

accompanied by informative photographs and illustrations. This gradually leads to Kukić Rukavina's analysis of Dovniković and Čukli's comic. The overview is intended for readers who want to find out more about both the novel and the comic, and serves as an excellent source of information for readers who are not acquainted with the novel or for those who just seek to broaden their knowledge in order to be able to fully understand and appreciate this adaptation.

This book is intended for all those who appreciate this form of narrative, especially those who are interested in the Croatian comic scene. It is a valuable contribution to research of the history of Croatian comics that describes the circumstances and cultural contexts in which they were created.

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Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Text

Mallan, Kerry & Clare Bradford, eds. 2011. *Contemporary Children's Literature and Film: Engaging with Theory*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. viii+188 pp. ISBN 978-0-230-23150-4

Theory has seemingly always been woven into the thinking of scholars of literature and, depending on their work, theory reflects varying degrees of significance as it positions the work it is framing. Often, perhaps, it is taken for granted in that while theory may tacitly provide a particular stance for reading literature, it may not be identified in specific ways. Whether one identifies him/herself as a theorist from a particular theoretical paradigm or whether one employs a variety of theories to support insights to literature, *Contemporary Children's Literature and Film, Engaging with Theory* provides intriguing insights, perspectives on theory supported by useful examples of literature and film, and critical contemplations that have potential impact on how critics perceive and share children's literature with other readers to include scholars, educators and children.

Are we now in a 'post theory' age? Does theory matter any longer? Is it time for its obituary? These are the questions that introduce this book and while they are posed in a rhetorical manner, the editors continue by presenting their own response that focuses on the need for not one interpretation but the coexistence of different theories. With the current focus on critical theory, they describe it as an "encompassing term that gathers theories under its umbrella" and continue describing the offerings of critical theory to children's literature and film. Defined as a "close reading of text with attention to theoretical or ideological assumptions on which analysis is based" (2), critical theory provides the framework as this book "seeks to demonstrate how theory informs readings of children's literature and film"(2). With a brief history of the forms of critical theory in regard to children's literature as well as insights into detractors of critical theory, the editors draw attention to the changing voice of children's literature in contemporary times and the need to employ "novel combinations of theories and the adoption of new fields of enquiry as the

forms and modes of textual production change” (6). The inclusion here of film is supported by the narrative form and function it shares with literature, as well as the impact on identity and culture – both of which are woven throughout each of the topically diverse chapters in this book. As the authors remind readers, literature and film are more than reflections of the world – they “actively construct worlds and meanings” (9) and have ethical responsibilities as part of cultural, political, and social aspects of life.

With diverse and intriguing titles, each of the eight chapters provides the application of theory or theories in ways that provoke engaged critical thinking, the challenging of basic assumptions, and contemplation of new ideas regarding what is assumed as cultural and literary ‘facts.’ Issues of identity, gender, globalization, place, adaptation of text, cognition, ecology, and technoscience are among the topics scrutinized by scholars from theoretical frames reflecting more traditional theories, such as postcolonial or sociocultural as well as newer theoretical frames for thinking such as ecocriticism or posthumanism. The brief chapter descriptions that follow share the variety of topics encompassed here; however, one must read for him/herself the complete book to fully realize the enlightenment that awaits children’s literature scholars of all theoretical paradigms.

Chapter 1 provides an apt beginning as John Stephens explores “Schemas and scripts: cognitive instruments and the representation of cultural diversity in children’s literature.” After defining the notions of schemas and scripts and their role in making meaning of the texts surrounding young readers, the author begins a detailed description of how young minds process both text and the visual in ways that can assist with creating positive representations of cultural diversity, thus transforming existing scripts into another way of understanding the world. This chapter provides a rationale for why scholars should have a concern about the messages contained in children’s books and media. Realizing that existing schemas can be modified by text makes the work of scholars authentic, to say the least. Stephens describes the stages of multicultural ideologies over the past 4 decades in supporting how literature has sought to affirm multicultural models of human rights and equality. He argues for the uses of strong representational texts that can be active in affecting how young readers understand the global society. Picture books, for example, should address the problems at hand and avoid one-directional cultural flows. Using specific literature examples, Stephens gives insight into the various ways that the unfolding of a schema within a book may result in the transforming of the reader’s personal schema when contemplating questions of difference. Such unfoldings may be found in books where social good is recognized by one or more characters, where a character is lacking some essential aspect of living, where a cultural assumption is presented in a way readers will reject; however, the text scripts in these are presented with a sequence of conflict, self-reflection, creative action, and social integration. Metonymy, parable, metaphorical relationships of verbal text and illustrations, social context and empathetic imagination are all discussed within the contexts of diverse picture books as potential factors leading to transformational outcomes of text scripts. Just as schema and script are powerful cognitive instruments, Stephens concludes

with a reminder that “schema and script function as transformative instruments, enhancing understandings of relationships between selfhood and otherness and informing social action designed to foster equity and social justice” (34).

“Journeying subjects: spatiality and identity in children’s texts” by Clare Bradford and Raffaella Baccolini, Chapter 2, uses cultural geography, postcolonial theory and utopian theory to examine the complexity of place and identities in children’s texts. Distinguishing between space (large and abstract) and place (local and bounded) the authors share notions of space, place, and identity across several perspectives that include power, diaspora, and globalization. This leads into an interesting focus on utopia and the movement away from utopia being geographically and temporally distant space to the notion of utopia as process or “journey through space that we need to undergo” (39). This can be a desire or dream for a better society or personal life and as a utopian dream also involves reason and potential action. Such worlds in literature allow readers to perceive their worlds in new ways – enhanced ways of being that feed into identity formation. This discussion leads naturally into considering the global and local in children’s literature as the authors use the film *Madagascar* to share the influence of both. A postcolonial lens supports the chapter’s discussion of time, place, and space with a focus on significance of place for different societies. A detailed focus on dystopian literature invites the reader to consider the potential critical perspectives found in both utopian and dystopian literatures to understand how to articulate change for current societies. A compelling conclusion calls for further consideration of the role of place and space in literature and film. “When protagonists move across and between places, they also traverse cultural differences, value systems and interpersonal relations” (55) thus calling for a range of theories to make sense of the impact on identity. “Places are never neutral or empty but are infused with histories, memories, and traces of interpersonal relations” (*ibid.*).

Chapter 3 is entitled “Local and global: cultural globalization, consumerism, and children’s fiction” by Elizabeth Bullen and Kerry Mallan. This exploration of how broader globalization processes are recreated into narratives written for children and adolescents also delves into the impact of globalization on the marketing of children’s texts and culture. As the authors explain globalization and its impact on political, economic and cultural connections, they also point out that its impact is unequal – for children as well as adults. In First World countries youth are targeted to realize the role of products for social identity while lower economic places find some children without basic human rights. There is also a tension between social modernization and maintaining traditional cultural experiences. It is in this area that children’s literature might play a significant role through the protagonists who are constructing identity, traveling globally, and demonstrating ideologies and technologies available for globalization. Another key point of this chapter is that of how the global influences the local and how the local impacts the global. Mass marketing of products directed toward children become global commodities with film taking a lead and being followed by promotional tie-ins. Clothes, magazines, toys, and other material items have become part of the search for identity across the globe. Children’s books in this

chapter reflect a sense of connectivity in that they share both the local and the global and help children replace old spaces with new ones or extend existing ones.

Gothic theory, psychoanalytical and political theories frame Chapter 4, "Monstrous Women: Gothic Misogyny in *Monster House*" by Maria Takolander. This chapter examines representations of women in this animated film, and the author urges readers to reflect "on the traditions of woman-hating that continue with disturbing potency in our culture today" (81). The chapter offers a discussion about graphic novels focusing on patriarchies and on the notion of the *vagina dentata* – that precaution should be taken for women as both desire and danger. Takolander quotes other scholars in this area in her focus on the traditions of woman-hating that demonizes rather than celebrates the maternal figure. Ultimately, the horror of this gothic story is that of the destruction of a woman as the film pits children against the archaic mother. The author reminds readers that children are more vulnerable to media messages than adults as film can be the manifestations of their fears. In conclusion, she aptly states that "All of this makes children's culture perhaps, even more so than adult culture, a necessary site for interrogation as well as for innovation, less in terms of animation technology than content," (91).

"Splitting the difference: pleasure, desire, and intersubjectivity in children's literature and film" by Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, provides both title and theoretical location for Chapter 5. Psychoanalytic gender criticism, as well as queer and feminist theories, supports this examination into how identities are negotiated in LGBT narratives. This chapter takes the reader into several different literature scenarios in which the child protagonists portray transgendered identities and the complexity of each situation emerges as each young boy seeks to affirm his feminist self, often by choosing to dress as a female. Wilkie-Stibbs points out that as each child is creative in play, so he finds self, but it is ironic that it is in the imaginary spaces of play that he is the "real" self. Another significant point made in this chapter is that the individual experiences of transgendered children are different and indicate a spectrum of sexual identity differences. The homophobic nature of the literature experiences is discussed with the main oppositions coming from fathers and other adults in the stories. Children's literature in the last decade, according to the author, has been a trailblazer in the complexity of LGBT literature, and this chapter clearly points to the continuing need for further critique in this area.

Chapter 6 takes an ecological focus as created by Geraldine Massey and Clare Bradford. "Children as ecocitizens: ecocriticism and environmental texts" engages readers in considering how environmental texts position children in the attempt to become responsible and empathetic adults of tomorrow regarding the environment. Sharing insight to the environmental discourse that ultimately in the Western world implies that human survival depends on the actions of informed motivated adults, Massey and Bradford remind readers that "The values presented to children are contingent upon the views and values of adults who produce environmental texts" (110). Ecocriticism focuses on literary and artistic expressions of the relations between humans and the natural world. With attention to the multiple perspectives that ecocriticism offers from which to analyze children's literature,

the authors draw from ecofeminist and postcolonial theories as well to engage readers in examining the ideologies of this literature. Extensive exploration of texts point to a range of environmental perspectives and issues: people, frequently Western males, speaking on behalf of the environment; contrasting positions on the environment, especially in light of Third World vs. First World countries; inconsistent representations in literature and film of environment issues; incomplete representations of the social histories behind some issues; creating advocacy through emotional images in texts; giving a single hero/heroine responsibility for saving endangered species. The authors have provided a well organized theoretically framed discussion around a complex topic that recognizes the need for young readers to be informed but that questions the images and contexts often found in books as well as the developmental limitations of young children.

“From ‘Wizard’ to ‘Wicked’: adaptation theory and young adult fiction” by David Buchbinder provides a noteworthy consideration of both the history and current use of adaptations in the literary and film world. Chapter 7 introduces contemporary notions around this theory with examples that span literary history beginning with stories from Greek culture and including Shakespeare’s era and the many borrowed narratives of that time. Within the chapter’s discussion Buchbinder weaves a solid argument based on scholarly input that adaptations are not necessarily inferior and need to be considered in light of the merit of their own purpose. They are built into a culture’s current understandings of narratives and may even serve to keep the original alive. The author highlights other important considerations in determining how adaptations are perceived such as whether the adaptation is from a single original or from a lineage of adaptations and whether an adaptation is “of” the original or “from” an original. He also distinguishes between adaptation and appropriation – the first being a close relationship to an original and the other a newer product. A discussion of *The Wizard of Oz* vs. *Wicked* brings yet other considerations of adapted texts that set them apart for mere retellings. Buchbinder ends this chapter with poignant and provocative questions that beg readers to further explore and contemplate the issues around adaptation theory. Many of these questions revolve around the performance aspect of a play since each performance is unique and around the reading of a text since each reader’s experience is a new transaction. Also; whether the reader’s understandings or interpretations might be considered as adaptations and, if so, whether the use of a theorist such as Louise Rosenblatt might help to frame this issue. Readers of this chapter might have renewed perception of adaptations, either textual or in film.

The final chapter in this resource is entitled “All that matters: technoscience, critical theory, and children’s fiction.” Kerry Mallan in Chapter 8 has drawn attention to the changes in science that have implications for ethical considerations and “rethinking of critical theory’s approaches to identity, power and desire (among other factors that impact on subjectivity, agency, and bodies)” (147). Technology is blurring the boundaries between what is human and what is computerized or a product of technology, what is fiction and what is real. In literature, cybernetic organisms know as cyborgs are human-machine

creations, thus changing what we consider organic life. Mallen discusses the notion of ‘posthuman’ and its meaning as an extension or condition of the human – a term that has a long history in describing hybrid characters. The author continues a rich discussion of texts that, in Mallen’s words, “carry both warning and celebration” (166), such as considerations of how technological innovations contribute new forms of knowledge production and the prediction of technological advances in children’s literature: “... science and children’s fiction open up a new theoretical space to explore questions about life, death, and what matters as considerations of our posthuman existence” (11).

Each chapter of *Contemporary Children’s Literature and Film: Engaging with Theory*, creates interest in the complexities raised, as well as invites questions and, perhaps, concerns. Each also ends with possible further readings to extend the authors’ well crafted discussions. “Does theory matter any longer?” is a question asked at the beginning of this book. The authors have created a collection of compelling perspectives that collaboratively and strongly respond “yes” to the power of using theory to unveil the layers of meaning, purposeful voices, and intentional contexts in global literature for young readers. The chapters offered here support the role of theory in our daily involvements as scholars, teachers, and readers of children’s literature as well as inform about topics, questions and concerns across areas of inquiry within the larger field of children’s literature.

Janelle B. Mathis

A Head Start with Books for Real Beginners

Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina, ed. 2011. *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 275 pp. ISBN 978-90-272-1808-7.

With a few introductory question teasers, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer sets the topic perimeters of the general subject of this book “at the heart of emergent literacy studies” (1). Readers are prompted to expect descriptions of not only children’s first encounters with picturebooks and early book behaviour, but also of the mental processes behind them.

As the editor states, “studies in emergent literacy research dealing with the impact of picturebooks on children under three are extremely rare” (*ibid.*). She offers valid reasons for the lack of interest in the field in question, but underlines the importance of emergent literacy and books for children under three. This is implied in all chapters, regardless of the fact they are written by different authors. By the end of the book, arguments given in various chapters persuade the reader that there can be no valid literacy research or any suitable claim in the fields of language acquisition, literacy studies or cognitive studies without first understanding emergent literacy.

This book is the result of the first conference focused on multidisciplinary approaches to emergent literacy. It successfully manages to maintain the benefits of the combined disciplines, each of them largely contributing to the true value and wide scope of the book.