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THE RESPONSES OF CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN TO THRESHOLD EXPERIENCES IN GRIMM FAIRY TALES AND AFRICAN FOLK TALES

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature.

Johannesburg, 2007

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the responses of contemporary South African, Grade one children to threshold experiences in Grimm fairy tales and African Zulu folk tales. Thresholds involve an exciting or challenging experience, or a transformation in stories. Three stories from each genre were read over six sessions, to ten diverse black and white children, from one school. The children's enjoyment was assessed, with focus on their backgrounds and previous knowledge, to help find beneficial reading for them. Results suggested that while gender of characters and story origins did not seem important, story length, humour, entertainment and educational ability, as well as personal involvement, were useful. The study supported the notion that stories are generally universal and could help bridge our cultural divide. Reader-Response theory was used and its principles helped to structure questions for the interviews, and to analyse data. Hopefully, the findings will help to select appropriate texts for all children beginning school in present-day South Africa.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____.

Stacey Wolpert

14th day of February, 2007.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank and acknowledge the guidance of my fantastic supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Stacey, who served as a great source of inspiration and direction throughout the project and never tired of my endless questions.

To Professor Victor Houliston, who always made himself readily available for advice on the project.

To my friend and 'editor', Nikki Stein, thank you for your dedicated hard work in proofreading the dissertation.

I would also like to thank the teacher and principal of the school used in the study. They were always willing to help and I appreciate their trusting their wonderful children to me.

I am very grateful to the university, as well as to the Tothill fund, who granted me generous financial assistance for the two years of the degree.

Lastly, to my wonderful family, who have listened to countless renditions of children's stories, and yet who continue to put up with me.

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