

seek meaning behind the elaborate syntax or complex terminology – ‘dystopian linguistic etiolation’ is just one example. I also missed a more specific description of ‘new world orders’, a concept referred to throughout the book but never defined or taxonomised. These two small reservations are, however, trifles compared to what the book offers. For teachers, students of humanities, educators, librarians and animators of culture *New World Orders in Contemporary Children’s Literature* is a solid, thematically-organised overview of a number of important contemporary novels, short stories, picture books and films which make children’s and YA narratives so vital for positioning young readers ‘to recognize the interaction between their own understandings of the world as it is now and the vision of what it might become’ (129).

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Poetry’s Playground: The Culture of Contemporary American Children’s Poetry. Joseph T. Thomas, Jr. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007. 180 pages. £21.50 (paperback).

Children’s poetry has long been considered a stepchild of poetry – of ‘real’ poetry, that is, as adult poetry is often called. In *Poetry’s Playground* Joseph T. Thomas suggests that children’s poetry *is* poetry, and should not be treated in isolation from the adult poetic discourse. Thus, his subtly diversified study places children’s poetry in the social and poetic context of mid-century and contemporary American poetry. Always keeping this larger context in mind, the author explores in five clearly written chapters several important aspects of poetry for children. Thomas’s decision to concentrate on texts from 1959 onward proves a well-considered strategy, as it was at this time that several eminent and respected American authors started to write children’s poetry.

The issue of canonisation is of great significance in Thomas’s book. This becomes obvious already in Chapter One, which focuses on Robert Frost as the official school poet in the United States and, likewise, one of the most anthologised authors of American children’s poetry. Thomas investigates the political and aesthetic conditions leading to this fame. At the same time, he shows comprehensibly why some other poets, among them Carl Sandburg and Gwendolyn Brooks, never quite succeeded in gaining this position. Next, Thomas draws attention to the critic and poet Randall Jarrell, whose children’s book *The Bat-Poet* (1964) deals with the dialectic between ‘raw’ and ‘cooked’ poetry. These terms were used in the so-called ‘Anthology Wars’ of the 1960s, opposing an eccentrically easy-going poetry (as published in *New American Poetry* in 1960) to a more scholarly kind of poetry (as published in *New Poets of England and America* in 1965). Jarrell’s children’s book, as Thomas points out, resists these binaries and shows through poems and a surrounding narrative text that poetry must not necessarily be one or the other, but is far more complex.

In his refreshing third chapter, Joseph Thomas takes a closer look at poetry written and performed by children, thus making a detour to the playground. Thomas grants children their own poetic tradition: ‘a carnivalesque tradition that signifies on adult culture, even while producing poetry that rewards repeat listenings’ (40). According to Thomas, children’s subversive and game-oriented rhymes are an important part of poetry and should find their way into the classroom. Somewhere in between this playground poetry and official school poetry lies domesticated playground poetry, which Thomas illuminates in Chapter Four. While this kind of children’s poetry might seem, like actual playground poetry, to have a carnivalesque aura, it is, however, somewhat more moderate – a point made evident by the poetry of John Ciardi, Theodore Roethke, or Shel Silverstein. Thomas defends their work as resolutely as he defends visual poetry for children in Chapter Five, an art form which he considers helpful for young readers in order to become ‘resisting readers, oppositional readers, sceptical readers, productive readers’ (103). The issue of canonisation, though omnipresent throughout the book, climaxes in the coda where Thomas examines eight major US anthologies of children’s poetry as groundwork for a possible future canon.

Joseph Thomas’s aim to sketch a working map of the terrain of American children’s poetry is impressively achieved, as he renounces a mere listing of authors and books and instead makes palpable the many facets of American children’s poetry. His great merit is his canny defence of children’s poetry as an important part of poetry and his insistence that there is no such thing as *real poetry*, only poetry.

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Tove Jansson: Ord, bild, liv [Tove Jansson: words, pictures, life]. Boel Westin. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 2007. 597 pages. SEK 174 (hardback).

Tove Jansson is now primarily known for her Moomin troll books, but as Boel Westin’s biography shows, Jansson did much more than write the Moomin series; she was a painter, illustrator, caricaturist, and prolific writer of short stories and novels for adults as well as children. She was, as Westin repeatedly reminds her readers, ‘a universal genius with an extravagant need to express herself, from the first drawings to the last book. She was driven by the demand to use language and the will to put pictures in motion’ [my translation].¹

Jansson was born in 1914 in Finland to a Swedish-speaking family; both her parents were artists. She published her first drawings and writings when just fourteen, and rocketed to international fame in the 1950s, with her books and comic strips about the Moomin trolls. The first Moomin book, *Småtrollen och den stora översvämningen* [The small trolls and the big flood],² was influenced by the Second World War. Westin, whose detailed analyses of the meanings of Jansson’s