

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE SUITABILITY OF SOME CONTEMPORARY  
SOUTH AFRICAN FICTION FOR READERS  
IN THE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                      | (ii)        |
|----------------------|-------------|
|                      | <u>Page</u> |
| Acknowledgements     | (iv)        |
| Abstract             | (v)         |
| Introduction         | (vii)       |
| Research Methodology | (x)         |

### **CHAPTER 1 : READERS IN THE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE**

|       |   |    |
|-------|---|----|
| 1.1   | A definition.   | 1  |
| 1.2   | Characteristic requirements of readers in the post-developmental reading stage:-  | 5  |
| 1.2.1 | Length of book  | 5  |
| 1.2.2 | Abstract thinking and its implications  | 7  |
| 1.2.3 | Searching for a sense of identity   | 10 |
| 1.2.4 | Fantasy or reality?   | 12 |
| 1.3   | A justification for the publishing of literature written specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage. | 23 |
| 1.4   | South African literature for readers in the post-developmental reading stage.   | 29 |
| 1.5   | Evaluation of the literature : Adults' or childrens' standards?   | 34 |

### **CHAPTER 2 : A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SOME INDIGENOUS WORKS OF FANTASY FOR CHILDREN IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE : MARGUERITE POLAND'S THE MANTIS AND THE MOON AND ONCE AT KWA FUBESI**

|     |   |    |
|-----|---|----|
| 2.1 | Introduction : Fantasy for the older child.       | 40 |
| 2.2 | Marguerite Poland and indigenous oral literature. | 44 |
| 2.3 | The narrator and the "audience".                  | 47 |
| 2.4 | Settings.   | 49 |
| 2.5 | Language and style.                               | 53 |
| 2.6 | Characters and characterisation.                  | 58 |
| 2.7 | Plots and themes.                                 | 62 |
| 2.8 | Conclusion.                                       | 67 |

**CHAPTER 3 : CONTEMPORARY REALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN FICTION : A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PIG BY PAUL GERAGHTY AND THE KAYABOETIES BY ELANA BREGIN**

|   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 3.1 Introduction : Contemporary realism and adolescence.          | 68          |
| 3.2 The value of contemporary realism.                            | 74          |
| 3.3 Some issues raised in <u>Pig</u> and <u>The Kayaboeties</u> : | 79          |
| 3.3.1 Friendship.   | 83          |
| 3.3.2 Peer group pressure.  | 88          |
| 3.3.3 Racialism and the South African adolescent.                 | 92          |
| 3.3.4 Relationships.  | 98          |
| 3.3.5 Language.   | 101         |
| 3.4 Realistic fiction in the classroom                            | 104         |
| 3.5 Conclusion : The "Happy Ending" and realistic fiction.        | 105         |

**CHAPTER 4 : CONCLUSIONS**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 4.1 The upsurge in the publication of indigenous children's books.                | 107 |
| 4.2 Indigenous books : Too "good" to be popular?                                  | 109 |
| 4.3 A need for the promotion of the literature.                                   | 111 |
| 4.4 Meeting the requirements of children in the post-developmental reading stage. | 114 |
| 4.4.1 Length of the books   | 114 |
| 4.4.2 Abstract thinking   | 116 |
| 4.4.3 A sense of identity   | 117 |
| 4.4.4 Fantasy vs. Reality in South African literature                             | 118 |
| 4.5 "Coming of age".  | 123 |
| References  | 124 |
| Newspaper reports and magazine articles   | 130 |
| Annexures   | 131 |

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Adverse criticism regarding the quantity and quality of children's books in South Africa appear in such respected sources as The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature and The Companion to South African English Literature, the authors of which are of the opinion that South African children are dependent solely upon Eurocentric literature for their reading material. In recent years however, local publishers have attempted to redress this imbalance by offering prizes for unpublished works. These prizes have acted as incentives for aspiring writers, many of whom have had novels published specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage. This study critically examines some of these prizewinning works of fantasy and contemporary realism, in an effort to gauge their literary worth within the context of accepted criteria for judging children's literature. Accolades from adults are not however a guarantee that the prizewinning books will be received with equal acclaim by the children for whom they are written. For this reason, five children in the post-developmental reading stage were asked to pass their opinions and non-literary judgments on the books. Although the critical evaluation of the indigenous works proves them to be eminently worthy of the prizes which they received on publication, the children did not rate them as highly as certain imported works. The works of fantasy by Marguerite Poland rated poorly in terms of their popularity despite the fact that the children said that in a non-circumscribed context, they choose fantasy in preference to contemporary realism. Within the context of the indigenous literature which they read for this study though, they preferred the works of contemporary realism as they were able to identify with particular aspects of the novels.

Indigenous literature for children in the post-developmental reading stage is a comparatively new phenomenon which needs to be nurtured if it is to attain any

lasting status. The onus rests upon the teachers of literature and librarians to introduce the literature and make the books more accessible to young readers.

Publishers need perhaps to engage the views and opinions of the audience for whom the books are written in an effort to publish books which, without in any way detracting from their literary worth, will deal with subjects favoured by young readers.

At the dawn of the Twenty-first century, great changes in South African education will have been wrought. In the present system of education, English First Language pupils are taught in a somewhat insular fashion, studying European and American literature, often to the exclusion of what our indigenous authors have to offer. The reasons for this appear to be multi-faceted and often obscure, but perhaps one of the reasons for its lack of popularity is the fact that much of what has been written has been subjected to sceptical views regarding its intrinsic worth. The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature (1984 : 491) claims that "the English-speaking population of South Africa imports almost all its children's books, chiefly from Great Britain ... the general quality of (indigenous) books is poor". The Companion to South African English Literature (1985 : 51) states that relatively few books have been written "for the enjoyment of S.A. children, and those that have appeared have served largely to underline the dearth of talent in this field".

But the status quo of indigenous publications for English-speaking children has been undergoing changes. In 1974 the Percy Fitzpatrick Award was instituted by the S.A. Institute for Librarianship and Information Science and is awarded for children's literature of outstanding quality. The Young Africa Award from Maskew Miller Longman Publishers, and the Sanlam Prize for Youth Literature are presented annually to writers of unpublished novels with an indigenous flavour. Volkskas and the Old Mutual also present annual awards, based on category rotation, for English or Afrikaans literature. These prizes have acted as incentives for aspiring writers, who have reacted by producing a variety of fiction, (particularly for readers in the 12 - 15 year age group), which has assisted in closing the erstwhile gap in the indigenous literature market, and which, as this study hopes to show, compares favourably with much of the contemporary fiction written for this age group in other countries.

Selected works of English South African fiction, namely The Mantis and the Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi by Marguerite Poland, Pig by Paul Geraghty and The Kayaboeties by Elana Bregin have been chosen as main primary texts for the purposes of this study because of their contrasting subject matter. The former two are works of fantasy and the latter two are works of contemporary realism. All of the books have received local prizes. Marguerite Poland's the Sir Percy Fitzpatrick Award, and Pig and The Kayaboeties the Maskew Miller Longman Award. These four texts have been chosen for analysis as they appear to be fairly representative of the significant number of titles which have been published in recent years. Reference to other South African works of fiction will be made in order to draw comparisons and highlight similarities in subject-matter and themes. By using the standard procedures of literary research, namely the close reading and critical analysis of primary texts, with special emphasis on themes, plots, characterisation and language, and by making constant appropriate reference to accepted authorities on children's literature, this study it is hoped, will serve to illuminate the importance of this burgeoning body of literature to our young readers who are now in the position to augment their reading material, which until recently has been largely Eurocentric.

However, the books under scrutiny in this study have been written for children, and as much as they may be lauded by the adult critic, it is the children who ultimately have to read and enjoy them. In an effort therefore to gauge the children's views and opinions of the specified texts, 5 children between the ages of 10 and 15 were each given a set of the same 5 books to read. Each set included either Pig or The Kayaboeties and one of Marguerite Poland's works, either The Mantis and the Moon or Once at Kwa Fubesi. The other three prose works, R.M. Ballantyne's The Coral Island, S.O'Dell's Island of the Blue Dolphins and R.C. O'Brien's Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH were chosen not only from a range of titles deemed suitable for

children in the post-developmental reading stage, but also because they had received international prizes at the time of their publication. By means of semi-structured interviews, using questions appropriate to their age, the children were asked to record their views and opinions of the texts. The responses thus gleaned from the children have been used throughout this study to elaborate upon, confirm or refute the adult views and opinions expounded in the critical analysis of the texts. The necessity for the combination of adult and children's views will be elucidated in Chapter 1.5.

Not only is the literature which is written for young readers in this country criticised as being of poor quality (The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature) and the authors of this kind of fiction criticised for their "dearth of talent" (The Companion to S.A. English Literature), but those writers who do write for children, particularly those in the post-developmental reading stage (who are either approaching or experiencing adolescence) are frequently considered to lack erudition or intellectual sophistication. Chambers (1985 : 87) discusses the kind of "endless disparagement" of the literature by people "who, for whatever reasons, dismiss teenage books as beyond serious interest - a bastard and unwanted hybrid", because they "wouldn't want to be thought academically retarded for handling such apparently unrespectable material". This study will, it is hoped, serve to show that neither of these suppositions is necessarily true and that much of what is being written in this country for children in the post-developmental reading stage is, in fact worthy of a second glance, and that South African children's writers deserve to have their works given credit where it is due. The detractors from indigenous children's literature need perhaps to reassess their stance and consider the substantial body of worthwhile books which is being published in this country.

How can knowledge of the ways in which children learn and the means by which schools achieve their goals be verified, built upon and extended? This is a central question for educational research.

(Cohen and Manion : 1985 : 124)

The study of literature, (and more particularly, individuals' responses to literary works), falls squarely into the affective domain of education. In order to discover the ways in which children learn it is vital for educationists to measure and record data related to the learning process so that the specified goals of education can be verified and the methods of teaching can be accordingly altered and expanded. This task is more easily accomplished when dealing with quantifiable subjects such as mathematics, computer science or even language study, where learning can be measured in terms of answers which are either right or wrong and theories can be tested by experimentation from which tables of data can be derived for the purposes of verifying hypotheses. But in order to record and measure less quantifiable data, such as children's responses to literature, the researcher has to look to methods of interpretation which require more subjective explanation : Cohen and Manion (1985 : 124) outline two broad approaches to education research; the first, based on the scientific paradigm, "rests upon the creation of theoretical frameworks that can be tested by experimentation, replication and refinement." This scientific paradigm is used by educational researchers dealing with quantifiable subject matter. For those subjects, which include literature, which fall into the affective domain of education, Cohen and Manion posit a second, non-scientific paradigm, which they describe as "interpretive and subjective". This alternative to the experimental paradigm which emphasises, (in Cohen and Manion's words) "the interpretive, subjective dimensions of educational phenomena is best explored by case study methods". (1985 : 124)

The nature of this study precludes any experimentation and employs instead a combination of the following procedures:-

- (a) In an attempt to establish the suitability of the texts for children in the post-developmental reading stage, the standard procedures of literary research were used, namely, the close reading and critical analysis of the primary texts, with special emphasis on themes, plots, characterisation and language. Throughout the study appropriate references are made to accepted authorities in the field of children's literature in order to establish the suitability of the prose works for children, within the framework of recognised criteria for the evaluation of fiction of this nature.
- (b) The case study paradigm (Cohen and Manion : 1985 : 124) was used in which the responses to given works of literature of a limited number (5) of children in the post-developmental reading stage were analysed in an effort to gauge the likes and dislikes of the respondents with a view to establishing generalisations about the way in which children in the post-developmental reading stage might respond to South African literature.

The five respondents in this study were selected by means of purposive sampling, (Cohen and Manion : 1985 : 100) primarily on the grounds of their being in the post-developmental reading stage, their ages ranging between 10 and 14. They were also selected because they have mastered the mechanics of reading and on the recommendation of their respective teachers are classed as "avid" readers. Avid readers were chosen above reluctant readers as the number of books (10) which the Respondents were required to read for

the purposes of this study would have been too great a quantity for a child who reads with little or no enthusiasm. It was also assumed that avid readers would be more likely to respond in a more articulate way as studies have shown that "less fluent children may seem to react inadequately [to a story] not because of limited response to a story but because of inability to express it." (Protherough : 1983 : 37).

In an effort to gain a greater variety of objective responses, the children were selected from three separate schools, two private multi-racial schools and one state-run, recently declared multi-racial school. The five children were each given a set of the same five books to read, with either Pig or The Kayaboeties and one of Marguerite Poland's works, either The Mantis and the Moon or Once at Kwa Fubesi being amongst the five. The other three prose works, namely, R.M. Ballantyne's The Coral Island, S.O'Dell's Island of the Blue Dolphins, and R.C. O'Brien's Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH were chosen as being from within a range of titles deemed suitable for children in the post-developmental reading stage. They were also chosen because at the time of their publication they had received international prizes in the category of literature for children in the post developmental reading stage. Similarly the South African titles have all won local prizes in this category. Each child was also asked to read any five prose works of his own choice, and, having read ten books, was asked to list, in order of preference, the books which most appealed to him.

- (c) Semi-structured interviews (Cohen and Manion : 1985 : 308) were used in an effort to gauge the children's responses to the South African texts. Semi-structured interviews were deemed to be the most apposite means of gleaning the required information because of their inherent flexibility. A pilot

study was conducted in which the children were asked to record their responses, in writing, to various aspects of the literature. This method of using a questionnaire proved to be too rigid in terms of the kind of responses which were required, and the younger respondents showed evidence of being unaccustomed to answering, in writing, specific questions relating to the literature. The direct verbal interaction which occurred in the tape-recorded interviews made for spontaneous responses. Although the questions asked were designed in a way which allowed for the eliciting of responses pertinent to very specific aspects of the texts, the informal structuring of the interviews allowed for sufficient flexibility so that the respondents were at liberty to interject with their own questions and comments, which made for greater spontaneity. The semi-structured interviews were used to gather information which had direct bearing on specific aspects of the indigenous literature. Cohen and Manion (1985 : 309) describe the interview technique as the most appropriate for gathering such information, as it provides "access to what is inside a person's head" and it "makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)". This study, being an attempt to elicit responses about literature, focuses on the aspects of values and preferences, attitudes and beliefs, areas of the psyche which are personal, subjective and subject to the fluxes and changes of the individual's ever-changing opinions.

The primary drawback of the interview as a research technique is the problem of the subjectivity and bias on behalf of the interviewer who is likely to design questions which require answers which suit the needs of the researcher. In an effort to make the questions more objective, they were designed upon model questions, appropriate to children in the post developmental reading stage,

which were drawn up by Protherough (1983 : 57). The responses, says Protherough are "abstractions based on generalising from many individuals". The following analogy which Protherough makes is appropriate, not only to his own study on responses, but possibly to this study and all other studies which have to do with the affective development of children:-

What they [stages of response] are intended to do is to 'freeze' moments in a continuing process for our attention, just as naturalists may film a flower at hourly intervals, to give a clear impression of what otherwise remains an imperceptible development.

(Protherough : 1983 : 46)

## CHAPTER 1

### READERS IN THE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE

#### 1.1 A DEFINITION

In recent times the earlier onset of puberty, changed social expectations and powerful commercial influences have modified previously accepted ideas about the stages of childhood, adolescence and early adult life. Yet some broadly defined succession of educational stages has to be assumed.

(Meek, et al : 1977 : 381)

Reading has to be seen as an ongoing process which continues throughout a child's school career, and which culminates in his ultimate ability to read with understanding, enjoyment and appreciation. The succession of educational stages outlined in this section are, therefore merely assumed, as one cannot accurately peg out definite fields of development in children and the books which they read and hope to correlate the two. Each child is an individual, with individual tastes, and the different areas of a child's development, whether they be intellectual, social or moral, proceed at different rates, according to the individual's own disposition and circumstances.

Young children should acquire, from the beginning, the mechanical skills which are required for mature reading. It is vital that the child is able to master the skills demanded at each stage if he is to attain the goal of being able to read with understanding and appreciation. As the child matures, so he will use his early-learned skills for more elaborate and demanding cognitive purposes.

In 1956 Gray (The Bullock Report : 1975 : 80) assumed three stages in the MECHANICS of reading development : At the level of PRIMARY SKILLS the child has to learn to perceive individual letters or groups of letters, and individual whole words. Having mastered these skills in the first years of schooling he is ready to move to the stage of INTERMEDIATE SKILLS in which he is expected to be able to handle sequences of letters, words, and larger units of meaning. The reader at this level is expected to cope with new words and their meanings in a particular context. Most children at this stage will probably be between the ages of seven and nine. The third stage, that of COMPREHENSION SKILLS is reached when the child is capable of reading fluently and easily and is succeeding in extracting meaning from the printed page. This third stage is usually reached when the child is in the middle years of school, from about the age of ten and upwards.

In an attempt to establish reading stages which are not characterised by chronological age or mechanical adroitness, Early (Donelson : 1980 : 10) outlined three distinctive stages of reading growth which she based on readers' RESPONSES to fiction. The first stage has its beginnings in infancy when parents sing to their babies and tell them nursery-rhymes and folk-tales. She describes this as the stage of UNCONSCIOUS ENJOYMENT, which continues as the primary stage of development into the beginning of the early school years where it strengthens the child's ability as he learns the mechanics of decoding. This stage of unconscious enjoyment, when the child knows what he likes, but not why he likes it, cannot be by-passed if the reader is to move to the other stages, as it is during this stage that the foundations for literary appreciation are laid down.

In Early's scheme, the reader at the second stage continues to enjoy literature on the first level of easy acceptance, but begins to move away from a simple interest in the story and starts to ask why certain things happen and why certain characters

behave as they do. Having acquired and mastered the mechanics of reading, the child will move away from the simple acquisition of knowledge to considering the nature of this knowledge. It is at this stage that the child begins to understand abstract ideas and is able to infer the processes of cause and effect and make generalisations about the information which he receives. Jean Piaget described this as the stage of "formal operations", usually entered into from about the age of ten. Further attention will be given to this stage in 1.2 where the characteristic requirements of readers in this stage will be considered.

The third stage outlined by Margaret Early may be reached during late adolescence or early adulthood, when the reader reads for self-satisfaction.

The works which are to be examined in this particular study will appeal to readers in Early's second category when the child is au fait with the mechanics of reading and has moved away from the acquisition of knowledge to considering the nature of this knowledge. This stage, for the purposes of this study, will henceforth be referred to as the post-developmental reading stage.

In South Africa, the term "youth literature" is used as a blanket description for the kind of books written specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage. In America it is called "Young Adult Literature", and in Britain, simply literature for "teenagers" or "adolescents". Subsequent reference to this particular body of literature in this study will utilise all of these appellations depending upon the context of the reference. However, by describing the literature as being for children in the post-developmental reading stage, the scope is broadened for the inclusion of literature for much younger children (anywhere from the age of 9) to much older children (over the age of 15) who may respectively be advanced or tardy readers.

Heale (1985) recommends The Mantis and The Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi as suitable reading for children in the senior school (age 13 and over). Although Marguerite Poland originally wrote the stories for younger children, she found that they did not appeal to the younger child as much as to children in the post-developmental reading stage, who are attracted by the kind of fantasy which is more firmly rooted in reality than overt fantasy. In many ways Marguerite Poland's stories can be compared with R.C. O'Brien's Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, a work which has been prescribed by the Cape Education Department (C.E.D.) for Standard 6 in 1990 - 1991.

The other two books which will be examined in detail in this study, Elana Bregin's The Kayaboeties and Paul Geraghty's Pig fall neatly under the heading of "Young Adult" or "Teenage" literature, as both are written specifically for this particular age group, and both deal with many of the issues relevant to this age group. These books were, in fact written in response to a call by Maskew Miller Longman Publishers for literature aimed at adolescent children.

Diagrammatically, a spiral, rather than a linear representation of reading stages, would probably be more representative of the way in which the reading process develops, as the lines drawn dividing the reading stages are not absolutes, with readers leaving one stage as they enter the next. In reality, readers constantly draw upon and refer to previous stages, blurring distinct boundaries between stages. There do, however exist certain cognitive limitations which at certain ages do apply to the reading process, and it is useful to employ developmental paradigms in an attempt to isolate some of the characteristics of particular developmental stages, in order to pass opinions about which elements in fiction will appeal to readers at particular levels.

## 1.2 CHARACTERISTIC REQUIREMENTS OF READERS IN THE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE

The specific requirements of any particular reader will always be an enigma to researchers, as reading, falling as it does into the affective domain of education, defies quantification by analysis. Although ongoing research has supplied generalised information and patterns of reading interests have emerged, it must be remembered that conclusions drawn can never accurately pinpoint the individual requirements of any particular reader, simply because reading is such a dynamic process and any one person's tastes and needs are constantly changing, let alone the tastes and needs of whole groups of readers. So it is with the recognition of these limitations in research, that some of the findings of educationists will be pooled in order to isolate and summarise the characteristic requirements of readers in the post-developmental reading stage.

### 1.2.1 Length

An obvious and simple factor in determining the popularity of a book at any particular reading stage is its length. As the conceptual boundaries of the child begin to broaden, he is better able to absorb material and read longer stories. The convention of short sentences and short, repetitive plot which are so important to the younger child, alters to coincide with the greater mental sophistication of the reader who is either entering into, or already experiencing adolescence.

The younger child in the immediate post-developmental stage, between the ages of about 9 - 11 will probably be able to cope very adequately with the length of Marguerite Poland's short stories in The Mantis and The Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi. The short story is in fact an extremely useful genre to employ in teaching

children of this age, as it is sufficiently short to sustain interest, and yet is, at the same time a complete unit in terms of structure, plot and theme. Recent research conducted by Gardener (1989) in this country shows that children in the post-developmental reading stage rely upon magazines and short paperbacks for the bulk of their reading material, so the short story, requiring less concentration than a full-length novel, should provide a useful form of entertainment for the child in the post-developmental reading stage. Gardener's research of the reading habits of White adolescents in South Africa, revealed that "with age a fall-off in book reading goes hand in hand with an increase in the reading of lighter, more fragmentary matter, especially magazines," (Gardener : 1989 : 242) and Chambers (1969 : 41) says that if people are taught to read, most will read willingly, but only what they like to read and that "reluctant readers know what they like and find it in the popular magazines". The reasons for many teenagers' preferences for light reading material are multi-faceted, but if children of this age are presented with shorter stories, of good quality, they may be more attracted to this better quality literature, provided that it is sufficiently short to sustain their interest. The children who were interviewed for this particular study were not averse to reading longer books, but all complained about the lack of time for reading amidst their very demanding sport and homework schedules:

... I enjoy a book that you can really get into ... cuddle up on a nice day and enjoy. A short book is also nice because I don't really have all that much time with all the homework and that that I have to do. I try to do as much reading as possible but mainly I choose what I have time for.

(Jennifer : 12)

... When I was reading The Lord of the Rings I actually had hepatitis and was in bed and didn't have to go to school, so I had lots of time, but when I'm at school and I've just got one day, like at the weekend, I like a short book because if I can't read for the next three weeks I lose the story and then lose interest in the book.

(Philip : 14)

These comments come from children who are labelled "avid readers". These are the ones who, because they love reading and need to read for self-fulfilment, actually make time to read, albeit shorter books which fit their frenetic lifestyles. Ironically, Gardner's study (1989 : 221) confirms that "pupils who read the most tend to do the most homework and participate in the most activities" at school anyway. It seems to be a sad reflection on an educational system which demands so much of a child's time, that a dimension of education as vital as reading, is forced to kowtow to the demands of other academic and recreational duties within the curriculum.

### 1.2.2 Abstract thinking

From the age of about eleven a child enters into what Piaget terms the "formal operations" stage of development when it becomes possible for him to think in abstract as well as in more concrete terms. The move away from purely concrete to more abstract thinking has a number of implications as far as the child's reading material is concerned, as it will affect the way in which he perceives issues such as moral choices, character development and the portrayal of the action in a story. A child at this stage can reason logically and is able to infer cause and effect, enabling him to consider a variety of possibilities in any particular circumstance.

They may, therefore, start passing from acquiring and storing up knowledge to thinking about the nature of such knowledge in the first place; where moral judgments are concerned, for example, a child may now begin to question some conventional morality in favour of the morality of individual principles of conscience. Not surprisingly, therefore, books for this age-group often echo these more complex intellectual and emotional processes, with fictional characters also sometimes standing back from their immediate reactions in order to take a more analytic look at what is really happening.

(Tucker : 1981 : 144)

Books for readers at the post-developmental reading stage should, therefore, take into account the increasing maturity of the reader, and should reflect the level of abstract thinking and moral judgment which corresponds with that attained by the reader.

The reader at this stage requires that moral judgments are not made at a facile level, but at a level which extends his own range of experience. Tucker (1981 : 186) uses the term "cognitive dissonance" to describe the way in which a gifted author is capable of recognising the reader's stage of moral development, and concerns his writing with moral growth:

This is what is meant by cognitive dissonance : If there is a difference between an Enid Blyton where you find the treasure in the end and everyone goes home happy, and, say, Treasure Island or The Pardoner's Tale where the real problems only begin when you find the treasure, it is in the fact that one presents a static view while the other presents a view of life involving the idea of growth in relationships and experience.

(Tucker : 1981 : 186)

The author of books for children in the post-developmental reading stage needs to extend the reader's imagination and thought processes beyond the conclusion of the story, leaving him to ponder "what if" and "if only".

In The Kayaboeties and in Pig there are some extremely undesirable characters, Trevor in Pig and "Pecker" in The Kayaboeties. But readers are not permitted to get away with snap moral judgments about these characters, since they are also shown to have their own insecurities which cause them to react in the ways that they do. Readers are allowed glimpses into their lives which force them into understanding, and perhaps even sympathising with the way in which they act.

When asked whether they ever feel sorry for Trevor, the class bully in Pig, these were the written responses of two children :-

Well, in one way I don't feel sorry for him because he always bullied everyone else. But in another way I do feel sorry for him because he himself was probably bullied by somebody, maybe his father, and is probably trying to get revenge.

(Gustav : aged 12)

Yes, I do feel sorry for Trevor in a way. Because he never got the right disciplining (sic) when he grew up. He will never be a nice person and as a result will never have any friend or opportunities as we do. Obviously his parents aren't the most wonderful people at all, I can just imagine why Trevor is such an awful person!

(Jennifer, aged 12)

These children are looking beyond Trevor's bad behaviour to some of the reasons why he may be such a bully. With their increasing maturity these two readers are better equipped to understand some of the contradictions between surface appearances and inner reality, and have begun to explore some of the complexities of personality and the forces which influence peoples' behaviour. Nicholas Tucker maintains that at about the age of eleven, children's firmer understanding of physical causation and worldly logic may lead them to become impatient with the kind of thinking reflected in books for the younger child:

In terms of personality, characters may now be understood as occasionally having problems that do not disappear even after the arrival of an unforeseen stroke of luck, or any other instant solution. If they happen to be nasty, unattractive individuals, it may not be quite such fun now to see them as the butt for everyone else's humour or dislike. Children may even start wondering how individuals got to be like that in the first place, and perhaps sometimes feel a little sorry for them.

(Tucker : 1981 : 145)

People and their behaviour are not always as simple as they appear. It is important that the author of books for children in the post-developmental stage take cognizance of this fact and his readers' need to identify with, perhaps, the rough adolescent or the unpopular child who other children are quick to condemn and ostracise.

Tolkein (Tucker : 1981 : 146) once wrote that young children are likely to ask of a particular character simply whether he was good or wicked. The older child though, is no longer content to oversimplify and label characters as being good or bad. His greater mental sophistication leads to an increase in insight into the possible reasons for people's behaviour, the result being that stories need no longer to be filled only with action but can now be involved with explorations of the complexities of personality. Both Gustav and Jennifer are aware that characters have problems which are not easily swept under the carpet or which disappear by the interjection of some benevolent fate. Again, the onus is on the writer for this age-group to show readers the inadequacy of the younger readers' ways of exploring human behaviour, not by intense psychological explanation, but by characterising his protagonists, not in terms of their actions alone, or in black and white, but by utilising all the permutations of grey which go to making up an individual.

### 1.2.3 A sense of identity

There is another great storying burst at adolescence where the connection with development is again crucial. As Piaget demonstrates, when the making of new worlds in terms of ideas becomes an adolescent preoccupation, narrative or storying is again the chief method of describing a desired experience, helping to project 'the world as I would like it to be' and 'the adult role I should like to play in it'.

(Meek : 1984 : 191)

Books for children in the post-developmental reading stage, particularly the child who is entering or experiencing adolescence, should reflect the reader's increasing preoccupation with the need to establish a definite sense of identity. The average adolescent is generally fairly egocentric. He sees everyone and everything in relation to himself and so it is important that the books he reads should illuminate crises and problems from his own point of view, that he is able to identify with characters and relate to them. Adults and adolescents should feature more frequently, acting as models for the child needing to establish a sense of his own more mature personality. Chambers confirms that teenagers require literature which satisfies and reflects their particular needs:-

The majority like best stories which are about people roughly their own age; contemporary times; the obvious, but none the less potent themes : parental relationships, challenging authority, establishing one's own personality and future, relationships with peers and (when allowed in a literature still puritanically controlled by intermediary adults) sex.

(Chambers : 1985 : 88)

Many of the books for readers in this age-range, including Pig and The Kayaboeties concentrate on the child's need for friends and his desire to be part of the "gang". Pig is the story of Michael who is rejected by his peers and made fun of by the in-group school-gang headed by Trevor. The Kayaboeties deals with the unhappiness caused by members of a home-made musical band who reject Sam because he is not White.

In this country, writing about the search for a personal sense of identity is seldom done without a consideration of the absurd artificiality of the macrocosm of a society governed by the rules of Apartheid. (Totemeyer; 1989) Stories which deal with the various aspects of the adolescent's personal search for identity, are naturally set against the backdrop of his social milieu. In South Africa, that milieu

is one on which racialism has had a pervading influence, hence the inevitability of the inclusion of the racial aspect of growing up in such a society.

Nicholas Mackenzie, the sixteen-year old White protagonist of Jane Rosenthal's Wake Up Singing, develops a friendship with Em, a girl from a liberal academic home. He finds himself brought to the edges of South African society, outside the comfort of his own White suburban Johannesburg existence. Em introduces him to Zach and Mpho, Black adolescents, and through them he is drawn into an understanding of life in the townships. In his search for self against the racial bigotry of his background, he is drawn into direct conflict with his father, the authoritarian cadet-master, and his peers. His search for self cannot be complete without the rejection of the mores of his erstwhile socially ordered world in which Whites lead a privileged life in the suburbs and Blacks live in a state of near-penury and constant violence in the townships. Jane Rosenthal's story is however, strictly about relationships, with politics acting merely as a catalyst for events. The theme is about reconciliation and the bridging of personal divides. Writers who deal with politics for purely didactic purposes can safely be accused of displaying imaginative anaemia, and there are, undeniably writers of this ilk who are being published in this country. It would seem however, almost inevitable that the literature which emerges from a country which is so fraught with political upheaval cannot escape being influenced by it, and much of that which is written in South Africa for adolescents definitely serves to heighten the reader's political consciousness.

#### 1.2.4 Fantasy or reality?

Without needing any qualifications in psychology, a little insight indicates that children, particularly children from about the age of ten, who are entering into adolescence, are at an ambiguous time of life, being neither child, nor yet adult.

Literature written for this age group should, consequently be sufficiently varied in order to accommodate the diversity of taste:

In the middle years of schooling in particular, the range of emotional and intellectual development within one class can be extremely wide, and a correspondingly wide range of fiction is needed ... There is no doubt in our minds that one of the most important tasks of the teacher of older juniors and younger secondary pupils is to increase the range and amount of their voluntary reading.

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 126)

The literature for children in the post-developmental age group which has emerged from America, Britain, Australia and more recently, South Africa, has been, by and large, realistic fiction, reflecting the concerns of teenagers living in the Twentieth Century. Publishers have been inclined to allot a back seat to fantasy, making room for increasing numbers of books which reflect, the harsh realities of modern living. This realism in fiction may be indicative of modern man's tendency to deprecate fantasy as being superfluous, and an uneconomical luxury. But fantasy is important in our lives, and equally important in the lives of youngsters who can look to works of fantasy to ameliorate the sometimes harsh realities of growing up in the Twentieth Century.

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary, the keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy it will make. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence) then Fantasy would languish until they were cured.

(Tolkein : 1966 : 74)

Fantasy for children in the post-developmental reading stage has its appeal in being, in many ways escapist literature. It allows the reader to leave the present and enter into another dimension where good and evil are absolutes, and where

heroic deeds are recognised and applauded. Children in the ambiguous phase of early adolescence need fantasy to escape for a few hours to this other world and return to reality with new insights and appreciation. Cook (1977 : 2) says that the best fantasy stories are like "extended lyrical images of unchanging human predicaments and strong, unchanging hopes and fears, loves and hatreds", and that adolescents who are never invited to enter the fantasy world of writers of the calibre of C.S. Lewis or Tolkein are, "quite literally, deprived children".

Arguments abound about the kind of stories which today's adolescents really want. Educators have questioned the intrinsic value of fantasy for older children in the post-developmental reading phase, arguing that children want contemporary stories which are relevant and speak of the problems of daily living. However, this is not altogether true, as Steenberg (1988 : 167) illustrates in her article which outlines the teenager's need to remain acquainted with the non-realistic dimensions of the younger child's fiction. She says that fantasy, which is so essential for younger children, plays an important role in the books written for teenagers, and that fantasy is more widely read by teenagers than adults realise. She says though, that fantasy for teenagers should not underestimate or embarrass the reader by being didactic, but should expound eternal truths and the struggle between good and evil in an adult way. Despite a blase exterior, the teenager is still insecure, and welcomes the kind of escape which good fantasy affords.

Perhaps one of the greatest advantages that good fantasy fiction holds above realistic fiction is that it caters for a wide variety of situations and emotions in an amorphous audience. One of the disadvantages of the kind of "relevance" expounded in realistic fiction for teenagers, is that it so often depends upon an homogeneous readership because the situations depicted in the stories are often peculiar to a very specific sector of society. Because realistic fiction usually

portrays too narrow a sector of life, it can be less enduring and "relevant" than many works of fantasy.

Chukovsky, (1977 : 145) a Russian writer, attempted to explore the implications of what happens when a culture, rich in myth and legend, turns to social realism for its window on the world. He found that fantasy, when it is suppressed, simply appears in other forms, because children have to have fantasy in their lives. He says that it makes no difference whether or not the child is offered folktales and fantasy, for, if he is not, he simply creates his own stories. Chukovsky realised that children create these worlds, not in order to evade reality, but in order to confirm their knowledge of it, and, as Warlow says:

Children create alternative selves, alternative lives and alternative worlds, in play and in storymaking, modifying and supplementing their everyday experience - making it better and more interesting.

(Warlow : 1977 : 96)

These alternative lives and worlds originate in, and are a product of the imagination, a faculty which is arguably for teenagers and adults alike, becoming dulled by the onslaughts of modern mass media and our society's emphasis on objectivity and empiricism. Hughes, the British poet, describes the imagination as being "not merely a surplus mental department for entertainment" but an essential piece of machinery, the "control panel" for everything we think and do, and that as such, it should be educators' primary concern. Hughes claims that individuals live simultaneously in an outer world and in an inner world and that if we ignore the inner world of the imagination, we, as teachers, do it at the risk of accidents, - "probably fatal accidents". He claims that by reading fairytales, folktales, myths and legends, people are able to make sense of their unconscious and languageless emotions and feelings:-

The inner struggle of worlds, which is not necessarily a violent and terrible affair, though at the bottom it often is, is suddenly given the perfect formula for the terms of a truce. A simple tale, told at the right moment, transforms a person's life with the order its pattern brings to incoherent energies.

(Hughes : 1976 : 94)

Peter Dickinson, editor of Punch magazine, is of the opinion that one of the most important functions of fantasy in the lives of teenagers is that it elucidates this coherence and underlying pattern of order:-

The reason why we have such an absurdly long childhood and adolescence compared with the rest of animals is that we are genetically programmed to do a great deal of learning. And almost the chief thing we have to learn is the basic matter of coherence. How the real world fits together in space and in time ... What fantasy literature is doing is providing us with maps of coherences, which we may imaginatively follow. That is what I meant when I said that fantasy is the poetry of ideas.

(Dickinson : 1986 : 248)

Dickinson is talking about the "organising principle" of good fantasy about which James Britton (1977 : 40) speaks. When reading fantasy, the individual performs an assimilative task, working towards "a more harmonious relationship between inner needs and external demands".

Members of the Committee of the Bullock Report emphasise the need for fantasy as part of all children's reading programmes, at whatever stage of development:-

We believe .... that fantasy, fairy-tale and folk-tale should take their place in the repertoire in the earliest stages of reading ... but all too often when children's own reading begins they leave this world in favour of a circumscribed domestic situation with narrow limits of action and feeling.

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 129)

The members of the Bullock Committee express regret about the move away from fantasy as children move into the post-developmental reading stage, despite evidence to suggest the importance of fantasy in children's lives at this level. So it is in the light of these claims for the value of fantasy, myth, folktales and the world of imagination that some works by Marguerite Poland, one of South Africa's foremost contemporary myth-makers will be examined in Chapter 2.

Having extolled the virtues of fantasy fiction for children in the post-developmental reading stage, it may prove to be a difficult task to justify the popularity of the rash of realistic fiction which has flooded the local market in recent years. Realistic fiction for teenagers has been hailed by some critics who are of the opinion that "adolescent literature has at last come of age". (Rowe-Townsend : 1983 : 335) More circumspect critics feel though that the content of contemporary realism opens up too many areas which, half a century ago, were taboo, thereby exposing adolescents to too much harsh reality. The realities of the modern adolescent are, in any event, reflected by the mass media which has brought with it daily exposure to violence, war, racial disharmony, terrorism, poverty, sex, divorce and so forth. Realistic fiction invariably reflects the issues of current interest, and, because of this has been criticised as being merely a branch of the social sciences, providing ersatz psychotherapy to readers. In fact the word "bibliotherapy" has been coined to describe the therapeutic effect which this literature may have on readers who are led, through a process of empathy, to see that the problems and suffering of others are universal and that they are not the first to have to deal with particular situations. Meek (1984 : 199) is of the opinion that fourteen-year-olds want and need this kind of social realism to be reflected in their reading matter, and says that it is the duty of teachers and parents to make sure that they get the kind of reading material which they find appealing, or else run the risk of the child reading nothing at all.

The essential nub of the problem remains : to put the right book into the right hands at the right time, and to do this, teachers and parents have to help each other again. Teachers face the acute form of their pupil's disinclination, so that they now have to read a great deal more of whatever is generally available, whatever its quality. They understand too the demands made by teenagers for stories that carry a new kind of conviction about social reality, notably in matters of sex and racism, language and class.

(Meek : 1984 : 199)

An extremely valid criticism of this kind of fiction came from David Shayer as early as the 1970's. He says that there exists a very real danger that teachers, parents and publishers are, at present concocting a "relevance fallacy" (Shayer : 1972 : 173) at the expense of real literature work. The cry for relevance has created a situation in which works of fantasy are being shunned because they lack social relevance. The Bullock Report takes up this point, saying that

"... we have heard the case for "relevance" carried to the point of excluding fantasy or any stories with settings or characters unfamiliar from their first-hand experience. We do not accept this view ...

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 129)

The danger of the creation of a "relevance fallacy" harks back to the notion of "bibliotherapy" when literature becomes what Heale (1979) terms "a course in social awareness". Nina Bawden rejects the idea of literature acting as ersatz therapy:-

Literature has a function in education, obviously - we all learn about the world and our place in it through story - but it is not a branch of social services, supplying advice about drugs or sex, what to do about VD or where to get an abortion ...

(Bawden : 1976 : 5)

Controversy also centres on the amount of graphic detail which may be included in this realistic depiction of life. Constant exposure to senseless brutality may blunt the readers' sensibilities, making violence seem the norm and not an aberration (Huck : 1979 : 291). Bacon (1977 : 130) questions the limits to which realism should be taken, saying that many of the books in this sub-genre are imbued with a deep pessimism and sense of helplessness in the face of a society hostile to human values:

This is the great adult "cop-out". To be sure, there are drunken mothers and no-good fathers, but the books wallow in guilt and lightly toss to the children the responsibility for clearing up the mess; without tools.

(Bacon : 1977 : 130)

Adolescents, now, more than ever, need books, which realistically portray life at its best, in which the sustaining qualities of humanity are emphasised.

Contemporary realism has also been criticised for its transience. David Shayer says of contemporary realism that

... it dates so quickly. Today's bestseller may well be a mere has-been in two years' time when its essential triviality has had time to emerge; and what children surely need today, more than anything else (their society being what it is) is a sense of permanence and continuity, of the valuable which remains valuable whatever the vicissitudes of popular taste or journalistic fashion.

(Shayer : 1972 : 173)

Realistic fiction is, admittedly, open to plenty of valid criticism. No literature should be that transient that it cannot withstand the "vicissitudes of time". Nor should it be so engaged with relevant issues that it becomes "a branch of the social sciences". Any form of art which becomes the purveyor of "relevant" messages, fails in its function as art and becomes mere dogma. If the contemporary realistic fiction

is to have any lasting value for its reader, it is essential that its content is such that it touches upon the great issues of love, death, sex and friendship in ways that adolescents can understand and relate to:

Though we consider it important that much of a child's reading matter should offer contact at many points with the life he knows, we believe that true relevance lies in the way a piece of fiction engages with the reader's emotional concerns.

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 129)

The advocates of realism in books for youngsters have to look at the way in which reality is depicted. The kind of realism sought is not the transitory relevance promoted by the champions of any number of fashionable causes, whether it be apartheid or abortion, but the kind which prompts the reader into engaging all levels of emotion.

Given that the fiction is of the quality which gives valuable perspective on life, it must be argued that much of the indigenous contemporary realism reflects many of the "inner conflicts" and "difficulties of growing up" mentioned in The Bullock Report:

Children's favourite stories at different stages reflect the particular fantasies and emotional conflicts which are foremost in their experience at that time. The child gets more enjoyment from those stories which say something to his condition and help him to resolve these inner conflicts. Books compensate for the difficulties of growing up.

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 125)

Most children will identify readily with characters in modern realistic books because of their contemporaneous nature, and through this identification will be able to expand and deepen their compassion and gain new perspectives on life :

Realistic fiction serves children in the process of understanding and coming to terms with themselves as they acquire "humanness". Books which honestly portray the realities of life may help children toward a fuller understanding of human problems and human relationships and thus, toward a fuller understanding of themselves and their own potential.

(Huck : 1979 : 396)

Any child who has had to change schools and has experienced the agony of being new and ignored by the "in" crowd , will empathise with Michael in Geraghty's Pig who finds himself being picked on by Trevor the school bully. A 12 year old boy who read the book and rated it as "excellent" says:

Through all the years that I have been at school I have always been kind and helpful to the new-comers, remembering how I felt each time I entered a new school. I have been in four different schools. When I left our farm in Kroonstad I also left behind my best friend, Thabo.

(Gustav, aged 12)

Through a process of identification with Michael whose experiences are similar to his own, Gustav is sensitised to the discomfort of others who might be in a similar position. Realistic fiction serves to reassure the young reader that he is not the first and only one who has had to face problems. As the youngster reads realistic fiction about the human condition, he may be able to draw from it some meaning for his own life, giving it an organising principle on which to base his own actions. As young readers vicariously face the sometimes harsh realities presented in these books, they are developing a modicum of fortitude with which to face some of the problems in their own lives.

Realistic fiction does have an important role to play in the lives of adolescent readers, for no other reason perhaps than because they ask for it. Fisher, (Heale : 1979 : 2) found that children ask that "the people in the family stories which they read should be reasonably like the people they meet in their own lives, the scenes and event not too far from those of everyday".

Heale (1979 : 2) reports that in a minor study which he conducted amongst his own pupils, he found that children prefer more modern books - that more recent publications are more popular than the older ones. He believes that children of today require realistic fiction to satisfy their reading requirements:

Today's children, our children, are no longer so guarded. The roughness of the world is yelled at them from newspapers, from the television, in the streets of the city where they roam with a freedom we seldom had ... The books they read must echo this same reality.

(Heale : 1979 : 2)

It is important that works of fantasy, as well as books which realistically portray life, are made available to readers in the post-developmental reading stage because of the diversity of intellectual and emotional levels at this stage. The members of The Bullock Report committee constantly reiterate the importance of keeping a flow of good literature of all varieties at the fingertips of all children. They emphasise their research findings which showed that children of all ages prefer the narrative mode provided in both fantasy and realistic fiction to books which simply supply information:

It was clear that the narrative mode provided for children of all ages by far the strongest motivation towards the reading of books. The potential of this for a general increase in reading needs no elaboration, and the school should have the books both to create and meet the demand. It is a recognition of this fact that underlies the success of those schools which have achieved a remarkably high rate of voluntary reading.

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 129)

Children of all ages should ideally be exposed to an eclectic array of books that they may find and experience vicariously the whole range of emotions and insights which good literature brings to bear on our lives.

### 1.3 A JUSTIFICATION FOR THE PUBLISHING OF LITERATURE WRITTEN SPECIFICALLY FOR READERS IN THE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE

No writer who is worthy of the title writer would write a book specifically to cater to the needs of a teenager - if he does this, he is not practising the art of literature, but is returning to a now defunct era of didacticism.

(Translated from Steenberg : 1988 : 168)

It has frequently been argued that there is no need for special books to be published for teenagers, as young people at this age, if they are reading at all, will be reading adult books when they are not too far into their teens. (Chambers : 1985 : 83) Adolescent literature has come under fire from many erudite quarters since its inception as a bona fide, body of literature, and it may be of interest at this juncture to mention some of the criticisms which have been levelled against the genre, and at the same time attempt to draw upon sources in the defence of it as a worthwhile supplement to the larger body of adult literature available to readers who are hovering sometimes uncertainly, between childhood and adulthood.

Ten women, aged between 28 and 52 were asked to respond to a questionnaire (see annexure B) in order to gauge whether they would have liked to have had the kind of books published specifically for teenage readers which have flooded the overseas markets in the past 20 years. All the women are, as adults, avid readers and belong to the same book club. Of the ten women who filled out the questionnaire, only one, (Joanne) said that she had been an avid reader between the ages of 11 and 14.

(All the women were adolescents before television was introduced to this country!). Joanne is the oldest respondent (52) and wrote down most of the more popular classics which were available in the 1950's in Britain when she was a teenager, viz. The Wind in The Willows, The Snow Goose, Tom Sawyer, Black Beauty, Lorna Doone, Little Women, The Scarlet Pimpernel and Enid Blyton's Famous Five series. She says that "it would have been wonderful to have had a greater selection. I read Dickens and Bronte but they were so grim and depressing ..." The books and authors mentioned most often by the other respondents were, in order of popularity, Enid Blyton, Louisa Alcott and Emily Bronte. In addition to these three, three of the younger respondents (aged 28 - 32) listed Catherine Cookson, Harold Robbins and Mills and Boon.

These titles were randomly selected from the respondents' memories, so the results cannot in any way be construed as being fit for recording in any empirical way, but it is interesting to note that all the women (who, incidentally filled out the questionnaire independently of one another), listed Enid Blyton as a firm favourite in their early adolescent years. At a time when there was very little written specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage, Enid Blyton may well have acted as the staging post between childhood literature and more sophisticated adult fiction. Having moved beyond Enid Blyton, those respondents aged 40 and over, turned to Dickens and Bronte, and those currently under 40 turned to Harold Robbins and Catherine Cookson and Mills and Boon. This may either be an indication of a more discerning taste on behalf of the older respondents or simply the fact that Robbins and Cookson-type books were unavailable at that time. Whatever the reasons, the ten women would probably have loved to have had books to read which were not as demanding as Dickens and Bronte, but more sophisticated than Enid Blyton.

One of the main arguments put forward against the burgeoning body of literature written specifically for teenagers, is that it is simplified in order to accommodate low reading skills (Donelson : 1980 : 12). In terms of their literary merit, a detailed analysis of the books which will be examined in Chapter 3, shows that this is a gross generalisation. It will have to be conceded though, that, the South African literature in this genre can safely be said to be oversimplified in terms of length. The average length of the books under scrutiny in Chapters 2 and 3, is no more than 100 pages. However, it may be argued that this factor is an encouraging one for the reader who has recently emerged from childhood reading material where stories are short. The length of a full-length adult novel may appear daunting to the reader who is just flexing his reading abilities, preparing to engage in more mature reading, but who is, as yet, unable to sustain prolonged periods of reading. As one of Chambers' students explained : (1985 : 87) "It is a big step up from Blyton to Dostoevsky".

Another criticism which is frequently levelled against fiction for teenagers (Bawden : 1976 : 4), is that it is less enduring than adult literature. Considering how new the phenomenon of literature written specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage is, it is not surprising that few books have emerged which have the same stature and durability of say, The Wind in the Willows or Northanger Abbey. J.D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, is perhaps one of the notable exceptions, as is Beverly Cleary's ever-popular Fifteen. Many of the teenage books which are being published, particularly in this country where racialism and apartheid form a unique theme, are admittedly, ephemeral by nature. But the same can be said of books which are being published for adults : "as always, in every art, most of the work produced has been sunk without trace, leaving only the peaks to be admired", (Chambers : 1985 : 85)

Despite the fact that teenage literature is not to be seen as a mere stepping stone from children's to adult literature, it very definitely does serve as a bridging stage for readers. Some readers may find that they pause very briefly to gloss over the available teenage literature in their haste to read more adult fiction. Nina Bawden berates teenage literature, saying that it is "watered down adult fiction," and feels that much of what is published for this age group does not present the reader with sufficient challenges. She says that most of the modern novels written for this age group are:

... thin gruel, rather foolishly served to people who not only should be cutting their adult teeth on more solid food, but, given the choice, would prefer to. Dr Johnson may not have been right when he said that babies do not want to read about other babies, but I am quite sure that most adolescents don't want to read about other adolescents, or at least not in a selectively limited way. They may read children's books, consciously slipping back into childhood from time to time for a number of reasons and no harm in that, but once they've crossed the bridge - so to speak - emerged from childhood, what they want to read about is the new world they've just entered.

(Bawden : 1976 : 5)

A body of literature written with a specifically adolescent readership in mind, may be just what is needed to encourage these children in the post-developmental reading stage who would never have picked up a book anyway. How much more constructive for a child to read a book, (albeit a shorter, more simplified blueprint of what is considered to be great literature) than to spend time in a video-games arcade? The children whose responses and opinions are recorded in this particular study are all children who are considered by their teachers and parents to be "avid readers", so unfortunately they can be of no assistance in deciding whether or not they would be encouraged to read by being offered fiction designed specifically for the teenager, but Forster, the head of a British secondary school which draws its pupils largely from an industrial area, laments the fact that publishers tend to publish books for those children who are not reluctant to read, and feels that the

vast majority of adolescents need literature which is simpler, more relevant, and aimed at a specific teenage market:

Finding the right book for the right child is not always easy. Unfortunately the majority of books published for children continue to be biased towards the few - those who are attracted to the world of books anyway - rather than to the many - those who are not. Consequently there is a shortage of the books we need most - books which will capture the interest of those children who are most in danger of giving up reading for ever.

(Forster : 1977 : 198)

The whole argument for the promotion of a body of literature for teenagers hinges on the notion that introduced to the right book at the right time, a child's reading interest will be sparked, and hopefully, having been sparked by the right book, the child will move on to self-initiated reading which he chooses to suit his own level of maturity. The Bullock Report states that the results of various studies of children's reading show that:

Children's favourite stories at different ages reflect the particular fantasies and emotional conflicts in their experience at that time. The child gets more enjoyment from those stories which say something to his condition and help him to resolve these inner conflicts.

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 125)

Quality fiction for children in the post-developmental reading stage can reflect some of the fantasies and emotional conflicts of the child far better than fiction written for adults, which teenagers, for lack of alternative reading material, are expected to read. Chambers (1985 : 94) tells of the laboratory experiment in which a vacuum is created in a can, and if the can is strong enough, it retains its perfect shape and the vacuum inside it. If the can is weak, it crumples and the vacuum is filled. He says that "this is precisely what happens to those youngsters - and they

are the majority - who come to, or are given adult books too young in their lives. The reading vacuum is filled, but the vessel is wounded."

Added to this, the literature may act as an impetus to encourage the reading habit in children in the post-developmental reading stage, which, according to research figures, diminishes as children move into adolescence. Frank Whitehead, observing children in the U.K., found that children's reading falls off markedly in amount around the age of 13 or 14. One of the reasons for this is ascribed by Whitehead to the lack of appropriate reading material for this age-group:

Perhaps the early-maturing fourteen-year old finds it less easy to come upon books which match his (or her) continual emotional maturity while at the same time satisfying the evident need to feel grown-up.

(Whitehead : 1966 : 87)

These comments were made in 1966, before the British publishing houses had started publishing books specifically for children in the post-developmental reading phase. However, a 1989 South African survey conducted by Gardner (1989 : 134) confirms that there is a fall-off in reading as children get older and pursuits other than reading become more attractive to them. If these children were offered books to which they could relate more easily on an intellectual and emotional level, would they not perhaps be more inclined to pick up a good book rather than pursue other, less constructive avenues of entertainment?

The new body of literature for adolescent readers, despite its critics, will no doubt find increasing space on bookshelves, because it does seem to fill an important gap, acting as a "bridging" literature for the reader who requires something more stimulating than a child's book and less demanding than an adult's. It also provides a body of literature which is likely to meet many of the intellectual and emotional

needs of the adolescent. In conclusion, a quote from Chambers will serve as sufficient justification for the ongoing publication of literature specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage:

I have never experienced any difficulty with the idea of literature for adolescents. On the contrary, all my working life, first as a teacher, then as an editor and author, such a literature has not only seemed necessary but possible, not only possible, but there.

(Chambers : 1985 : 124)

#### 1.4 SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN IN THE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE

In a country where race and ethnicity have become the cornerstone of an ideology of human separation, resulting in estrangement between the children of the country, and alienation from one another, a literature is necessary which may contribute to bridging these gaps.

(Totemeyer : 1988 : 80)

Unfortunately, the literature written for children and for the youth in this country has, for a long time, and to a certain extent still is, being written by Whites for Whites, and is based on an uncritical acceptance of the mores which have been dictated by a political infrastructure based on social, economic and political differentiation of the races, namely apartheid (Totemeyer : 1988 : 80). Children's and youth literature has therefore mirrored the ideologies of this system, and the census-board, for many years, was careful not to permit the circulation of literature which did not preserve the status quo of White supremacy and which did not communicate the values and beliefs inherent in the apartheid system. Go well, stay well by Tockey Jones, for example, the story of the relationship which develops between a White girl, Candy and a Black girl, Becky, was excluded from approved lists of books suitable for Cape school libraries (Totemeyer : 1988 : 83). However,

with the dismantling of apartheid has come the increase in publications which deal specifically with the new political ideology of promoting racial harmony and bridging the gaps between children of all colours. Pig and The Kayaboeties, two of the books examined in Chapter 3 deal very specifically with the problem of bridging the racial gaps. It must be remembered that these are still books written from a White person's perspective, and as such they can be seen as noble attempts at reconciliation, but cannot in any way be construed as being reflective of what would be appealing to a Black teenager. It is not within the scope of this study to examine the preferences, or in fact the literature written for young Black adolescents, who until the beginning of 1991 had separate syllabuses in separate schools. There is a great deal of scope in this area for separate studies, but by individuals who have the experience and knowledge of teaching literature to Black children.

The trend towards a body of literature written specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage in South Africa has followed, to a certain extent the trend which started in America in the 1960's and in Britain and Australia in the 1970's and 1980's. A brief review of American and British trends will serve to show how South African publishers have, since about the middle of the 1980's, followed the international trends.

The concept of a body of literature written specifically for children in the post-developmental reading phase, is a comparatively new one. Less than a hundred years ago, children who were advancing beyond the literature of childhood were reading Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Swift's Gulliver's Travels and Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, for want of alternative reading material. The development of a body of literature which is aimed specifically at the teenage market has coincided with the recognition of the concept of adolescence as a specific period of life (Donelson : 1980 : 10). The term "young adult" fiction was coined by American

librarians, but British librarians and publishers simply refer to the literature as being for "teenagers". The term "youth literature" (a translation of the Afrikaans "Jeugliteratuur") is used to describe the sub-genre in South Africa.

The concept of adolescence as a unique period of development can, arguably, be traced to the change in Western society, in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century and the early part of the Twentieth Century, from being predominantly agricultural to becoming a sophisticated technological society requiring greater specialisation. Prior to this change, a child at about the age of fourteen would have been sent out to work to augment the family income. However, the increasing demands made by a technological society, have resulted in children staying in school for longer periods, preparing to take their places in adult society. (Donelson : 1980 : 11).

In the United States, and more slowly in other parts of the English-speaking world, it has gradually been recognised in recent years that adolescents exist : people who are not children, but not yet adults, and who have needs and interests of their own.

(Rowe-Townsend : 1983 : 291)

John Rowe-Townsend points out that a recreational literature for young children could not come into existence until people became aware that children themselves existed, not merely as "embryo adults" but as creatures with their own needs and interests. So too, the recognition of adolescents as adolescents has given rise to the development of recreational literature specifically for them. Literature for adolescents falls into two broad categories, namely, that which is written specifically for them, and that which is written either for younger children, or for adults. Some younger adolescents will need to return to the more childish literature on occasions, and some older readers may need to turn to adult literature for reading satisfaction.

The line of distinction between the novel for adolescents and adults was, perhaps first blurred by American author J.D. Salinger with his Catcher in the Rye (1962). This novel heralded the creation of a whole new sub-genre - the "young adult novel". It marked a transition from the sentimentality and moralising of the early novels of the century to novels which focus on a range of specifically adolescent experiences.

In America, H.G. Felsen's Two and the Town (1952) and Anne Head's Mr and Mrs Bo Jo Jones (1968) began an influx of novels dealing with issues such as unwed motherhood, homosexuality, divorce, death and racialism - subjects which had been considered strictly taboo. In 1964 in Britain the Bodley Head established a section for publishing books for "young people". Authors who came to the fore in their writing in this category included Alan Garner with The Owl Service (1965) and K.M. Peyton's Pennington's Seventeenth Summer (1970) and John Rowe-Townsend The Intruder (1969). In the 1970's and 1980's writers for children in the post-developmental reading stage in Britain came to the fore, including Catherine Storr and Nina Bawden. Australian writers of fiction for teenagers also started emerging in the 1960's and early 1970's (Rowe-Townsend : 1983 : 336).

In South Africa prizes for books written for teenagers have acted as a tremendous incentive for writers in this sub-genre. Maskew Miller Longman present an annual award, The Young Africa Award for an unpublished novel with an indigenous flavour, meant for 12 - 15 year-old readers. In 1974 the Percy Fitzpatrick Award was instituted by the South African Institute for Librarian and Information Science for children's books of outstanding quality. Sanlam awards an annual prize for writers of quality youth literature. In 1985 Jay Heale's Young Africa Booklist was published as a guide to the very substantial number of local books available to

children of all age groups. He has categorised the books into Fiction and Non-Fiction sections and assigned each book to an appropriate reading age.

For children in the post-developmental reading stage the South African literature mirrors, by and large, the concerns written about in the American and British books for this reading stage. It is unique, however, in its reflection and representation of the macrocosm of South African society with its racial peculiarities. Protagonists in many of the books are coming to realise that human relationships are complex and multi-faceted, and that stereotypes are not a true reflection of society. Clones of Salinger's Catcher in the Rye promoted the idea of the anti-hero in which parents and teachers were portrayed as lacking in competence. This negative view of the establishment is echoed in stories such as The Kayaboeties, Wake Up Singing and Pig in which the parents and teachers seem to be out of touch with their children and unable to break through the barriers of conventional South African authoritarianism. Nevertheless one finds that the authoritarian adults in these books are tempered by an understanding of human foibles, which makes for less harsh characterisation. Totemeyer says of the contemporary literature for South Africa's youth that:

... Although South African youth book authors have become quite progressive in recent years and tackled themes such as drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, parental rejection, illegitimacy, alcoholism and so on, these themes concentrate mainly on conflict management at an inter-personal (micro-social) level, i.e. in the family, school and peer group. It has, however, become imperative for authors to broaden their perspective to include conflict management on the macro-social level, i.e. towards peace and understanding between groups in society at large, in this respect it is necessary for more Black writers to start writing for children. Young White authors, who are products of apartheid, have lived separately from Blacks all their lives and cannot possibly write from experience about life in the township or the slum. It is time a new kind of children's book emerged, to meet the challenge of a new, non-racial South Africa in which inter-personal and inter-racial understanding, will, we hope, prevail.

(Totemeyer : 1989 : 87)

The South African books which are being written for children in the post-developmental reading stage may echo, to a large extent, the literary trends of teenage literature in Britain and America, but are in many areas not as promiscuous as some of the books which have been published overseas. It is against this background that some contemporary fantasy, as well as realistic fiction, will be examined in Chapters 2 and 3.

### 1.5 EVALUATION OF THE LITERATURE : ADULT'S OR CHILDREN'S STANDARDS?

The adult's response and the child's cannot be the same; the former has a memory of childhood and categories for delineating experience and judging it. The latter has childhood itself, passing every day, and memory is one of the things that a reading experience creates.

(Meek : 1977 : 4)

We have emphasised the point that, although it is possible to judge books by what are called "adult standards" and regard them as part of literature, the young reader carries a different world in his head, no less complex than an adults but differently organised. He reads his stories in a different way, his experience of reading must be different. When discussing stories for children, to lose sight of the reader is too dangerous to contemplate.

(Meek : 1977 : 11)

For adults dealing with books for children, evaluation appears to be a simple task : if the books fit certain preconceived criteria in terms of its content and literary qualities, it must necessarily be a worthwhile piece of literature. But literary merit may be the very last criterion for any person's choice of a book. Recommendations which are made by an adult on the basis of a book's potential popularity may well be left to collect dust on the bookshelf because the children for whom it was recommended are not even vaguely enamoured of its content. Thus since the

popularity of a book cannot be used as the sole yardstick for the selection of books for children, there has to be some consideration of the literary merits of any particular book written for children. But, researchers in the field of evaluation of books for children have recorded that they "feel as if they are working in a vacuum"; a feeling which results not only from the affective nature of the material in question, but also from the lack of a suitable framework within which to place the evaluation of literature for children, particularly for those in the post-developmental reading stage. Chambers ascribes this lack to a general lack of interest in literature for children of this age:

It (literary merit) has all to do with an alchemy based on the elements of tone, content, point of view, thematic concerns, language and textual reference points. Typically the argument jams up at this point for lack of a critical apparatus commonly known to all of us interested in the subject. And we lack it because endless disparagement of the form by people who, for whatever reasons, dismiss teenage books as beyond serious interest - a bastard and unwanted hybrid - has frightened off those who are equipped with the training, skills and knowledge to build the critical approaches that might help. They wouldn't want to be thought academically retarded for handling such unrespectable material. Thus work as diverse and honourable as Alan Garner's The Owl Service, William Corlett's trilogy beginning with The Gates of Eden, and Virginia Hamilton's novels (to name no more) are sometimes airily and ignorantly dismissed because they appear as books for young people.

(Chambers : 1985 : 87)

Protherough (1983 : 35) too, laments the lack of an objective base for any consideration of children's ability and development in their responses to fiction. The measurement of response is too subjective and cannot validly be plotted on any scale. Protherough examined hundreds of responses made by Hull children to stories which they had just heard, and concluded that there are three broad stages of development in evaluation, separated from each other by the relationship that is envisaged between readers and text:

At the most elementary level, judgments simply convert personal response into a generalised assertion : if I like a story, it must be good ... At the next

level, judgments reveal awareness of the relationship between reader and book; verdicts are based on what effect the story has produced on the individual ... At the third level, there is an awareness that judgments need to be described in terms which other readers can discuss, that there should be some apparently objective justification for the verdict.

(Protherough : 1983 : 39)

These three stages of response were all observed in children aged between 9 and 15. The children at the most elementary stage were aged between 9 and 11, the second, and rather more mature level at which judgments concentrate more on the relationships between the reader and the book, was found among children aged 12 - 13. The third level, from about 13 onwards, showed the beginnings of attempts to find apparently objective reasons for evaluations. Protherough confirms the notion that as children grow older the difference between liking and judging becomes clearer, but that even at the age of 13 - 14, it is clear that most critical judgments "are pretty thin and clearly dependent on the teacher's example." (Protherough : 1983 : 41)

This leaves the teacher with an enormous responsibility in choosing appropriate books for children. Because children, even at the post-developmental reading stage still find it difficult to separate liking and judging a book, it remains the essential task of the adult to evaluate books in terms of their literary quality.

It would, however, be unfair on young readers if books were to be evaluated and judged suitable by an adult, without some kind of deference to the young reader's own preferences and tastes. What to the adult evaluator may seem appropriate and a "good read", may to a younger reader seem boring. As literature for children in the post-developmental reading stage becomes increasingly popular and a genuine force with which to be reckoned, and as more of this sub-genre is being published in

South Africa, there is an obvious need for those adults who are concerned with young readers, to reach a consensus on the evaluation of the literature.

Lemmer (1985 : 271) quotes the empirical investigation conducted by J.R. Squire, into the reading responses of adolescents. Squire experimented with a group of adolescent readers and found that the traditional teaching approach to critical reading by frequent interruptions for evaluation, is not the most effective method. He recorded a positive correlation between a total affective involvement while reading and an ability to make the most perceptive responses and critical judgments in retrospect : "The two types of responses seem to reinforce one another, with readers who are emotionally involved formulating more literary judgments even though the responses occur at different times." (Lemmer : 1985 : 271) In short, adolescents are better able to evaluate on a critical level without constant interruptions and interference by the teacher!

In an effort to establish which criteria were applied in the adjudication of the prize-winning books which are selected by the publishers Maskew Miller Longman for readers in the post-developmental reading stage, a letter was written asking whether the panel of selection judges consisted only of adults, or whether the opinions of those children for whom the books are written, are also taken into account. In a reply letter from Maskew Miller Longman, (Annexure C), it was established that the publishers are interested, first and foremost, in a saleable story : "if we are faced with a choice between a well-written story from a language point of view and a strong storyline which would need more editing, we would go for the latter!" The following are the criteria for prospective writers as stated on the entry form for the competition (Annexure D):

Maskew Miller Longman is looking for outstanding new fiction for all the young people of Southern Africa. Your novel, which should be aimed at the

12 - 15 year age group, should be marked by a strong story line and depth of characterization. It should have a firm and vivid Southern African setting, drawing on your experience of local lifestyle, conversation and behaviour in order to create a distinctively local flavour. Contemporary, historical and humorous novels will satisfy the requirements of the competition. The winning novel will present young people growing up in Southern Africa today with a fresh, unsteorotyped perspective on their own experience and the land they live in.

(1992 Entry form for Young Africa Award)

With such noble aims for the potential reader, it seems to be a gross oversight that none of the young people for whom the literature is intended are present at the adjudication of prize-winning books. The publisher acknowledges that the selection panel consists only of adults and that no children's responses or opinions are taken into account : "our panel of judges consists only of adults, although most of them (all of them this year) are published authors of children's books" (Annexure C). The identity of these "published authors of children's books" is not known, but they are, it is hoped, popular authors, whose books are read and enjoyed by children.

Chambers (1985 : 72) criticises the adults who try too hard to press upon young readers what they, the adults feel the children ought to be reading:-

"It is in fact, the infernal interference by the adult which so often creates reluctance, by recommending books not tuned to the needs of the child at that time, by making sacred cows of certain writers and books, by the damnation of "you must read this - it's good for you!" (Like the man with his weeping child walking along the beach. The child is crying and asking to go home. The man is clipping the child's ear and saying "I've brought you here to enjoy yourself, and enjoy yourself you will!")

(Chambers : 1985 : 72)

In an effort to avoid what Chambers condemns as the "bookish, intellectual, strategically thoughtless" standards which are set by adults for children's books, the opinions and responses of the children have to be taken into account. The most

obvious approach in the selection of reading material for children would seem therefore, to be a combination of the traditional literary appreciation method, by adults, to gauge the literary value of the book, and the taking into account of the opinions of those for whom the literature is written. Such an approach will be adopted in the discussion of the literature reviewed in this study in Chapters 3 and 4. In an attempt to establish the suitability of the texts, standard procedures of literary research, namely, the close reading and critical analysis of primary texts, with special emphasis on themes, plots, characterisation and language, will be employed. Appropriate references will be made to accepted authorities in the field of children's literature in order to establish the suitability of these prose works for children, within the framework of recognised criteria for the evaluation of fiction of this nature. Interspersed with this evaluation, children's comments and opinions will be used in order to gauge the popularity of the books in terms of what the children themselves find interesting and entertaining.

## CHAPTER 2

### A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF SOME INDIGENOUS WORKS OF FANTASY FOR CHILDREN IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE : MARGUERITE POLAND'S ONCE AT KWA FUBESI AND THE MANTIS AND THE MOON

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION : FANTASY FOR THE OLDER CHILD

Of what use, the realists ask, is a 400-page story about talking rabbits (Watership Down by Richard Adams) or one about a bizarre family that includes a hunter, a mermaid, a bear and a lynx (The Animal Family by Randall Jarred)?

(Huck : 1979 : 248)

Fantasy plays an essential role in literature for young children, and yet those who write for older children who have entered into the post-developmental reading stage seem to shy away from fantasy, unless in the form of romantic fantasy or science fiction. The children who were interviewed for the purposes of this study, however, all rate fantasy fiction high on their lists (see Fig. 2) : 10 year-old Bridget with The Wind in the Willows topping her list, 12 year-old Andrew with Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, 12 year-old Jenny has Mrs Frisby and The Hobbit as numbers 2 and 3 on her list, 12 year-old Andreas has Mrs Frisby and The B.F.G. as his second and third choices, 13 year-old Mark lists Mrs Frisby and The Borrowers as second and fifth choice, and 14 year-old Philip rates The Lord of the Rings, The Chronicles of Narnia and Mrs Frisby as his three favourite books.

Fig. 2: Summary Table showing book ratings

| Name & age | Bridget<br>10                | Andreas<br>12                   | Jenny<br>12                     | Mark<br>13                        | Philip<br>14                            |
|------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| RATING     | TITLES OF THE BOOKS READ     |                                 |                                 |                                   |   |
| 1          | The Wind in the Willows      | The Coral Island                | The Coral Island                | The Coral Island                  | The Lord of the Rings                   |
| 2          | The Incredible Journey       | Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH | Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH | Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH   | The Chronicles of Narnia                |
| 3          | Sweet William                | The B.F.G                       | The Hobbit                      | Survival                          | Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH         |
| 4          | Little Women                 | I am David                      | The Kaya-boeties                | Island of the Blue Dolphins       | The Body in the Billiard Room           |
| 5          | Charlotte's Web              | The Witches                     | The Mantis and the Moon         | The Borrowers                     | The Coral Island                        |
| 6          | William the Gangster         | Matilda                         | Island of the Blue Dolphins     | True Confessions of Adrian Mole   | One day in the life of Ivan Denisovitch |
| 7          | Mrs Frisby and the Rats NIMH | Pig                             | Serena's Story                  | Pig                               | Island of the Blue Dolphins             |
| 8          | My side of the mountain      | Boy                             | A Quiver of Ghosts              | The Mantis and the Moon           | Pig                                     |
| 9          | The Mantis and the Moon      | -                               | Tom Sawyer                      | But Jasper came instead           | The Mantis and the Moon                 |
| 10         | The Kayaboeties              | -                               | Pig                             | The Mystery Squad and Mr Midnight | The Good, the Bad and the Ugly          |

A survey conducted by Heale (1991 : 3) on 750 candidates at various levels within the post-development reading stage, shows that English-speaking South African children rate Roald Dahl, Tolkein and C.S. Lewis as their all-time favourite authors. All of these writers write the kind of overt fantasy fiction which explores various aspects of the imagination which cannot easily be explored through the medium of realistic fiction. It is fantasy which has moved away from instant gratification and immediate wish fulfilment, and is, in many ways truer to life than some realistic fiction. The Mantis and the Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi also contain stories which reflect the kind of fantasy which is explored in Tolkein's and Lewis's books. Marguerite Poland's works may lack the stature and ubiquitous appeal of Tolkein and Lewis, but in South Africa, her works are deserving of acknowledgement because of the unique way in which she has created her fantasy. Part of the way in which Marguerite Poland makes her fantasy so credible, is the intricate way in which she has grounded her characters in very real settings. Her stories invite comparison with Richard Adams' Watership Down because both books are, in many ways more realistic than realism, being so firmly rooted in the world with which we are so familiar. The details of tribal life and animal behaviour are accurately presented by Marguerite Poland, without being in any way sentimentalised. Richard Adams creates in Watership Down an entire rabbit civilisation which includes a religion, a mythology and even a special lapine language. Marguerite Poland's animals also have their very own culture and traditions which are borrowed from the San and Xhosa tribes. There is, in Marguerite Poland's works a blurring of the boundaries between the human and the animal, where the animals always remain animals, but with human emotions and insights. In Watership Down, however, the rabbits, on coming into contact with humans, are seen to lose their natural identities and become sentimentalised bunnies who are manipulated by man. Man, in Marguerite Poland's stories, however, is seen merely as a kind of omnipresent force which threatens the safety of the animals, yet never physically intervenes in their world. In this way, Marguerite Poland, like C.S. Lewis or J.R.R. Tolkein, manages, better than Adams,

perhaps, to sustain a make-believe world, which, because of its consistency, remains a credible place. The main criticism which the children levelled against The Mantis and the Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi was that they felt that the stories "lacked action". They said that Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, also a story of anthropomorphised animals, was far more exciting as it was "full of adventure and action". The story which was quoted most often as being a favourite from The Mantis and the Moon was "Fudo and the Prickly Pear Thieves", a fairly long story with a hint of slapstick tied into the trickster plot. This story seemed more than the other stories to fulfil their wish for action.

Two of the children, who rate Marguerite Poland's books high on their list of preferred reading material are children who are nature-lovers - one brought up on a farm, and the other with an interest in wildlife, who rated Once at Kwa Fubesi second only to Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH. This suggests, perhaps that Marguerite Poland's books will be more appealing to a less sophisticated, less urbanised child who is more familiar with the settings, the customs and the values which are expounded in the stories. It would be an interesting exercise to test the responses of children in small platteland towns in order to see whether they respond more favourably to these books than do the urbanised, fairly sophisticated children from larger towns and cities. However, it is not within the scope of this study to attempt such an experiment, so mere speculation as to an improved popularity rating will have to suffice. It must be added, however, that although Marguerite Poland's books were not rated as first choice by any of the candidates, nobody rated the books as tenth on the list. (See annexure E)

Bridget (aged 10) said that she had read The Mantis and the Moon when she was eight and had not enjoyed it then, so listed it as No. 9. She feels that she was too young to have enjoyed it when she read it aged eight, and it was spoiled for her on the first reading, and has therefore not attempted a second reading.

Marguerite Poland's stories are, admittedly, difficult to ascribe to any specific age of reader. Her books, like A.A. Milne's, are aimed at a younger reader but are enjoyed most by an older reader who better understands the subtleties and innuendoes implicit in the text. Similarly, Rudyard Kipling's Just so Stories, although they are written for the enjoyment of the younger child (the "Best Beloved" to whom the stories are addressed), they require an adult reader acting as narrator. Like Milne's and Kipling's stories, Marguerite Poland's lend themselves very aptly to being read aloud, by an adult reader who can act as the oral narrator, to a younger reader who may hesitate over the Xhosa and San words and phrases. The teacher of children in the immediate post-developmental reading stage, some of whom are not yet accomplished readers, will, in all probability find these stories extremely useful for reading aloud in the classroom.

## 2.2 MARGUERITE POLAND AND INDIGENOUS "ORAL" LITERATURE

Stories are as old as language, as old as the earliest societies. A few of the earliest even survive : those told in pictorial form on the walls of caves in Lascaux in France or the Mpongweni Mountains in Lesotho. And others have come down to us in the worlds myths and folklore to which we now have access on the printed page. Storytelling is older than printing, older even than writing, and the first stories to be set down on paper, papyrus or parchment were not the work of that writer, but records of the oral tradition of past centuries.

(Klein : 1986 : 53)

Storying is the most significant way we explain how we came to be where we are, and a universal language habit that transcends all cultural barriers. We are cut off from its origins by the device of writing.

(Meek : 1977 : 8)

The paradox implicit in the notion of an "oral literature" lies in the fact that by the time our children have the opportunity to come into contact with it, it has been mutilated by the various processes of having been written down, edited and

published and hence has lost its spontaneity - "storying "cut off from its origins by the device of writing". Without the scribes, however, the tales which for generations have survived by being passed on by word of mouth, would, in all probability be lost to us in the constant flux and social disintegration of modern society. There have been collections of African folktales published since as early as 1870, but most publications, with a few exceptions, have tended to be bookish translations of the originals which have lost the lilt and vigour of the original storyteller, making them tedious to read. (Jenkins : 1988 : 94). The 1980's saw an upsurge in the publication of traditional folktales in this country, suggesting an increasing interest in looking beyond our familiar literary horizons, at the wealth of traditional culture in South Africa. Jenkins suggests that

The upsurge in publishing in this field in the last ten years indicates that it is meeting a public demand which is possibly rooted in the dismantling of apartheid and the consequent desire of Whites to learn more about African culture.

(Jenkins : 1988 : 92)

The hangover of a cultural inferiority may be lifting as ethnicity the world over, has become fashionable and even desirable in the arts, including music, fine arts and literature. Compounded with this factor is the change in South African society as we move into a post-apartheid educational era in which all racial groups are free to indulge in the multi-faceted culture which is part of our heritage. Marguerite Poland feels that

It is tremendously important for children to bridge the gaps between each other and learn to share the country where we all live. From an early age they must appreciate the value of other people and respect their human dignity.

(Poland interview : 1988)

White South African children have grown up as being educationally privileged and isolated from Black children. For this reason, indigenous literature can offer White children greater insights into situations to which he can relate, opening up a new world which includes various sub-cultures, which until recently, have scarcely been looked at.

The stories in the volumes Once at Kwa Fubesi and The Mantis and the Moon have traditional San Bushmen and African folktales as their ancestors, and, as such do invite comparison with the originals. But Marguerite Poland has adapted them to suit today's children, saying that they are "made-up stories", and that "I am not retelling a folktale, I'm talking about a concept from the past that I find beautiful". (Poland interview : 1988) The notion of "a concept from the past" is, basically the essence of all myth, legend and folktale - a kind of cumulative knowledge and wisdom which goes into establishing the norms and standards of a society. Folktales, beneath their variety of costumes, are essentially the same everywhere, and Marguerite Poland's characters, although they are spontaneous inventions of her own psyche, bear within them the germ of their source, dating back as far as Aesop. In the absence of an effective general mythology in Twentieth Century Western society, Marguerite Poland has succeeded in voicing and sharing her own private mythology. The Mantis and the Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi have been selected for close examination, as they deal more specifically with animals in folktales. Her volumes entitled The Wood-ash Stars and The Small Clay Bull deal with humans in folktales, and it is not within the scope of this fairly limited study, to deal with both. Sambane's Dream is a volume which combines most of the animal tales which appear in The Mantis and the Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to show how Marguerite Poland has indeed, created her very own stories based on the original folktales, and, at the

same time, how the stories should, in theory, fulfil many of the criteria which are required to create literature which is enjoyed by children.

### 2.3 THE NARRATOR AND THE "AUDIENCE"

Stories have been told as long as speech has existed, and sans stories the human race would have perished as it would have perished without water.

(Denisen quoted by Greene : 1989 : 2)

Traditional folktales rely heavily upon the cadence and rhythm of the narrator's voice for their spontaneity and interest. The story-teller has to be quick thinking and versatile, and have a range of oratory skills not required by the author of a written story. In fact, the narrator in traditional societies was an actor, performing many of his tales. The speaking voice in Marguerite Poland's stories tends to be a more sophisticated one, capable of recalling details which would have been impossible for an oral narrator to have remembered. She has managed, however, to combine the author persona with the narrator persona by retaining fragments of the African vernacular and the lilting speech rhythms of a storyteller. In the opening paragraph of Once at Kwa Fubesi the narrator sets a timeless scene, using simple descriptive language to capture graphic images which are imparted by the slow rhythm of the story-teller's voice :

Once at Kwa Fubesi ... so long ago it seemed, when Fosha the bushpig was young and the stripes on her flanks still showed through the darkening coat. A time when the bush was full of birdsong and the chuck and chirr of wings and busy flutterings. Before the chock of the woodcutter's axe ...

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 1)

The stories are written for the enjoyment of children in the senior primary school, and because of their "oral" origins, lend themselves to reading aloud by the teacher.

They will appeal to modern English-speaking children who have been reared on the mainstream of European and American fairytales and who will therefore be able to identify Marguerite Poland's tales as belonging to a similar literary genre, set in an African landscape. At times, the names and settings are so very African that the stories may not necessarily appeal to a child unfamiliar with the African continent. When Jennifer (aged 12) was asked about whom she thought the story-teller might be, she obviously had a sense of the omniscience of the oral narrator, but did not feel that the narrator was necessarily of tribal origin. She says :

Well, when I listen to animal stories or read an animal story, I imagine an old owl telling the story ... I don't know why. It always seems like a person who has seen a lot ... a person who is very sort of wise ... an animal who has seen a lot and knows a lot and can see almost everything.

(Jennifer : aged 12)

She is perhaps too young to be fully aware of the notion of an oral narrator as found in primitive societies, but she is aware of the wisdom imparted by such a narrator. The intonations, figurative language and rhythm which makes for the artless spontaneity in an oral rendition of a story, is unfortunately lost in the process of writing.

Occasionally, the author persona betrays herself as not being a bona fide oral narrator by interjecting with esoteric terms which are not in keeping with an oral narration. In "Sidenge's Potion" (Once at Kwa Fubesi : 75) for example, the "pompalid wasp" referred to has a footnote in explanation. A reference to the "carpenter bee" in "The Season of the Stubby Caterpillar" (The Mantis and the Moon : 81) is also incongruous in the African setting. These scientific references create an interesting contrast to the African creatures which are referred to in colloquial terms : Toktokkie, hamerkop, rhebok and jackals, to name but a few.

The scientist persona also emerges in the very accurate descriptions of the fauna and flora. Mbongi in "The Adventures of Ntini, the Small Otter" (The Mantis and the Moon : (27) is described as "the spotted-necked otter", and great care is taken to give the generic names of creatures such as the "monitor lizard", the "scrub hare" or the "forest shrew". The true oral narrator would have been satisfied to use their colloquial appellations. But ultimately the sense of an oral narrator is restored by the accurate knowledge of the habits of wild creatures about which the stories are told. Also the stories, in many instances are episodic, requiring more than one sitting for the telling. In The Adventures of Ntini the Small Otter (The Mantis and the Moon) the action spans a considerable amount of time, which makes for a fairly long story which would certainly be too long to relate in a single sitting. The traditional folktales were simple and short so as not to tax the story-teller's memory. By moving away from the traditional oral narrator, Marguerite Poland has made her stories more appealing to a more sophisticated audience. She has used her unique talent to bridge the gap between the oral narrator of traditional folktales and the modern White child, thereby making the traditional oral literature of the African people accessible, and at the same time, creating within the child an awareness of the natural environment.

#### 2.4 SETTINGS

It is, perhaps the settings in Marguerite Poland's stories which most reaffirm their Africanness, and which create a very real backdrop against which the fantasy can unfold. One of the primary concerns of the author of fantasy works is the way in which the writer is able to make the fantasy believable. A variety of techniques may be employed to create belief in the unbelievable, but perhaps one of the most effective ways of doing this, as Marguerite Poland has done, is to ground the story very firmly in reality before moving into fantasy. Once an author has entered into

an imaginary world it is vital that the imaginary world which has been created maintains an internal coherence in which the make-believe takes on all the appearances of reality. Marguerite Poland never allows her fantasy realm to be interrupted by reality. Even her use of scientific terms and the need for footnotes in her text are evidence of the minutely studied way in which she has created her anthropomorphised fantasy world. Dickinson (1986 : 41) outlines the importance of the author sustaining the imaginary world which had been created, and not allowing the invented logic to unravel by introducing elements which do not fit precisely into this fantasy world:

The crucial thing about any act of the imagination is its self-coherence, the way in which each part of it fits with all the other parts and by so doing authenticates them. This is the way in which we know and authenticate our real world. We know we are not dreaming by the great coherence of our perceptions. We know that something is wrong with a major scientific theory by one minor self-contradiction. Very often that little flaw brings the whole theory down, and another theory has to be rebuilt to replace it. Give my heroine green eyes on page nine and brown eyes on page 203, and immediately it becomes apparent that the girl, for all her beauty, courage and wit, does not truly exist in my imagination.

(Dickinson : 1986 : 41)

It is through her very careful attention to detail in her settings that Marguerite Poland achieves a very credible sense of reality. By starting in a very real, very specific African landscape, Marguerite Poland moves into a world of fantasy, and anthropomorphised creatures, where the mundane becomes extraordinary in a credible fashion. Settings in The Mantis and the Moon and Once at Kwa Fubesi are very specifically African, and in many instances specific to a particular geographic location in South Africa. Sometimes the descriptions of the settings are very detailed. Others, in their brevity, are evocative of a harsh, ungiving landscape :

The desert is harsh. Sometimes the clouds move in, heavy with rain, but the hot wind from the north pushes them away so that only their racing shadows cool the ground ...

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 110)

Descriptions of the Eastern Cape are so specific that in many instances, for one who is familiar with the area, the places described are very recognisable :

It was a quiet valley between a scoop of hills and dunes. A valley where the tracks of duiker traced back and forth across the ash-grey sand and bushbuck kept to the thickets. Tortoises plied from gaukum patch to gaukum patch and drongos and hoopoes and dusky bushbirds lived there. Only in spring the bright electric flash and sweet, piercing note of bee-eaters livened the bush when they came to nest in the limestone banks. It was a place where cicadas shrilled among the blombos when the summer bergwind blew; where mist drifted in in winter, salty with sea-spray. And it was called Kwa Fubesi by those who lived there - the home of the giant eagle-owl.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 2)

The Eastern Cape Coast is beautifully described in this passage. The details of the fauna and flora and the language used to describe them are so specifically South African that a child unfamiliar with the African landscape may, in all probability, struggle to relate to the story.

The farmyard described in "If the Boerboon Flowers Fall" is so typically South African that it could be a description of any Free State, Karoo or Transvaal farm:-

Mbiba the grey rat crept out of a crack in the wall. His shadow darted beside him over the stones - stopped and hovered as he glanced around. He scuttled over the patch of bare earth between the watertank and the cattle-kraal and hid in a thorn bush growing at the gate. He looked mournfully into the hunting bag he carried, counting the contents - a few hard seeds, a piece of bleached bone and half an eggshell with a little yolk still smeared inside. It had not been a successful morning and the children would be hungry.

He sat awhile, blinking in the dusty shade, his grey fur standing all awry. He could see goats wandering among the spekboom and the jagged shadows of the bushes trembled in the hot wind. He humped his bag on his back and sidled into the cattle-kraal, searching among the dung and churned-up earth.

He found nothing so he went home - past the pepper trees, under the idle old wagon and into a hole in the wall of an abandoned cottage, used as a haybarn. A passage scratched out between the lime blocks led to a disused "bakoond" where he lived.

(The Mantis and the Moon : 41)

The heat, the decay from disuse and the drought are tangible in the description of the abandoned farmyard. The South-Africanness of the scene is created by the use of words such as "cattle-kraal", "dusty shade", "spekboom", "pepper trees" and "bakoond". There is no mistaking the Africanness of the settings which despite their seeming tranquility, impart a sense of uneasiness, a sense of there being something amiss in the silence.

Marguerite Poland does not hoodwink her child audience into believing that nature is idyllic. Nature is beautiful, but also often cruel and indifferent. She makes no attempt to shield the child from reality, despite the fact that she transports him into a world of fantasy. (Heale : 1987 : 48).

All except one of the children who read either The Mantis and the Moon or Once at Kwa Fubesi said that they enjoy stories which are set in South Africa. The reasons which they gave were varied, but boiled down to the fact that they like being able to identify places, and they like the familiarity of the scenery :

... In S.A. stories ... you know the place ... you know what's going on ... a story set in say, England, you're not too sure really what it's like so you have to invent your own setting. It's not as if you actually know what it's like there.

(Jenny : aged 12)

I do (like stories set in SA) You know ... I can relate to them and understand them because I live in South Africa.

(Mark : aged 13)

A discussion of the settings in Marguerite Poland's stories would, however be incomplete without considering the language used in her descriptions of places. The language is an integral part of the setting as it serves not only to place the characters in very specific locations, but it is also used to create the atmosphere in all the stories.

## 2.5 LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Marguerite Poland's great repertoire of African plants and animals place the stories very firmly in Africa. She uses a combination of colloquial English, African and Afrikaans names to describe the fauna and flora. Examples such as this one, abound throughout the stories :

Swifts fled across the sky in search of insects as Ngqangqolo the dikkop came cautiously out of the grass on his long yellow legs and looked about. Nduna stepped into the clearing.  
"Pi-pi-pi-pi-pi," shrieked the dikkop racing away from him.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 5)

Dikkops, hammerkops, polecats, kiewietjies, the boerboon, spekboom, euphorbias, prickly-pears and a host of indigenous plant and animal names help to evoke an African landscape. Occasionally footnotes are used to explain some of the African and Afrikaans words. The vivid descriptions of animals provide for the child an unobstrusive form of education. These are the replies of some of the children when they were asked whether, having read either The Mantis and the Moon or Once at Kwa Fubesi, they had learnt anything new about animal behaviour or about Xhosa or Bushman tribal customs :-

Ja. I did ... like how they live.

(Mark : aged 13)

A bit, perhaps about customs.

(Philip : aged 14)

No - not really .... well yes, actually you do - you do actually find an otter being taken away on a flood, but most of the things about the animals are what I knew already.

(Jenny : aged 12)

Didacticism is decidedly not Marguerite Poland's aim in these stories. Any learning which may take place is subtle and unobtrusive.

The frequent use of onomatopoeia and alliteration contributes greatly to the sense of an oral component in the tales, allowing for the African vernacular to flavour the stories. Apart from the myriad of sounds heard in the bush which are described using onomatopoeia and alliteration, many of the names are onomatopoeic : there is the "Piet-my-vrou" bird and "mokhwarakhwana" the sandgrouse, amongst others.

As in the traditional folktale, sentences are usually short, using words with great economy. Simple past and present tenses are reflective of the simplicity of lives in which nature is the overriding force.

The descriptive imagery in the stories is particularly beautiful. Similes and metaphors abound, using for their comparisons African images, sounds and smells and frequently drawing on the African and Bushman cultures as referents :

Nungu looked up at the sky. The stars were fading like the ashes of a cooking-fire, the glow becoming a soft, pale grey.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 15)

Fire is an essential element in tribal life, and is often used in the images evoked. For Bushmen, the calabash represents the vessel for storing water and milk, and the hunting-bow the weapon for procuring food. These items too, are used symbolically in many of the stories, each becoming, in a sense, a primitive talisman to be invoked and revered. In these poetic passages the moon is described :

For although the moon always returns to light their grazing grounds, perhaps, one night it will just keep on falling into the great wastes of sky below the earth and never turn and rise again over the desert : slim and curved and supple as a hunting-bow.

(The Mantis and the Moon : 31)

and

He (the mantis) hid among some rocks on a high ridge where he was above the moon when it rose - full and orange and as heavy as a calabash of thick, sour milk.

(The Mantis and the Moon : 3)

Some of the most evocative images appear in the Bushman tale Tusi and the Dry Wind, in which a crippled springbok lamb, and one of a twin, is abandoned by the herd because of his disability. It is left to fend for itself in the desert where

Fallen camelthorns, shored up with sand-drifts, lay across the empty river-bed like twisted skeletons - alive only with the secretive passage of beetles and ants.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 113)

The small buck, in his search for water, reaches a dry river bed, which is aptly compared to the dry skeleton of a long-dead creature which has succumbed to the inhospitable desert :

He looked out over the great deserted plains stretching away from the bleached spine of the river.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 116)

The small buck, like the bushmen, has to struggle to survive in a landscape where drought and the relentless sun are a constant threat to survival. Marguerite Poland uses the image of the sun as being a predatory beast, cruel, threatening :

The morning sun prowled up above the dunes, stalking the shadows.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 118)

Huck (1972 : 12) says that "children do not enjoy a story that is too descriptive, but they can appreciate figurative language, provided the comparisons are within their background of understanding." The metaphors and similes used in these stories make for simple comparisons, readily understood by the young reader.

The passage depicting the forest in which the stubby caterpillar undergoes her metamorphosis is exceptionally evocative and lyrical, culminating in the emergence of the moth from the chrysalis, drifting "like a fragment of starlight ... rare and beautiful and free" (The Mantis and the Moon : 88):

Many creatures came and went past the Keurboom as she slept, changing from a fat ungainly caterpillar into a husky chrysalis like a curled brown leaf.

Outside the small purple-pink flowers of the Keurboom were blown away in the winter wind. The mountains and forests were misty and silent. Only the wet leaves stirred in the gusts of falling rain. Ants passed across the trunk, some stopping curiously to examine the caterpillar's silky door. Birds pecked among the roots and these insects which did not mind the damp of winter foraged forlornly.

But spring came and watsonias thrust up their green spears to open in a double stairway of orange or white or pink bells and the buds on trees were bursting with moist young petals.

The summers are hot in those great forests. The heat sinks among the trees making tendrils of steam curl round drooping leaves and the cicadas and crickets shriek their shrill song so that the air sobs.

The stubby caterpillar in her cocooned chamber dreamed of wings; soft silver-spotted wings. She dreamed of delicate feelers and a swift, tapered body like the rusty moth she had seen.

(The Mantis and the Moon : 86)

This passage lends itself superbly to a lesson on Figures of Speech; examples of metaphors, similies, alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia abound. The figures of speech are simple, and the comparisons obvious, which means that they can easily be understood by the young reader.

Atmosphere in the stories is created by the lyricism of the language. In Once at Kwa Fubesi, a story about a young crippled bushpig Mnci, who helps Nungu, the "chief" bushpig out of a snare, there are moments of suspense and a tremendous sense of foreboding as the sounder of bushpigs is threatened by the presence of the woodcutters and their dogs :

They toiled up the ridge. Frogs called mournfully in the thickets. Spiderwebs brushed against Fosha's face and ears and from the dune-bush a nightjar called - a soft, falling quaver.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 32)

In many of the stories there is a brooding sense of the presence of an unseen threat. In Gada's Pool the tension in the atmosphere is tangible as Mokhwarakhwara the sandgrouse goes down to the water where Gada the bushcat lurks. Animals in the wild are constantly on the qui vive, alert to the dangers in the veld :

He flew down and drank, sometimes lifting his head, his dark eyes alert. Cautiously he went into the pool and wet his breast so that water seeped between his feathers. But the water shivered slightly - as though disturbed by a falling seed or the flick of a beetle, or the pressure of a paw dabbing the

surface. He looked round alarmed. Gada the bushcat leapt at him from the reeds.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 39)

A child can easily relate to the superb blend of suspense and realism in these stories. In the above passage there exists a form of dramatic irony in which the reader is powerless to warn the sandgrouse of his imminent attack by Gada the bushcat.

## 2.6 CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISATION

Perhaps one of the most complex ways in which Marguerite Poland's tales differ from the original folktales, is in the way her characters are depicted. In traditional folktales, characters take on a symbolic role, being either good or evil, beautiful or ugly, rich or poor etc. They are usually one-dimensional, undergoing little or no development in the course of the story. The main characters in Marguerite Poland's stories however, are never flat. They undergo certain experiences, emerging as wiser and more fulfilled beings. "The strengths and weaknesses of the characters are well-defined, resulting in the ability of the child to identify with the characters and to realise the realities of life through the nature of people." (McKellar : 1983 : 6)

There is a dichotomy in the anthropomorphism of Marguerite Poland's animals. Unlike Brer Rabbit, the characters in The Wind and the Willows or Beatrix Potter's animals, her animals are not fully anthropomorphised, in that they do not wear clothes or carry with them the paraphernalia of human domesticity, and yet her characters have far more rounded personalities, inhabiting a real world (Jenkins : 1986 : 164). Mnci the bushpig and Mbiba the rat, despite their generic

relationship, have very little in common with Pigling Bland and Mrs Tittlemouse. Marguerite Poland's characters are not judged on their outward appearance, but are seen to be worthwhile for their own sake. There are no stock characteristics attributed say, to the snake as being subversive, or the rat as a symbol of all that is unclean and degraded. Each character is judged on his own merits. One often forgets that they are not human beings. In If the Boerboon Flowers Falls (The Mantis and the Moon), the family of rats is unmistakably a Xhosa one, with names like Mbibo and Xhego, who is sometimes called "Bawo", the Xhosa word meaning "father". They eat bean bread, bean soup and "ngqolowa". They pray that their ancestors may bless "Nkosikazi", and they uphold the ideals of Xhosa society in which the young care for the old and weak. Mbibo tells his wife that despite the drought and the shortage of food, they owe it to Xhego, the old rat to care for him : "you know it is our duty to look after the old ones - that has always been our way." (The Mantis and the Moon : 47). Although the animals are credited with human speech and abilities, they are not removed from their natural habitat. They are not fully anthropomorphised and are therefore not sentimentalised.

Humour in the stories is very subtle, never blatant. It is manifest in the characterisation and based on human foibles. Individual's vices are often turned into humorous idiosyncrasies, thereby softening the character fault and creating plausible beings having both positive and negative character traits. Vanity, pride, selfishness are seen to be part of human nature and weaknesses which can be overcome.

Children reading these stories are led to the discovery of the cultures and traditions of the African people, thereby opening their minds to the universal qualities of the human race. They are educated to understand some of the communal social values to which other races subscribe. "Sidenge's Potion" (Once at Kwa Fubesi) is a story

about the apprenticeship rites of the diviner in Xhosa society. In "Tusi and the Dry Wind" (Once at Kwa Fubesi) we learn of the traditional way in which Bushmen abandon the old or weak to die in the desert so as not to tax the meagre resources of a tribe of hunters and gatherers who eke out an existence from the sparse offerings of a hostile desert:

Another ewe, wise with many seasons, returned and nudged the smaller lamb away. She urged the mother and the stronger lamb to follow, saying, "The journey is long. You do not have milk enough for two."

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 111)

In the title story Once at Kwa Fubesi, the rites of chieftainship are seen to be exchanged. The old boar is succeeded by a young, strong male :

Nduna stood in the gathering silence, then he turned to the waiting sounder and said, "Bomvu, lead us on, for this will be your territory to defend. Lead us on, my son."

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 36)

Most of the stories are based upon African and San folktales using the originals as a springboard for a more sophisticated form of literature. "The Windflower" (Once at Kwa Fubesi) is an exception, in that it is rooted in a Twentieth Century City. Marguerite Poland has created a modern folktale which is almost allegorical, describing the life of the rural Black who is enticed to the city, only to find squalor and lack of privacy. The story is about Lwembu, a country spider, who, having arrived in the city, has to eke out an existence on a somewhat insalubrious rubble-heap. The rural social structures of her tribal life have been destroyed, and ties with her nuclear family have been severed, leaving her at the mercy of her streetwise boyfriend in an alien environment in which she has no privacy and cannot find a place to weave her nest :

So it was the Lwembu came to live with Tsiba in the rubble-heap : in a dark, damp cranny among the rocks. She tried to build a nest - a white silk pouch in which to lay her eggs - but a green trail of water, slimy as a snail's track, crept down the wall and loosened the threads. Every other place was occupied. There was nowhere to sit quietly, for no matter where she turned, eyes watched her.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 89)

Lwembu yearns for the privacy and purity of the countryside. She is bewildered in this uncaring world of her city-slicker mate, who each day "polished his legs and went out ... to lounge about the rubble-heap, boasting to his friends ..." (p. 91). The reader is transported to the city in which subcultures and gangs abound. The main characters in this story are so well characterised that one tends to forget that they are spiders, not humans. The reader shares Lwembu's jubilation as she returns to the unspoiled, clean countryside, awakening to the freshness of the morning :

She was amazed by the light. It was not the cold grey glimmer of the drain, nor the harsh, dusty glare of the rubbish-heap. It was a light she had once known well - so long, long ago : a clear green light that breathed warmly on the underside of leaves. It meant a morning full of sunshine and birdsong.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 107)

The subtle transition between reality and fantasy in these stories allows for the child's imagination to weave its way in and out of the real and imaginary worlds, often with the blurring of boundaries. The anthropomorphised characters are often indistinguishable from the human beings which they represent, their dual identities being inseparable. The stories provide the child with an array of characters with whom he can readily identify.

Many of the tales deal with relationships and human values. In Once at Kwa Fubesi the main character Mnci, a young, crippled bushpig is seen to be selfish and

inconsiderate. She endures a series of dangerous encounters and is forced into altruism by her experiences. She is seen against the background of her family who are also subjected to trials, temptations and dangers, but who emerge triumphant, yet wiser and less selfish at the end. The two-dimensional characters of the original African and Bushman tales have been turned into multi-faceted individuals who portray a wide variety of human qualities, both desirable and undesirable.

The stereotyped characters found in the traditional folktales do occasionally appear in Marguerite Poland's stories. In traditional folktales the rabbit is cast as the trickster, the elephant as powerful, the mouse as small but smart, and so on. But the characters in these stories, being imbued with far more personality, are less predictable than the traditional stock characters, making for more drama and a greater sense of expectation.

## 2.7 PLOTS AND THEMES

One of the most important criteria in judging a good children's book is, perhaps, that it should be able to extend the child's world beyond the boundaries of his own experiences, so that he may be led to having a greater empathy with the lives of others and a more profound understanding of his own life. Of her own works, Marguerite Poland says that "children mustn't be shielded from reality. They have to have magic and hope." (Poland interview : 1988)

There are reassurances in her stories that despite the anxieties and fears which are part of life, there remain comfort, joy and understanding to be found in decent human relationships, and that the individual's anxieties and fears are not unique but part of the human condition.

Most of the plots and themes in the stories are not original, having been derived from the traditional folktales, in which plots and themes are frequently repeated with stock characters participating in different roles from story to story. Many of the original folktales were aetiological in nature, and have been described as purquoi stories - telling about the origins of certain inexplicable phenomena. Marguerite Poland includes some of the purquoi themes in her volumes. In The Mantis and the Moon, for example we hear the explanation of how the praying-mantis got his distinctive praying attitude. In "Moyoyo" (Once in Kwa Fubesi) we learn about how the various species of snakes acquired their characteristic markings.

Ted Hughes points out that Plato regarded the traditional stories of Ancient Greece as being valuable educational devices for children because they transmit "intuitions of psychological, perhaps spiritual states and relationships" (Hughes : 1976 : 94). The traditional tales of any culture form a kind of reference for the people of that culture, and the fact that the themes and plots in these tales are so frequently repeated adds to their value as referents as they are absorbed into the spirit of the community. Hughes maintains that:

What began as an idle reading of a fairy tale ends, by simple natural activity of the imagination, as a rich perception of values of feeling, emotion and spirit which would otherwise have remained unconscious and languageless. The inner struggle of worlds, which is not necessarily a violent and terrible affair, though at the bottom it often is, is suddenly given the perfect formula for the terms of a truce. A simple tale, told at the right moment, transforms a person's life with the order its pattern brings to incoherent energies.

(Hughes : 1976 : 94)

Children's stories should highlight certain standards which a child can identify as being good, sound values. Marguerite Poland's themes deal with many of the social and moral issues confronting our youngsters. Through a marvellous blend of the

concrete and the abstract, she raises these issues and shows how different individuals deal with the variety of situations which arise. Her stories are not the moral fables of Aesop and other early European bestiaries and fables, but rather, reflected in her stories are the age-old themes of birth, death, old-age and sickness, and the constant cycle of decay and rebirth. The tales reflect the natural, rhythmical cycles of degeneration and regeneration which touch the lives of all human beings. The animal characters are at one with these cycles, accepting their fate with the equanimity and serenity of those who live close to nature.

In If the Boerboon Flowers Fall (The Mantis and the Moon) Xhego, the old rat is conscious of his frailty and his unimportance in the grand scheme of things :

"A rat", said Xhego sternly, "is no greater than any other creature, nor of less account. When there is a big storm - is it the big wind or the lightning or the crashing of thunder that brings life? No! it is the slow, quiet rain that has the power."

(The Mantis and the Moon : 56)

It is the unquestioning acceptance of the order of the universe that is a certainty - a universe in which the old are succeeded by the young :

Nduna stood in the gathering silence, then he turned to the waiting sounder and said : "Bomvu, lead us on, for this will be your territory to defend. Lead us on, my son."

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 36)

It is often a harsh, uncompromising universe where nature is "red in tooth and claw", and where only the fittest survive. One of the most important ingredients for contentment in this universe is the regularity of the rain. Rain is seen as a powerful force in many of the tales. Rain in a traditional rural culture is the giver of life,

without which plants and creatures wither and die. This passage from "Tusi and the Dry Wind" describes accurately and poetically the manner in which the springbuck await the rain.

Summer came, but the sky was pale and empty and held no sign of rain. Then one day the thunder-clouds banked briefly, driven east by the wind. The herd turned and watched the horizon, stamping their feet impatiently; the flicker of ears and tails like the first faint shimmer of summer lightning. They jostled together, haunches tense, noses eager for the smell of rain.

(Once at Kwa Fubesi : 111)

Just as rain is seen to be a powerful force, so too, is man seen as a force, but one which poses a threat to the lives of the animals. The theme of conservation of nature underlies all the stories, and man is seen as the destroyer of the primordial order of the natural universe. Ntini, the small otter, hears about man and the dams which he builds, and he equates man with danger :-

"What is a dam?"

"Men make it. They stop the water with a wall and the water spreads out and the birds are afraid that when the first rains come their nests will be flooded. You had better tell your grandfather that DANGER is coming to your burrow."

(The Mantis and the Moon : 7)

In Once at Kwa Fubesi the mealie fields of the wood-cutters are a place of danger for the bushpigs. In this paradise of plentiful food Nduna is caught in a snare, having attempted to partake of the delights which the mealie-field presents. Humans never enter the stories as individualised characters, but are seen to be a force which has encroached upon animal territory, bringing the threat of domesticity in the form of dams, fires and dogs. The underlying theme of conservation is a relevant one for children who inhabit a planet which has been littered, polluted and defiled by man.

The cyclical rhythms of birth and death are dealt with in a natural, unselfconscious way. There is no fanfare surrounding birth and child-rearing :

The pups were born. Litters of four or five - small tottering creatures with the half-closed milky eyes of the newly-born. The jackals were preoccupied with their young. The males hunted while the mothers lay and fed - the puppies clambering and struggling to find a place to suck.

(The Mantis and the Moon : 73)

Death is accepted as the natural order of things:

As he climbs higher he hears a rush of wings, a yelp and then a cry of pain. The eagle has swooped and has the young jackal in its talons.

(The Mantis and the Moon : 78)

The harshness of nature is not left out in these stories. The children reading these stories are not shielded from reality. Bereavement and tragedy, however are allied to the love, caring and support which is found in close-knit tribal communities.

The recurrent themes which are touched upon in all the stories, of selfishness and dishonesty being overcome by selflessness and honesty, of the human condition seen in terms of cruelty, jealousy, death, birth and old age, are confirmation of the true function of folktales in any society. Folktales pass on the mores and values of society such as rank, which orders the social control in that society. The essential morality implicit in ancient folktales remains a significant feature which underlies Marguerite Poland's stories, despite the fact that her tales do not have a definite moral purpose and never rely upon any form of didacticism. The essential feeling with which the reader is left is the certain knowledge that in nature good is ultimately triumphant, and that in the slow, cyclical rhythms of nature, renewal is a

constant. There is an inexorable timelessness in the themes in these stories which make them relevant for many generations of readers.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

Marguerite Poland believes that when writing for children, one does not have to make a statement - a refreshing sentiment at a time when "relevance" is the buzz-word in so many areas of literature and so many facets of our lives. She believes that "children must be offered a chance to dream; without dreams there is no creativity, no imagination". (Poland interview : 1988) In these stories she provides the child with that very opportunity to dream, to expand his knowledge to encompass the experiences of others. She creates, through the medium of her stories an inner environment which is sufficiently detached from reality to allow him the opportunity of escaping into a fantasy world which is firmly rooted in reality. Marguerite Poland's invented world, with its strict constructional coherence provides for the reader a recognisable physical landscape in which very realistic, yet fantastic creatures, go about their daily routines. It is against these very ordinary lives that the reader is invited to pit his own experiences and, in so doing, discover within himself some private coherence for solving the problems of everyday experiences. In conclusion, a quotation from Bettelheim (1976) serves to underscore the real value of folktales, not only in the lives of children, but also in the lives of those adults who read to the children :

Nothing in the entire range of children's literature, with rare exceptions, can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult as the folk tale. True, fairy tales teach little overtly about the specific conditions of life in modern mass society, but from them a child can learn more about the inner problems of man, and about solutions to his own predicaments in any society, than he can from any other type of story within his comprehension.

(Bettelheim : 1976 : 114)

### CHAPTER 3

## CONTEMPORARY REALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN FICTION : A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PIG BY PAUL GERAGHTY AND THE KAYABOETIES BY ELANA BREGIN

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION : CONTEMPORARY REALISM AND ADOLESCENCE

My dear child! My dear pretty Alice, now with black and green hair.

How can I hope to explain Literature to you, with its capital "L"? You who could read when you were four. But then, sensibly, you turned to television for your window on the world : you slaked your appetite for information, for stories, for beginnings, middles and ends, with the easy tasty substances of the screen with visions of violence and the cruder strokes of human action and reaction; stories in which every simple action has a simple motive, nothing is inexplicable, and even God moves in an un-mysterious way ... How can I convince you of the pleasures of a good book, when you have McDonald's around one corner and An American Werewolf in London around the next?"

(Weldon : 1984: 12)

"Realistic fiction" is a term which lends itself to interpretation, because what is real to one person may not necessarily be so to the next. For the purposes of this study, therefore, it will be taken to indicate fiction "in which the events described are such as might actually happen in real life, and in which the setting is the present rather than the historical past". (Rowe-Townsend : 1983 : 261). Realism for young readers has changed dramatically in the past fifty years and the content of realistic fiction has altered to reflect these changes in modern living. One of the most important influences has been, perhaps, the disintegration of the nuclear family, and the generation of adolescents "now with black and green hair" is no longer exposed to the realities of family life which comprised events such as birth and death, where the geriatrics of the family were part of the family unit. Instead, the realities of the modern adolescent flicker off an indifferent, ever-up-to-date

television screen. They are exposed, on a daily basis, to the violence, terrorism, racial disharmony, divorce, sex and poverty brought into living rooms by the mass media. It is a sobering thought to consider that children of the television generation have probably seen more violence, killing and war action than any of their grandfathers who may have served in World War II. As these children vicariously experience the realities presented by the media, so are certain of the erstwhile taboos of society being exposed, and after their exposure, abandoned. Realism, as depicted in literature has also moved with the times, and there are books being published in the Twentieth Century which would never have passed Victorian census controls.

In literature, the word "realism" connotes a seediness which is directly opposed to romantic and classic ideals. The author of realistic fiction is set a hard task if he is to rise above the ordinary and secular by keeping a proper perspective on the sensitivities of the characters who people the pages of his book. Realistic fiction, if it is to possess any literary merit, has to go beyond the sensationalism implicit in much of reality, and be able to show compassion and concern for the human condition:

Youth no longer needs protection, but it does need the perspective that literature can give. A well-written book makes the reader aware of the resulting human suffering of people's inhumane acts, whereas television or films are more apt to concentrate on the act itself ... By way of contrast to the plastic television world, a well-written story will provide perspective on the pain and suffering of humankind. In a literary story the author has time to develop his characters into full human beings. The reader knows the motives and pressures of each individual and can understand and empathise with the characters. If the tone of the author is one of compassion for his characters, if others in the story show concern or horror for a brutal act, the reader gains perspective.

(Huck : 1979 : 392)

The Kayaboeties by Elana Bregin and Pig by Paul Geraghty have been chosen as the main referents in this study to show that contemporary South African writers of realistic fiction are capable of producing the kind of fiction which maintains a perspective on human frailties, despite the fact that much of what is written is set in a country in which racial tensions frequently lead to violence. The unprecedented political upheavals in this country have provided writers with more than enough raw material, and The Kayaboeties and Pig reflect the problems of racialism which emerge in nearly all of the books in this sub-genre. Pig is the sensitively related story of the events in the life of a young adolescent boy, Michael Goodenough, whose idyllic rural lifestyle on a Natal pig farm is unexpectedly shattered by the sudden death of his father. Michael and his younger sister Jenny move to Cape Town with their mother who is forced by financial necessity to find a job in the city. The children, who are accustomed to the non-competitive environs of their farm school find it extremely difficult to adapt to the kind of peer-group pressure, bullying and social competitiveness inherent in the playground pecking-order of the large suburban school. The story hinges on Michael's attempts to adapt to this alien environment where, for the first time in his life he is forced to deal with racial and social prejudices. Inherent in the story are many of the elements found in much of the so-called "teenage" literature which deals with issues specific to this particular age-group, such as peer-group pressure, relationships with adults and relationships with siblings and friends. Michael leaves behind his best friend Phocho, a Zulu boy of his own age, when he leaves the pig farm. The children at the new school in Cape Town ridicule him for reasons as diverse as his surname, Goodenough, for his rural upbringing, but most of all, for the fact that his best friend is, in their terms, a "kaffir." Michael is bewildered by their overt racism and by the hostility with which they treat him. He finds that he has nobody with whom he can share his misery; his father is dead, his mother preoccupied with the difficulties of recent bereavement and the demands of single parenting. His

teachers appear to be aloof, insensitive and indifferent. The gang leader of the class, Trevor is particularly vindictive in his victimisation of Michael whom he sees as a potential threat as he is a good soccer player. It is Trevor who gives Michael the nickname "Pig", derived from his having grown up on a pig farm. Trevor and his gang of schoolboy thugs are relentless in their bullying not only of Michael, but also of children such as Peter Green the "naff" who wears thick glasses and has acne and dandruff. It is not surprising therefore that Michael turns to the old Xhosa caretaker, Johannes, who becomes not only a friend and confidante to Michael, but who also takes a paternalistic stance, offering Michael advice and assistance. Michael resists the efforts of Trevor and his gang to destroy his relationship with Johannes and it is Johannes who, in the end helps Michael to fight back.

The turning point in the story comes when Trevor, Mally (one of the gang) and some other boys beat Michael up in a way which is reminiscent of the kind of school-boy violence which emerges in Golding's The Lord of the Flies. Annexure "F1" contains the extract from Pig which relates the way in which the gang attacks Michael. It is after this attack that Michael realizes the value of true friendships and is able to plan ways of revenging himself and boys such as Peter Green for the indignities which he has had to suffer at the hands of the gang.

The themes in Pig are pertinent to adolescents growing up in South Africa as the story focuses on the personal anguish of a child whose life is turned upside-down by events which are beyond his own control, and shows the indomitable courage with which he deals with the traumas which beset him. Pig ends on an optimistic note as Michael discovers that he is not the only person in the world to undergo the difficulties which he encounters in the process of growing up.

Many of the themes and issues which are raised in Pig are also raised in The Kayaboeties, the story of a group of young white teenagers, whose decision to enter a local songwriting contest takes them outside the realm of their own suburban experience to an increased understanding of the way in which black teenagers in this country live. The story is imbued with the idiosyncratic, sometimes impertinent observations imparted by the first person narrator, a young teenager called Charmaine, better known as Charlie. Charlie's brother Chris and his two friends, Richard (Pecker) and Alan, decide to form their own band which they call "The Kayaboeties," a name which they derive from the place where they meet for practices, the "Kaya," the servant's quarters at the back of Pecker Petersen's parent's house, which "didn't smell too good on account of the blocked toilet next door." The children come from the kind of middle-class homes which consider it the norm to have this kind of dingy servant's quarters in the yard.

Alan introduces Sam, a young black teenager who is a talented musician, to the group. He believes that Sam will be able to assist them in creating better music which would increase their chances of winning the competition. Pecker however, is unable to accept Sam into the group because Sam is black. Conflict arises out of Pecker's overt racism which is a direct result of his own restricted and conservative upbringing.

Because of the transport difficulties to and from his home in the township, which Sam experiences he has to spend a night at the "Kaya." All the members of the band, including Pecker, recognise Sam's intrinsic worth as a musician, but none of them is prepared to take him home to spend the night as they are all frightened of the way in which their parents will react to their bringing a black child home to sleep. Pecker's father discovers Sam in the "Kaya" and beats the child severely. (See Annexure "F2"). The children hide Sam in the school toilets and Pecker

receives a severe beating from his father for acknowledging his part in Sam's presence in the Kaya. As Sam unfolds to the white children the hardships of his life in the township, they begin to realise how ignorant and blind they have been to the needs of a boy who, despite his skin colour has aspirations in life which equal their own. By the time the band finally plays in the contest, the problems which arose out of racial misunderstandings, have been resolved, and although they do not win the contest, they do get an honorary mention, and the reader is left with a sense of the harmony which arises from the children's acceptance of one another. In a very subtle and always humorous way the reader is shown the futility and pettiness of racial bigotry. Ironically, Sam, the black boy is the only member of the band with any musical talent, and without him they would never have been able to create any real harmony at all. Various parallels are drawn between the discord which exists between the inter-personal relationship of the band members and the actual music which they attempt to make. During practices Pecker, the drummer, creates a cacophony by his lack of rhythm and musical ability. It is Sam, the boy whom Pecker scorns because he is black, who teaches Pecker to beat the drums rhythmically and by so doing to create the harmony which the band lacks. Harmony, in terms of the resolution of personal differences and harmony in terms of the music created by the band is seen to emerge from the discordant relationships which threatened the continued existence of "The Kayaboeties". Although Pig, The Kayaboeties, Serena's Story and Wake Up Singing amongst others, are books which deal primarily with the individuals' search for a sense of identity, all of these stories are set against a background of racial tensions which have evolved in the wake of Apartheid.

Another theme which emerges strongly in the sub-genre is that of conservation, and many of the stories, including Flashflood by Jenny Winter, A Red Kite in a Pale Sky by Dianne Hofmeyr, and Warrior of Wilderness by Elana Bregin show the

experiences of youngsters who struggle towards finding their own identities in a world in which the natural balance of nature has been corrupted by man. The themes of racial disharmony and conservation, as depicted in these books are reflective of the kind of concerns with which the adolescent in this country are faced.

### 3.2 THE VALUE OF CONTEMPORARY REALISM

Children's favourite stories at different ages reflect the particular fantasies and emotional conflicts which are foremost in their experience at that time. The child gets more enjoyment from those stories which say something to his condition and help him to resolve these inner conflicts. Books compensate for the difficulties of growing up.

(The Bullock Report : 1975 : 125)

It is not the exclusive domain of contemporary realism to serve the reader in the ways which will be outlined below, but contemporary realism does, unquestionably reflect many of the "inner conflicts" and "the difficulties of growing up", often at the expense of being labelled "bibliotherapy", the word coined to describe the kind of literature which borders on psychotherapy which was mentioned in greater detail in Chapter 1 of this study. Huck (1979) outlines one of the intrinsic value of contemporary realistic fiction, saying that:

Realistic fiction serves children in the process of understanding and coming to terms with themselves as they acquire "humanness". Books which honestly portray the realities of life may help children toward a fuller understanding of human problems and human relationships and thus, toward a fuller understanding of themselves and their own potential."

(Huck : 1979 : 396)

Any child who has had to change schools, whether it be from a small country school to a city school or even from a primary to a secondary school, will be able to identify with Michael Goodenough in Pig who is forced to summon all the defence

mechanisms which he can muster to avoid showing his hurt to the boys who shun him :

I parked off and moped about things on my own for a while, and apart from horrible things the world seemed pretty much empty to me. There wasn't anything in the world worth living for, when I got to thinking about it. So I thought about hanging myself and stuff. Maybe from one of the trees at the soccer club. Then when they came down for soccer practice they'd see what they'd done to me.

They wouldn't ever be able to forgive themselves for driving me to suicide. Maybe they'd never say "kaffir" again. But it didn't take me long to decide against that one. I mean, why should I worry about a bunch of consolation prizes like them?

(Pig : 50)

Michael tries to rationalise his situation by berating the boys whose acceptance he needs and longs for more than anything. Trevor and his gang, the authors of Michael's unhappiness, are too young and selfish to understand how hurtful their behaviour really is. It is sufficient to cause Michael to entertain, albeit briefly, thoughts of suicide. A twelve year old boy who read the book said that he knew exactly what Michael felt like because he had had similar experiences in the four different schools which he had attended.

Similarly, Sam in The Kayaboeties is treated insensitively by the other members of the band. The circumstances surrounding his being an outcast are different because of the racialistic aspect : he is Black and the others are White. Essentially, though, he is just as vulnerable as Michael, but the reader is not in a position to gauge the depths of his humiliation because the first person narrator Charlie, simply reports the circumstances of Sam's predicament. The children decide to vote, by show of hands, to see whether or not to accept Sam into the band. They treat Sam as if he has no feelings at all, or as if he is not there at all:

"Look," said Alan after a moment, all this arguing isn't getting us anywhere. Why don't we just vote on it? All those in favour of letting Samuel join the Kayaboeties, put your hands up." My hand shot up immediately. So did Alan's of course, But they were the only two.

"You might as well put your hand down Ugly Face," said Pecker with a sneer. "Your snotnose vote doesn't count."

"It does too!" I protested quickly. "Don't forget I'm the Roadie. And anyway," I went on, "even if it didn't, you'd still be outnumbered. 'Cause Chris' vote makes three. Come on Chris," I said impatiently, "put your hand up."

But he just went on standing there like a fool.

"Put your hand up," I urged again, wondering why he was being so slow about it. An awful thought struck me suddenly.

"You're not... voting with him are you?" I asked incredulously, meaning Pecker.

I wished he'd look at me. But he seemed more interested in Bruce Springsteen on the wall. He mumbled something. It sounded like "It's Pecker's kaya."

"That's right!" smirked Pecker triumphantly. "It's my kaya! And I say No Coons Allowed In Here!"

I was too dumbfounded to answer. I just couldn't believe it! I don't mean what Pecker had said - that I believed all right - coming from him it was no surprise. But that my own brother should stand there silently agreeing with him, that was a big shock to me.

I glanced over at Samuel, wondering what he thought about all this. His face showed no expression. But he must have been feeling something inside. Maybe his English wasn't good enough to follow all that was being said - I certainly hoped so. See, I knew a little bit about how it felt to stand there and have them talking back and forth about you as if you were deaf or stupid. They did it to me too. Boys can be such arses sometimes - as my brother would say.

(The Kayaboeties : 27)

Neither Sam nor Michael is accepted by their peers - both for different reasons but with the same devastating effect on the spurned individuals. This leads directly to the second function which realistic fiction may serve : that is, to reassure youngsters that they are not the first and only people in the world who have had to deal with

problems. There can be a kind of consolation drawn from the knowledge that one is not alone in one's suffering:

You think your pain and heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me the most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive or had ever been alive.

(Baldwin in Huck : 1979 : 39)

Allen (1965) reiterates this sentiment in his discussion of the value of literature for children of all ages. He talks about the two dimensions of literature - the private and the public aspects of the individual's response to literature:

Is literature concerned with unique or common experiences? Are birth, death, love, hate, failure, success, unique? The truth seems to be that literature deals with the recurring experiences of human existence as they happen to unique human beings - they are therefore unique variations on a common theme. To be totally unique in all particulars is to be outside the human fold. Literature is written by men speaking to men out of a common condition - it is both unique and common, as is our response to literature. Literature and reading seem to require an individual personal meaning and a public dimension.

(Allen : 1965 : 15)

Essentially, Allen is talking about the way in which literature can pinpoint for the reader both his uniqueness as an individual, but also his common bond to all humanity through experience, which, when all is said and done shows patterns of similarity in which all people's sufferings are echoes of what others have gone through before them. And it is by a process of empathy that the reader is able to recognise the weaknesses and foibles of others, identify with them, and sympathise with them. Thus it is that the children who read Pig were very conscious of the "there for the grace of God go I" maxim. Philip, aged 14, understands perfectly the hazards of being a new-boy in a school and his experiences allowed him to identify with Michael in Pig:

... My attitude to them (new boys) has always been somewhat kinder because I was a new boy when I first came to Prep. I was German ... couldn't speak the language. I was a new boy, so I know how I felt, so I've always been a bit more considerate than other boys. So my attitude wouldn't have been changed - it would be strengthened, if I could say that ...

(Philip :14)

Pig has a very autobiographical ring to it. The experiences of Michael are so credible that there can be few people who cannot identify with the child who hated break-time because it brought with it the humiliation of having to be alone, excluded :

It's absolutely pathetic being scared of break time. I mean, that's what makes school bearable, going out to break. But there I was, wishing breaks didn't exist.

(Pig : 7)

Michael is left out by the other boys because he is new, and was naive enough to tell the other children that he had lived on a pig farm (hence the nickname "Pig") and that his best friend was a Black boy. He is unable to see that he is not the one at fault, that it is the other boys' immaturity which is the reason for his unhappiness. He tries desperately to ingratiate himself with Trevor and his gang, at the cost of making himself appear more foolish in their eyes. It is only through his own suffering though that Michael is sensitised to the needs of others. He eventually strikes up a friendship with Peter Green, also an outcast because of his severe acne, greasy hair and thick glasses. He would probably never have got to know Peter, had he immediately been accepted as one of Trevor's friends.

The vicarious experience offered by realistic fiction can illuminate personal problems as well as cast light upon experiences which youngsters have never had. It can become a way of experiencing life as others experience it, thereby broadening

the horizons of the individual and providing him with deeper insights into his own life. A quotation from Bruner highlights the important role which art and literature play in the shaping of life:

Man must cope with a relatively limited number of plights - birth, growth, loneliness, the passions, death, and not very many more. They are plights which are neither solved nor bypassed by being "adjusted". An adjusted man must face his passions just as surely as he faces death. I would urge that a grasp of the basic plights through the basic myths of art and literature provides the organising principles by which knowledge of the human condition is rendered into a form that makes thinking possible, by which we go beyond learning to the use of knowledge.

(Bruner in Huck : 1978 : 391)

### 3.3 SOME ISSUES RAISED IN PIG AND THE KAYABOETIES

Pig and The Kayaboeties are, in many respects representative of much of the realistic literature which has been emerging in South Africa in the last decade. And these works, are, once again representative of the larger body of this sub-genre which has been emerging from America, Britain and Australia since the 1960's. It is the books in this sub-genre which have sometimes been dubbed "problem" novels or exercises in "bibliotherapy". These books tend to home in on issues which are "relevant" to the lives of adolescents and which reflect the experiences of the Twentieth Century adolescent. But it is the duty of the authors of these books to raise them above the level of ersatz psychotherapy and imbue them with real guidelines for coping with difficulties, without overt didacticism. Durham (1976) succinctly encapsulates the need for writers to avoid didacticism, as the best kind of literature never sets out to preach or teach but to reveal what in a sense we already know or half-know. Much of what has been written both overseas and in this country tends, however to carry its message too strongly, thereby making the literature merely a means of conveying lessons in the way in which youngsters

should conduct their lives. This is particularly true of many of the South African books in this sub-genre which deal with issues of racialism, or issues, such as environmental conservation. Serena's Story by Lesley Beake, ultimately fails as literature with a capital "L" because it is too concerned with promoting a particular point of view. It is the story of a young Black South African girl attempting to make her way in the harsh, ungriving city of Johannesburg to which she has fled in search of her long-lost mother. Her search involves her with Beauty Mangele, a notorious shebeen queen and dagga dealer. Although the story is ultimately about Serena's personal fear and courage, the apartheid system is seen to be the real cause of her woes, as well as the woes and subsequent criminal life led by Beauty:

"So you look for a way. A way out. So when you come back to your mean little room after a day's work, there's something to warm you, something to take you away from the old bed that nobody wants, and the table with the cracked plastic cloth and the curtains with purple flowers that never even came into fashion, never mind going out."

She was angry now. Her voice was going up and down, like she was going to shout.

"Yes, Madam. No, Madam. Yes, Master. No, Master. It goes on and on and on and ON ..."

Suddenly she picked up one of the clean glasses that made the beautiful sound. "Smash" against the wall she threw it, so it would never make bell noises again.

(Beake : 62)

I can remember them all. All the madams. All their children who were sometimes polite to me and sometimes not. All their dogs that I had to feed and look after. All their cars that I had to clean. I can remember them, but I don't want to. Somewhere along the way I got old. In between the washing and the ironing and the cleaning I found the time to get old. I also got a baby. A girl. I was sorry about that. Just another girl to grow up - and still be a "girl" washing the madam's cars and feeding the madam's dogs.

(Beake : 45)

There is no question that the Apartheid system has spawned a plethora of social ills and has left in its wake a generation of displaced adolescents. But if literature

harps on these political issues, young readers, instead of empathising with the characters, may turn instead to other, more entertaining forms of writing.

Although Lesley Beake makes a noble effort in this book to portray life as a Black teenager in South African Society, the dialogue and social interaction frequently come across as being contrived. (See Annexure "F3" : emphasis mine). There is, unquestionably, a real need for literature which portrays the life of Black children, but this particular story, written by a White person, does not appear to ring true. Although the implicit message about the hardships of Black children, is conveyed to the reader, there is a certain lack of conviction, owing to the fact of its White authorship, and a sense of the author having tried too hard to convey a particular point of view. The passage which describes the way Siphso shows Serena around the Johannesburg streets and takes her to a video arcade is an example of the way in which the White author persona enters the story. Serena, a totally unsophisticated farm child, is taken to a video arcade where she proceeds to play with "helicopters", "space-ships" and "strange planets". Granted, these items are all part of the video game, but Serena describes, as first person narrator, the way in which she "pulled the levers" and "pressed the buttons". It is not the fact that she actually did these things, but the fact that she, a rural farm girl describes these items in a way that would indicate that she is au fait with all the terms. Similarly, the kind of overt emphasis on the need for conservation in a story such as Warrior of Wilderness by Elana Bregin places the book in a category which borders on didacticism. (See Annexure "F4" : emphasis mine). The story is about Danny, the hero of the book, whose quest it is to save the creatures of the wilderness, the wild animals which are being threatened by the evil "shadow". This story would fall under the heading of fantasy, but has been included in this discussion at this point in order to indicate the way in which much of the fiction for young adolescents acts as a vehicle for promoting certain points of view. If a detailed discussion of Warrior of Wilderness

were required, however, it would be categorised somewhere between contemporary realism and fantasy, as it starts out in the very real world with Danny watching television and ruminating about how best to escape the taunts and bullying of his cousin, Cedric. He then moves into a dreamlike fantasy world of wild creatures, and during his adventures as their champion and saviour, learns how to deal with the gibes and teasing of the bullies, like Cedric, who inhabit his real world. The story ends, also in the real world, but with a middle section which contains echoes of Maurice Sendak's controversial Where the Wild Things Are. Although Danny's creatures are beautiful and seemingly frail, threatened animals, they inhabit Wilderness, which is part real, part fantastic. The story is also reminiscent of a story by Barbara Wersba called The Land of Forgotten Beasts in which Andrew Smith, a boy who does not believe in the make-believe comes upon an old "Book of Beasts" which describes creatures like the unicorn and the manticore, as if they are real creatures. He falls asleep and enters the world of these forgotten creatures and saves the creatures from oblivion. In The Warrior of Wilderness, however, the quest to save the threatened animals loses much of its impact by the overt promotion of the theme of conservation. This, however, is a personal opinion, and since it is an adult one, it would be unfair to label the book as unworthy of children's appreciation, since it is, after all, written for children.

Regardless of how noble a cause may be, whether it be to illustrate the ills of the Apartheid system, or to bring to children's attention the dire need for conservation, when the cause becomes the raison d'être for the book, something important is lost. Pig and The Kayaboeties are about causes, but the causes come second to the very real personal crises which dominate the children's lives in these books. The stories, although set against a background of racial disharmony, deal with the personal problems of youngsters growing up in a society in which racial segregation is shown to influence their lives, and not to dominate their lives. The common issues dealt

with in Pig and The Kayaboeties include friendships, peer-group pressure and relationships with adults. These will be examined in detail in this section in an attempt to show how the authors of these books have dealt with the problems of adolescence in a sympathetic, sometimes humorous way, but without a hint of overt didacticism.

### 3.3.1 Friendship

Witkin, (1974) writes about the way in which literature can assist the developing child in coming to terms with the complexities of human relationships and the ability to move away from his egocentricity to a consideration of how other people may be feeling. In other words, the way in which literature can assist in creating in a child, an empathy with others:

As the adolescent develops he becomes increasingly capable of appreciating other viewpoints than his own, of grasping the other person's perspective, of constructing both sides of an argument, of being rational and conscious of the feelings of others ... In English this challenge is usually met by opening up to the pupil the world of complex human situations, through literature.

(Witkin : 1974 : 59)

Both Pig and The Kayaboeties have the underlying theme of friendships. The friendships which are examined, however, are surrounded by a myriad problems. The intricacies of friendships which are subjected to trials ranging from parental interference and peer pressure to racial prejudices, are dissected and examined. It is common for people of all ages to want to have a special friend. In Pig, Michael's best friend is a Zulu boy, Phocho, who lives on the farm. To Michael, there is no difference between having a Black or a White friend. After his father's accidental death, he has to leave Phocho to go to school in Cape Town, knowing that the chances of ever seeing Phocho again are slim because of the geographical and

financial distance between them. The boys at the new school in Cape Town exclude him from their games at breaktime and try to keep him out of the soccer team. Michael, unhappy and dejected, forms a friendship with Johannes, the old Xhosa caretaker at the school, who soon becomes his confidante and mentor. In Johannes, Michael sees a combination of his dead father and his childhood friend Phocho. He says of Johannes:

I loved his little room. It was as if part of Phocho's old compound had been captured in there ... It all made so much sense when he said things. I wondered why I hadn't realised what he'd told me all along, and decided it was because I never talked to anyone. You only realise things when you say them to somebody, and I didn't have Phocho to talk to anymore. Or Dad. ... He'd keep giving me hope and new things to try whenever I felt like giving up. But apart from him, I don't reckon I had any friends to talk to, really.

(Pig : 70 - 71)

Michael cannot be openly friendly to Johannes as he is scared of what Trevor and the other boys will say:

"Johannes stayed a secret, just like Peter's piano lessons. Sort of compulsory to survival, I'm sorry to say."

(Pig : 137)

Adolescents reading the story may well take stock of their own attitudes towards potential friends. Although Michael, nicknamed "Pig", is seen to be the butt of the other boys' cruelty, he too, is often seen to pass judgment on the worth of other pupils in the school. His judgments are based upon physical attributes :

"Not that I think that I was a naff, but Peter Green definitely was."

and

"I had to hang back at one point because I started catching up with two girls from my class who were dawdling up ahead. One was the fat hippo of a female whose name turned out to be Celia."

(Pig : 15)

Despite the cruelty of his remarks it is these adolescent quirks which endear Michael to the reader, being indicative of his immaturity of judgment and which makes him seem more vulnerable to the kind of bullying to which he is subjected. Most adolescent boys reading this book will probably be able to recognise themselves at various times as, alternatively, Michael the scapegoat, Trevor the bully and Frances the traitor. One child, having read Pig saw himself, as a junior in the senior school, as being in Michael's position on occasions : "I wouldn't like it if I was in Pig's position. Sometimes I am now that I'm at College ....". Children reading descriptions of the way in which other people conduct their relationships, whether they be constructive or destructive ones, are in a better position of, in Witkin's words, "grasping the other person's perspective, of constructing both sides of an argument, of being rational and conscious of the feelings of another." Michael tries desperately to be accepted by Trevor's gang, but the harder he tries, the more he is ridiculed. The ultimate blow which Trevor and his gang deal to Michael is when they corner him near the river and beat him up. Reflecting upon the undignified way in which he succumbed to their blows, Michael suddenly sees that true friendships have nothing to do with belonging to a gang. True friends such as Johannes or Phocho value him for himself and not for the way he plays soccer or mixes with his peers:

I couldn't sleep. My head was full of things. I wish I'd said to them while they were getting stuck into me. All sorts of things that would have made them feel ashamed of themselves, and things that would have made them stop thinking I was a naff. Then I would twist and curl awkwardly as I remembered how I'd cried in front of them. Even some of the Standard Four lighties had seen me crying. Suddenly I'd discover that my fists were tight with fury as I thought about the whole thing. Mally had a bloody cheek to tease me about Phocho. Phocho was a real friend, not a plastic weed like him. He

was more worried about acting tough than being anyone's friend. One day they would realise how pathetically shallow their big gang of main ous really was. They were the types who wouldn't bother to stick up for one another when the crunch really came. I stepped up to Mally and grabbed him by the neck and strangled him. as he choked his last few breaths, I growled bitterly between clenched teeth, "I only wanted to be friends with you and the other blokes, but you wouldn't listen, so now I'm afraid you'll have to pay the price" ...

(Pig : 92)

In The Kayaboeties the issue of friendship cannot be separated from the issue of racialism which pervades the story. White children in this country have never mixed freely with black children because of the constraints of the laws governing Apartheid. The absurdity of this enforced racial segregation is highlighted in The Kayaboeties by the way in which Pecker assumes no responsibility for the plight of Sam, a member of his band, who is severely beaten up by Mr. Petersen when he finds him in the "Kaya."

Charlie is at first the only one to see that Sam is a friend, a boy about her own age, with aspirations which defy the artificial segregation imposed upon him by a colour bar. Charlie attempts to show the other members of the band and particularly Pecker, that Sam is a real person, capable of loyalty and friendship and not just a useful addendum to their band. The passage in which she beseeches Pecker to tell his father that Sam is a friend and that he should be allowed to sleep in the "Kaya" shows how the racialism intrudes upon the real values implicit in a friendship. Pecker, like his bigoted parents, cannot conceive of the idea of having a black friend. The following extract is quoted at some length in order to illustrate this intrusion:

I turned to Pecker, my last hope. "Pecker," I sobbed, "you've got to speak to your Pa. You've got to tell the truth about Sam - explain that he's a friend of ours, that he's part of the Kayaboeties. You've got to let him agree to let Sam stay on here till the contest is over."

The expression on Pecker's face would have been funny if I'd felt like laughing.

"You've got to be kidding me!" he said incredulously.

"No," I sniffed, "I mean it. It's our only chance."

Pecker stared at me for a second. "You want me," he said slowly, "to walk up to my Pa and tell him that the guy he just beat the living daylights out of is a friend of mine? That I knew all along he was up here, because I'm the one who said he could be up here in the first place?"

I nodded, furiously wiping my eyes.

Pecker laughed, but it wasn't a happy sound. "Do you have any idea what he'd do to me? He'll smash me to a pulp, man! Sam's face is nothing compared to what mine will look like when he's finished, I promise you!"

"What about you Ma then? Can't you try talking to her?"

But he simply snorted and turned his face away.

"Sam would do it for you if it was the other way round," I choked out frustratedly. "He's not a coward!" I was glad to see him flinch. "He let himself get beaten up for you - to save your skin." I went on, deliberately twisting the knife. "I don't know why - after the way you've treated him, after the way you've been so stinking to him all the time. "Why were you so rotten to him always?" I said accusingly, wiping my nose along my arm. "What did he ever do to make you hate him like that?"

"I didn't hate him," Pecker mumbled uneasily.

"Well you sure acted like it! From the first day he came, you were a real pig to him. You wouldn't even let him drink out of the glasses because you thought his lips might be dirty or something. Why do you hate black people so much?"

"Charlie, you're all upset," said my brother worriedly. "You should go home now. You're getting yourself all worked up over nothing."

"It's not nothing!" I shouted, "Sam's not nothing! You just don't care about him. You don't care what happens to him. None of you do!"

(The Kayaboeties : 73, 74)

The children are embroiled in a battle which arises out of inability of the White children to perceive that Sam is a real person, worthy of their friendship. They have been conditioned by the Apartheid system, to be indifferent and arrogant to

black people. It is Charlie who is the first to see the damage which such a blinkered outlook can cause, and she is the catalyst who sets in motion the chain of events which eventually lead to all the children, even Pecker, coming to a realization that true friendship transcends superficial barriers such as skin colour, and has to do with loyalty and the kind of bravery shown by Pecker who eventually defies his father and stands up for what he has come to believe in.

Children of all ages, and especially those nearing or experiencing adolescence, often need guidelines for the way in which they should or should not behave, and what better medium than books, which deal sensitively with the myriad permutations and subtleties of human relationships and friendships, to provide these guidelines?

### 3.3.2 Peer-group pressure

In Pig the problem of peer-group pressure is examined in detail. Michael is rejected by his classmates because he is a new boy from a farm and to his more sophisticated classmates appears to be too naive and sensitive to be accepted by the gang. Frances, one of his classmates, runs with the hares and hunts with the hounds. He is too embarrassed to be openly friendly with Michael for fear of rejection by the gang, and so is only kind to Michael when they are on their own. Michael says of him :

"He wasn't such a bad chap, really, at least, not when you compared him with the others. It was just a bit funny the way he'd be okay to me in the classroom, but didn't seem to ever know me at break ..."

(Pig : 39)

In a later incident, when Michael says that he wants to join the soccer team, he meets with the following response:

"Go 'n play for some Kaffir team," said Trevor.

"Go 'n get that piccanin friend of yours and join Kaizer Chiefs!"

Everyone roared.

"We'd rather pick a girl than have a traitor like you playing for us," Leon chirped.

"Yeah!"

"Go 'n feed your pigs," Andy added. "We don't need any farmers in our team."

"I'm not a farmer, I live here."

"You're still a pig, no matter where you live."

Everyone laughed and people started catching onto the pig idea.

"Yeah, Pig!" and "Go back to your pen!"

Then Trevor said, "Grunt off!" There were gusts of vicious laughter. And the horrible thing was that I noticed even Frances was laughing with them ..."

(Pig : 49)

Frances is Michael's Brutus. The jeers and mockery of the other boys are not as hurtful to Michael as Frances' betrayal. Frances is inadvertently cruel to Michael in his own attempts to win a place with, and the approval of, his peers. The nastiness which Trevor and his gang deal out to Michael is relentless. The ultimate cruelty occurs when they spitefully give him the wrong address for a party to which the whole class is invited. Michael, anticipating the party with mixed feelings knocks on the door of the house at the wrong address:

The sound of the TV carried from the lounge. My heart was busy trying to pound itself loose from its mountings, so I knocked quickly before I had a seizure, then waited in the swirling darkness for about six days before the shuffling feet arrived at the door. It opened and a fossil with glasses squinted at me ...

I escaped onto the pavement and stood for a long time, feeling slightly sick. What was the next move supposed to be in a spot like that? I just wanted to collapse and pack it in with life, there and then.

(Pig : 79)

Michael is shown no compassion by his peers and the teachers are unaware of, or indifferent to, the cruelty meted out by the other children. By reading this kind of fiction, adolescents may be able to gain fresh insights into their own and others' behaviour within the peer group.

The Kayaboeties not only mirrors the realities of peer group pressure, but presents the adolescent reader with a window through which he can see more clearly the answers to some adolescent questions. Charlie's brother Chris finds himself in an awkward position when forced to make a decision about allowing Samuel to join the group; he does not have the courage to defend his principles and vote with the minority:

"You might as well put your hand down Ugly Face," said Pecker with a sneer. "Your snot nose vote doesn't count."

"It does too!" I protested quickly. "Don't forget I'm the Roadie. And anyway," I went on, "even if it didn't you'd still be outnumbered. 'Cause Chris' vote makes three. Come on Chris," I said impatiently, "put your hand up." But he just went on standing there like a fool. "Put your hand up," I urged again, wondering why he was being so slow about it. An awful thought struck me suddenly.

"You're not ... voting with him are you?" I asked incredulously, meaning Pecker. I wished he'd look at me. But he seemed more interested in Bruce Springsteen on the wall. He mumbled something. It sounded like, "It's Pecker's Kaya."

"That's right!" smirked Pecker triumphantly. "It's my Kaya! And I say no coons allowed in here!"

(The Kayaboeties : 27)

Neither Chris nor Frances have the courage to stand up for what they believe is right because of fear of being rejected by their respective peer groups. A parallel can be drawn between Michael in Pig and Alan in The Kayaboeties who are prepared to acknowledge Phocho and Samuel as friends, despite their difference in colour. Both boys come from homes in which racial prejudices are not an issue, and Michael particularly, is horrified to discover that racial prejudices exist at all.

One of the developmental tasks of the adolescent can, arguably be said to include the working out of relationships with his peers. Pig and The Kayaboeties scrutinise the difficulties of establishing relationships with other teenagers. Both books, but Pig in particular explores negative peer pressure and the power that a gang can hold over individuals. Few adults fear having their lives controlled by a group of thugs, but many school children, even the outwardly secure ones, have twinges of fear about fellow students like Trevor. Asked whether they would like to be a member of Trevor's gang, two children responded in different ways, the younger child (Mark, aged 13) saying that he would not like to be in the gang, and the older child (Philip, aged 14) saying that he would have liked to be a member of the gang:

"Gee ... No. Because he didn't like let the other guys have a say. He just like ... sort of ... what he did or what he said was ... like law."

(Mark, 13)

Mark admits to never having been the butt of a bully, unlike Philip, who feels that he has encountered people like Trevor, and would prefer not to be on the receiving end of Trevor's bullying. He says that he would have chosen rather to be a member of Trevor's gang:

"Umm ... yes, [I would have liked to have been a member of Trevor's gang] yes I think so, ja because I don't like to be umm ... different from the group."

(Philip, 14)

Conformity is an important issue to adolescents. They do not like to be seen to be different. Individuality is frowned upon rather than regarded as an asset. In books such as Pig and The Kayaboeties however, we see characters such as Michael and Alan who are prepared to stand up for their principles and their Black friends (Michael because he is forced to by the peer group, and Alan because he believes he should) and, because they do withstand the pressures of their respective peer groups, are seen to emerge victors in their situations, and ultimately, admired by the very peers who scorned them. In these books, however, the microcosm of the children's lives is seen against the macrocosm of political structures in which Blacks are seen as the enemy, to be avoided at all costs. Not only do these children have to deal with their personal growing pains, but they are having to do so against a backdrop fraught with racial tensions.

### 3.3.3 Racialism and the South African adolescent

Rowe-Townsend (1983 : 272) talks about one of the most striking features of post-war American realistic writing for children being the determined, yet inadequate attempt to widen the scope of the fiction to include the experience of minority groups, especially Blacks. The Blacks who appeared in Uncle Tom's Cabin and Huckleberry Finn were decidedly subservient characters who were the victims of overt racism. In South African literature too, the stereotyped "kaalvoetklonkie" is being replaced by more positive portrayals of Blacks. Authors such as Jenny Seed, Diane Case, Paul Geraghty and Elana Bregin have done much to produce Black characters who are wholly credible, sharing both human

weaknesses and strengths with their White counterparts. (Totemeyer : 1988 : 94). There is, as yet, no cogent answer to the question of racial disharmony in this country, but in a pluristic society it is essential to appreciate the diversity of cultures, and what better way of raising the level of consciousness of the new generation of both Black and White South Africans than by introducing them to literature which can deepen their understanding of different cultures and of people who are different from themselves? Elana Bregin, author of The Kayaboeties says:

I have always been bothered by teenage racial attitudes - that smug, unthinking bigotry found in White teenagers. They've been so conditioned into these racial stereotypes and never have any social contact with Black people. Their attitudes are constantly reinforced by the people around them and they never even get to the stage of questioning them.

(Bregin interview : 1989)

Books such as The Kayaboeties and Pig, amongst others, are harbingers of a new era in South African literature in which adolescents, particularly White adolescents can discover that racial prejudices need not be barriers to the understanding of the uniqueness of each individual, as well as the universal qualities shared by humankind.

In Pig the racial issues arise out of a different situation from those in The Kayaboeties. In Pig Michael tells how Phocho, his Zulu friend, is admitted to the White farm school, resulting in the removal from the school of some White children:

Then of course, the Oliviers on the farm next door were so cheesed off about their stupid brats sitting in class with a Zulu that they took them out and sent them off to some Afrikaans boarding school, where they reckoned they'd get a proper education. Good luck to them, I reckon. At least I had someone my own age to go to school with. And he was my best mate as well.

(Pig : 10)

Michael is bewildered by the anti-Black feelings of the boys in the Cape Town school. They call Johannes the "coon" and the "old Af who hangs around the fields and cleans up sometimes." They suggest that Michael "Go 'n play for some Kaffir team" and Trevor calls him a "Kaffir-boetie", and says that "if you touch him you might turn Black." These children are the products of parents whose values do not extend as far as racial acceptance. Pecker, in The Kayaboeties, has no chance of gaining perspective on his prejudices, because they are part of his domineering parents' value system. Pecker's petty prejudices are reflective of his parents' lack of insight into racial issues:

Half the time he acted like Sam wasn't even there at all. If he had to refer to him, it was never by name, it was always as 'him' or 'that coon over there'. He never let Sam forget for one moment how much his Blackness offended him ... If Sam put his Black hand near the plate of cake before Pecker had taken his piece, then Pecker would refuse to eat any. If Sam happened to sit down next to where he was sitting, he'd deliberately get up and move away. And he was always wiping things - the orange crates before he sat on them - anything Sam might have touched ... You would have thought, by the way he carried on, that Sam was full of disease or something, and he was afraid of catching it. But he never admitted it was him who had the problem; he always blamed it on his Ma.

(The Kayaboeties : 39)

Pecker is unable to overcome the fear of disobeying his parents. He has never had the courage to consider formulating any opinions of his own, as his home environment is not conducive to free thinking. Charlie and Chris are also afraid of their conservative parents' attitude should they have had the courage to take Sam home:

Sam wasn't like our other friends. The idea of his Black face sitting at our dinner table and sharing our bathroom with us - much as it appealed to me, just didn't seem feasible. Our parents were a lot more decent about Black people than Pecker's were, but only up to a point. They still had a lot of old-fashioned ideas to get rid of - things they'd had drummed into their heads

when they were children, which were stuck there now and difficult to get out again.

(The Kayaboeties : 71)

Totemeyer, (1988) in an article entitled "Racism in Children's Fiction : towards the Creation of Non-racist books in South Africa", summarizes the guidelines which have been drawn up to identify racism in literature. The list of guidelines is based upon the results of research done in West Germany, Britain, the USA, Holland, Puerto Rico and Brazil on racism in children's literature. It would seem appropriate at this point to quote liberally from Totemeyer's summary of the list in order to show the criteria against which children's books are judged in terms of racist attitudes, and to show that The Kayaboeties and Pig, are not racist although they deal overtly with the issues of racialism:

1. Relationships : do Whites in the stories always have leading roles and are they in a position of authority over Blacks who act in supportive roles, or who are marginal figures or spectators? Are Whites paternalistic, generous and benevolent towards Black characters? Are Blacks without names, surnames or without personality?
2. Black main characters : Are Black main characters admired for the same characteristics as their White counterparts?
3. Lifestyles : Are Black lifestyles contrasted unfavourably with the "White norm", or are insights offered into another lifestyle with emphasis on its positive aspects such as the solidarity of the extended family?
4. Socio-political and -economic perspectives : How are these aspects handled? Are Blacks depicted as "the problem"?
5. Historical perspective : Who is blamed for the conflict between Black and White?
6. Illustrations : Are Blacks stereotyped with thick lips, white teeth, infantile, stupid expressions?
7. Language : Do Blacks use broken language or limited language as compared to Whites in the stories? Are they mostly silent or mute? Are loaded adjectives such as "barbarous", "primitive" or "backward" used? Do Blacks "squat" while Whites "sit"; do Blacks "gulp" their coffee while Whites "drink" theirs?

8. Possible influence on the reader : Does the book re-inforce a positive association with the colour white and a negative association with the colour black?

(Totemeyer : 1988 : 173)

In Pig the protagonist, Michael, is a White child and central figure in the story. Johannes, the Black caretaker plays a vital role in Michael's life and is seen on many occasions to take on the role of father to Michael, whose own father is dead. It is not a reversal of racist attitudes in which Johannes is elevated to the paternalistic role in the book nor given a patronizing "Uncle Tom" type of character. Johannes' and Michael's relationship arises out of their mutual need for a genuine friendship in a seemingly hostile city environment where Johannes is separated from family and friends by migration laws, and Michael is separated from the security of his farm upbringing and his best friend, Phoco, by the death of his father. Out of this mutual need springs a relationship in which colour is never considered to be an issue until it is brought into focus by the bigotry of Trevor and his gang who insult Johannes by calling him "kaffir" and "boy". Ultimately though, it is the bonds of the very real affection which Michael and Johannes have for one another which overrides the ridicule and racial hatred of the gang who are eventually shown up for their immaturity as pathetic victims of their own stilted backgrounds. Johannes is never portrayed in a stereotyped way, but is seen merely as a person who has a fatherly interest in Michael, and as such the colour of his skin becomes irrelevant to the reader.

In The Kayaboeties the theme of racism is far more dominant than in Pig. The racist attitudes of the Petersen family towards Blacks in general, and towards Sam in particular, forms the central theme of the story. The racist issues are dealt with overtly and so do not permeate the story in a subtle way. They are the issue, and are dealt with in a humorous yet ever-sympathetic manner. By bringing the racist

attitudes "out of the closet" the author allows the reader to deal with them openly and the young reader of this book is lead, in a very subtle, never didactic way, to see how unjust a system is which sanctions racialism and racist behaviour. Sam is seen to be the victim of the Apartheid system which has relegated him to living an impoverished life in the township. But Pecker, Charlie and Chris are also seen to be victims of the Apartheid system; they are blinded to the fact that Sam is a boy, an adolescent just like themselves with the same aspirations and dreams. In the cocoon of their suburban existence they are unable to accept that although Sam is Black there is no difference between them:

Pecker hesitated, then gave a grudging nod. "just so long as he behaves himself," he said darkly, shooting a hostile glance in Sam's direction - as if Sam was a dog who might mess on the floor or something.

"G-r-eat!" Alan beamed, hitting his palms together. "So what are we standing around for, huh? Let's get this show on the road!" He strode briskly forward to pick up the guitar.

"Where's Sam?" he threw over his shoulder. "Come on Sam - we're going to play our song for you. Come and stand here where you can hear us properly."

Just like that he said it. No word of apology to Sam for the disgraceful scene he'd had to witness, no thought as to how he might be feeling about all the insulting talk he'd overheard. Exactly as if Sam was a dog, who couldn't understand what was being said about him. Sam didn't move. For a moment, I thought that maybe he hadn't heard Alan. Then he lifted his eyes. And I knew that he'd heard, all right. He'd heard every single word that had been spoken about him in that kaya.

There was a look on his face that made me want to cry for him. I felt like grabbing those three stupid heads - yes, Alan's too - and bashing them together till their tiny brains fell out. Boys can be such arses.

(The Kayaboeties : 28)

The realisation that Sam is a real, suffering person, dawns first upon Charlie, and through her intervention, eventually upon all of the children in the story. The White children are seen to grow in their understanding of the kind of life, fraught with hardships, which Sam has had to lead. For the first time in their lives they encounter a Black child who is regarded by the White children as being less than significant. Gradually, the children, come to understand the depths of the hurt

inflicted on Sam by their own racial prejudices and the reader is given the chance to witness the reconciliation which is brought about by Sam's resigned forgiveness of White children's unquestioning bigotry towards Blacks. All this is done without a hint of didacticism or patronization on behalf of the author. Sam, Charlie, Alan and Pecker are all ultimately seen, merely as young adolescents, members of a band in which skin colour ceases to be the overriding concern.

The adolescents in Pig and The Kayaboeties are part of a generation which is growing more aware of the inequalities inherent in the apartheid system. They are not only struggling to come to grips with the personal problems presented by adolescence, but they are having to do it against a turbulent socio-political background. The characters in these stories are real, inhabiting a real world which presents them with real problems, for which they have to assume responsibility.

### 3.3.4 Relationships

Perhaps the most pertinent of the adolescent problems raised in both books, are those pertaining to relationships with other people. Adolescence is a time when youngsters are searching to understand themselves as people in their own right:

The story of every man, every woman, is the story of growing up, of becoming a person, of struggling to become one's own person. The kind of person you become has its roots in the experiences of childhood - how much you were loved, how little you were loved; the people who were significant to you, the ones who were not; the places you've been, and those you did not go to; the thing you wanted and the things you did not get. Yet a person is always more than the totality of his experiences; the way he organises, understands and relates to those experiences makes his individuality.

Childhood is not a waiting room for adulthood but the place where adulthood is shaped by one's family, peers, society, and most importantly, the person one is becoming. The passage from childhood to adulthood is a significant journey for each person. It is no wonder that children's literature is filled with stories of growing up in our society today.

(Huck : 1978 : 398)

Parents are probably the most important influence in any child's life. It is from one's parents that one learns life's values and how to conduct oneself in society. Parents in children's literature have often been domineering, two-dimensional figures who have receded to place the emphasis on the children. In contemporary realism however, "there is little left of the assumption that parents are always right. More and more fictional parents have been useless to their children ..." (Rowe-Townsend : 1983 : 293). The Kayaboeties opens and closes with descriptions of Mrs Peterson, Pecker's mother. She is so typical of the stereotyped middle-class South African housewife who is unable to keep a maid, that the descriptions of her border on caricature:

Mrs P is quite a small woman, considering she has such a big voice. She's sort of leathery looking, with grey hair that reminds me of one of those steel wool pot-scourer things, and lots of wrinkles - which is on account of all the cigarettes she smokes, my mom says. You hardly ever see her without a cigarette in her mouth. She always smells like an ashtray that badly needs cleaning out, which is the way that Pecker's house smells too. 'What's going on here?' she bellowed now into poor Pecker's face, belching smoke through both nostrils - like a dragon. 'What's all the bladdy racket about?'

(The Kayaboeties : 34)

Pecker's bigotry can perhaps be traced directly to that of his parents. Pecker does not have the self-confidence to assert himself because he knows that he will meet with physical violence should he dare to gainsay his parents' views. As it transpires, he is beaten up by his father for allowing Sam to stay in the 'Kaya'. Pecker obeys his parents, not out of respect for them, but out of fear of the reprisals which his disobedience would provoke :

Pecker's not as tall as Chris, but he's quite hefty and he comes from a family that uses fists first and asks questions afterwards. And, like his Ma and Pa, he doesn't have too much fondness for Black people at all.

(The Kayaboeties : 23)

Similar to Mrs P in The Kayaboeties, Michael's mother in Pig, although not a racist, is seen to be out of touch with her adolescent son. She is a single parent who has to raise two children within the constraints of widowhood. She genuinely has her son's interests at heart, but is out of touch with his real needs. The worst thing that she could have done for Michael was to complain to the headmaster about Michael's nickname "Pig". She exacerbates the problems which he is having within his peer group. The parents in both these stories maintain a strong background presence, and are seen, realistically, to have their strengths as well as their weaknesses.

Other relationships explored in these two books include those between siblings and between pupils and teachers. In The Kayaboeties the relationship between Charmaine and her brother Chris is seen to take the form of the condescending older brother being opposed to the spitfire younger sister. However, when either is threatened in any way, the family tie is seen to be very strong. Michael in Pig, is constantly having to avoid the scrutiny of his younger sister's curiosity, who ingenuously reports everything to their mother. The real affection which the respective sets of siblings have for one another is evident in both stories. Both boys actually rely more heavily upon their sisters' unspoken support than either would care to admit.

In Pig the teachers in Michael's school are distant, two-dimensional characters. The reader sees them only through the eyes of a school boy, and they come across as being insensitive to children's real needs. "Dracula" the headmaster and Mr Laing, a teacher, inadvertently expose Michael's vulnerability by making an exception of him and punishing his classmates. They are unaware of Michael's need to be part of the group, even at the expense of having to be punished with them for their misdemeanours.

Besides the various relationships which are explored in the books, other adolescent problems are also touched upon. Developing sexual awareness for example is briefly mentioned in The Kayaboeties. Both stories make mention of religion and death as perceived by the adolescents. Neither of the books is in any way didactic or moralistic in approach. The Kayaboeties is written in a racy humorous style which mirrors the narrator's personality. The themes in Pig, so pertinent to young South African readers are expounded with such sensitivity that there is never a hint of didacticism. Adolescents growing up in South Africa today are surrounded by prophets and predictions of doom and fears of racial disharmony. Neither The Kayaboeties nor Pig skirts around these issues but they do give the reader the opportunity of gaining perspective on these issues in a humorous way. There is a healthy balance between the social problems which are dealt with and the manner in which they are discussed.

### 3.3.5 Language

One of the hallmarks of the kind of reality which is portrayed in modern realistic fiction, is the shift from the formal studiedness of the language to an increasing use of colloquialism and slang. The children who were interviewed for the purposes of this study, had opposing attitudes towards the kind of language used. There can be no conclusive theories drawn from the findings since the sample of children interviewed is so small, but what did emerge from the interviews is that the younger children objected to slang and colloquialisms, whereas the older children said that it was perfectly acceptable, being representative of the way in which people really do communicate. It may be that the younger reader has hitherto not been exposed to a great deal of literature in which slang, and colloquial language are used, or simply that his home and school background have not promoted the kind of reading

which makes use of slang and colloquialisms. On being asked what readers thought about the language in Pig and The Kayaboeties, these were some of the responses :-

It was too coarse, really ... I find it [The Kayaboeties] coarse because of the language...

(Bridget 10)

and

Q: What do you think about slang and swear words in books, eg in The Kayaboeties?

A: I actually don't mind because there's a lot of swearing in our house and I'm used to it. I have no objections to it really. Its not that bad in my eyes. I mean, in some people's eyes it would be considered a real sin, but I've been brought up that way and I think it's okay - it's fine.

(Jenny : 12)

and

Q: The language in Pig is very much that of a school boy. What is your feeling about the use of slang, swearing and colloquial language in books?

A: No, no it's perfectly fine because it often portrays the character of the person, especially in direct speech ... of just speaking, and sometimes you can only do that ... with bad language. Like sometimes if it's a real mean guy, or maybe just a person trying to show off, then bad language is going to be used quite a lot there and is quite acceptable.

(Philip : 14)

The slang and colloquialisms which abound in both Pig and The Kayaboeties, are essential for the purposes of adding to the realism of the narrative. Both books use first person narration. Michael and Charlie tell events in their own colloquial ways

so that the reader is always in a position to hear the teenagers' point of view. Charlie in The Kayaboeties comes across as a gossip in many instances, regaling the reader with delectable details, especially about the way in which Mrs P behaves, and the things that she says:

"She (Mrs Pecker) straightened up. She turned to Pecker :

'And next time, you bladdy rubbish, ask before you swipe my new mattresses!' she bellowed, making us all jump."

(The Kayaboeties : 35)

Mrs P's harridan language is reported throughout the story. Michael in Pig uses the slang and colloquialisms peculiar to a young adolescent. It is interesting to see the way that Michael slips out of the colloquial mode into more formal language when he describes his life on the farm. He reserves the slang for descriptions of events in the school situation. He describes the meeting with his teacher thus:

Mine was a really scary - looking bloke. A giant-sized man with hundreds of craters and bits of beard on his chin, called Mr Laing. Jenny's teacher looked quite nice. She was young and friendly. I secretly wished she was my teacher, and that I could be a lightie again ... There wasn't anyone to talk to and I didn't want that slimy bogeyhead to see me again ...

(Pig : 4)

Michael's language lends extra credibility to his character as a young adolescent, trying desperately to be accepted by his peers and blend inconspicuously into the gang at school. His language reflects the self-conscious awareness which he feels at school in the city, but which is not apparent when he is away from his peers, reminiscing about the farm. His language then becomes nostalgically lyrical:-

Lex sat next to me, also watching, his gentle panting drowned by the sound of the wind as it stirred the dark petticoats of the wattles, scaring the trees with its rising fury ...

(Pig : 24)

### 3.4 REALISTIC FICTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Many of the topics which are dealt with in realistic fiction are topics which are relevant to the personal lives of the children for whom these books are written, and it is in the English class that many of these issues can be raised and discussed in anonymous, less personal ways for children who may be embarrassed and too shy to raise such topics in the first place. The literature teacher, who so often functions merely as translator when dealing with books which need detailed explanation, is able, when dealing with the real-life issues raised in realistic fiction to alter his stance to that of confidante and mentor. When dealing with a Shakespearean work for example, a large portion of the literature class will, of necessity, have to do with teacher input and pupil passivity. In contrast, when the subject of the book is the young adolescent and his experiences, the balance of knowledge is changed, and in terms of the evaluation of the characters and the resolution of problems, the children are able, in many cases, to speak with greater authority than the teacher. At the same time, the teacher is still in possession of greater knowledge than the children in such matters as plot, setting, theme and other elements, and he can use that knowledge to lead his pupils to worthwhile analysis and evaluation of the literature. Realistic fiction for children in the post-developmental reading phase contains ideal material for pupils who are learning to make worthwhile literary observations and value judgments, without too much emphasis having to be placed upon detailed interpretations which invariably inhibit affective response. "The nature of the material allows for spontaneous exploration of themes and motifs by the children who can identify with the issues raised in the books". (Donelson : 1980 : 164)

Exploration of the literature can be based upon an initial class reading, followed by group discussions, written responses or interviews. In this way children will have

opportunities to compare their own responses with those of other children, and explore the differences in their personal responses to the particular issues which are raised in these books. The teacher, acting as facilitator to these activities, must plan the activities and questions in such a way that they help to elicit and broaden the scope of the children's ideas, responses and opinions about the fiction. (Donelson : 1980 : 64).

### 3.5 CONCLUSION : THE "HAPPY ENDING" AND REALISTIC FICTION

In stories for children, both short and long, there is a special sense of an ending, closely bound up with the role of fantasy and symbolic play. Tolkein says children need the 'eucatastrophe', the 'consolation of the Happy Ending'. He believes it is a special feature of fairy stories ...

(Harding : 1977 : 74)

Harding explains that as children grow up, they are able to relinquish the conventions of the happy ending in the understanding that "literary belief" offers possibilities which life cannot and that in real life events are not ordered in such a way as to guarantee the ideal ordering of events. Pig and The Kayaboeties provide a kind of transitory literature from childhood to adulthood, in which the happy ending is replaced by a realistic one, but one which provides the reader with solutions to problems raised in the stories. It is possible for the adolescent reader of these novels to pick out some meaning for his own life, without being conned into the belief that everybody lives happily ever after. The books serve as a preparation for living by showing that ultimately each individual is responsible for his own happiness. Michael's story does not end happily ever after but he comes to realise that problems are not insurmountable; and in his new maturity comes to grips with the importance of the true values of life:

Sitting on the steps of the clubhouse, I unfolded the latest map of my life. It was actually quite odd how the roads had taken all sorts of turns and things that I'd never expected. Now that the huger mountains that had once stood in my way were gone, I no longer wanted to get beyond them. Others were there all right, but they were ones that looked as if they'd stay. Like what would the blokes have said if they ever found out that my best friend in the whole of Cape Town was an old Xhosa man? Peter was a mountain that could be crossed. He came along. He never called Johannes a boy again. And Frances was always okay inside. Just as long as the gang wasn't watching, that's all. Maybe even Trevor and the gang were crossable mountains. Maybe. I didn't reckon there was enough time to find that out, what with high school just around the corner, and us all going in different directions at the end of the year.

(Pig : 133)

Similarly, The Kayaboeties ends in a positive, yet realistic way. The band doesn't win the contest, but does, at least, get a special mention. More important though, the teenagers learn a lesson of tolerance and understanding for one another. Charlie is even optimistic that she may be able to change Mrs P's views on life:

Meantime, we're going to work on Peter's Ma. Butter her up so that she'll let us use the Kaya for our Practice Pauzy again. I don't see how she can object really. After all, she knows Sam now. She's seen him perform and sat next to his mother and everything - so she can hardly call him a stray coon anymore can she?

And who knows ... once she gets to know him better, she might discover what a terrific person he is. She might learn not to worry so much that his skin is a darker brown than hers - she might even get to like him. After all, Pecker did!

(The Kayaboeties : 90)

Pig and The Kayaboeties are stories for adolescents, about adolescents. They reflect some of the absurdities of growing up in South Africa today and offer adolescents and the adults associated with them a window on the process of growing up, and as such deserve to find their place not only on our children's bookshelves, but also in our classrooms.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 4.1 THE UPSURGE IN THE PUBLICATION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Writers of English fiction for children in the post-developmental reading stage have been emerging fast and furiously since the mid 1980's in response to the prizes offered by Maskew Miller Longman, the Institute for Librarianship and Information Science, Sanlam and Old Mutual. There is no doubt that South African writers for children in the post-developmental reading stage show that they are following international trends towards this kind of literature, which started in the late 1950's in America and migrated first to Great Britain in the 1960's and later to Australia. An annual average of approximately 600 books, aimed specifically at the teenage market, were published in America in the latter half of the 1970's and early 1980's. (Donelson : 1980 : 8). English-speaking South Africans are the cultural minority in this country and have, in the past, depended upon overseas writers for most adult as well as children's books. The emergence of South African writers in various genres may perhaps also be attributed in some degree to the cultural boycotts imposed by sanctions by Britain and America. The Equity ban on television rights, dramatic productions and the import of certain books has forced South Africans to tap some of the local talent. Sanctions may, in fact have acted as the impetus which has pushed South African writers to the fore where they have come into their own in the absence of international competition. (Steenberg : 1988 : 56). Those institutes offering prizes for indigenous literature saw the gap which became apparent in the absence of imported literature, and, by offering monetary rewards, have attracted otherwise dormant or indifferent writers to come to the fore. The imposition of

sanctions has also had the effect of inflating the price of overseas literature to such an extent, that most imported publications have become prohibitively expensive. The books published locally, on the other hand, are relatively cheap in monetary terms and therefore are more accessible.

Another factor which is likely to have been a catalyst in the increase in the publication of local literature is the enormous amount of raw material with which artists are able to work. The tremendous political upheavals concomitant with the dismantling of apartheid have provided local writers with a diversity of subject matter which has acted as a backdrop for much of the more personal action in these books for young readers. Global issues such as conservation of the environment have also provided much of the subject matter against which individual characters are portrayed. The macrocosm of a land in political and environmental turmoil has provided a vast and intricate backdrop for the microcosm of the lives of individuals who are learning to come to terms with their own place in society as a whole.

The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature and The Companion to English Literature, which in 1984 and 1985 respectively claimed that the English-speaking population of South Africa "imports almost all its children's books" and "that relatively few books have been written "for the enjoyment of S.A. children", will clearly have to amend their entries regarding the quantity of this genre being published in this country, because for all the above reasons, and probably many more, English South African writers for children in the post-developmental reading stage are becoming progressively more prolific. Children in the post-developmental reading stage no longer have the limited options of reading Cry the Beloved Country, The Story of an African Farm or The Beadle and very little else, should they ask for books with an indigenous flavour. Not only is the English speaking South African child in the 1990's able to lay his hands on indigenous fiction, but he is also in the

position to choose from a wide range of fiction which is written specifically for children in the post-developmental reading stage.

#### 4.2 INDIGENOUS BOOKS : TOO "GOOD" TO BE POPULAR?

But for all the increase in the number of publications over the past decade, the question of the quality of these books still has to be answered. It is one thing to reply to a gap in the market by supplying goods for sale, but a difficult task to supply goods which are saleable. Where books are concerned, saleable books are not necessarily quality books, as so many children in the post developmental reading stage (and adults too for that matter) are prepared to settle for books which are not good in terms of literary quality. The books analysed in this study show that in terms of literary qualities, they can be considered to be "good" literature. But in terms of their popularity amongst the children who read them, for the purpose of this study, they did not rate very well. The Marguerite Poland books in particular, were thought of as being "boring" and "lacking in action". Heale, one of South Africa's undisputed experts on children's literature, conducted a survey (Bookchat : 1990) in order to gauge what South African children most want to read. He found that locally published books did not rate well in terms of their popularity amongst South African children, and he offers the following explanation, which accounts perhaps for Marguerite Poland's low popularity rating:

Why are our books not popular enough? They are good enough! I think that the answer lies in the fact that "reading a book" in this country is regarded as a relaxation activity, to be equated with TV, video or other spare time activities. Our children want books as relaxation, as escapism - not for stimulation. They head for books, that require no effort, no extra thinking. Hence the seductive power of The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew (and Enid Blyton). Always - and who's to blame them? - they want books to make them LAUGH. That's why Roald Dahl is so hugely popular. He's funny and he's anti-authority. He pokes merciless fun at authority figures. SA Books are not allowed to do that! (Otherwise they will never be "prescribed" which is the financial jackpot all publishers are aiming at.)

Our indigenous books are, frankly, TOO GOOD! They picture the South African scene well - and our children don't want to read about our S.A. scene. They have it thrust down their throats all day long. Sure, there should be books about race relations and the underprivileged, but our S.A. children don't head towards such books for pleasure : they regard such reading as a chore.

(Heale : Annexure G)

Heale may be right about the fact that our children demand that books be more entertaining and perhaps more humorous. Marguerite Poland's books may pass the quality control tests of adult critics, but there is very little sense in publishing books which children just do not enjoy, because if they do not enjoy the books, they will be unlikely to read the books unless they are coerced into so doing by having the books "prescribed". But, however much the children prefer to read intellectually less demanding books, the onus then falls upon parents, teachers and librarians to coax them into reading books of better literary quality. Chambers (1985) is convinced of the fact that successful books, in terms of their popularity amongst children, need not inevitably be of a poor quality, and that it is the duty of those adults responsible for the childrens' reading, parents, teachers, librarians, to introduce and encourage the reading of quality fiction:

We go on eating poor food because we don't know there is better. We breathe foul air because we have created foul air, and often because the foul air stretches over such an area of land that the effort of reaching the fresh air is too demanding. In the end we notice neither the poor food nor the foul air, and may even talk as if we prefer them. Nevertheless, preferring them or not, we go on eating and breathing the inferior harmful stuff because we must eat and breathe : they are functions essential in life. In the same way, verbal experience of life carried on in our imagination is an essential function of the social-intellectual-spiritual life and we deny it at our peril.

(Chambers : 1985 : 40)

The above argument serves to illustrate the importance of encouraging children to read authors such as Marguerite Poland. Just as much as it is the responsibility of adults to inform children of the importance of choosing nutritious foods rather than

junk foods, so it is the responsibility of adults to guide children towards reading of worthwhile literature.

#### 4.3 PROMOTION OF THE LITERATURE

The old adage about taking the horse to the water but being unable to make it drink does not inevitably apply strictly to the reading of books. Often children do not read quality books because they simply do not know what to choose. A child's critical faculties can only be sharpened by constant coaxing and coaching by an adult who is himself an avid reader and in touch with books which are worthwhile promoting. Although there may no longer be the erstwhile dearth of talent in the indigenous book market, it seems that much of what has been written and published locally has not been brought to the attention of those for whom it has been written. There is a special section in our local public library which has been designated as being "for teenagers", but to date there are practically no indigenous books on these shelves. Considering the large number of publications which Maskew Miller Longman and Sanlam have put out for readers in the 12 - 15 year age-group in the past few years, it seems odd that not even one of these publications appears on the shelves. Once again, Jay Heale believes that librarians and "the system" are to be blamed for not encouraging the reading of indigenous literature:

I remain sadly convinced that the majority of school librarians in this country are so obsessed with teaching book knowledge (the Dewey System, information retrieval et al) that they allocate no time or trouble at all to imparting a love of books.

No wonder that children get stuck on Enid Blyton. They know where her books are on the shelf. There is a plentiful cross-section reference on FACTS but none at all on FICTION. If a child arrives asking "where are the ghost stories?" or "where are the funny books?". There is no way of answering. So I place the blame squarely on the librarians and "the system".

(Heale : Annexure G)

Presumably Mr Heale has had first-hand experience of the incompetence of the library system in schools, and it is not within the scope of this study to conduct a survey regarding its efficiency, but suffice it to say that the onus does lie squarely on the shoulders of librarians to keep up to date with new publications and to devise an effective method of promoting literature which is being published. But not only should librarians be responsible for the promotion of the literature, but the teachers (especially English teachers) should also keep abreast with latest publications, whether overseas or local.

Jay Heale's indictment that

"South African teachers know nothing about children's literature. So who's surprised if children head back to the old worn favourites?"

(Letter : see Annexure G)

is a strong one and a difficult one to verify. A vital aspect of any child's reading is the kind of encouragement which he receives from the adults who are appointed to instruct him. There is no possible way of ensuring that teachers, as part of their training, become enthusiastic readers. Yet for the literature teacher, this would seem to be an essential pre-requisite and a foregone conclusion. The proliferation of study aids for literature however, often precludes the necessity for close study of texts by literature students at both the secondary and the tertiary levels, and it is not surprising therefore, that many teachers may perhaps themselves not be au fait with books. The English Literature teacher, of all the teachers in a school, should always be aware of the vital role of literature in education and keep abreast of literary trends. The teacher of English has the unique responsibility to know a wide variety of books and to search for answers through his own eclectic reading and critical questioning.

Accepting the fact that it is the responsibility of teachers and librarians to encourage and promote literature, especially the indigenous literature which is struggling to come to the fore in our classrooms, it is also the responsibility of

educational authorities (Heale's "the system") to ensure that our indigenous literature finds its place in the classrooms. Reid (1982) who researched the literary texts prescribed by the Cape Education Department, the Transvaal Education Department and the Department of Education and Training, found that "many set works of literature were perceived to be meaningless and pointless by many pupils and even teachers", and that "too few works with contemporary African and South African relevance are set". There is an apparent dearth of research into prescribed texts subsequent to Reid's 1982 investigation, but of the eleven prose works set by the CED for the Junior-Secondary phase for 1990 - 1992, only two are South African publications, both of which are set for Standard 7 only. (The Education Gazette Nov. 1988). Lemmer (1985) claims that the Junior-Secondary set novel is "not making an impact on the youth because of inappropriate prescription choices." If these children were to be offered some of the contemporary fiction written in this country, they may indeed find that their prescribed works are more "relevant" and less "meaningless and pointless". The works which were highlighted in this study would obviously not all be prescribable since most of the children did not respond with great enthusiasm to Marguerite Poland's works. But contemporary realism as found in Pig and The Kayaboeties would certainly be well received in most classrooms in the place of some of the imported literature.

Another way in which the indigenous books could be promoted is for schools to invite authors to talk to the children. In this way enthusiasm for the literature may be promoted by a very simple advertising ploy. Children of all ages respond well to the celebrities of films and television, so there is no reason why they should not be equally enamoured of the idea of meeting a real author. In this way, the children will be made aware of the literature and will, in all probability be prompted into reading some of that particular author's books.

Our indigenous literature will not be widely read until our children are motivated to read it. Education authorities, schools, librarians, and most importantly, the English teacher all need to work together to encourage children to read some of our locally published books, which are often more "relevant" than overseas publications, and have the added advantage of being inexpensive to purchase.

#### 4.4 MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF CHILDREN IN THE POST-DEVELOPMENTAL READING STAGE

Because reading, and any individual's responses to reading, are such dynamic processes, the results of the responses of the children involved in this study reflect this dynamism, and variations occur with each individual's reading responses at different times, as well as within the reading responses of the group as a whole. The conclusions set out below therefore, should be regarded with circumspection, as they reflect the responses of a small group of avid readers at a particular time. The conclusions cannot be said to be representative of what all children in the post-developmental reading stage require from a book, or the way in which these children respond to any particular book, as there are such an infinite number of variables which bring to bear when attempting to isolate the specifics of reading response. The conclusions which have been drawn from this study only represent a small number of individual responses arrested at a particular stage in the child's ongoing process of maturation, and as such cannot be quoted as rules governing reading response.

##### 4.4.1 Length of the books

As the conceptual boundaries of the child begin to broaden, he is likely to be in a better position to absorb more material and read longer stories. The children

involved in this study showed that although they were capable of reading and absorbing fairly long stories, including Roald Dahl's Boy, Tolkein's The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings and Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, they all complained about lack of time for leisure reading. These are all children who want to read and read for pleasure, and yet they said that although they usually prefer longer books, "which you can really get into", they were forced by circumstances (too much homework and extra-mural activity) to read shorter books. All except one child indicated that they are only able to read longer books during their holidays because they find that they are forced to interrupt their reading so frequently that they lose the thread of the story. Those who read Pig and The Kayaboeties said that they enjoyed the length of these two books since they could be finished in just a few sittings. However, most of them felt that Marguerite Poland's short stories were too short for the reader to get sufficiently involved, and the stories which were cited as the most popular were the two longest stories in the volumes, viz The Adventures of Ntini the Small Otter and Fudo and The Prickly Pear Thieves. However, it may also be the subject matter in the Marguerite Poland books which inspired the negative reaction to the length of the stories, as most of the children who read the books were not particularly favourable in their responses to Marguerite Poland's works.

The children whose responses were recorded for this study indicate that there is a definite need for shorter reading material, not because they are intellectually unable to grasp the demands made by longer books, but because they are caught up in the hurly-burly of demanding school schedules. These are the children who read despite their hectic schedules. But what about the very great majority of children, the reluctant readers, who did not enter into this particular study? They would almost certainly benefit from shorter books such as The Kayaboeties and Pig, as they demand so much less from the reader in terms of retention of content. Both

these books, as well as Marguerite Poland's short stories would lend themselves to loud reading by the class teacher, as they are quickly read, and easily divisible into episodes should they not be finished in one sitting.

#### 4.4.2 Abstract thinking

Of the five children who participated in this study, the youngest, aged 10, had clearly not yet entered into Piaget's "formal operations" stage of development, since she preferred books of overt adventure such as The Incredible Journey and The Wind in the Willows. She was unable to give any specific reason why she disliked The Kayaboeties and was unable to say what she thought about Richard Petersen as a person, or whether or why she would not have liked to be his friend. She was obviously too young to have participated in the study, but her responses indicate, true to the findings of authorities like Nicholas Tucker, that children do move away from stories which simply describe actions to those which require greater questioning and the making of moral judgments and decisions. The most responsive of the children who had obviously entered into the "formal operations" stage were Jenny aged 12 and Philip aged 15. They were able to give very specific reasons why they preferred certain characters to others and they also showed sympathy towards, and an empathy with these characters, Trevor in Pig and Richard Petersen in The Kayaboeties, who were singularly unlikeable individuals. These two children were able to see beyond the facade of these unlikeable characters and they were able to speculate about why they behaved the way they did. In terms then of promoting and encouraging the processes of abstract thinking and the adjudication of moral dilemmas, realistic fiction provided these children in the "formal operations" stage of their development an opportunity to flex their maturing intellectual muscles and make moral judgments, tempered with sympathetic insights, on those characters of dubious reputation.

#### 4.4.3 A sense of identity

The works of contemporary realism which were examined, viz Pig and The Kayaboeties fulfil most of the criteria set out by Chambers (1985) and other authorities (See Chapter 1), for which readers at this level search. In both stories, the adolescents are preoccupied with their own need to establish a sense of personal identity, to come to terms with the adults who influence their lives, and to learn how to cope with peer-group pressure and school bullies. The stories are "about people roughly their own age; contemporary times; parental relationships, challenging authority and establishing one's own personality". (Chambers : 1985 : 88) These are the criteria which realistic fiction fulfils, and four out of the five children who were interviewed were able to recognise themselves as being in similar circumstances as the protagonists in the stories. It is possible that the child who is seeking answers to his personal queries, may be able to use this kind of fiction as a map for his own life. By the vicarious experience gained by reading about the lives of others in similar situations to his own, he would be able to utilise the experience of the fictitious character for his own problem solving and dealings with other human beings.

In this country, realistic fiction deals, unavoidably, with politics. The reader of this kind of fiction is led perhaps to a better understanding of the discrepancies inherent in the various racial and cultural groups, and it is only through mutual understanding that individuals are able to overcome their personal prejudices. The children who read about the lives of people of other cultures will have the advantage of entering into the new century with greater insight into these multi-cultural diversities.

Although one would have hoped that by reading Marguerite Poland's stories the children would have learnt more about Xhosa and Bushmen cultures and perhaps something about the importance of conservation and the necessity to preserve our national heritage, those children who did read the books said that although they learnt a few Xhosa words, and found the animal behaviour fairly interesting, they did not feel that these stories were particularly relevant to their lives or that they felt in any way personally edified by having read the books. It may be that the children who read the Marguerite Poland stories felt that they did not say enough about their own lives, that what happens in these stories is too far from their own perception of reality to have a lot of meaning for them. They preferred the realistic fiction which portrays the lives of children which correspond closely to their own lives. The characters and the action in Pig and The Kayaboeties satisfied the older readers' needs to identify themselves with the fictitious characters in their quest for a sense of personal identity.

#### 4.4.4 Fantasy versus Reality in South African literature

Despite claims that children in the post-developmental reading stage want and need fantasy literature, (Tucker : 1981 : 155) the results of this study show that they do not particularly want the kind of fantasy literature written by Marguerite Poland. All of the five candidates indicated on their personal reading lists that they do prefer the kind of overt fantasy as represented in The Wind in the Willows, Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, The B.F.G., and The Lord of the Rings. All of the children said that Marguerite Poland's short stories "lacked action". It would seem that these five children in the post-developmental reading stage, from the youngest who is 10 to the oldest who is 14 do want and need fantasy fiction, but not the static kind to be found in Once at Kwa Fubesi and The Mantis and the Moon. The stories which these children cited as the best in the volumes were "The Adventures

of Ntini the Small Otter" and "Fudo and The Prickly Pear Thieves". Both of these stories were filled with action, the first being about Ntini confronted with flood waters, and the second having the kind of action which, save for its setting, borders on slapstick.

Obviously, it is disappointing to discover that the five readers involved in this study were not particularly taken with Marguerite Poland's works, but what may be fairly safely concluded from their reaction to the stories is that children at this age want real action, the kind of action depicted in Tolkein's The Lord of the Rings and the action of the anthropomorphised rats in Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH. It would seem that children at this stage enjoy fantasy which involves adventure. The youngest reader (aged 10) rated The Incredible Journey as her favourite story. Although it is not overt fantasy, since the animals do not talk themselves, the story represents a quest, just as the characters in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings are involved in their great quest which involves all sorts of supernatural elements. It is the combination of the epic adventure and the supernatural into a credible fantasy world which is so appealing to children of this age. As Tucker (1981) says:

One of the most popular literary genres for children involving overt fantasy, is the adventure allegory, which combines the epic form with the supernatural. The most famous examples, such as the Iliad or The Pilgrim's Progress, have always been popular - at least in terms of their bare plots - with children as well as adults ...

(Tucker : 1981 : 156)

Tolkein's The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings and O'Brien's Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH were rated as the most enjoyable books by the children involved in this study. Similarly, The Coral Island and Island of the Blue Dolphins, although they are not overt fantasy, were rated highly by all the readers, the latter two stories

are adventures which deal with all sorts of dangers and survival techniques, and as such are representative of the children's enjoyment of the quest-type adventure.

Perhaps it was unfair to have pitted Marguerite Poland's fantasy works against such books as Mrs Frisby and The Rats of NIMH or Coral Island since both of these books have had time to prove themselves popular amongst children in the post-developmental age-group. But it would seem that although her works are smaller in stature, their subject matter is just not what children at this level are interested in. It is also not just a simple matter of the children having "grown out" of this kind of story, since Bridget (aged 10) said that she had read them when she was eight and had not enjoyed them then. Admittedly, the stories do on occasion come across as being bookish, and it is this factor, as well as the lack of "action" which made for their relative unpopularity amongst the readers. But despite the children's generally unenthusiastic responses to Marguerite Poland's fantasy, not all the feedback was negative, as some of the children admitted to having gained insight into animal behaviour and tribal customs and found that they could better identify with the local settings than with exotic locations. (The oldest pupil, Philip, however, said that he preferred exotic settings to local ones)

If nothing else, this study has emphasised the frequent discrepancy to be found between the tastes of adults and that of children, and shows the necessity for taking into account the views, responses and opinions of young readers. Adult critics who have hailed the works as being marvellous examples of South African fantasy are correct in terms of the quality of the literature : these works are extremely sound in terms of plot, settings, language and subject matter, but they fail in their appeal to the young reader. Perhaps Heale's hunch that South African literature is "too good" applies in this case, and it is only by the promotion of this "good" literature, by parents, teachers and librarians, that the children may, in time learn to

appreciate that which is not filled with heady excitement and "action". A personal belief remains, however, that these stories, read aloud by an expert teacher, would be more appealing to the children, since they are meant to be stories which are told by an oral narrator. They do most certainly lose a certain dimension and spontaneity by having to be read silently, and a loud reading to a class would certainly imbue the stories with the vigour of the oral narrator, and perhaps increase the childrens' enjoyment of these very worthwhile works of fantasy.

Pig and The Kayaboeties, representative of "realistic" fiction, were more popular than Marguerite Poland, but once again, were not as popular as Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH and The Coral Island. The oldest candidate (Philip, aged 14) rated Pig number eight out of ten. Although he responded well to the questions which were asked about the book and although he showed a very strong empathy with Michael as well as Trevor, he would probably have enjoyed The Kayaboeties more, since Pig is the story of a twelve-year old boy, and Philip has probably passed being interested in a younger boy's plight. Similarly, the youngest candidate, Bridget (aged 10) was simply too young for The Kayaboeties as she has not yet reached that stage of maturity where her choice of fiction includes works which are not fantasy, and which deal with the experiences of the adolescent. The story of Pig appealed most to Andreas and Mark, both twelve-year old boys who were able to identify with Michael. Twelve-year old Jenny, on the other hand rated The Kayaboeties more highly than Pig, for the obvious reason that Pig is specifically about the experiences of a boy rather than a girl, and she was better able to identify with Charlie, the teenage protagonist and narrator of The Kayaboeties.

As far as this particular study is concerned, the children responded with empathy and enthusiasm to the realistic fiction which they read. They were able to identify with the characters and their situations, and appear to have enjoyed the books for

these reasons. Contemporary realism set in South Africa holds a new excitement and relevance for the maturing teenager, as it offers a fairly new approach to literature. Our South African teenagers are probably not as sophisticated as their American and British counterparts having been subjected to a fairly conservative kind of education, but the contemporary realism which is being published, appeals to the older child in the post-developmental reading stage, as it deals with the specific concerns of the maturing child. The realism depicted in the South African books is still fairly restrained, and touches upon issues which affect a fairly average White child. None of the books deals in any detail with the problems of drug-abuse, abortion or sleazy sex, because the majority of White children, raised as they are in a system of Christian education, are simply not ready for such subject matter.

Contemporary realism in this country is exactly that : contemporary. There is no doubt that these books are relevant to the here and now, and may be unable to withstand the onslaught of time, as their subject matter will become dated too quickly. But that is no reason to ignore this substantial body of children's literature since it does have a role to play in their lives, albeit for a very specific time period. The underlying themes of friendship and the nurturing of decent human relationships are universal and defy the changes wrought by the passing of time. Future generations of children will still be able to glean the essential values which are expounded in these books despite the fact that they are somewhat dated. Who knows, they may eventually become historical novels, reflecting the way the great political upheavals of the 1980's and 1990's in this country affected the lives of the children? After all, many of Charles Dickens' novels reflected the contemporary social and political issues of the nineteenth century, and characters like Little Dorrit, Oliver Twist or Pip, represent the way in which children in the last century had to come to terms with their personal problems, against a broader socio-political

background. So too has Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird become a classic, despite it being a story about two young children growing up in a racialistic community. It is the abiding values imparted in books such as these which make them relevant to all generations of children. Even if the contemporary realism being written for children in the post-developmental reading stage never succeeds in gaining eternal status, it will at least have served a certain purpose for the children who read them in the here and now.

#### 4.5 "COMING OF AGE"

The new directions being taken in indigenous English fiction for children in the post-developmental reading stage represent a good beginning. This literature despite its many critics, continues to be published in an ever-increasing quantity. (Annexure H). Parents, teachers and librarians still have a major responsibility to make these books known and available to young readers. This study has assisted, it is hoped, in showing that much of our indigenous literature for older children is becoming a force with which to be reckoned, particularly in the South Africa of the 1990's, in which the old educational dispensation is under siege and in a state of unprecedented turmoil. The literature emerging from this country has an important role to play in the bridging of social and racial divides, and in guiding children towards a better understanding of one another and of the macrocosm of South African society. What is really needed is the working together of publishers, teachers and librarians to nurture prospective writers and readers so that our indigenous literature might increase in quality and stature and be able to stand alongside the great classics of our time. South African literature for children in the post-developmental reading stage needs to be granted the kudos which it deserves so that it may be recognised as being worthy of attention and eventually be able to realise its full potential and "come of age".

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ANNEXURES

- A. Letter sent to candidates who participated in this study, stating what would be required of them.
- B. Questionnaire circulated to members of book club.
- C. Letter from Maskew Miller Longman.
- D. Facsimile of entry form for 1992 Young Africa Award.
- E. How the children rated the 10 books and transcriptions of relevant sections of the tape-recorded interviews with the children.
- F. Extracts from primary texts.
- G. Letter from Jay Heale.
- H. Copies of back covers of some contemporary indigenous publications for children in the post-developmental reading stage.