

pitfalls, and this book provides some wonderfully simple and ingenious solutions for avoiding them. It does not cater for those proposing to mount glitteringly expensive and complicated events. Instead, what is offered is essentially simple, but most importantly, it is workable. Even the notoriously difficult-to-follow origami instructions are clear and actually produce results. Our house is now coming down with Samurai hats in ever decreasing sizes! Who said a gerbil wouldn't love one?

This is a book for parents who feel that the party-giving "business" has got out of hand. The emphasis today tends to be placed on "getting", not only for the birthday person, but also for the guests, in the form of the "loot-bag", which has become almost de rigueur. Shelley describes alternatives to these, as well as inexpensive ideas to put into the loot bags. It was heartening to read that her own two daughters were destined to lead a life of loot-bagless birthday parties. In the games and activities the spirit of co-operation and sharing is encouraged.

From the initial invitations, which involve the birthday person and siblings as much as possible, through to activities for guests to do on arrival, there are many common sense suggestions. There is the tricky time of opening the presents, how to, when to; all are aimed at diffusing any hurt feelings that can arise. What food should be served, when, where, and on what? Ideas include cutting drinking straws to fit cups, so that there are fewer spills; simple but effective! For parties where there are children of different ages, the section on treasure hunts allows everyone to be involved.

Apart from being a great resource book for parents, this book also offers preschool and kindergarten teachers ideas on snacks, games and activities. The layout is clear, and the diagrams easy to follow. Helpful hints, lists and stories supplement the main text and also appear in the margin.

Despite the most careful planning, things do and will go wrong. Use of this book, however, may help minimize most of the potential disasters or at least bring things into perspective.

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## CRITICAL THEORY AND ENCYCLOPEDIC LISTS

**Magic code: The use of magical patterns in fantasy for children.** Maria Nikolajeva. Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1988. 163pp. ISBN 91-22-01200-1.

Maria Nikolajeva has compiled an impressive survey of "the magical elements in English fantasy for children in the twentieth century" (23). Drawing on

children's fantasy written between 1900 and 1980 for this work which was her doctoral dissertation project, she focuses on books written in English, thus narrowing her field of inquiry to 250 texts, excluding collections of short tales and picture books. Despite, or because of, this large effort, however, *The magic code: The use of magical patterns in fantasy for children* is more a series of lists with semiotic and structural theory at the beginning and at the end than a substantial critical analysis of the field.

The book begins with fifteen of the many definitions of fantasy available today. Nikolajeva discusses and discards those definitions that include fairy tales and the fantastic, and that deny fantasy is a genre. The rest of the opening chapter, "The concept of fantasy," deals with related genres such as fairy tales, literary fairy tales, and science fiction, provides a brief history of fantasy for children, gives a description of how the author set the parameters of her study, and establishes the terminology used in the text. Under the sub-heading "Methods of research," Nikolajeva replaces what she deems unsatisfactory terms with semiotic and structuralist terms. She substitutes primary and secondary "chronotopes" for primary and secondary worlds, differentiates between paradigmatic and syntagmatic analyses of stories, and converts "mytheme," (a structuralist term describing the elements of myth which may or may not be structural necessities but are nevertheless important) to "fantaseme," "a literary device used to introduce the extraordinary into the ordinary" (23). These intellectual gymnastics will interest some readers, but frustrate others. Analyzing children's literature using different critical theories is an exciting possibility, but the critical terms Nikolajeva introduces are used interchangeably with more traditional terms, making unclear the importance of establishing the new terms.

After her critical theoretical introduction, Nikolajeva lists all elements and motifs, or fantasemes, and gives examples of the books that use them. In the five chapters, "The magic law," "The magic space," "The magic time," "The magic passage," and "The magic impact," Nikolajeva discusses common fantasy motifs and their variations. Within each chapter there are sub-headings, all listed in the table of contents, which make it very easy to look up a particular motif such as "the picture" and find examples of books in which a picture is part of the magic. While each chapter has an introduction, none has a conclusion, leaving the reader to construct the connections between the various examples given and interpret their significance to the particular motif under discussion. The lack of connection gives the sense that the text is a quick reference list rather than a critical analysis.

Part of the stated intent of this book is to show a chronological development in the demands that fantasy makes upon its readers. Early fantasy explained the rules of the magic it encompassed. Modern fantasy does not, allowing "a more intellectual approach to the material" (17). In some cases such a development is easily perceived. For instance, the discussion of "The rela-

tion between the primary and the secondary time" begins with E. Nesbit's *The story of the amulet* and *The House of Arden* and ends with Alan Garner's *Red shift* after touching on Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles*, Uttley's *A traveller in time*, and Pearce's *Tom's midnight garden*. Although not following a strictly chronological progression (since Uttley preceded Lewis by some twenty years), the increasing intellectual demand connected to the ideas of time is very clear. In other chapters the connections are not so clearly made by the books themselves.

The most serious problem throughout this book is a lack of connection between critical theory and analysis. The book offers interesting ideas and very useful bibliographies of both primary and secondary material, and has merit as a research tool for anyone who wants a quick overview of common fantasy motifs and the books that employ them. Listing motifs and examining children's literature with the tools of different literary theories are useful endeavours in themselves. In the case of this encyclopedic survey, one could wish for more elaboration on the correlation between theory and particular examples of fantasy motifs.

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## POUR PARENTS CONSCIENCIEUX

**Le secret de la pierre magique.** Madeleine Gaudreault-Labrecque. Montréal, Hurtubise-HMH, 1987. 158 pp., broché. ISBN 2-89045-819-9.

A vrai dire, les parents inquiets des mauvaises influences que peuvent subir leurs enfants à l'extérieur – alors que de nos jours on joue assez librement du couteau dans les écoles secondaires! – seront ravis par le roman de Madeleine Gaudreault-Labrecque.

Ils y trouveront, en effet, tout ce que les éducateurs attendent d'un ouvrage pour jeunes adolescents: des héros aux dimensions humaines mais respectueux des normes (par exemple, Michel et Geneviève se permettent de manifester de la tendresse entre eux mais, pré-pubescence du lecteur oblige, juste ce qu'il faut), un couple d'enfants assez délurés pour secouer l'apathie des adultes et faire progresser l'enquête mais assez sages pour appliquer les règles élémentaires de la prudence (ainsi, s'ils empruntent la chaloupe du sorcier, Xavier et Sabrina s'empresent de revêtir les ceintures de sécurité), un paria réhabilité (Chèvre-pied le marginal au pied-bot, l'artiste victime d'une