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Sandra L. Beckett, ed. *Reflections of Change: Children's Literature Since 1945*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997. xi + 203 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-30145-2.

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Reflections of Change
Children's Literature Since 1945
Edited by
Sandra L. Beckett

Reflections on Change: Children's Literature Since 1945 joins a growing discourse on radical change in children's literature. Perhaps it is the *fin de siècle* that prompts a backward glance. I tend to be shy in making grand pronouncements that suggest a teleological progression. A case could be made for the 1920s and 1930s in the United States as a period of enormous experimentation more dramatic than our own. Many subversive texts have surfaced in the post-Lear and Carroll era. Our half-century has no claim on modernity, despite the fact that this is my generation.

Nevertheless, it is critical to explore the effects of postmodern literary criticism, mass media, technology, and publishing, as well as the effects of wars, the Cold War, and the many global changes in ethnic and regional identity. The explosiveness and immediacy of these changes can dull the critical edge by which we ask the historical questions of how children's literature both reflects and constructs culture. Despite the haze, we must break ground.

This collection of essays is the product of the Twelfth Biennial Congress of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL), held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1995. Scholars from twenty-five countries gathered to discuss the theme of changes in children's literature and children's literature theory and criticism since 1945. Papers were chosen from the conference to be included in this volume, which often leads to uneven quality. A variety of papers were required to represent the international perspective, but they don't necessarily hold together well, except in a common historical component.

In the introduction, editor Sandra Beckett briefly summarizes from the conference papers, largely those re-

lated to literary theory and criticism. She finds an enhanced status for children's literature, a phenomenon that owes much to postmodernism and its leveling effects. An unprecedented growth in children's literature research internationally is elevating the field in academia. A more secure stature has encouraged experimentation in approach, especially in the realm of literary criticism, which now applies many of the same critical postures to children's books as to adult books. In Beckett's words, "readers are confronted with new temporal, spatial, and human dimensions" (p. xi). The result is a greater sophistication of discourse and demand on child readers. The question, as raised, is does this duality of audience signal the demise of children's literature? My hasty answer to that quandary, based on my research into Victorian picture book reception, is that a creative tension historically exists between the binaries of child and adult in children's literature. A useful resource on this question is the special issue of *Children's Literature* on "Cross-writing Child and Adult," edited by U. C. Knoepfelmacher and Mitzi Myers (v. 25).

The book is organized into six broad divisions: "Theory and Children's Literature," "Shifting Boundaries between Children's and Adult Literature," "Experimental Writing and Postmodern Trends," "Paradigm Shifts," "National Literatures," and "Reconceptualizing the Past." Being an international conference—one of few in the field—many of the essays address specific countries and their literature for children, although are were not mentioned in the introduction. I would like to have seen a fuller discussion of all the papers with some interconnections between them. In short, the introduction does not really introduce the book that follows, although it is valuable for its generalizations on changes in literary criticism and theory.

The slight introduction is followed by slight editing. I spotted various typos and grammatical errors as I read the text. The chapter on German children's literature needed attention, if not better translation. Vague expressions occasionally impede the reading, such as "claim of exemplary choice" or "a children's literary anti-tendency," both of which are repeated as important concepts. With more of a descriptive than analytical approach, some of the essays lacked critical perspective, such as the piece on Taiwanese young adult literature, which views the subject merely as reflection of the times rather than as social construction.

The strength of the book is in its diversity, its coverage of international topics, and a number of key essays that are richly nuanced in reflections of change. This is an important historical document, as it draws together some of the best and brightest minds in the field, across several continents, questioning the rationale for a literature of childhood, exploring deeply and widely the practice of children's literature, and speculating on its future as book arts in a technological age.

I will single out a few of many fine essays. Perry Nodelman in "Fear of Children's Literature: What's Left (or Right) after Theory?" foregrounds Paul Hazard's 1944 English translation of *Books, Children, and Menas* as a way to trace changes in the representations of childhood. Nodelman demonstrates the deftness of criticism—gender studies, psychoanalysis, and other ideological theories—to go beyond fear toward hope. John Stephens examines in "Is This the Promised End?" the *fin de siecle* mentality in seven recent books and finds oppositional readings. Deborah Stevenson confounds traditional approaches to everyday stories in "Ramona the Underestimated" and conjoins status of genre to status of field. Jerry Griswold examines "The Disappearance of Children's Literature (or Children's Literature as Nostalgia)" in recent American literature and struggles with the paradox of a booming publishing field and a shrinking sense of childhood. Eva-Marie Metcalf in "The Changing Status of Children and

Children's Literature" views the integration of children's literature into mainstream cultural discourse and international import.

Specific national literary cultures are examined, including Anne Scott MacLeod on American adolescent literature; Anne de Vries on Dutch children's books about the German occupation of the Netherlands; Beverly Pennell on Australian children's fiction; Asfrid Svensen on recent Scandinavian children's literature; Danielle Thaler on French Canadian young adult fiction; Dagmar Grenz on German realistic stories from 1970-1994; Shu-Jy Duan on the development of children's and young adult literature in Taiwan; Vincas Auryla on children's literature in the Baltic republics; and Olga Maeots on new trends in Russian children's literature.

Other essays present provocative views on multiculturalism by Daniel Hade; the fantasy books of Susan Cooper by Carole Scott; the meaning of changes in children's book titles by Maria Nikolajeva; the status of sequels, mainly Fitzhugh and Cormier's work, by Bettina Kummerling-Meibauer; a study of World War II British children's books by Dieter Petzold; and a probing look at violence in recent American books for teens by Roderick McGillis. I would have liked to have seen something by a publisher on the commerce of children's books and also something by a librarian on the evolving role of youth libraries and children's literature.

The overall, albeit unstated, subject of the volume is cultural studies, whereby relationships are studied within and between cultures as to how childhood is constructed through literature. That we ponder these relationships more at a millennium makes this volume even more urgent.

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