

# Lore and worldview:

a folkloric and thematic exploration in the oral compositions of the Congolese schoolchildren

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Documented investigation throughout the world points to the universal nature of children's oral compositions. As observed in a great number of papers presented at this conference, this literature abounds in imagery and fantasy, and thrives in accordance with an overwhelming sense of genuine creativity embedded in the children's verbal performance. That is the literature which shapes their worldview and tailors their behaviour in society.

Children's oral compositions have received serious attention since the works of such inspiring folklorists, anthropologists, oral literature and linguistics specialists such as Marcel Griaule (1938), Ruth Finnegan (1970) and Alan Dundes (1978), to name but a few. As a matter of fact this growing interest has been vividly depicted by the insightful international book illustrations exhibited at this conference.

Whereas in the Congo little investigation has been carried out in the domain of children's literature in spite of sporadic attempts by authors who have appended a few songs to primary school readers. However, it should be noted that these songs are exclusively adults' compositions intended for children, thus not a reflection of the learners' own interests and imagination.

One may wonder why in a country which boasts of an impressive number of writers of international reputation, children's literature draws so little attention?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that quite often, this literature triggers a déjà vu experience within a given portion of the adult population. Once, they believe, in their tender years they also performed the same repertoire to a certain extent. And nowadays, they merely take it for granted that children's rhymes convey no meaning whatsoever. This biased and paternalistic view tends to underestimate the youth's sense of creativity. Yet the oral compositions of Congolese schoolchildren, although they are performed for ludic purposes, embody indeed a flourishing treasure of intrinsic social and cultural values worth scrutinising for a better understanding of their lore, worldview and behaviour.

This paper purports to investigate the oral compositions of Congolese kindergarten and primary school pupils. It seeks to treat the children's rhymes beyond the mere collection and descriptive tasks previously undertaken in the scholarship. In order to fulfil that objective, consistent with the contextual approach, I will address the textual features of the children's verbal lore, its performance and function.

The material under consideration was collected from pupils attending a private and two public institutions, respectively the Fondation Chevriot and the Ecole de la Poste located downtown in the commercial district of Brazzaville, the capital city, and the Mbaya primary school in Gamboma, an administrative centre located in the Plateau region. The data contains 50 songs, but for reasons of economy, I will concentrate on eight compositions only which are relevant to my topic. The children's rhymes with their English translations are appended.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the contextual approach this topic suggests, at the outset this paper will provide a brief ethnographic account of the complex environmental features that

surround the children. These features are amongst other things physical, economic, social, and political.

The schoolchildren belong to the Bantu-speaking people who presently occupy the Congo. The land covers an area of about 139 000 square miles, and stretches northwest from its 60 mile long coast-line in the southwest to the dense equatorial forest bordering, respectively, the Central African Republic and Cameroon in the North, Zaire in the East, Gabon in the West and Cabinda (Angola) in the southwest.

The Republic of Congo is basically an agricultural country with two major seasons: the rainy season (September-May) and the dry season (June-September). During these periods, Congolese engage in various activities involving subsistence farming, hunting and fishing.

The country derives a great portion of its revenue from oil whose bonanza but perturbing price fluctuations induced the Congolese to tighten their belts notably with regard to their political, economic and socio-cultural affairs. Added to these measures of austerity is the devastating consequence of the recent devaluation of the CFA Franc which unexpectedly forced householders to seek additional means of survival.

“Devaluation”, reiterates a schoolgirl in her comment on the rhyme entitled *Na mboka na biso* (In today’s Congo), “has taught us how to add more holes to our belt”. “In other words”, said she, “you can tighten your belt alright. But the more you starve, the more you have to add holes to your belt”. We shall return to the song in subsequent sections (see Rhyme no 8).

The Congo comprises a population of more than two million inhabitants. The last reliable census held in 1974 showed an overall slight imbalance in the female population over the male (52% women compared with 48% men). These figures may have a bearing on the higher rate of school enrolment observed among women (55% compared with 45%). The desire for education is best expressed in the Congolese school children's poetic song verse:

Landaka nzele ya lekole  
La vie mwana ekoya sima  
(Child, go to school,  
and life after hard work will be rosy.)

We shall discuss that specific point later. Let us finally turn to the political environment.

The Congolese entered the democratic era more than two years ago after the country had undergone 30 years of marxist and military rule.

As acknowledged in most societies emerging from political mutations, change does not occur overnight. Generally people struggle to adjust to their new socio-political environment. However, in the Congo previously acquired attitudes still linger among a few nostalgics of the monoparty era. Peculiarly enough, some Congolese schoolchildren have not been spared this mentality. For instance, listen to them sing: "Militaire à gauche" or "Bana Sassou baleki" (see Rhyme No 2).

In the first rhyme, allusion is made to the soldiers' march cadence. The second praises the former president, an army general, who ruled during the period preceding the country's acceptance of the democratic process. It should be

remembered that throughout the world, for various reasons, the military career has always attracted youngsters. It suffices, for instance, to observe scores of military toys which some of them collect proudly in their toy arsenal. Likewise, Congolese schoolboys, exposed to the lavish military parades which they attended during the former régime, have also nurtured a certain passion for military toys and career. Usually they play at being soldiers and are totally unaware of the ongoing disruptive influence which their toys can exert on their underdeveloped and innocent minds.

Seen within this scope, the above ethnographic background provides the context for the present paper. A study of the Congolese children's oral compositions calls primarily for an examination of their form and content.

Dundes (1978:78) in his insightful introductory work, *The Study of American folklore*, lists four major categories of American rhymes performed by both adults and children. They are: nursery rhymes; rhymes of play, games and fun; rhymes of work; and written traditional rhymes. Ruth Finnegan's (1970:303) informative treatise of African expressive forms, *Oral literature in Africa*, classifies the African children's songs and rhymes under such broad terms as nonsense songs, singing games and catch rhymes. Similarly these categories are also observed in the Congolese folk poetry.

Based on Dundes and Finnegan's classifications and related subdivisions, one may posit for the Congolese schoolchildren's rhymes the following categories: praise rhymes including work rhymes and advice rhymes; play rhymes; derision rhymes; parody rhymes; march rhymes; nonsense rhymes and topical rhymes.

Seemingly they differ in form, but in content some of these rhymes convey the same meaning and fulfil the same function. Their form can be exemplified by the praise rhyme entitled *Koko* which, in addition to its original form, also displays semantic features similar to those encountered in rhymes of advice and play rhymes.

Most of these rhymes are of various lengths ranging from two rhythmic verses (eg *Namboka na biso/batekaka mike mike*) to five lines or more whereby the performer may in “*medias rei*” improvise a lengthy rendition from a formulaic verse (eg *Koko*, *Bana jardin* and *A l’Ecole*). In the second case, for instance, the leader introduces a formulaic verse which is repeated in a refrain by the chorus, fully embellished with onomatopoeic words.

Onomatopoeia occur in verses such as *Elayila*, in the rhyme *Koko*, *Ewa* in the *Bana jardin*, and *A l’Ecole* in *Qui veut chanter?* The flowing vowels i, e, a and o render the rhymes easy to learn and add to the poetics of the rendition.

As stylistic and communicative devices, the Congolese schoolchildren’s rhymes display linguistic and paralinguistic devices comprehensively investigated in folk poetry. These are: rhythm, intonation, figurative language, parallelism and codeswitching.<sup>2</sup> For reasons of economy, I shall narrow down my study to the themes drawn from the rhymes only. Since in folklore, form, content, including meaning, and function overlap, I shall proceed with a holistic approach towards the assessment of themes embedded in the children’s oral compositions.

The much exemplified praise rhyme *Koko* tops my collection of rhymes. The schoolchildren sing it in order to honour their mates who do not cut classes, the

mothers and fathers who showed them the way to school, and the teachers for their painstaking task of educating them. It has been noted above that Congolese children treasure education. For them a good training can secure their future by enabling them to land a good job when they graduate. In addition to being a learning institution, the school also provides the playgrounds where boys and girls socialise. For as their song *Qui veut chanter?* (Who wants to sing?) goes, it is only at school that one can "... work ..., listen ..." and "... concentrate ...", "... play ..." and "... laugh ..." (see Rhyme No 2).

Where else but at school can one learn and have fun, prompts the kindergarten's rhyme *Bana jardin*, another praise song which substantiates the themes of work, leisure and courage. In this rhyme, the pupils recall their mother's advice when they outlined:

Bokende lekole  
Bokende koyekola  
Mama alobaki  
Soki babeti y o  
y o mpe azongisa

(Go to school  
Go and learn.  
Mother said,  
If they beat you,  
fight back) (see Rhyme No 3).

Thus, at an early stage, the Congolese child understands that at school, far from the parental shelter, he or she evolves in a relatively hostile environment where it is the survival of the fittest. "Occasionally", remarked the singer "the teacher looks after us. She provides protection. But for how long? There are a lot of kids in the playground ... It's self-defence sometimes when you are facing a bully

... Just like Bruce Lee (mimicking the late movie star), he took a karate stance and launched a shout amid the approving laughter of his colleagues.”

Derision rhymes such as *Mama Elisa*, *Batiye zemi* and *Pharmacie* depict respectively themes of mockery, precarious pregnancy and authority. Children sang *Mama Elisa* in order to poke fun at the women who cannot perform the latest dance steps. Readers who are versed in music and dance, will probably know that each new hit comes along with its dance steps. So in this metaphoric rhyme these children ridiculed *Mama Elisa* who can be anybody who fumbles when dancing. In fact, they likened her to a “Mokomboso” (chimpanzee). Allusion is made to the dancer’s awkward moves which resemble the animal’s when he walks.

Naturally, this behaviour can make the untrained Western observer bat an eyelid. Nevertheless, in Africa, and in the Congo in particular, it is not unusual to see a five-year-old child dance as well as – and even better than an adult. Dance holds a significant position in their traditional culture. Children consider their elders as models who should not fail to transmit this legacy to them. Therefore, failure to perform the latest dance hit can indeed incite sarcasm among Congolese schoolchildren.

Mockery takes a bitter turn in *Batiye zemi* (The pregnant young girl) who is debased by her peers when they remarked:

There you are, prematurely expecting a baby. Who’s going to look after you, poor girl. Now that you’re out of school, who’s going to take care of you and your child when you up? You’ve let your studies go to waste!

The issue of the pregnant young girl has been widely debated in African societies. In the Congo for instance, unmarried girls are somewhat marginalised by their married counterparts. The latter dread them as potential rivals whose charm may attract their husbands and consequently jeopardise the harmony in their households. The plight of the unmarried girls reaches an abysmal point when they have not undergone formal education, are unemployed, and worse still, are single mothers. Due to the imbalance in the population mentioned earlier, more females than males, competition for marriage remains a serious matter of concern for parents whose mature offspring wait to meet the expected suitor in vain. Likewise, at times, schoolchildren ponder this matter. Girls in particular stress the hazards of pregnancy and fear to be an object of derision when their friends warn:

Batiye zemi  
Monoko esila  
(She's pregnant  
She's speechless) (see Rhyme No 5).

The rhyme *Pharmacie* is chanted in order to assert oneself in a quest for authority, role change and status in society. The author Patty, a 10-year-old girl commented on her rendition as follows:

One day, I went to the pharmacy. I met two kids.  
I fought one of them. They ran away and hid themselves.  
I kicked them so hard that they ran for diapers.

She meant that the pain made the boys pass water.

This derision rhyme reveals a subtheme worth noting, that of violence. The girl, a tom-boy, attacks a passer-by because he has invaded her territory. Violence is

expressed rather vividly in the closing lines of the song when the aggressor calls for a soldier to frighten the unfortunate victim away with his gun:

Mimi Kaoule

Basoda babeti masasi

Toyo, toyo (see Rhyme No 6)

(Mimi Kaoule!

She yelled.

The soldiers fired

Toyo, toyo). (Dramatising the shouting).

Furthermore, the theme of violence recurs in the boys' cadence rhymes, *Militaire à gauche* (see Rhyme No 7). They employ these two rhythmic verses when they mimic their ideal officers marching during official parades held at the Army Boulevard. Questioned why they composed the rhymes, the boys merely replied that they admired the soldiers and gendarmes for their authority. "They carry guns and can kill you", they emphasised before continuing: "We hope to finish school and enrol in the army. We will arrest thieves and torture them."

One may wonder who instilled this notion of violence in the minds of the children? The question triggers two hypothetical answers. First, they were born and raised during the military régime which indulged in tacit overt and covert violence. In addition throughout their early years, they listened to eyewitness accounts of, or witnessed the bitter social upheavals instigated by soldiers. These experiences gave rise to mixed feelings, on the one hand there was bitterness and on the other hand admiration for the soldiers.

Secondly, the recent shootings which destroyed the social tissue in various districts of Brazzaville left little to the imagination of the children. They are also

constantly exposed to violence in the media, to their detriment. Local authorities display an indifference to the situation.

Surely, to wipe out these sad and disruptive memories, and the Rambos and Bruce Lees of the television screen, will take time. Meanwhile, the schoolchildren seem bound to recall past events and model their behaviour on that of their respective heroes. Unless drastic actions are taken to eradicate violence in the country by all means possible, it will unfortunately continue to fuel the Congolese children's imagination.

Finally, let us consider the topical rhyme *Na mboka na biso* (In today's Congo). To a certain extent the rhyme reveals an aspect of stress endured by the Congolese in the aftermath of the transitional years to democracy. It is caused, among many other factors, by the decrease in buying power and the puzzling effects of the devaluation of the local currency with which housewives are confronted.

Due to the devaluation of the CFA Franc, the cost of living, including the price of foodstuffs, has skyrocketed. These prices increase so rapidly that in market places people must indeed sharpen their bargaining strategies in order to pay reasonable prices.

In her commentary, Little Evelyne describes the crisis by observing that in today's Congo we have to spend cautiously because even in the marketplace the koko seller strives to shred her vegetables in smaller heaps than usual. She does so in order to reduce the amount of her product and make a profit<sup>3</sup>. At the end the girl asked why in an agricultural country like the Congo which produces a

great variety of vegetables the koko, which grows unattended in the wilderness of the forest, should be so expensive?

“In today’s Congo goods are sold in bits at higher prices. What does the future hold for us children?”, she concluded. That is one of the numerous problems posed by the schoolchildren while performing their oral compositions.

Taken altogether and considering the themes discussed above, the children’s rhymes may lead us not to look down on their authors as ordinary people. But rather just like the bard, to a certain extent they merit being raised to the status of critics of the society, social commentators and active participants in the shaping of tradition. These roles, I believe, can contribute efficiently to the making of a new cultural and didactic environment related to the books intended for our young readers. In order to achieve that goal, the decision makers, children’s book writers, illustrators and publishers should shake off their possessive instincts and lucrative interests. Furthermore, they should cease to create a fictitious world which binds our children to acculturation.

As mentioned in the opening sections of this paper, there exists no written children’s literature in the Congo. In what might be considered a case study, I endeavoured to analyse the Congolese schoolchildren’s rhymes which could at this particular stage of inquiry shed light on the topic under discussion. I am convinced that this seminal task will result in further investigations which will hopefully help to lay the foundations for a more comprehensive treatise of the children’s oral compositions, including their sense of imagination and verbal artistry.

## Notes

- 1 The taped rhymes appear without the singers' commentaries. The author omitted them voluntarily due to space and editorial constraints. The tape can be obtained by special permission.
- 2 For additional linguistic notes on the linguistic and paralinguistic devices observed in the Congolese folk poetry, refer to Jean-Pierre Ngole's doctoral dissertation: *Bargaining strategies as performance: an ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of women sellers in Congo* (Indiana University, Bloomington, USA, 1988:233–238).
- 3 Koko is an exotic vegetable which grows in most central African forests. Its green leaves resemble spinach but are smaller in size and bitter in taste sometimes. Koko occupies a prominent position in the culinary recipes of the Congolese housewives as would salad or cabbage in Western foodways. The leaves are sold in shreds and prepared with dry fish, palm oil or peanut butter sauce.

## Bibliography

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- Griaule, Marcel. 1938. *Jeux dogons*. Paris: Universite de Paris, Institut d'Ethnologie.

## Appendix

### 1. Koko



Leader: Koko (bis)

Koko (twice)

Chorus: Koko elayila (“)

Koko elayila (“)

L: Et les enfants

Long live the children

C: Elayila

Elayila

L: Et les mamans

Long live the mothers

C: Elayila

Elayila

L: Et les papas

Long live the fathers

C: Elayila

Elayila

L: On va crier

Let's shout

C: Elayila

Elayila

L: Et les maitresses

Long live the teachers

(by kindergarten pupils)

## 2. Qui veut chanter?

L: Qui veut chanter?

Who wants to sing?

C: A l'Ecole

At school

L: Qui veut travailler?

Who wants to work?

C: A l'Ecole

At school

L: Qui veut écouter?

Who wants to listen?

C: A l'Ecole

At school

L: Qui veut jouer

Who wants to play?

C: A l'Ecole

At school.

(by kindergarten pupils)



## 3. Bana Jardin

L: Bana Jardin

Kindergarten pupils

C: Ewa!

Ewa!

L: Tutaa tuta!

Hurry, hurry!

C: Ewa!

Ewa!

L: Tuta makolo

C: Ewa!

L: Bokende lekole

C: Ewa!

L: Mama alobaki

C: Ewa!

L: Soki babeti yo

C: Ewa!

L: yo mpe ozongisa

(by kindergarten pupils)

Hurry up!

Ewa!

Go to school

Ewa!

Mother said

Ewa!

If they beat you

Ewa!

Fight back

#### 4. Mama Elisa (Mother Liz)

Mama Elisa e

Boya kotala e

Bomona wapi e

Mokomboso akobina

A ee, mama!

(by Evelyne, 9 years old)

Mother Liz eh

Come and see eh

Where have you seen eh

A chimpanze dance

Oh Mother!

#### 5. Batiye zemi (The pregnant girl)

Batiye zemi

Monoko esila

by Ngabou, 12 years old)

She's pregnant

She's speechless

## 6. Pharmaci (Pharmacy)

Nakendaki na pharmacie

Namonaki bana mibale

Nabeti moko double patte

Bana yango bawela kobombana

Aie mama, hum, hum!

Bana yango bawela bacouche

Aie mama, hum, hum!

Mimi Kaoule, kanga ye Ma, ma

Mimi Kaoule

Basoda babeti masasi Toyo, toyo

(by Patty, 10 years old)

I went to the pharmacy

I saw two kids

I kicked one down

They ran away for safety

Oh mother, hum, hum!

They ran for diapers

Oh mother, hum, hum!

Mimi kaoule, stop him Ma, ma

Mimi Kaoule

The soldiers fired Toyo, toyo

## 7. Militaire a gauche (Soldier, left)

L: Militaire a gauche! (3 fois)

C: A gauche, a gauche

(by kindergarten pupils)

Soldier, left! (3 times)

Left, left

## 8. Na mboka na biso (In today's Congo)

Na mboka na biso

Batekaka mike, mike, mike

(by Evelyne, 9 years old)

In today's Congo

They sell goods in bits

# Aboriginal narrative:

its place in Australian children's literature

maureen nimon



Until the last quarter of this century, the exposure of most non-Aboriginal Australians to Aboriginal narrative was restricted to collections of stories marketed as children's books. The principal example of this was *Australian legendary tales*, composed of material originally published by K Langloh Parker in 1896 and 1898. An edition of *Australian legendary tales*, edited by H Drake-Brockman and illustrated by Elizabeth Durack, was published in 1953 and another in 1978.

The importance of this collection in providing some access to Aboriginal culture for young Australians must be acknowledged. Without it Aboriginal culture would have been entirely invisible for many. Moreover the dedication of Langloh Parker to the preservation of a culture she perceived to be vanishing deserves respect, as does the work of those who edited and promoted her work, not only to continue that preservation, but in the hope of creating by such a book, a window into Aboriginal traditions that would foster understanding in the wider community. Unfortunately for such intentions, *Australian legendary tales* did not win widespread popularity. Niall (1985) attributes this to Langloh Parker's attempts to remain as close as possible to the stories as she heard them by her incorporation into the text of a large number of Aboriginal words (Niall 1985:206). Even so, *Australian legendary tales* remained the standard title representing Aboriginal narrative in a form accessible to the non-Aboriginal

population, apart from anthropological studies, until the books by Percy Trezise and Dick Roughsey began to appear in 1978. These took the form of picture books in which Trezise, a white man, wrote the text from stories he collected in the Cape York Peninsula of Far North Queensland and Roughsey, an Aboriginal person from that area, provided vivid illustrations which presumably reflect an authentic conceptualisation of the characters.

The importance of *Australian legendary tales* in the history of Australian children's literature is acknowledged, but nevertheless consideration has to be given to the fact that the manner of the creation of this collection offers an argument for assessing it to be more truly a representation of the culture of those responsible for the book than an accurate record of Aboriginality. Furthermore, the context within which the book was read between 1896 and World War II argues that it may have served to reinforce some of the negative perceptions of Aboriginal peoples in the white community rather than modify them. The discussion of these matters which follows is necessarily broadbrush and oversimplified, but it provides a background for the examination of some recent titles published by Aboriginal authors and their place in Australian children's literature.

The three women whose work ensured the creation and continued existence of *Australian legendary tales* were all from pastoral families. The stories Langloh Parker collected she heard as a child when living on her father's property in northern New South Wales. Both Drake-Brockman and Durack were, likewise, people well acquainted with particular Aboriginal communities which, because they were still living in the countryside though partly displaced from their lands, retained connections with the culture of earlier times. Yet consideration of the processes involved in the collection, writing and editing of the tales raises

questions as to the relationship between them in published form and the original sources. Firstly, one asks, what kind of tale would have been told to an uninitiated white female child and young woman? Probably the answer is that those chosen by the tellers would indeed have been stories for children. Secondly, mention was made above of the large number of Aboriginal words Langloh Parker used in her text. In doing so, her aim must have been to respect the original, but the hurdle they constituted for English language readers highlights the compromises that have to be made to make the cultural artifact of one society comprehensible to another. What other decisions did Langloh Parker make in the process of converting an oral tale into a written text? Not only was there the matter of the use of Aboriginal words and the editing of the non-standard English of Aboriginal tellers, but there may have been a restructuring of the material to fit into the accepted form classified by Western specialists of the time as “folk-tale”. Given Andrew Lang’s praise for Langloh Parker’s first edition (Drake-Brockman 1953:vi), it seems likely that restructuring took place. The preface to the 1953 edition claimed that Langloh Parker was “the first to set forth, to any noteworthy extent, their (the Aborigines) own vision of themselves and their conditions of living, so far as she was able to reproduce their thoughts and speech forms in written English” (Drake-Brockman 1953:vi). As a person with no expertise in Aboriginal cultures and languages, I am not well placed to judge the validity of this comment, but my inability to distinguish striking differences between *Australian legendary tales* and representative collections of other people’s folktales reduced to English language children’s literature persuades me that not only compromise was involved in spanning the enormous gulf between the lost world of Aboriginal peoples and that of the white invaders, but that the process was also one of mutation. The suspicion is strong that the imposition of Western language and literary criteria forced the originals into forms that destroyed their uniqueness. An allegory to illustrate this may be created by imagining a teacher confronted by Picasso’s cubist portraits telling the

artist he needed anatomy lessons. Thus the value of *Australian legendary tales* as an item which acknowledged the right of Aboriginal peoples to a place in Australian cultural life remains, but there is substantial doubt as to the accuracy of the representation of Aboriginality. Or at least the nature of that Aboriginality is elusive to the non-expert reader.

The context in which *Australian legendary tales* appeared and was read over decades needs to be mentioned briefly. Aboriginal people were not physically visible as a normal part of everyday life to the majority of Australians. Our great open spaces misled many people overseas in their assumptions regarding the Australian way of life. Throughout the history of our country, our great open spaces have been just that – spaces which white people have on the whole avoided assiduously. Instead we huddle together on the seaboard, on a narrow strip of relatively fertile land generally less than 30 miles wide, and live as we have always lived – in cities – among the most urbanised people on earth. This distribution of settlement and the small proportion of the population that is Aboriginal, and the even smaller proportion of that category who in the past chose to live in cities, has meant that Aboriginal people have been largely out of sight in a literal sense until comparatively recent times. Here, though, we also need to reflect for a moment on cultural factors which rendered Aboriginal people out of sight and out of mind for much of Australia's brief history. These cultural factors ensured that most Australians assumed the Aboriginal peoples to be socially, culturally and politically insignificant, peoples living on the margin of all that mattered. I chose the word "assumed" here with care, because if I used the word "judged", this would imply that people gave consideration to the issue, while it is evident most did not. Some white Australians undoubtedly knew better, but in the generalised argument I put here, I wish to remind you of influences on Western views of the world which, in 1896 and for some decades

later, seemed to prove scientifically that Aboriginal people were insignificant and were, indeed, “dying out”.

The first is that at the end of the 19th century, the Whig notion of history as a discernible march of progress by European peoples was still powerful. Given the immense scientific and technological changes of the century, it is not surprising that civilisation was often measured in terms of products. One hundred years before, travel, production and lifestyles were still governed by machinery driven by horses, water and wind, though change had begun in Britain. By the end of the century, the application of power-driven machinery had not merely transformed Britain, but that country had been eclipsed already by Germany and the United States. Religion remained an acknowledged authority, but religion was, for many, measured by outward conformity to the formal structures of organised churches. Against such standards, the Aborigines were seen to have no civilisation at all. They grew nothing and produced only the simplest of tools. In the classification of the times, they were “stone age” peoples. Moreover, at that time their spirituality was beyond the perception of all but a handful of Europeans, so that it was commonly believed that they had no religion: childish stories, perhaps, but no religion.

Not merely history but science also condemned them. When European explorers first encountered Aboriginal people, the interpretation of natural phenomena was guided by Linnaeus’ chain of being. Such was the vision of the 1770s, that for many scientists the Australian Aborigine appeared to be best placed in the chain between the monkey and man (White 1981:8). This judgment was not improved by the impact of Darwin’s *Origin of species*. More particularly, Herbert Spencer’s application of Darwin’s ideas to human society, with his arguments for the right of might distilled as “survival of the fittest”, seemed to justify the dispossession

of Aborigines as “natural” and to render inevitable their demise. Even those most well disposed towards the Aborigines interpreted the relationship of Europeans to them as the stewardship of the more intelligent for the essentially child-like. Under the influence of such ideas, Aboriginal children who had discernible European genetic inheritance were taken from their mothers and raised in missions so that their supposedly greater intellectual potential could be developed. This practice was official Australian government policy before World War II and it operated in some parts of Australia until the 1960s.

Finally, since there was no gain to be made by the Australian community in general from the study of Aboriginal languages, only a tiny number of anthropologists and missionaries had knowledge of even one of the hundreds that existed. Consequently, most communication between Aboriginal groups and other Australians depended on the degree to which Aboriginal people could speak English. The limitations of their command of formal English served only to reinforce the conceptualisation of them as child-like and simple.

Reference to these views of the nature of Aboriginal culture and the place of Aboriginal peoples in society was made in the preface of the 1953 edition of *Australian legendary tales*. The anthropologist, Professor Elkin, was quoted as warning “some folk carry the metaphor of child-race too far”. The professor went on to explain “a child-race is so called because it has not attained the stature of our civilisation ...”, but “its grown men and women, however, are adults” (Langloh Parker & Drake-Brockman 1953:vi). That Elkin felt such a reminder was necessary and Drake-Brockman considered it an important inclusion in her preface highlights the awareness of Drake-Brockman and Durack of attitudes towards Aborigines in the general community and their interest in seeking to alter them. However, their chosen tool of a collection of stories produced as a work

for children, while intended to shape the view of the next generation, may have served to confirm ideas of the “child-like” nature of Aboriginality. Similarly, the bestowal of the 1954 Children’s Book of the Year Award on *Australian legendary tales* may be interpreted as a community acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture, but if this is so, the acknowledgment was bestowed upon that culture as expressed in a children’s book in English, a format unlikely to rupture established community views of Aboriginality.

How different is the position today of Aboriginal literature in Australian children’s literature? A great deal, we all assure ourselves and hope it to be true. Yet we find in recent publications, criticisms which echo the points just raised in regard to earlier times. Sutton (1992:34) asserts that Aboriginal sacred narratives have been appropriated and colonised “especially in the bowdlerised, infantilised versions published as children’s literature in English ...”. Rowse (1992:7) asks:

If Australia’s indigenous oral literature comes to non-indigenous readers primarily as illustrated stories for children, isn’t there a danger that “Aboriginality” is, in effect, being distanced from the concerns of adult Australians? Might not the proliferation of Aboriginal “fairy tales” give new life to an older non-Aboriginal prejudice that “Aboriginality” is a thing of child-like simplicity, of charming naivety?

The situation today is different from that of the past, though not perhaps in as clear cut a fashion as is desirable. Firstly, there remains the question of to what degree the requirements of adapting another’s cultural artifact to meet the criteria for acceptability in our society forces Aboriginal authors to compromise what they consider significant. (Of course they are not alone in facing such pressures. At the launch in Adelaide of *The Watertower* in September, 1994, Gary Crew spoke briefly of the major rewrite of *Angel’s gate* which he had to undertake to suit it to his American publisher’s requirements. The adaptations required are not a

matter of the substitution of American terms for Australian colloquialisms, or even changes in emphasis, but nothing less than a recasting of the book to make it suitable for a younger audience than that for which it was originally intended. In Crew's case, however, the author is master of both the original form and that of the new book which will result. This may not be so for Aboriginal authors.)

Nevertheless the evidence is that Aboriginal authors, whatever compromises they must struggle with, are choosing to write books for their own purposes. For instance, Mary O'Brien (1992:7) responded to Rowse's comments by pointing out that she had selected the material she published to avoid the secret or sacred. She also stated that she wrote stories because she "wanted Aboriginal children to be proud of their Aboriginality" and be able to see themselves reflected in the books found in school. The choice of Aboriginal authors to become part of Australian children's literature in itself radically alters their place within the field.

So does the attainment of excellence. Among Aboriginal authors today, there is one who has not only chosen to be part of Australian children's literature, but has demonstrated his right to be recognised within it for his mastery of the European folktale form. In *Enora and the black crane*, Arona Meeks (1991) has written a book with a haunting admonitory tale, urging respect for the bush and its creatures. He draws on his culture to do so, but expresses it within the structures of European narrative and permeates it simultaneously with a concern for conservation, a concern shared by many Australians of different backgrounds. His illustrations illuminate the text and fuse both into a brilliant whole.

Other titles, however, may be seen to introduce new ways of communicating across gulfs of culture, experience and language. Two of these titles are discussed

here. The first is *As I grew older* by Ian Abdulla. *As I grew older* is in the traditional format of a picture book. It offers three texts to the reader by which to share something of the life of “an Aboriginal family on the Murray River in the midtwentieth century” (Abdulla 1993:jacket cover). Abdulla tells of his childhood in a series of paintings which form one text on which he has written his verbal text. These paintings appear on the right in the two page spread, while the third text, which may be regarded as a translation of Abdulla’s, stands on the left. The left-hand text is a translation in that it puts Abdulla’s words into standardised spelling and grammar. In the early pages, the reader finds that there is little difference between the texts, Abdulla’s and the translator’s, except for the standardisations and an occasional sentence that gives Abdulla’s words more of the structure of the English language autobiography. For example, in the texts on the opening double-page spread, the first sentence of the standard text gives a time-line and clues to the context of Abdulla’s recollections that are not otherwise there for the non-Aboriginal reader.

Further into the book, however, the standard text provides information indiscernible in Abdulla’s own words: it fills in gaps that are necessary for the understanding of the reader expecting a sequentially linked narrative that makes sense independently of the pictures. Clearly an anonymous person<sup>1</sup> worked with Abdulla to help him record his story in a form comprehensible to the wider community. It is a significant part of the communication of difference that this book offers that the assistant remains anonymous. He or she is simply facilitating the telling of Abdulla’s story. Another is that Abdulla’s own text is respected as a dialect of English reflecting the cultural world in which he grew up, dispossessed of his land, but not displaced from it. Earlier times would have seen Abdulla’s own words replaced by a standard text, not explicated by it. In *As I grew older*, his words, together with the pictures, can be claimed to be the primary story and the standard text a bridge to them.

It is important to recognise that this approach legitimises Abdulla's experiences and the language he has developed to express himself within the Australian community. It acknowledges his manner of narrative, rather than concealing or denying it by transforming it into something that is "acceptable". Abdulla appears to have conceptualised his life as a series of visual memories which he has painted, then to which he has added explanatory annotations. In turn the person I have called the translator has provided elements of time, context and order, as understood by non-Aborigines, to assist them to interpret Abdulla's work more fully than they otherwise could. Non-Aboriginal readers must also be prepared to re-read text to modify the connotations they first apply to some of Abdulla's words as they discover that the understanding they first bring to them is inadequate. Thus the "rats" he and his family hunted for their skins were native water rats, not the common domestic nuisance known to most of us. The presentation of Abdulla's life in the format to be found in *As I grew older* acknowledges that it is non-Aboriginal readers who are deficient in the skills needed to understand Abdulla's narrative and the translator's role is to provide them with the structures they need; it is not to "correct" Abdulla's story.

The discontinuities (in our literary terms) of another title are also the keys by which non-Aborigines may glimpse through it a world that is immensely alien to their own. These are to be found in *Do not go round the edges*, by Daisy Utemorra, illustrated by Pat Torres. There are three texts by which readers may explore this book. The first is the collection of poems, written by Daisy Utemorra. The poems appear in a framework of an illustrated double-page spread, incorporated into Pat Torres' paintings. Underneath and across both pages, there runs an account of Daisy's life, told in the first person, but given final form by people who worked with Daisy to record her story. The reading of this account brings surprises to many non-Aboriginal people as they interpret

words such as “father” in conventional ways only to come to another understanding of what the word meant for Daisy as they learn more about her life. The order and explication in the narrative suggests a different concept of time, even as Daisy’s poems speak in the present tense of her being in her own lands, which, we discover, her people left before she was born.

The thoughtful exploration of the apparently jarring or discontinuous elements of these two books offers experience of difference not only to children but also to adults. While they are published as Australian children’s literature, they deserve examination in other arenas and promotion as books for everyone. It is time now that they are seen for what they are – autobiographies classified as Australian children’s literature because we find it handy to pigeonhole picture books as such. We have already learned from Raymond Briggs across the years that the picture book format is a unique form of communication which may be used to telling effect for adults. Gary Crew is currently demonstrating its power when designed for an audience of boys aged nine to twelve.<sup>2</sup> Now Aboriginal authors have found that it has given them a form they can use to tell us about their lives. It is important that we do not allow patterns of habit to disguise from us that while the two books discussed here are picture books, they are not children’s books.

Similarly, it is important that we do not force them to fit our preconceptualisations in other ways, for to do so is to destroy much of their potential for communicating difference and to distort the authors’ voices. In *From picture book to literary theory*, edited by John Stephens and Ken Watson (1994:46), there is an article on *Do not go round the edges* which describes it thus: “... this book does ‘go round the edges’. It tests and transgresses the boundaries of conventional stories, showing many of the characteristics often associated with postmodernism”. A few lines below, the book is again described as “postmodern, self-ironising”.

The article further describes the book as “ideal for helping students question some of the traditional white Western norms of narrative ...” (Stephens & Watson 1994:46) and it is easy to see that this is so. However, the stance taken in the article implies that *Do not go round the edges* is a postmodernist text, written from within Western tradition and consciously devised so that it “tests and transgresses the boundaries of conventional stories”, as though trying to break free of them. There is no acknowledgement that Utemorrah’s book is one the publication of which has only been made possible because in the past few decades we have dismantled our own criteria of acceptable literary forms and, in the process, allowed ourselves to recognise as valid, narratives from other cultures. *Do not go round the edges* is a book able to enter the field of Australian literature, because we have broken down former barriers to accepting novel forms of story. It is vital that we do not raise new barriers to our understanding of it by labelling it in a way that associates it with specific developments in main-stream culture in an inappropriate manner.

To summarise, in Australian children’s literature today, there are some pointers to significant developments in Aboriginal narrative to be seen in several titles currently available. It is argued, however, that children’s literature experts should be working to see that some of the titles being published as children’s literature are recognised for being documents of much broader social significance and promoting their examination in other areas. Some are in fact properly autobiographical materials, the extraordinary forms of which offer truly novel windows into other worlds for all non-Aboriginal readers.

## Notes

- 1 The person whom I have chosen to treat as anonymous was almost certainly John Kean who provided a page of supplementary information as a postscript. What is important, however, is that Kean does not claim any role in telling Abdulla's story.
- 2 Raymond Briggs demonstrated the use of the picture book format for adults in his title, *The Tinpot general and the old iron woman* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), as well as in other titles. An example of Gary Crew's picture books for boys is *The Watertower* (Adelaide: Era, 1994).

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# The Diaries of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic

stephen m finn



I have now reached the stage that I don't care much whether I live or die, the world will still keep on turning without me; what is going to happen, will happen, and anyway it's no good trying to resist.

I trust to luck but should I be saved, and spared from destruction, then it would be terrible if my diaries and my tales were lost.

*Anne Frank – 3 February 1944*

Some people compare me with Anne Frank. That frightens me, Mimmy. I don't want to suffer her fate.

*Zlata Filipovic – 2 August 1993*

Fifty years separate the lives and diaries of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic. The former was a girl who started keeping her diary when she was a 13 year old in Amsterdam, and wrote for over two years, nearly all of which was spent holed up in a few rooms while hiding from Nazis; she and her family were eventually caught, transported to the transit camp of Westerbork and then to Auschwitz; later Anne was sent to the death camp of Bergen-Belsen where, wracked with suffering and disease, she died in March 1945. The latter is a girl who started keeping her diary as a 10 year old in Sarajevo, and also wrote for over two years, most of which was spent fearing for her life as snipers and bombers tried

their utmost to destroy the city and those living there; but Zlata and her family were flown to safety in Paris, one reason being that she had become a celebrity through her writing, through her being widely regarded, even if somewhat facetiously, as “the Anne Frank of Sarajevo” (Filipovic 1994:v).

Both girls had their lives disrupted, and turned increasingly to their diaries as a means of expression and escape, as an object of confidence and a surrogate for a fuller social life.

As such, both can be considered as continuing in the 18th century tradition of the diary, a time when religious journals were increasingly replaced by introverted, secular ones. Martens (1985:56) points out that these diaries “became a major confessional type throughout continental Europe. We find this outpouring of dreams, desires and traumas throughout the diary writings of both Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic which range, as so many others,

from intimate details or introspective self-assessments to descriptions of the events of [the] day, random observations or aperçus, outbursts of anger, aphorisms, drafts for poems, or even quotations (Martens 1985:3).

It is in their diaries that they evidently can write from the heart. “You know why I think you’d be interested?” Anne asks her diary. “Because although I can’t express myself properly anywhere else even in my tales, in my diary I can completely” (Frank 1989:521)<sup>1</sup>.

However, the *raison d’être* for and increasingly the motivating factor behind the writing of these diaries is that they become the “best friend”, the confidante, the person (because the diaries are increasingly regarded as such by the writers) to whom Anne and Zlata can tell their most intimate thoughts.

Both girls deeply regret the loss of friends in their changed worlds as both once enjoyed being surrounded by their coterie. Anne regales Kitty (the eventual name for her diary) with descriptions of Hanneli, Sanne, Ilse and Jacqueline, among others, and the boys, including Maurice, Emiel, Rob, Max, Herman, Leo, Albert and Hello, many of whom we are told are her admirers (cf Frank 1989:179; 187–188). Indeed, the first part of her diary concentrates on what most youngsters of her age would: her social life and her time at school. Her writing is light-hearted, superficial and, at times, flippant. But once in what has become known as the “Secret Annexe” (“Het Achterhuis”), Anne misses her friends terribly and writes a series of farewell letters to them, in which we can see that she is crying out for friendship, for a life already gone by (cf Frank 1989:243; 246; 248–249; 252; 260; 266). She dreams at times of Hanneli (Frank 1989: 422–423), and now she no longer dwells on personality, but on situation; no longer on day-to-day trivia but on a matter of fear and death – as we see in her entry of 29 December 1943:

And Hanneli, is she still alive? What is she doing? Oh, God, protect her and bring her back to us. Hanneli, I see in you all the time what my lot might have been, I keep seeing myself in your place ....

You could cry when you think of your fellow creatures, you could really cry the whole day long. We can only pray that God will perform a miracle and save some of them. And I hope that I am doing that enough (Frank 1989:436).

Anne cries out a week later: “If only I had a girl friend!” (Frank 1989:443) Although it is, of course, a one-way relationship, she has a surrogate girl friend in Kitty, her diary. This she hopes for from the very beginning; her first entry reads:

I hope I shall be able to confide in you completely, as I have never been able to do in anyone before, and I hope that you will be a great support and comfort to me (Frank 1989:177).

Eighteen months later Anne confides to Kitty:

I have three things to confess to you today, which will take a long time. But I *must* tell someone, and you are the best one to tell, as I know that come what may you always keep a secret (Frank 1989:440).

And even later:

There's no one in the world I've told more about myself and my feelings than you, so I might as well tell you something about sexual matters too (Frank 1989:545).

The pathos emerges here: a young girl, developing into adolescence, acquiring a new knowledge of herself of her sexuality, and with only a book she feels totally free to express herself to. Her beloved father is of a different generation and a different sex; her mother she cannot relate to at best, and despises at worst; her sister, Margot, is older, regarded as different and is, obviously, not forthcoming; and Peter is a boy who, although the object of her desire, cannot be told everything.

The younger Zlata is not so bereft of contact with friends, but she, too, has suffered losses with both girls and boys she has known being killed in the war. Like Anne, her diary starts with a somewhat shallow narration of her everyday life with her friends, summed up succinctly on 6 October 1991, a month after starting her writing, with: "Basically, we have fun" (Filipovic 1994:3). She chatters on gaily about Mummy, Daddy and various relatives and friends, but seven months later she cries out:

AND NINA IS DEAD. A piece of shrapnel lodged in her brain and she died. She, was such a sweet, nice little girl. We went to kindergarten together, and we used to play together in the park. Is it possible I'll never see Nina again? Nina, an innocent eleven-year-old little

girl – the victim of a stupid war. I feel sad. I cry and wonder why? She didn't do anything. A disgusting war has destroyed a young child's life. Nina, I'll always remember you as a wonderful little girl (Filipovic 1994:42–43).

Like Anne, Zlata's life is forever changed by this loss of friends. Also like Anne, she turns to her diary, in repeated acts of anthropomorphisation. After not having written in it during a weekend away, she apologises:

I took you with me, dear Diary, but I didn't write anything. You're not cross with me, are you? (Filipovic 1994:9).

Eighteen months later, after having received copies of her published diary, Zlata exults: "Today I received five copies of YOU" (Filipovic 1994:144). Later she prattles about the promotion of the book:

All in all, it was nice. It couldn't have been otherwise, since it was your promotion, Mimmy represented you. You know how much I love you. I represented you with all the love I feel for you (Filipovic 1994:153–154).

It is both obvious and understandable that Zlata's intimacy with her diary is not as emotionally fraught as Anne's: she is younger and also not as isolated or confined; she has outlets other than her diary to talk to. One also gets the impression that Zlata is consciously writing for a wider audience much of the time.

This is opposed to Abbott's (1984:10) contention that

diarists are supposed to write only for themselves; they have no one to impress, no one to perform for, and thus can be quite simply themselves.

Culley (1985:11), on the other hand, is more discerning in holding that the “importance of the audience, real or implied, conscious or unconscious, of what is usually thought of as a private genre cannot be overstated.” The diarist Marie Bashkirtseff reveals her awareness of this aspect of her genre in saying, somewhat cynically:

The record of a woman’s life, written down day by day, without any attempt at concealment, as if no one in the world were ever to read it, yet with the purpose of being read, is always interesting: for I am certain that I shall be found sympathetic, and I write down everything, everything, everything. Otherwise, why should I write? (Quoted by Simons 1990:1).

Similarly, but in a much lighter vein, Oscar Wilde (1981:357) has Cecily in *The Importance of being Earnest* refusing to allow Algernon to look at her intimate and private diary. “You see,” she says, “it is simply a very young girl’s record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication.”

It does appear that Zlata Filipovic has just this in mind for much of her diary. No doubt, she started her writing as a fun exercise, but early on she reveals an awareness of the implied reader. This is evident in her explaining to her diary (before it has taken on the personality of Mimmy) that Crnotina is “our place about fifteen kilometres away”, and then describing it in detail (Filipovic 1994:4). Likewise, she explains that Srdjan is her “parents’ best friend who lives and works in Dubrovnik, but his family is still in Sarajevo” (Filipovic 1994:7); she continues with these annotations throughout the period before the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina hits Sarajevo (cf Filipovic 1994:11). This is even more obvious a year later, halfway through the diary where Zlata admits to copying part of the diary with a view to publication:

... they want to publish a child’s diary, and it just might be mine, which means – YOU, MIMMY. And so I copied part of you into another notebook and you, Mimmy,

went to the City Assembly to be read. And I've just heard, Mimmy, that you're going to be published! You're coming out for the UNICEF week! SUPER! (Filipovic 1994:88).

Only half of the diary had been written at this point. No wonder there is nothing derogatory about anyone in the diary and nothing intimate is revealed, apart from the obvious fear and anger. The diary is a competent work by a child aged between ten and twelve, but it remains emotionally bland throughout, possibly because of the knowledge that it might be, then will be, then is read by a worldwide audience vicariously and with 1990s immediacy experiencing the problems (and instant celebrity) of a little girl in a war-ravaged city and surrounded by journalists and television crews. Of course, their promoting her as a modern-day Anne Frank adds hype to the cause.

Admittedly, Anne Frank is also aware of an implied readership, but with her the position is much more complicated. On 28 March 1944, almost two years after she had started writing the diary, Gerrit Bolkestein, Minister of Education, Art and Science in the Dutch government in London, delivered the following address to the Dutch nation on Radio Oranje:

History cannot be written on the basis of official decisions and documents alone. If our descendants are to understand fully what we as a nation have had to endure and overcome during these years, then what we really need are ordinary documents – a diary, letters from a worker in Germany, a collection of sermons given by a parson or a priest. Not until we succeed in bringing together vast quantities of this simple, everyday material will the picture of our struggle for freedom be painted in its full depth and glory (Quoted by Gerrold van der Stroom in Frank 1989:59).

It was really only then that Anne Frank gave serious thought to the publication of her diary, and started revising it (but her original writing has survived, and

forms the basis of discussion in this paper). Therefore, there is no sham when she writes on 12 July 1942: "Dear diary, I hope no one will *ever* read you except my dear sweet husband ..." (Frank 1989:227). She is obviously her own and only reader; no adolescent girl would willingly share her thoughts on her physical development, her sexuality, her frustrations, her cattiness, and her sensitivity with the world. This is why she edited many parts out, and why the original diary remains a testament to the sensitivity and psychological turmoil of a girl living through a traumatic time in emotionally difficult years.

Emotionally, Anne appears to be little different from most adolescents of her age. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984:xiii) could well be talking of her when they write:

Of all the stages of life, adolescence is the most difficult to describe. Any generalization about teenagers immediately calls forth an opposite one. Teenagers are maddeningly self-centered, yet capable of impressive feats of altruism. Their attention wanders like a butterfly, yet they can spend hours concentrating on seemingly pointless involvements. They are often lazy and rude, yet, when you least expect it, they can be loving and helpful.<sup>2</sup>

Anne remarks on these attributes of hers throughout her diary: her preoccupation with herself but, especially later on, her ability to perceive how others regard her; her caustic comments on Mrs van Pels, but her acceptance of her finer points; her adoration of her father, but her awareness of his failings; her insight into her two natures – the bubbly, gregarious and superficial Anne, and the quiet, lonely and introspective one. Her conflicting emotions are seen especially from the beginning of 1944, a time of her growing attachment to Peter van Pels and the awakening of her sexuality. On 12 March 1944 she writes:

The hardest thing of all is to keep looking normal, when I feel so dismal and sad. I have to talk, to help, sit with the others and above all I have to be cheerful! Most of

all I miss Nature and a little corner where I can be alone as long as I like! I think I'm getting everything mixed up, Kitty, but then I'm completely confused: on the one hand I am mad with desire for him, can hardly be in the same room, without looking at him and on the other hand I ask myself why he should actually matter to me so much, why I am not sufficient unto myself why I can't be calm again (Frank 1989:524).

She knows she might be regarded as just a "silly little schoolgirl" but is aware that she has "more experience than most; I have been through things that hardly anyone of my age has undergone" (Frank 1989:623). (Unfortunately, here she was proven wrong.) In short, she sees herself as "a little bundle of contradictions" (Frank 1989:696–697).

The ambivalence about her ability also comes through at this stage:

... I must work so as not to be a fool, to get on to become a journalist, because that's what I want! know that I *can* write, a couple of my stories are good, my descriptions of the "Secret Annexe" are humorous, there's a lot in my diary that speaks, but – whether I have real talent remains to be seen (Frank 1989:586).

Anne dreams about becoming a journalist; Zlata is feted by them. Unlike Anne, she does not reveal massive conflicts of feelings, or instances of the seesawing of emotions; but, then, she is a younger writer, less experienced, less able, and more aware that she is writing for and on behalf of others. Whereas Anne's diary increasingly becomes a means of expressing her private ideas and passions in a society unaware of her existence and uninterested in her plight, Zlata's increasingly becomes a public performance for a guilt-stricken and inept world.

Both Anne and Zlata undergo the different facets of extreme stress that Kahana et al (1988:55–79) have delineated in their work on trauma brought on by

environmental conditions involving man-made disasters. Their life experience is disrupted, with conditions replacing “the total fabric of normal life with a surrealistic existence ...”; their familiar elements of reality might remain the same with their immediate loved ones, but the environment in which they find themselves is changed as it is “extremely hostile, threatening and dangerous” with limited opportunities to act upon it. Furthermore, there is no predictable end to this experience and their suffering appears to be “meaningless and without rational explanation” (Kahana et al 1988:59).

With all the disruption, Zlata manages to develop within the social settings of family, peers and school, even if these are somewhat unusual and truncated; Anne has to develop without the last two. Both, however, are beginning to discover the paths to adulthood in their starting to say goodbye to childhood (cf Hauser 1991:3). Anne, of course, being older is further along the road, but both are forced by a changing world to grow up more quickly than they otherwise would have.

We become aware of a terrible irony when Zlata refers to politicians by the popular nomenclature of “kids” (Filipovic 1994:26), indicating that the people regard those involved in the machinations of government as immature and irresponsible; it is the real “kids” who have to grow up too quickly in a devastated world that is destroying their childhood.

She comments that the wrong kind of “kids” are playing (Filipovic 1994:95) and, repeatedly with much pathos, perceives that she has lost her childhood. She plaintively observes that

the children no longer seem like children. They've had their childhood taken away from them, and without that they can't be children .... So how can I feel spring, when spring is something that awakens life, and here there is no life, here everything seems to have died (Filipovic 1994:122).

Childhood also starts dying in the once carefree Anne. On 24 December 1943, she confides:

Believe me, Kitty, if you have been shut up for 1½ years, it can indeed get too much for you some days. No matter if it's unfair and ungrateful you can't get rid of your feelings.

Cycling again, dancing, flirting and what-have you, how I would love that; if only I were free again! Sometimes I even think will anybody understand me ... and just see the young girl in me who is badly in need of some rollicking fun? (Frank 1989:432–433).

Three weeks later she adds:

... I do believe that if I stay here for very long, the youth in my young woman's soul will have fled. And I did so much want to grow into a real young woman! (Frank 1989:458).

It is at this stage that she looks over her diary again and cannot believe that she ever was “such an innocent young thing” (Frank 1989: 304). Increasingly, she realises that her childhood is forever lost, and she expounds on this in her remarkable six-page entry of 7 March 1944 where she reviews her life, her feelings, her dreams and desires, and her philosophy:

Go outside to the fields, enjoy nature and the sunshine, go out and try to recapture happiness in yourself and in God; think of all the beauty that's still left in and around you and be happy! (Frank 1989:520).

Childhood might be going, suffering, deprivation and frustration might be the order of the day, but Anne retains a positive attitude to life, a *joie de vivre* that remains until her last entry five months later, even though she is beset by loneliness and an increasing feeling of being smothered because of her incarceration.

As early as 1 August 1942, she complains: “The fact that we can *never* go outside bothers me more than I can say” (Frank 1989:227). She had to endure another two years of this. However, she does regard herself as lucky to be where she is, compared to the suffering of others and those being hauled off to the death camps in Poland. Anne, in longing for freedom and fresh air, philosophises:

... the best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature, and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of Nature (Frank 1989:498).

Her notions are, of course, understandable: we have a girl, to all intents and purposes locked up in a few rooms, with the same people around her all the time, with little real privacy, and few opportunities to be alone. She has the insight to realise why she has this overwhelming desire to commune with nature and with God in nature. She asks:

I wonder if it's because I haven't been able to poke my nose outdoors for so long that I've grown so crazy about everything to do with nature? I can perfectly well remember that there was a time when a deep blue sky, the song of the birds, moonlight and flowers could never have kept me spellbound. That's changed since I've been here .... It's not imagination on my part when I say that to look up at the sky, the clouds, the moon and the stars makes me calm and patient (Frank 1989:676).

One can extrapolate that subconsciously Anne holds that God is not with her, and the only way to reach the eternal is in a nature unspoilt by the horrors

wrought by a war based on greed and an oppression based on hate brought on by a nefarious policy of ethnic cleansing.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to these last factors, Zlata's condition is similar: she is someone who is also the victim of racial hatred and a war that makes no sense to her. She, too, complains that she has not been out of the house, when she has been shut up for six weeks (Filipovic 1994:46), and laments:

God, what did I do to deserve being in a war, spending my days in a way that no child should. I feel caged. All I can see through the broken windows is the park in front of my house. Empty, deserted, no children, no joy (Filipovic 1994:62-63).

But for her, this is not a lasting situation. The streets might be devastated, the buildings bombed out, but she is able to get to different parts of the city at times. This does not take away from the pain experienced and the horror witnessed. Like Anne, she records events and a life that has been warped in an atmosphere of perversion.

It is possibly because of such surroundings – physical, mental and moral – as well as her seemingly eternal proximity to two women she frequently dislikes and despises, that Anne's thoughts turn to her status as a woman and to the role of women in the world, concepts which are obviously beyond the scope and present thought processes of the younger Zlata. In relating consistently to the female gender, Anne evinces a desire to be remembered and highly regarded, aspiring to something beyond the dull, humdrum and predictable life accepted by those of the older generation. On 5 April 1944, she affirms:

... I want to get on; I can't imagine that I would have to lead the same sort of life as Mummy and Mrs v.P. and all the women who do their work and are then forgotten, I must have something besides a husband and children, something that I can devote myself to! (Frank 1989:587).

Anne continues in the same vein four days later:

I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage! If God lets me live, I shall attain more than Mummy ever has done, I shall not remain insignificant, I shall work in the world for mankind! (Frank 1989:601).

In all likelihood, Anne's beliefs and desires come in some way from the negative influence of her mother's example, an attempt to be just what her mother is not. She understands, too, that such an independent feminism is a result of her hardships. In an unusual entry she regards her diary objectively and depersonifies it for once, also revealing the general tenor of her emotions at this stage with the promise of liberation, but, in effect, three months before her capture:

I have often been downcast, but never in despair; I regard our hiding as a dangerous adventure, romantic and interesting at the same time. In my diary I treat all the privations as amusing. I have made up my mind now to lead a different life from other girls and, later on, different from ordinary housewives. My start has been so very full of interest, and that is the sole reason why I have to laugh at the comical side of the most dangerous moments (Frank 1989:628–629).

This attitude and thematic concern continues until the end of Anne's diary, but her main entry devoted to the role of women in the world comes on 13 June 1944, three-and-a-half pages of which are given over to this. She ponders the question of why women have been treated as men's inferiors throughout the world during the course of time, and militantly holds that "it is stupid enough of women to have borne it all in silence for such a long time ... ." She continues that "modern women demand the right of complete independence!" The catalyst here is Paul de Kluif's book *The Fight for life* that has affected Anne deeply. She endorses his views that women deserve to be held in as high esteem as soldiers, for

women suffer more pain, more illness and more misery than any war hero just from giving birth to children. And what reward does woman reap for coming successfully through all this pain? She is pushed to one side should she lose her figure through giving birth, her children soon leave her, her beauty passes. Women are much braver, much more courageous soldiers, struggling and enduring pain for the continuance of mankind, than all the freedom-fighting heroes with their big mouths (Frank 1989:678).

It should be borne in mind that these are the thoughts of a 15 year old writing 25 years after women had been given the vote in Germany and the Netherlands, but decades before an even more assertive feminism held sway. In this way the precocity and compassion of Anne Frank are evident.

Such fellow-feeling can be seen in both Anne's and Zlata's attitude to their own people, although neither feels strongly about religion as such: Anne is Jewish, but Christmas is commented on and celebrated more than Jewish holy days; Zlata manages to avoid any confirmation of her own religious upbringing (if any), mentions Jewish convoys and a Muslim holy day, but admits to enjoying Christmas and New Year, without any religious implications. However, she does see herself as at one with her own people.

On 14 April 1992, Zlata comments on the sadness of friends and family leaving Sarajevo, and seven months later continues in the same course:

It was sad. Sad and upsetting. November 14th, 1992 is a day Sarajevo will remember. It reminded me of the movies I saw about the Jews in the Second World War (Filipovic 1994:92).

Anne, a Jew living through this war, is more expansive about her people:

... during the two years they [the Germans] have been here, there have been all sorts of Jewish laws. Jews must wear a yellow star; Jews must hand in their bicycles; Jews are banned from trams and are forbidden to use any car, even a private one; Jews are only allowed to do their shopping between three and five o'clock and then only in shops which bear the placard Jewish Shop; Jews may only use Jewish barbers; Jews must be indoors from eight o'clock in the evening until 6 o'clock in the morning; Jews are forbidden to visit Theaters, cinemas and other places of entertainment; Jews may not go to swimming baths, nor to tennis, hockey or other sports grounds; Jews may not go rowing; Jews may not take part in public sports. Jews must not sit in their own or their friends' gardens after 8 o'clock in the evening; Jews may not visit Christians; Jews must go to Jewish schools ... (Frank 1989:226).

This might be factual, but the detail and length of it reveal Anne Frank's deep concern and her bitter awareness of discrimination. It must be remembered that this was written in July 1942 and is part of the unedited original diary, not intended then for publication or to be read by anyone else. With this in mind, the pathos of the situation is underscored. On 2 and 3 October 1942, nearly 5 000 Jews were arrested in large-scale arrests in Amsterdam; when Anne learns about this, she succinctly comments: "Horrible" (Frank 1989:266). Her horror at the events and compassion for those affected grow throughout her diary, and in her 15-page entry of 9 April 1944, after a burglary, Anne remonstrates in such a way that her and her family's situation is seen as microcosmic of that of the Jews in general:

We have been pointedly reminded that we are in hiding, that we are Jews in chains, chained to one spot, without any rights, with a thousand duties ... . Sometime this terrible war will be over. Surely the time will come when we are people again, and not just Jews (Frank 1989:600).

Liberation, even if anticipated, is a long time in coming, something Zlata feels, too: "God, is anyone thinking of us here in Sarajevo?" she asks (Filipovic 1994:83).

Because of her diary, people did think of her. Just as “no single document written during the Holocaust riveted the attention of the Western reading public more than the diary kept by Anne Frank” (Gilman 1988:9), so Zlata Filipovic has become the emblem of the oppressed, the stricken and the violated in Bosnia.

Like Anne, Zlata remained in a dangerous situation for over two years, but unlike her, she did not stay isolated for long. Where Anne in her diary reveals that she fears the knock at the door, Zlata in hers shows how terrified she is of snipers.

Where Anne becomes the object, like all Jews in Europe, of specific searching out, Zlata always has the possibility of being the next random sacrifice. But both girls in their changed circumstances and longing for those of their own age in a once more normal life, bear witness to the carnage and brutal destruction of buildings, lives and youth.

Because of her own perception together with the media assumed equivalence with Anne Frank much of Zlata Filipovic's diary suffers from the suspicion of contrived intent. In addition Zlata's scriptural ability and depth of philosophy are immature and shallow compared to those of Anne with her prodigious skills, but it must be remembered that she is the younger writer by two years, and it would be unfair to depreciate her for this. Both Anne and Zlata lived through excruciatingly parlous times. Anne Frank died and has, thus, become a victim forever; but because of the conscience of a world who neglected her and 1½ million other children like her, people intervened to save the life of another girl writing 50 years on. Both diaries are testaments to the anguish of a child torn between the joys of childhood and the horrors of the war and confinement they had to grow up in; they reveal a change in consciousness in a changed world.

## Notes

- 1 The references to and quotations from Anne Frank's diary come from her original, unrevised one, unless otherwise indicated. It has not been possible to determine how much of Zlata Filipovic's diary was revised for the purpose of publication.
- 2 Freud's letter to the editor of *A Young girl's diary*, a controversial diary written purportedly by an adolescent girl and first published in 1915, could well be referring to Anne Frank's, too: We are shown how her feelings grow up out of a childish egoism till they reach social maturity; we learn what form is first assumed by her relations with her parents and with her brother and sister and how they gradually gain in seriousness and inward feeling; how friendships are made and broken; how her affection feels its way towards her first objects; and, above all, how the secret of sexual life begins to dawn on her indistinctly and then takes complete possession of the child's mind; how, in the consciousness of her secret knowledge, she at first suffers hurt, but little by little overcomes it. (In Gunn & Guyomard 1990:3)
- 3 In her *Tales from the Secret Annexe*, Anne Frank (1983) puts forward her views about the revitalising aspect of nature and the presence of God in it in several stories, including "The Flower girl", "Fear", "The Fairy", "Rita" and "Cady's life".

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