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Not Safe for the Nursery?— Toni Morrison's Storybooks for Children*

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Abstract

In recent years, Toni Morrison and her son Slade, collaborating with two artists (Griselle Potter and Pascal Lemaître), published five books for children that received mixed responses. The Morrison team's project in the field of children's literature offers pertinent cases for us to reconsider critical issues involved in this field—readership, censorship, power relations, didacticism, genres and forms, etc. In this paper, I would like to start with a discussion of adult feedback on these storybooks to see what expectations parents, teachers, librarians, reviewers hold for children's books in general. Then, I will set to examining how the norms and ideologies children's literature in the past two hundred years have been codified. Finally, with a brief analysis of these storybooks, we may come to a tentative evaluation of the authors' and artists' collective contribution to children's literature in the new millennium. Generally,

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Toni Morrison and her partners write not only for children. These five picture books and fable comics adopt the strategy of Aesopian writing: they are written ostensibly for young readers, however, under playful banter they communicate nuances of meaning to an audience composed of both children and adults. In these subversive texts, the Morrison team tries to make heard the voices of the child/the weak/the colonized. There are many spaces between the lines, and between word and image, enabling readers of all ages to arrive at different levels of interpretation.

Key Words: Toni Morrison, children's literature, fable, the picture book, illustration

Wandering from adult to children's fiction is far from new; E. B. White, Rudyard Kipling, Leo Tolstoy, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Alice Walker all have applied their pens to children's books. In recent years, Toni Morrison and her son Slade, collaborating with two artists (Giselle Potter and Pascal Lemaître), have published five books for children that have received mixed responses. This paper aims to examine the texts produced and the criticisms raised to consider the problematic nature of children's literature in our time.

The first book created by the Morrison team, *The Big Box* (1999), is about three kids placed in a luxuriously furnished room, with three locks on the door because "they cannot handle their freedom." The second book, *The Book of Mean People* (2002), catalogues (in an ironic tone and with *double entendre*) the "mean" people in a sweet bunny's everyday life. In the other three books—*The Ant or the Grasshopper* (2003a), *The Lion or the Mouse* (2003b), and *Poppy or the Snake* (2004)—the Morrison team adapts Aesop's fables to a comic format in which the concluding morals refuse to close off.[1] The quality of collaboration between the co-authors, the artists, and the editor deserves admiration;[2] however, most readers feel that these storybooks are unlike the books for children with which they are familiar.

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[1] According to a report from *The Write News*, an online publishers' trade journal, Scribner signed a contract of a half dozen series of fables with Toni and Slade Morrison and Pascal Lemaître the artist. That is to say, three more adapted versions of Aesop's stories are going to the market ("Scribner signs," 2002).

[2] The Morrison team's setting of fables into comic form creates a world of interplay between image and word which makes reading these books a challenging but entertaining experience. The members on the Morrison team are good professionals. Toni Morrison, herself, is a respected writer; the co-author, Slade Morrison, is an artist and an adult who likes to challenge conservative ideas. The artwork of Lemaître appears in *New Yorker* and *Time* as well as in children's books; editor Nan Graham, who also edited Hillary Rodham Clinton's *Living History*, is Scribner's editor-in-chief and vice-President.

Morrison's publishing project in the field of children's literature offers inspiring occasions for students to reconsider critical issues involved in this field—readership, censorship, power relations, didacticism, etc. However, until now these texts have been curiously neglected; very few scholarly analyses are available. In this paper, I would like to begin with a discussion on adult feedback on these storybooks to see what expectations parents, teachers, librarians, reviewers hold for children's books. Then, I will set to examining the norms and ideologies codified in children's literature in the past two hundred years. Finally, with a brief analysis on Morrison's storybooks, we may come to a tentative evaluation of the authors' collective contribution to children's literature of the new millennium.

I. Children, Adults, and Power

Despite Toni Morrison's canonical status, the Morrison team's storybooks received, at best, only a lukewarm response; most of the reviews are unfavorable. Librarian Ellen Fader says, in *School Library Journal*, that *The Big Box* "is a book that will have a hard time finding an audience: it looks like a picture book for younger children, yet the theme and images require some sophistication and a desire to explore life's boundaries" (1999: 227). An anonymous review in *Publishers Weekly* comments that "ultimately the tale is mundane; the social commentary on childhood, freedom and the tendency of parents to give children things instead of time and attention seems aimed more at adult readers than children" ("Review," 1999). Roger Sutton, editor-in-chief of *The Horn Book*, is reported to have criticized the Nobel laureate indirectly, "Some authors should stick with their original genre" (Donahue, 2002). Morrison's second book *The Book of Mean People*, which catalogues "mean people" from a child's point of view, evokes still more displeasure. Librarian Judith Constantinides voices a typical criticism: "The book could

be used as a springboard to discuss anger and shouting, etc., but it does not give any reassurance that any of these people [parents and other adults] are ever caring and loving" (2002: 132). As for the three fables in comics, very few reviews are available, but the response of John Peters, a librarian of New York Public Library, on *Who's Got Game? The Lion or the Mouse* is not unexpected: "Morrison's celebrity status may sell the book, but this patchy, illogical episode isn't likely to sell many readers on its lesson" (2003).

Parents, publishers, librarians, and teachers are the most important adult readers of children's literature. Their opinions reveal the norms contemporary society has prescribed for children's books. Their comments show that children's literature is usually defined as a type of writing that is easy to read, didactic and unambiguous; that books for children are supposed to offer positive images of parents, teachers, and persons in authority and to convey a coherent moral vision.[3] Morrison's books challenge these expected standards and address "inappropriate" issues (such as power and control). Their debut work, *The Big Box*, exposes how narrowly children and childhood are defined. Standing not only for a prison for undisciplined children, "the big box" is also a metaphor of the biased, stereotypical education that adults impose upon young people. *The Book of Mean People*, the second

[3] In fact, though a respected author for adults, Toni Morrison's novels are considered unsuitable for the young by some parents and educators. As far as I know, her novels encountered censorship twice in schools in the past years. In the first case, Daphne High School, Alabama, accepted a parent's challenge that *Song of Solomon* contains sexually explicit images. The novel was removed from the assigned list of a sophomore college-preparatory class, in spite that it is on the Alabama Department of Education's list of approved books. In the second case, the school board for Littleton Public School District, Colorado, decided to pull Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* from the shelves of its high school libraries due to a parent who challenged its explicit description of incestuous rape. According to American Library Association, she was one of the most frequently challenged authors in 2002, 2004, and 2005 (American Library Association, 2006).

storybook by the Morrisons, adopts a child's perspective and narrative voice, and is even more subversive or iconoclastic. These three fables, though clothed in the apparently innocent form of the comics, hide complicated intertextual references in moments of simple delight.[4] In sum, Toni Morrison and her partners are not writing for children only; they are endeavoring to appeal to an audience composed of both children and adults. Hence, when the adult (who wields power, speaks for, and makes decisions for children) criticizes the books as far more than their apparently targeted readers—children—can handle, he is off the mark.[5] Morrison's texts, challenging to the child and the adult reader alike, are designed for various levels of interpretation. They form a battleground for debate and discussion; they invite children and adults to read together and exchange perspectives. The Morrison team's publishing project in children's literature, in this way, serves dual purpose, challenging current institutions and encouraging a rewarding collaborative reading experience that more equally empowers child and adult.

Being African-American writers, Toni and Slade Morrison certainly intend to portray a distinctively African-American worldview in their books. In addition to African cast and cultural elements, the Morrison team also attempts to "liberate" the child

[4] Comics are generally considered a form for the young, but in the past decades it has also developed into a highly experimental genre for adults. The common image of a comic was of a cheaply produced slice of entertainment for children, but now there is a huge array of subject matter for adults—everything from sexual fantasy to satire and political documentary. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986), a pictorial narrative of a Polish Jew caught up in the Holocaust, is the first Pulitzer Prize-winning comic book.

[5] As the review of Peters (2003) indicates "the average reader" of children's literature feels the Morrisons' fables difficult to understand. Readers today are familiar with only a few simplified versions of Aesopic fables, while Toni and Slade Morrison attempt to recover the complex use of the fables in the oral tradition.

reader and children's literature from the tyranny of adult control.[6] In the following, I will explore the nature of traditional children's literature and compare it with a long-existing alternative tradition called Aesopian (children's) literature.[7] I will, then, examine how the coauthors of these storybooks appropriate strategies of Aesopian language in their cross-audience writing in order to bring changes and new visions to their storybooks.

II. Tales of Two Rabbits

Definitions of literature for children have long been debated. Most would have it that it should only include fiction written specifically for children, while others argue that books both children and adults might read are included (for example, the *Harry Potter* books). No matter how it is defined, the truth is that children's literature addresses double audience (Shavit, 1986: 83). Behind each text meant for children, there is always an adult addressee. Adult involvement in children's literature is pervasive: from production, distribution, marketing, to the use and teaching of the materials. Before a children's storybook reaches their little hands, it has to acquire approval from a series of adults (Shavit, 1999). Raymond Williams maintains that books written for children reveal a "selective tradition" in which a society's behavioral standards and expectations are reflected and legitimated (1989: 58). Children's literature, as a representation of the selective tradition, in its history of about 150 years has been a "conservative medium" produced by adults, sold to adults, in order to solidify social values for the young generation. The cultural

[6] In recent studies, the colonized-colonizer opposition is applied to the child-adult power relation in children's literature.

[7] The term was first coined in Russia to refer to subversive children's literature in former USSR. Aesopian writing generally means a delicate system of allusions to otherwise unpublishable notions about life and ideology. Due to the necessity of working through a censor, Aesopian writing is characterized by paradoxes and multilayered richness in meaning (Loseff, 1984).

establishment always has conceived of children's literature as a stronghold for the dominant society's hierarchies of race, class, and gender.

In this light, it is not surprising that Toni and Slade Morrison's subversive books elicit negative reviews from librarians and hostile criticism from parents and teachers. Being an experienced writer, Toni Morrison would have expected this response, but she still chose to voice subversive ideas in children's books.[8] As African-American writers, Toni and Slade Morrison cannot possibly write their texts in the style of traditional or "innocent" children's literature, which functions to incorporate and preserve "selected" values. I would say that if the Morrisons planned to write a story of a rabbit, they would definitely create one about the shrewder Brer Rabbit rather than the sweet Peter Rabbit.

Paul T. Connolly compares the two rabbits and concludes that though the stories of Peter Rabbit and Brer Rabbit share similar plot—a greedy rabbit illicitly enters a garden, tries to evade a farmer or a larger animal, and then enjoys getting his fill—they belong to two different traditions (1999: 149-152). *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter, 1902) is a classic written with a modern concept of childhood in mind, while Brer Rabbit stories, a corpus of trickster tales from African folktales which had been extremely popular among slaves in the American South before it was written down as part of Uncle Remus' tales for children, originally was not intended for children.[9]

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[8] In the process of finding a publisher, a skeptic told Toni Morrison that publishers usually wouldn't publish books in which the child at the end is not reconciled with the adult point of view (Capriccioso, 2003). Even a writer of her stature might be rejected because she planned to write something atypical.

[9] Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* was published in 1880 and considered from then on a book for (white) children. Harris was a journalist in Atlanta, Georgia. His Uncle Remus' folk tales are stories that he collected in the plantations from black Southerners.

Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit is spirited, adventurous, and naughty. He is too ignorant to fear, but is allowed to make mistakes and learn a lesson. The child reader is supposed to identify with young Peter, a kid who is well-loved by a mother and well-protected in a home. Peter is lucky that the farmer, Mr. McGregor, does not get him, but his deviation has almost made him another delicious pie on Mrs. McGregor's dining table. The story of this beautiful rabbit entertains the child and at the same time delivers a valuable educational lesson of obedience—we know that Peter's father was caught and became a pie, and that disobedient Peter ends up ill in bed and is deprived of a delicious supper of bread, milk, and blackberries.

The Brer Rabbit story (or sometimes known as the tale of "tar baby"), originating in West African oral tradition, is basically amoral. Small and helpless, Brer Rabbit is a trickster, who uses his cunning to escape by exploiting the vulnerability of his adversaries (usually larger animals or humans). Unlike Peter Rabbit, who has siblings and a loving mother, Brer Rabbit is alone in the world, dependent only on himself. Struggling with harsh natural environment and a world with limited resources, the cunning trickster had been assigned an inferior position in the natural order. Tellers and listeners of the trickster tale, who were living in a condition not unlike that of Brer Rabbit, usually identified themselves with the trickster and celebrated his triumph over a powerful enemy in each encounter. It was in a hostile environment, potentially destructive to the well-being of the individual, that Brer Rabbit became a hero. John W. Roberts points out that magic, one of the most important elements in European fairy tales, is absent in African trickster tradition (1989: 27). Trickster tales often celebrate values or actions that are disapproved of by society, but the hero is seldom blamed for its cunning and greediness—survival skills are highlighted at the cost of morality (1989: 28-29).

The trickster tale of Brer Rabbit was not intended specifically for children. It was the story of the poor, the weak, and the repressed. But in the spread of Brer Rabbit stories in the American

South, they gradually acquired a quasi-children's literature status in the nineteenth century. Lawrence W. Levine explains why the trickster tales were popular among slaves: "[r]egardless of where the tales came from, the essential point is that slaves quickly made them their own and through them revealed much about themselves and their world" (1978: 82). From Africa to America, life did not seem less harsh or oppressive and, this time, they had to face new enemies—the white masters of the American South. Roger Abrahams explains that in the plantations of the American South, a link developed between the weak animal, the slave, and the child:

> In the guise of the small (childlike) animal, the Negro is perhaps fulfilling the role in which he has been cast by his white "masters." At the same time, in this role he is able to show a superiority over those larger and more important than himself through his tricks, thus partially salving his wounded ego. (1964: 64)

On the one hand, the trickster as a small and weak animal reveals the hindered and delayed development of black identity under white oppression; on the other hand, the trickster's deviate actions illustrate feelings of rebelliousness against the values of a system which denied consideration of its well-being.

It is important to note that the story of Brer Rabbit, a submerged protest against the injustice of the social environment, passed censorship and was well regarded by the white masters as harmless childish tales. As I have said, the stories of Peter Rabbit and Brer Rabbit stand for two traditions in children's literature. One is "innocent" or "genuine" children's literature; the other is quasi-children's literature, subversive texts disguised as innocuous entertainment.

Writers and artists finding themselves under strict censorship may develop techniques of masking sensitive issues with seemingly innocent content. Using allusions, metaphors, and other devices, they create texts with many layers of meaning. One such example comes from a quasi-children's literature that the Russians have

labeled "Aesopian." Ray J. Parrott defines Aesopian language as a "language of hidden meanings and deceptive means [used] to criticize . . . national life, politics and society" (Tumanov, 1999: 129). In other words, Aesopian writing is a kind of submerged critique of state policy or mainstream culture. In different cultures in different time, we can find a lot of examples of "Aesopian" literature; the Brer Rabbit tale is only one of them.[10]

Generally, the writers of "Aesopian children's literature" envisage three types of readers: an enlightened adult reader, a child reader, and the censor. The enlightened adult reader is insightful; he or she is expected to decode the text as the writer really wishes, making sense of allusions, irony, parody, allegory, and so on, against the backdrop of social and political reality. The child reader is supposed to read any given text as (innocent) children's literature, while the censor is hoped to read "like a child and not perceive (or even attempt to perceive) any subversive Aesopian subtext" (Tumanov, 1999: 129-130).

The Morrisons' picture books and comics adopt the strategy of Aesopian writing. They are written ostensibly for young readers; however, under the playful banter, they communicate nuances of meanings to a cross-audience of children and adults. With the absence of the real "oppressors" such as a Stalinist bureaucracy of former USSR or the white masters of the American South, this new kind of literature for children maintains its subversive nature and aims to make the voice of the child/the weak/the colonized heard. These texts have a lot of spaces between the lines and between word and image, enabling the reader to arrive at their own interpretations.

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[10] Practitioners of Aesopian language use children's literature to conceal subversive content, so they can avoid censorship or direct attack from enemies. Similar cases can be found in Aesop's fables, fairy tales by Charles Perrault and women writers in the late seventeenth-century France, and Salman Rushdie's novels such as *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (Acton, 1997: 158-159).

III. Voice of "the Child"

Critical responses reveal teachers' and parents' discontent with the content of Morrison's storybooks: the texts hold too many ideas of nonconformity and paradoxes, sophisticated visual and textual signs and wordplay are probably beyond children's comprehension. Childhood has been long defined as a state of incompleteness, and children are considered vulnerable as they lack experience and knowledge. Children's literature accordingly serves a one-directional communication purpose aiming at instilling moral values in children. In order to help children digest the messages intended for them, most texts undergo a process of "purification" in which undesirable elements such as controversy and ambiguity are removed.

In terms of power structures in traditional books for children, the voice of the child is seldom heard. If we place children's literature in the context of post-colonialism, the voice of the child is just like the voice of the other. When the adult—I mean the censor, not the insightful reader—suddenly recognizes in the Morrisons' books the voice that is more spoken about than speaking, more written about than writing, he or she certainly feels disturbed, for the adult authority is challenged by the previously muted, and the meek now turns defiant. Roderick McGillis reflects on our treatment of children and says that "our continuing inability to treat them as anything but colonial subjects," is a problem (2000: 224). In my reading of *The Big Box* and *The Book of the Mean People*, I think the Morrisons' picture books take strides toward liberating the child. Both books are not stories of realism; they are emblematic. The interlay of child and adult viewpoints, the naïve, folkloric double-spread illustrations that contrast pastoral nature and materialistic urban life, the short narratives of praxis, all inspire the child and the adult to think and then tell together their own interpretations of their life experience.

Incorporating rebellious ideas into one's writing is but one

way to inspire and to liberate the reader. And, most adult readers may not consider nonconformist elements to be the real causes making the Morrisons' books problematic, since disobedience is not new in children's literature.[11] Yet it is important to note how Morrison and her partners use nonconformity in their stories. In those traditional or "normal" children's books (such as *Peter Rabbit*), rebellion is a means to confirm the child's self-esteem and spiritedness, not an issue presented to trigger debate, discussion, or reflection. To illustrate this difference, let us read the beginning lines of *The Book of Mean People*, in which the innocent narrator complains:

> This is a book about mean people.
> Some mean people are big.
> Some little people are mean.
> There are people who smile when they are being mean.
> Mostly, mean people frown.
> SHOUTING is a favorite thing of mean people.
> But some of the meanest people whisper.
> These are the mean people I know.[12] (2002)

Each sentence is simple and each word is smartly set into its place. As every simple sentence above enlists a type of mean people, its respective illustration further describes in visual images the identity of such a mean person: a tall austere father, a little diapered brother who lifts up the bunny's ears and crossed them over, a smiling mother forcing our hero to eat green peas, an angry mother frowning at his refusing the peas, some "friends" who are

[11] Even the story of Peter Rabbit conveys subversive messages. And in the past decades, one of the best-known and most admired picture books of child disobedience is Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963). Alison Lurie's well-known book *Not in Front of the Grown-Ups: Subversive Children's Literature* (1990) claims that literature for children is basically subversive. Compared with its counterpart in this paper, Aesopian writing, the two types of writing appeal to different readership so they do not hold the same levels of subversiveness.

[12] All the five storybooks are not paginated.

shouting, and some "friends" who are sneaking. The playful performance of word and image contextualizes the use of the word "mean." The bunny continues:

> My grandparents are mean.
> My grandmother tells me to sit down.
> My grandfather tells me to sit up.
> How can I sit down and sit up at the same time?
> My mother is mean. She says I don't listen.
> She says, "DO YOU HEAR ME?"
> I can't hear her when she is screaming.
> . . . . . .
> Big people are little when they are mean.
> But little people are not big when they are mean. (Morrison, 2002)

Simple words and sentences are not necessarily simple in meaning, since words should not be taken at face value. For example, what do the last two lines of this quote above say? Big and little are not only about sizes; they are also related to moral evaluation. Toni Morrison once said in an interview that the mean people are not really mean. Children are simply speaking a language that they are trying to learn.

> What does it mean to waste time? What doe it mean to sit up and sit down? This is the time when children are learning syntax and double entendre and what you really mean. That's the point of the "meanness." [The child is] not around villains. He's trying to wade his way through what for a six or seven year-old is a very complicated world. (Capriccioso, 2003)

Toni Morrison continues that all these ideas of childlike wordplay came from a child: Slade (or the Slade when he was nine). As for Toni Morrison, she states that her responsibility in this collaborative project is putting ideas and stories into poetry: it is a child's language even to other children; she herself "never would have developed that kind of inquiry. Kids understand it because

they're there" (Capriccioso, 2003).

In this collaborative project, Toni and Slade Morrison, together with artist Pascal Lemaître, invite readers to explore the issues of power relations and the use of language in a child's everyday life in a meditative reading process. The total design of the book reveals that the adult reader is supposed to read carefully with the child, appreciating details in each illustration and even examining clues hidden in the paratext—the title page, the copyright page, and the notes of dedication and acknowledgement. If the adult reader does not do this, he or she may assume the role of the unperceiving censor of Aesopian writing. However, if he or she does read carefully, this thinking adult reader may chuckle when, for example, spotting Toni and Slade Morrison's smart dedicatory line on the copyright page—

> To brave kids everywhere (mean people, you know who you are). (2002)

Moreover, under this very line, a small illustration celebrates childhood by showing the bunny and his little pet dog, both naked, jumping away happily toward an Edenic garden of pastel pinks and greens. For the child reader, the bunny and his pet successfully tackle pressures and threats in daily life. For the adult, the verbal and the visual, working together, evoke at the same time the child of the nostalgic past and the mean person of the present time.

In sharp contrast to the golden childhood portrayed at the end of *The Book of the Mean People*, *The Big Box* deplores the impact of urbanization and consumerism on childhood. The narrator relates with a naïve voice at the very beginning:

> Patty and Mickey and Liza Sue
> Live in a big brown box.
> It has carpets and curtains and beanbag chairs.
> And the door has three big locks.
> Oh, it's pretty inside and the windows are wide
> With shutters to keep out the day.
> They have swings and slides and custom-made beds

> And the doors open only one way.
> Their parents visit on Wednesday nights
> And you should see the stuff they get.
> Pizza and Legos and Bubble Gum
> And a four-color TV set. (Morrison, 1999)

This luxuriously furnished room ("the big box") is a metaphor of the middle-class American childhood. Every child can be a Patty, a Mickey or a Liza Sue.[13] These children, in fact, have done nothing really bad. They just acted as children do. Patty "talked in the library," "sang in class," "went four times to the toilet," "ran through the halls and wouldn't play with dolls." Mickey had too much fun in the streets all day, "wrote his name on the mailbox lid," "hollered in the hall," and "played handball right where the sign said not ta." Lisa "let the chickens keep their eggs, let the squirrels into the fruit trees, and fed honey to the bees." A subtext suggests that what really goes wrong is the adult world: the adults' treatment of children.

The Big Box is a statement against contemporary adult-child relationship in urban United States. The words open up the story while the pictures showing the reader with varying degrees of specificity what the words tell us. Five scenes are illustrated and appear in the book alternately: (1) the natural world in which seagulls scream, rabbits hop, and "beavers chew trees when they need'em;" (2) the big room where the three children live—a place full of luxurious furnishings, expensive toys, wide windows with shutters, and a door with three locks on it that opens only one way; (3) a flashback scene in which one of the children is having fun and "makes the grown-ups nervous;" (4) a flashback scene in which a child is facing a crowd of frowning adults who decide that the

[13] The text says that "Patty used to live with a two-way door in a little white house quite near us," "Mickey used to live on the eighteenth floor with two elevators to serve us," and "Liza lived in a little farmhouse where only the crickets disturbed us." No matter they are children living in the suburbs, the city, or the countryside, no matter they are boys or girls, they are now put in the big box.

child "can't handle his or her freedom;" (5) a meditating child with a lowering head, contemplating the adult's harsh words and thinking: "I know you are smart and I know that you think you are doing what is best for me. But if freedom is handled just *your* way then it's not freedom or free."

The young reader of *The Big Box* easily gets the message that these child characters are punished because they are not obedient, but the young reader also understands that the children in the book are well-loved and protected. Ironically, the book reveals that it is the love and protection the adults grant them are problematic. Parents in *The Big Box* seldom show up: they just pay a weekly visit and leave expensive gifts. Liza Sue does not need "stuffed duck prepared by a restaurant cook" for Thanksgiving; Mickey does not need "a store-bought cake, an autographed basketball and a record that played exactly the sound made by a living seagull" for his birthday; neither does Patty want "brand-new jeans, Nikes, and a Spice Girls shirt" on Easter. Thanksgiving, birthday, and Easter are occasions for family reunion. What the children really want and need at those days is attention, love, and happy hours with their parents, not luxurious treats and gifts.

Next, the door "with three big locks" is the most ambivalent visual sign in this picture book. Children may or may not be able to notice this "mistake" in the illustration; it depends on their age and ability to naturalize visual and verbal texts. The door is painted as being closed inside with three big locks. On the one hand, Giselle Potter's illustration makes a literal visual translation of the text—the children live in a room with a door that "has three locks." On the other hand, this visual representation of the verbal is incorrect. Since the three children are put into the room because they can't handle their freedom, the locks and chains should be "outside" the room and invisible to the children. If they are visible from inside the room, they are signs of protection, not imprisonment. The door with three big locks seems a sign of protection in the book, but in fact it is a deliberate screening of a sign of imprisonment and control. The adult and the child should

read together and discuss it to bring out this point of uncertainty and disagreement.

The Big Box and *The Book of Mean People* are in the form of a picture book. A more equal relationship between the child and the adult is promoted in these picture books as they offer unique opportunities for a collaborative relationship and empower the two audiences more equally than other narrative forms. For this reason, the picture book, in the recent years, has been considered a significant form in which the boundaries in children's literature have been redrawn. Sandra L. Beckett states that "innovative graphics and the creative, often complex dialogue between text and image provide multiple levels of meaning and invite readings on different levels by all ages" (1999: xvi). The Morrisons' first two books testify to advances of children's literature in this aspect. In the following, I will discuss how Toni Morrison and her coauthors, in the second stage of their publication project, by employing the radical genres of the fable and the comics, further create textual flexibility and encourage the reader to retell their version of Aesop's fables.

IV. Fable, Comics, and Moral Vision

At a press conference announcing her six-fable deal with Scribner, Toni Morrison showed her enthusiasm for the rewriting project and expresses that she admired novelists who "write for all ages" ("Scribner signs," 2002). She then continued to voice her dissatisfaction with the "dead-end" morals of Aesop tales in our time. Morrison promised that in each retelling, she and her partners were going to give fresh meaning to the tales, "to suggest that everything isn't a done deal: the victim can strike back; the fool can become smart; the frightened can become courageous; the weak can get strong."[14] On the same occasion, Pascal Lemaître, the

[14] These words also appear on the front flap of the dust jacket of the *Who's*

illustrator, said that his comic strips would give the fables a new contemporariness and that the pictures would "serve the text by leaving the questions open." Co-author Slade Morrison stated, "I see the stories not just in shapes, line, and color, but also in elements of tension that point to questions, uncertainty. What is going on in these fables is the beginning of something, not the end; not the moral."[15]

The impatience of the Morrison team toward didactic fables of today should be regarded as an impatience to "innocent" children's literature in general. In the ancient world, Aesop's fables were not considered "children's literature." Aesop himself was a legendary figure, a master of disguise and transformation, and his fables were the embodiment of powerful persuasive or deceptive art. Storytelling in the fable tradition was a performance, and the spare stories are narratives of praxis, rather than texts for quiet study. Fables always had spaces inviting the reader to an interpretation that was quite at variance with the playful tone on the surface. It was during the long history of editing that the stories were cut off from their use in oral contexts and the morals at the end became "dead-ends."[16]

Like the trickster tale of Brer Rabbit, Aesop's fables were not intended for children, but in our time they are generally considered children's literature. David Whitley's brief survey shows at the hand of English writer Samuel Richardson in the mid-eighteenth

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Got Game? series.

[15] See the front flap of the books in the *Who's Got Game?* Series.

[16] The fable was originally an oral genre used in performance. However, when these narratives of praxis were recorded in writing, the editor has assumed to hold great sway. Since in every practical use of the fable, there were moral messages inside the story and outside the story (i.e. social, historical, and political contexts), and sometimes these morals were contradictory to each other, to make sure that the fables could be read "correctly" editors of Aesop's fables in the past centuries have adopted a totalitarian strategy: sacrificing multi-meanings of a narrative by adding a definite moral at the end of the story. In this way, the history of our reception of Aesop is a process of reduction and simplification.

century, the huge Aesopic corpus underwent a process of reformulation. In making Aesop "safe for the nursery," in removing it from the arena of debate and controversy, the fable also became unchallenging (1996: 95-97). Now, by recovering the rich and varied texture of the fable, Morrison and her partners attempt to restore the genre's shades and gleams so even children can be encouraged to explore possible meanings and appreciate the beauty implied in this ancient genre. As modern readers are only familiar with the "purified" or "simplified" versions of Aesop, Morrison's rewritings of Aesop seem much longer than expected. These new versions communicate by word, by image, and by a wealth of meanings that have been entirely lost in children's collections of Aesop.

In a recent public conversation with Cornel West, professor of religion and African-American studies at Princeton, Morrison talked about problems of the younger generations: They feel unhappy and disoriented because the dominant market way of life deprived them of access to non-market values and activities. To better communicate with the youth who are "on a different vibe," Morrison suggested that "[w]e need their language and we have to talk . . . . There's a whole generation of us that we have never said anything . . . to the younger generation" (Goodman, 2004). This communication between generations, Morrison proposed, aims at making children "feel the connection" with family, community, and with history. Toni Morrison continued that children are too young to "remember" historical events, so the adults are responsible to put the events into relevant context for them.[17]

Since their first comic fable, contemporary elements are smartly woven into classic tales. For example, Aesop's fables and

[17] Here Toni Morrison mentions her new book, *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*, a collection of archival photographs. Morrison writes imaginary captions for each photo, trying to record an important time a half-century ago that each American must remember, the Supreme Court's decision in the case known as Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

rapping, in *The Ant or the Grasshopper* and *The Lion or the Mouse*, are exquisitely combined. Aesop represents the wealth of human (and arguably African) wisdom,[18] while rap is the "language" of the young generation, a representative of American urban culture. Yet talking rhythmically, with or without music backing, is not a new idea. Poetry and song were considered the same in many cultures.

In the past two decades, rap has acquired global acceptance and become both a commercial pop genre and the voice of rage, yet no one can deny its African roots. The narrator and the animal characters in the Morrisons' first two fables are all rapping or hip-hopping. For example, *The Ant or the Grasshopper* begins with a scene in Central Park, New York, with the narrator rapping:

> Foxy G and his ace Kid A
> were hanging in the park.
> They romped each day till the sun's last ray
> and didn't stop till dark.
> They climbed trees, tore up their knees,
> dunked balls and shot hoops from afar,
> Swam in the pool where the water was cool,
> and sang with their air guitars. (Morrison, 2003a)

And, in *The Lion or the Mouse*, the bully lion king of the wild savannah threatens others:

> LISTEN UP! LISTEN UP!
> NO IFS, MAYBES, ANDS, OR BUTS.
> I AM THE KING ALL OVER THE LAND.
> I DO WHAT I LIKE. I DO WHAT I CAN.
> IN THIS PLACE I MAKE THE LAWS
> BECAUSE, BECAUSE OF MY MIGHTY PAWS!
> (Morrison, 2003b)

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[18] The Black Athena debate suggests that European civilization evolved from an African—possibly black—civilization. Toni Morrison shows great interest in this debate and may accept the idea that Aesop was black (Morrison, 1990).

This stream of rhythmic beat beams a magnetic attraction that urges the reader to read on. However, in *The Ant or the Grasshopper*, the voice of the rapper/musician/poet has also a deeper cultural significance. One of the traditional African speech-genres which rappers have taken up and transformed is from the profession of the *griot*. The *griot* is a news-singer or rhapsode. Just like bards in the ancient world or European *troubadors*, the West African *griots*, were singers and musicians who traveled from village to village, informing audiences of both recent events as well as tribal traditions (Toop, 2000: 31-32). Jurgen Streeck's study of West-African *griots* today also shows that rappers are oral historians or walking libraries.

> by communicating this body of knowledge to a largely teenage audience—they have in fact revived the memory of these [civil rights] struggles and passed it on to a new generation: they have served as educators, in other words. And they have also spread the news about current struggles, about poverty, depression, and family problems across the African-American community. In the words of Chuck D. of Public Enemy, "rap is like the underground Cable News Network of the African-American community." (n.d.: 1-2)

Rappers had, and have, a lot of responsibility in a community. They are given respect according to their message and how they abide by their culture. They play the roles of musician, poet, prophet, educator, and social rebel against injustice.

It is significant to note that, portraying Foxy G, the grasshopper musician in *The Ant or the Grasshopper*, as a rapper, this new fable elevates the status of the notorious "lazy fool." In contrast, Kid A (the ant) is degraded here as a cold-hearted middle-class family man who refuses to help his friend when winter comes. The verbal text does not mention Kid A's selfishness, but it is not difficult for the reader (especially the young reader) to know from the comic frames that Kid A has four refrigerators, three TVs, and good store of food at home. Peritextual clues make

sharp critique on Kid A: He joins the crazy shopping crowds, he stocks up cabinets and cupboards, and then he laughs at his summer friend for not preparing in advance. Reading the verbal and the visual messages together, more of the reader's sympathy would probably go to Foxy G, the outgoing, optimistic, generous musician who enjoys making superb music for the community, for people in the park.

However, the trauma and memory of September 11 terrorist attacks—evoked in Lemaître's illustrations of stifling shopping crowds in the supermarket—to a certain extent make Kid A's lack of a sense of security understandable. Furthermore, the debate of the ant and the grasshopper, in the form of verbal battle of African-American youths,[19] is thought-provoking. Here, artistic ideals confront conservative middle-class mentality:

> Foxy G: But music's been good for you and me.
> It ought to deserve your sympathy.
> Play your own song, kid.
> Don't play me. I create.
> Kid A: No you take.
> Foxy G: I Make.
> Kid A: No, you Fake.
> Foxy G: Your stomach's full; your bed is warm.
> Your house is clean, but where is your dream?
> Know what I mean? D-R-E-A-M! (Morrison, 2003a)

"The Ant and the Grasshopper," a well-known fable that stresses middle-class respectability and work ethics, is reformulated here into a debate. No one can deny that the appeal of Foxy G the artist strikes at the heart of our capitalist society.

(1) "How can you say I never worked a day? ART IS WORK.

[19] In African-American oral culture, there are two forms of repartee: a "call and response" in songs of religious gatherings and a verbal street duel known as "playing the dozens," in which two opponents try to outdo each other with insults (Toop, 2000: 32).

It just looks like play."

(2) "I quenched your thirst and fed your soul, you can't spare me a doughnut hole?" (Morrison, 2003a)

Who's Got Game? This is the title that the Morrison team gives to their comic fable series, and it is also a question that haunts the reader's mind.

In the classroom versions we are familiar with, the grasshopper is the underdog who is humiliated and learns a hard lesson. In this new comic version, the verbal part seems to follow tradition, while the visual takes a departure and represents the grasshopper with great sympathy. At the end of the fable, Foxy G walks away in snow with his pride, while Kid A stays in his warm living room, timidly and remorsefully, watching from behind the curtains his friend leaving. This is a story about friendship, philosophy of life, dreams, work ethics and sympathy. As the authors deliberately make the moral relatively equivocal, the reader is encouraged to seek resolution of the issues embedded in the story.

Animal stereotypes do come into play in Aesop's fables, but as the fables of the ancient times celebrated surprise and paradox, things in the Morrisons' books can turn out other than expected. For instance, the ant and the grasshopper traditionally in children's fables are representations of two antithetical moral qualities—triviality and diligence. In modernizing "The Ant and the Grasshopper," the Morrison team gives these characters additional identities: Kid A, the ant, is a family man and a middle-class white-collar worker, while Foxy G, the grasshopper, is an artist, a gambler, and a dreamer. Moreover, the "kid" in the Morrisons' version is not as innocent and vulnerable as the ones we have encountered in numerous fables, while the one named "foxy" here does not own characteristics of slyness or cleverness.

With such irony and ambiguity, with the verbal and the visual both having a say in retelling the fables, how can the reader decide the meaning? There may not be an easy answer to this question as

there were none in the use of the fables at Aesop's time. David Whitley says:

> Fables would seem to offer particular kinds of power to readers who know how to use them. This notion is inscribed in that "metafable"—the life of Aesop—which was the standard preface to all earlier major collections. Aesop's life shows, again and again, how he uses his ability to tell apt stories at timely moments to gain an authority and influence otherwise inconceivable for a slave. The model of Aesop himself suggests that the interpretation of the fables is not a matter to be settled in the armchair of a study. Rather, interpretation depends upon the context within which the fables are uttered. If you can find the appropriate fable at a critical moment you may be able to alter—quite radically—the view which people take of a situation and their consequent actions. (1996: 98-99)

Fables were, and are, meant to be used; every reader, no matter whether he or she is a child or an adult, can utter his or her own version of the story. I believe the authors of these comic fables support Whitley's view. Consider the book titles again, we find that not only there is the umbrella title (*Who's Got Game?*) for the books in the comics series, the Morrison team has also twisted traditional titles such as "The Ant and the Grasshopper" to "The Ant *or* the Grasshopper." With this "or," these comic versions do not promise to provide the reader definite final morals. Word and picture, adult and child, ant and grasshopper, lion and mouse, old man and snake—each one offers its/her/his perspective in storytelling. The privileged authorial power of Aesop's mediators is made null. With the supreme adaptability of the fable, Toni Morrison and her partners demonstrate that through active engagement, the child and the adult both can enjoy children's literature.

V. From Hierarchy to Ecology

In the field of children's literature, African American writers have made steady efforts toward creating satisfying books for children that deal with the Black experience. As early as the 1920s, renowned writers such as William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and Jessie Fauset launched *Brownies' Books*, a magazine for "children of the Sun." In the decades from 1930s to 1980s, African American writers fought against white aesthetics as well as racism and inequality. Toni Morrison's storybooks mark a new stage in African American literature for children, as we can see that the issues explored in her books are no longer limited to racism, black aesthetics, and African American history. *The Big Box* and *The Book of Mean People* are both about liberation of the child in general, not only the Black child. Their second comics fable, *The Lion or the Mouse*, takes a step further: the protagonist is not a weak/timid/powerless creature, but a powerful lion. This lion king is a bully at first, but through another person's fall into pride and blindness—the mouse's indulging in the self-importance of being the lion's savior—he realizes the drawbacks of a hierarchical power system and decides to relinquish his throne, quit his old bullying habits, and go into nature to become part of it.

In the Aesopic tradition, "The Lion and the Mouse" is a story about social relations and hierarchy. That an insignificant mouse can be the savior of the lion king humbles the powerful and encourages the weak. Morrison's *The Lion or the Mouse* however, further questions the system of hierarchical social powers. A lion king who always roars—"I am the STRONGEST night and day, I can WHIP anyone who gets in my way"—is feared, not loved or respected.

The Lion or the Mouse is a hilarious, rhyme-filled tale for children. It successfully clothes moral messages in humorous words and pictures. The young reader always feels happy when he or she sees a villain fall. Lion is the cause of his own suffering as under his

ruthless rule mutual trust and the spirit of cooperation do not exist. Plagued by the thorn in his hind paw, this huge animal whines:

> Listen up. Listen up.
> No ifs, maybes, ands, or buts.
> I was running over the land.
> I ran like the wind and
> I looked so grand.
> Now I can't get a roar
> from my mighty jaws
> because, because a thorn
> is stuck in one of my paws.
> Tigers, hyenas, or elephants too,
> Please help me out.
> I don't care who. (Morrison, 2003b)

He doesn't care who! Being the king of the savannah, Lion has never paid due respect to his subordinates, not to mention his ignorance about how to appropriately appeal for help. His moans, groans, and pleas are heard by all the passersby, but no one is willing to help him. Tiger says, "Not me, I have to hurry home. My baby's alone. I promised to bring her an ice cream cone." Hyena palters, "Not me, I have to bury a bone. I'm on my own. Besides, I'm on the telephone." Elephant drops these words in haste, "Not me, I have a date to keep. A floor to sweep. And I never touch meat." Monkey also excuses himself on seeing all the animals leave, "Sorry, King Lion. I heard you whine, but I'm busy right now and I don't have time. My wife is calling. My mother is sick. My roof is falling. I have fruit to pick." These nonsensical excuses with a formulaic pattern are typical of younger children's literature! Moreover, the repetitive "not me" phrases evoke the (adult and child) reader's memory of another classic tale for children, *The Little Red Hen*.[20]

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[20] The Little Red Hen is a traditional story about a hen's asking the cat, the goose, and the dog for help in doing domestic chores. The best known version is that illustrated by J. P. Miller and popularized by Little Golden Books, a series of 12 picture books published for the mass market in 1942. The Little Golden Books

As I have said, the Morrisons' storybooks are written for several audiences. In addition to entertaining the child reader, *The Lion or the Mouse* also attempt to illuminate profound ethical issues. The most impressive renovation of this lion-and-mouse story lies in Mouse's transformation and Lion's epiphany. Lemaître's frames of comics effectively complement the text in portraying the ambition, self-deception, and moral degradation of the little animal. Mouse's bedroom is an exquisite exhibition of his dreams and wishes. On the walls, one can find a large picture of himself side by side with the portraits of his idols—Napoleon and Alexander the Great. On the desk and the floor, a biography of Napoleon, a book on cheese, Mouse's photos, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, and *Tar Baby* are scattered around. Besides, a huge mirror standing at the end of Mouse's bed exposes this small animal's incurable narcissism. Having saved Lion from his miserable plight, Mouse believes that he is now a VIP, the great, grand person he has always longed to become. Endorsed by Lion's gratitude and tolerance, petty Mouse assumes the role of a bully in the animal kingdom: he fluffs up his fur around the neck to make it look like a mane; he attacks the trees, kicks the flowers, and roars at other animals. With no one's being afraid of him, Mouse becomes a laughing stock. But, *The Lion or the Mouse* does not end here. Lion earns an epiphany of power relations through the negative *exemplum* of Mouse. Leaving his palace, his crown, and robe behind, Lion walks into the wild savannah and becomes a supporter of communal harmony. This story-within-a-story design provides new profundity to Aesop's well-known fable.

Compared with hilarious *The Lion or the Mouse*, the third fable in this series *Poppy and the Snake* is a serious and difficult read. The authors take even greater liberty here in retelling the

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were an instant success; moreover, the 12 classic stories are still in print today. As of 2005, Golden Books claimed that a billion and a half copies had been sold. They have become an American icon (Fifty Years, 1992).

fable of "The Old Man and the Snake."[21] At least three major changes can be easily identified in this comics version which features the long-standing animosity between man and snake: (1) The man in the story is assigned the name Poppy; (2) The setting of the story is specifically the "Bayou region" of the American South; (3) An additional, silent role—the armadillo—appears in the background of the visuals from time to time to add footnotes to the verbal text.

Poppy or the Snake is again set in a framed structure. An African American old man leading a solitary life in the Bayou region encourages a little boy to go back to school and concentrate on learning by telling him a story of his triumph over a sly enemy. Poppy shares his name with the flower that is a symbol of memory, an allusion to the Civil War or World Wars I and II. Assigning the major character such a name, the Morrisons shift the focus of the fable from fear and distrust of two antithetically defined species to history, memory, and survival.

The reader may detect a similarity in plot between *Poppy or the Snake* and "The Good Samaritan" story ("*Gospel of Luke*," 10: 25-37).[22] Poppy, who accidentally ran over the snake on his way home, is forced to assume the role of a Samaritan and take the wounded animal home. Yet, a careful reader observes that the precautious Poppy, who knows that the other party is a dangerous, poisonous snake, is in fact reluctant to grant the snake hospitality. It is the cunning snake that talks Poppy into making amends by taking it home. The snake seems desperate; its sly argument leaves Poppy speechless. It protests,

> You gonna blame me for having poison fangs? How else can I protect myself from enemies? Anybody liable to jump up and take me down. I ain't got no hands to fight with,

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[21] See fable #74 and fable #75 of Laura Gibbs (2002). Both of the two versions are entitled "The Snake and the Farmer."

[22] Toni Morrison once described in an interview that the snake fable she and her son were working on as a Good Samaritan story (Morrison, 2004).

> LIKE YOU DO. And I ain't got no feet to stomp with, LIKE YOU DO. Or a loud roar to scare somebody with LIKE YOU DO. And if you look close you'll see I don't got no wings to fly away on. I NEED MY FANGS, MISTER SMARTY. (Morrison, 2004)

Not able to decline the snake's request, Poppy later finds himself stuck in a trap. The snake continues staying in his house and pretends to be his friend. Fortunately, Poppy keeps in mind that a snake bites. Being an experienced swamp-dweller who knows his environment well, the old man takes precaution (the snake serum) and survives. It is his clever rival that loses the survival game and becomes a pair of shiny boots—Poppy's "remembering" boots.

Despite their apparent similarity, *Poppy or the Snake* is different from a Good Samaritan story. By naming the old man Poppy, the Morrisons shift the theme of the fable from non-discrimination or interracial harmony to war, memory, and self-protection. As the direct addressee of Poppy's story is his grandson, the old man is giving this inexperienced child a lesson about hazards of the real world and telling him to "remember," to "take precaution," and to "dig deep," because in the hostile environment there are always species with spiteful instincts. In other words, Poppy (a grandfather who stands for experience, memory, and history) preaches in his triumphant tale the wisdom of self-protection.

In this comics fable, word and image work together to convey complementary messages. The verbal text focuses on actions; it tells little about the wisdom of life in the forest and marshy swamps. For the dangers (snakes and voracious reptiles) lurk behind the trees and in the ponds and rivers, the reader has to resort to the visual text for clues. Again, the verbal text reveals only Poppy's hesitation to receive the snake at home while the visuals, with the appearance of a mysterious armadillo at the margin of the comic frames again and again, foreshadow Poppy's reaction to dangers. The reader, whether an adult or a child, is

forced to make sense of this strange animal's presence. The armadillo, which protects itself from predators with its bony armor, is Poppy's alter ego. Animals act on nature; the snake bites, and the armadillo curls up to hide its face and belly from predators. Humans should learn and remember animal wisdom.

The complementary relationship between word and image in *Poppy or the Snake* is disturbing for most adult readers as it cancels the advantages of the adult and privileges the child's curious eye. There is no longer a rigid distinction between what pictures and words communicate. In the form of comics, texts and pictures are mixing together. Thus, the logocentric view long honored in our literary tradition is not working here. As word and image are on par, the verbal text does not downplay the ability of pictures. The adult reader's capabilities in vocabulary and in working out narrative coherence seem inadequate in decoding the fable re-created by the Morrison team. However, a child's endless stream of innocent questions (about the quiet, omnipresent armadillo at the background of the pictures, for example) may force the adult reader to think "deeper." Retelling the ancient fables in comics, both authors and artist symbolically celebrate the liberation of children's literature from adult domination and control. Though the books created by Toni Morrison and her team received mixed responses, they do have their influence. *The Big Box* has run several prints since its publication in 1999; there are also Spanish and German editions. Thanks to Toni Morrison's stature, the storybooks are widely available in libraries and in classrooms. Additionally, we know that a new comics fable *The Mirror or the Glass* is going to appear in 2007.

Not many major writers who have turned their pen to children's literature have demonstrated such perseverance as Toni Morrison. These five storybooks may seem weird at first; however, they are pertinent cases for us to reconsider critical issues involved in the field of children's literature—readership, censorship, power relations, didacticism, genres and forms, etc. In *The Big Box* and *The Book of Mean People*, the voice of the child (that is long

repressed in classic books for children) is definitely heard and the problematics of adult/child power relations are revealed. In the comic series (*The Ant or the Grasshopper*, *The Lion or the Mouse*, and *Poppy or the Snake*), Aesop's fables are tailored to promote an active engagement of the child and adult reader. All these five storybooks are ostensibly written for the young, but under playful banter, they communicate nuances of meaning to an audience composed of both children and adults. There are many spaces between the lines, and between word and image, enabling readers of all ages to arrive at different levels of interpretation. Children's books can be complicated and rich in meaning. With significant attempts like the Morrisons', children's literature may be coming of age.

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兒童不宜？——談童妮・摩里森的圖畫故事書

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摘　要

童妮・摩里森近年來與她的兒子司雷德・摩里森以及兩位插畫家合作，出版了五本圖畫書，但卻未獲書評的熱烈迴響。童妮・摩里森寫作童書的例子事實上非常值得探究，因爲當中涉及了兒童文學的重要議題，如：目標讀者、童書審查制度、道德教育、兒童與成人的權力關係等。本論文將以家長、教師、書評等兒童讀物評鑑者對摩里森童書的批評做爲起點，檢視成人對於兒童文學的普遍期待。其次，藉由兒童文學傳統的回顧，我將討論西方兒童文學的典範和意識形態。最後，評估在新世紀的歷史脈絡中，摩里森等人的集體創作對兒童文學的可能貢獻。

關鍵詞：童妮・摩里森、兒童文學、伊索寓言、圖畫書、插畫