



Ethics and Children's Literature (Studies in Childhood, 1700 to the Present)

Claudia Mills

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Exploring the ethical questions posed by, in, and about children's literature, this collection examines the way texts intended for children raise questions of value, depict the moral development of their characters, and call into attention shared moral presuppositions. The essays in Part I look at various past attempts at conveying moral messages to children and interrogate their underlying assumptions. What visions of childhood were conveyed by explicit attempts to cultivate specific virtues in children? What unstated cultural assumptions were expressed by growing resistance to didacticism? How should we prepare children to respond to racism in their books and in their society? Part II takes up the ethical orientations of various classic and contemporary texts, including 'prosaic ethics' in the Hundred Acre Wood, moral discernment in Narnia, ethical recognition in the distant worlds traversed by L'Engle, and virtuous transgression in recent Anglo-American children's literature and in the emerging children's literature of 1960s Taiwan. Part III's essays engage in ethical criticism of arguably problematic messages about our relationship to nonhuman animals, about war, and about prejudice. The final section considers how we respond to children's literature with ethically focused essays exploring a range of ways in which child readers and adult authorities react to children's literature. Even as children's literature has evolved in opposition to its origins in didactic Sunday school tracts and moralizing fables, authors, parents, librarians, and scholars remain sensitive to the values conveyed to children through the texts they choose to share with them.

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