Introduction: Homely Children, Unhomely Literature

"The kids are making noise today
in the courtyard: it's Carnival"

~ Gianni Rodari

The mode of literary praxes, including the writing, reading, nisreading, circulation, reception, promotion, censor, mediation, canon-formation and criticism, that focuses upon the texts, inter-texts and peri-texts that pass through hypothetical, targeted, and/or actual child-readers is broadly identified as the domain of "children's literature." As such, it is definitely not a generic category but a receptional category, with its taxonomical limits ranging from picture books and primers to science fictions and fantasies, fairy tales to ghost stories, marionettes to animation films and nonsense rhymes to computer games. The reception is sociologically defined with respect to the biological and cultural age of the reader/consumer, and psychologically in terms of the expected emotional responses to the anticipated/approved semantic base of the text; but these closures cannot be said to operate within same rigid and assured limits, as the scriptibility of a mode based on the fantastic and the imaginary [which forms the internal logic of the category] is too radical to be fastened into a restrictive and disciplined set of norms, suitabilities and closed meanings [which form the external rules of the category]. Peter Hunt comments:

Children's literature is an amorphous, ambiguous creature; its relationship to its audience is difficult; its relationship to the rest of the literature, problematic.

There are four inconveniences in convening the category as closed, conventional and confirmed:

1. The signifier "child" and "children' are by no means any monolithic or homogeneous categories—psychoanalytic issues like infantile sexuality, corporeal discourses like the sensuality and sensuosity of the child's body, and political issues like the child labor and the consumerist appropriation of the children's taste open up the category child itself as a site of discursive and practical heterogeneity.


2. The texts circulated as children's literature are themselves produced, circulated and received in a certain historical contingency whose parameters are neither child-centric nor delimited by the historic instantiation of the-then "child".

3. The texts are, in spite of being marked, are exegetically unmarked—adult books are not for children, but children's literature is literally open to the "universal reader". The interventions of the adult reader's exegetic engagements modify the hermeneutics of the children's texts in unforeseen ways, like "Little Red Riding Hood" being almost always linked with the underlying parapraxis of "penile aggression versus the pedophilic female body" psychotrope.

4. The children's texts are written rarely by children themselves, so the overarching point of view, despite its ardent and conscious attempts to conceal its experience by the ruse of innocence, is the adult-authorial point of view, a fact that no amount of infantile charade can eliminate completely. For example, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is permeated by Lewis Carroll's perspective regarding Alice Liddell; even when the authorial intention is to mimic the child's perspective, the actual operation is much more complex—first the author has to exercise his adult point of view about the point of view of the child, and then channel the narrative or depictive act through the filtered filter constructed thereof. The children's text is therefore the hymenographic proximity/abolition betwixt the child's perspective and the adult's impression regarding the child's perspective.

Besides these, children's literature has tended to remain relatively uncanonical and culturally marginalized till the mid-90s, and even today not a majoritarian identity amongst the different categories. Naturally the conventional is to be transgressed or interrogated more through the peripheral-emergent than through the "eternal verities" of major literary and cultural formations. Hunt argues that an analogy may be forged between the emergence of children's literature and criticism of children's literature on one hand and the emergence of New Literatures and criticisms thereof. Ethnic, postcolonial, feminist literary practices and criticisms have formed a considerable share in the institutions, pursuits and enthusiasm of the late twentieth century literary academia; similar to them, children's literature also jeopardizes the taxonomic schemata as well as theoretical purities. The role played by the category of

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3 Ibid.2.
children's literature is therefore that of an irritant to the majoritarian literary and critical conventions. As such this would imply a tensional field—the potential of interruption and irritation and the institution of a dispositive, a reactionary regulation must vie against each other for the upper hand. Jody Norton comments:

"Children's literature" is a deceptively simple term. In the United States, among other things, it names a commodified, politically charged body of texts created, produced, and selected for use with children. Children's literature also describes a field of academic endeavor that is in part complicitous in the discipline (regulation, constraint) both of the corpus of children's texts and of the ideological body of the child within those texts, and in part committed to the critical interrogation of the multiple political investitures in and around "the child" as cultural construction.  

Given the above constraints, it is worthwhile to see children's literature not as a case of sociological and aesthetic survey of child-readers' reception, but as textual instances of a "form of politics" as well as of "politics of form", or rather as a Blakean contrary between the serious poetics and serious politics, sublated by the discourses of entertainment-education nexus of the paternalistic anchorage of children in the world of adult art, knowledge and power. Beneath the surface of the aesthetic and the leisurely rationing of suitable books, toys and videos, there lies the philoprogenitive desire to discipline, warn, mould and initiate.

In this Ph.D. project, it is my contention to look into the poetics and politics of children's texts, in terms of their semiological and ideological interrelatedness. As such there cannot be any poetics or textual strategy without a political embedding, context or motivation, and all political utterances, events and telos do have a particular poetics [ in terms of their textual maneuvers, their mimetic strategies, their tropology and their rhetorical persuasions]. However, in this Ph.D. project, I have not subscribed to the commonly seen practice of flatly diagnosing and prognosing ideology in some sample texts, because flatly locating the political presence in the text is no big deal given the historicity of the text, author and reader triad. What is more intriguing is how the rhetorical, linguistic and aesthetic "form" [including the poesis of formlessness] of the text invoke, recall, trace, conceal, foreground, enclose or disclose the political, even when apparently the political engagement is disappearing, withdrawn or receded. The poetics of the text can be said to be retreating the politics in this sense. For example, Philip Pullman's Clockwork captures both the poetics of wonder and

transformative power of the fairy tale and the interface between the ipseity and alterity in
dark psychological and narrative complexity of post-Enlightenment Romanticism; like
Romanticism's retreat of the onto-political (French revolutionary ardour, for example) at the
instance of its rhetorical remnunciation (by the poetics of Imagination, or the fantasies of
"escapism", for example), Clockwork combines elements of the fantastic, the marvelous, and
the uncanny to produce a darkly optimistic contemporary fairy tale that suggests the potential
of compassion, courage, and love to transform human relations in the face of the threat posed
by a culture of extremal egotism. By looking into the poetics of the comic strip, the Disney
texts including Disneyland, the science fictions, the fairy tales, the toys and doll-texts, the
ghost stories, I have tried to map this retrait, the disappearing appearing of the political
through the textual inscriptions. As for the working definition of “text”, I have considered the
origin, the dissemination and the differential reception/reading of the text, so that the retrait
can be found at instances of inscription, circulation and consumption of the book, the film,
the toy, the formation and not just merely within the limits of the book.

The methodology in chasing and arresting the receding ghost of the political, so to say, in the
semiotic universe of the text is to be an eclectic stalker oneself, not a “suitability criteria”
type exorcist or an arid cartographer of the stable architecture of the institutional and
hierarchical plateaus. What the liberal humanist and New Criticism parlance calls “content”
is obviously loaded with issues of politics—of authoritative allocation of values, of resolution
of conflicts; of material, cognitive and libidinal economies—politics is quite canny in and
along the surface as well as the mass of the literary content. But the necessity instead to
intervene at the level of the artistic constitution, generic conventions, the technique of
representation, the mimetic and the mimic strategies, the linguistic and the visual-semiotic
“information” arises in order to reach beyond the often hegemonic and re-hierarchizational
performances of the ideological critiques of children’s literature, primarily due to four
reasons:

1. Children’s texts represent, trace or name the political that is beyond the limit of
childhood and the ethical boundaries of the target reader, hence the simplistic and flat
enumeration of the political content would be misleading, inadequate and already always
imbricated within a “larger than thou” intimidation. The politics, in other words, do not
follow a realism [whereby the co-ordinates of content and comprehension become orderly
and complete] per se in the children’s texts.
2. Children's literature is a category evolved out of the plane of reception, not of generic singularity. Hence “child lit” will encompass different genres in different media, like “women’s texts” would. Each of these genres has its own disciplinary positivities, its own eccentricities and their own anchorages and expressions. The mere focus on the political content would therefore be unwittingly reductive, since the difference as well as assemblage of these manifold genres and forms, with their different media and different rhythm of circulation and different textual strategies, would approach the same political ontology with different textual means, while different political contingencies would be approached in the same generic norms within the same text/genre. The construction, representation and inscription of the political would be therefore, heavily endogenic—a fact that would demand that the poetics traces the politics.

3. Children's texts are already always invested with a telos-quotient—they are part of “growing up” and not merely leisure or aesthetic activity. Hence it is obvious that they will be appropriated as the primary ideological apparatus, but an obviosity of ideological induction would make them “profane” than they are meant to be, and self-defeating. Hence the discourse of “catch them young’ is expected to start working from the most a-political, innocuous, de-institutional, non-culpable plateau—the plateau of “form”. In other words, the category of “child lit” is cleverer in installing its closures than the adult literature, and the hidden narratives and the inner fissures are both inscribed and withdrawn by its “politics of form”.

4. Children’s literature also has a special repertoire or reservoir of textual strategies, which are not frequently discerned in the adult literature. One of them is definitely the deployment of the depiction, illustration, pictoriality, even frequent outright pictogrammatical code. The optics of children’s texts do negotiate scopophilia and the political stratagem of opsis [“the scene”], but the negotiation is different—the child’s eye is recalled, emulated or simulated by the adult artist—a stooping to conquer. In children’s books the visual semiotics ranges from iconic to non-iconic, and each degree, mode or ensemble of visual details has a different politics to excite. Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott have succinctly rendered the semiotic nature of picture books as two "levels of communication": namely, the verbal, which is conventional, and the visual, which is typically "iconic," creating an ambience for the apparent synonymy between the signifier and the signified, a figure of common pertainingness. Nikolajeva and Scott postulate that in a picture book, "The function of the pictures, iconic signs, is to describe or represent;
the function of the words, conventional signs, is primarily to narrate.\(^6\) While the false synonymizing of the signifier and its supplementation in language, erstwhile notionalized as the semantic content or the signified, is a gesture of the realist and structuralist poetics, it carries the political notion of the children’s point of view as cognized by the adult perspective—children are figured as the grounding unit of canny realism, transparent and direct vision and stable epistemological subject, like Blake’s “The Lamb”, contradistinguished from the complex, ambiguous optical and epistemological standpoints of the mystic-political adult subject expressed in “The Tyger”. On the contrary, many pictogrammatic complexities in the illustrations used in children’s fairy tales, science fictions and ghost stories upset and problematize this realist schema. The use of learned codes like size, colour and shape inscribe the political [for example the panic and the power] in texts whose verbal counterpart withdraw, gloss over or conceal the political narrative. In such cases of “depiction” out of joint, the absence of the verbal signification of the political is set against the density of information in the pictures, and vice versa, so that contrapuntal reading is in-built and further invited—a surplus of scriptibility. The simplicity of the image may retreat a complexity of the political, and the multiple associations deliberately foregrounded in an irreal picture may actually retreat a moment in the political where no further assignment of meaning is possible because of the exhaustion of political with its completion. The sameness of the picture of Phantom, for example, over four centuries of plot-time, is overloaded with his parricidal mode of being within the name-of-the-father, as we will see in chapter II. However, the radically diverse, complex, individuated figures of the characters in X-MEN, in spite of being a chaos of the optic presence, perception and associations, essentially name the same, finished and finite “end” of history in a far-futuristic novum—though full of pictogrammatic excesses, they are reduced to the exhaustion of the political because of the totalitarian accomplishment of the political. Figures 0.1, 0.2 and 0.3 illustrate the visual commotion and optic pandemonium in the portrayal of X-Men, who, however, amidst their violent, power-puffed and turbo-velocitous motilities, do not name the political but represent the finite totalitarian exhaustion, the finished omneity of the political. The pictures of X-Men and Phantom both, however, name the sovereign, as Phantom’s figural ipseity defends himself against a hubristic downfall demanded by a

poetic justice—instead, Phantom becomes the figure of “outside law” for the arbitration of law or poetic justice to take place, while X-Men inhabit, along with the entirety of their “personal”, the place of the sovereign embodied in the panicky, non-narcissistic, superheroïz masse commonalized in the figure of “X-men” [X for the mutant X-gene, and X for Xtra(extra) Power], the grounding figure of a “political” and epistemic commonality—suggesting a completion and totalization of politics as the onto-typology.

Another example of a special literary strategy would be demographic majority of child-protagonists and de-adulted, infantilized, neutralized adult figures and frequently phatic animals. The fairy tales like the “Little Red Riding Hood” and the children’s/teen “feral” films like Teen Wolf (1985), Hook (1991) and Disney’s live-action The Jungle Book (1994) do pose a political with its poetics of homo ferus, which foregrounds the betwixt/wildness and the character of the [hum]animal body on one hand and suppresses/occludes the outsides of the patriarchal-colonial norms by reterritorializing such bodies within an ethnographic and/or phallocentric stratifications. The politics in/of children’s literature would definitely be activated through this type of “special”, privileged tropes and styles, which would mean that we have to examine these in order to trace the political.

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[Figure 0.1: The heterogeneous homogeneity of X-Men, with everyone being X-tra powerful, power is effaced from its capacity to design sociological suture]
[Figure 0.2: the corporeal differences of X-Men neutralized by the *end* of the *political*; the marked body—gendered, racialized, ageistic is *opened* up by the craze for power and the imperative or compulsion to subscribe to a masse-ethos of superheroic power]
[Figure 0.3: The X-Men and the cyborgs do not really show much pictogrammatic difference, in spite of narrative antagonism; the X-Men are totalized into the realm of the corporeal proximity to the grotesque cyborgs, making the different difficult to discern without the narrative or verbal component]

In this dissertation, therefore, I have explored the poetics to arrive at the politics, and often treated the coupling as a literary rhizome which manifests and installs ideological closure and/or disclosure in the texts, their promulgation, issuance, and their readings, re-readings, re-writings. In this research, I have tried to address sample texts from each loosely defined genre with the following questions:

1. How does the history of the genre/text interact to the poleros between its poetics and politics?

2. How do[es] the text[s] of each genre both participate in the erection of a positivity, a common poetics and politics pertaining to the genre and by the specificity and singularity of an art work, challenge the notions and institutions of generic homogenes? Besides, how does the particular-generic poleros reinforce and/or deconstruct the congressional generalizations about “children’s literature?”
3. How do the formal or semiotic elements that are the least likely to proclaim, negotiate or dramatize the political actually inscribe the disappearing appearing of the political? In other words, how do techniques, tropes and textures of children's literature generate a political positivity even at the absence of any macro-political territory in it?

In order to inquire the above, I have looked into diverse fields of children's literature, ranging from the original and re-worked fairy tales to the post-modern leisure items like toys and dolls. The poetics-politics poleros in these texts operate in different ways, but all of them were keeping in with my hypotheses:

1. Children's literature utters the past in a complex manner, ranging from the hauntological to the “future anterior” of science fictions. Time is one of the most figurative elements in children’s literature, and almost never represented in terms of linear historiographical time or bourgeois-quantified clock time. Rather time is either spectral, out of joint [Phantom comics or ghost stories], or machinic and differend [in time-machine science fictions, for example], or even flattened out like a frozen and reified non-history [the synchronization and horizontalization of ethnic cultural chronotopes into “Distory” in Disney texts and Disney land]. The oblique, complex presentation of time is one of the most significant zones of the poetics-politics poleros in children’s literature, and encompasses the collusions and collisions between colonial/imperial and capitalist ethos. In his 2004 illustrated novel La misteriosa fiamma della Regina Loana, Umberto Eco offers readers a re-call of the Italian children's literature during the fascist period. The novel has been translated as The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana. The paperback edition of the English translation traces the front cover of Yambo's 1924 novel Le avventure di Ciuffettino, a children's book modeled on Pinocchio. In the novel, the amnesiac protagonist Yambo (recalling the name of the children's writer) attempts to re-wok his lost identity by “stalking” the comics, songs, novels, and scholastic textbooks of his youth. Through the adventures of Sandokan, Topolino, Flash Gordon, Sherlock Holmes, and Gian Burrasca, the multivalent and schizophrenic early twentieth-century Italian children’s culture is traced, which metonymizes the contemporary cultural politics in general. In this novel by Eco, therefore, retreats the political through the poetics of inter-textuality, pastiche and revenance; although time as the instance of the particular

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historical moment is removed, and misremembered, through the amnesiac allusion to a writer’s proper name pertaining to the lost time, the mark of the removal acts as an incision upon identity, selfhood, memory so much so that the figure of the author-child protagonist Yambo becomes the grounding gesture of the already finite [finite and finished] political culture, albeit from its outside and as its resistance. The opening of the plot-proper in Clockwork “Once upon a time (when time ran by clockwork)” announces the complicated para-temporal that the story will offer, as the phrase inscribes a conceit between the “timeless” world of the traditional folktale to the political history of clock as the petty objet of realism. Pullman problematizes the canny-uncanny poleros by the hymenographic recalling of time in his text’s opening to the real, concrete historical world of past technology, an opening that also abolishes the historical by invoking the fantastic in tandem. Time runs “by clockwork” for a very fixed diachronic amount of human history, as his “Note About Clocks” points out:

In the old days, when this story took place, time used to run by clockwork. Real clockwork, I mean, with springs and cogwheels and gears and pendulums and so on. When you took it apart you could see how it worked, and how to put it together. Nowadays time runs by electricity and vibrating crystals of quartz and goodness knows what else... Clocks and watches like that might as well work by witchcraft for all the sense I can make of them.

2. Space is also one of the prominent components of the poleros named above, and in children’s texts space is also almost never a realism of landscape or architecture but a spectral [the haunted house or the empty railway platform in ghost stories], a topography of exotic Otherness [Disney’s Latin America in The Three Caballeros], an occultuated colonial appropriation [Phantom’s jungle], panary-confectionary reification [the witch’s cottage in “Hansel and Gretel”], the place of the indeterminate flux [science fictions like The Creepy Creations of Professor Shock], the inner space [in nanotechno-biological science fictions]. The notion of space is both diversified and defamiliarized in children’s texts. The political imperatives, intentions and emergences are uttered through the manipulation of spatial profiles in these texts.

3. Body becomes another important category of analysis for the poleros of poetics and politics in children’s literature. Like Time or Space, the body of children’s texts is never a

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9 Ibid. xi-xii.
straightforward presence, but spectral [the immortal-mortal body of Phantom],
animorphed [Donald Duck, for example], teratological [the monsters and the cyborgs],
 machinic [the Tin Woodman’s body in The Wizard of Oz or the robotic body or even the
mind-body rhizomes in the science fictions], manimal [Spiderman or the beast in “Beauty
and the Beast”]. Apart from taking the body away from familiarity and realism, the body
in children’s texts undergo un-thought of modifications, mutations and
deterritorializations, ranging from the politics of anthropometry in Barbie dolls and the
punitive deformation in Pinocchio’s nose, to the refectory politics of Hansel and Gretel’s
body, the opsis of Red Riding Hood’s pedophilic physical appeal and the retrait of the
epidermalized body in apparently non-racial demography in space-adventure texts.

4. The relationship between the self and the other is never an absent poetics or politics in
children’s texts, although apparently they disappear from its pages, stages or media.
Rather, the central concern of the discursive contestations in children’s texts seems to be
the disjunctions, opacities, osmosis, permeabilities, rhizomes, chiasmus and permutations
between the self and the other. In fairy tales like “Clever Brother Hare” the
phallogocentric instance [mirror stage] of self-recognition via the identification with the
specular other is both recalled and parodied in the gestures of the Clever Brother Hare,
who defeats his political other by exploiting the relations between the subject and its
mirror-reflection, and in science fictions like The Creepy Creations of Professor Shock
the reader-protagonist second person “You” finds himself/herself in an incessant
chiasmus through mirrors and reverse mirrors because his/her self-buttressing other[imago] has become fugitive and truant. Phantom, the eponymous hero of the comic strip
series, has appropriated the pre-Phantomic moment of the death of the other as and into a
perpetuity of the colonial melancholia, which on one hand leaves his mission incomplete
and thus alive, on the other hand justifying his enthronement as the despotic sovereign
above the primitive and inferior racial other. Disney’s The Three Caballeros is an outright
exploration of the libidinal economy between the imperial elf and the exotic other, and
the ghost stories regularly spectralize the self, teasing its ontology by a hauntological
recurrence and reappearance of the other into and through it.

5. The face value of the children’s literature is more a matter of education, tutelage,
instruction, pedagogy, didacticism; it is not shocking therefore that most of them do
comment, centralize or border on the issues of epistemology, knowledge and learning as a
self-reflexive gesture. For example, Phantom offers a poetics and politics of the “library”,

while science fictions with the mad scientist as its central figure offers the “laboratory” as the epistemic grid of new knowledge, both technical and moral. The ghost story “Midnight Express” that I have chosen to examine in my final chapter links the reading of a book the central trope for the spectralization of the self, while Donald Duck uses the imperial epistemologies like the ingestive book, the album and the telescope as the tropes for the hegemony of the imperial American gaze upon the Latin American other. Management and politics of knowledge are regular themes of children’s literature, and it is equally usual to represent these themes with the tropes of acquiring and preserving knowledge. In fact, the whole genre of science fiction is based upon the reliance upon scientific knowledge/moral knowledge relations.

To examine these issues, I have chosen to look into a wide variety of tropes, issues and institutions in a number of texts belonging to diverse genres of children’s literature. Chapter I focuses upon the poetics and politics of colonial haunt, imbricated within the textual strategies and political responsibilities of the comic strips on one hand and the gothicity of the imperishable colonial mastery on the other. Chapter II explores the poetics of animation films and its links with both the film-consumerism-nationalism nexus in modern America and the practice and stereotypes of the Imperial Americanism, especially its libidinal economy with respect to the Disney animation films like The Three Caballeros. Chapter III focuses on the nature, scope, history and the politics and poetics of futurism in children’s science fictions. The main sample in the genre, The Creepy Creations of Professor Shock, unleashes a textual, para-textual as well as onto-machinic novum of plurality, undecidability, rhizomes and radical disclosures of identity, which would celebrate infinite difference with a modernist caution, while Wolfbane addresses the hierarchies and resistances in the contemporary world through the far-futuristic novum of inter-galactic colonialism. In Chapter IV, I have looked into the economy and tropology of “food” in “Hansel and Gretel”, the explosion of heterogeneous meanings in fairy tales like “Cinderella” that retreats the politics of race and gender, and the sexual politics in the poetics of the female corporeal illustration and depiction in “Snow White” and its remaking. For the fairy tale, the archaic quality and the frequent inter-textual reworkings constitute and circulate much of the poetics-politics thrust, just like for the Disney films, it is the hegemonic standardization of the consumerist American society through industry-market-consumption triad for a multiple “tie-in” modus operandi. In Chapter V, the gendered and Eurocentric anthropometry of Barbie Doll as a text, along with the violent history of multinational corporations’ mutual antagonisms for the monopolization
of the doll-industry is examined, followed by an analysis of a fictional marionette, Pinocchio. In spite of the multiracialization of Barbie and postmodernization of Pinocchio, the poetics of the doll rarely accrue new subversive potentials. Similarly, although the miniature anthropomorphic plastic/wooden bodies of the dolls can activate a shuffling between the original subject and its plaything objet, and also destabilize the conventional binaries like the humanoid/machinic or the anatomical/libidinal, the doll's corporeality, if read with its history suggest a relative triumph of the majoritarian fantasies. Chapter VI focuses entirely on the spectral and the uncanny, in its examination of ghost stories like “The Canterville Ghost” and “Midnight express”, and show how this genre does away with the canny sense of time, history and past, and, operating through a surplus of the belated-as-the-rearrivant, cracks a hole upon the surface of ipseity by emancipating the cryptic abjects/dead others. Through these symptomatic, semiotic and political readings of the texts and their genre, we can locate the poetics-politics poleros at the heart of the literary space for children and young adults, whereby the formal or technical strategies inside the text and the institutional-financial contexts and contingencies of its circulation and reception outside the text both conceal and unleash residual, dominant or emergent ideologies, visions and values.

I intend to locate the politics of children’s literature in the enigmatic trajectories of reappearances, retraces, retreats, since it is a corollary of my hypotheses that children's literature flouts the normative scales of “time”, “past” and “history” more problematically than other categories of literature usually do. In this regard the notions of “retreat” and “revenance” become crucial. “Retreat” implies, like the French “retraiter”, to withdraw, retire, recede, draw back, and even remove, but usually the semiotics of retreat recalls a political contingency—an armed combat, or a game of chase, for example. Close to it but not synonymous is the “retrace” or “retrace”, implying “to trace back”, to look again, to re-memorize, to go back. The double sense of withdrawal and trace is combined, with the sense of “re-treat” or “treat again” in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s working definition:

A retrait does not mean an absence, that is to say a presence simple removed. No prior identity can be here removed. To draw back [se retirer] is not to disappear, and, is not, strictly speaking, any mode of being... retrait is the act of disappearing appearing. Not only to appear in disappearance, but to appear as disappearance, in disappearance itself. The more general question...is here that of an inscription which traces itself only in drawing back...the very incision which inscribes it.10

The importance of looking at the “retreat” of the political in the poetics of children’s literature is not an isolated or stylish issue. The most obvious example is the Disneyesque erosion of the labour metaphysic from Disneyland, where the workers are disguised as the timeless Disney characters and in doing double work, i.e., the labour-work and working for leisure of the others, the Disneyland proletarian and his political is retreated by the conspicuous invisibilization of the figure of labour. Or, in the world where actual totalitarianisms exist, and everything that is personal has become political, politics goes without saying and hence is never uttered as politics—re-treat of the political at its Vollendung/vanishment. The poleros between drawing back and trace is therefore a significant way by which the political manifests itself, being gathered in utmost possibility precisely as its end.

Similarly, the notion of the “revenant” is crucial for my analysis—the one who only ever comes in coming back, and as such, is not, is never present as such and hence cannot be exorcized or mourned completely, that which is named only in re-inscription and thus interrupts the canny closures of the Vollendung. The revenant, or the spectral, is already and always a trace, a retrace, and it energizes the accomplissement by resisting the finishing instance and hence finitude of the achievement. The institutional, architectural, topographical spaces as well as the psychoanalytic and/or political sense of the self are already-always disturbed from within by the rearrival of the other, which defers the closure in/of meaning, politics or being. In ghost stories, in the “undead” superheroics of Phantom, in the “beyond apocalypse” type of new myths of science and science fictions, the revenant performs the function of supplementing-yet-counterbalancing the Retrait. Partial palimpsest, partial erasure constitute the mythopoeic novum of the science fiction or the hauntology of the “unhomy home” in horror stories for children; even the self of the human-animal or cyborgs in children’s literature, whose machinic becomings trace the irradicability of the other, the impossibility of absolutely crypting the dead or abjected otherness, or the incessation of untimely revisitations of the subject by the furtive apparitions of alterity, can be read as traces and not in the binarism between absolute beings/presences or absolute abolitions/exclusions.

By looking into the moments of Phantom’s parricide, an instant sans duration in the narrative yet an imperishable instant because of its hauntological revisitations, or into Young Mortimer’s experience of being always stalked by his alter ego prior to recognition of the same through the haunting rhythms of the other, I have tried to examine the aleation of the self within a spectral field of the return of the other, a haunto-political thematic without which it would become impossible to read the political in random and uncanny events that are abundant in the children’s texts.