

dénaturer. Dans ces conditions, comment respecter une nature à la Walt Disney, qui semble si bien absorber tous ces symboles polluants du capitalisme moderne que sont les boissons gazeuses, les pailles en plastique, les motoneiges, les barbecues, et tous ces accessoires destinés à amuser le lecteur? Que reste-t-il de la nature dans tout cela? On peut donc se poser la question de savoir si le message des images convient vraiment à l'objectif général du livre et de la maison d'édition. Ces animaux travestis, colonisés par l'être humain, qui leur impose ses goûts et ses activités, arriveront-ils à donner aux lecteurs "la passion de la nature" dont l'éditeur se réclame?

L'image me paraît donc avoir été traitée à la légère, en ce sens qu'elle est ici revêtue d'atours superficiels et aguichants, sans égard à leur signification profonde. Or, on le sait, le message iconique s'inscrit directement dans l'inconscient du spectateur sans passer par le filtre de l'esprit critique, surtout si le contemplateur est jeune ou inexpérimenté. L'histoire de la communication visuelle fournit de nombreux exemples de cette emprise directe et insidieuse de l'image, utilisée pour transmettre toutes sortes de comportements, des meilleurs aux pires.

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EGOFF'S WORLDS WITHIN

Worlds within: Children's fantasy from the Middle Ages to today. Sheila A. Egoff. Chicago and London: American Library Association, 1988. 340 pp., \$32.40 U.S. cloth. ISBN 0-8389-0494-7.

While Sheila Egoff's survey traces the line of children's (non-picture book) fantasy fiction in English from its earliest days, the book has a distinctly modern purpose. She began this study when she observed a distinct paradigm shift in fantasies of the 1970s and '80s, noticing "strong trends and patterns" that were "notably different from those of the past, that is, before the 1960's" (ix). Egoff defines a somewhat paradoxical situation. On the one hand, there is a general contemporary resurgence of fantasy and its offshoots, attested to by the success of *Stars wars* and Stephen King, the rise of new science fiction genres, the release of Walt Disney blockbusters such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Little Mermaid*, as well as the more recent fascination with vampires. On the other hand, Egoff finds that recent fantasy writers for children are "experimenting with fantasy's inner core, breaking many of its conventions and so changing its purpose and values" (ix), and this is a change she configures as a loss for both

the genre and its young readers. While the book wears its polemics lightly, developing a definition of a contrastive “true” children’s fantasy literature (from which the later literature will be perceived as a deviation or decline) is one of the aims of *Worlds within*.

This definition is developed for the most part inductively, after an introductory chapter which surveys a number of sub-varieties (beast tales, ghost stories, and so on) to propose a simple but useful definition of fantasy as “a story in which the sustaining pleasure is that created by the deliberate abrogation of any natural law, no matter how slight, or by the taking of a step beyond it” (17). (While it fits her definition, Egoff pays little attention to science fiction writing for children, which may be one reason why she finds writing of the 1970s and 1980s discontinuous.) From this point, the book proceeds by an historically-organized survey, which relies on Egoff’s encyclopaedic knowledge of children’s literature and its context to survey several hundred works beginning with tales for children in medieval folk and oral traditions. After chapters devoted to the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the work is sub-divided by decades, to reflect the increase in both quantity and variety of children’s literature in this century. The breadth of the survey alone qualifies *Worlds within* as a significant reference book. Published by the American Library Association, it is clearly intended in the first instance for the librarian’s shelf. (The ALA’s standards of accuracy, by the way, should have demanded a checker to catch several typos in the text, as well as three references to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, that great theorist of the fantastic, as “William.”) *Worlds within* could also be used by a student in search of an introduction to this important genre, or by a parent (or even an older child) looking for “good reads.”

While Egoff gives a thorough overview of fantasy fiction, she is equally interested in the cultural contexts of different works, attributing developments in the genre to the social surround and to changing conceptions of childhood. Egoff makes useful links between adult and child literature of the day (seeing in Edwardian fantasy fiction, for example, the same freedoms and restrictions which characterized adult life in that interregnum), and she gives some interesting examples of the moralizing of the anti-fantasy factions who periodically appear. She also assesses by the “touchstone” method the success or failure of different works on the basis of their maintenance of a “true” fantasy spirit rather than their strict accordance to generic codes or conventions. This commentary raises the perennial problem of appraising children’s books, old or new: what appeals to the adult reader’s current sense or memory may not be the favourite of any one child reader. (Children, like adults, have variable tastes in addition to a perverse proclivity for anything grownups might label substandard.) Egoff’s assessments remain interestingly arguable, important primarily for the way they help her to hone the standard of fantasy by which the works of the ’70s and ’80s are judged.

Egoff is attentive throughout *Worlds within* not only to the relationship

between children's literature and its cultural surround, but to the ways that relationship is repeated in the fantasy fiction itself (with events and mores of the day referenced, satirized and allegorized—the "Alice" books and *The wind in the willows* functioning as prime examples). However, Egoff appears to prize fantasy to the degree that it acts as an imaginative escape literature, with the cultural referents carefully coded, and thus she is cautionary about the shift or reversal (302) in the fantasy-realism balance she dates at twenty years ago. Noting the rise of new sub-genres of fantasy fiction, where the mental and emotional strains of intolerable family circumstances cause the child to develop psychic or supernatural powers, or propel an escape into a parallel world, Egoff remarks:

In earlier fantasies, once the major premise had been accepted ... writers made the fantasy world as real as possible. The fabulous gradually became the ordinary Almost conversely, most fantasists in modern times ask for the suspension of disbelief by concentrating on events and details in the real world. (302-303)

The title of *Worlds within* thus has a curiously contradictory force, denoting the imaginative "world" of the child, or the processes of psychic and mental development of which play is so integral a part, but which for Egoff should not receive a direct treatment in children's literature. Fantasy, then, can become a part of the world "within" only to the degree that it deals with worlds "without." As Egoff herself writes: "Once upon a time, 'worlds within' meant the release of the imagination that could then be applied externally; now the phrase all too often means the internalization of emotional problems and an alienation from the external world" (310). The equation of only certain forms of fantasy fiction with the "once upon a time" is a judgement that other readers may wish to challenge. But in raising the difficult question of the "real world" functions of the fantastic for children, Egoff has passed on a thorny theoretical problem to her critical successors.

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UNE RONDE POÉTIQUE DE MOTS ET D'ANIMAUX

Le Bestiaire d'Anais. André Vigeant. Illus. Anne Villeneuve. Montréal, Les éditions du Boréal, 1991. 91 pp., broché. ISBN 2-89052-421-3.

C'est l'univers poétique des enfants, encore libre de cloisons entre le rêve et la réalité, entre le son et le sens des mots, qu'évoque André Vigeant dans *Le*