***Day 1***

*Eileen John (Philosophy) – ‘Children’s Literature and Ethics’*

Using a text from her childhood, John asked what it is about childhood texts that cause them to have such an impact on us and why we retain what we do of them. She then introduced the interdisciplinary audience to possibly *the* basic questions of moral philosophy: “what is it to live well, and does that include being morally good?” She also gave a brief overview of how some philosophers and writers have conceived of the role literature can play in answering those questions. Literature is, arguably, valuable insofar as it is able to offer a ‘lived’ perspective to engage with, one with emotional power that can highlight an individual perspective which includes different ways of viewing what is ethically important or significant in a situation. Literature also offers a fictional and imaginative relationship to the events depicted which triggers something playful in us that could also help us explore situations in a different fashion to when they are being lived. John then asked how we might factor in the deliberate choice to write for children into all of this. What specific needs and capacities must we take into account, and what are the issues and core considerations of the adult-child relationship in this context? She then set aside something she found particularly interesting in children’s books: the illustrations. The audience were asked to look at a selection of pictures taken from children’s books and asked to analyse them out of context to establish their own thoughts on their meaning and potential ethical and aesthetic worth.

*Maebh Harding (Law) – ‘Children’s Choices and Autonomy’*

Using a particular case, Harding analysed the questions: What is for a child to go from a vulnerable individual to a full-grown, responsible adult? How does the law conceive of this change? When is it appropriate to allow children to make life-changing decisions? If an adult has to make the decision, who should it be and what criteria should they use to make it? She had participants analyse the case and decide what they think should happen before being told what happened. A lively discussion ensued before she revealed the impact of this case on another controversial case and asked her questions again.

*Catherine Lester (Film and Television) – ‘Horror for Children’*

Lester first addressed the intuitive reaction to the notion of horror for children; namely, that scaring children and introducing the to some of the traditional horror tropes, such as gore, seems transgressive insofar as it runs counter to the image of an ideal childhood as being a safe and innocent space. However, she pointed out that a lot of research actually points to horror being interesting and intriguing for *some* children as well as helping others realise that they have to power to overcome their basic (negative) impulses and fears, and it does so without any of the stereotypical child-damaging effects ascribed to the genre. Ultimately, Lester argued, there is no ‘automatic’ answer when it comes to childhood, even in a realm such as horror.

**Day 2**

*Phil Gaydon (Philosophy) – ‘The Ethics of Sport in Children’s Literature’*

Gaydon used a brief game, physical spectrum of opinion (where participants had to stand on a line of agreement and disagreement), and theory building to bring open-space learning to the workshop. The theory building task involved each group getting a selection of cards with images and quotations on them which they had to lay out in order to form an answer to the question, ‘What role, if any, does sport play in the moral development of children?’ Themes explored by the groups included violence, gender, status, socialisation, health and fitness, the role of the coach, cultural differences, cheating, rules, maturity, and parental behaviour. Gaydon then spoke on the parallels between the philosophy of sport and children’s literature, in particular, the similar models seen in relation to the habituation and practice of virtues and how society and the individual view the coach in a very similar manner to the author.

*Peter Sidebotham (Warwick Medical School) – ‘Dealing with child abuse and neglect in practice, theory, and literature’*

Before a short break, participants were read the story *Not Now Bernard* by Gaydon and asked to consider it in relation to the word ‘neglect’. This story-telling device serves well to juxtapose the feeling of being read aloud to and being in ‘story-time’ to the ‘adult’ reading and awareness of a text.

After the break, Sidebotham fantastically interwove his own experiences as a paediatrician, and quotations and reflections on such works as *Peter Pan*, the Roald Dahl novels, and *Harry Potter*. Peter has since blogged using his notes from his lecture so I would not wish to re-report his ideas:

<http://petersidebotham.org/child-abuse-in-fact-and-fiction-seminar-notes-from-ethics-and-childrens-literature-event-warwick-university-february-2015/>

He ended with the question, ‘What can children’s literature tell us about abuse?’ Participants discussed the largely unaddressed area of sexual abuse in children’s literature, whether this *could* be addressed, or whether it needed to be if the core component of emotional resilience could be considered without it. This also led onto wider questions of what children’s literature is for and who does it speak to? Some made a link back to the horror talk from the previous day and the need for a distancing effect in order for the goods to be achieved. If, they suggested, a text explicitly dealt with something as horrible as sexual abuse then would it be *too* close to the matter to be helpful?

*Leila Rasheed (Warwick Writing Programme) – ‘What we expect from children’s authors’*

Leila Rasheed discussed the case of William Mayne, a highly-revered children’s author convicted of the sexual assault of young girl fans. She used this as an entry point into asking what role we consider the children’s author to play not simply in writing books but in the development of children and in society. For example, why were Mayne’s books largely removed from shelves after his conviction? Leila spoke of how diverting too much attention to such things can paralyse you as a writer, but it intuitively seems that you have a duty to take care of your audience because of who they are (whatever that may entail) and so you need to at least to set your moral compass in a way an author for adults does not. She also brought up the unwritten rule of children’s literature that your story need not have a happy-ending but there must at least be some hope and discussed this in relation to the latest Carnegie medal winner *The Bunker Diary*.