

generations and from several countries. The publication of this decoratively bound, detailed and high-quality handbook with a range of carefully selected and meaningfully placed illustrations is a real milestone in the history of writing about the modern Irish theatre, hopefully becoming available in all major university libraries. Grene and Morash's collection is an excellent source of culturally and philologically grounded scholarship, providing valuable information and an intriguingly adventurous intellectual journey for researchers and teachers of Irish theatre studies as well as theatre-lovers for many years to come.

Mária Kurdi  
University of Pécs

#### **AN UNEXPLORED RELATIONSHIP: THE SUBLIME AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

Kamila Vránková, *Metamorphoses of the Sublime: From Ballads and Gothic Novels to Contemporary Children's Literature*. České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích – Pedagogická fakulta, 2019. 168 pp. ISBN: 978-80-7394-753-8.

This remarkable study of the sublime attracts attention by "suggesting various possibilities of the employment of the sublime in literary interpretation." This objective is achieved by simultaneously applying two rather diverse approaches: the discussion of the theories of the sublime in Pre-romantic and Romantic Anglophone literature in the wider context of a twentieth-century (chiefly Post-structuralist) philosophical thought, and the use of theoretical approaches to the sublime in the interpretations of the past and contemporary Anglophone children's literature. The complementary nature of these perspectives establishes the scholarly value of this book.

Interpretations of children's literature based on the aesthetic and ethical implications of the sublime demonstrate that good books for children do not contain simplified representations of reality derived from the authors' ideas of children's perceptions, feelings and understanding, but that they contain deeper and more complex levels of meaning connecting children's worlds with those of the adults. Moreover, valuable children's literature often shows the flawed nature of the adults' world. As the author points out in her interpretation of *The Wonder Book* by Nathaniel Hawthorne: "the adulthood [...] does not mean maturity, the experience that does not bring either knowledge or improvement."

## Reviews

The author's preoccupation with the functioning of themes frequent in adult literature, such as "time travel" or "other worlds," in books for children shows that children's literature cannot be easily separated from that for the adults, but that both categories have important common aesthetic and ethical features. This is, for instance, persuasively demonstrated in Chapter VIII, "Repetition in Time-Travel Fantasy: Adventure of Choice or of Destiny," which proceeds from an in-depth critical analysis of Bakhtin's chronotopes (of the road and the encounter) in the light of Deleuze's and Guattari's thought of mobility and dynamic structures and Foucault's notion of "heterotopia." The interpretation of a number of children's stories of time-travel, e.g., *The Children of Green Knowe*, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, or *The House of Norham Gardens*, reveals an optimistic and generally relevant truth:

The value of becoming, together with the denial of finality, is, moreover, included in the theme of childhood itself, in the concern with openness, change and possibility. A crucial role in the process of becoming belongs to particular encounters and relationships, which bring out the heroes' hidden characteristic features, their emotions, propensities, abilities and weaknesses. And special emphasis [is] laid on the relationship between children and their ancestors, on the past and future that "inhere in time and divide each present infinitely" to open space for a liberated and hopeful movement towards a new experience.

Another important link between adult and children literature is established by specific, psychological interpretations of the sublime, emphasizing the complexity of liminal psychic states or experiences, which often emerge in relation to "rites of passage." The connection of Arnold van Gennep's theory developed by Victor Turner, Mircea Eliade and others with the sublime (especially "the liminal phase of the initiation process") is demonstrated in Pre-romantic ballads, Gothic novels and Hawthorne's romances (the book contains a penetrating analysis of Hawthorne's *Marble Faun* undertaken from this perspective). The productive link between the theory of the sublime and "rites of passage" proves seminal for the analysis of the ghost stories for children (in Chapter 7, dealing with the "Aspects of Fantasy Adventure in Contemporary Fantasy Fiction for Children") and also children's time-travel stories (Chapter 8). As the author points out: "the goal of the quest in children's fiction is connected, in fact, with the heroes' maturity, which is the ideal fulfilment of their rites of passage." In Chapter 10 discussing "The Formless and the Unspeakable" in recent children's literature, the approach based on diverse theories of the sublime

(including those of Jean-François Lyotard or Slavoj Žižek) leads to a persuasive reading of Harry Potter novels as initiation tales responding to the uncanny and threatening forces of the world:

Harry's constant concern with the world of the unknown may be viewed as a symbolic expression of his initiation: his effort to overcome separation (the pre-liminal phase of the rites of passage) and find the way to the others (the post-liminal phase) through exploring the various aspects of estrangement (the liminal phase).

Although the book has evolved from a series of journal articles, it reads as a thematically and methodologically integrated work. This impression is mainly due to the introductory theoretical chapter, systematizing rich literature about the sublime starting with Longinus and ending with Žižek. It also deals with diverse interpretations of the sublime by art and literary historians (including the works of James Twitchell, Thomas Weiskel or David Punter). Moreover, the introduction gives a convincing rationale for the selection of works of children's and adult literature and their interconnections.

All this leads to conclusions reevaluating the ethical implications of sublime experiences and theories, first articulated in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. As the book's conclusion emphasizes, in the analysed works of children's and adults' literature "the theme of initiation into maturity through the struggle for self-improvement and a rediscovery of one's moral identity is in sharp contradiction to the 'ethical nihilism' characterizing the postmodern sublime."

Finally, a remarkable and precious feature is that the book has not resulted from an isolated research, but is an integral part of a collective effort of a number of scholars, including Peter Hunt, Anna Jackson, Dale Townshend, Karen Coats, Anna Smith, Alice Mills and others. It is evident that the outcome of the author's research represents an important moment of an international initiative aimed at a fundamental reassessment of traditional approaches to children's literature. Within this movement, the book represents an important methodological contribution.

Martin Procházka  
Charles University, Prague