

Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature.

By Susan Honeyman. (New York: 2010. Pp. vii – 230, illustrations, preface, acknowledgements, introduction, notes, bibliography, index.)

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Readers will recognize some of the content in *Consuming Agency in Fairy Tales, Childlore, and Folkliterature* as a re-visitation of older works by Susan Honeyman, re-printed here as part of a more cohesive text. The book functions collectively as a statement about “the agency of young subjects through material relations” (5), or, how food is used to subjugate children. The socio-historical analysis and emphasis on the relationship between childhood and material objects (toys and food) in the fairy tales, lore, and literature presented in this book are restricted geographically to the United States. The discussion begins historically with the rise of consumer capitalism starting in the mid-19th century and continuing throughout the 20th century. With food as the thematic thread throughout the book, many of the chapters are playfully organized around a single tasty treat: gingerbread/honeycakes, candy, molasses, and spinach. According to Honeyman, these sweet temptations have a corrosive effect on young people’s agency as presented in the texts she analyzes, often favoring — and thus encouraging — children to adopt roles as objects, not subjects. Writing from the perspective of child-rights activism, Honeyman skillfully applies interdisciplinary methods to familiar texts (*The Wizard of Oz* and *The Velveteen Rabbit*, for example) in order to make a powerful argument about the manipulative nature of consumption for children.

Each chapter furnishes its own argument, addressing a specific topic concerning the relationship between childhood and consumption. The first chapter documents the marginalization of children with the rise of consumer culture. Referencing tales like *Pinocchio*, Honeyman focuses on puppetry and its implication for childhood agency. Next, she explores the temptation of food itself, and the socializing effect it has on children, analyzing such well-known texts as “Hansel and Gretel” and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Halloween rituals and candy companies occupy the middle of the book, where the author demonstrates how childhood resistance is pacified by adults. In later chapters, the author covers gastronomic utopias to determine how food fantasies are used to control the hungry, and also highlights the historical progression of Popeye, his connection with spinach, and the equation of spinach with power. Honeyman also uses this space to address class bias in U.S. nutritional reforms. In conclusion, she contends that hunger allows for the body to be exploited. The pervasive struggle highlighted throughout this analysis of children’s tales and lore is one against hegemonic control, and Honeyman argues that, for children, this occurs through bodily hunger and temptation, encompassed in the lure of food.

In her introduction, Honeyman states that, “much of popular culture tends to be ignored in folklore scholarship,” but contends that many popular forms (such as the comic book) are aware of, and incorporate, folklore into their works (10). Her book acts as a vehicle for bridging distinct disciplinary categories, arguing that the issue of childhood agency and consumption is pertinent not just to one field of

study, but to many. Indeed, she makes a lofty attempt to tackle several key issues surrounding this topic, and the reader may find her/himself wishing the chapters were longer and referenced more texts. However, even if the argument is restricted by page numbers, the book should incite discussion across academic disciplines, bringing together folklorists and child-rights activists, cultural studies and children's literature scholars. For this reason, the book is invaluable to anyone interested in childhood studies, no matter what their academic or professional angle.

Overall, the book serves as an extensive study of childhood agency through food lore. While folklorists and cultural studies scholars may recognize references to Jay Mechling and Clifford Geertz, and to Roland Barthes and Antonio Gramsci, respectively, the book is also pertinent to child-rights activists. Honeyman, an Associate Professor of English and a cultural studies scholar, does not claim to be a strict folklorist, but she does argue for the importance of folklore to a variety of disciplines, including popular culture and cultural studies more generally. Folklorists hoping for an ethnographic approach to childhood studies should consult another resource; those more inclined toward textual analysis will enjoy Honeyman's decadent assortment of fairy tales, lore, and literature references. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, academics and professionals in the fields of folklore, childhood studies, children's literature, fairy tale studies, and cultural studies should find significant the arguments made in this book, relevant to their specific discipline. *Consuming Agency* is particularly useful to the student seeking to make connections across these fields.

Children's Folklore: A Handbook. By Elizabeth Tucker. (Westport, CT: 2008. Pp. 1-164, preface, introduction, glossary, bibliography, web resources, index.)

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Elizabeth Tucker's *Children's Folklore: A Handbook* (2009) is an introductory guide to the "traditional knowledge shared by a group of two or more children, usually without the involvement of adults" (p. 1). The Handbook is a comprehensive survey that considers both historical approaches and recent developments in the study of children's folklore. According to Tucker, its purpose is to "provide an overview of children's folklore since the late 1800s" within the major genres (p.vii). She defines and provides examples of riddles, jokes, rhymes, taunts, songs, cheers, games, pranks, narratives, rituals and material culture. The vast majority of the folktales incorporated in the survey are from English-speaking countries, although occasional Indo-European lore and personal narratives are included as well. Tucker generally provides the context for each sample — the time and place it was recorded, the age of the children involved, and the source where it appears — and a few brief analytical statements. Tucker notes that her Handbook emphasizes "nature lore and imaginative, dangerous, and sexually oriented games" more than previous surveys have (p. 2). She regularly interprets the case studies for their sexual content or for their implications about gender, race and power relations, as well as for other matters of cultural significance.