

canonical work in British schools. She briefly mentions how American schoolbooks tended to overlook Spenser's work. The epilogue mentions adaptations of *The Faerie Queene* made during the last fifty years. One of them, *The Questing Knights of the Faerie Queene* by Geraldine McCaughrean (2004), uses the characters of Britomart Britomart, a female knight, and Talus, a man of iron, to provide insight into gender. Richmond suggests that the latest adaptations of the poem give reason to believe that *The Faerie Queene* still remains a significant part of literary history.

In her well-researched book, Richmond provides an informative look into Victorian and Edwardian adaptations of *The Faerie Queene*. She contextualises Spenser's work and offers examples of adaptations made in both England and the United States. The book is well structured and provides the reader with all the necessary information in an accessible way. Especially interesting are the author's observations on the adaptations of *The Faerie Queene* made in the last 50 years. The first two chapters are the most informative as they introduce the social, religious, historical and political context in which Spenser wrote. As such, they will be useful for anyone who wants to find out more about chivalric romance.

Kristina Zirdum

## Child Rule and the Paradoxes of Children's Literature

**Christopher Kelen & Björn Sundmark, eds. 2017. *Child Autonomy and Child Governance in Children's Literature: Where Children Rule*. New York: Routledge. 250 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-93164-0**

In their elegant introduction to the recently published volume *Child Autonomy and Child Governance in Children's Literature: Where Children Rule*, editors Christopher Kelen and Björn Sundmark explain why the concept of child rule in children's literature is such a fruitful subject of study. The reason is far from simple and concerns the deeply paradoxical nature of children's literature much debated by scholars in the field for over thirty years. Kelen and Sundmark are not the first to note that although children rarely rule their own everyday lives, stories written for and about them frequently portray them as empowered and in charge. Yet, inspired by Paul Hazard's idea of "The Republic of Childhood" (1944), they have found a fresh way to approach the contradictory impulse at the heart of children's literature, which is to contain childhood while simultaneously escaping it. As they put it, childhood as metaphor and social construction is "a state of unbecoming: to be a child is to be in the process of no longer being a child" (8) and, thus, children's literature is infused by conflicting struggles to both liberate and control the child.

In addition to the introduction, the volume comprises fourteen essays more or less obviously connected to the theme of child rule. At best, this inclusive principle results in a plethora of voices and perspectives, including many delightful surprises for the reader. At worst, it leaves the reader slightly confused as to the guiding principle behind the volume as a whole. Clearly, the volume would have benefited from slightly stricter editing. For example, whereas the title states that children's literature is at the heart of the study, many of the essays explore a variety of materials, such as comic strips, TV series, film, and religious imagery. Moreover, essay authors who write about the same texts (e.g. Carroll's *Alice*

books) or use the same theoretical approaches could have been encouraged to enter – at least to some extent – into dialogue with each other. These measures could have helped tie all the individual pieces together into a more self-evident whole.

Nevertheless, the volume still offers compelling reading for those interested in how children have been perceived and portrayed as powerful and autonomous agents in culture and literature. Some of the articles do this by looking back in time and reminding us of how notions of the child and childhood have kept fuelling and changing our views on children and their literature. Mavis Reimer and Charlie Peters, for example, return to the highly influential writings of the Enlightenment philosopher John Locke in order to investigate how his views on children intertwine with his theory of government. They conclude that many of the themes dominating Locke’s philosophical writings are found in his version of Aesop’s fable “The Fox and the Eagle”, which shows that Locke imagined a competent child reader “capable both of close observation and of abstract thought” (28).

Emer O’Sullivan also takes a historical point of view. She traces the once so popular discourse of internationalism behind French scholar Paul Hazard’s utopian visions about children and children’s literature. Whereas Hazard’s ideas about children’s books as a utopian realm that can transcend all borders seem far too simple and essentialist today, O’Sullivan elaborates on where they originate and why his optimistic vision remained so popular for such a long time.

The concept of child rule is very evidently at the centre of Björn Sundmark’s article in which he compares a wide selection of stories about shipwrecked children finding refuge on desert islands. The aim of the article is to find out if and how these narratives conform to a child Robinsonade trope, as well as what kind of child rule they envision. In another intriguing essay, Sundmark studies a mixed selection of horror narratives (not necessarily aimed at a child audience) in which children hold the power and reign in terror. Both articles well illustrate how conflicting notions of child rule co-exist and reflect adult hopes as well as anxieties associated with children and childhood.

With her article on twentieth-century fantasy literature and girls’ empowerment through magic, Clare Bradford adds a much-welcome gender-conscious piece to the volume. Bradford studies three English-language fantasy series in which tropes of magic comment on girl protagonists’ agency and independence in the real world with varying results.

Despite its harsh subject matter, Karin Nykvist’s chapter on contemporary young adult “sick-lit” is delightful reading. Nykvist argues that the 19<sup>th</sup>-century sentimental trope of the dying child has returned in the shape of terminally ill teenagers in contemporary YA fiction. Moreover, the teenage characters’ illnesses make them exceptional, and paradoxically increase their power and agency. Coming-of-age, self-discovery, and finding autonomy are at the heart of these novels, according to Nykvist, although the young protagonists never enter adulthood.

Despite its somewhat misleading title, Zoe Jaques’ imaginative and thought-provoking article explores children’s texts by Lewis Carroll and Maurice Sendak from a post-humanist point of view, revealing a deep-set unease in the depiction of child-human and animal rule. Jaques shows that both Carroll’s Alice and Sendak’s Max are human children crowned and allowed to rule over animals and other species, yet they simultaneously critique the boundaries and dominance of human rule.

Shaping a collection of essays into a self-contained unity is by no means an easy task. The selected articles, commented on above, illustrate how – paradoxically – a generous and inclusive approach to the subject matter of child autonomy and child governance is, in fact, one of the volume’s best features. Apart from the texts singled out above, readers can also delve into enlightening discussions of the ambiguous religious imagery of the Christ child (Davis), a carnivalesque Polish novel in which an adult is temporarily transformed into a child king (Czernow), play as a child-ruled space (Kelen), child rule in a contemporary comic strip and a popular TV series for children (Ommundsen), how picturebooks allow and encourage agency among child readers (Yokota), and the importance of playtime (Chengcheng & Malilang).

*Maria Lassén-Seger*

### A Scandinavian View on Children’s Media in Retrospect

**Helle Strandgaard Jensen. 2017. *From Superman to Social Realism: Children’s Media and Scandinavian Childhood*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. xii, 188 pp. ISBN 978-90-272-0160-7**

This book gives a nuanced and detailed account of the sometimes heated public and academic debates on children’s literature, media, and culture in Scandinavia in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1980s. Drawing on a voluminous archive of newspaper editorials, transnational conference proceedings, academic articles, and books, Jensen elucidates not only the immediate issues under debate, but also how they were informed by contemporary social anxieties and by shifting understandings of children’s needs. This involves contemporary understandings of childhood, as well as ideas about parental authority, the role of experts, and the question of the purpose of children’s media.

This approach has the signal advantage that it makes decades-old debates intelligible and thereby avoids the pitfall of seeing only incomprehensible moral panic. For example, in Scandinavia in the 1950s, there was, as in the USA and elsewhere in Europe, a debate about the appropriateness of comics for children, although the terms of this controversy were particularly Scandinavian. Superhero comics such as Superman, Batman, and the Phantom were popular with children, but educational experts regarded them with suspicion. These comics were seen as too capitalist and were thought to undermine democratic values; they diverted children from higher quality reading such as classic children’s books.

Sixty years later, the comics in question may look rather innocuous, but Jensen’s analysis helps us to see why many people were troubled by them. With World War II still fresh in people’s memories, comics that celebrated superpowered vigilantes who acted with apparent contempt for democratic principles and due process looked very dubious. Putting myself in their shoes, I find it hard to dismiss their anxiety that these comics might encourage children to adopt anti-democratic attitudes, even if there was a large dose of paternalism in the belief that parents needed expert advice to choose appropriate reading matter for their children. As the most popular comics were American imports, there was also concern that native Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian cultural traditions might be drowned out. Anyone who has walked past a Swedish multiplex in recent years, where American blockbusters