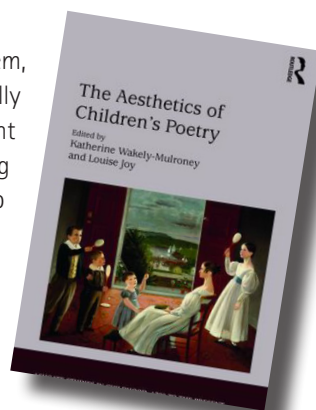


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*The Aesthetics of Children's Poetry. A Study of  
Children's Verse in English.* London/New York,  
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Children's poetry occupies a peculiar position in literary system, mainly because of two reasons. On one hand, it has been traditionally viewed as a stagnant part of children's literature, with "strong, resilient lines of continuity that run across the Centuries", according to Morag Styles. And, in the other hand, there is a relative scarcity of scholarship in the field, compared to the number of studies written about fairy tales or, more recently, picture books. The later can be definitely a consequence of the former. Maybe scholars argue that it is not worthy to explore such a conservative literary genre. What is the point – they would probably say– of dealing with a part of children's literature that seems to be frozen in a never-ending Arcadia of animals, rhymes, nonsense and humour?



Nevertheless, children's poetry is far to be an unproblematic literary genre. Rather the contrary: it is one of the most challenging parts of children's literature even nowadays. Many scholars, as Peter Hunt provocatively pointed out in "Confronting the Snark: The Nont-Theory fo Children's Poetry", have doubted about its very existence, since "poetry" and "children" seem to be two words that do not match. The first one is connected to complexity and high-brow culture, while the second one is linked to simplicity and low-brow culture. So, there is a question that always arises when speaking of children's poetry: does children's poetry really exist? And, if this is so, is there a real aesthetics of children's poetry?

Answering these two questions (and especially the second one) seems to be the main goal of *The Aesthetics of Children's Poetry. A Study of Children's Verse in English*. In fact, the aim of this collective volume of essays on children's poetry, as it is clearly stated in the introduction by the editors, is on the whole "to understand what it is that we do when we encounter this peculiar kind of writing – children's poetry – which in its very simplicity and familiarity poses such complex critical questions." Therefore, despite the absolutely and rich variety of proposals included in this volume, its thesis is very clear: there is actually an aesthetics of children's poetry, and that means that children's poetry poses its own characteristics and literary devices. And, consequently, it must not be reduced to have a mere preparatory role for the appreciation of adult poetry:-

Nevertheless, in order to demonstrate that there really is an aesthetics of children's poetry, the essays of this book have to prove two main issues. First, that children's poetry has had a tradition of its own so far. And second, that children's poetry needs new critical approaches in order to be fully understood and valued as a literary genre. *The Aesthetics of Children's Poetry* certainly does so through two different kind of studies: the ones focusing on the past and the ones focusing on the present.

The essays by Corinna Russell on William Blake, Katherine Wakely-Mulroney on Lewis Carroll, Kristie Blair on Victorian children's poetry and, especially, the four included in the third part regarding anthologies, focus on the past. Due to that, you can conclude that from 18<sup>th</sup> century, children's poetry has always suffered from a tension between humour and didacticism. Although a didactic mode is always a dangerous presence regarding children's literature (as it is analysed in a whole section of the "Introduction"), in children's poetry the battle was won by the comic mode, as it is clearly stated by Louise Joy and others in the essays focusing on the present. This is one of the main differences between adult's and children's poetry nowadays, insofar as the comic mode is absent in verses written for grown-up readers.

Considering that, new and more specific approaches to children's poetry are needed today in order to understand children's poetry better. And this is precisely what Louise Joy, Debbie Pullinger, Karen Coats and James Williams offer in their essays, by linking children's poetry to body, playing, music and cognitive poetics. This last approach, proposed by Karen Coats, can be particularly suggestive since it deals with the very responses of children when reading poetry and it can thus open the door to more empirical methodologies.

A question arises regarding this conclusion about the prevalence of the comic mode that it is found in the book. After having read the book, it is obvious that this is a current tendency nowadays in children's poetry. But, at the same time, the lack of a real lyrical mode in children's poetry could have deserved a reflection in this book, insofar as nowadays an increasing presence of literary poetry for children can be actually identified in several countries such as Italy, France and Spain. Can this also be applied to Great Britain?

Nevertheless, despite being only focused on English tradition, *The Aesthetics of Children's Poetry. A Study of Children's Verse in English* constitutes a worthy approach to children's poetry proposing new approaches to be really appreciated by scholars all over the world.