



Course rationale for the seminar: “Territories and borders in children’s literature”

The inter-laboratories seminar in children’s literature entitled “territories and borders in children’s literature” brings together researchers from the ILCEA4 and Litt&Art laboratories in order to question the notions of territories and limits in French and international children’s literature.

This seminar is part of a growing research dynamic at the University Grenoble Alpes (UGA) where many classes on the subject are offered, both in the French (UFR LLASIC) and language (UFR LE) departments, as well as in the options (ETC) and in the teacher-training programs (ESPÉ).

The notions of territories and borders are at the heart of the discussion in this seminar which explores the concepts of limits, thresholds, passages, links, world maps as well as borders between genres, between audiences, between text and image and between historical periods.

In children’s literature territory is deeply linked to belonging, that is to say to the way the individual fits inside his territory and represents it, what defines his territory as his own and how the

individual and the territory grow from each other. This link is particularly visible in the *Bildungroman*¹ and the adventure story² and in novels which deal with rites of passage and maiden trips. In these texts, the protagonist and the reader go on a journey from the child's territory (represented by the home, the village, and all which is familiar) through a liminal or heterotopic³ space (such as the forest, the cemetery, death, the road, the open sea) to the land of the adult (the town, institutions, etc.). This passage between territories is linked to the question of identity, a concept which is present throughout these novels both for the protagonist and the reader as these voyages enable them to learn and grow. Maps are often of prime importance in these novels (as the *Cahiers Robinssons* underlined in 2010⁴) as they enable the reader to follow the path taken to cross territories and places. Some archetypal places can also become near-characters as the *topos* of the castle, the cottage, the forest etc. attest.

The circulation of these texts and their reception will also be analysed in this seminar as their journeys between countries, regions and centuries through translations, reinterpretations and adaptations is key to their understanding and their study. The different impassable boundaries encountered by texts will also be discussed as many children's stories have been stopped at the border because of political, religious or moral considerations.

The notion of borders is intrinsically linked to that of territory in children's literature as the spaces of children's and adult literature have constantly overlapping through history creating an open, blurred and porous border line⁵. Indeed, there are many criss-crossings between fairy-tales, folklore and children's literature creating movements between the genres. Movements which function both ways as fairy tales seem to be returning to a more adult audience after having spent many a year ensconced in the children's realm. In point of fact, children's literature implies many ideological questions on the link between children and adults: is this literature necessarily didactic and guided by the adult or can it exist in its own right? This line of questioning, which had been initiated in the 2006 colloquium entitled "Devenir adulte et rester enfant⁶?", is part of the discussion of this seminar. On the other hand, the opposite, that is to say the passage from the children's text to the adult reader will also be analysed, from the appropriation of children's literature by adults to stories being read out-

¹A novel which discusses the main character's formative years such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795-96).

²See Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le roman d'aventures* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982).

³Michel Foucault, *Le Corps utopique, les hétérotopies*. 1966 (Paris, Lignes, 2009).

⁴Danielle Dubois-Marcoïn et Eléonore Hamaide-Jager, "Cartes et plans : Paysages à construire, espaces à rêver" *Cahiers Robinssons* 28 (2010).

⁵Isabelle Nières-Chevrel (dir.), *Littérature de jeunesse, incertaines frontières* (Paris : Gallimard, 2005) 9 : "Les frontières de la littérature de jeunesse sont mouvantes et poreuses." My translation: "The borders of children's literature are unstable and porous."

⁶Isabelle Cani, *Devenir adulte et rester enfant* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2008). Conference papers from the colloquium which took place on the 18th, 19th and 20th of May 2006 in Clermont-Ferrand, France.

loud by parents and a certain education of the parent through the text.

The territory of children's literature is also subversive by essence as it is partly detached from the adult world. A host of negative characters such as the fool, the idiot, the idler and the rascal (which are typical of facetious tales) are shown in a positive light as they often succeed in the story. The adult religious and moral conformism is oftentimes undermined in children's literature in order to create a world which is freer and happier, far from adult supervision. As Peter Hunt mentions at the beginning of *An Introduction to Children's Literature*, "[c]hildren's books are singularly unhealthy places for parents"⁷ as the adult figure is often removed at the beginning of the story. Moreover, the parent character is of interest as he is often synonymous with a certain form of violence which makes the child's removal from his society necessary for his survival. Interestingly, cruelty and violence are not removed from children's literature but are present both in fairy tales and in contemporary works for children. Indeed, the dystopian development in 21st century children's literature enables us to better question the border between children and adult fiction and to better analyse the links between the two genres as they thrive off each other.

⁷Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 24.