

of fairy-tale studies this century. Anthologies such as *Revisioning Red Riding Hood Around the World* best show by the number, innovativeness and the thought-provoking qualities of the literary texts themselves why this is the case.

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## A Possibility of Children's Fiction

**David Rudd. 2013. *Reading the Child in Children's Literature: An Heretical Approach*.** Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. x+238 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-32234-0

This is the most recent publication of David Rudd, Professor of Children's Literature at the University of Bolton, UK. He has published numerous articles, mainly in the field of children's literature, but also on other subjects, including education, information science, media and film. His earlier works include *A Communication Studies Approach to Children's Literature* (1992) and *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature* (2000). He is also the editor of *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (2010).

In this book, Rudd examines and discusses some key ideas of several scholars in the field of children's literature, including Jacqueline Rose, Bruno Bettelheim, Jack Zipes, Perry Nodelman and Maria Nikolajeva. He also offers close readings of a few classic works of children's literature, *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Where the Wild Things Are*, among others.

In the introduction, Rudd makes an interesting point by claiming that "we sometimes seem to be trying too hard, that we have become too ponderous in our deliberations about children's books (we murder to dissect) such that we lose the actual excitement of reading" (1). He further suggests our analysis should be based more on 'energetics', and less on 'mechanics', and argues for more openness in the field of children's literature.

The rest of the book is organised in four parts, centred on key notions of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who claimed that we as human beings exist within three overlapping orders: the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. These terms are additionally explained in the book's glossary.

The first part of the book (the first two chapters) is concerned with the Imaginary. In Chapter 1, Rudd examines the influential 1984 book by Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. Although he agrees with many of Rose's ideas, he rejects her conclusion that children's fiction is impossible, opposing it with a more interactive model of Mikhail Bakhtin, in which "children's fiction is always and forever possible, though its effectivity can never be fully gauged" (23). Chapter 2 offers a close reading of *Peter Pan* in the light of several Lacanian concepts. While the protagonist of Barrie's novel, an idealised image of eternal youth and innocence, "seems to incarnate the Imaginary, Captain Hook epitomises the Symbolic" (42). Rudd's detailed analysis shows deeper layers under the seemingly perfect surface of Neverland, and reinforces many of the disturbing issues from the book by examining Geraldine McCaughrean's 2007 official sequel to *Peter Pan*, i.e. *Peter Pan in Scarlet*. This section, among other ideas, draws a

parallel between Peter Pan and Jesus Christ, and will be especially interesting for those who have not thought of this classic in psychoanalytic terms.

In the second part of the book, the focus moves from the Imaginary to the Symbolic. In Chapter 3, Rudd asks an important question: “are we content to expose children to the world of books (adult and children’s), as so many of us, as avid young readers, probably were, or do we want to try to control this reading, to try to inoculate children against devouring books indiscriminately and illicitly, though often passionately?” (58). After giving examples of Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton, popular children’s writers who are often dismissed, he suggests “a need for more openness; for an approach that avoids finding texts, after being sieved through a particular theoretical grid, as either progressive or reactionary” (61), which can be problematic because “Valéry always seems to end up as *petit bourgeois*, just as Tolkien is reduced to being ‘a conservative upper-middle class English male’” (ibid.). The section continues with an analysis of Milne’s Pooh stories and Louis Sachar’s *Holes*, in which Rudd contrasts his interpretation with those of other critics. Chapter 4 is dedicated to Perry Nodelman’s magnum opus, *The Hidden Adult* (2008). Rudd argues that “the notion of a shadow text, attractive as it seems, is actually itself very amorphous” (97), and suggests a more open approach than his binary adult-child model, in which shadows, who indubitably exist in all texts, do not necessarily correlate with the adult position.

In Chapter 5 the emphasis is on the Real, the third order of human existence according to Lacan. It examines the notion of the *uncanny* in children’s literature, as seen by other critics, and then proceeds to exploit it in another classic, *Alice in Wonderland*, a book in which uncanny images abound.

Chapters 6 and 7 make up the final, fourth part of the book, in which all the three orders, Real, Symbolic and Imaginary, are discussed. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the division between fantasy and realism which, according to Rudd, are far more interlinked than we might imagine. In the rest of the chapter, he offers analyses of two picturebooks, Anthony Browne’s *Zoo*, and Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*. In Chapter 7, the focus is on *The Children’s Book* by A.S. Byatt which, despite the title, is anything but a book suitable for children. Rudd uses it to show the difficulties in drawing a line between works for adults and children. He claims that the novel shows “how children’s literature can never be pure, but neither can it be impossible: it is always a hybrid, negotiated place” (187).

Rudd gives a fresh perspective on various topics in the field of children’s literature, even ideas that are taken for granted, examining questions of children’s literature as a genre, adult-child and fantasy-realism binaries, among others.

His goal seems to be to create a more open approach by encouraging further discussion. With his unique style of writing (“‘How does this have anything to do with the Möbius strip?’ I might hear you asking (although disembodied voices, dear reader, are a sign of psychosis, to say nothing of that habit of apostrophising absent beings)”), he captures readers’ attention, while at the same time giving the reader many concepts to study further.

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