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*Critical Childhood Studies and the Practice of
Interdisciplinarity* ed. by Joanne Faulkner and Magdalena
Zolkos (review)

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Joanne Faulkner and Magdalena Zolkos, eds. *Critical Childhood Studies and the Practice of Interdisciplinarity*. Langham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2016. Print.

Scholars working on critical issues related to children and childhood from interdisciplinary perspectives have often done so from the edges of other more established scholarly disciplines, with the exception of those situated in several academic units dispersed worldwide that take childhood as their central focus, such as the Departments at Rutgers University-Camden, Brock University, and Linköping University. Just as the figure of the child itself is so frequently derided as minor in status (while also, paradoxically, held as a central figure around which social values are viewed and contested), so too has the area of childhood studies been relegated to the sidelines. While this overwhelming lack of a disciplinary home has traditionally marginalized childhood studies, in *Critical Childhood Studies and the Practice of Interdisciplinarity*, editors Joanne Faulkner and Magdalena Zolkos frame this position as an advantage. They contend that field's liminal status also engenders or even necessitates methodological and epistemological flexibility, which, in turn, interrogates "the nature of 'discipline' itself—as an epistemic field for delimiting what, and how, things can be known" (x).

Critical Childhood Studies is organized into three sections: The Child in Memory, The Child in Imagination, and The Institutionalized Child. Each chapter in the collection is short—most are under twenty pages—but dense, and provides a fruitful starting point for further reading and research given that each is accompanied by an extensive list of notes and a comprehensive bibliography. These structural elements prime the book for application in advanced undergraduate and introductory graduate-level classrooms. Individual chapters both consolidate key critical themes and identify core scholarly discourses from which these themes arise.

Given the book's intentional interdisciplinary scope, each chapter draws upon distinct scholarly traditions including history, philosophy, sociology, and feminist studies. Yet across many of the contributions, authors evoke the work of Enlightenment philosophers John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to anchor and historicize particular influential conceptualizations of the child's "nature" and assumptions about best educational practices. Similarly, works that have become "canonical" for many scholars of childhood studies, such as those by Philippe Ariès, Viviana A. Zelizer, Carolyn Steedman, and Margaret Higonnet receive frequent mention and serve to unite chapters about wide range of topics. This common critical lineage enables the book to be easily incorporated into childhood studies curricula that similarly draw upon these sources.

Many of the book's contributions share a critical preoccupation with understanding the various ways that the figure of the child has been instrumentalized, such as Joanne Faulkner's consideration of the relationship between conceptions of play, temporality, and sexualization discourses surrounding girls. Faulkner argues that adults project both a nostalgic past and a hopeful future onto children as a way of assuaging their own anxieties about mortality, requiring the child to "perform [a] role as guardian to temporal experience" that is threatened by the figure of the sexualized girl (97). In a similar vein, Gail Hawkes and Danielle Egan's chapter explores the cultural and historical specificity of conceptions of the child's "natural" state, from original sin to blank slate. They argue that "'the 'nature of the child' is thus a profoundly malleable concept at once reflecting (and perhaps contributing to) the prevailing anxieties in the wider social context" and that such reliance upon the child to embody those tensions precludes consideration of the child as autonomous subject (76). Still other chapters are particularly attentive to what theoretical conceptions of the child have the potential to bring to bear on children's lived experiences. For instance, Kylie Valentine considers the constructions of childhood presumed as normative within social policy for children in Australia, persuasively arguing that the turn to neuroscience informing policy design accounts for the child at the wrong scale, "produc[ing] a very narrow vision of childhood, which can see the child's brain but not their broader social environment" (140).

On the whole the book's chapters balance their coverage of critical overviews with particular case studies and interpretations, but at times the comprehensive scope of the chapters comes at the cost of losing vivid singular examples as illustrative of broader concerns. Notable exceptions include Isobelle Barrett Meyering's "Theorizing Childhood in Second-Wave Feminism: A Re-reading of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970)," which examines Greer's text to reclaim the previously occurred relevance of early feminist writing to child studies, including a reconsideration of the child's fraught position in relation to motherhood. Magdalena Zolkos' "'Ancestral Guilt': Childhood as Redemption and the Question of Nazi Descendancy in German Cultural Memory" likewise considers the centrality of the figure of the child in national memory through the 2011 documentary film *Hitler's Children* (Dir. Chanoch Zeevi).

Although each chapter in the collection models distinct, interdisciplinary methodologies, Shurlee Swain's "Locating the Child within the History of Childhood" most directly examines methodological quandaries in childhood studies. In particular, Swain overviews many factors contributing to the relative dearth of historical artifacts and documents that enable historians access to children's subjectivities, though she also leaves open the possibility that

visual, textual, and material sources nevertheless do permit some forms of access to historical childhoods (8–9). For more detailed models of interdisciplinary childhood studies research within the humanities, Anna Mae Duane’s edited collection *The Children’s Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (2013) may be a helpful resource.

Overall, *Critical Childhood Studies and the Practice of Interdisciplinarity* is a welcome contribution to childhood studies scholarship, particularly because of its explicit embrace of the field’s diverse epistemological practices and commitments. Its wide-reaching scope attests to the importance of children and childhood across multiple disciplines, and each chapter’s extensive bibliography represents a network of connected resources to facilitate and anchor ongoing critical engagement from readers. The book’s central promise to explore the notion of disciplinarity itself surfaces across individual contributions, and the book may find especially relevant application within the childhood studies classroom.

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Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris, eds. *Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children’s Literature*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014. Print.

This volume, a collection of nineteen essays (including a coda by Chinese children’s writer Mei Zihan), is part of a growing body of scholarship on children’s literature in Asia. It follows John Stephens’ collection *Subjectivity in Asian Children’s Literature and Film* (2013) by just one year, and, as such, effectively answers Stephens’ previous call for “a reciprocal exchange of literary theories and methodologies between Eastern and Western scholars of children’s literature” (7). The essays included in the collection provide a model for the kind of intellectual exchange that Stephens identifies as woefully absent from the bulk of children’s literature criticism and is also a useful starting point for exploring the rich history of Chinese children’s literature. Originally intended to create a dialogue between U.S. and Chinese children’s