**“Kinderboekenschrijver worden? Zelf doen!”**

***A qualitative approach to the position of children’s literature in an adult world***

**By Weike van Koolwijk**

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**Introduction**

March 20th this year was -and is- an important date in the history of children’s literature in the Netherlands. It is the first time, namely, that a Dutch author of children’s book wins the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. This award, also seen as the ‘Nobel Prize of Children’s Literature’ has been awarded to Guus Kuijer, a 70-year old ex-primary school teacher (who doesn’t like school) who has written over 30 children’s books over the course of his career. The prize is awarded each year to an author, illustrator, or organization that works in the spirit of famous author Astrid Lindgren (the author of e.g. Pippi Longstocking). The goal of this prize (which is almost half a million Euros, and there’s nothing childish about that), is to promote children’s literature. The judges say about his work: “The uncompromising perspective of the child is a consistent feature in Guus Kuijer’s works, but at the same time, through his young protagonists, he paints a perceptive picture of the adult world. With humanity and warmth he portrays a complex world in unpretentious yet subtle language”(Swedish Art Coucil, 2012). Kuijer’s works, which are always reflective or even critical of the day and age in which it was written, are much appreciated amongst Dutch young readers. “The name Guus Kuijer has become something of a brand”, the author says, “In the Dutch children’s book world, that is. It just happened. It’s a very strange thing to me. Fortunately, outside of this world, nobody knows me”(Wijndelts, 2012).

It seems like a good thing to be famous while at the same time not having to put on a fake moustache and a cloak when walking in the streets (something which, I suppose, would draw quite a bit more attention). I guess it’s a privilege that only children’s book writers can have. But why? Why are they not as well-known as literary authors for adults? Don’t children’s books play an important role in a child’s life? The bigger question would be: Where does children’s literature stand within the literary world?

Every year prizes are handed out in order to draw attention to the children’s books that have come out that year, prizes that will increase the credibility of children’s literature as a literary field that deserves appreciation. Sometimes, a children’s book will win a prize for adult literature: Philipp Pullman’s *The Amber Spyglass* won the Whitbread Book of the Year award in 2001 (Gibbons, 2002). Looking at the amount of prizes, the emancipation of children’s literature seems successful. But is this really the case?

It seems to me - as will become clear from this essay - that children’s books take in rather an awkward place in the literary world. Arguably, are not given as much attention as they deserve. This doesn’t make me love them less. For as long as I remember, I have been reading children’s books. As I got older, I continued reading them. Last week the local library had a book sale, and after strolling around for about an hour I found myself walking out the door with a big pile of children’s books in my arms. The kids around me looked rather envious at that pile because of course I picked out all the good ones. Somehow, children’s books fascinate me. Reading these books, it’s like being stuck on a wheel of delight. It may be the relative ease with which one reads such a book, or the drawings that are usually so fascinating, or the fact that-however short the book is- there is always a story in which things-actual things- *happen*. My love for children’s books even went so far that when I was in high school I had to read literature for my Dutch class, but I couldn’t bear to do that. After some discussion with my literature teacher he agreed that could read children’s literature instead. My teacher considered this to be good enough, as long as it was considered a classic or if he would get the chance to approve of it before I put it on my literature list. All the other students were amused by this (though I suspect that secretly they were jealous), but they also frowned a little upon the fact that I refused to read adult literature.

Where does children’s literature stand within and without the literary world? Is it accepted and respected, or more like rejected and frowned upon? What especially interests me is the experience author’s have with being a children’s book author. How do they experience it themselves, and how do they think that others view their work. This makes all the difference, because handing out a prize of excellence to the teased child in class doesn’t necessarily make him more accepted.

Last year I already conducted a research about more or less the same topic, called *Children´s Book Illustrators Today* (Koolwijk, 2011)*.* Instead of the children’s book author, I chose the children’s book *illustrators* as my focus of analysis. In that previous essay I interviewed seven children’s book illustrators in the Netherlands and Belgium about their experiences, and in order to structure the information I gained from the interviews I used Howard S. Becker’s *Art Worlds* (2008 , original 1982). Back then I found Becker to be very useful in structuring my data, however I also found him to be a bit constraining in my own creativity. With this essay I do not wish to test Becker´s theory to my case. It is sure that it will apply, because his theory can be all encompassing if you interpret it loosely. Perhaps arrogantly, I do not think that using his theory will add much value to my essay. Becker’s points are rather straightforward in the sense that without his guidance I can also gain the same information from the interviews. This does not mean I have not used Becker at all. His work is very interesting (not to mention fun to read) and it was always at the back of my mind. I have used his work as guidancefor the interview questions I developed. However, after the interviewing stage I have not seen Becker´s *Art Worlds* as essential for my analysis. Rather, I distilled (like a true chemist) the most workable points from the interviews.

In order to collect my data I made use of qualitative interviews. I selected four children’s book authors and I interviewed them at their homes and over Skype. One author I even interviewed in Amsterdam where a children’s book writer’s meeting was about to happen, so I got to see (however not talk to) a lot more authors in the ‘wild’. The interviews were about an hour each, in which I asked the interviewees questions about their experiences. I tried to keep the questions as broad (or ‘open-ended’) as possible, clinging onto interesting leads for follow-up questions. I did previously select some topics that I wanted to hear their opinion about, and I usually discussed them all. I thought the interviews were most fruitful when the authors would already answer my questions without me even asking them, which fortunately happened very often. The authors were incredibly helpful, and gave me a lot of additional information that I would have never come up with when reading books and researching on the internet. I also interviewed two other people, Harry Bekkering and Aukje Holtrop. Bekkering represents the more historical (and jury’s) side, and Aukje Holtrop the reviewer’s (and also jury’s) side of children’s books. They both added a lot of interesting perspectives to my research. Those six interviews were a very important source of information, and I used their comments widely. In this I assumed that their answers were truthful, an assumption which I feel can be justified. I think this because the authors usually did not seem constrained in their answers due to the fact that I am just a student and my results are not going to be published outside of my university setting. The questions I asked were rather open, semi-structured as it is called in interviewing terminology. Only later in the interview my questions were getting more specific. After posing those questions, I attempted to view which points the authors talked about *without encouragement,* so without me putting the words in their mouths. This gave me the chance to see what they themselves viewed as important. Several aspects of a children’s book author’s experience arose through this method and these aspects I have braided into the essay you are reading now (Seale, 1998).

This brings me to the main question I will investigate upon in this paper: *What is the role of the children’s book in the literary world?* How to tackle this question? First we will have a look into children’s literature at large. But before we get to that, I will shortly introduce the interviewees to you.

**Introducing the interviewees in this article**

**Harry Bekkering**

****Harry Bekkering is a professor of Arts and Culture at the Radbout University Nijmegen. He specializes in children’s and youth literature. He helped creating *De hele Bibelebontse berg* and was a boardmember of the Jan Campert Stichting, which awards prizes to i.e. children’s books (Nienke van Hichtum Prize). He also often contributed to the magazine *Literatuur Zonder Leeftijd* i*.*

**Marion van de Coolwijk**

****Marion van de Coolwijk was a teacher on a primary school and made her debut in 1989. After the birth of her first son she became a PR assistant of the education department for the publisher Kluitman for several years, where she also wrote many AVI-books[[1]](#footnote-2). She is now combining her writing work with her work as remedial teacher. She has written over 100 books over the course of her career, amongst others the popular *MZZL MEIDEN* series. *MZZL MEIDEN* won the Tina Bruna Award in 2006 ii.

**Aukje Holtrop**

Aukje Holtrop is journalist and published a lot about children’s literature, amongst others a biography of author Nienke van Hichtum. In the 70s and 80s she worked as a children’s book reviewer for *Trouw* and *Vrij Nederland* (*De Blauwgeruite Kiel*) and was main editor of the children’s newspaper *Primeur*. She co-founded the Woutertje Pieterse Prize in 1988, and was in the jury several times. Now she is a freelance journalist and she works for *Vrij Nederland* and several radio and TV programs iii.

**Joke van Leeuwen**

Joke van Leeuwen is an author-illustrator and made her debut in 1978. Her second book, *Een huis met zeven kamers,* was awarded with the Silver Pen and the Golden Brush award in 1980. After this she won several other prizes for her work, amongst others the Woutertje Pieterse Prize (which she won twice). In 2000 she won the Theo Thijssen Prize for her oeuvre. Apart from her children’s books, she also wrote several books for adults, and she makes cabaret. In 2008-2009 she was the ‘city poet’ of Antwerp, where she lives iv.

**Ted van Lieshout**

****Ted van Lieshout was schooled as an illustrator. In 1982 he started illustrating at the children’s newspaper *De Blauwgeruite Kiel* of the newspaper *Vrij Nederland*, and in 1984 he published his first poems there. In 1986 he published his first books, and he has been working as a children’s book writer ever since. His work won numerous prizes, such as the Vlag & Wimpel for his poetry and the Silver and Golden Pen[[2]](#footnote-3) (which he won several times). In addition to this, he won the Nienke van Hichtum Prize in 2001, the Theo Thijssen Prize in 2009, and his latest book, *Driedelig paard*, was awarded with the Woutertje Pieterse Prize in 2012. In that same year his first book for adults was published, *Mijn meneer,* based on the relationship he had with an older man when he was a child. This book gave him a lot of attention, and he was interviewed in the TV program *Pauw & Witteman* about his experiences v.

**Anna Woltz**

Anna Woltz knew she wanted to be a writer ever since she was 12. When she was 15 she wrote a weekly column for a year in the newspaper *De Volkskrant*, about her life at school. When she was 17 she wrote her first children’s book, *Alles kookt over*, which was published in 2002. After studying history she took up full-time writing in 2005. In addition to this, she was a columnist at *De Volkskrant* from 2005-2009. In Belgium her children’s books were awarded with the first and second prize for the children’s jury. In the Netherlands she was on the list of nominations for the children’s jury several times. In addition to writing, she often visits primary schools to talk about her work vi.

**Chapter 1:**

**The Function of Children’s Books**

“A child only remembers a fraction of what he reads. But this fraction he will remember so incredibly well, that it will accompany him for the rest of his life, in his heart and blood, it becomes a part of himself”

Annie M.G. Schmidt

(as quoted by Collie, 2007, p. 11)

I was once in a theater play, and at the night of the play we ordered some french-fries to give us the necessary energy to make the evening a success. When one of the actors carried in the bag of fries we realized we didn’t have a plate, so we tore open the bag and put it on the floor. As we were eating one of my fellow actors smiled. “We’re like *the Stampertjes*!” she said. We looked at what we were doing and started to laugh. Indeed, we *were* like Annie M.G. Schmidt’s little disorganized family, who would always eat french-fries on the floor of their room full of mattresses. We were 18. The book is for small children, and most of us hadn’t read it in at least 10 years. We all remembered this book, *Pluk van de Pettenflet,* and the curious family of the Stampertjes. Pluk van de Pettenflet had, as it were, become a part of our lives. And this is very interesting.

**The six basic functions of children’s books**

How do children’s books do that, what is their function in the hands and minds of children? Jan van Collie (2007) outlines a couple of functions[[3]](#footnote-4) that a children’s book could have in order to satisfy the child’s needs. According to him, there are six basic functions.

First and foremost, children’s books can be relaxing. This is an important motivation to start reading a book. I can’t even remember the number of times that I woke up as a child in the middle of the night, after having been tortured by a horrendous nightmare. I would turn on my light, and read a children’s book. I would read an especially light-hearted section, and this way would take away my stress, and after a while I was not so afraid to close my eyes again. Through humorous stories, or adventures, my mind was able to wonder away from those nightmares and calm down again (Collie, 2007).

The second function of a book is the creative function. Through the use of imagination and fantasy the child can imagine itself to be in a different world. This experience can also push a child to be more creative in his own world, to make the child realize that the world as it is doesn’t necessarily always have to be this way. That is not to say that if a child wants to go to Hogwarts that he can go to Hogwarts, but in a more loose sense it allows children to view the world as a malleable place and to approach it with a creative eye (Collie, 2007).

Thirdly, children’s books have an emotive function. The stories that children read can make them feel scared, happy, sad, angry, or loved. Sometimes these emotions are brought across quite literally, making a child cry or making him close the book because the story is too scary. These emotions in the book can be indicated directly, ‘Alice is mad’, or indirectly, ‘Alice turns around and storms away, closing the door behind her with a loud BANG’. A child needs more experience to understand the indirect way of expressing emotions than the direct way. Through empathy the child can experience the emotions (Collie, 2007). Also, arguably, by empathizing with people in books, children also learn to empathize with the people in their surroundings (Woltz, 2012). Books can also help children to deal with their own emotions. Books about puberty-problems, such as the *Hoe overleef ik-*series by Francine Oomen[[4]](#footnote-5) can show a child that other children have their problems too, and this makes it easier to cope with them (Collie, 2007).

The fourth function van Collie points out is the informative function. Picture books for toddlers are one of the first gateways to get to know the real world. As children grow older, the most obvious informative children’s books are the non-fiction ones. But also within fiction there are informative books with the (perhaps added) intention to teach a child something. Books such as historical children’s books, or a story that is set in another culture. Also ‘problem books’, such as the already mentioned *Hoe overleef ik*-series can teach children important things about what to do when parents get divorced, or when a child’s father dies. In addition to this, children’s books are also informative in the sense that they teach children new words (Collie, 2007).

Next is the moral function. Children’s books often have a pedagogical function, and this is one of the strongest ways in which they differ from adult’s literature. Books can teach children about moral values, making them think about the way they want to live their lives. Books can express norms and values implicitly or explicitly. The explicit form can often be seen in old fairy tales, where the moral of the story is clearly expressed at the end of a story. There are a lot of books about rebellious children (e.g. Roald Dahl’s *Mathilda*), and these subversive books “appeal to the imaginative, questioning, rebellious child within all of us, renew our instinctive energy, and act as a force of change” (A. Lurie, as quoted by Collie, 2007, p. 23). Often the books attempt to teach children to think for themselves, which means that “you are able to discover new structures in your experiences, you can come up with new solutions, and make up new opinions” (T. Rondhuis, as quoted by Collie, 2007, p. 23).

The last function as mentioned by van Collie is the esthetic function. This is not focused on the story itself, but rather the way in which it is shaped; the words, the illustrations. This function can only be satisfied if all the previous functions are not too protrusive. Books where the informative function is too forward, for example, distract from the aesthetic beauty of the story. If the esthetic function is put to use correctly, the story and the esthetics are in a perfect balance. You have the feeling that the story could not have been written differently (Collie, 2007).

**Chapter 2:**

**The function of children’s books 1880-1980**

After having explained the basic functions of children’s books, it has become a bit more clear how such books can have such a profound influence on a child’s life. It is interesting to think of how many children in this world have been raised with the ‘whizzpoppers’ of Roald Dahl’s BFG, Dr. Seuss’ witty rhymes, or Astrid Lindgren’s anti-authoritarian character Pippi Longstocking, and that these characters and their ideas are entrenched in a child’s mind, and however old you get, the fact that these authors have ‘raised’ you in a way, will never fade.

If it is clear to us now that children’s books are of significant influence to children, but in order to fully understand this it is key to see how this influence has been perceived throughout history. In this article I will mainly focus on the children’s books of the late 20th century, but in order to grasp our current understanding of children’s books it is important to look at how children’s books were perceived in the past. Because the functions of children’s books as we perceive them today are not as obvious as it might seem. I will base my historical account largely on the book *Wat heten goede kinderboeken? Opvattingen over kinderlteratuur in Nederland sinds 1880[[5]](#footnote-6)* by Anne de Vries (Vries, 1989). De Vries distinguishes three periods, the period of 1880-1930, 1930-1960, and 1960-1980, and her focus is on the Netherlands and only marginally on Belgium. In order to explain what happened after the 1980s I will make use of the interviews I conducted and other literature. I will give a short summary of de Vries’ argument, but you should keep in mind that in each period there were a lot of conflicting opinions, and that the version you will read below is the simplified version of de Vries’ book.

Before 1880 there was not a lot of attention given to children’s literature, or at least not a lot of essays can now be found on the topic. This interest only started to rise at the end of the 19th century. At that time, the main question was what kind of books a child should be allowed to read, e.g. whether a small child should be exposed to the horrors of many fairy tales. Certain criteria are formulated, and about these criteria there is hardly any discussion. In 1887 teachers of the Netherlands start to make a list of which books are suitable for school libraries, and around 1890 the interest widens and a discussion starts to evolve to find out which requirements a good children’s book should meet. The ideal at that time was often books with a very strong pedagogical function, with very strong moralizing ideals. This is often directly connected to how children were perceived at that time. They were seen as individuals who were not yet developed, and they still had to be shaped. The children who hadn’t read books were “empty of head and heart” (Vries, 1989, p. 131); Ida Heijermans even views the child as a “future human being” (p.131). It was assumed that the morals of the books with directly imprint themselves on the empty child’s minds (Vries, 1989). Those books usually didn’t star children; the main characters were adults, people children should look up to (Mathijsen, 2008). Books which carry out the wrong morals should be kept away from children, was the general conception. These books also did not see fantasy as something suitable for a children’s book; a book should be as close to the reality as possible. It was considered dangerous to wander too far away from reality, and get lost in the fantasy-word. However, at the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century another (often additional) ideal was coming up: the aesthetical function of a children’s book. The followers of this ideal did not see the child as someone that is yet to become real; instead they see the child as it is now. If a child is already someone, they can also have books in which their own thoughts and feelings are drawn out. The people who plead for the aesthetic way of approaching the children’s book simply discarded the direct moral, saying that reading about ‘naughty’ children with bad morals doesn’t necessarily mean that the child will become naughty himself. Instead of stating the moral in these stories, the child would have to find out what is wrong or right through identifying with the emotions of the characters in the books. The followers of the aesthetic function were not against the exploration in the fantasy world; they were of the opinion that fantasy perhaps would not give a book a severe advantage but it could still be seen as an enrichment of the mind (Vries, 1989).

The 1930s are the start of a new development in the perception of children’s books and a new generation of authors makes their debut. The period 1930-1960 is also the period in which the famous Dutch author Annie M.G. Schmidt starts writing and imprinting her ideals on the Dutch society. This is the start of a period of increased attention for the literary and emotional development of children. Schmidt goes against the idea that children’s books should be ‘constructive’, instead the only requirement she poses for a good children’s book is that “it must be true and only true” (Annie M.G. Schmidt, as quoted by Vries, 1989, p. 189). The meaning of ‘true’ in this case does not mean that it must directly respond to reality, on the contrary (for anyone who has ever read Schmidt’s books can see that direct reality of often nowhere to be seen. Instead, it is about an ‘inner truth’, which has nothing to do with reality. A children’s book must not be made up, instead everything must develop naturally. Children read to satisfy a need for certain emotions, and all a writer can do is to make those emotions as real as possible. In addition to that, Schmidt insists that everything in a book should be perfect. The language, the tone, everything. A good children’s book, she said, can “develop the taste of the child, and therefore create the fundaments of his culture” ( Schmidt, as quoted by de Vries, 1989, p. 215). The people who follow this more ‘aesthetic’-or ‘literary’- point of view also tend to see the children as a more independent and resilient group. If children seek to experience emotions, this should not be censored. Children shape themselves, and therefore they have to decide for themselves what kind of emotions they need. However, at that age also the opposition was still present. This group argued that children should be ‘protected’ from certain things. Books which could suggest ‘indecent’ thoughts in the mind of the child should be avoided. They did still believe in the strong moralizing influence of children’s books. Even though this group also agrees that the writer should be an artist, at the same time they think that the book should still fulfil its pedagogical function, and if the literary function overrules the pedagogical one this should be put right. When the discussion in the previous period was about whether the moral should be directly or indirectly (or at all) developed in a story, this new period showed an increase of attention for the literary aspect which drew the both groups closer together (Vries, 1989).

The next period, 1960-1980, witnessed a great change. Children’s literature was more publicly acknowledged than ever before. In the period between 1970 and 1980 more books, articles and brochures were published on the subject than in the entire century before. The creation of the 3-yearly ‘State’s Prize of Children’s and Youth Literature’, now known as the ‘Theo Thijssen Prize’ in 1964 was by some seen as the definitive acknowledgement of the children’s book. Later, in 1971, the yearly Golden and Silver Pen allocation (a prize for children’s literature) was set in place (Holtrop, 1986). This acknowledgement of the children’s book also had a lot to do with the increasing attention from the ‘teacher academies’[[6]](#footnote-7), which included children’s literature in the curriculum of the future teachers. In 1968 children’s literature was included in the curriculum of teachers of primary school children, and after 1970 the Dutch teachers of middle school (12-15 year olds) as well took up children’s literature as a field of expertise (Vries, 1989). In an interview I conducted with Harry Bekkering, a Dutch university professor who is specialized in children’s literature, he also pointed this out. He says: “those teacher academies have played a big role in increasing the visibility of children’s literature-and once children’s literature also popped up in universities it also got more scientific attention. In addition, there were more and more prizes for children’s literature […] that have led to the development that greater importance was assigned to those books” (Bekkering, 2012). The increasing expansion and popularity of organized children’s libraries also played a role, and because of this increased attention, children’s books were seen as a field which deserved professional interest. Predominant conceptions of children’s literature at that time were preaching for the use of children’s books as something that should increase the independent decision making –or ‘critical thinking’ capacities of a child. A book with an obvious moral, which did not leave the child any space for personal decision-making, was looked down upon. Despite this rejection of the moral, children’s books were still of strong pedagogical value. Around 1970 the public opinion was that children’s books should add to the ‘social awareness’ that had to develop in a child. The “Werkgroep Kinder- en Jeugdlektuur”[[7]](#footnote-8), founded in 1972 in Eindhoven, had a large influence on this society-oriented view. There was increasing attention to racism (‘black people in children’s books still wear skirts’) and gender-based division of roles (e.g. Schmidt who writes about children who want to become “houseman” and “carpenter-woman”) (Vries, 1989, 1990). Related to this are the so-called ‘problem books’, which also made its appearance in the 70s. ‘Problem books’ are books for adolescents in which subjects like death, abortion, drugs, homosexuality, divorce, even suicide are made to serve the purpose of a children’s book. This ‘genre’(the large variety of subjects makes it difficult to call it a genre), was-and is- much despised by literary critics, the most common criticism of such books being that “children are not allowed to be children anymore” (Baudoin, 1983, p. 26). The pedagogical critique was mainly that children usually like to have ‘fun’ when reading and that they shouldn’t be confronted with ‘adult problems’-in the first place because it’s not ‘fun’ –and the children’s world is supposed to be pleasant-and secondly because they were presumably not developed enough to ‘handle it’. This view can be criticised, amongst others because the lives of adolescents at that time was really not that ‘innocent’ as was presumed. There are many different kinds of children, and therefore many different kinds of needs. The criticism on the literary side, however, is a bit more convincing. The literary critics claim that the emphasis is put too much on the story and too little on the form, and because of this the stories in these ‘problem books’ often are rather ‘lifeless’. In this period-like in the previous ones-there are a lot of alternative views, but in general the development is that children should no longer be locked up in the children’s world, and that they should be taken seriously. This can be seen as an “upgrading of the childlike status”(Baudoin, 1983, p. 32). And I think I have to agree with Baudoin when she says that the ‘problem books’ from the 70s as an end are not particularly valuable, but as a *process* of seeing children as a group that can be taken seriously it is definitely a good development (Baudoin, 1983). This ‘upgrading’ also counts-to a certain extent, at least- for children’s literature (Vries, 1989).

**Chapter 3:**

**The 80s and the Coming of Age of Children’s Literature**

The 80s bring a shift to a very serious appreciation of especially the literary side of children’s literature, and it definitely deserves several paragraphs to try and explain the consequences of this. Although the 70s already show a clearer literary point of view, the pedagogical aspect is still present. Often the ‘story’ was still seen as more important than the ‘form’. According to Bekkering, the ‘problem book’ “has caused a lot of people to think ‘we shouldn’t only have books with content, we also need books in which something is done on a structural level-so on a compositional level and in terms of language’”(Bekkering, 2012). And this is exactly what happened. Slowly but certainly certain big names in children’s literature crawl into view, big names which will dominate the discussion of children’s books for decades to come: Toon Telligen, Paul Biegel, Imme Dros, Els Pelgrom (Bekkering, 1993). I interviewed Aukje Holtrop, who was at that time a writer of reviews of children’s books in *Vrij Nederland* and *De Blauwgeruite Kiel*, amongst others, and who co-founded the Woutertje Pieterse Prize, which I will discuss later. Holtrop said about this development: “[I]n the 80s some writers came to the surface who just wrote amazingly well. Their work was fantastic. And that their books happen to be for children was in their case often a coincidence, that’s just how they wrote” (Holtrop, 2012). I am not sure whether the development of a serious literary interest of children’s books has developed because of these writers, or whether these writers just were in the right place at the right time. In any case, they were at the heart of the discussion of children’s books as a literature, for their texts could be analyzed by purely literary standards, the same which were used for adult literature. You could notice the difference in the way the jury of e.g. the Golden and Silver Pen discussed the children’s books in their jury reports. In the early 70s, the criteria for judging children’s literature weren’t very strong (‘it is easy to read’, ‘it talks about things that interest kids’), by the 1980s however, it the criteria became more serious, more ‘literary’ (Holtrop, 1986). The clearest example of this more ‘literary’ approach to children’s books was when in 1985 Els Pelgrom’s book *Kleine Sofie en Lange Wapper*  won the Golden Pen. According to Harry Bekkering this was the beginning of a development that was to continue for decades, a development which carved a divide between what adults think is a good book and what children think is a good book. “It was the start of “two ‘forms’ of jury’s: the public’s jury, and the artistic jury. For a long time there was no divide, they were kind of the same. In ’85 this changed. Els Pelgrom’s book (…) had been the start. You could also see this in the jury reports. Different arguments were used, style, metaphors, psychologizing of characters, etcetera. Then there was suddenly an attention for other types of books ”(Bekkering, 2012). At that time the critique on the Pen jury usually evolved around the literary quality of the book, which was sometimes not advanced enough. (Vries, 1996). By the choice of the Pen Jury to apply ‘grown up’ criteria to choose which children’s book they deemed best a divergence started to appear between the decision of the adult jury and the choice of the readers (Vries, 1996).

The ‘public’s jury’ Bekkering mentions is the children’s jury[[8]](#footnote-9) which also had its official start in the 80s. Before that time there wasn’t much disagreement between what children appreciated and what adults chose for them, judging from the local children’s jury accounts which were present at that time. A lot of books which were allocated the Golden and Silver Pen in the 70s are still incredibly popular among children, *Kruistocht in Spijkerbroek* (by Thea Beckman), but to name an example (Vries, 1996). There are three categories in which a book can win a prize, namely one for 6-9, 10-12, and 13-16 year olds[[9]](#footnote-10). The idea of the children’s jury has its roots in Rotterdam in 1955, where Christien van Rheenen took the initiative to start such a jury in a children’s library. She did this in the wake of a child’s comment that “it wasn’t fair that *adults* always get to choose the best children’s book of the year” (Lierop-Debrauwer, 2006, p. 66, my emphasis). It was only in the 70s that this idea of a children’s jury spread to other cities in the Netherlands, and in 1988 an official national jury was organized by het ‘Nederlands Bibliotheek en Lectuur Centrum’[[10]](#footnote-11), the VARA and the CPNB foundation, and the children’s jury got its official form. At that time the children’s jury was an object of interest for two reasons; the first being the ‘original’ reason, namely to counterbalance the choice of the ‘adult jury’, and to show which books were actually appreciated by the children. The second reason is that it was a form of ‘reader research’. By looking at the criteria held by children in their decisions, the adult jury’s could see what was important for children and what was not. The attractiveness of the cover, to name an example, was often left undiscussed by adult juries at that time, while the children themselves thought this was very important. The children’s jury in the Netherlands works as follows: the children are asked to make a top 5 out of all the books published in that previous year. Of course this leads to quite a scattered outcome, but due to the large number of children participating there is always a clear ‘winner’. The one which is most popular wins the ‘Prijs van de Nederlandse Kinderjury’. No money is attached to this prize, apart from the honor to the author. The winning book does receive a sticker on its cover that reveals it as a children’s jury prize winner, which usually means more revenue for the author so in a sense the prize pays itself (Lierop-Debrauwer, 2006).

**The Woutertje Pieterse Prize**

Although the books that won the Golden and Silver Pen prize were judged by more literary criteria than before, some people still thought this wasn’t enough. Aukje Holtrop says: ‘the Pens were collaboration between the publishers and bookstores. That didn’t mean they awarded books which were badly written, absolutely not, but they always took into account whether the books were sellable. And I understand that”(Holtrop, 2012). But she –and with her some others- didn’t think this was enough and together with a group of other critics she founded the Woutertje Pieterse Prize in 1987. This prize is the consequence of the literary development in children’s books, and at the same time it stimulates new literary works for children. The point of these critics was to view the children’s book as a fully developed literary genre (Boonstra, 1993). Holtrop: “It [the prize] was very explicitly called into existence to judge a book purely on literary and special characteristics. It had to be a very special book. It also had to look very beautiful, that was another criterion. So if a book was great, but it was printed on some kind of toilet paper, it could not win the award. The question whether it was understandable or not that wasn’t our concern”(Holtrop, 2012). The prize is in 1988 first awarded to Imme Dros for her book *Annetje Lie in het Holst van de Nacht.* The existence of this prize (which also consists of €15.000) wasn’t without criticism from the side of the Pen –and children’s jury (which made its first official appearance around that time). The criticism evolved around the idea that the books which were awarded would never be chosen by children. And this could easily be true, you can see this in the way Bregje Boonstra wrote about the book *Lieveling Boterbloem* [[11]](#footnote-12)“as with every important children’s book the question arises whether the book is accessible for children, at the same time this question is irrelevant altogether”(Collie, 2007, p. 56). Holtrop: “This has always been a discussion. But as long as there were still a number of children who did love these ‘too complicated’ books, as some people called them, we thought the prize had a right to existence. And this has always stayed this way” (Holtrop, 2012). Holtrop didn’t think that complicated books were necessarily unappreciated by children: “I do think you have to read such a book for pleasure, I think that this is very important. But I don’t think it’s a problem if it’s a little complicated, I don’t think that children mind doing that” (Holtrop, 2012). Also, she didn’t think that the existence of the more literary books meant that the more ‘popular’ books should be looked down upon. Their argumentation, according to her, was that “those people who sell an enormous amount of books, they are already rewarded because they make so much money; they sell so much, and are very popular. And that is very nice. And of course this is a bit of a ‘wrong’ argument, but (…)we wanted the books that were a bit more complicated to also receive some appreciation”(Holtrop, 2012).

And this thought led to a kind of literature which was chosen by adults for children, but which was undeniably ‘literature’. What kind of literature it was, was sort of left in the open. It may have been a bit too complicated for children, or a bit too ‘childish’ for adults. It resides in the grey zone, being more or less suitable for both age groups. This is how the phrase ‘literatuur zonder leeftijd’ (ageless literature) came into being, a phrase which became the title of a magazine about children’s literature which was founded in 1986 (Bekkering, 1993; Literatuur zonder leeftijd, 1986). This kind of literature was-although targeted at children- simply ageless.

**Chapter 4:**

**The Passionate Battle Between Children’s Jury vs. Adult Jury: What the authors think**

The difference between what kind of books children prefer and what kind of books adults deem suitable for children can be seen in a small anecdote by one of the most famous Dutch children’s authors, Annie M. G. Schmidt.

Before she became a writer, Annie was a librarian. When she was working she read books to the children in the area once a week, at the cost of 2 cents. She picked out beautiful, literary correct stories. But the children hated it and yelled at her: “the money doesn’t grow on our backs, we paid two cents!” “Anyway,” said Annie, “I kicked them all out. But afterwards all the children were waiting outside and started kicking at my shins. And they were right, because I didn’t amuse them with my books. The next time, I told them a bloody story. It was a great success indeed”(Official Webpage Annie M.G. Schmidt, 2012).

Now, in 2012, the children’s jury still often disagrees with the choice of the adult jury. The problem remains that there is not ‘one child’, and the literary books which get chosen by the adult jury sometimes still receive some appreciation from their intended audience. For every argument you can say ‘but I know a child who…” while there is always another child who can prove the contrary. Interesting is that *adults* have to decide what’s good for *children* to read. Another part of the question which is often ignored in this discussion is that adults also *write* what children read. However, just like there isn’t ‘one kind of child’ there is also not ‘one kind of author’. The adults I interviewed for this essay are very different from one another in their writing style[[12]](#footnote-13). As you could already see in the ‘introducing the interviewees’-section, Joke van Leeuwen and Ted van Lieshout are much praised by the adult jury in terms of their work, though they both have written books that were also recommended by the children’s jury. They have both also written books for adult audiences. Marion van de Coolwijk, writes books which are very ‘accessible’ for children. Her book *MZZL MEIDEN* won the TINA-BRUNA AWARD in 2006, and her books are very popular with children and adolescents in terms of sales records. Anna Woltz is a beginning writer, and she aspires to walk the golden mean between the literary and the popular. She already won two children’s jury prizes in Belgium and was nominated for the Dutch children’s jury once. I asked them about this perceived difference between the opinion of the children and the ‘grownups’.

Ted van Lieshout doesn’t like this discussion in which critics claim that the Pen (and especially the Woutertje Pieterse and Nienke van Hichtum Prize) are ‘too literary’. He says “there is a heated discussion going on in the writers’ world about whether the prizes maybe shouldn’t go to the best literary books, but to the books that are well-written as well as popular. And that’s usually not the case with literary books, so what it comes down to is that you would choose for the number three books. It’s like with sprinters in a running contest, the person who gets the third place can still run very fast, but not the fastest. But maybe he can run more often. And a lot of people think these are the kinds of books that should win and I actually don’t agree with that. I think that the best should win, and not the second best”(Lieshout, 2012). Van Lieshout, who won many prizes for his poetry and children’s books, writes in a way that oftentimes is highly valued by those adult juries. He thinks it’s very important for him to win these prizes –on the one hand because it is of course very flattering, and on the other hand because of the money. Usually the prizes he gets are for poetry collections, and those generally don’t sell so well. But when a book receives a big literature prize it sells a bit better. Therefore in a sense he needs those awards to continue writing children’s books for a living.

The prizes are of very high importance to the full-time writers, because they put you on the map. Van Leeuwen: “Especially the first time [I won a prize] it was very fun. Because in the beginning you try really hard to secure your place, and then still no-one knows that you’ve made something. So the first time when I won a Golden Brush[[13]](#footnote-14) and a Silver Pen, that was for *Een huis met zeven kamers.* Then you are suddenly a part of that world [of children’s books]. And people see you as a writer and that is very necessary if you want to live off your work. So I was very pleased. And I’m still happy every time I win a prize. (…) Of course [winning prizes] doesn’t change anything about the fact that you always have to start from scratch, with an empty piece of paper or an empty screen. But I am very happy with them of course. But at the same time I’ve been in juries often enough to know that it isn’t a sports competition. It’s often a big discussion and many a time someone won a prize while I actually would’ve liked to give it to someone else. The judges try to convince each other and eventually someone wins, but often the winner could’ve easily been one of the others as well”(Leeuwen, 2012).

Joke van Leeuwen views the current ‘anti-literary’ discussion differently. Her books were-and are-very popular among certain children, the “more creative” ones as she names it. However, from 2000 onwards she witnessed a change. From that time onwards the books which were previously appreciated-the more personal and peculiar ones[[14]](#footnote-15) as she writes them- were suddenly called ‘elitist’, and ‘too difficult for children’-even though she didn’t write any differently than she did before, and previously her books were always labeled as ‘accessible’. “I have heard so many times the question ‘do children understand this, is it suitable for children, but that doesn’t bring you any further, it’s not an interesting question. I am not an educator, I’m a writer. And often these ideas are prejudices of people who think too much about what children cannot do and too little about what they can do. I think that if children don’t understand something completely something still happens in a child. Just like an adult can read a poem and not understand it, but like it nonetheless”. She gives a good example to illustrate this problem. She received an email from a teacher who had read her book *Toen mijn vader een struik werd [[15]](#footnote-16)*, about a girl that is a fugitive. “I think it’s a beautiful book, she said, but I’m not sure whether it will go down with the children”. A year later, the teacher tried it anyway. “She was so surprised about the interesting conversations that were sparked by [the book], about how it stimulated children to talk about such issues, and she wrote me again with thick bold letters ‘I regret that I thought this way about it before I had tried’. This is what I mean (…) I just don’t want [the children] to be constrained beforehand ”(Leeuwen, 2012).

Anna Woltz does see some truth in the claim that the literary children’s books are often not appreciated by children. It isn’t necessarily that this idea that it’s too difficult is something imposed on them by adults; it really emerges out of their own experience. But this doesn’t mean that the books should all be very simple so that the children can understand every word. “I think reading ‘up’ works very well when you talk about vocabulary. A book is allowed to have a lot of words that a child doesn’t know yet, because once you’ve read them a couple of times you do know them. But some stories-they can be so incredibly subtle and literary, I don’t think the average 10-year old is advanced enough to understand that.” This seems to be the constraining patronizing attitude Joke van Leeuwen talks about. However, Woltz illustrates her point by taking the example of Toon Telligen-a much-praised author who writes stories in which animals are usually the main characters- and she says that even though she was a very well-read child, she just couldn’t get through. “The stories are beautiful; adults love them, but children simply can’t finish the books. And then it’s not a question of ‘well, then they’ll just have to try harder’. (…) It’s ok for children to walk tiptoe, but at a certain point it’s just so out of reach that they will never be able to get to it anymore. And then it overshoots the mark” (Woltz, 2012). So the claim that ‘it’s too difficult’ sometimes does have a valid ground, because on some points children simply aren’t developed enough to understand the more literary children’s stories. And –especially with her Toon Telligen example, I can ascribe some truth to her claim. I loved reading as a child (and I still do), and I would read everything that was in my reach, whether it was a newspaper, a book, or the back of a milk carton. But when one of Toon Telligen’s books appeared in our house, I just couldn’t manage to read it. I must have picked up the book a hundred times, but after a couple of pages I would always put it down again. It was simply too difficult to read, I didn’t understand the point of the story. His stories might have been beautiful, but I never got to that point, because it was simply too tiring to keep on reading. That’s what Woltz means by ‘overshooting the mark’- a story can be so beautiful, but if a child cannot read it, you should perhaps reconsider whether you have written a good children’s book.

Marion van de Coolwijk is on the other side of the spectrum. She uses easy words and a simple storyline so that children can understand her stories, and she doesn’t think that winning a Pen would be suitable for her. “I think it’s more important in any case to win the children’s jury prize, because that’s who you write for in the first place. If your target audience says what you wrote is fun for them, then you did a good job I think”(Coolwijk, 2012). It all depends for what purpose a person takes up writing for children. Some people write for themselves, to take out their creativity, and they also have to make the work interesting for themselves, e.g. by putting in multiple layers of interpretation in a story. Marion van de Coolwijk, who is more of a ‘popular’ writer, writes especially and only for the children. She has two dyslectic children, and the most important thing for her is that children *read.* It doesn’t matter what they read, as long as they read. She says: “I don’t try to be complicated and literary with my work, with long sentences and beautiful words. That’s not my thing. I write so that everybody can read it with pleasure and so that a little movie appears in your head. Because that’s the way it is for me. (…) But there are always 5 children in each class who say ‘I don’t have that’, because [they simply read] too slow. My son says ‘reading isn’t like watching a movie; it’s like watching a movie in which every minute is interrupted by advertisement’. That the movie can never get started, that annoys them ”(Coolwijk, 2012). Marion writes for them, the children who actually never read. And her biggest accomplishment is to make reading for those children fun again. “I’m still a bit of a school teacher. That’s why” she says with a smile.

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**Chapter 5:**

**“Kinderboekenschrijver worden? Zelf doen!”[[16]](#footnote-17) About the popularization of children’s books in the new millennium**

When talking about the increasing attention for the more literary children’s book, Harry Bekkering notices a change from the new millennium onwards. “That process went on for really long and now we can witness a turn back. I have grown along with this development. In the beginning I thought it was good, that books kept on getting more and more literary. I felt that children also have a right to ‘the best’. But actually we have (…) gone a bit too far. We neglected to take into account that it’s children’s books we’re talking about. And that they need readers, else wise the books don’t exist. So now I am of the opinion that I was too much focused on the book itself (…) and too little focused on the readers of those books. (…) [I] still think that a book should be well-written. But now I think that not only should the language be appealing, the story also has to be good”(Bekkering, 2012).

I earlier explained the development of the children’s books in the Netherlands[[17]](#footnote-18) and how children’s literature was perceived over the years. If the 80s show a clear increase in the attention for the more literary children’s books, then the new millennium is a period in which the popularity of these children’s books is going down and a very rapid pace. Now that the literary children’s books are losing popularity, this is the age for the easy-to-read, easy-to-grasp children’s books to climb the Olympus and drink nectar with the gods. Not a lot has been written about the way children’s books have been perceived after the turn of the millennium. I draw the information from this part mostly from the interviews I conducted and from the few essays that have been written about it.

As a start it should be said that –especially after 2000, but the threat had been in the air for a while- the entire book sector is having a difficult time. Book sales are going down, book shops (like Selexys) are –or have been- close to bankruptcy and only barely make it through. On top of that, the price of the central storage house (Centraal Boekhuis) for books is going up, making it less profitable for publishers to have large print runs of a book in storage. There are several other threats, like the rise of the e-book (which cost less and hence make less money for the publisher and the author) and the fact that TV and computer take over a lot of functions earlier assigned to the book (e.g. relaxation, emotional and aesthetic needs, etc.)(Coolwijk, 2012; Leeuwen, 2012; Woltz, 2012). In general, authors always get 10% of the revenue of each book that is sold. If we compare the sales-price of a regular children’s book with an adult book, children’s books usually are sold for €12.50, maybe 15 Euros maximum, whilst adults are willing to pay up to €19.95 for a book for themselves. Looking at these numbers, a simple calculation shows that children’s books make less money per book (Lieshout, 2012). At the risk of sounding alarmist, if we add to this calculation the fact that children’s book usually are sold in runs of a couple of thousands while adult books are normally printed in larger numbers, this shows just how difficult it must be for a children’s book author to get by in this day and age (Coolwijk, 2012).

Not only is it difficult for an author to keep his head above the water, the publishers of children’s books also had to suffer the stress from the decreasing sales. The fact that less books are sold makes them shift the focus of their efforts from the more ‘literary’ books to the more ‘popular’ formulas. One of those ‘popular’ formulas to generate more revenue is by selling series. It is very effective, because if children have read part one and they liked it, they also want to read part two, and part 3. From a commercial point of view, book series are very practical (Lieshout, 2012). Marion van de Coolwijk is the only author who I interviewed that published many series. “It happened to me with *MZZL MEIDEN*, that was one book, and the story was finished. I think it was published in April 2004. Then [my publisher] called me within 10 days of publication, saying that it was entirely sold out and that everybody was super enthusiastic about it. And that I should write part two. I answered ‘but there is no part two, I didn’t intend for it to have a part two.’ And then they said ‘well, just do it anyway, because it’s commercially valuable, and if you finish it next month then the book can still join in the children’s book promotion week[[18]](#footnote-19) in October’. At the time it was half April, and it had to be finished before the first of July so that it could be printed before the first of October. And I did it, I just continued the story where the first one ended and I thought ‘let’s try whether it works like this’. And now I’m already at part nine. And this wasn’t my original intention at all. And then next year part ten, it’s quite funny isn’t it?”(Coolwijk, 2012).

Joke van Leeuwen is not very appreciative of this development. Van Leeuwen: “You can really see now that there is an enormous difference between the group that sells well and all the others. This difference used to be much more nuanced. My previous publisher at Querido-who is now retired-, always said ‘we sell because we sell quality’. And back then that was enough. But not anymore. Now the only way to sell is by making a lot of noise, showing ‘I’m here! This is what I made!’. And you can no longer say ‘we have quality, therefore we will sell’. That’s just not the way it works anymore”. She is quite stoic about this development, saying “you can be sad about it, but you can also say oh well, the times have changed. I just notice it because I’ve been in the business for a while”. When I asked her why this changed, she answers “because of the rise of neo-liberalism, with its unquestionable belief in the market and in money. Quantity suddenly replaces quality, even though it actually has nothing to do with each other”[[19]](#footnote-20). Fortunately she has already gained a position in the children’s book world where she is not subjected to every whim. Her editor doesn’t persuade her to write a series, for example. “If my publisher would say go write a series, I would never do it because the publisher says so. I would only do it if I would deem it creatively interesting. I put my heart and soul in a book. It’s not really a commercial way of thinking, but at least it’s a way which makes me happy”. She is not interested in ‘hypes’, like series, or adopting a certain writing style because ‘children like that so much right now’. Van Leeuwen is founded enough in the children’s book world to know that her books will always find a way to the audience, even if the hype tells her to go in an opposite direction (Leeuwen, 2012). And in a way she is lucky about that.

Anna Woltz is only just starting to secure her place in the children’s book industry. She is relatively new, but she already won two children’s jury prizes and can live as a full-time writer. Her books are much appreciated by children, and up and till now she has been given absolute freedom in her writing. But the uncertainty of being a full-time children’s book writer makes her think that maybe this might change one day. “Maybe one day I will [write a book series]. The silly thing is, I want to continue to write, and I have to make money with that or else I can’t survive. So if the publishing industry is going to get even more difficult, you will have to choose as a writer: Either you take up another job, ór you have to write a more commercial book. (…) Being a writer, you can talk all you want and have really beautiful ideas about literature. But you still need to make money to survive, one way or the other. So at a certain point you’ll have to make concessions”(Woltz, 2012).

Marion van de Coolwijk calls herself a ‘businesslike writer’. She had learned some of the tips and tricks about selling children’s books at the publisher Kluitman, where she was working as a PR Education for quite some years while writing books as well. “When [Kluitman] published a book and they would try to get it into the stores (…) but the big book stores wouldn’t purchase them. (…) So we would have to make use of our entire families and go to the bookstores to ask ‘do you have the book by Charlie Smith this and that?’ and then the book store would say no and we would answer ‘that’s crazy, such a good book? Well I guess I will go to your neighbour then’. And then a grandfather came by and asked for the book, and then a colleague, and at a certain point the book stores would buy the books. And once they’re in the stores people start buying them. And it is only then when it starts. (…) So when I have a new book I ask my friends on Facebook ‘come on boys, I have a new book, could you try to…’ and if you don’t do that …oh well. My colleagues might think I’m businesslike, but without [being businesslike], nothing happens”(Coolwijk, 2012). This is something which never occurred to me, that it could work this way. It is very far away from the romantic idea that I always had in mind that if you write a good book, it will sell. But I suppose it is really like Joke van Leeuwen said. Today you have to make a lot of noise, quality isn’t a guarantee that books will sell. Marion van de Coolwijk continues, “A lot of writers say ‘I write, but I don’t deal with the business side of it, the publisher does that for me’. But more often than not nothing happens if you leave it to the publishers. Because they are not going to give a lot of money to a newcomer, mind you. I did the PR at Kluitman, I know how it works. I know that you need attention; you have to go over the top. It is only when people talk about you that they will get your book. That’s why school visits are also of crucial importance. I make my own PR-cards (…) on which I put my signature and which I give to the children. Did you think that the publisher would pay for that? I pay for that myself (…) but because of that the business does start running. So want to become a children’s book writer? Be prepared to do it yourself! [[20]](#footnote-21) ” (Coolwijk, 2012).

This is quite a sad prospect to all those people who want to become a children’s book writer[[21]](#footnote-22) in the future. However ‘sad’ it might sound, this very experience is not confined to van de Coolwijk alone. In the book *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Sloveny Peter to Harry Potter* (2001) by Jack Zipes, he also draws out this quite pessimistic and saddening (however perhaps more realistic) view about children’s literature in this day and age. Also Becker’s *Art Worlds* (2008 ) is very closely associated to this idea. I like to be naïve. I like to believe that children’s books are produced with a noble idea in mind, and that the publishers carry out this idea. One thing that I did not want to see as a driving factor is money. But maybe it is true. Zipes (2001) talks about the way the children’s book industry functions in the American market, and it seems to reflect what van de Coolwijk was already saying. The success of a book is often determined by the amount of attention the publisher (and critics, etc) pay to it. “The large publishing houses, certainly the reputable ones, generally produce a very marketable product, and care is taken to guarantee that the book looks attractive. But once it is produced, there is a certain indifference about its fate because there are so many more to come that it is not necessary to cherish and cultivate the final product”(Zipes, 2001, p. 51). After the book is produced most books do not get any additional attention and it is really like van de Coolwijk puts it, that you have to ‘do it yourself’. Simple fact is that the offer is very large, and the chances of success are small. When a book -for whatever reason- becomes really popular, the publishers do everything to exploit this success.

**Case study: Geronimo Stilton**

One of the series the authors often mentioned when talking about ‘the commercialization’ or ‘popularization’ of children’s books, is Geronimo Stilton. *Geronimo Stilton* is a book series which is currently very popular among young children in the Netherlands and Belgium. The main character is a mouse, Geronimo Stilton, who writes a mouse-newspaper about his adventures. The books claim to be written by Mr. Stilton himself, and the ‘real author’ isn’t revealed. It is known, however, that the book series is written by a writer’s collective in Italy, where approximately 12-14 authors are employed. Their books are so immensely popular that by 2010 (when the books existed for 10 years) over 45 million books were sold, of which 20 million in Italy itself and 25 million elsewhere. The approach of these books is highly commercial, with a marketing strategy which very strongly focuses on advertsing towards the children. About 40 books have been written about Geronimo Stilton himself, but the collection is broadened to also write about other characters in the books, such as Geronimo’s sister Thea Stilton who has now become the star in her own book series as well. The books are very creative in their typography and also are very inventive in some ways; one of the things that appeal much to small children are the ‘scratch-and-smell’ drawings in the books, so when you scratch a picture of e.g. a pizza, the pizza smell will be released. The book series is marketed very directly towards the children. In Flanders the books were for a while more popular than in the Netherlands, because the Dutch publisher was a bit hesitant to take up the full marketing strategy as was originally intended, because usually Dutch publishers do not market a new book in a very extensive way. The book sale in the Netherlands wasn’t very high at the start but by now the marketing strategy[[22]](#footnote-23) is working to its full potential and the books have become immensely popular. To promote the books, a man dressed up in a Geronimo-suit visited primary schools in Belgium (Hindryckx, 2011). In addition to this, the books are also advertised on TV, Anna Woltz calls it “almost some sort of advertising agency”(Woltz, 2012). This child-centred marketing is very appealing to children and can clearly be seen in the sales. In 2010, Stilton’s books were rated as most popular in the category up until 12 years old, where in the older categories Stephany Myer (*Twilight,* etc.) dominated. In general the critics aren’t very passionate about the series. They view the series as “cliché and not very inventive”(Hindryckx, 2011, p. 39), and the series has not won a Pen prize or equivalent up till now. Here again shows the distinction between what children like and what adults think is good for children. In 2008 a competition was held in Belgium named ‘the most beautiful children’s book of all time”. About 16.000 children voted on their favourite book out of a longlist of 99 titles; after which another 20.000 people voted out of a shortlist of 10.000 books which book should win. And who was voted no. 1? Geronimo Stilton, with ‘his’ book *Fantasia.* Annie M.G. Schmidt was second with *Pluk van de Petteflet*  and *Mathilda* by Roald Dahl was voted third. The Flemish publisher was very honest about it, they said that not the best book of all time had won, and that Stilton just profited from its fanclub and hype (Cloostermans, 2008).

From the writer’s perspective this move towards more ‘commercial’ works is understandable. “On the one hand it’s not so special anymore [compared to the period before the 80s] that very good children’s books get published, and on the other hand you can see a certain popularization taking place. People think that it’s nice of course to write a beautiful literary book, but if it’s only for a hundred people it’s kind of missing the point, you have to write books that can also be read by the children. And that’s why there are more and more writers who try to –while of course still writing good books- write on a level on which children are more inclined to read the books than the books of a couple of years ago”(Lieshout, 2012). Anna Woltz recalls a lecture by Eduard van de Vendel on this very idea. “(…) Van de Vendel is a writer who for a long time was highly valued by the adult jury’s, but who didn’t sell a lot of books. Children didn’t appreciate his books very much. But then he started to think, this is crazy, I write children’s books. I want *children* to like them. And he as an example he said that he would previously always give the main characters in his books very unusual names, because he thought that was fun and original. But then he started thinking, you know what, there are an awful lot of children in the Netherlands who are called Sofie. So maybe I should try using that name. And then we wrote *Sofie en de pinguïns* , (…) and that was nominated by the Dutch children’s jury. And it isn’t the case that he put all his principles overboard and starts to write commonplace commercial books. His books are still very good, but he has made them accessible to children” (Woltz, 2012).

When I asked Harry Bekkering about this increased commercialization of children’s books he doesn’t focus on the literary writers writing in a more commercial way, instead he puts the literary books and the commercial books opposite each other. He said: “Look, commercial books have of course always existed. Only right now you can see at Querido, the *Hoe overleef ik* series. Querido is a very respectable publisher, but this really has become a purely commercial project. (…) The more literary books will have more and more difficulties in the current juncture. And that has to do with the development of the e-book, etcetera, but actually publishers are not very inclined anymore to spend money on ‘poorly selling books’. Because of a children’s book, a difficult one, usually only 3000 are printed. And then they don’t even always sell out. (…) And those kinds of risks publishers are usually no longer willing to take” (Bekkering, 2012). When talking about the recent more ‘commercial’ development at Querido, he justifies this saying “You see the change, because publishers have to exist somehow. Some other people are at the top now, and they say ‘we will need some sort of mixture between the literary book (…) and at the same time publish books which you could call purely commercial. And about the question what I think about this I think, look, both should exist. But I don’t think it’s good that only purely ‘readable’ books are published. (…) I think it is fine they exist as long as other books also continue to exist. (…) But this current age does have the danger that the best-sellers will come to dominate the book market in such a way that the other books will no longer be published”(Bekkering, 2012).

This all doesn’t sound very promising, and even though some writers manage to take up writing as their profession (i.e. practically all the writers I interviewed), I fear that van de Coolwijk’s vision is quite realistic. She says: “It’s such a nasty world sometimes, despite the fact that it really is such a nice job. But it can easily go the bad way. So I always say [to children who want to be writers], first go find a job, and then write in your free time. It is very admirable if you manage to prolong your success, like Simone [van der Vlugt]. (…) You have to see it as a hobby, and when you manage [to make it into a job] then that’s nice. But you shouldn’t think ‘I’m going to be a writer as a profession[[23]](#footnote-24)’. That’s very difficult in the Netherlands”(Coolwijk, 2012).

**Chapter 6:**

**The social position of children’s book writers in an adult world**

“The manner in which children’s books are virtually ignored by literary magazines, by Sunday newspaper reviewers and by the so-called literary establishment in general is scandalous. (…) Children’s books are only noticed every now and again. And yet – now listen carefully please – and yet, let any of these high-blown authors or critics attempt to *write* a children’s book. I mean a fine children’s book that children will fall in love with and which will endure over the years, and he will almost certainly fail”

Roald Dahl (1983, p. 15)

Let me start with my own opinion on this issue. I am a huge fan of children’s books, and I think that a good children’s book can be a hundred times better than a novel for adults. I think it’s ridiculous that there are only so few children’s book reviews in the newspapers these days and I think that children’s books should be granted the appreciation they deserve, regardless of whether they are written for children or for adults. That is not to say that I think *all* children’s books are good. Not at all. In fact, many a children’s book I’ve read I found very uninspiring and poorly written. I tried reading Twilight a while ago- because I figured there must be some reason why it was so popular. But I really couldn’t get through, the ‘and then, and then’ style of writing was not very appealing to me. And also in other age categories I did not always find the books very well written, or very original. But still, the *good* children’s books, I can read over and over again and enjoy them every time. And about the writing of these books I share Roald Dahl’s opinion “I am fairly sure that it is more difficult to write a fine and enduring children’s book than a fine and enduring novel”(Dahl, 1983, p. 15). But maybe I am biased, because I cherish a silent hope that one day I will also write a children’s book that will get published. And I want to be proud when presenting my (still hypothetical) book, and not have the feeling that everybody thinks ‘oh she only wrote a children’s book…everybody can do that’.

Interestingly, I was kind of anxious of asking the question of how children’s book authors perceive the ‘acceptance’- that is to say, the literary acceptance- of children’s literature. This question has been around ever since the more literary children’s book arose in the 80s and maybe even way before that, but it still hasn’t been answered satisfactorily. The question remains whether it can be answered at all. When I tentatively asked a question about the acceptance of children’s literature, the people I interviewed either rolled their eyes or looked at me with a slight smirk because they had heard this question so many times before. The question why people look down on children’s books is simply not interesting anymore, because it simply seems unanswerable. Holtrop: “It’s true but it doesn’t change anything. People look down on children’s books, it’s simply a fact, adults look down on them, I’ve noticed it many a time. (…) [ The acceptance of children’s books in the literary world] has always been quite bad, at least as long as I know. But I think it’s completely uninteresting to always make such a point of it. It is the way it is.”(Holtrop, 2012). And this is the kind of feeling I got from many authors as well. It’s still a relevant question, because the ‘problem’ is still not solved, but it’s not a question which is going to have an answer. I still thought it was worth asking, because this was the question I originally had in mind as the main topic of my essay, and I think it’s a good question to end with. And I do think that the answers I got from the interviews were in fact very interesting, because many of the interviewees understood why children’s book writers are often seen as inferior.

Holtrop: “There are always people who think that they can reinvent the wheel and that they can make children’s literature just as appreciated as adult literature. It will never happen and I don’t think this is particularly strange. I do think it’s idiotic to look down on children’s books. Because in the first place everybody was a child once, and if you’re a bit of a fun person you probably read a lot. So you know how important it is for a child. It’s a phase in your education. And you can give children a sense for beautiful sentences, and for fantasy. (…) But you shouldn’t pretend that a book by Annie M.G. Schmidt can compete with a masterpiece by Hermans or something. That’s nonsense; the things adults can write about are much more complex. A child can have a horrible childhood, but that usually is very straightforward misery. You have horrible parents and that’s awful. But I think that when an adult has to make very complicated decision in his life, in which you really have to think whether it’s right what you are doing, I think this is a lot more complicated ” (Holtrop, 2012).

This surprised me quite a bit, coming from Aukje Holtrop. Her mission was that ‘the literary children’s book’ should get acknowledgement from the literary world, and yet she is saying that it’s ‘not particularly strange’ that children’s books are looked down upon. Her view also corresponded with some other writers, like Anna Woltz. She says: “It is often thought that it is easier to write a children’s book than a book for adults. And I don’t even fully disagree-it’s a very complicated and sensitive issue. I think that writing a *good* children’s book is very difficult and only very few people can do that. And that’s a top performance, just like writing an incredibly good book for adults. But there are also an awful lot of children’s books about which I think ‘well, it’s not very difficult to write something like that’. You have to have a bit of imagination and determination (…). But I don’t think that all the books that are published are terribly good. I also don’t think that the books for adults that get published are all very good. But I have the feeling that it perhaps is a little easier to write an ok children’s book than to write an ok book for adults”. After thinking for a short moment, she continues: “I don’t think it’s a problem at all to start writing a new children’s book now. I’m not afraid of it, I’m sure that it will work out. But writing a book for adults, I think I’m a little anxious about that. I do want to do it at a certain point in time, but I’m not sure whether I will manage. And maybe that’s just me, because of the way I work, and what I am experienced in and what I didn’t practice yet. But still, children’s books are always about the children’s world. Books for adults can really be about anything and everything, and the themes can be much more complicated. Children’s books can also be about anything and everything, but still in a ‘child-like’ way. You want to write it down in a way in which it is still understandable for children. [Some books] are only understandable for adults. Why that is, well to begin with they have more difficult words. But also the form you choose can be much more complicated for adults than for children, such as flashbacks, flash-forwards, and different narrative perspectives. You really have to be careful doing this in children’s books, because at a certain point they just get lost. Adults are able to handle much more complicated narrative structures. More main characters, more different places, a book that covers a century-I think this is my point; a book for adults is more difficult to read but also more difficult to write. If you have twenty characters that all should play a role in a book (…) that makes a book much more difficult book to write. And it’s simply impossible to write this for children because they can’t keep the 20 characters apart. Now I think 20 is a bit too much either way, I don’t think that makes anyone very happy. But you get the point” (Woltz, 2012). This way of approaching why children’s books are seen as ‘inferior’ only makes sense to me to a certain extent. The reasoning is that books for adults can be more complex, both content-wise and form wise, and therefore they are superior to children’s books. My problem with this is that I still think that writing a children’s book can be very complicated as well, especially because of the fact that it cannot be so complex. Van de Coolwijk agrees with me: “You often hear ‘Oh well, you’re ‘only’ a children’s book writer”. But it’s very difficult, Sjoerd Kuyper[[24]](#footnote-25) also said that, it’s very difficult to write a good children’s book. It *seems* so easy. It’s just like with the AVI-books[[25]](#footnote-26), everybody is kind of scornful about that. But it’s incredibly difficult! I automatically write on AVI-1 or AVI-2 level because I am experienced. (…) But it’s terribly difficult to write in a simple way. It’s a lot more difficult to write in a simple way than to just literary babbling, I always say. But people often see this the other way around. So children’s book authors are often seen as inferior. I am ‘only’ a children’s book writer. Or ‘how cute, you have a hobby, you write children’s books’ ”(Coolwijk, 2012). This is exactly my point, and I am rather surprised that the other authors don’t all share this view. But I also notice a certain recalcitrance from the side of the authors because their ‘lower status’ seems to be so pervasive. Van Leeuwen : “[I] don’t really care whether people assign a ‘lower status’ to [being a children’s book writer]. Then I think either they don’t know how much fun it is, or they don’t see what is possible. Or they have a view of children that I don’t agree with. Because I think that you should take children seriously in these kinds of things. And then I don’t mean ‘to treat them like adults’ (…) but don’t saddle them up with trash. That’s what it comes down to in my case”. Joke van Leeuwen thinks children’s books should be taken very seriously, because –together with education- they make for a foundation in life, and the importance of a good foundation shouldn’t be underestimated (Leeuwen, 2012).

And yet there is something about children’s books (and their authors) which –despite the fact that these books are very important for having a ‘good foundation’ in life, still makes adults look down on them. Holtrop: “I was once in a jury and I really wanted Toon Telligen to win with a book for adults. I didn’t succeed, and I think the jury was right, but I still think…I write so much about children’s books that I have the feeling that even when a children’s book writer writes a book for adults, he will always be considered a second rate author. Paul Biegel made it, and Annie M.G. Schmidt, and also Joke van Leeuwen. They all write for adults. But a lot of other writers don’t, they think children are great but they don’t play a role in adult literature at all. It’s quite odd actually. But maybe it’s not, because [children’s books] aren’t so complicated. I think a book should be complicated [in order to be accepted by adults]”(Holtrop, 2012). Ted van Lieshout doesn’t necessarily agree with Holtrop’s statement. Van Lieshout is a very interesting case, because he was-and is- a much-praised children’s book author, but he has recently published his first book for adults, *Mijn meneer*, about the relationship he had as a boy with an older man. After publishing this book he was invited to one of the biggest Dutch talkshows on TV; *Pauw & Witteman.* He says: “The respect with which people have treated me in the past months as a writer for adults is much and much larger than the respect I received being a children’s book author. It’s a substantial difference. The difference isn’t that now people are polite while in the past they were always rude to me when I was still only writing for children. It’s in the little things. And it has a lot to do with reverence. The fact that I wrote a book for adults is much more impressive than the fact that I write children’s books. And actually I think this is quite weird, because writing a children’s book is just as great a creative challenge than writing a book for adults. So it’s a little strange actually” (Lieshout, 2012).

It seems that there are two groups- one group which understands why children’s books are considered inferior due to the fact that they are less ‘complicated’ than adult novels, and the group which does not see the increase in complexity as sufficient reason. I belong to the latter group, though I could agree with the argument of the first group when I apply it to the more mediocre children’s books that I’ve read. But I’m also starting to understand the ‘pointlessness’ of this question, because apart from the idea that it is ‘weird’ or ‘strange’ that children’s books are under-appreciated, this does not bring us any further. And it’s not going to solve the issue either. That explains why a lot of the authors respond quite stoic to this issue, saying ‘it doesn’t interest me’ or ‘I’m just not going to care’.

According to Harry Bekkering the prestige of children’s books and their authors did increase with the development of the more literary children’s book. Bekkering: “for a long time children’s literature wasn’t considered to be a form of art, it had an educational purpose, pedagogical. And for a long time this didn’t change (…) in the 80s that changed, and it was dependent on several factors, the universities, teacher academes, juries. Children’s literature at a certain point (…) became a form of art. Or at least, some [children’s literature] did. (…) In the past the [adult writing world and the children’s book world] were two separate worlds, and now they are getting closer together. Back then teachers would usually be the ones who write children’s books. (…)The moment that children’s literature became a thing that could be seen as art, you saw authors who previously never wrote for children, authors for adults, who suddenly did start writing children’s books. (…) [Children’s literature] became a domain in which you could be seen, so to say. (…) And now children and their parents can choose out of a much wider spectrum, and that’s because (…) at a certain point it was no longer seen as an inferior genre but as a genre that had some real importance” (Bekkering, 2012). This sketches a rather positive view, but (in my opinion) also a view that dates from the 80s, from the time when the literary children’s books were still booming. The times when the children’s books were heavily discussed in Dutch newspapers is in the past, and now they will have to do with a two-in-one review every other week. Why this is, I am not sure. But I think I would like to agree with Aukje Holtrop: “It’s just the zeitgeist, I think. In the 80s every newspaper and magazine had children’s book reviews every week. And you also had some very good authors. But this decreased, less and less space was given to children’s books. (…) I think it was suddenly not in fashion anymore to think that discussing children’s book is important. I think that’s all there is to it. It’s just totally out of fashion” (Holtrop, 2012). I believe, like Holtrop, that these kinds of things can have their ups and downs. So even though right now we might be experiencing a down, it could someday–like tiger prints- get in fashion again.

**Final thoughts**

On my way to each interviewee I was always really nervous. Before ringing the doorbell I would take a deep breath, close my eyes, and hope that I wouldn’t stammer during the interviews. Some of the authors I interviewed visit school classes to make some extra money and to meet their fans. One of the authors told me that oftentimes the children in these classes would have been nervous all morning, and even the child that was actually ill decided to come to school anyway. This is how excited they were about having a *real* author in their classroom. I never really had any authors in my class when I was in primary school, and I got to experience the thrill they must have had now that I was given the chance to interview them. I’m going to interview a *real* children’s book author! The ones that ‘raised’ me! They didn’t disappoint me. All of the authors and also Harry Bekkering and Aukje Holtrop were very inspiring people and without their help, this essay would’ve turned out quite differently.

I had quite a rose-colored and naïve view of what it would be like to be a children’s book author. I wanted to find out that the literary emancipation of children’s books was relatively complete, and that children’s books were quite accepted in the ‘adult’ literary world. The opposite turned out to be true. The 80s were a very fertile time for literary children’s books, and even today there are still a lot of quite literary children’s books which are much praised by the adult juries. However after the turn of the millennium this ‘literary emancipation’ was decreasing. This was both because of economic reasons and personal reasons; because of the current crisis in the book industry publishers are more inclined to publish more ‘popular’ books, and are less willing to take the risks of publishing the ‘less sellable’ literary children’s books. Also, the conception that children do not like literary children’s books has led many authors to write more ‘towards’ the children, instead of focusing on the literary quality of the book as the highest good. I think this is a good development, because one of main points of children’s books in my opinion is that they make children *read.* And I believe that the more accessible you make a book for children, the faster they will pick up the book and read it. And this doesn’t mean that your book cannot have literary qualities anymore, but the literariness of a children’s book shouldn’t be on the first place, the primary focus should be on accessibility.

Although this development of writing more ‘towards’ the children may make the children’s books more popular for the children, this step away from literariness is also a step away from the acceptance by the literary world. And maybe this is for the best. The development that children’s books were for a long time getting more literary and literary has started to stagnate. Many anecdotes in my interviews pointed out that most children often would not bear to read such a book, not even if they were to be stuck on an inhabited island with the book as their only companion. Of course there are still children who do appreciate the literary children’s book, but more often than not the books are just too literary for the children to grasp the story. Judging children’s book by adult criteria is good if you want to get a children’s book accepted by the ‘grown-up’ literary world, but it is missing the point. That point being that children’s books are written for children. It’s like comparing a bicycle to a car. If you judge the both in terms of beauty and speed the car will always win. A bike can be very beautiful and well-designed, with a light frame and 25 gears, but it will never go as fast as a car, simply because it is a still a bike and not an automobile. The literary children’s book is like the bicycle; it is simply not designed or intended to go as fast as the literary book for adults. But that doesn’t mean that a children’s book cannot still be very beautiful on their own terms.

Looking at the financial aspects of the children’s book world, I already knew that the book business isn’t exactly a booming field. Still I cherished a silent hope that the children’s book authors I interviewed would be exempted from financial difficulties. From what I had read before I did the interviews I was quite confident that the authors wouldn’t have too many problems to get by. The people I interviewed were either full-time or part-time authors, though most of them managed to fill their time with children’s book related things[[26]](#footnote-27) and still make a fine living out of it. This seemed very promising, but even the ‘lucky ones’ that I picked out experienced difficulties in making enough money. Some of them depended on prizes to make enough revenue, while others actively market themselves in order for their books to be sold. It was clear that it requires a lot of hard work and endurance to make a living out of being a children’s book author in the Netherlands. And this made me slightly sad. If the authors I interviewed-who were all more or less established in the children’s book world by now- already experience difficulties, then how should a beginning children’s book writer expect to make a living out of it? But these kind of thoughts do not get me anywhere.

I want this essay to have a happy ending, like most children’s books have a happy ending. I like to believe the idea of Aukje Holtrop that (the literary) children’s book is just not so much ‘in fashion’ right now, but I am not sure whether I believe it. I think that perhaps-but this is just my opinion after writing this article - this development which started in the 80s is coming to an end, and now the children’s book will have to find a balance between literariness and accessibility. In the 80s the literary children’s book was new, and exciting, and either because of the amazing authors at that time or because of the zeitgeist, a lot of attention was given to these books. Now it isn’t so special anymore that children’s books can be ‘good’ in a literary way as well, and this could be the reason why less attention is paid to those books in newspapers and literary magazines. I do believe that ‘trends’ also play a role in this, but I do not believe that the current development can fully be ascribed to the fact that children’s books are ‘just out of fashion’.

This essay is mostly built upon the claims of authors themselves, and the opinions of their publishers haven’t been taken into account. In terms of future research I think that more interviews are needed in order to get a more profound view of how the children’s book industry has developed after the turn of the millennium. Interviews with authors who haven’t won any prizes or nominations, children’s book publishers, and news papers. All of them (and perhaps more that do not cross my mind right now) still need to be investigated upon to get a more varied view. And this way the claims that were made by the interviewees in this article can be confirmed, redefined, or denied, depending on what the other actors in the book industry say.

An important fact I have largely overlooked in this essay because I was focusing on traditional book industries is that we are in an age in which the media-landscapes are changing rapidly. This is also one of the reasons why the book industry in general, so not only children’s books, is having a difficult time. And I believe-perhaps innocently- that the book industry will reinvent itself so that it would fit into the new landscape. Joke van Leeuwen told me that she made an app of her book *Kweenie,* where she integrated sound and movement into her book. I believe that apart from the paper-based books, children’s book authors will have to experiment in new forms to make the children’s book attractive for children. I will not go too far into this discussion, because I do not know much about it, but I think it definitely could be an interesting topic for future research. How do children’s books adapt themselves so that they fit into the new media-landscape? If the 80s was the development of the literary children’s book, the 2010s are a time for a renewal of the children’s book as a whole. And there is still a lot to be explored in this field, which makes me think that the future of children’s books might bring us more surprises.

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1. AVI-books are used in primary school education as a standardized form of analysis to see at what level a child can read. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In Dutch: de Zilveren en Gouden Griffel [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. A more apt way of saying it would be ‘possible function’, or ‘possible impact’. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Eg. Francine Oomen, Hoe overleef ik de brugklas? (2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. What are good children’s books called? Perceptions about children’s literature in the Netherlands since 1880 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. There were several different academies, one (PABO) which deals with children of 5-11, and a ‘teacher academy’ (lerarenopleiding) which deals with children of 12-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Working group focusing on children’s and youth books. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. In Dutch: Kinderjury [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. In 1997 the children’s jury the ‘oldest’ category was separated from the children’s jury and now called itself ‘the young jury’. My opinion of why they probably did this is because 13-16 year olds didn’t want to be called ‘children’ anymore. Why they then resided to calling it ‘young’ jury is still a good question. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Dutch Library and Reading Centre [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Silver Pen & Woutertje Pieterse Prize in 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. I am terribly sorry to the writers who later will read this essay about the ‘boxes’ I put you in. The reader of this piece must realize that these ‘boxes’ are imposed on them by me, and that they do not necessarily belong there at all. Maybe the box in which I should have put them should be named ‘no box’. However, I deemed it necessary –for clarity of this piece- to put the authors into the boxes I assigned them to. I would just like to remind the reader that this is just my personal interpretation, and nothing more. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. A prize for the best children’s book illustrations. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Her word in Dutch: ‘Eigenzinnig’-I fear this has no direct translation in English. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. In English: When my father became a bush [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Want to become a children’s book writer? Be prepared to do everything yourself. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. And Belgium- the Dutch-speaking part. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. In Dutch: Kinderboekenweek [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. I wasn’t intending to mention anti-capitalist tendencies in this fairly innocent essay about children’s books. But there you are, I suppose it is unavoidable. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. In Dutch: Kinderboekenschrijver worden? Zelf doen! (see title) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Though this development is not confined to the children’s book sector alone. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. The marketing strategy being a very child-focused approach, where the children are ‘bombed’ with advertisements about Geronimo Stilton. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. The definition of profession as mentioned by all the authors is ‘if you can make a living out of it , it’s your profession’. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Sjoerd Kuyper is an author who writes for children as well as for adults, and he was allocated the Golden and Silver Pen several times. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. AVI-books are used in primary school education as a standardized form of analysis to see at what level a child can read. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Except Joke van Leeuwen, who also writes books and cabaret for adults. And Ted van Lieshout, who wrote *mijn meneer* which is also meant for adults. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)