

UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO USFQ

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**The Case of Struwwelpeter: Why is the Category of Children's
Literature so Diverse and Flexible?**

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Literature so Diverse and Flexible?**

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RESUMEN

Nuestra percepción actual de la literatura infantil se ve limitada por los estereotipos que asociados a ella. Tendemos a entenderla como un género simplista, inocente y sin valor académico. Para desacreditar estos prejuicios y probar que existe mucha diversidad en el género analizamos *Struwwelpeter* (1845) del Dr. Heinrich Hoffman, una pieza de literatura para niños que rompe con la manera en la que percibimos estos libros actualmente. Aquí sostengo que la literatura infantil contiene mucha más variedad y flexibilidad de lo que los estereotipos actuales nos permiten pensar. Esto se debe a que no hay una definición firme que delimite la literatura infantil. Lo cual ocurre gracias a que nuestra percepción de la infancia cambia con el tiempo, por tanto, transformando la literatura que dejamos entrar en la vida de los niños pequeños.

Palabras clave: literatura infantil, infancia, *Struwwelpeter*, estereotipos, definición, flexibilidad, variedad, literatura.

ABSTRACT

The perception we nowadays have about children's literature is being limited by the stereotypes we have come to associate with it. We tend to understand it as a genre that is simplistic, too naïve, and lacking any intellectual value. To push back those prejudices, and to prove just how much diversity exists within the genre, we analyze *Struwwelpeter* (1845) by Dr. Heinrich Hoffman. A piece of children's literature that thoroughly differs with the children's books we produce today. Here I argue that this genre has more variety and flexibility than the current stereotypes allow us to think. Which occurs thanks to the fact that our concept of childhood is constantly changing and, with it, the things we allow into the lives of little kids.

Key words: children's literature, childhood, *Struwwelpeter*, stereotypes, definition, flexibility, variety, literature.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a speech by Phillip Pullman, the author of the successful book series *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), where he expresses an opinion that I find myself sharing. The name of the speech is *Philip Pullman on Children's Literature and the Critics Who Disdain It*, and this is one of its most important points: "I thought I should begin by trying to say what children's literature is; but that's not as easy as it seems. We think we know what it is—there are books about it, you can be a professor of it—but it still seems to me rather a slippery term" (Pullman). Here he is saying that a definition for children's literature eludes us, despite our efforts to standardize it. I am referring to him because that is the main point that I would like to address within this paper.

That main point being that the lack of a proper definition has allowed for children's literature to be a genre that bears a huge flexibility and that allows diversity. The word flexibility will be defined as a characteristic that allows its subject to be modified, without being destroyed. In this case it will allude to the ability of children's books to showcase different characteristics between themselves without stopping to be catalogued as such. Also, diversity will be used to point at the wide variety of products that can result from the capacity of children's literature to be flexible.

To understand my argumentation during this paper it is necessary to abandon a typical mistake that often happens when discussing children's literature. That mistake is that when asked to define children's literature most people will answer it is a genre that consists of books that are read only by kids. A stereotype that is, very often, wrong. More than that, it is an assumption that often results in children's books being dismissed from intellectual circles. This is product of our society's assumption that kids cannot or will not read anything too complex. Still, there are kids

that are not contempt with what the market says they can read. Phillip Pullman addresses that on his speech too by saying: “Adults are happily reading children’s books; and what is more, children are reading adults’ books. A thirteen-year-old boy of my acquaintance was a passionate reader of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Unconsoled...*” (Pullman). As an eleven-year-old I would enjoy reading Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe. This past month, as an adult, I read *Oh, The Places You’ll Go!* by Doctor Seuss, a very famous children’s picture book, and I thoroughly loved it. Therefore, children’s literature is not only meant to include texts that are read by kids. Children can read horror, complex classics and pretty much anything they would like to. Also, adults can explore books labelled as children’s literature as well. We do not control what people read thus this one does not work as a definition.

But, if children’s literature is not just books that are read by the young, then what is it? As was mentioned in the beginning, a clear definition has eluded academic circles for quite some time. This has happened thanks to the diversity and flexibility within the genre. Here I intend to explore some of the reasons that allowed those two characteristics to exist in the first place. In order to show just what has been allowed within children’s literature I will take one of its weirdest pieces and explain its surprising characteristics. This exercise will help us see why almost anything can be allowed in children’s literature.

The piece I chose for this exercise is a book written and illustrated by Heinrich Hoffmann, called *Struwwelpeter*. It was first published in 1845. It features a collection of short verse stories that exaggerate the consequences of misbehavior. The standards that rule today’s market for children’s literature, will have made it impossible for this book to be published today. At least under that genre. This is because of the violence that appears not only on the verses, but on the illustrations too. Very few books scape the constrictions of today’s literature critics and

editors to do something different, something scary. Also, censorship boards make it impossible for violent pieces to be catalogued as children's literature. Yet, in the past it was more common to see texts such as this one.

During this paper we will lay off stereotypes surrounding this genre and, hopefully, lose them. This will allow more readers to be more open to the intellectual challenges children's books provide for them. *Struwwelpeter* (1845) will help to see that the limits of what can be allowed on this genre are almost nonexistent and what factors made it that way. Also, we will examine how our vision of children shapes our way of seeing children's literature as well. Overall, we will see just why there is so much diversity and flexibility within this genre.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To study the variety within the children's literature category we first need to cover some information. Therefore, here I will explain the way we will define this label. During this task we will come to understand that a strict definition is hard to pin down. So, we will use a more encompassing approach will be used. Then, we will continue to explore one of the most interesting examples of diversity within this genre *Struwwelpeter* (1845) by Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann. This will, in turn, take us to the history of childhood itself and how the evolution of that concept has shaped the literature we associate with it. The children's literature genre has been influenced by a few very important factors.

To discuss the diversity and flexibility of children's literature, we will start by defining the standards we are going to use to refer to it. We are stepping into a challenging endeavor since academics have been debating this issue for quite a very long time. Marah Gubar (2012) wrote an article where she examines the conflicts that arise when trying to define children's literature. She divides this debate between definers, and non-definers. Furthermore, she extends some critique to the first group by saying that "definers rely too heavily on authorial intention and often end up essentializing children or adults" (Gubar, 211). Gubar is against the limitations often imposed to what is generally understood as the children's literature genre by notions such as having kids' books being defined by standards like: read by the young, or defined by authorial intent, being too clean, or just written in a simple/cute way.

She goes on to say that we cannot assign the name of children's literature to everything read by young people, since that includes a broad range of texts and even pornography. Sometimes people will aim to use authorial intent as a definition, which would be to say that children's books are those written for children. Authorial intent, as the Oxford's publication A

Dictionary of Media and Communication (2011) puts it: “A position that argues that the creator of a text possesses a privileged understanding of its meaning... This position has been criticized for its assumption that authors can ever be fully conscious of the meaning of what they produce”. Gubar (2011), says this has not been a determining factor. Publishers or readers have meddled with writer’s vision of their work to suit demand. She also mentions cases where children’s books have not been stereotypically clean, such as *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie. A piece often read to kids even though its main subject is death. Gubar’s (2011) purpose is far away from trying to establish a set of rules to define children’s literature. To her, the lack of a definition is not a problem.

The article affirms we should abandon the idea that children’s literature is a coherent or even that it is possible for it to be a clear category. Instead, in order to study it, she proposes to adopt a method used by Wittgenstein: “family-resemblance approach enables us to stake out a middle ground between the anti-definers and the definers: we have neither to throw out the concept of children’s literature nor to unearth a common trait exhibited by all (and only) children’s texts (Gubar, 212). This is the method I will use to approach the subject.

Now, an article by Walter Sauer (2003) compiles the history of one of the most successful “children’s literature” classics of all time: *Struwwelpeter* (1845) by Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann. A text that works as the perfect example to refer to the **diversity** within the family-resemblance of children’s literature. This one is part of the group of books that were written for immediate members of the author’s family, in this case, his son. According to the text, “Hoffmann wrote and illustrated the *Struwwelpeter* stories for his three-year-old son Carl as a Christmas present in 1844” (Sauer, 218). Later, his friends motivated him to publish the book. It

ended up being a huge success, becoming a classic in Germany and having more than five editions.

Frederick (1845), part of the *Struwwelpeter* collection, finishes by having the protagonist injured after a long day of bad behavior. His punishment seems to be the wound and the visit of the doctor. A dog bites his leg and then we see him in bed, resting. On both illustrations one can see that “in both manuscript pages have been visibly tampered with by means of a sharp utensil” (Sauer, 228). This was done to erase the heavy flow of blood originally stemming from the kid’s leg. It has been said that either Hoffmann himself or his editor could be responsible for this choice, thinking that too much blood would scare the children. They did not erase the blood, instead it was just reduced. This is something we would not see on today’s market.

Hoffman’s work is part of a tradition that usually does not value the irrepressible child-energies that youngsters exhibit, it rather shows value to them. While also trying to warn against them. This might seem contradictory. Here we will look at Knoepflmacher’s work where she tries to explain why *Struwwelpeter* is a text that validates defiance. She states it can be read two ways:

The stories can be viewed as autocratic and repressive, directed against the instinctual energies of a careless and amoral youth. And they can just as easily be regarded as a “send up,” a subversive mockery of the mode of the cautionary tales that Hoffman may only pretend to be following. (Knoepflmacher, 25)

In Knoepflmacher’s (2000) article she conciliates these two views by explaining how this work influenced other writers. It starts by referring to Mark Twain, who translated the book to English and often referred to the text to talk about the celebration of rebelliousness and why it

should be encouraged. Twain, for instance, wrote *Tom Sawyer* (1876) a text about a child questioning the notions of guilt and morality that had been imposed to him by the adult world. Admirers of Twain's works like Kipling and Maurice Sendak would also show that on their work. Knoepfmacher (2000) concludes that "the text seems to mock both the compulsive, addictive child and the impotent parent who must rely on bogeymen to help her stablish an order free of addiction" (Knoepfmacher, 92). She affirms that Hoffman's work exposes how stupid adults and children can be. It renders them more equally capable of dumb mistakes, one for not being able to teach effectively. The others for lacking a fully formed conscience and hence, making very bad mistakes.

When studying children's literature and its **diversity** we must understand how society's vision of childhood has changed over time. Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt's (1999) article refers to how the concept of childhood has shaped the literature that we associate with it. She begins by taking us to Charles Darwin's work: "In this framework, the child was equated with the savage" (24, Zumwalt). Darwin would affirm that in puberty the intellectual and physical capacity grows to its fullest, hence it is not as strong in children. The literature that feed on this view of childhood would often portray kids as weak and unformed savages that needed emotional support and education. Darwin would also say that "savages" such as natives from Africa and South America, stayed on a stage of intellectual development like the one of white children. But on their case, this was permanent. "Just as the child is raised by the parent so can the savage be pulled out of the primitive state by the representatives of the civilized nations" (25, Zumwalt). So, the literary works were simplistic, to make them easier for those dumbled minds, and violence was not to be a matter of shock. Thus, allowing books as weird as *Struwwelpeter* (1845) to

peacefully exist within a family where adorable and clean books are also a part of. This view of children granted the existence of rhymes that display, among others, cannibalism, such as:

Fee fi fo fum I smell the blood of an Englishman!

Be he alive or be he dead,

I'll grind his bones to make my bread! (Bett 1924, 31)

Zumwalt (1999) recommends recognizing that children are not simple, just like the adult world is not. The child is complex and the way we strive to understand it has changed overtime. Thus, taking us to authors like Malinowski (1922) that would say children's folklore could be a tool to create a social child, one with cultural values. Then comes literature which tells children how to behave, like rhymes from the same region as *Struwwelpeter*. There is a particular one that talks about being a pretty little Dutch girl, who is cute and uses that fact to get what she wants - money, fruit- in exchange of a kiss. This is when Zumwalt's (1999) reasoning comes in and tells us that literature does not necessarily yield the ideal, it rather reflects the real. The Dutch girls were not like that, still they tried their best to do so. Therefore, that literature spoke about the expectations their society had for them.

Even though Zumwalt (1999) states that is often the case, she ends her article by saying that the factors that shape children's folklore cannot be fully understood. She writes: "The fluid world of the child eludes the static state of the printed word" (25, Zumwalt). Still, multiple tales and books have been censored to fit today's market's expectations and cultural norms.

Let us take one of the oldest examples of such adaptations. For instance, until recently the complete first edition (1812) of the Grimm's fairy tales was not available to English speaking readers. Initially, this book was not meant to be for children. Its first edition features the original

instruction written by the Grimm's brothers. There we can clearly see that their intentions were to keep track and share Germany's shared literary history. These are collected stories, that belonged to oral tradition. Given the gruesome nature of many of the stories they were erased passed the 1812 edition. A case of this is *How Some Children Played at Slaughtering* (1812), this was far too violent for adults even. It is a tale about children who, having seen his father slaughter a pig, create a game where they do the same to one of their brothers.

On a more recent example, "2014, nearly fifty years after the publication of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the chapter "Vanilla Fudge Room" reappeared after being edited out of the first British and American editions" (Richter, 328). This chapter featured the almost certain death of children by being chopped to pieces with the rest of the fudge. The chapter was deemed sadistic and demeaning. Indeed, it was full of warnings and danger for insubordinate children. So, editors opted for erasing it at first. Still, Richter's (2015) article continues by saying that "there is a place and a precedent for danger and darkness in children's literature" (Richter, 379). It becomes almost as a demand from that public. By reading a material that is more realistic when it comes to portraying the very real risks of life, children are better prepared.

This information allows us to set the framework, I will use to explain the diversity within the genre. During this section we have established that we will not use a strict definition for children's literature. From Gubar's (2011) article we will be taking the family-resemblance approach. One where we do not expect all the members of a category to fit an exact description, but rather to have certain similarities associated with the genre. Sauer (2003) and Knowpflmacher's (2000) explained the history and subsequent influence of the classic I intend to use as focus: *Struwwelpeter* (1845). Sauer (2003) in particular, referred to the violence of the

illustrations within this book made it clear it is not something we would see in the children's section today. Even though it is still labelled as children's literature it appears in more adult oriented sections of bookstores. So, it is not marketed towards children. Yet, it still is part of the family of children's literature. To understand why we had to examine the history of childhood. There Zumwalt's (1999) article revealed that children were savages that needed to be educated. This allowed for very violent texts to come to be targeted to children. All this information helps to fill what we needed to know to discuss this subject further. In the following section I will proceed to analyse *Stuwweltpeter* as an example to explain why there is so much diversity within children's literature.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

As we previously covered on the past section, what we have come to call children's literature is often misunderstood. Nowadays, we associate this genre with the following characteristics: books that were written in a simplistic way for children to understand them, that had an author purposely addressing the text to kids, that are read exclusively by the young, that have never been bearers of violence or dark themes, that have cute and friendly illustrations, and, lastly, that often are perceived as having less intellectual value than other books. It has already been said that those assumptions are often misleading. This is because while sometimes the pieces associated to this genre feature those characteristics, they do not constitute the norm. Children's literature does not have a strict definition. So, here I intend to use the previously explained framework to analyze *Struwwelpeter*(1845) by Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann and thus show how the stereotypes can be broken.

This work of literature features one of the classic characteristics of the genre: it was written for children. "...Hoffmann wrote and illustrated the Struwwelpeter stories for his three-year old son Carl as a Christmas present in 1844" (Sauer, 218). However, that is where the coincidences with today's assumptions about children's literature end. The original name of the book was: *Lustige Geschichten und drollige Bilde (Merry Stories and Funny Pictures)*, it was changed to the title of its most famous story. By the third edition the name of the collection of stories was *Struwwelpeter (Shockheaded Peter or Slovenly Peter)*. With which we will start our analysis.

Just look at him! there he stands,

With his nasty hair and hands.

See! his nails are never cut;
They are grimed as black as soot;
And the sloven, I declare,
Never once has combed his hair;
Anything to me is sweeter
Than to see Shock-headed Peter. (Hoffman 2)

That is the whole story, it is the shortest of them. In here we see a rhyme about a kid who does not cut his nails or combs his hair. The tone is that of a parent complaining at having a child that does not listen to their advice on how to carry personal hygiene. Shock-headed Peter is not a cute child, as we see him standing on a sort of stage with nails that almost look like claws, long messy hair, and a sad face. That is how a disobedient child looks, or how the book puts it at least. The blending of illustration and text makes us think that it is impossible for a kid that does not cut his nails, or combs his hair to look good, to be happy. The image and text set the mood for what is to come in the rest of the story collection. Just like Peter, kids who disobey their parents will not be happy. Some of them will just end up in trouble, most of them will die.

From this point we will see that *Struwwelpeter* (1845) breaks with the requirement of not portraying violence. Another tale where this feature becomes very clear, we will take *The Story of Little Suck-a-Thumb* (1845) as an example. One day, the mother of a child named Conrad turned up in a situation that forced her to leave to him alone at home for a short period of time. Before going out, she warns her son that there is a tailor out there who comes to children who

have the bad habit of sucking their thumbs. If Conrad starts doing that, the tailor will come and cut his thumbs with his big scissors and they will never grow back again.

He disobeys his mother, as the ongoing theme of the book goes. So of course, the great tall tailor came and dismembered little Conrad. Once his mother gets back home, she just said:

Mamma comes home: there Conrad stands,

And looks quite sad, and shows his hands;

"Ah!" said Mamma, "I knew he'd come

To naughty little Suck-a-Thumb. (Hoffman 16)

The horrible consequence became true and there was no sign of compassion, just a cold I-told-you-so. Knoepflmacher (2000) wrote a text that was mentioned on the previous section. In it she was dismantling her initial opinion towards the book. At first, it seemed, those stories were just a way to scare kids out of bad behavior. In a way, prompting them to obey everything they heard for fear of the consequences. Yet, after analyzing the way this tale collection has been interpreted through history, she realized that it satirized both parents and children.

Mark Twain translated this work to English. He was a fond of the idea of the revolutionary kid, the one who would ask “why”, instead of just blindly obeying. Also, another characteristic of his own work is that adults were not portrayed as perfect. His admirers later adopted those ideals. Hoffman’s work was fascinating to him. Once seeing through the violence, we can understand why. “Hoffman relishes the funny stories and droll pictures that allow him to manipulate children as well as to expose the stupidity of their elders” (Knoepflmacher, 94). This conclusion is drawn from the fact that neither of the stories do not have happy endings. If it those

parents were really doing a good job their kids would be less likely to die. Yet they do, the safety of the children is not guaranteed. There is not a safe environment for them to explore and build their own conscience, even if it is through defiance. *Struwwelpeter (1845)* is therefore criticizing the bogeyman that parents invent, how absent they are from the household and how little effort they intend to make for their children.

So, in here we have seen that there can be violence in children's literature, especially in old books such as the one we are analyzing. But also, we have seen that it is not necessarily a bad thing to have it in there. In this case, it serves as a method for satire.

Hence, another aspect that differentiates this book from others is that it does not essentialize children. To essentialize, in this case, means to show a concept in terms of one or more stereotypical or those who are assumed to be intrinsic traits. Our society tends to assume kids are always innocent and hence morally good, that children have no evil within them. For the purpose of this paper, I do not intend to answer this question but to mention how children's literature has often challenged that assumption.

Hoffman (1845) here is satirizing misbehaving kids and ends up posing a challenge to the essentialism we submit children to. His book features a story called Cruel Frederick in which a kid miss behaves in a different way than the rest. Most of the children featured in this book disobey parents when it comes to things like hygiene or not playing with matches. In this case there is no parent warning Frederick, he does as he pleases.

And threw the kitten down the stairs;

And oh! far worse than all beside,

He whipped his Mary, till she cried. (Hoffman 3)

As we can see on the previous passage from the story, he is cruel towards animals and to his servitude. One day, he goes out and whips his dog Tray. The animal reacts just as violently and bites his leg until it bleeds. In the end he is forced to stay in bed by his doctor and the dog eats his dinner. This story is about what happens when children do not have parents that show them lessons, it is showing that cruelty gets what it deserves. Still, it is also about how the young can also be cruel, it makes fun of that unjustified anger and vicious acts that children often do just out of whim. Thus it is challenging a the vision of childhood.

Another children's classic that breaks with the idea that kids are pure and morally good is *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (1963). The plot of his story starts with a little kid being mean to his mom and to his own dog. He is disguised as a white feline with claws and gets into the role. He acts like a wild thing. So, his mom sends him to his room without having dinner. That is when he travels to an island where the wild things, like him, live. In the end, he grows tired of the monsters he encounters, they are too mean, too wild. He feels lonely and wants to go back home to his mom. This story, while having a sweeter nature when one compares it with *Cruel Frederick* (1845), is also talking about a child that is not perfect. One that can be cruel and needs to learn his lesson.

Adults are also imperfect in *Struwwelpeter* (1845), they are not seen as figures that you are particularly keen on obeying or on trusting. They are absent, the only thing they do for their kids is to give orders and not they do not even help the kids complete them. Also, when the little ones suffer, are mutilated, or die, they never seem too surprised. Within this collection, there is a tale about a kid that fidgets in the table too much: *The Story of Fidgety Phillip* (1845). After disobeying the order of staying still during dinner, Phillip's chair falls and he is covered by

falling knives and plates. He either dies or is gravely injured. Still, his parents just stand worried about the state of their table.

Here we find a critique to the idealization to the parent and of the child. The parents are not always going to care for their children's safety. Or, even if they do, they will not always know what is best for them. These kids, the unprotected ones, do not owe anything to their irresponsible parents. That is, unless they want to give it anyway. The narrative of 'the good parent' is often used to reinforce the idea that children should take care of them when they are old. I believe this mocking of them through satire is meant to show they are just as lost as little kids. and that this debt that their descendants are supposed to have does not apply to every case. The text is, consciously or unconsciously, challenging systems. It is being disruptive and different. Therefore, it is posing intellectual questions of a level that we do not usually expect from a book labelled as children's literature.

The next stereotype *Struwwelpeter* (1845) breaks is the one about having cute illustrations. The tale *The Story of Augustus Who Would Not Have Any Soup*, as the name states it, is about a picky eater that refuses to have soup. At first it might seem like it is a sweet story about learning to love food and to get used to different flavors. The reality is completely different. The illustrations feature a fat kid standing up next to the table waving his hands at the reader. Sort of a protest posture. As the days past and Augustus does not eat, the book showcases how he starts to lose weight in a scary way. By the fourth illustration his arms look like chopsticks. By the fifth we no longer see Augustus, just his grave on the ground. There might not be explicit physical violence, but the depiction of starvation is just as alarming.

Also, on *The Story of Little Suck-a-Thumb* (1845), once the giant sailor comes, we see that as the fingers are snapped drops of blood begin to fall. In this case, the drawing helps to

portray physical violence. Yet this is not the only way in which the images in this book differ from what we are used to.

The key element that I want to cover here is that the children that are drawn on the book do not really look like real kids. They often have huge torsos and faces that resemble more to those of adults. “Indeed, the drawing of this curious figure makes him look like a hybrid: his head, enlarged by that lion’s mane, and his huge torso and extended arms are those of an adult, whereas the short, stubby legs still seem to belong to a child” (Knowepflmacer, 87). Therefore, these children are shown as half adult, half kid, for they will grow up one day. They are currently being educated to get there. It makes sense for this kind of book to not have cute illustrations. If they looked like actual kids it would probably be harder for us to see them dying. As the original title would say, this are supposed to be “funny pictures”, after all.

There have been other instances in which dark humor is found in children’s literature. One of those that came a century after *Struwwelpeter* (1845) is *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* by Edward Gorey. This book was originally published in 1969 and it consist of an illustrated alphabet. What is interesting about it is that each letter is the name of a kid that dies by the end of the sentence. One example would be the next one: “E is for Ernest who choke on a peach” (Gorey, 5). On the illustration we see a little kid sitting on a huge chair, in front of him, the white mantel of the dinner table is mostly empty. Except for a plate containing a big peach. He is smiling at it, happy to eat it. We, as readers, know how it ends. That, as dark as it gets, is the humor the picture book uses. I mention this example to show that the tradition of having creepiness within illustrations and story is not that uncommon. Nor only possible in the 1800s.

In conclusion, in this part we have examined how the example of *Struwwelpeter* (1845) and many other examples break the modern assumptions of what children’s literature can or

cannot entitle. In this case, yes, it was written for children. But as previously seen, the Grimm's Brother's work was not intended for children and yet, it is vastly considered as children's literature still. This despite the author's will to just collect German's oral literature tradition. Then, it was explained that children's books can feature gruesome and creepy illustration work. To prove that I referred to the story of *Little Suck-a-Thumb* (1845), this because the tale has a drawing that shows mutilation. This contradicts today's idea that they need to be cute. Also, it was examined how these differences in children's literature can speak or teach about profound subjects. Which is something that happens withing the satire created withing the stories in *Struwwelpeter* (1845). Not only there but on more modern examples such as *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* by Edward Gorey which is a collection of dark humor about childhood neglect achieved with an illustrated alphabet about kids dying.

CONCLUSION

During the development of this paper, we have mentioned the difficulty that lays behind setting tight standards to define what children's literature is. It has been said the modern world has its own rules about the genre. Those have been evolving through time and will continue to do so in the years to come. Hence, providing humanity with more examples to show just how much diversity can exist withing one same genre.

The problem that got me started on this topic was that today people tend to assume children's books work along these prejudices: they feature simplistic or poor writing, they are specifically written for kids or are only read by them, they cannot be dark or violent in their ways, they have adorable illustrations, and the most dangerous of all the stereotypes, they have less value. In here wanted to provide an example from the 1800s to show what used to be allowed within children's literature from another time. So, I went into a deep analysis of Fredrich Hoffman's children's classic *Struwwelpeter* (1845). I chose this piece because of how disruptive it can be for today's public. This thanks to the way this book breaks almost every stereotype we believe about what children's books can or can not do today.

It was indeed written for a three-year-old, in fact, it was meant to be a Christmas present for the author's son. Despite that, it features death, gruesome illustrations, and a complex satirical narrative that complains of the methods of parenthood at the time. There was only one instance where editors complained about the use of blood. However, it must be made clear that while they reduced the amount of blood, they never erased it. Not even in the Russian edition, where they changed the artist, and redrew all the original illustrations. For today's market its mad to think of publishing a children's book that contains blood or violence in general. That is

why is *Struwwelpeter* is such a good example of the diversity and flexibility withing children's literature.

As it was said during the literature review, there is really no need of having a firm definition. Here I am saying it might be wiser to adopt the method used by Wittgenstein: "family-resemblance approach enables us to stake out a middle ground between the anti-definers and the definers: we have neither to throw out the concept of children's literature nor to unearth a common trait exhibited by all (and only) children's texts (Gubar, 212). A family approach is much more suitable for this genre. This method will help us to go into children's literature knowing that almost every book within it is different and yet it is catalogued with the same label due to very random characteristics.

Children's books might follow some of what I have referred to as today's stereotypes of the genre, yet not every book will feature all of those. And this, is not necessarily a matter of the time that produces the pieces. It would be incorrect to assume that older children's books are the only ones that dare to challenge those characteristics. In modern times that happens too, just not with as much freedom.

Let me exemplify that last paragraph. Under the words 'Children's Literature', we might find works like *Hello Lighthouse* by Sophie Blackhall (2018). This piece was awarded with one of the greatest prizes in the industry: the Caldecott Medal. It is worth mentioning this great book because at first sight it will look exactly like what we currently expect from children's books cute illustrations, a soft story without violence, written for children, and very few words. Still, even this book does not fit all the conditions. This is, thanks to the fact that it deals with historical fiction. Thus, adding a deeper complexity to the text, a critique to the mistreatment of lighthouse operators back in the day. A theme that today's public would hardly judge as

‘appropriate for children’. Hence reinforcing my point that no book that is labelled as children’s literature fits all the possible stereotypes or characteristics that are assigned to them.

Anything can be allowed into children’s literature because there is no clear standard of what kids like, or of what they will be interested in reading. Not even of what they can or cannot handle or understand. The definition of childhood has changed enormously since Charles Darwin’s definitions of them as savages that needed to be civilized through literature. Hence, allowing cannibalism and cruel endings to naughty kids.

Now we are more protective of them, our market’s censorship -mostly not allowing blood or physical violence to touch the pages of a children’s book- shows that our conception of childhood has changed. So, it is only logical to have diversity and flexibility when the definition of what constitutes the genre is in itself is changing constantly.

Taking everything into account, there is no defining factor, or set of standards for that matter, that can constrict the complexity of the children’s literature genre. Why is children’s literature so diverse and flexible? Because it is subject to the definition of childhood, a concept that changes overtime and cultures. So, the books that have been labelled under this genre are often like a biological family. One can see similarities being scattered around, yet that does not mean every member will share those. Therefore, it is wiser to be open to the richness that lays between its diversity and flexibility.

Also, it is important to keep in mind that the epoque where the books appear, while having influence on its contents, is not a decisive factor. This is to say that not everything published before the 2000’s is gruesome and violent. A good example of this is Oliver Goldsmith’s *Little Goody Two Shoes* (1765), it is even older than *Struwwelpeter* (1845) and yet,

it is about a little girl receiving recompenses for being morally good. Also, not everything after the 2000s is as clean and adorable as it might seem. I will name Neil Gaiman's *The Wolves in the Walls* (2013) as an example. This is a beautifully complex rhyme that tells a scary story about how we fear the deep secrets of our own household. So, even when the time of publication does have an impact on the content of the books, the only rule seems to be that there are no rules. The pieces within this genre will continue to have great books worth of study withing it is shelves.

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