

What *Funny You Should Ask* really lacks is an index. Unlike an encyclopedia whose structure insures success in locating information, finding an answer in this work is hit and miss. The Table of Contents is not helpful unless the question is the leading question, but even that is misleading. Those listed are actually heading pages with clever drawings by Tina Holdcroft. A further search is still in order. As well, deciphering the code under which a question is classified is frustrating. My search for marbles took a while — did I see it under Sports, Odds and Ends, Science, or where? The book would have been better served listing the questions as its organizational tool. Thank heavens the book is only 156 pages!

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Critical Approaches to Children's Literature

Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic. Maria Nikolajeva. (Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 1816; Children's Literature and Culture, v. 1.) Garland Publishing, 1995. 239 pp. \$35.00 (US) cloth. ISBN 0-8153-1556-2. *Rediscoveries in Children's Literature.* Suzanne Rahn. (Garland Reference Library of Social Science, v. 862; Children's Literature and Culture, v. 2). Garland Publishing, 1995. 185 pp. \$35.00 (US) cloth. ISBN 0-8153-0930-9.

As introduced by its general editor Jack Zipes, the Children's Literature and Culture Series is "international in scope and [is] intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology" (1: xii). The first two volumes admirably display these characteristics and herald a collection of valuable, thought-provoking works which will certainly help promote scholarly interpretation and greater appreciation of children's literature and its significance throughout a literate person's entire life. Nikolajeva would have us consider children's literature directly as an art form, that is *as literature*, by de-emphasizing the traditional relations to pedagogics and submitting the works to the same critical approaches and theoretical gazes assumed towards other categories of literature. Rahn revisits particular forms, specific authors and their works which, having seemingly failed the test of time and been discarded or disregarded, yet are argued to be worthy of contemporary critical attention from adults and reading by today's children.

In *Children's Literature Comes of Age*, Nikolajeva strives towards a contemporary theoretical analysis using a model she calls historical poetics and a method rooted in semiotics. Her focus is on inherent features of the texts — that is, on “tendencies, regularities and their possible explanations” (4). Her study opens with an interesting discussion of world literature for children versus national literatures. The works assume a noteworthy and illuminating perspective from the outset, countering the isolationism so typical of much English-language criticism, especially American scholarship, through her tendency to emphasize European works, especially the Swedish and Russian ones the author knows best. She raises many questions regarding cultural relativity and translatability of children's books, the unpredictable rejection or celebration of some of one culture's children's books by another before she presents in the second chapter an argument for children's literature as a canonical art form. This approach enables her to devote the third chapter to reviewing the history of children's literature from a semiotic perspective. This overview leads to her proposing in Chapter Four a periodization (or general stages of development) which is seemingly applicable to all countries and language areas, namely: (1) adaptation of existing adult literature and of folklore for children, (2) didactic, educational stories written directly for children, (3) establishment of children's literature as a literary system with different genres and modes, and (4) polyphonic, or multi-voiced children's literature. Chapter Five consists of a discussion of new structures within children's books; it follows the notion of the chronotype developed by Bakhtin and applied here to a range of works. Analyses of “Intertextuality in Children's Literature” and “Metafiction in Children's Literature” comprise the final two chapters, demonstrating the contemporary evolution of children's literature “towards complexity and sophistication on all narrative levels” (207). The author concludes with a disclaimer, noting the as-yet limited quantity of “literary” children's literature. She points to a movement of the literature as a whole towards mainstream literature, and the consequent call upon grownups who provide children with books to keep pace with the changes. It is, she concludes, through ensuring comparable rather than special treatment for the field that children's literature can be duly appreciated and its importance within our global cultural legacy be fully recognized.

Rediscoveries in Children's Literature commences from Rahn's recognition that serious critical analysis has remained restricted to three groups of children's books: the undisputed “classics”; works by a few contemporary authors, destined to become classics; and largely maligned formula fiction. Most simply “‘good books’ — books of high quality, distinct individuality, and staying power” (2:xiv) — were ignored, and children's literature as an academic field of study narrowed in scope. In nine highly effective essays, Rahn seeks to redress this situation, broadening our perspective on what qualifies as literature for analysis and what makes any given book worthy.

One particular measure she explores to good effect is the degree to

which works have endured with their readers, though not necessarily with critics. Her consideration of the Betsy-Tacy stories by Maud Hart Lovelace reveals such an enduring attachment to this series among adult women sufficient to found a Betsy-Tacy Society (1990) and support a newsletter ever since. Her analysis of the toy theatre reveals such impact of this popular amusement that Winston Churchill may have unconsciously borrowed from his favourite toy theatre play in constructing his famous 1940 “we shall never surrender” speech (36).

Rahn explores the fairy tales of Frank Stockton, revealing the challenges within them for adults as well as children; recaptures the significance of the toy theatre as a form of influential literature for the young; presents the complexities involved in Selma Lagerlof’s creation of the Nils books and in the multiple levels of their contemporary appreciation. She also offers insight into the very modern nature of older works, such as Dorothy Canfield’s Made-to-Order stories which may have appeared in the first quarter of the century but are immediately current in promoting personal empowerment among children. Similarly Rahn shows how Florence Crannell Means’s popular ethnic literature for the young was distinguished by its decidedly humanistic vision when her many books appeared over forty years ago; and today some are exceptional in that they remain well worth reading for more than mere historical significance. Rahn also interprets the social and psychological significance of one distinctive character-type, the cat-child central figures in works by Beverly Cleary and Ursula Moray Williams, and focuses her critical attention on appreciating one particular — and seriously maligned — work, *Fungus the Bogeyman* by Raymond Briggs. She concludes her illuminating and engaging work with a consideration of Diana Wynne Jones’s revolutionary fantasy as a means whereby today’s children can make sense of the unpredictable, ever-changing contemporary world. In sum, her critiques show just how much more there is than first meets the eye in all the works she considers — hidden treasure which she maintains, “We should not rest content until we have it all” (178).

Both works are well worth close and repeated reading, and each will undoubtedly stimulate further delving into the extended and valuable listings provided of primary as well as secondary sources. Rahn’s is the more fully realized work, while Nikolajeva’s broad-ranging treatise is, in many ways, exploratory as well as experimental, and certainly challenging throughout. Rahn’s style is compelling and masterful: she writes with forthright lucidity, deftly weaving her argument by invoking enough of the texts to create an engaging storyline through which she fashions and supports her literary, social, and historical insights. It is much harder to read Nikolajeva’s work, and not only because the print font is considerably smaller. English is not Nikolajeva’s first language as is evident in the numerous problems of expression and apparent direct translations which create a decided awkwardness, understandable yet especially unfortunate in a theoretical and potentially contentious work. Her argument is certainly of such significance

as to have commanded thorough editing to achieve its maximum impact. It is, however, replete with broad generalizations and essentialisms. The scope of this study, especially its international perspective, and the limits of a single, average-sized volume necessitate brevity in references, but comments such as that Disney films are "typical American interpretations of European texts" (1:26), or that in "Japan or among Australian Aborigines ... most art is created within predetermined rules" (51) are neither felicitous nor constructive, let alone true. One such statement reveals the definite limitations of Nikolajeva's work as cultural scholarship, namely that "There is little in the *Anne of Green Gables* series that makes the books specifically Canadian" (22). This comment demonstrates a severe lack of knowledge of Canada and Canadianness, for Montgomery's works are profoundly Canadian as variously indicated by Rubio and Waterston and throughout the 1996 conference on L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture at the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown, PEI. A reader necessarily challenges some of the many such statements, presented as authoritative judgments, when they are made in his/her area of expertise, and comes to doubt other aspects in what is in many respects a ground-breaking analysis. Nikolajeva's various comments about folk tradition, especially folktales, strike me just this way, as she fails to appreciate accepted knowledge within the field, e.g., distinctions between mutable oral tales and literary established versions. Still, her study is an impressive and valuable piece of scholarship.

It is high-calibre works such as these two volumes which are needed in abundance to provoke further study that will, in turn, drive forward scholarly enquiry into children's literature. The field is richer as an academic enterprise when its practitioners are challenged to think more deeply and appreciate more fully, but it is the works themselves that will reap even greater benefit from quantitative and qualitative advancements in criticism. We owe that to tomorrow's children.

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The Powerful Pleasure of a Performer of Poems

Teaching to Wonder: Responding to Poetry in the Secondary Classroom. Carl Leggo. Pacific Educational P, 1997. 144 pp. \$19.95 paper. ISBN 1-895766-31-1. Poet, professor, teacher, with two master's degrees and a doctorate "all sig-