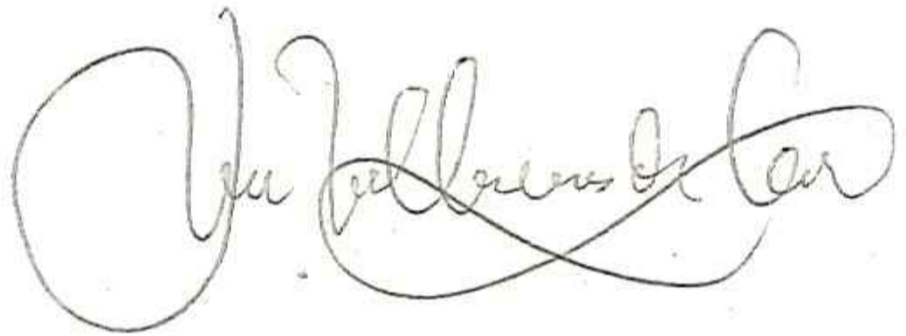


Thinking through Children's Literature  
in the Classroom

Edited by

Agustín Reyes-Torres,  
Luis S. Villacañas-de-Castro  
and Betlem Soler-Pardo



*Copy of the author,*

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P U B L I S H I N G

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## CHAPTER ONE

# AN 'EDUCATION TO REALITY': AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM

LUIS S. VILLACAÑAS-DE-CASTRO

### Problematic subject matters

One need not go too far, nor delve too deep, into any curriculum before discovering at least one reality that is never represented in its wording and, as a result, never obtains its proper lot of attention inside a classroom, neither time- nor content-wise. I am referring to the *mode of production*, the name given to society by Karl Marx, when he analyzed it in terms of how its individual members maintained different positions, and fulfilled diverse roles, in relation to the means of social wealth. This variable accordingly divided them into the groups we call *social classes*. Of course, one should not hasten to interpret the absence of this reality from the content-goals of education as if it were truthfully external to, or insignificant for, the field of education, let alone for the vast province of the social and the human sciences; for it is not. Quite to the contrary, sociology discovered long ago that clear-cut sociological variables not only end up affecting in numerous and intense ways the lives children lead as grown up workers, but, most importantly, that they already play a major role during the earlier steps of their instruction. Social division has educational consequences which no reasonable pedagogue will fail to observe (McKeon, 1994; Wrigley, 2000).

As evidence of this, suffice it to say that Marx's original research laid down the suitable conditions for future discoveries (for instance Pierre Bourdieu's) on how social division of labour and the ownership of the means of production shaped an ample scope of facts well-known today by



educators. The sheer idea that "in calculating the cost of production of simple labour power there must be included the cost of reproduction, whereby the race of workers is enabled to multiply and to replace worn-out workers by new ones" is tightly interwoven to an immense network of implications, the consideration of which no social scientist can simply decide to ignore when approaching social phenomena, including the facts of education (Marx, 1847, p. 206). At a strictly pedagogical level, for example, Jim Cummins (1986, 1988, 1994) has insistently claimed that, as a result of the larger social inertias, teacher-student interactions tend to reproduce spontaneously the general power dynamics between races and social classes that determine a given social context—unless educators become aware of this dialectic, and counteract it with alternative pedagogies. Likewise, regarding the sociological level, we are nowadays flooded with evidence of upward mobility no longer being an effective tendency, since the unjust way *value* is distributed among the workers through the salary system compels sons and daughters either to replace their parents at their exact workplace, or to plunge directly into unemployment. As a matter of fact, the impossibility of labour ever being paid at its proper rate under capitalist relations of production entirely subtends the present international economic crisis. In view of this, I believe that our problems as professional academics and scholars are no longer confined today to the theoretical misconceptions or mistakes that may derive from the overwhelming presence of ideology and the hopelessness of our capitalist society ever correcting itself by looking into the mirror ideology offers. What is at stake right now is the very viability and functionality of some of our most basic institutions, especially health and educational. As regards the latter, the situation in Greece, Portugal and Spain may serve as good examples.

A similar argument, by the way, could also be held regarding another prominent theory that, just like Marx's, has long been kept out of most educational and scientific curricula and barred from the standard forms of institutional sanctioning. I am referring to psycho-analysis, which describes the mental life of an individual from the vantage point afforded by the discovery that the psychic apparatus is divided into conscious and unconscious regions, among which determining mental representations (such as fantasies or memories) are distributed. Its exclusion from the human sciences has taken place despite the fact that, in his life-long quest for the traces of the sexual drive, Sigmund Freud soon came to realize that "the psycho-analysis of an adult neurotic is equivalent to an after-education", and also that the complex mechanisms of *primary* and *secondary* forms of *repression*, of *sublimation*, and of the other destinies



the libido underwent in its urge for satisfaction, necessarily conditioned intelligence, concentration, effort and working-aptitude indicators, in children and adults the same (Freud, 1925, p. 4168; Cho, 2009). Many are the suggestions dealing with this idea that Freud left scattered along his works (1916-1917, p. 2405; 1925, pp. 2834-5), but it is not the aim of this paper to comment on them. Leaving more field-specific theses aside, Freud's (1925; 1937) general thoughts on education crystallized around the idea that *teaching* was one of three impossible professions, together with *governing* and *healing*, due to the paradoxical and contradictory nature of all three. At the core of this assertion lies the fact that, while the bright and clear intelligence children show during the first five years of their lifetime is soon thwarted by instinctual repression (Freud, 1927; Freud, A., 1931), teachers cannot, all the same, spare them this repressive mechanism, at least if education and cultural heredity are to pass on from generation to generation (Freud, 1916-17). Hence the impossible and contradictory nature of an educators' profession, for neurotic symptoms and a lessened cunning and creativity—Freud (1927) says, “think of the depressing contrast between the radiant intelligence of a healthy child and the feeble intellectual powers of the average adult” (p. 4455)—are the collateral and negative consequences of an educational process which, however, on the face of the alternative, cannot but be considered a lesser evil. Furthermore, it was to ameliorate this evil that psycho-analytic therapy offered itself as a proper compensation. This line of research was taken up and applied to school children by his daughter Anna Freud, by Nelly Wolffheim, Wilhelm Reich, Vera Schmidt, Hans Zulliger, and D. W. Winnicott, among others. But Freud (1933) himself ascertained that the only “appropriate preparation for the profession of an educator is a thorough psycho-analytic training” (p. 4749).

### An education to reality

In view of the situation that affects theoretical and scientific instruction in our society, the first aim of this chapter is no other than to denounce the incongruence inherent in the fact that young learners are institutionally barred, curricula-wise, from learning about subject matters which deeply determine their present and their future lives, such as is the case of the dynamics of a mode of production. I believe that this concealment should be interpreted in the light of the almost unanimous endeavour, undertaken by governments and publishing houses alike, to *sanitize* educational syllabi and classroom resources. This strategy manifests itself regardless of the field of studies involved (Cummins, 1996; Bigelow, 2008). For



instance, it has been argued that this sanitation plan has affected nearly every EFL textbook that is sold internationally. It is difficult to ascertain the damage thereby provoked to English learners, who have missed the opportunity to build and improve their language and critical skills through engaging topics. "For reasons generally attributed to the production of mainstream coursebooks produced for the general EFL class regardless of where they are used," Darío Banegas (2010) claims,

publishers avoid the inclusion of provocative topics in developing the units of work coursebooks may be divided into. This has produced a set of guidelines summarized as PARSNIP (Gray, 2000; Akbari, 2008). This acronym stands for the avoidance of topics related to politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, such as communism, capitalism, feminism among others, and pornography. (p. 1)

Without a doubt, all these subjects could be suitably confronted either through Marx's or Freud's theoretical paradigms. More important than this, however, is to underline the decisive course of action taken by Banegas (2011, 2011a, 2012) as a reaction to this generalized expurgation. Through a collaborative action research project, he developed a set of controversial topics to enrich the EFL syllabus and connect it to the students' Argentinean reality.

In line with this initiative, I defend the need for reality to return to the curricula; that is, for a re-enactment of an '*education to reality*' (Freud, 1927, p. 4456), the main characteristic of which is that attention, time and effort are distributed among school topics in direct proportion to the way their corresponding subject matters impinge on the students' realities. Freud (1930) grieved deeply in his own day that education concealed from children "the part which sexuality will play in their lives" (p. 4523). Something similar can still be maintained today, not so much with regard to sexuality (for, luckily, many changes have occurred in this case), but rather about the knowledge obtained of the social structure in which pupils necessarily participate, and the division of which conditions their lives. As it is well known, this is one of the main objectives pursued by any *critical pedagogy* that, like Paulo Freire's, focuses on the need to understand the *word* at the same time as the *world* in which the former occurs (Freire & Macedo, 1987/2006). Undoubtedly, the first cannot occur without being affected by the second. The following quote by Marxist pedagogue Peter McLaren may shed more light onto this argument. "Every student is endowed," McLaren (2011) defends,



with the capacity for reasoning critically about his or her life and should be apprised of the opportunity for understanding the complex and multilayered context in which his life is lived [...]. Every student has a right to ask: what has my history, my experiences as an individual living in a capitalist society made of me that I no longer want to be? (p. 231)

If this is the case, then educators have the absolute duty to help students formulate these types of questions inside the classroom—for instance, by preparing an interactional context that enables such interrogations to arise—; but also, to provide the basic conceptual tools for them to lead their own self-reflective reasoning towards a rational answer and a consistent and constructive end. Students shall not be left to wander aimlessly and desperately inside a blind alley, in an intellectual cul-de-sac. Following along this track, the Editors of *Rethinking Schools* (2012) proposed recently that teachers “need to turn [their] attention to investigating the origins of the economic crisis that has laid a blanket of hardship and insecurity over so much of the world [... and equip] students with the critical skills to interrogate the economic inequality that from year to year yawns even wider” (p. 6). Of course, only some pedagogical approaches will be suitable to this aim, since many are the affective, ideological, and conceptual stumbling blocks one can expect a student to find in the process of building his/her own identity around these critical topics. As a matter of fact, only dialogic orientations to pedagogy—ones that place *discussion, not transmission*, at the center of their practice (Elliott, 1992; Gibbons, 2009)—, which prompt pupils to question their deep-rooted beliefs and perceptions at the same time as they reinforce trust and confidence in education and in their own abilities, will prove capable of sustaining them throughout this critical development through which identities are rebuilt and *expanded* (Cummins, 1994; Roz Camangian, 2013).

Difficult as this challenge may seem, it is worth a try. Many positive consequences derive from considering the individual as part of a bigger and more complex reality and from judging education as the process whereby students should gain awareness of this fact. Among these consequences, I do not want to miss the opportunity to suggest the way this perspective criticizes and impinges on *humanism*, on what Charles Sarland (2009) has recently defined as the *liberal humanist consensus* (p. 36). As far as literary studies are concerned, this ideology is still the dominant one. Nor are the ideas defended in this chapter compatible with the relativistic and subjectivist illusions cherished by post-modernism and the so-called cultural studies, which focus all their enmity against concepts like *objectivity* and *scientific knowledge* (Watkins, 2009). These doctrines



are to be held responsible for the fact that, whilst students are introduced in school into the knowledge (however basic) of the specific subject matters of biology and physics (of the internal laws of species and of the universe), they are on the other hand completely barred from developing any acquaintance whatsoever with the other strata of which their lives also consist; for instance, the subject matter of sociology, or psychology. Should ignorance prove to be a good safeguard against the impingement of reality, this curricular void would not bring about effects as grave as it actually leads to. But I am afraid that objectivity always ends up overcoming, one way or another, whatever barriers falsehood and ignorance build against it.

### The role of literature in an education to reality

Luckily, among other resources and strategies, teachers can rely on literature to compensate for this institutional oversight, for this educational void. Needless to say that before literature can fulfil this function, the way it is taught and included in school curricula must greatly evolve. As an example of this required shift, let me start by providing a general definition of literature, one that stems from much of what has been said up to now, especially concerning the methodology adopted by Marxian sociology. From this standpoint, literature could be conceptualized as those linguistic metaphors a human being produces about realities that affect him/her in ways of which s/he is generally ignorant, even while s/he is rendering them in a particular linguistic form. According to this definition, human ignorance would inevitably account for literary representations being, as a norm, *incomplete* as well as *distorted* by the very determinations the author ignores—hence the appropriateness of calling them *metaphoric*. Literary artefacts should be regarded as symbolic distortions of a multi-layered reality, the effect of which on the human individual (the author) is not spontaneously accompanied by the latter's accurate knowledge of it, except after laborious scientific work.

Considering literary artefacts, it is plain that social and psychic variables exert the dominant influence. Nonetheless, they continue to be absent from school curricula. In this chapter, I find it pressing to concentrate on the literary effects that derive from the ignorance of Marx's work. It was through concepts such as *ideology*, the *camera obscura* (Marx & Engels, 1845, p. 154) or the *phenomenal forms* (Marx, 1894, pp. 265-85), that Marxian sociology was able to explain not only the individual and social unawareness that institutionally silenced this theory down and prevented it from enjoying an official scientific status; for it was



also able to shed light onto the metaphorical representations that individuals and institutions created in its stead. In view of this, it is no coincidence that this theory ended up becoming a powerful critical methodology, first in the very hands of Marx, later on in those of Lenin, Lukács, Brecht, Adorno, Althusser, Macherey, Williams, Jameson, Zipes (the latter in the realm of children's literature), and so many others. In a similar fashion, it is well known how the influence of psycho-analysis (especially through Bettelheim's seminal but problematic work) became fruitful in the field of literary studies and children's literature (Bosmajian, 2009). In both cases, it was through the exercise of what may be considered their most distinctive methodological concept, the *symptomatic reading*, that these approaches supplied scientific explanations for the genesis of unscientific cultural artefacts (Althusser, 1965, p. 22). They probed into the objective reasons which account for content deformations (Macherey, 1966/2006; Jameson, 1982, cited in Zipes, 2009, pp. 2-3).

At the end of the day, this is precisely the reason why I believe Marxian sociology could also afford an interesting didactic method whereby reading literature was used as a facilitating tool for students to understand some basic scientific concepts. This is the chief interdisciplinary object that my paper pursues: namely, to maximize the pedagogic potential which, according to this theory, remains concealed in every literary work. In posing this challenge—for a challenge it is—I am also following suit from Ballester's (1998) attempt to derive a set of didactical premises from different schools of literary criticism. What undoubtedly makes the Marxist school of criticism so special, however, is that it belongs to a wider theory, one which attempts to trace the literary phenomena back to objective determinations and causes, amiable to scientific rationality.

## Methodology

Since this didactic hypothesis may be difficult to follow, I will try to present it in the most clear and organized manner. In my opinion, Marxian sociology bears the seeds of an interdisciplinary didactics which would no longer confine literature to teaching and learning a first, second, or foreign language, nor to producing aesthetic enjoyment only (Duff & Maley, 1996; Lazar, 1993). These two dimensions are perfectly sound and should be respected and attained; but, in addition to them, a critical and interdisciplinary didactics of literature would contribute to building up students' scientific knowledge by facilitating their acquaintance with the



objective processes that so intensely affect their reality as much as any literary work.

How should this proposal be carried out? Let me draw on some examples so I can explain. The tale "Why?" by Herminia Zur Mühlen, published in a 1925 collection called *Fairy Tales for Workers' Children*, and included in Mickenberg & Nel (2008), provides a metaphorical model of the pedagogical movement to be followed. The main character of this story is Paul, an orphan boy who, were it chronologically feasible, could have been fashioned after the subjective paradigm that psycho-analyst Jacques-Alain Miller described as an *asker*, as one who "ask[s] insistently, and the very fact meant by [this] questioning installs in the analytic experience the dimension of knowledge" (1984, pp. 63-4). Let us see why.

A sad life it was for little Paul. He never heard a kind word, no one loved him, and no one petted or comforted him whenever he was unhappy. Instead of that he was scolded every day and often he was even spanked. One peculiarity of his particularly irritated the supervisors of the poorhouse: at every occasion he used to ask, 'Why?' always wanting to know the cause of everything.

'You mustn't always ask why,' angrily declared the stout Matron who was in charge of the poorhouse. 'Everything is as it is, and therefore it is right.'

'But why have I no parents like the other children of the village have?' insisted little Paul.

'Because they are dead.'

'Why did they die?'

'Because the good Lord willed it so.'

'Why did the Lord will it so?'

'Keep quiet, you good-for-nothing! Leave me alone with your eternal questions'. (Zur Mühlen, 1925, p. 141)

According to psycho-analysis, all curiosity is sexual in origin. This means children's early queries, of the sort described in this story (as repetitive and obsessive as Paul's), should be interpreted as displacements, substitutions or metaphors of a central, sexual doubt which a child represses and holds back from his consciousness. Zur Mühlen's tale remains faithful to this dynamic, even though she changes the nature of the doubt concerned. In this case, Paul does not long for a sexual enlightenment (still, Freud would argue that the latter remained the final cause), but he is rather obsessed and preoccupied with Marx's subject matter, i.e., with the reasons accounting for *social inequality*. This is the one phenomenon of which he actually knows he is ignorant. At the end of the tale, Paul bumps into an ill-tempered, demanding Dryad, and it is then



when the reader finally understands that the kid's previous, irritable questions were but substitutions for, and distortions of, the one important issue he never allowed himself to ask for fear of being beaten, insulted or lied to: "Why am I poor?", "Why are there rich people in the world?", "Why have the idlers everything and the workers nothing?" These are the mysteries that functioned as the real but secret engine that pushed Paul's curiosity forward, and also the tale's entire plot, which clearly symbolizes a learning process. In his quest for reaching the knowledge of the mode of production in which he lives and suffers, Paul encounters all the series of epistemological obstacles that inhere in social reality. In the end, however, he overcomes them with the help of the Dryad (the mentor, the ideal teacher) who directs him towards knowledge and social transformation.

'Then I must continue asking questions?'

'Yes, little Paul, but do not ask the rich, they will not answer you because if they did they would have to say, "The world is such a bad place for poor people because we, the rich, are greedy, selfish, vile," and no person likes to say that about himself. But go to the poor and ask them, "Why do you eat dry bread though you work hard, while the idle rich eat cake? Why are your children pale, thin and ill while the rich children are rosy, fat and healthy? [...]. Ask the poor people these questions so long and so often that they will fall on the structure of injustice like a hammer and smash it. Will you do that, little Paul?'

'Yes,' replied the boy with the eyes alight. (p. 145)

The reason why I defend that this tale holds a metaphorical mirror to an education to reality is that, methodologically speaking, a teacher should operate just like the dryad in this story does. Teachers should identify the metaphors, displacements and ideological substitutions that play havoc in the students' knowledge; next, help the latter scrutinize these displacements against the background of the original and determining factors that caused them; and, finally, encourage pupils to act in common to transform the world and change the deforming inertias in reality. In doing so, teachers would reproduce the different phases identified by any critical pedagogy (Ada, 1988, as cited in Cummins, 1994, pp. 49-52; Peterson, 2007; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007, pp. 44-6). In fact, they would act in the same manner as Marx first departed from Hegel's philosophy and then from capitalist ideology, for example; or Freud from the symptomatic formations his patients brought to him—that is, by starting off from the (symptomatic, ideological) literary text and reconstructing *backwards* the process whereby objective causes assaulted the author unbeknownst to him/her, and deformed the resulting literary work by turning it into a metaphor of those objective processes and of



their corresponding scientific representations. Obviously, a writer may make a conscious decision to oppose his or her text to science, but this intentional aspect changes nothing in relation to the didactic strategy the teacher should employ to approach a literary work. The teacher should, first, make clear to students the distinction between literature and science, as well as the fact that aesthetic quality has nothing to do, in principle, with scientific knowledge. Next, s/he should deal with children's literature as consisting of metaphors of objective processes, and thus as a potential point of departure for introducing scientific theories in the classroom, which present an accurate explanation of such developments. Finally, a dialogic teacher-student interaction framed by the principles of critical pedagogy should lead to changes (however slight) arising in relation to this specific issue.

Let me express this pedagogic process in a different way. The didactic potential inherent in metaphors should be taken advantage of inasmuch as metaphoric distortions can provide an adequate, albeit indirect, access to knowledge. This idea has never been foreign to Marxist pedagogy (Lewis, 2009). According to Terry Wrigley (2009), for example, the possibility of bridging the gap between *metaphor* and *science* was at the core of Raymond Williams' cultural endeavour, of his

ideal of an education that would both respect the 'ordinary' culture—in the sense of both creative activity and its products and of a culture as a 'whole way of life'—and provide access to (a critical reading of) the selective tradition". This sort of reading would already provide "a clear understanding of scientific theory. The one pole without the other," he concludes, "provides a limited education". (pp. 26-7)

In an attempt to theorize this complex dialectic, many pedagogues have resorted to the concept of *mediation*, precisely to refer to the teacher's ability to take his/her students beyond their spontaneous ideas or beliefs and escort them to a rigorous scientific outlook. According to Pauline Gibbons (2006), concrete didactic strategies such as *recasting*, *contingent response*, and *message redundancy* in dialogic teacher-student interaction may afford opportunities for learning that also involve successful knowledge developments, even *identity* expansions (pp. 236-57).

In our approach, this role could be fulfilled by insisting and taking advantage of the metaphoric quality of literature. If every metaphor participates in objectivity to the extent that real causes determined the distortion it displays, then a teacher may first want to analyse the imaginative way a tale describes certain phenomena, but later make sure that students also receive the correct and complete scientific account,



accompanied by suggestions on the possible causes that acted behind that deformation. Though in a simplified fashion, I designed a didactic intervention of this type in relation to "The Corner," a short fable about one of Frog and Toad's many adventures, as originally conceived by Arnold Lobel. Let me describe the basic plotline and then unfold my commentary. In this short masterpiece from the book *Frog and Toad All Year*, Frog recalls a childhood memory of him misunderstanding his father's words: "Son, this is a cold, gray day but spring is just around the corner" (Lobel, 1976, p. 20). Eager as he was to feel the first sunrays of the year on his greenish skin, Frog set off on a journey through an idyllic territory, searching for the spring. Through woods, meadows, rivers, and valleys, he looked for a season which he believed would be waiting for him at a real corner of the landscape. Clearly, the story celebrates Frog's formative and pedagogic wanderings through the pastoral universe in which it is set, so redolent of *The Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame. The reader gladly follows Frog from one corner to another, and then, after his long walk, back to the roundabouts of his own house where his parents welcome him, already with the first rays of the spring sun shining on their backs.

'I found another corner. It was the corner of my house.'

'Did you go around it?' asked Toad.

'I went around that corner, too,' said Frog.

'What did you see?' asked Toad.

'I saw the sun coming out,' said Frog. 'I saw birds sitting and singing in a tree. I saw my mother and father working in the garden. I saw flowers in the garden.'

'You found it!' cried Toad.

'Yes,' said Frog. 'I was very happy. I had found the corner that spring was just around'. (p. 28)

The fable takes advantage of young Frog's innocent ignorance (which may be shared by the children who read it) in order to actualize the full aesthetic potential of an everyday metaphoric expression. In doing so, it also explores the intricacies of literal and figurative meanings, as well as the inevitability of confusing them at a young age, as Frog does. Hence my advice that, in order to complement this tale, any education to reality should present the real causes of the seasonal cycle, an explanation that the text does not provide. Recalling the guiding principle of Raymond William's cultural pedagogy, I suggest that pupils should read and enjoy first the poetic and humorous quality of the story, but that once this first phase is over, the teacher should start to familiarize them with the



scientific explanation of the one natural event that has been beautifully distorted in the pages of "The Corner", but whose real nature is never revealed—hence leaving both the reader and the character of the story in a shared limbo of childishness. In order to prevent this from happening, the events in Lobel's fable could be profitably contrasted, for example, with a rigorous description of the tilted axis of our planet and its elliptical journey around the sun—an idea which, as a matter of fact, is already suggested, albeit in a displaced manner, by Frog's circular route from his parents' house and back.

### More examples

Let me offer more evidence of the positive outcomes that can be expected from this interdisciplinary didactics, but this time by focussing on a social fact we have already mentioned: the impossibility of market laws ever bringing about upward mobility in a class-ridden mode of production. In one of the introductions the editors of the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* present to contextualize their texts, it is underlined how cats, "foxes, jackals, fairies, dead people, and trees" have, in fairy tales, traditionally brought aid "to a common man to rise in society to become a rich nobleman, or a peasant maiden to become a princess" (Zipes et al., 2005, p. 186). Actually, this idea crops up in the editors' introduction to Charles Perrault's "The Puss in Boots", a classic tale from the 17th century; but it also appears separately in Zipes' (2009) more detailed analysis of the story (pp. 41-2). This tale offers an ideal occasion indeed for us to insist on our previous theses and claim that, if literature resorted to fantastic and imaginary causes precisely at this point (to make upward mobility occur), it was not by chance, but rather because social reality disabled such process in particular to take place at that moment in history. The same argument applies to the plot found in "Jack and the beanstalk," since there too magic allows a humble peasant to reach the mythic heights of comfort and richness (as represented by the giant's abode beyond the clouds) after having been cheated in the marketplace. Never would have Jack escalated the social ladder just by toiling and selling his crops. Thus, "only in imaginary experience (in the folk tale, for example), which neutralizes the sense of social realities, does the social world take the form of a universe equally possible for any possible subject" (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 42). Confronted by these tales, the teacher should follow three steps, according to the interdisciplinary focus I have proposed. First, state that fantasy has in these cases brought about exactly what historical objectivity disavowed. Second, introduce the social causes



as to why this was so. And third, provide students with the conceptual tools necessary for them to know how upward mobility could, some day in their lives, really come to occur.

Apart from many appropriate theoretical suggestions put forward by the editors, and invaluable references on our subject of concern, the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* contains an immense number of other texts this didactic could valuably employ. On account of qualities found in its plot, Rudyard Kipling's "How the camel got his hump" can be regarded as a paradigmatic example of how socio-economic variables determine the conceptual and aesthetic horizons of a literary text. They subtly build inflexible ideological traits into its plot, which limit imagination by banning certain possibilities. I find it convenient to end this chapter by applying this methodology to Kipling's text, which is addressed to readers at higher steps in their formation. On the one hand, "How the camel got his hump" is a remarkable example of the genre to which it belongs, *fables*, a variety which may even require some specific reflection at this point, since I have given so much prominence to it in this text. Leaving aside the fact that fables form part, by their own right, of the children's literature canon, I believe there are sound reasons for having chosen two of them to illustrate the endeavour that characterizes an education to reality. These fables may not seem, at the outset, the most appropriate to illustrate what Marx's theory affords the study of children's literature; after all, they do not portray society, but the natural world. And yet, the reason for selecting them instead of other more obvious examples is, precisely, that these tales offer clear displacements of Marx's subject matter, and thus pose a beautiful challenge for this critical didactics to prove its ability to reverse the process that resulted in these imaginative distortions. Education to reality may obviously resort to literary works that portray society objectively, as it is, and which assume a critical dimension towards it; but it can also make use of texts which, like Kipling's and Lobel's, lack this social awareness, and use them to analyze their silence as an effect of the social structure of which they remain consciously or unconsciously ignorant.

This, I believe, is the case of most imaginative literature, including fables. Taken generally, what I consider most relevant in them is the way they substitute sociological variables for biological ones in order to explain the behaviour of their animal characters. There is indeed an original displacement working at the very core of every fable, but there is something specific in "How the camel got his hump" that renders it especially apt for an interdisciplinary analysis. With this fable, Kipling definitely pushed forward the classical frontiers of the genre; he employed



its archetypal substitution to explicate, not a cultural or moral trait (as in the classical model), but a purely biological phenomenon like the emergence of a new feature in an animal species—a camel's *hump*. Needless to say such a tour de force was dependent on Charles Darwin's previous revolutionary study of the evolution of biological species. Even though Darwin did not yet supply an explanation for genetic mutations, which lie at the root of any new species, he did lay down the logic of a specific biological causality—*natural selection*—based solely upon the interplay between members of a species and their natural habitat. As a result, a concept was immediately banished and abandoned from the realm of biology: *creationism*. It is at this point when we must ask ourselves the following question: Is it a matter of coincidence that creationism was precisely the one idea Kipling's fabulous story reintroduced? I don't believe so. Kipling's fantasy inevitably re-enacts creationism, together with a whole set of bourgeoisie values that were dominant in his own colonial society, and which actually functioned as obstacles or hindrances to capitalist progressiveness, let alone to a fairer society. The setting of Kipling's tale reproduces the Biblical context where a world is made from scratch, and similar observations could be made regarding the main character, a humanised genie who, out of free will, miraculously creates a hump on the camel's back as a punishment for its indolence.

We may confidently conclude that British colonialism is, at the same time, the reality which becomes distorted in Kipling's literary mirror as well as the cause of that distortion, which replaces biological laws by ideological norms. Just like India lived under the oppression of the British metropolis, and was forced to do so under a civilizing pretext, the habitat depicted by Kipling is enslaved by a self-governing genie who, having banned Darwinist laws from his territory, acts at once as God's and the bourgeoisie's representative, and rules the natural world through moralizing chastisements.

## Conclusion

I hope this chapter has convinced the reader that the moment the social (and natural) sciences are allowed to shed light onto literature through an interdisciplinary approach, they disclose manifold didactic possibilities and, more than that, they provide students with a real opportunity to transform the world in which they live. By approaching texts as different as Zur Mühlen's, Lobel's and Kipling's, I have attempted to show that the critical and interdisciplinary didactics at the core of the education to reality project can be applied to any literary text, provided the teacher is willing



to meet the challenge. This requires time to think about the real determinants that lie behind a literary work, but also about which may be the most appropriate didactic strategy to help students move, one by one, through the different pedagogic steps of which I have repeatedly spoken.

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