Speaking to Both Children and Genre: Le Guin’s Ethics of Audience

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There are precisely as many genres as we need, genres whose conceptual shape is precisely determined by that need.

(Adena Rosmarin)

Writers who claim that they write only for themselves deny that the influence of either genre or a readership guides the writing. These writers argue by implication that they neither communicate with readers nor observe generic traditions; they simply write to themselves. They are self-proclaimed literary isolationists. Jill Paton Walsh (“The Writers in the Writer” 4), Katherine Paterson (47, 50), P. L. Travers (63), Mollie Hunter (12), and Michael Steig (Bottner 4) all directly point to themselves as at least partial audience in their commentaries on writing for children, but they don’t go so far as to claim that they don’t write for children. Arthur Ransome made “the reiterated denial that he wrote for children” (Wall 30), but he ultimately “made a distinction between writing for children and writing to children” (30), claiming the latter occupation for himself. Peter Hollindale believes that Ransome is less interested in child readers than he is childhood (“Signs” 31), which Hollindale considers a feature of the genre of children’s literature. In any case, writers for children who would deny both interest in and consciousness of form and audience argue that theirs is children’s literature entirely by accident. However, a book becomes a children’s book—intended by the writer or not—when critics identify generic features (text) and/or children find that the book speaks to them (context).

I’m more interested in the children’s writer who claims both to write children’s books and to write books for children—those writers who conflate text and context. When the children’s author describes “writing
Speaking to Both Children and Genre

...to children,” we are invited to see a rhetorical relationship between a writer and a reader; when the children’s writer discusses “writing children’s literature,” we are invited to consider the text as a member of a particular genre or text type. We shouldn’t be surprised when authors sound like rhetors at one moment, and the next moment—perhaps in the next sentence—they go on to talk about and even define their work in textual terms only. This authorial tendency to combine textual and contextual definitions of children’s literature frustrates critics eager to distinguish clearly between “book people” and “child people.” After discussing the blurring of these boundaries in general, I will show in particular how Ursula Le Guin, famous for blurring both the edges and ages of genre, creates a dialogue between the textual and the contextual as she attempts over time to define what she does. Ultimately I hope to show how Le Guin distinguishes between her audiences based on the ethics of both audience and genre.

Those authors who have primarily (though not solely) a rhetorical view of what they do see the text as a conduit for the delivery of their own message to real children. Beyond mere lecture, Betsy Byars, Mollie Hunter, Katherine Paterson, and C. S. Lewis all claim to engage in a dialogue with actual children. Byars’s sense of audience comes, she claims, directly from her own children, who also give her the ideas for her books (7). Hunter, too, credits dialogue with her children for her success (8–9). Paterson makes her process and aim clear: “I write for my own four children and for others who are faced with the question of whether they dare to become adult” (109). C. S. Lewis is perhaps the most well-known critic of the cult of the generalized child: There needs to be, he says, a dialogue between an author and a child, a real person with whom one either actually consults or about which the author can predict responses based on the history of acquaintance. Lewis points out that the “participants modify each other” and form “a community” (1075).

But these authors for children don’t always make clear distinctions between audience and genre. Authors as influential as those cited above seem to shift their gaze from genre to reader. For example, Lewis claims he writes in the particular genre of “children’s literature” in the cases when children’s literature “is the best art form for what [he has] to say” (1075). Here Lewis shows that he is as much engaged in a dialogue with genre as with some individual person, careful never to say which it is that he does (to whom he speaks?) in all cases. There is no small bit of irony in the fact that Lewis’s “art form” is as general as the generalized concept of the child audience that he cautions writers to avoid. Katherine Paterson
also makes a shift from audience to genre in one breath, blurring the
distinction between them. As if in response to Zohar Shavit’s claim that
“writing for children usually means that the writer is limited in his options
of text manipulation” (66), Paterson writes, “‘Don’t you feel constricted
writing for children?’ they’ll ask. William, don’t you find fourteen tightly
rhymed lines an absolute prison? Ah, Pablo, if you could just yank that
picture off that lousy scrap of canvas! You get the point” (33). What
Paterson and Lewis illustrate is that it is both easy and sensible to combine
the notions of genre and audience when one is writing in a genre named
for an audience—text and context become conflated. Genre and audience
are combined rather than confused with each other. These authors haven’t
made an error; they have made an erasure: They erase the distinction
between audience and genre in children’s literature.

Perhaps it isn’t odd to talk about genre as an audience. Genre is an
audience in its own way, an audience to which people write, a living
tradition with clear rules and expectations for discursive behavior. The
dual audience in this case is composed of both children and tradition
rather than that of children and adults.

The critic’s impulse, however, is to make a distinction between
categories—between texts and contexts. Peter Hunt suggests that “the
critic of children’s literature has only two choices”: She can either
decontextualize the text by ignoring the audience, or she can grant the
primacy of the audience as the foundation of the genre and communicate
to that audience, however perceived (“Necessary Misreadings” 108).
Hunt’s position is that there is an absolute and necessary choice. Lewis’s
and Paterson’s conflation show that such easy distinctions may be too
complicated to count on, if not actually impossible.

Respected critics can be as ambivalent about the differences between
texts and contexts as successful authors. Peter Hollindale considers “the
author’s textual negotiations with the child” (“Signs” 12) to be what
makes children’s literature “unique, and different in kind from other forms
of literature” (12), yet questions that negotiation when he says that “the
adult children’s author is always obsolete” (22) and that “children” is
“an increasingly unstable concept” (25). Jacqueline Rose maintains that
“there is no child behind the category ‘children’s fiction,’ other than the
one which the category itself sets in place” (10), yet she is concerned
about the potential for unethical authorial control over real child readers
that might result in a sort of “molestation” (70). Barbara Wall notes that
there is a “substantial barrier of age” between adult writer and child reader
that “may be surmounted or traversed” but never removed (20). Does
“traversing” the barrier mean that writers will “serve . . . their chosen
audience” (20)? Can an implied audience be served? For Wall insists that “the real author knows only the implied reader, a presence his or her text inescapably calls into being” (7). Wall, then, suggests that it is possible to traverse a barrier that is impossible to traverse. The implied audience that can be served is the genre itself.

Children’s writers who claim an audience may more easily weave issues of textuality into their discourse by talking about ethical fiction; ethical fiction is discussed in thematic and structural terms, borne of a concern for an audience. Claudia Mills, prolific both as a children’s writer and a critic of children’s literature, argues that critics of children’s literature “are more willing than many other critics to concede that one aim of a children’s book is to shape the evolving character of its readers” (181), even the “book people,” presumably. Even a critic like Jacqueline Rose, someone who denies the existence of the audience category “children,” claims that “writers for children must know and understand children” (70). Katherine Paterson makes this vow: “I cannot, will not, withhold from my young readers the harsh realities of human hunger and suffering and loss, but neither will I neglect to plant that stubborn seed of hope” (38). The distressing is not omitted; it is merely treated in a way that Paterson believes will work for a child audience, an audience of her own children. “Hopeful realism” then, becomes a special feature of Paterson’s vision of the genre of children’s literature. While Paterson refuses to water down issues, she also insists that there be a sense of hope by the end of the story. Her concern for audience forms the textual possibilities of her version of the genre—as simultaneously limiting and as limitless as the sonnet she compares it to above.

Writers who claim an audience of generic tradition rather than of children might end up with a product similar in structure and ethical quality to the writer who conflates audience and genre, but that is because they observe the needs of the genre or of the implied audience Wall herself implies. Ethical writers have continuously influenced the textual tradition of children’s fiction because of their concerns for children; subsequent efforts by writers less rhetorically or ethically conscious are affected because of their concerns for satisfying tradition. As if in response to Paterson, Jill Paton Walsh asks, “how can I feel any responsibility to my audience when I don’t know who my audience are?” (“The Writer’s Responsibility” 30). Wayne Booth argues that “most who have rejected ethical criticism . . . [claim] that authors must not be burdened with worries about the reader’s ultimate welfare if they are to serve their art properly” (127). Since Walsh doesn’t “know” the actual readers and since the readers, whoever they are, don’t have a responsibility to the writer,
Walsh is “responsible to nobody” (“The Writer’s Responsibility” 32) except to the book itself as artistic product (35). But the creation of ethical art isn’t limited to those with specific notions of a child audience or to those who have generalized notions of children. It is entirely possible that what one writer considers a matter of audience, another writer without rhetorical concerns might find to be a textual feature of children’s books. If Walsh doesn’t consider children as she writes her children’s books, she then writes with an eye focused on generic tradition. For her to write what she considers “children’s literature” while ignoring a sense of audience necessarily means that her guideline—her context—is genre, however she perceives it.

Both writers are known for their hopeful yet unflinching social realism. Paterson’s self-consciousness about an audience is the reason she writes hopeful literature; Walsh writes hopeful realism for her own reasons apart from audience considerations, though it works as children’s literature owing to, in part, the presence of this feature. Ethical art is art, nonetheless. Wayne Booth argues that “the distinction between genuine literature (or ‘poetry’) and ‘rhetoric’ or ‘didactic’ literature is entirely misleading if it suggests that some stories . . . are purged of all teaching” (151–52). The idea that all good art is ethical enables writers for children to serve both text and context . . . or the two traditionally demanding audiences of children and children’s literature. We see the same conflation of audience and art, text and context, ethics and genre in Le Guin’s self-critical discourse.

The idea of the crossover writer—the writer who writes for both children and adults—has been on children’s literature critics’ minds lately. Not much had been said about crossover writers before the special issue of The Lion and the Unicorn in 1978. David Galef has reintroduced the matter with his argument that “an equally complex but perhaps more fruitful query than [‘What is a children’s book?’] is ‘What enables an author to write both children’s books and adult fiction?’” (29). Critics are seeing the worth of examining the nature of children’s literature at the site of the successful crossover writer because such writers actually perform the genre distinctions in question. Mitzi Myers’s question about the crossover writer seems a natural one to ask of Le Guin: “[W]hat continuities or divergences mark the writings of those who create separate works for child and adult?” (120).

Le Guin, like Paterson and Hunter, is concerned with the real live child audience who reads her books. She describes her duty to her much younger audience by defining what she won’t do in the particular genre of children’s literature:
there’s a certain type of hopelessness that I just can’t dump on kids. On
grown-ups sometimes; but as a person with kids, who likes kids, who
remembers what being a kid is like, I find there are things I can’t inflict on
them. There’s a moral boundary, in this sense, that I’m aware of in writing
a book for young adults. (McCaffery and Gregory 82)

Like Hunter and Paterson, Le Guin refuses to absolve herself of any
responsibility. She shows here a rhetorical awareness regarding her
writing to children. Le Guin has written recently that “a denial of authorial
responsibility, a willed unconsciousness, is elitist, and it does impoverish
much of our fiction in every genre, including realism” (A Fisherman of the
Inland Sea 4–5). This statement, written to introduce a collection of short
stories for the adult market, seems to reinforce her comment above that
ethical art is not at all a matter restricted to the child audience. Le Guin
tells us that children “need to be—and usually want very much to be—
taught right from wrong” (“The Child and the Shadow” 65). Once a child
knows the difference, a child “[knows] what bad is. Grownups get
confused” (“Introduction, City of Illusions” 141). We all need moral art,
Le Guin seems to be saying, though perhaps in different degrees based on
age, and she marks the distinction between being preachy and being
ethical. In the introduction to The Word for World is Forest, Le Guin notes
that those writers who yield to the temptation of didacticism “forget about
liberty . . . and instead of legislating in divine arrogance, like God or
Shelley, they begin to preach.” So, while Le Guin has a special concern for
children, she is ambivalent about the real distinction between ethical
fiction for adults and for children:

[W]riters for children write with as much concern about audience as writers
for adults—indeed, usually with a more conscious and perhaps more
ethically alert concern. They have to; writing can damage people. Writers
for kids don’t want to damage kids. (Letter to the author)

The adult audience and the child audience, despite their differing degrees
of confusion about right and wrong and their needs for ethical art, may not
be so very different that they provide Le Guin with a useful guide for
marking generic difference—a difference she must see for her to comment
on her “children’s books” at all.

Le Guin seems forceful when she denies audience awareness alto-
tgether, not unlike Walsh and despite her own protestation about serving
actual children. Le Guin claims that she doesn’t “know of anything you
‘do’ for kids that is different than you do for adults” (McCaffery and
Gregory 82). Despite her observation that she has a stronger sense of her
fiercely loyal readership now than she did years ago, Le Guin still
maintains that to think of the reader “is fatal” (Walsh 203). “Ultimately
you write alone,” she tells the readers of her new book on the craft of writing (*Steering the Craft*). But by addressing another audience altogether—a particular generic tradition rather than a generic group of children—Le Guin can have her ethics and child audience, too, all with a clear sense of how her writing for children and adults separate from each other. Le Guin personifies genre as an audience with needs, expectations, and demands, and she explains the risk one runs by running counter to the demands of this audience:

The beauty of your own tradition is that it carries you. It flies, and you ride it. Indeed, it’s hard not to let it carry you, for it’s older and bigger and wiser than you are. It frames your thinking and puts winged words in your mouth. If you refuse to ride, you have to stumble along on your own two feet; if you try to speak your own wisdom, you lose that wonderful fluency. You feel like a foreigner in your own country, amazed and troubled by what you see, not sure of the way, not able to speak with authority. (*Earthsea Revised* 10)

Regardless of whether she has tried to defy genre or write to it, Le Guin has always used literary genre to guide her efforts; in fact, by constantly bringing our attention to her defiance of it, she reveals how she uses genre to define herself, to give herself authority, even if it is all (or mostly) by opposition. Since she has claimed that there are few definitions of children’s books (Reinking and Willingham 57), is there an established tradition to which Le Guin can speak that simultaneously speaks to children, that satisfies their (her?) need for ethical fiction, and that marks itself as distinct from her literature for adults?

Le Guin has discussed the special moral dimensions of another genre: “Fantasy is the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil in the soul” (“The Child and the Shadow” 64). In fact, she points out that “realistic fiction for children is one of the very hardest media in which to [teach children right from wrong]” (65), highlighting the difficulties she faces in finding a surefire ethical address to children. So, Le Guin professes confidence in children’s superiority to adults in identifying both the moral and the real; where else but in fantasy can the child’s supposed superiority in both areas be used to best advantage?

There are no real science fiction tales for children among Le Guin’s texts and few outright fantasies for adults. Realism cuts across the two groups, however, with the qualification that the children’s realism is a frame for a fantasy within the tale. Hollindale makes a similar observation about the genre of children’s literature in general, and, in a gesture that calls Le Guin to mind, uses the tradition of fantasy for his comparison: “[T]here is an implicit definition of children’s literature which has
little necessarily to do with children; it is not the title of a readership but of a genre, collateral perhaps, with fable and fantasy” (“Ideology” 9). Le Guin implies the equation of fantasy and children’s literature:

And I also rejoice in the privilege of sharing this honor, if I may, with my fellow writers, not only in the field of children’s books, but in that even less respectable field, science fiction. For I am not only a fantasist but a science fiction writer, and odd though it may seem, I am proud of both. (“National Book Award Acceptance Speech” 52)

She also makes the link between fantasy and children’s fiction when she asserts that “fantasists are childish, childlike. They play games” (“Do-It-Yourself Cosmology” 122), though fantasy is a game “played for very high stakes” (“From Elfland to Poughkeepsie” 79) because of its focus on moral matters. Le Guin’s use of the words adult and children’s seem to serve as synonyms for “our world” (present or future) and “alternative world” (fantasy), respectively. The genre of children’s literature is the same as the generic tradition that, according to Le Guin, is implicitly moral when it is well-written—Good when it is good. And it is good to avoid didacticism, which one can do if one gives up the control of what gets written to the work itself, which Le Guin claims is essential (Steering the Craft 149); if control is given over to the “winged words” put into the writer’s mouth by generic tradition, Le Guin can write good/Good fantasy, write moral tales for children, and not end up preaching to children. From the time of the essays reproduced in The Language of the Night on fantasy and science fiction (1972–1988) until her letter to me late in November of 1995, Le Guin has remained consistent about her views on fantasy and children’s literature and the special role of morality in those genres. The consistency becomes, in effect if not in intent, a conflation of fantasy and children’s literature, which is a conflation of text and context not unlike that practiced by Lewis, who wrote fantasy for children and science fiction for adults, or by Paterson, who writes realism for children almost exclusively and for whom children’s realistic fiction and ethical realism can be equated without a real need for dividing age-based genres.

Le Guin claims that she “finally got [her] pure fantasy vein separated off from [her] science fiction vein, by writing A Wizard of Earthsea and then The Left Hand of Darkness” (“A Citizen of Mondath” 25). Since 1973 when she wrote the words above, Le Guin has continued to pursue various generic paths. Having worked out the “different veins,” she continued the fantasy vein by starting to write specifically for young children through picture books: Leese Webster (1979), Solomon Leviathan’s Nine Hundred and Thirty-First Trip around the World (1983), although this story was first written when Le Guin was a young adult; A Visit from
Dr. Katz (1988); Fire and Stone (1989); the Catwings books (1990–1999); and A Ride on the Red Mare’s Back (1992). All of these texts, all for children, have clear and necessary elements of fantasy if they aren’t fantasy outright. Interestingly, Very Far Away from Anywhere Else (1976), The Beginning Place (1980), and Tehanu (1990)—her books usually recognized as those for young adults—clearly represent a range from realism to high fantasy with mixing going on in between. Young adult literature—a literature of transition from age to age—may well mark where Le Guin allows her age-based genres to blur regarding morality and literary genre. In any case, from City of Illusions (1967) to Unlocking the Air (1996), Le Guin has kept her adult readers pretty firmly in the genres of realism and science fiction. Even the Orsinian Tales, set in a fictitious nation, are meant to play in the affairs of Eastern Europe, not Roke.

Gerard Genette observes that all genres contain several other genres (65); in Le Guin’s case, rather, certain genres exist as other genres, as seen in the fantasy/children’s literature relationship. Truth to tell, while Le Guin’s fantasy is also known as her literature for children, it is also appropriate for everyone—an inclusive definition of children’s literature that is as old as its status as a field of study. “Fantasy is the great age-equalizer,” she tells us (“Dreams Must Explain Themselves” 49). Is this simply another fly in the ointment of demarcation? If so, it should neither surprise nor distress us. She pulls in the adults as well, after all. But while fantasy is not incongruous with adult readers (as children’s literature is not), it is fantasy that enables Le Guin to talk about children, children’s literature, and morality. Ironically, fantasy and science fiction might be two genres that help Le Guin discover a genre otherwise invisible: adult literature. Famous for both her treatment of the “other” in literature and for defying genre, Le Guin may have found herself first confronted with the “other” when she was introduced to age-based genre with the publication of A Wizard of Earthsea. Before Ged, what had been simply different genres—realism, short fiction, science fiction, the essay—suddenly became subcategories of adult literature(s)—genres that she wrote to when writing to adults. Despite Le Guin’s discourse on morality and the inclusion of older readers, we continue to recognize Le Guin’s children’s books by the code word fantasy, we recognize her books for adults by the code words realism and science fiction and nonfiction. Maureen Thum’s description of Wilhelm Hauff seems an apt description of Le Guin: Le Guin, like Hauff, explores the “area of wonder, of free-floating potentialities and magical intercessions associated with the child’s ‘unreal’ world of fantasy, and with . . . the ‘real’ world of the adult” (3).

Brian Attebery reminds us that Le Guin’s “first three books of fantasy
appeared interspersed with her science fiction novels,” and so “it is not surprising . . . that her fantasies share the same concerns as her science fiction” (165); David Galef argues that thematic parallelism is seen in a number of “cross-over” writers as well (29). Le Guin’s shared set of themes (freedom, home, journey, identity, otherness as seen in the beast and alien, and the courage to construct a self in the world) surface in all of her writing; they are merely articulated in different contexts. Perry Nodelman reminds us that “many readers, both children and adults, seek out further texts by authors they have enjoyed, because they expect a common thread, a consistency in subject and style, in all the texts an author produces” (145). This is certainly true of Le Guin’s readers. Readers of The Dispossessed follow Le Guin to Always Coming Home, perhaps to come home in different ways in different genres; the young readers of A Ride on the Red Mare’s Back will find in Ged’s story and then in Shevek’s those same concerns about always coming home, though they travel from folklore to high fantasy to science fiction to get there. However, given the clear generic alliances Le Guin makes between fantasy and realism (traditional or science fiction) and age, her “approaches to the themes vary considerably” (Attebery 166).

Though genre isn’t a barrier to Le Guin’s themes, genre is an influence felt from her earliest foray into children’s literature with the publication of A Wizard of Earthsea. Her entry into the realm of heroic fantasy with the Earthsea series was allowable, she observes, because they were published as children’s books. “So long as [she] behaved [herself], obeyed the rules, [she] was free to enter the heroic realm” (Earthsea Revised 7). Le Guin found that she needed to challenge genre’s influence in order to speak as herself. Until she realized she was the mouthpiece of tradition, she confused security with freedom; once she realized this, she says, the long succession of “genre-busting” texts began—texts for adults, that is. As a writer writes within a given genre, “she begins to write against the genre, thus changing and renewing it. The rigid system of genres and modes [begins] to disintegrate” (Nikolajeva 7). By bucking tradition, Le Guin gives up the authority vested in her as a duly appointed officer of traditional genres and creates a new authority for herself. Always Coming Home defies demarcation; Malafrena asks us to consider a fictitious country in a Europe we know. Although she claims that “people are writing differently and the genres are all merging” (Walsh, “I Am a Woman Writer” 198), her children’s literature remains fairly genre-faithful. She simultaneously plays with genre in her adult texts while respecting the integrity of the children’s literature/fantasy relationship.

So, despite all of her “genre-busting,” Le Guin keeps genre clear in her
sights (or watches it over her shoulder). Todorov notes that “it is . . . considered a sign of authentic modernity in a writer if he ceases to respect the separation of genres” (13). Rosmarin, too, argues that “to be a modern writer and to write generically is a contradiction in terms” (7). “We forget,” Scholes reminds us, “that when we attribute total freedom of choice to an artist we are constructing a fiction of freedom, projecting our own needs and desires upon a figure who is far less free than we may assume” (Textual Power 117). So as much as Le Guin defies genre expectations and tradition, as much as she “seems to contain within herself a multitude of writers” (Prose 10), she also respects the rules as one price to pay to satisfy a need—the need to provide moral literature for young readers, the need to have a clear sense of audience that combines people and tradition, and the need to write what is distinguishable as children’s literature in her own body of work. Perhaps, then, we underestimate the influence of genre on Ursula Le Guin. Moreover, perhaps we overestimate the ability of writers and critics of children’s literature to separate matters of audience from matters of genre and matters of literary communication from matters of “art.” While it is certain that there are very successful writers who lay claim to moral relationships with child readers, those acts of literary communication are also simultaneously hopeful communiqués to a demanding and clear tradition.

Should genre be separated so neatly from audience in our consideration of children’s literature? Le Guin’s own writing of all kinds illustrates the problems with doing so. In the most significant ways Le Guin’s notion of the child is her notion of the genre of fantasy; the “conceptual shape” is the same. Her themes remain the same for all audiences, but the genres do not. While Le Guin may be a crossover writer “trying out identities” (Knoepflmacher and Myers ix), she is not creating a “colloquy between past and present selves” (vii) but rather is engaging in a dialogue between multiple present selves, genres, and audiences. Although it would be foolish to discount the importance that individual children have played, and do play, in the writing contexts of many authors, the context and expectations of genre are more accessible for writers and seem to match the needs of those children’s writers to find a distinctive form of address. Markers like “hope” and “morality” can serve to guide the author who would write in a genre named for an audience who will remain largely unknown; separations by fantasy and realism (including science fiction) can help the ethical crossover writer to keep some lines straight.

The conflation of audience and genre, as seen in the commentaries of Le Guin, Paterson, Lewis, and others, is a phenomenon that itself marks literature for children as a unique genre shaped in part by its own demands.
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Notes

1 For a thorough, clear, and in all ways useful discussion of the narrative relationships between authors (implied and real) and audiences (implied and real) in children’s literature, see Barbara Wall’s *The Narrator’s Voice: The Dilemma of Children’s Fiction*.

2 Aidan Chambers warns us to “be wary of using as evidence in criticism what an author says about himself, publicly or privately: a caution we have not sufficiently taken to heart in talking about children’s books” (98). While this is good advice, authorial commentary gives us insight into the different ways authors think about their relationship(s) to their texts, audiences, and genre(s). Finding paradox or contradiction in the ways any one author talks about audiences and books can serve our understanding of how all writers continue to construct and complicate the notion of “childhood” as well as “children’s literature.”

3 See John Goldthwaite’s *The Natural History of Make-Believe* for a recent discussion of Lewis’s questionable literary morality.

4 Here consider, for instance, *A Visit from Dr. Katz*. It is only in the juxtaposition of the written and visual texts that the reader can really understand the imaginative game being played by mother and daughter in the story. While the pictures reveal one clear, realistic setting, the words describe a slightly different realistic (though slightly odd) set of circumstances. In short, the “Dr. Katz” described in the text is revealed by the pictures to be Marianne’s two cats who have made a visit to her sick bed. While no division is absolute, especially in Le Guin’s work, this strong generic trend in her body of works is striking.

Works Cited


