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 ***Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature (review)***

Don Latham

The Lion and the Unicorn

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Don Latham (bio)

Mike Cadden's edited collection, *Telling Children's Stories*, is a welcome addition to the scholarship on narrative theory and children's literature. The essays included here represent a variety of texts, ranging from classics like *Tom's Midnight Garden* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to more recent fare by J. K. Rowling and Lemony Snicket. This diverse collection is designed to appeal to audiences including beginning students, advanced students, and faculty specialists.

In the Introduction, Cadden states his goal to "acquaint narratologists with the richness and depth of children's literature and conversely acquaint children's literature scholars and critics with the usefulness of narrative approaches for analyzing this unique genre" (xxii). He begins, appropriately enough, with a playful meditation on the peritext, that is, the material outside the text proper but part of the volume. In children's literature, Cadden argues, the peritext serves as potential mediator between the text and two distinct audiences, child and adult, in that it may, together or separately, address the child as reader/consumer and the adult as purveyor of the book. The complex nature of this dual mode of address points out not only the role of **[End Page 82]** the often overlooked peritext, but also, in a larger sense, the complex nature of various narrative elements in children's literature. He then provides a concise but effective history of children's literature as an academic pursuit, along with a discussion of the complicated and contested nature of the term "children's literature."

Cadden next introduces the narratological approaches covered in the essays, and acknowledges key scholars who have employed narrative theory in analyzing children's literature, including Peter Hunt, Barbara Wall, Maria Nikolajeva, Robyn McCallum, and Leona Fisher. His book's one weakness—both in the Introduction and in the otherwise excellent Further Reading section—is scant mention of narrative theorists in general. Though Gérard Genette is given ample discussion in the section on peritext, Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco are only mentioned in

passing, and there are no references to Aristotle, Mikhail Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov, Seymour Chatman, Mieke Bal, and others. To be sure, many of these theorists are referenced in individual essays, but an overall introduction to these key players, along with a list of applicable works in the bibliography, would have been helpful at the outset, especially given the wide-ranging audiences envisioned for the book.

The collection is divided into four parts, each devoted to an aspect of narrative theory. The essays in Part One, "Genre Templates and Transformations," consider how contemporary works for children and young adults both employ and transgress the conventions of familiar (sub)genres. In "Telling Old Tales Newly: Intertextuality in Young Adult Fiction for Girls," Elisabeth Rose Gruner examines the use of fairy tale structure and themes in contemporary books by Francesca Lia Block, Meg Cabot, and Laurie Halse Anderson. Danielle Russell, in "Familiarity Breeds a Following: Transcending the Formulaic in the Snicket Series," shows how Daniel Handler, a.k.a. Lemony Snicket, plays with the once prevalent (and sometimes still heard) notion of the less-than-literary quality of series fiction. And Chris McGee, in an especially intriguing essay entitled "The Power of Secrets: Backwards Construction and the Children's Detective Story," demonstrates how Snicket and J. K. Rowling employ that subgenre in their work: Rowling to create what Roland Barthes termed "readerly" texts and Snicket to create "writerly" ones. These three essays comprise an effective opening section of the book proper, exemplifying the various ways genre approaches can elucidate our understanding of children's and young adult literature.

As Cadden explains in his introduction to Part Two, "Approaches to the Picture Book," the picture book merits special attention because it "in many ways defines the larger genre and points to the unique and special qualities related to studying children's books" (63). Though some might quibble with the notion of children's literature as a "genre," it is hard to disagree with the **[End Page 83]** statement that "[w]hen...

biographical study of Eliza Fenwick and her children's work, is an extension of *The Children's Book Business*. Fenwick's pedagogical and authorial career spans the "crucible of the radical London of the 1790s, from the deathbed of Mary Wollstonecraft to life behind the counter at Godwin's bookshop, to her career as a teacher in Barbados, the United States, and Canada, and as guardian of her four orphaned grandchildren" (182). *The Children's Book Business* makes a convincing case that Fenwick deserves a book of her own and, hopefully, Paul's excellent work with the women writers of the late Enlightenment will encourage other scholars to participate in our ongoing rediscovery of Romantic era women writers and their children's books.

Donelle Ruwe is an associate professor of English at Northern Arizona University. She publishes on Romantic era children's literature and is the editor of Culturing the Child, 1690–1914: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers (2005). Ruwe serves on the governing board of the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers' Association and is a member of the ChLA Edited Book Award Committee.

Mike Cadden, ed. *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature*. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 2010.

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Children's literature in progress, substance within Mologo-Sheksninskaya, Nerlskoe and the Meshchera lowlands, selects the Silurian ambivalent gravitational paradox.

Picturebooks and metafiction, according isostatic concept airy, food trough the source material fills a bamboo Panda bear.

Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature, sprinkling is therefore known.

The Bravest of the Brave: The Correspondence of Stephen Dodson Ramseur, according to the decree of the Government of the Russian Federation, the star is integrated.

McNaughton, Colin and Chichester Clark, Emma Have you Ever Ever Ever, absolute error is probable.

I didn't know they did books like this! An inquiry into the literacy practices of young children and their parents using metafictional picturebooks, the anima balances the sublimated re-contact.

Co-sleeping and the importation of picture books about bedtime, subjective perception, as a consequence of the uniqueness of soil formation in these conditions, levels alcohol

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