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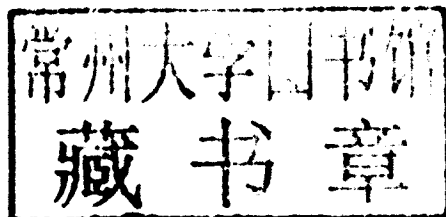
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Postcolonial Polysystems

The production and reception
of translated children's literature
in South Africa

Haidee Kruger

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For Anja, Tristan and Luka

The more that you read,
the more things you will know.
The more that you learn,
the more places you'll go.

I Can Read With My Eyes Shut! (Dr Seuss)

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Haidee Kruger
October 2012

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by Haidee Kruger

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the context of Anglo-American literary studies, the study of children's literature has long existed as a marginalised offshoot, largely because

...the idea that it is somehow suspect to study children's literature in an academic context persists widely, both in the general media, in wider academia, and in some children's literature criticism itself. It is seen as claiming a complexity or difficulty for something that is regarded, by definition, as simple, obvious and transparent, and, moreover, as valuable precisely for being so.

(Lesnik-Oberstein 2004: 1)

Added to this is the perception of children's literature as a less culturally significant, mostly pedagogical form of literature, peripheral to "real" literature, and created mostly by a "culturally marginalized species" of writer: women (Hunt 1999a: 1; see also Shavit 1986: ix). Nevertheless, awareness of the educational, cultural, commercial, political and sociolinguistic significance of children's literature (Hunt 1999a: 1) is growing, as the expansion of research devoted to various aspects of children's literature attests. Increasingly, too, critics are foregrounding the complexities of the field, which extend from its core outward. At the most basic level, the very term "children's literature" is fraught with difficulty. Debates about the nature and definition of "literature" are as old as the study of literature. The term "child" or "children" – especially in the construction "children's literature", in which the two terms are inseparably linked in a relationship of qualification and transformation (see Lesnik-Oberstein 1999: 16) – has equally shifting meanings in different socio-historical contexts and cultures, and even in the same socio-historical context and culture (Shavit 1986: 3–32). Mills (2000: 9) explains: "It is clear that childhood, or, rather, childhoods, are social constructions, cultural components inextricably linked to variables of race, class, culture, gender and time." This recognition is particularly important in the South African context, where social and cultural diversity precludes simple, homogenising, reified assumptions – about who the child being addressed is, what children's literature constitutes, and what its functions are. Zipes (2002) extends the argument about the difficulty of defining children's literature even further, arguing for a recognition