

anti-utopian worlds, the books of L. Lowry remain essentially anti-utopian as they do not predict the possibility of change, while those of S. Collins offer readers hope that the collective action of ordinary people can create a better society.

In the volume's final contribution, "Ursula Le Guin's Powers as Radical Fantasy", Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak analyses the third novel in U. Le Guin's series *The Annals of the Western Shore* (2004–2007), viewing it as a representative of so-called radical fantasy. The author concludes that even though radical fantasy need not be any more subversive than other cultural forms, it can still enable young readers to oppose contemporary forms of domination and exploitation through radical political subjectivity.

The fourteen contributions (including the introduction) presented above use new approaches to the problem of social inequality to pose important questions about the nature and purpose of children's and young adult literature, as well as the possibilities of resistance to both the commercialisation of literature, and traditional and routine modes of thinking. The volume is therefore a valuable contribution to literary theory which may prompt readers to re-examine their own attitudes, or direct them towards literary and theoretical orientations and works which they have previously ignored or found to be insufficiently worthy of their attention.

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From Plaything to Player

Virginie Iché. 2015. *L'esthétique du jeu dans les Alice de Lewis Carroll*. Paris: L'Harmattan. 260 pp. ISBN 978-2-343-07927-1

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Virginie Iché rightly starts her study of play in the works of Lewis Carroll (Aesthetics of Play in Lewis Carroll's *Alices*) from Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's fascination for games and playing as evidenced by his life and especially his literary work. To Carroll, everything could be a stimulus for play: objects, but also words, phrases and letters, as long as you "learn to look at all things / with a sort of mental squint" (Carroll, L. *Phantasmagoria and Other Poems*, 1869). In her book, Iché examines the function of play in Carroll's *Alice* stories and the role the reader can have.

The first part of the book is dedicated to play as a structural element in the *Alice* stories. In order to get a grip on the concept of play, Iché relies on ground-breaking scholars in the field of play studies, especially Émile Benveniste, Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois. All three view game as an activity that is at the same time characterised by freedom and by rules. In Iché's approach to play, the concept of *légaliberté* (borrowed from Colas Duflo) plays a central role, emphasising the overlap between freedom and restriction or guidance. Further on, she elaborates on the concepts of *paideia* and *ludus*, coined by Caillois, as poles between which the game is played: on the one hand the need for clear rules and on the other for playfulness, creativity and improvisation. The tension between these two runs like a thread through Iché's study, making it coherent and clearly focused.

In the first chapter of part one, Iché tries to give a complete overview of all the games, toys and objects of play in Carroll's classics *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through*

the Looking-Glass. She not only makes an inventory of them, but shows, by means of a detailed stylistic and linguistic analysis, how the representation of play in the *Alice* stories meanders between *paideia* and *ludus*. In her analysis of the conversation between the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle about the “lobster-quadrille”, she first makes clear how the imperatives and time conjunctives (first, then) dictate the player’s comportment. At the same time, the verbs in the fragment express a kind of vitality that is typical of the *paideia*: the two animals “cried”, “shouted”, “screamed” and “yelled” (note the gradation), interrupted each other and “had been jumping around like mad things”. Iché’s analysis of the fragment at the end of the first chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass* is an interesting example of her approach, too. In this passage, Alice experiences the double identity of a child and a chess piece. Iché’s close reading of the text, paying attention to the different grammatical functions of the words, reveals how Alice is sometimes a pawn in the game and sometimes becomes a player. Finally, Alice will acquire the rules that govern the parallel world and, in doing so, she will gain a certain freedom to play with these rules.

Iché not only scrutinises the text very closely, she also pays attention to the illustrations by John Tenniel and to the historical context. She makes clear how the illustrations guide the interpretation of the text and how Carroll gave clear instructions to his illustrator. Nevertheless, her analyses of the illustrations would have gained more depth if she had developed them in more detail by using theoretical insights from scholars such as Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (*How Picture Books Work*, 2001). More revealing is the fragment in which Iché shows how Carroll responded to Victorian readers’ interest in new toys (39–40).

In the second chapter, Iché examines to what extent the playful world in Carroll’s stories is a “carnavalesque” world as defined by Mikhaïl Bakhtine in his study of the French writer François Rabelais. The carnivalesque in Carroll’s work is without doubt the reversal of hierarchy, the motif of joyous circular time and festive violence. However, Iché points out that, unlike in Rabelais’ work, the violence in Carroll’s stories never has any consequences, freedom is more limited and at the end the story returns to linear time.

Part 2 of Iché’s study focuses on authorial strategies that invite the reader to a playful reading of the text. She gives numerous examples of instances where Carroll plays with the reader’s expectations, at the macro-level of the text structure, as well as at the micro-level of the discourse. In the first chapter she focuses on the narrative structure (titles, chapters, incipits, etc.). The second chapter is dedicated to nonsense, the game with/against/on language. Quoting Jean-Jacques Lecercle, she considers nonsense to be essentially playful, as it “is both free and constrained” (116). Her analysis of several instances of wordplay is intriguing, pointing out how speakers do not take into account the co-text (what the other speaker says), or the context. Thus, they repeatedly question language as a stable system (here she relies on Gilles Deleuze) and force Alice and the reader to consider the playful possibilities of language. In the third chapter, Iché focuses on intertextuality. She distinguishes between parody (with minimal transformation of the source text), rewriting (maximum transformation), and citation. In this context, the idea of the active reader pops up as it is the active reader who has to recognise and interpret the references to other texts or reality. Iché rightly points out that the efforts the readers of the time had to make were minimal, as Carroll mostly parodied well-known texts. Still, her analyses of the parodies of

popular poems remain limited. The humour, after all, relies not only on parody, but also on other humorous techniques, which can still be appreciated by contemporary readers who do not recognise intertextuality anymore. Her analyses would have been richer if she had read humour theories by scholars such as Salvatore Attardo and Arthur Asa Berger.

In the third part of her study, Iché concentrates on the reader and the act of reading. Relying on insights of Wolfgang Iser, she examines how far the “blanks” and “negations” in Carroll’s texts stimulate the implied reader’s creativity and imagination. She concludes that Carroll aims much more at the ideal reader, as defined by Umberto Eco. This model reader is guided much more strongly by the narrator, to the extent that he fills in what has already been told. Iché focuses on the addresses made to the reader and on the incomplete sentences (often with an indent). She also elaborates on the manipulation of the reader in *The Nursery Alice*. She demonstrates how the numerous suggestive and negative questions guide the reader and restrict possible interpretations. In doing so, however, she seems to underestimate the playful freedom of the storyteller who reads the story aloud.

Iché’s analysis of the ways in which Carroll directs his readers, within the confines of his playful textual universe, is impressive. Less convincing is the way in which she moves from the model reader to the reader-impostor. Building on the insights of Michel Picard especially and Jean-Jacques Lecercle, she remarks that the reader, although strongly guided, can take the position of an impostor who can give alternative interpretations. Through their carnivalesque and distorting approach to reality and language, Carroll’s books even invite the reader to play with the interpretations the text seems to impose. Here, Iché refers to real readers for the first time. However, she only mentions the very dubious interpretations of three scholars, which weakens her point. Her comments on these alternative readings raise the question of how ordinary, contemporary readers deal with the playful world in the *Alice* stories and, more particularly, how far the interpretations of children and adult readers differ. To these interesting questions, Iché does not give any answers; they call for further research.

Without doubt, Virginie Iché makes an original contribution to the enormous stream of *Alice* studies. This is a merit in itself. Most convincing are her well thought-out and meticulous stylistic and linguistic analyses, which bring literary and linguistic studies closer together. She does this in a coherent and compelling argument, summarised in the title of her conclusion “Du jeu au je” (From play to I). By means of her intelligent analysis, she makes clear that the reader, together with Alice, can evolve from plaything to player, conscious of the chances to master the world and the language within the confines of the world of play. The fact that she makes readers of her book think about their own reading, moving between *ludus* and *paideia*, makes her study all the more valuable.

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