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Children's Literature, Child Engineering and the Search for an Ennobling Gender Paradigm

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Abstract

The article is an exegesis of selected works of Zimbabwean children's literature in English. It discusses these works with a view to unravel perspectives on gender and child engineering. The conceptual and epistemological thrust in these works underlines the fact that they largely derive inspiration from and are coterminous with children's oral narratives and games in which neither maleness nor femaleness is a handicap. This makes them an ideal sociological discourse and pedagogical resource in advancing knowledge on gender. Consequently, the article marshals the contention that, though a neglected genre in Zimbabwean critical scholarship, written children's literature is a befitting discursive instrument for the advancement of an ennobling gender consciousness and paradigm. It deconstructs the socially constructed identities of women as those who are permanently vulnerable and neurotically lacking the impetus to struggle and triumph. It conspicuously achieves this by depicting and locating girl children and mothers at the center of the struggle to transform weakness and vulnerability into strength. Thus, this kind of a curriculum on gender makes children's literature critical in the investment of gender in nation building processes.

Introduction

The article is an analysis of selected works of Zimbabwean children's literature in English. It focuses specifically on Mazhindu's and Magosvongwe's *The Offshoot* (2008), Alumenda's *Marita Goes to School* (1997) and Hanson's *Takadini* (1997), with a view to canonising children's literature as imaginative discourse embodying life-affirming human factor values on gender and child engineering. The narratives are selected because they give primacy to a *modus operandi* in which capability and the possibility of *becoming* are operationalised outside the precincts of a narrowly defined framework of existence. Also important to note is the fact that Zimbabwean critical scholarship has paid scant attention to this literary genre, preferring instead, to analyse what one might call 'mainstream' literary texts. This scenario has, to a large extent, kept the Zimbabwean reading public unaware of the vast sociological, pedagogical and philosophical treasure embodied in these narratives. Further to that, the neglect of children's literature as legitimate cultural discourse in Zimbabwean critical scholarship has occasioned a situation

whereby this genre has lagged behind in terms of the development of appropriate critical canons and the healthy interplay that should obtain between creative authors and literary critics. These concerns emanate from the realisation that, every form of discourse develops relative to the amount of critical engagement it attracts.

Narratives analysed in this article qualify as children's literature and/or literature about children in that they exhibit certain salient features that are definitive of this genre. For instance, readers note the celebration of child agency and the prominence of a child protagonist whose penchant for life is clear in the manner he/she presides over the dismantlement of limiting conditions of life with a view to creating a world in which human potential is not diminished. Thus, in analysing Zimbabwean written children's literature, the article takes due cognisance of the fact that this corpus of works redounds with echoes of practical life principles that are also expressed and celebrated in Shona/Ndebele/African children's games such as *mahumbwe* (children's initiation games), *zvindori* (songs that teach children about the environment), *magure* (songs that teach children about courtship and adult roles), *mitambo yavakomana navasikana* (games played by male and female children). By referring to literary texts, the article argues for the need to promote a universe of thought on gender and child engineering from which both children and adults can draw valuable insights on life.

Children's Literature, Child Engineering and Child Agency

Children are to any given people what a flower is to a plant (Muhwati, 2005: 84). In this regard, the engineering of children is one of the most important businesses of a nation. It entails the designing of proper coping mechanisms as well as cultural and intellectual models which facilitate the germination, nurturing and maturation of child talent and ability. It emerges out of the understanding that "life is made today but lived tomorrow" (Muhwati, 2009: 7) and that children are a part of the future that must be won, hence the need to keep on inventing and mentoring them. Seen in this light, effective and sustainable child engineering concentrates on bringing out the power and capability of the child to thrive regardless of their gender and the magnitude of the challenges ranged against their best interests. It increases their awareness of the potential they wield and the contributions they can make, individually and collectively. Against this backdrop, this section of the article discusses child engineering, centering specifically on the challenges faced by the girl child and the resultant agency she develops, as depicted in *The Offshoot* and *Marita Goes to School*.

Mazhindu's and Magosvongwe's *The Offshoot* (2008) is a story of suffering, struggle, hope and commitment to life. Through flashback, as will become clear in the unfolding of the discussion, the narrative traces the unfortunate experiences

of the protagonist, Masiwa, a young girl of school going age who loses her father, the family's breadwinner, to HIV/AIDS related illnesses. Masiwa is the prism through which the authors advance awareness of the debilitating conditions experienced by orphaned children. In particular, she exemplifies the multiple tragedies of the girl child, most of which are occasioned by avarice in the family and the flagrant abuse and misinterpretation of Shona customary practices such as *kugara nhaka* (inheritance of the estate of the deceased). Her life becomes unbearably difficult as her father's greedy relatives chase away her mother and forcibly take away the deceased's family house in Mufakose, his car and bank book. The maltreatment that Masiwa and her sibling, Nyasha, receive from their uncle and aunt who have taken over the family house in Mufakose, forces them to take to the streets where the former is raped twice.

The title of the narrative, *The Offshoot*, is incandescent with echoes of renewal and regeneration. It is a celebration of the victory of the human spirit over forces inimical to spiritual, moral and physical growth, premised on the unassailable conviction that "we build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how and we stand on top of the mountains, free within ourselves" (Hughes, 1998: 80). As a teenage girl, Masiwa's life is dominated by shame, victimisation and humiliation. She has no decent clothes and often misses school because she has to herd cattle and look after her sibling. As the authors explain: "She sometimes went to school shabbily dressed in a dirty uniform...Life was unbearable in the village. All the work in her grandmother's home was her sole responsibility" (38). While exposure of children of both genders to work in Shona/Ndebele/African culture, properly understood, is part of child engineering, Masiwa's condition renders this culturally and socially noble practice exploitative. Under normal cultural circumstances, every member of the Shona/Ndebele/African family is a vital link in the bread-winning chain of action that delimits the family as a unit thriving on the concatenation of participatory energies. However, Masiwa's grandmother's constant drunkenness, when she is supposed to be the family's leading figure, amounts to neglectful parenting; the effects of which take a huge toll on Masiwa's performance at school and general development.

When Masiwa and Nyasha are moved to Harare, their aunt, Clara, severely ill-treats them. She denies them food and makes spurious accusations. The intensity of Clara's hatred leaves Masiwa with no option but to take to the streets. Unaware of the unwritten codes of street life, she is at one time brutalised by a group of older and 'seasoned' street children and in a very horrendous incident, she is lured to a secluded lodge in the outskirts of the city where she is raped twice by a man she only identifies as Mr. Carlos. The depth of the psychological turmoil she suffers after the rape is profoundly narrated in the following set of questions:

My life is hell...Now I have been raped. Am I pregnant? Who will take me into their home? Can anyone believe my story? What will I do? What will my life be like? No one knows that we are dying silently. My life is slowly crumbling together with my world (73).

While Masiwa's condition appears insurmountable, the authors' achievement is in their creative ability to ingeniously juxtapose suffering and the unimpeachable desire to overcome and conquer. Further to that, the fact that the authors endow Masiwa with the responsibility to narrate her ordeal marks a revolution in Zimbabwean literary discourse where the tendency is to narrowly blame women characters without privileging them with voice and agency. The above set of questions achieves the dual objective of reflecting the depth of her predicament as well as telling the story from a woman's perspective because, "when women [speak], they not only create their own stories but by the act of [speaking] they gain authority over their own lives" (Shaw, 2002: 83).

As the narrative brings out the problems as well as the vulnerability of children orphaned as a result of HIV and AIDS, it makes no attempt to depict Masiwa as a pitiable figure. Instead, it depicts her problems as part of the vast and complex processes of life. To that extent, the vision in *The Offshoot* interlocks quite remarkably with p'Bitek's (1986: 25) philosophical exegesis of the exigencies of existence:

Problems, crises, challenges are, have always been and will continue to be, a necessary ingredient of living. And, it is precisely the facing and tackling and solving of them, that life is all about.

Masiwa shakes off the hangovers of an unfortunate and potentially incapacitating childhood as discussed above to become a medical practitioner. Through flashback, as already mentioned, readers are introduced to Masiwa right at the apex of her professional life before they are escorted through the dungeons and precipices of the "zone of nonbeing, [the] extraordinarily sterile and arid region, [the] utterly naked declivity," (Fanon, 1967: 8) that her life was. As the proud owner of a thriving private surgery somewhere in the High density suburbs of Harare, Masiwa's success epitomises the discursive deconstruction of narrow gendered representations of female-male roles/capacities. Mr. Carlos, whom readers later identify as the man who raped Masiwa, is one of the patients at Masiwa's surgery. During the time of the rape, Mr. Carlos was the healthy, wealthy, strong and conquering 'male' who could use his power to get himself anything. On the other hand, Masiwa was his exact antithesis, representing the vulnerable, the conquered and conquerable 'female' living at the mercy of the powerful male. However, as Mr. Carlos enters Dr. Masiwa's surgery, demanding to see "the big man himself" (9), it is possible for readers to begin to realise a reversal of fortunes

and identities between the two characters whose presence in the narrative resonates with macrocosmic representations of gender. For instance, Mr. Carlos now looks frail, decrepit, and is a patient; while Masiwa is composed, flourishing and very much in control. And as is clear in his demand to see 'the big man himself,' Mr. Carlos emblematises cockeyed and jaundiced social constructions of gender in which participation and achievement in certain professions is a privilege for men. The unmistakable informing rubric of his erroneous school of thought is that women must occupy the lowest social, economic and professional rungs. This is an attitude that has unfortunately been presented as expressive of African cultural tyranny and, its inability to furnish women with adequate participatory space for self-expression, self-realisation and self-actualisation. The juxtaposition of Masiwa's rise to professional glory and Mr. Carlos' precipitous descent into oblivion enables the authors to invent and advance a pedagogy and curriculum of life that opens up the future and liberates readers from possible stagnation and inertia. It has the potential to "de-stabilise conventional notions of gender" (Attree, 2007: 60).

Laden as it is with pain, strife and travail, Masiwa's experience provides a complete African story in which struggle, conquest and victory are the ultimate vocations of life. To fully appreciate the existential value of the narrative in human engineering, one needs to look at African story-telling traditions in which resignation and withdrawal are anathema. In this regard, the authors have invested in Masiwa the agency and urgency to "abandon the idea of [African women] as those who are marginal..., as those who stand on the periphery of [male] triumphalism, as those who are only acted upon rather than acting, and as those who are culturally and historically dominated" (Asante, 1998: xii). Her story of struggle and victory has the potential to inspire both young and adult readers who find themselves discouraged by conditions of life. It provides an ennobling vision of life that challenges readers to overcome victimhood and its subversive potential. Thus, if "the liberation of a people is above all a process in the minds of men and women" (Davidson, 1981: ix), children's literature cannot be ignored in the broad and complex tapestry of liberating consciousness and action.

Alumenda's *Marita Goes to School* (1997), is a story that centers on Marita, a young village girl who is denied the opportunity to go to school by her father, Kondai, on the basis of exhausted and unsustainable reasons, camouflaged as tradition. Kondai, who prefers educating his son, Ngono, is convinced that:

It was a waste of time and money to send girls to school because they were only going to get married. And if Marita went to school, there would be no one to help with the work at home (1).

Similar contorted and lopsided decisions on gender which favour the boy child can also be seen in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) in which a warped version of African culture championed by Babamukuru and his young brother, Jeremiah, prioritises boy child education and only avails Tambu with the chance to go to school after her brother, Nhamo, dies. Apparently, *Babamukuru*, a university graduate, believes in the power of education to liberate and develop minds and it beats the imagination why he should fail to think better than the unlettered Kondai in Alumenda's *Marita Goes to School*. But in as much as Marita is a victim in Alumenda's narrative, Kondai's statement above also passes him for a victim of the collusion and contest between a bastardised African 'tradition' and a marauding European 'modernity' which precipitate a Fanonian "nervous condition" (Fanon, 1967: 17) and a Baldwinian "cultural chaos" (Baldwin, 1954: 40) which militate against the possibility and desirability of sound cultural judgements. It is a 'nervous condition' and a 'cultural chaos' because, Shona culture, properly understood, recognises both male and female children as seen in Shona philosophical statements such as, *wazvara mwanakomana wazvara mwanasikana, wazvara mwanasikana wazvara mwanakomana*; (s/he who begets a male child has begotten a female child, and s/he who begets a female child has begotten a male child) *mwana mwana* (children are the same regardless of gender) and *chenga ose manhanga hapana risina rhodzi* (all beings are equal and deserving of equal treatment). These Shona philosophical views in which twinning; diurnality and inclusion are the informing hallmarks share much in common with Igbo value systems in which the idea is that "everything has its own unique energy which must be acknowledged and given its due" (Achebe, 1989: 62).

However, in the confused and confusing context depicted in the story, Alumenda has assumed the responsibility to "liberate the forces which, alone, can organize from this chaos a new synthesis, a synthesis which will be the reconciliation of the old and the new" (Baldwin, 1954: 40). With the colonial subversion of indigenous African processes and systems of knowledge generation and dissemination, the school symbolises the 'new' and by extension, 'enlightenment' and 'development' without which the girl child would forever remain entrapped in a distorted tradition. Kondai and the other patriarchs who are averse to girl child education stand for the unpalatable combination of the 'old' and the 'new', which they misrepresent as authentic African cultural standards, values and principles.

In her battle for recognition as a human being and a child with equal entitlements and talents as her brother, Marita determinedly engages prejudice, ignorance and misconstrued African cultural practices. She evolves into an aggressive soldier in the battle to liberate and open up the narrowly defined gender space of the girl child in the village. In the context of an incorrigible regime represented by her father, Marita clandestinely takes lessons in reading and writing with Miss

Hombo despite the inevitably grave consequences should her father find out. Miss Hombo is the scorned local school teacher whom villagers call a 'Hen-cock' and on whom they also blame all their misfortunes:

If there was a drought they blamed Miss Hombo.; and if locusts attacked the crops they blamed Miss Hombo; and when there was too much rain, they blamed Miss Hombo. They said it was because she was not following the tradition of the African people (5).

Given such prejudice, Marita "would sneak to Miss Hombo's house every weekend for her lessons" (11). Because of the secretive nature of her learning, Marita makes use of her brief escapades to the well to "pull a book from her pocket and read for a while before going home" (12). In this regard, her commitment to reading becomes ammunition for the battle to break out of the claustrophobic and strangulating embrace of a narrow and limiting village philosophy. As the author makes clear, Marita's mastery of reading enhances possibilities and opportunities for her in the future. Thus, to be in a position to read, as Marita demonstrates at the end of the narrative, is to have control over the world, to name, redefine and repurpose it in a manner that debunks objectification and thingification. Seen in this light, Marita's mastery of the act of reading is part of the glossary of power and the turf upon which socially constructed vulnerabilities are contested and negated.

Just like Marita, Miss Hombo herself had been a victim of morbid cultural attitudes in her youth. That she is now a successful woman who owns a car and has a stable and 'prestigious' job makes this story resonant with the values expressed in Booker T. Washington's race uplifting title, '*Up from Slavery*'. The combination of Miss Hombo's and Marita's struggle and triumph over the twin manacles of an incarcerating 'tradition' and an enslaving patriarchy provides blueprints for an ennobling social order. It also defines the two women as personifications of the capacity building idea that is crucial in child engineering and development. In a very profound way, therefore, Alumenda invests in the girl child a spirit-force that has the potential to "instill will into the [woman's] mind to reclaim itself" (Ani, 1994: xxi). This is even clear in the title of the narrative; *Marita goes to School*, a galactic expression of struggle, transcendence and victory over dwarfishness and related stultifying modes of thinking. Through her own determination and the support from her mother, Marita overcomes her community's intransigence on the place of the girl child. She takes it upon herself to search for a suitable answer to her quandary and in the process, provides readers with a sound moral and philosophical homily into the search motif as enunciated by Asante (1998: 205) that: "We must still search in order to find [because] those who are not in the search mode will never find." Thus, what Marita demonstrates is the fact that the individual has a bill of responsibilities that she/he must settle before blaming

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the wider social, cultural, political and economic forces, for, as Baldwin (1972: 15) argues, in life, "the biggest responsibility lies in what one demands, not of others, but of oneself." For young girl readers, Marita is a force that the author deploys in order to relocate and reposition women at the centre of gender, social, cultural and intellectual metamorphosis.

Redrawing the Margins of Motherhood: the Quest for an Ennobling Gender Paradigm

As the previous section has shown, Zimbabwean children's literature largely articulates a philosophy that equips readers with a desire to struggle and triumph. But of particular note is the manner in which this genre also sets the pace in portraying mother characters as more resilient, creative and family-centered than most of their male counterparts who have largely been protected by culture as defined by a rigid patriarchal structure. Thus, this section provides an exegesis of the manner in which Hanson's *Takadini* and Mazhindu's and Magosvongwe's *The Offshoot* make use of mother characters as intellectual and epistemological resources in the struggle to enlarge the spectrum of choices available to readers. In these narratives, the innovative visualisation of the life experiences of mothers derives legitimacy from the realisation that, "the struggle for justice [and development] can be handicapped if women have a negative image in society. A negative image delegitimises their struggle for fundamental rights and freedoms such as the right to jobs, education, health and other valued goods and services in society" (Gaidzanwa, 1985: 8). It is against this background that these Zimbabwean authors whose works are under analysis in this section have realised the necessity for literature to imbue mother characters with the vision to struggle in order to become visible and audible in a context in which culture itself is manipulated to ratify self-centered male agendas. Thus, by presenting mothers as proactive in the search for new options and life-furthering possibilities, Zimbabwean children's literature, as the ensuing discussion will show, casts mothers as potential liberators of culture itself from the stranglehold of 'powerful' and 'unrelenting' patriarchs.

Hanson's novel, *Takadini* (1997) is a narrative about Sekai, a resilient woman who, after nine years of marriage without a child, gives birth to an albino son. This son, whom Sekai names Takadini, is born into a society which stipulates that babies of his nature have to be immediately destroyed and "sent back to the ancestors" (21). Sekai's decision to keep Takadini regardless of the society's customary code leads to her abandonment and castigation by her husband and relatives. Her decision is an act of courage, particularly given the fact that "no sope [albino] child had ever been allowed to survive before" (21). Thus, on the very day the village patriarchs are expected to gather and decide her fate, Sekai escapes with her son. Her decision is anchored in her unalloyed motherly love as expressed in her no-holds-barred discussion with her husband:

This is our son, yours and mine; but if you do not want him, cannot bear the sight of him, I cannot compel you to be a father to him. You are a man; I am a woman and his mother. He came out of my body and I will love him and care for him no matter what he looks like (22).

Unmistakable in this excerpt are revelations of Sekai's self-confidence, self-esteem and an undiluted awareness of her agency, humanity, dignity and womanhood. In choosing flight, Sekai has not only assumed control over her life but is also redefining and renaming herself and her world. Firm as it is, her resolve contests established societal conventions which limit the individual's space for free expression and self-realisation. Through her decision, Sekai demonstrates that "the confirmation of our freedom and responsibility occurs in the decisions that we make" (Asante, 1998: 32). In particular, the view represented by patriarchs such as Sekai's husband, Makwati and Chief Zvedi, that albino children should be destroyed immediately serves largely to criminalise and scapegoat mothers as is clear in the manner in which Makwati remonstrates with Sekai; "Tell me, woman, were you sharing your mat with some other man? And is this the punishment" (22). Makwati's remonstrance which is not based on solid and convincing reasons, demonstrates that there is very little justification for the society's decision to incriminate mothers and discriminate against, and destroy albino children. The fact that Hanson makes use of a woman, Sekai, in the "struggle for the human rights of our entire family – men, women, and children" (Hudson-Weems, 2004: 8) in order to negate limiting approaches and perceptions in life speaks to the author's confidence in mothers.

Through her decision to leave Chief Zvedi's village and take her chances in the wild, Sekai becomes an embodiment of a universe of thought and action that potentially sets free several mothers, albino children, prospective fathers and even the patriarchal custodians of culture themselves. She redraws the margins of motherhood, representing it as the centerpiece of human survival, fulfillment and a quality of thought and action rather than a mere biological designation. A similar conception of motherhood as represented by Sekai is raised by Gambahaya and Muhwati (2009: 56) who have explained it as an "operational paradigm that ensures strategic intervention in crises while simultaneously serving as the community's strategic life-support resource."

Sekai successfully pleads her case in Chief Masasa's village and is given a place to stay together with her albino son. Her presence in Chief Masasa's village ignites debate on customary values, with the better percentage of the villagers arrayed against Sekai and her son. Eventually, the Council of Elders, comprising Chief Masasa, Sekuru Chivero the medical practitioner and Manyamombe, one of the respectable father figures in the community, manage to contain the fusillade of animosities directed against Sekai and Takadini. What emerges clearly from

the novel is that, unlike her husband who is caught in the jaws of an unflinching practice to the extent that he is prepared to sacrifice both his wife and albino son, Sekai is a strong, family-centered, self-naming, self-defining, authentic, ambitious, nurturing and flexible role player (Hudson-Weems, 2004). In a context that imposes death as the only option, Sekai chooses life by contesting rigid conventions to create more options and choices for herself and her son. This is even clearer in the name that she gives to her albino son, Takadini (What wrong did we commit?), a name which questions and interrogates an established superstructure that victimises instead of empowering and protecting. Going through this novel, readers are readily reminded of events in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in which twins and so-called social outcasts are condemned to the evil forest. Ironically, this is one way in which African communities have contributed to their own subjugation in that when the first European colonisers came, the outcasts became their first and most ardent converts because they had found a sanctuary in the new dispensation.

In Mazhindu's and Magosvongwe's *The Offshoot*, the notion of motherhood is represented by Masiwa's mother and John's wife, Mary. Prior to John's demise, Mary enjoys a stable family life in which wife, husband and children are pieces of each other. The nature of the interaction between them is expressive of the philosophy of life epitomised by Cooper (1988: 61) who has it that: "Woman's cause is man's cause: [we] rise or sink together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free." This balance is scuttled in the aftermath of John's death as his relatives, particularly his brother, Mabasa, and sister-in-law, Clara, unscrupulously drive Mary out of the family home in Mufakose, rustivating the children and debarring them from accessing their father's estate. Against this background, Mary summons all her energies to contest Mabasa's and Clara's insolence, at first without success. Constant reflection on her disenfranchisement rejuvenates and drives her into the search mode:

How long will I be here staying with my parents? What is my future out here in Buhera? What is the situation with my children? I cannot come to terms with this new status *amai*. I have got to fight on. Mabasa surely does not have both the legal and moral vindication for what he has done to me (88).

The anguished voice in the excerpt above bespeaks a refusal to timidly embrace the tyranny of an imposed future. The soul-searching questions are incandescent with a vision to rediscover and rededicate one's energies to the transformation of one's life. They are products of a mind that is self-examining, searching for and improvising ways of moving out of an embattled existence. When human beings self-engage, as Mary does, the result is enhanced self-knowledge. As Clarke (1991: 58) observes:

What we do for ourselves depends on what we know about ourselves and what we are willing to accept about ourselves. When other people control what we think about ourselves, they will also control what we do about ourselves... We can confront the world if first we confront ourselves. We can change the world if first we change ourselves.

As is the case in Hanson's *Takadini*, Mazhindu's and Magosvongwe's *The Offshoot* celebrates mothers for their immersion in their family's struggles for liberation. Because of the ubiquitous nature of the problems associated with the inheritance of estates of the deceased, Mary's never-say-die attitude and story of struggle potentially serve to empower other women who find themselves hamstrung by similar circumstances. Thus, what one immediately observes in children's literature is the commitment of its mother characters to life. Through the projection of 'mother-warriors', children's literature marshals and articulates a vision of life that transforms the formerly peripherised mother character into a creator. In these narratives, mothers are prone to stand up in defense of the family and their rights as women. In the Zimbabwean literary tradition, mother characters have been cast as the foil against which male agency, superiority and athleticism have been negotiated, celebrated and entrenched. This has resulted in a scenario whereby mothers have been discursively disenfranchised and negotiated out of the nation building effort. The net result of such negative depictions has obviously been the distortion and narrowing of the gender space such that the nation has not been fully benefiting from the collective energies of all its citizens, regardless of their gender. In a literary context in which there is an implicit hierarchy between men as sole movers/creators and women as objects, children's literature, particularly the narratives examined in this article "disturbs this hierarchy...It upsets things, and the first thing it upsets is the [patriarchal] hierarchy" (Cesaire, 1959: 155).

Conclusion

The discussion has brought out the gender, intellectual, philosophical and pedagogical value of children's literature. It has shown that the continued neglect of this genre in Zimbabwean critical scholarship will not only ensure its stagnation and underdevelopment but will also deny the reading public access to ennobling views on topical issues. If one takes into account the fact that children's literature adds to the wealth of progressive values on gender by enunciating a framework where neither maleness nor femaleness is a handicap, it becomes clear that its marginalisation is counter-productive in the shaping of the consciousness of the child on matters related to gender as well as the sanitisation of tomorrow's adult relationships, interactions and social networks. Zimbabwean critical scholarship would do well to study children's literature and make accessible the crucial values it expresses. Equally, it should also endeavour to articulate a framework for the critical analysis of children's literature, taking into account the differences that obtain between children's and other brands of literary discourses.

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