

Children and Time

From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature. Maria Nikolajeva. Children's Literature Association/Scarecrow, 2000. 307 pp. US\$75.00 cloth. ISBN 0-8108-3713-7.

Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, published in 1927 and translated into English in 1958, begins with the admission that "scholarly literature concerning the tale is not especially rich." Things soon changed. As inspiration for the whole structuralist movement in anthropology, folklore research, and literary criticism, Propp's work has remained legendary for its elegance and scientific rigour, even after the excitement of structuralism was extinguished in the English-speaking world by the vogue for French poststructuralism. Maria Nikolajeva's new book revives the structuralist study of myth largely inspired by the model Propp outlines for an examination of narrative based on the methods and terminology of linguistics. Her book argues that children's literature is dominated by utopian places — secret gardens and enchanted worlds — but that the time of what she prefers to call "idylls" may slip from the timelessness of *kairos* (eternal mythic time) into linear, measurable time or *chronos*. While this may not seem revolutionary to Canadian readers raised on the myth criticism of Northrup Frye, Nikolajeva claims to have erased the boundary between "realistic and nonrealistic modes, which at least within children's literature research is still the predominate view on genres" (264).

Readers of *From Mythic to Linear* may wish to keep Gerald Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology* close at hand to check on references to Greimas's *actant* or on Nikolajeva's eccentric use of a term such as *paralepsis*, defined here as "a side story which does not take up any narrative time" (127). For Prince, *paralepsis* is a shift in focalization that provides more information than expected as opposed to *paralepsis*, which provides too little — for example the bottle in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that simply says "DRINK ME." More needs to be said by Nikolajeva about how children's texts narratologically arrest time. The argument as a whole hinges decisively on the idea of the iterative: "telling once about an event that has taken place several times or is taking place regularly" (8). The iterative functions in works such as *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and *The Secret Garden* to emphasize the recurring structure of rituals and pleasures that ground the meanings inherent in idyllic spaces. A single telling underlines the deep pleasure of a meal or boating expedition. Thus Riverbankers may depart on adventures, but they do so under the recurring (and utopian) option of returning to the comfort of home.

Scholars will be pleased concerning the range of texts brought under the control of utopian time and pleasure: Chapter 3 concerns itself with social utopias from the Soviet Union while Chapter 4 engages with "the haunting of time" that makes us reluctant to grow up. The overall shape of the argument isn't as clear as non-specialists might wish, but it should be of concern to those of us who fear that a realist trend in current literature for children may no longer be able to sustain idyllic enchantment.

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