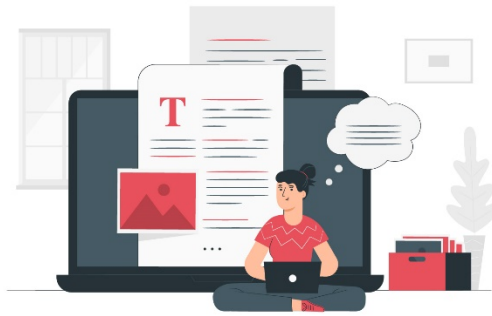


IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

12th Year of Open Access

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal

Vol. XII, Issue-2 (April 2021)

Editor-In-Chief : Dr. Vishwanath Bite
Managing Editor : Dr. Madhuri Bite



www.the-criterion.com



AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Innocence Lost: Childhood Studies and Reconstructing the Child in Paro Anand's *No Guns at My Son's Funeral*

Parth Lakhani
Second Year,
English Honours,
Christ University BGR.

Article History: Submitted-18/02/2021, Revised-13/04/2021, Accepted-15/04/2021, Published-05/05/2021.

Abstract:

Securing childhood innocence is a key objective of parenting as innocence is inherently tied to a society's moral functioning. Paro Anand's 2005 book *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* subverts traditional notions of childhood innocence and in this process destabilizes conventions of children's literature demonstrating a clear link between ideas of ideal child and the aesthetic form of children's literature. This paper considers the Anand's de-construction of the Romantic child and the reconstruction of the Modern child through the lens of Childhood Studies. Anand's work comes to be seen as indicating new definitions of the ideal child, innocence and redefining expectations from Children's Literature.

Keywords: Childhood Studies, Innocence Studies, Children's Literature, Romantic Child, Violence and Children Studies, Ideal Child.

Introduction

Who is the ideal child? What is the ideal childhood? What should be told to the child and what must be kept from the child? How long does childhood last? These are some questions that cultures around the world are preoccupied with, as these ideas are intrinsically linked to a society's moral functioning. Foucault in *The Abnormal* argues that the innocence of the child serves as a principle for creating distinctions between normal and abnormal forms of behaviour and subjectivity. For instance, one would be hard pressed to find mentions of caste, sexuality, religious disharmony in popular children's narratives in India; as it has been largely deemed that this information would corrupt the child, rob the child of their characteristic innocence. Further, childhood and adulthood are defined in relation to innocence as when innocence ends, adulthood begins. The adult author censors themselves while writing to the child creating a body of literature that generally skews reality because of

a certain idealization of the child. The outside world is mediated and distorted by the adult author to preserve and further insulate the innocence of the child. I would go as far as to say that mainstream Children's Literature attempts to delay the end of innocence, to prolong childhood at all costs.

At this juncture it is essential to state that the preservation of innocence in children's narrative is not guided by a benevolent agenda; the idea of innocence is mired in "complex moral and epistemological operations" designed to uphold existing systems of power (Duschinsky 764). Childhood innocence as Foucault hinted at earlier begins to function as a moral authority, however when children become complicit in the abnormal or deviant behaviours and are no longer innocent - the systems of power hinged on innocence are thrown into disarray. This is precisely what is encountered in Paro Anand's *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* where a young teenage boy is radicalised and is depicted post innocence. As a result, literary conventions hinged on preserving innocence lose their moral imperative and are left behind. Anand erases the dichotomy between child and adult, good and evil subverting the defining features of Children's Literature, to create space for a new kind of work rarely encountered in Indian Children's Literature.

Within the Indian context, Superle analysed hundreds of Indian children's narratives from 1998 to 2008; at the end of which they labelled the Children's Literature in India as "aspirational literature with a transformative agenda" (6). They also describe Children's Literature in India as overly prescriptive and didactic, fashioned in order to protect children from harsh social realities. However, Navin Menon declares that trends are fundamentally changing in Children's Literature in India. He states that the element of "overprotection" which characterised Children's Literature in India is being abandoned in favour of narratives that accurately represent social and political realities (Menon 57). Paro Anand's book *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* - the focus of this research paper - arrived at the crest of these burgeoning changes. Anand in her own way challenges entrenched ideas of childhood innocence and subverts attempts to preserve childhood innocence through Children's Literature.

Keeping Superle's criticism in mind, *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* occupies an unique position in the continuum of the genre of Children's Literature and the academic field

of Childhood Studies. *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* is in many ways symbolic of broad sweeping changes occurring in Children's Literature. First, the book embodies the fairly recent recognition that the imagined child who the authors of this genre have been writing to is not reflective of the behaviours and thoughts of the real child. Anand spoke of this in a lecture titled "Unlearning Children's Literature" stating that there was a "disconnect between what I was writing and what their [children's] conversations were about" (Anand). Her books are aimed at bridging this "disconnect" which is the gap between the real and imagined child. *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* also contains within itself a new understanding that reality of the world with its horror and complexities must be negotiated in the space of Children's Literature.

Kenneth Kidd builds on this particular idea stating "we no longer have the luxury of denying evil or postponing the child's confrontation with such" in their essay "A Is For Auschwitz" (Kidd 142). These words reflect the dichotomy drawn between the child and evil in contemporary thought - the very dichotomy that Anand distorts in her book. This leads us to Anand's unique position in Childhood Studies, she subverts the configuration of the child by making her protagonist Aftab the vehicle of violence, the harbinger of destruction - the source of trauma as well as its victim. *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* can be understood as chronicling the corruption of innocence through the central character of Aftab. The idea of the loss of innocence can be enlarged to include not only the fictional children in the book, but also the actual child reader. Paro Anand through bold and controversial themes of violence, religious intolerance and through description of a military torture and graphic sexual encounters challenges the perceived innocence of her readers and the literary conventions of Children's Literature - creating a rich and complex space for multidimensional research and analysis.

This paper titled *Innocence Lost: Childhood Studies and Reconstructing the Child In Paro Anand's No Guns At My Son's Funeral* uses the theoretical framework provided by Childhood Studies along with a close Textual Analysis to understand Anand's construction of the Child. The paper is also supplemented by research into innocence, Romantic child, literary conventions of Children's Literature and the implied reader.

Objectives

1. The research will situate Paro Anand's in the larger tradition of the Romantic child in order to understand how the author diverges from established ideas of the Child.
2. The research shall show that Anand not only imagines a new kind of ideal child but also reconstructs the child's relationship with trauma and violence.
3. Research shall provide evidence of an intrinsic relationship between construction of the ideal child and the literary conventions of children's literature.
4. The paper will show that Paro Anand through the construction of a new ideal child destabilizes the literary conventions of Children's Literature.
5. The paper will prove that Anand is imagining a new child for a new implied reader - Anand's understanding of her target audience fundamentally differs from those of typical children's authors.
6. The final objective in this research is to read Paro Anand's *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* as a subversive, counter-traditional work that indicates the path towards the construction of a new form of Children's Literature.

Paro Anand's *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* constructs a new ideal child in terms of both the fictional implied child and the implied reader, marking a radical shift in definitions of the child and Children's Literature which can be understood through the lens of Childhood Studies.

De-Romanticising the Child

Anand's book "No Guns At My Son's Funeral" can be understood as an attempt to de-Romanticise the child and through that challenge generalizations about children that have informed much of Children's Literature. The central plot of Anand's book - the radicalization of a child into terrorism - is at odds with the Romantic myth of childhood as a transhistorical holy time of innocence and goodness, uncorrupted by adulthood. The Romantic model of childhood is essentialized by Wordsworth when he declares in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* - "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!" (66).

Another cornerstone of the Romantic construction of the child is what Austin in *Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy* terms the "imitative child", Austin states that such a Romantic child "usually appeared in the act of rehearsing adult

behaviour” (76). Such an entity may be encountered in Wordsworth’s 1800 poem *The Pet-Lamb* wherein the child is reduced to a figure who imitates authority figures and lacks any real sense of autonomy. Paro Anand’s central character Aftab stands in clear contrast to the “imitative child”. Aftab routinely questions and opposes his parent’s world views telling his mother in one instance “Ammi, you don’t know anything. You - you stay inside the house and then pretend to know what’s going on outside. You’ve been blinded by the propaganda” (Anand 18). Aftab also questions what his militant leaders tell him after receiving a letter from his Kashmiri Pandit friend. Anand depicts the child as a rebellious figure who questions authority figures.

Carolyn Steedman writes about the Romantic childhood saying, “Childhood was a category of dependence, a term that defined certain relationships of powerlessness, submission and bodily inferiority” (7). Anand’s child characters are not envisioned as hapless, weak creatures at the mercy of adults. Their potency and ability can be determined by the magnitude of destruction they unleash. While it is true that Aftab to a certain extent copies the behaviour of another adult in Akram the militant leader. There is however a marked dissociation between the child and the family. Aftab isolates himself from his birth-family, entering into another societal structure of the militants which he fashions for himself. Anand thereby subverts “traditional social iconography of the child to designate the family” (Austin 87).

Anand’s Reconfiguration of Violence and Child

After examining the internality of Anand’s new child - thoughts, behaviours and emotions - it is imperative to examine the child’s relationship with their environment, particularly the child’s relationship with violence. Anand’s here too attempts to de-romanticize the child’s relationship with hardship and violence. The Romantic child such as Matilda in Elizabeth Inchbald’s 1791 novel “A Simple Story” retains as Christopher Rovee states “a spotlessness of demeanor and generosity of soul” despite being imprisoned by a tyrannical father for much of her childhood (1). This suggests that Romantic construction of the child presents the child as being unchanged by violence and hardship. Further, the trope of the “Child-Healer” pervades Romantic thought, wherein the child is constructed as repairing trauma, undoing bloodshed caused by adults (Smith 116).

Kenneth Capshaw Smith observes that the child is constructed as either “the victim” or “the survivor” of trauma. (Smith 116). Smith too exhibits the Romantic understanding of the relationship between violence and the child - violence is an external event inflicted by adults on the child. The child in such a configuration is positioned as being affected by trauma, however Anand in *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* disrupts the causal relationship between violence and the child. The author depicts her protagonist Aftab as the perpetrator of trauma with Aftab at the end of the book setting off a bomb that kills hundreds. Anand writes “And the dead were dead because of Aftab” firmly placing the blame on Aftab leaving no room for the reader to even question Aftab's responsibility in this heinous act of violence (168). It must be acknowledged that Aftab is by the end of the novel thoroughly radicalised by Akram the militant leader who quite explicitly desires to corrupt Aftab's innocence saying “an innocence that was like clay in his hands. He would mould it now” (Anand 24).

Feroze, another militant leader, speaks about the terrorist camps for young boys where the boys as young as twelve are trained in making I.E.D's, guerilla warfare, ambushing and other forms of terrorism. Feroze while remarking of his own capture as a twelve year old boy by armed forces speaks of the terrible torture inflicted on him. He adds that the army should have killed him as the militants would have done saying “We would have done so. We would have tortured one of theirs, a child if that's who fell in their hands. And then, we would have killed him. Or her. It doesn't matter” (Anand 29).

While it is the adult who pushes the child towards violence, Paro Anand acknowledges the ability of the child to inflict violence - the child continues to be the victim but the role of the child as the oppressor is crucial in the continuing trauma of violence in Kashmir. Aftab's death at the end of the novel in suicide bomb blast that kills hundreds along with him provides a potent metaphor of a dramatic new configuration of child's relationship with violence wherein the child is the source of violence as well as its victim.

Comparing the Romantic and the Modern Child

Paro Anand in a story about the corruption of innocence presents two opposing constructions of the child in Aftab and Angad. Aftab is the source of violence while Angad is the ultimate victim of violence. Consequently, a comparison between these characters allows us to understand Anand's particular subversion of the ideal child.

Angad conforms to the model of the Romantic child while Aftab can be understood as representing a “real” child - a child who is flawed and no longer innocent. While Angad is very much the child that was popularized by Rousseau - a child who “is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things” but “degenerates in the hands of man” (Rousseau 1). Angad therefore works to represent the natural goodness of the child that is essential to Romantic thought while Aftab is a symbol of the new ‘de-Romanticized’ child. Angad’s actions in the book provide a means of decoding the impulses and desires embedded in the cross-cultural emphasis on the Romantic model of the child. Angad throughout the book encourages Aftab to play cricket and other games with children of his own age while Aftab generally refuses to do so, preferring to spend his time with his militant outfit. Angad here vocalises the parental impulse to encourage children “no longer purely childlike, to enact the childhood they have moved beyond” (Nodelman 23) attempting to preserve the idea of childhood innocence. Aftab’s refusal to engage in children’s activities is a reflection of his desire to lose innocence and grow up whereas Angad wishes to preserve the sanctity of the child. This is most evident in his attempts to dissuade Aftab from pursuing devious activities with the terrorist group. However, his attempts are unsuccessful as at the end of the book Aftab plants a bomb that results in his own death as well as that of Angad and hundred other innocents. Anand through this appears to be saying that in the collision of the Modern child and the Romantic child, the Modern child is shown to be the more powerful entity ‘winning’ with horrific consequences.

Literary Conventions and the Romantic Child

Anand’s construction of the real child in Aftab exposes the frailty of the traditional narrative framework of Children’s Literature in presenting the de-Romanticized child. Anand could not write a story about a child terrorist while still conforming to the conventions and expectations of this genre. Therefore, the following analysis of Anand’s subversion of the traditional features of Children’s Literature works to show that the literary conventions of the genre preserve and perpetuate the Romantic myth of the child.

Nodelman and Reimer essentialized Children’s Literature calling it a field characterised “binary oppositions” (199), “simplicity” (203), general tone of optimism, hopefulness and frequent use of “happy endings” (209). The model of CL created by Nodelman and Reimer can be compared to the features of *No Guns at My Son’s Funeral* to understand Anand’s subversion of the stereotypes of the genre.

(i) Binary Oppositions

McGillis states that Children's Literature is a “form of literature based on a series of binary opposites that refuse reconciliation” (257). These binaries supply Children's Literature with narrative simplicity which in turn shields the child from the complex and harsh realities of the world. Binaries are thus a way to simplify the world for the child, but at the same time binaries naturally misrepresent the world. Anand in *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* interrogates the binary opposition of the child and the adult - two entities whose mutual isolation to each other is essential to didactic purpose of Children's Literature. David Rudd terms this as a controller-controlled binary in which children are imagined as “powerless objects of the adult discourse” (31).

The character of Aftab in particular is a strange hybrid of the adult and the child. He engages in typical child-like behaviour such as craving the comfort of his mother's arms, playing cricket with his friends and is labelled innocent and unknowing throughout the book. However simultaneously but not in contradiction Aftab behaves like an adult, he is cruel, calculating and terribly violent. Aftab acquiesces to Akram's suggestion that his own sister should provide sexual favours to an officer in order to gain entrance to the army camp - evidencing his desire to agree to do anything for the 'cause'. He is also ready to destroy himself saying “He too would immolate himself on the flame that was Akram's mission” (Anand 53). Aftab's burning passion for the jihadi mission and readiness to commit violence is most evidently seen in the climax when he murders hundreds of “enemies to the cause” in a suicide bomb attack (Anand 13). Thus, Aftab is written to be a character who lies in the middle grounds, neither child nor adult.

Anand also explicitly collapses the binary of child and adult when Feroze says of his own capture and eventual escape from the Indian army - “It was a child they captured. But it was a wily, dangerous man, full of thoughts for revenge who escaped from their clutches that night” (Anand 29).

(ii) Simplicity

Children's narratives are constructed keeping the limited knowledge of their probable readers in mind. The simplicity is often configured in the form of flat characters, lack of moral ambiguity, clear distinctions between good and evil. Simplicity - an ideological innocence - becomes an epistemological tool that works “in order to block out the knowledge

of (or acknowledgment of the knowledge of?) the actual complexity and uncertainty of childhood for both children and adults” (Nodelman 24).

Anand positions her child characters in ways that force them to confront ethical dilemmas and moral ambivalence of Kashmiri politics, there is no simplicity in plot or action here. For instance, Aftab who wishes to remove all non-muslims from Kashmir receives a letter from his Kashmiri Pandit friend Laxman Kachru. It is a letter that warns against the militancy speaking of the profound pain that terrorists such as Aftab’s own radical group have inflicted upon Laxman and his family. After reading the letter, Aftab is left uncertain about his own political and social identity - “Suddenly his mind was clouded with doubts and he couldn’t tell right from wrong. For the first time since it all began, he started to wonder which side he should be on” (Anand 122). Paro Anand forces the child reading her book into recognising the complexity of the world, the reader too is forced to question themselves as does Aftab.

(iii) Tone of Optimism

Paro Anand’s book *No Guns At My Son’s Funeral* begins with the following poem -

“In fact there didn’t seem to be
 Anything left for us to see
 A shred, a shard, a tuft of hair
 A flip-flop flung without a care
 But the dust we scuffed
 Beneath our feet
 Revealed a blood-red underneath”

(Anand 1)

It is a dark and ominous poem that works to set the tone for the book; this book does not promise the safe security that is traditionally associated with Children's Literature. No promises of a simple tale, a happy ending here - none of what Paro Anand terms as the “*laxman rekha* [border line] of Cinderella” (Anand). The book recognizes the universality of violence that lies hidden - “the blood red underneath” - and it is this universal feeling that is particularized through Kashmir and through the central character of Aftab (Anand 1). The bleak tone continues throughout the story with little respite, including descriptions of military torture, prostitution and increasing radicalization.

(iv) Happy Endings

Happy endings are a mainstay of Children's Literature, Pape who traced the history of happy endings in "*Happy Endings in a World of Misery*" writes "the structure of stories for children has generally reproduced the dominant interpretation of the world, which anticipated a happy endings" (180). Within a genre that is rapidly reinventing itself, happy endings have been termed the "last taboo" of Children's Literature (Lauren). Paro Anand transgresses this last taboo in *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* in an ending that is unlike those of traditional literature. The book ends with all its major characters and protagonists - Aftab, Angad, Akram, Feroze - dead with Aftab murdering his best friend Angad and his family. The book dwells on Aftab's mother's guilt at being unable to prevent her son's radicalization - "She is also burdened by guilt. It's because of her son that the other [Angad's mother] has come to the gate - hair undone, dressed in white" (Anand 168).

While such an ending is distant from fairy tales and other traditional Children's Literature, Anand is particular about including a glimmer of hope. The book ends with the characters affirming their commitment to peace and distancing themselves from violence. Aftab's mother refuses to allow armed military personnel to attend her son's funeral giving the book its title "*No Guns At My Son's Funeral*". Thus, Anand reinvents and enlarges the idea of "happy endings" to include a hopeful end that is more appropriate to narratives of violence.

(v) Language

Language or more accurately the aesthetic form serves as another marked convention of Children's Literature. Rose within this context refers to a "realist aesthetic" (60) as a form of writing that "attempts to reduce to an absolute minimum our awareness of the language in which a story is written in order that we will take it for real" (65). Anand subverts the realist aesthetic through the use of meta fictional asides that highlight the constructedness of the text. These asides are presented in italics throughout the book and continually disrupt the narrative. For instance, Anand writes "*She could say all she wanted to, no one would listen to her words and warnings until later. Much later*" (11). This statement is spoken by an omniscient narrator - directly to the reader - hints towards the end of the book. The narrator thus subverts the chronological flow of the text, essentially spoiling the book for the reader.

Shifting from regular to italicized font draws attention to the typed font, a facet that would have been largely ignored otherwise. Finally, the asides also function as an example of intertextuality referring to another point in the book - “No Guns At My Son’s Funeral” does not simply unfold before the reader but rather is presented as already constructed and finished. Anand’s narrative choices are not only experiments in aesthetic form; they indicate a new, more complex view of the child. Metafictional texts are viewed by Hunt as being closer to the culture of childhood, with child readers somehow having a natural affinity with such texts; they are “the true ‘deconstructors’ of texts”. (Hunt 97)

Anand through her graphic descriptions of violence also counters Barbara Wall’s assertion that adults speak differently when writing to children. Wall bases her analysis of Children’s Literature on “the conviction that adults...speak differently in fiction when they are aware that they are addressing children...[This is] translated, sometimes subtly, sometimes obviously, into the narrator’s voice...[which defines] a children’s book” (Wall 2–3). Anand speaks to the child reading the book as an equal, which works to democratize the hierarchical relationship between the adult author and the child reader.

(vi) Didacticism

Didacticism has been a central, unifying element for the Children’s Literature across cultures and time. It is what supplies Children’s Literature with a moral purpose elevating the writing of the genre to a necessary occupation. The moral message of Anand’s *No Guns At My Son’s Funeral* is only limited to the idea that violence is horrific no matter what the side. Thus, Anand’s text does not contain the “monologic, authoritarian control of this cautionary literature” instead moves towards a new form of didacticism (Cross 55).

Anand provides a counter traditional work in “No Guns At My Son’s Funeral” in the sense that her work does not conform to the prescriptive didacticism of traditional children’s narratives. As observed earlier, the book questions binaries and evil which didactic narratives naturally depend upon. The book is told through multiple perspectives - such as Aftab, Akram, Feroze, Shazia, Major Ramneeq and Ammi; the narratology is thus influenced by a cacophony of conflicting worldviews and ideologies. The book as a whole is largely focalized through the character of Aftab who becomes a child terrorist, such a focalization prevents the general identification of the child reader with the ‘good’ character - it forces the reader to develop a sense of empathy with a terrorist. Through these features, Anand’s work develops

its own form of didacticism which Cross terms “New Didacticism” that aims “to facilitate young readers’ own interpretations and enable more active participation in meaning-making” (Cross 57). Thus, Anand does not embed a prescriptive moral message in her work but rather encourages her reader to form their own meanings. This works to reveal her construction of the child as an entity that can understand complexity and has the maturity to make value judgments on their own - the Modern child.

(vii) Appropriateness

In addition to the model of Children’s Literature prescribed by Reimer and Nodelman, Coats describes appropriateness as another convention of Children’s Literature. She states “No other literature is quite as implicated in the ethics of readership as books written for and marketed to children” (Coats 390). The ethics of readership are fundamentally connected to the preservation of the Romantic myth of childhood. Anand presents in her work intense themes of violence and trauma, inherently recognizing that children are already familiar with such ideas. She thus asserts the need to question the centrality of innocence which has guarded the realm of Children's Literature - deciding which ideas, events, themes are allowed entry into the “cultural safehouse” of the genre and which are deemed inappropriate for the constructed child (Reynolds 5).

Within this context, Foucault’s observation that innocence is the principle that distinguishes between the normal and abnormal is particularly pertinent. This is certainly the case in Children’s Literature; it is innocence which permits themes of friendship into the genre but refuses entry to themes of sex or violence. *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* de-Romanticizes the child by constructing it as an entity that has lost innocence, thereby changing themes of terrorism and extremism into appropriate themes. Anand’s work is grounded in the de-construction of the Romantic Child which is necessary for the construction of the Modern child. Anand in this process reveals the cross-cultural “nostalgic worship of childhood innocence” to be only a myth (Warner 2).

Who is Paro Anand’s implied reader?

The romanticization of the ideal child embedded in Children’s Literature is founded on the idealization of the child in the real world. The characters of a children’s book only mirror the thoughts and behaviours of an ordinary child imagined by adult authors. Thus, an

analysis of the implied reader is essential in Anand's deconstruction of the Romantic child and construction of the Modern child.

Iser defines the implied reader as a "textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient". (34). Paro Anand through her subversion of tropes and conventions of Children's Literature indicates that she is not writing *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* to the same implied reader that authors of mainstream Children's Literature have been writing to. Anand stated in a talk titled "Unlearning Children's Literature" that her motivation for writing a tale of violence emerged from discussions with real children and asking them what they wanted to read. This leads to her recognizing that the myth of childhood innocence needs to be unlearned, which forms the basis for her construction of the de-romanticized child and a new type of implied reader. Anand keeping the mythicity of innocence in mind, re-imagines the "repertoire" of her implied reader - repertoire is the "factual, cultural, and literary knowledge the text refers to, and that knowledge enables the implied reader to understand the text" (Iser 87).

The implied reader according to Iser can be reconstructed through "textual gaps" or "blanks" - which is information that the author does not deem necessary to provide (32). Blanks exist on both the thematic level (what is said) and the level of textual strategies (how it is said). Anand's implied reader can be understood by her choice of themes - "No Guns At My Son's Funeral concerns themes of themes of violence, religious disharmony, exclusion - inclusion, extremism, grief, PTSD, guilt and innocence. Anand clearly considers themes to be appropriate for her audience, therefore constructing her implied reader as a child who is aware of the existence of harsher realities. When Anand writes "the word prostitute would not apply here", it is clear that she recognizes that the child reading the book will understand its social implications of the word (132).

The level of textual strategies is more practical in assessing the repertoire of Anand's implied reader. Anand describes a military interrogation of a twelve-year-old child writing "Ah - I - I can't even begin to tell you. It was too awful. They nearly killed him. They broke his bones. They almost bled him to death" (Anand 28). In another instance, she describes a terrorist attack in her book writing "He was killed instantly. But maybe he was luckier than Sonu mama who really suffered. Both his legs were blown as the bomb exploded right under the jeep. He was thrown up in the air. In the fall, he also badly fractured oh so many bones.

You just can't imagine. He was in so much pain" (Anand 118). These two instances show that Anand does not soften or subdue the violence inflicted by the military and the militants in Kashmir for her child reader. She believes that the implied reader would not be traumatized by her language as it is the language that the ordinary child is familiar with and maybe even speaks in.

Paro Anand thus constructs her child characters and her implied child reader as entities who are already post innocence. Herein she marks a dramatic deviation from the traditional construction of the child which informs her entire body of work.

Conclusion

The terminology of "Children's Literature" with its use of the possessive apostrophe has traditionally been a misnomer; the name implies that this is a genre that *belongs* to children. However, children are not involved in the writing, editing, publishing stages of a children's book, they are only imagined as passive consumers of texts produced by adults. Despite the obvious limitations of the genre (the author is likely to always be an adult), Paro Anand is involved in a larger task of reclaiming Children's Literature for Children. She achieves this by recasting and reimagining the child both in terms of the fictional child embedded in the book and the text's implied reader. In this process, Anand subverts traditional conventions of Children's Literature, paving the way for other children's narratives that do not conform to typical expectations of the genre.

It is essential to pause at this moment and consider the ideological implications of what Anand has achieved; she has questioned the centrality of innocence that has governed the functioning of Children's Literature and larger society. Returning to Foucault since innocence is what creates differences between normal and abnormal, Anand by deromanticizing the child - the very embodiment of innocence - is questioning the existing principles of differentiation. For instance, if the child understands what sex is, should sex be categorized as abnormal or taboo? *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* offers no definitive answers within this context, rather inserting ambiguity and space in a closed genre.

Paro Anand's greatest accomplishment with *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* is how the text provides a model for other books that wish to tell children their own stories. She shows how Children's Literature need not be categorized by a dull simplicity, reductionist

dichotomies or predictable happy endings. Anand demonstrates how the author can de-Romanticize the child to create narratives that more closely resemble the lived realities of the modern child. Anand's work *No Guns At My Son's Funeral* is a statement on how Children's Literature needs to move from a desire to preserve innocence to an understanding of the real child, from the aspirational to the actual and from the Romantic to the Modern.

Works Cited:

Anand, Paro. *No Guns at My Son's Funeral*. Roli Books Private Limited, 2012.

Anand, Paro. "Unlearning Children's Literature" Mezzaterra. Christ University, 17 November 2020 Online Lecture.

Austin, Linda M. "Children of childhood: Nostalgia and the romantic legacy." *Studies in Romanticism* 42.1 (2003): 75-98.

Barrie, James Matthew. *Peter Pan*. Penguin, 2004.

Cross, Julie. "The Inevitable and Inescapable Didacticism of Contemporary Popular Junior Fiction." *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 10.1 (2004): 55-70.

Coats, Karen. "Conventions of Children's Literature: Then and Now." *Style* 35.3 (2001): 389-392.

Duschinsky, Robbie. "Childhood innocence: essence, education, and performativity." *Textual Practice* 27.5 (2013): 763-781.

Hunt, Peter. *Criticism, theory, and children's literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Kidd, Kenneth B. "'A' is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the 'Children's Literature of Atrocity'." *Children's Literature*, vol. 33, 2005, p. 120-149.

Lauren "The Last Taboo of Children's Fiction?" Children's Literature at Cambridge, Centre for Research in Children's Literature at Cambridge., 19 Feb. 2016,

Menon, Navin. "Children's Literature in India - The Changing Trends" *Indian Horizons* 44.2 (1995): 53-66.mcgil

McGillis, Roderick. "What Is Children's Literature?." *Children's Literature* 37.1 (2009): 256-262.

Nodelman, Perry. "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 17.1 (Spring 1992): 29-35.

Nodelman, Perry, and Mavis Reimer. *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*. New York: Longman, 1996.

Reynolds, Kimberley. "Radical Children's Literature." *Future Visions* (2007).

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile, or On Education*: Translated by Babara Foxley. e-artnow, 2018.

Rovee, Christopher. "The Romantic Child, C.1780-1830." *Historical Essays: The Romantic Child*, Stanford University,

Rudd, David. "3 Theorising and theories." *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (2004): 29.

Pape, Walter. "Happy Endings in a World of Misery: A Literary Convention between Social Constraints and Utopia in Children's and Adult Literature." *Poetics Today*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1992, pp. 179–196.

Rose, Jacqueline. "The Case of Peter Pan." *The Children's Culture Reader* (1998): 58-66.

Smith, Katharine Capshaw. "Trauma and Children's Literature." *Children's Literature* 33.1 (2005): 115-119.

Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange dislocations: Childhood and the idea of human interiority, 1780-1930*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

Superle, Michelle. *Contemporary English-language Indian children's literature: Representations of nation, culture, and the new Indian girl*. Vol. 78. Routledge, 2011.

Wall, Barbara. "The Narrators Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction, New York: St." (1991).

Warner, Marina. *Managing monsters*. Random House, 2010.

Wordsworth, William. *Ode on Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood*. Lothrop Publishing, 1807.