

# Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910-1949 by Kimberley Reynolds.

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## ***Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910–1949* by Kimberley Reynolds (review)**

Philip Nel

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

*Reviewed by*

*Philip Nel (bio)*

Kimberley Reynolds's rich, layered, deeply textured history of radical children's literature in Britain should be required reading for scholars, teachers, and writers of books for the young. *Left Out* shows scholars how to build literary history, weaving in case studies and biographical information effectively, allowing particular works and figures to represent broader historical trends. Like its American predecessor (and now companion) Julia Mickenberg's *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (2006), Reynolds's book is an act of recovery, correcting omissions from standard histories of children's literature by introducing us to a body of work that, in her words, "was bold, politically radical, actively promoted—and has been entirely forgotten" (9). *Left Out* highlights the role of progressive schools in shaping the younger generation and the adults they later became. As she notes, though they were relatively small in number, graduates of progressive schools "wielded a disproportionately high level of influence" as "publishers, policy makers, professionals, and public thinkers" (55). In *Left Out*, contemporary creators of children's literature can find traditions worth building on now, as they and we—in the UK, the US, and around the world—help the next generation confront a resurgent, nativist nationalism. As the twentieth-century left has shown us, the utopian dreams of radical children's books can indicate ways of transforming the present and working toward a more egalitarian future.

Indeed, a leitmotif of Reynolds's book is how ideas that once seemed outlandish later became widely accepted. Citing health-minded progressive schools' emphasis on organic gardens and physical activity, she notes that "much of what at the beginning of the century had been dismissed as eccentric came to be accepted as good practice and common sense during the interwar years" (158). In the 1930s, children's books "presented the need for a nationwide building programme" (177) to address Britain's housing crisis; in 1946, the British government passed

legislation to begin building council housing (214). Reynolds does not allege that all such dreams were realized (they have not been), nor does she claim a verifiable causal connection between radical children's books and later progressive change (temporal order is not causality). But she does suggest that **[End Page 204]** radical children's literature can at least lay the imaginative groundwork for such changes.

As Reynolds notes, the works that we read in childhood stay with us and thus may continue to influence us many years later: "radical children's literature may have been forgotten at a cultural level, but books read in childhood often linger in the memory" (39). The process of reading these books and theorizing their potential effects later on is what she calls "future memory": "as activists and members of the avant-garde, creators of radical children's literature were consciously representing the present while keeping one eye on the future. Reading these works, therefore, means encountering what might be called 'future memory,' for it connects us with what people hoped was being called into being as well as with what they knew first hand" (38). "Future memory" is a useful concept for theorizing historical effects whose documentation is elusive: naming the effect helps us to see possible evidence. Where she can, Reynolds does substantiate connections between childhood reading and future political activity, citing memories of children who read these works and suggesting how these books shaped their beliefs. But since documents written by adults (as many of these are) may distort or forget childhood experience, she also looks at print runs, numbers of editions, and contemporary reviews. Such endeavors are necessarily speculative, but the evidence that she amasses is compelling, and her understanding of how children read—and why these books stay with us—is insightful. As she writes during an analysis of Enid Bagnold's *Alice and Thomas and Jane* (1930), "For children, everything they do is real at the time they do it, and in the stories extended collective fantasies and everyday..."

## Book Reviews

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By Kimberley Reynolds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Reviewed by Philip Nel

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„Niewolnictwo z ułamkiem-kontrowersje medialne wokół literatury dziecięcej o tematyce niewolnictwa a retoryka przemysłu wydawniczego, socialization, as is commonly believed

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