

Mini-Review

South Africa in English-Language Children's Literature, 1814-1912. Elwyn Jenkins. McFarland, 2002. 272 pp. US\$49.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7864-1105-8.

Elwyn Jenkins's *South Africa in English-Language Children's Literature, 1814-1912* fills a major gap in South African literary history. Noting that children's literature has been "a relatively neglected subject" and noting as well that children's literature has a distinct value in the country's literature as a whole, the author closes this gap through a consideration under various topics of writing from 1814 to 1912 and brings together earlier scattered and incomplete surveys. The author explains his choice of dates by stating in his preface that, before 1912, South Africa's "flora and fauna, people and politics . . . were constantly commented upon whereas after 1912 they became part of the background."

In his first chapter, Jenkins comments on selected authors and their works by providing brief biographical sketches and overviews of the content of their books. The books that fall under this study were written in English by a South African, contain South African content, or were published in South Africa. In fact, many of the authors included in this study were visitors to South Africa who made the country the setting and subject of their books, even though many of their books were published in London or elsewhere abroad. R. Ballantyne, G.S. Henty, H. Rider Haggard, "Captain" Marvyat, and Thomas Pringle are the best known of these writers; others equally widely read in their day are also given attention. In the second chapter, Jenkins discusses the readers of children's literature of the period and offers an accounting of the particular appeal of this writing. Chapters three to nine discuss how these stories were presented in published form to make them attractive to readers through a consideration of "The Country and Its Natural History," "Two Unusual Birds" (the Honey-Guide and the Ostrich but with miscellaneous reference to other members of the fauna of the land); a chapter on how language incorporates vocabulary from various linguistic groups to add verisimilitude to the writing; chapters on "The Indigenous Inhabitants" and the variety of treatments they were given in this writing; portraits of Afrikaners, English-speaking colonials, and the British, as well as the relations between these three contending groups; and, finally, an account of how political considerations account for the various wars with indigenous peoples, notably the Zulus, and the Boer Wars between the British and the Afrikaners.

The book is a selective yet quite comprehensive survey of the writing of the period. Not only is it informative but it is a lively and enjoyable read. The book has a narrative flow unusual in compendiums and surveys. The bibliography lists some three hundred authors and titles of their books. The index is extensive and fully reliable.

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