is characterised by its supposed sincerity and authenticity, innocent genuine and precious like children's play. Often in this pretence of authenticity, its real value as a complex discourse constructing meaning is lost' (p.37). Thus short

poems make up most of the anthology either because this is primarily a marketing decision enabling as many poems as possible to be included in the anthology or because it is assumed that childhood is a time when concentration and attention is limited. This latter assumption seems to ignore the intensity and complexity of meaning that Flynn refers to as intrinsic to poetry and that has already been suggested with regard to those poems that are about language and/or poetry. Presumably this is something that children are able to respond to or should be exposed to.

Patten has included three long poems, 'Mrs Malone' (p.290), 'The Lion and Albert' (p.299) and 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' (p.313). These poems are all from the earlier part of the twentieth century. Perhaps then the tradition of the ballad or narrative poem was stronger; perhaps there was a greater reliance on the oral presentation of poems within the family society as well as in school; or, perhaps the assumption was that children had, or were expected to have, an ability to concentrate for a longer period of time on the written or spoken word. Whatever the reason, these poems, as well as the later 'Lizzy's Lion' (p.67), show the importance of the narrative story. This may not be recognised by children as being an element of poetry but it is certainly a significant part of childhood where story is an enabling feature.

Patten may also have included these poems for the more didactic purpose of exposing the child reader to a variety of poetic forms. Regardless of length it becomes obvious that education is a basic connection between poetry and childhood; for the adult poetry is a means of instruction while the child's most common exposure to poetry lies within the classroom.

The predominance of humorous poems, the fourth element to link poetry and childhood, suggests that not only is childhood a time when humour 'naturally' occurs but also that this humour is of a particular style. Nevertheless despite the evidence of oral work from the playground the omission of scatological humour precludes the anthology from being representative. The assumption may be that these are the types of humour seen as appropriate for childhood; or perhaps it is seen as inappropriate for scatological humour to be given the status of the written word; or, again, this may have been a marketing decision. While some of the humour is language based much of it relies on an exaggerated or absurd situation, and this is often when the child is the participator and the adult the focalising agent. Kennedy (1990) suggests that nonsense verse is a powerful vehicle for absurd situations, for criticising parents and for even allowing 'a child's worst fears [to] sometimes come true' (p.30). Humour allows fears and chaos to

be confronted but he puts great reliance on the form of the poem for making this acceptable: 'a short and obvious form maintains a fundamental and reassuring order in the work of art, even though everything else runs wild' (p.32). This seems to put unusual emphasis on the form of poetry for a means of universal control. There is all manner of implicit control in the reading or listening to poetry beyond the form of the actual poem. It seems that the humour of childhood must be controlled and confined within the poem as well as within that period of life.

Finally, it is the thematic concerns of the poems that reveals assumptions about childhood. Most obviously it seems that childhood is a time of rather limited interests and experiences, but of boundless imagination. The poems selected by Patten assume that what they contain are not only the actual concerns of childhood but they are what should be the concerns of children in his own time and place. Thus, even though he is selecting from all of the twentieth century his choice must be coloured by his own understanding of childhood. He gives no indication as to the representative importance of a poem for its own time and place so while each poem must, to some extent, reflect its own age's assumptions, the impression from the anthology is that of the editor's time at the end of the twentieth

century. Thus the number of poems that in some way refer to nature may change in specifics but there is a general assumption that nature offers up a mirror to childhood: of its wildness, its possible and necessary domestication, of the on-going cycle of life and the position of humans in the nature world. Nature is shown to be interesting for itself, its beauty and its continuity, and also as a metaphor for the life and times of children and of adults.

The other main thematic concern is that of childhood itself. Many of the poems present the emotions, activities and interest of children. It is not an unreasonable assumption to consider these of interest to the child reader but this does raise other issues such as the veracity of these depictions, the role of the real world and that of the fantastic, the interaction of these within childhood, and the colouring effect of nostalgic memory. The difficulty of knowing exactly what does interest children is summed up by Roy Fuller, quoted by Scannell (1987), 'the poems of my own which most regularly appear in children's anthologies and . . . are most enjoyed by young readers were not originally written for children and could not, I think, be called light verse'. This is reinforced by Charles Causley, in an interview (1988), '. . . a lot of the poems up to that point [prior to the publication of his first book of

children's poems, 1970] were used in children's anthologies as well as in adult anthologies' (p.128).

The rest of the themes of this anthology are, to some extent, those of any collection: love, death, sensual pleasures, power and memory. What is more important is the assumption that these are what children will find interesting, or that childhood requires. These are the poems that not only reflect childhood concerns but will be responsible, to some extent, for establishing the parameters of that childhood. It is too easy to assume that these parameters are common knowledge.

In conclusion, the assumed position of childhood, from the above elements of the discourse, is one where language is an intensely involving and important part of life, but in the poetic form it has to be treated with caution. As a poem it is assumed that language requires cues to interpretation, and a concentration that may be difficult to maintain; but that it is also a source of humour and of story.

In exploring the parallels between ideologies of childhood and of poetry it is apparent that there are many similarities. These parallels become important when considering the meeting point, usually the classroom, of poetry and childhood. Anthologies do not carry warning signs but teachers

need to be aware of the ideological potential of any discourse, and especially those of poetry, when making choices of texts for classroom reading and discussion.

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