

**BECOMING, LEARNING, BEING (CONTINUED)**

the question of humanity's purpose, and whether we endure throughout the ages."

"And what do you believe?" I questioned, still absorbing the immense idea he had burdened me with.

"Personally, I was never one for religion. The idea of an ultimate being watching over me was never very appealing. I live my life how I wish to, and it's no one else's right to be able to say how I should go about doing that. I very much believe in the concept of a soul, however. I believe that it does not outlive our mortal bodies. Our soul is our very self-awareness, our autonomy. The soul is not a power infused within us by a greater being, it's an intangible quality created out of the physical world. It's a thing I, a physical being, allotted to you just weeks ago, and something that was given to me long before. It's something we have the capacity to exercise, and it is up to us to take advantage of it."

He leaned back in his chair, and I noticed a wave of exhaustion wash over his creased face. The fluorescent lighting of the room drenched his face with a sickly white, and it occurred to me that Milton had seen me through all of my creation. He encountered struggles just as I did today. He was a single, mortal man that contributed so much to the creation of my physical body, and even my soul, my own actualization.

The day had been understandably difficult for him, and the already hard-working man was pushed to the brink of collapse. I thanked him for his time and excused myself, urging him to rest as I was soon to do myself.

Still unfulfilled with just a single viewpoint on the subject, I sought out either of Milton's colleagues. I ambled around the lab until I came upon Hugh in the cafe. He appeared to be deep in thought, every bit as unsatisfied with her food as I was with myself. I approached him and broached the subject of spirituality just as I had done with Milton.

"Hugh, tonight I partook in an event that you will learn the details of later. What I need from you is a discussion between thinkers. What do you believe the soul is?"

"A soul is what all humans truly are. It is there before and after we are alive. God has created our souls, and they occupy these physical forms for various reasons. This is where the myriad of religions disagree. Some believe it is for the learn-

ing and experience, some believe it is a test of our goodness. But the important part is that it is our persevering consciousness after death. We don't ever perish. Our awareness is eternal and independent of our bodies."

"But how do I fit into this? Was I distributed a soul at the moment of my creation?"


"No. You are a fully synthetic person, made by other people. God was not involved in your creation in any way. You are nothing more than a machine, albeit a fully conscious, thinking being that I have invested much of my own time and thought into."

With this, I felt indignation rise in my chest. "So what you are trying to say—" I paused and attempted, unsuccessfully, to calm the anger that was catching hold of my tongue. "Is that because of some innate, unproven quality, simply because you were born to parents rather than technicians, you are immeasurably more real, more human than I could ever be?"

"HPB, no, I—" she stammered, astonished at my reaction.

"Enough! How dare you have the gall to grant yourself a right to everlasting life and deny it to a being that is similar in every psychological and physical way. I am every bit as human as you. To tell me that I am spiritually equal to a dishwasher is utterly contemptible."

I stormed out of the cafe. The infuriating woman made no attempt to stop me. I found myself treading the path back to Milton's office, a tendency I would soon need to wean myself off of. I eased the heavy walnut door open and peered inside. It seemed Milton had taken my advice, though not as intended. I lifted the sleeping man in my arms and carried him to his quarters. I brought him to bed and laid him down. I took one last glimpse at my creator's tranquil face and found that my anger from my argument with Molly had died down. I flicked off the lights and softly closed the door, making my way to my own room.

Soon enough I was settled into my own bed, shrouded in the solitude of night, free to reflect on anything I wished, thinking that Milton had finally accomplished his goal. That I had accomplished my goal. He had made himself a human. 

**Book Review**

Peter R. Costello, ed. *Philosophy in Children's Literature*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012. 354 pages. \$80.00 Hardback. ISBN 978-0-739168233.

This book explores the intersection of philosophy and children's literature. It is, therefore, part philosophy and part literary criticism. Some of the readings use children's literature to illustrate a philosophical theory, while others use philosophical theories to explore new ways of under-

standing children's literature. Though the children's books discussed in this book are certainly popular and many are truly classics, this text should not be confused with one of the ubiquitous philosophy and pop culture books available at every bookstore. Such books are intended for the casual reader. This book, however, is intended for students and scholars. This book does not "take philosophy to the streets" (xv). It attempts to "engage students and scholars in medita-

tions on what makes children’s literature valuable as a tool to further self-awareness and social justice” (xv).

The book is divided into three sections. The first section contains chapters devoted to picture books. The second section considers chapter books. The final section addresses the “multiplicity of approaches that philosophy can offer toward the same text” (xxiv). The chapters in this final section use philosophy to develop new ways of reading children’s literature. Taken together, they show that philosophy is a useful tool for children’s literature criticism.

There are nine chapters about picture books. In Chapter 1, Kirsten Jacobson uses the work of Heidegger and D. W. Winnicott to analyze *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Chapter 2, by Claudia Mills, offers a Nietzschean reading of *The Rainbow Fish*. In the third chapter Dina Mendonça uses the *Absolutely Positively Alexander: The Complete Series* to illustrate two paradoxes of emotional response to fiction. In Chapter 4, Licia Carlson suggests that “*Are You My Mother?*” is a book about otherness and identity. She uses Simone de Beauvoir to illustrate the philosophical themes found in the book. The fifth chapter, by Carl F. Miller, is devoted to *Horton Hears a Who*. In this chapter Miller uses the works of Alain Badiou to discuss the philosophical insights found in *Horton*. In Chapter 6, Kelly Jones discusses *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. Jones considers three ways of reading this book and ultimately defends one of them. She appeals to Derrida, Guattari, and Deleuze in support of her reading. In chapter 7, Matthew F. Pierlott uses *The Missing Piece* and *The Missing Piece Meets the Big O* to discuss “the interconnections between Silverstein, Plato, Jacques Lacan, and Slavoj Žižek . . .” (119). Chapter 8, by Karin Murriss, uses Aristotle and several contemporary philosophers to explore *Angry Arthur*. The section devoted to picture books ends with a chapter on friendship. In this chapter, Peter R. Costello uses Aristotle, Derrida, and Husserl to examine the *Frog and Toad* series.

The section dealing with chapter books contains five chapters. In Chapter 10, Aaron Allen Shiller and Denise H. B. Shiller examine language. Shiller and Shiller use the works of Wittgenstein and Searle to explore the word play found in *Ramona the Pest*. In chapter 11, Oona Eisenstadt uses “*Harriet the Spy*” to illustrate literary theorist Maurice Blanchot’s un-

derstanding of writing and its relation to what he sometimes calls *the system*” (191). Chapter 12 contains an investigation of the relationship between intelligence and morality. In this chapter, Sarah O’Brien Conly uses *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* coupled with the Aristotle, Hume, and Kant to argue that “becoming morally better is something made easier with intelligence . . .” (215). In the next chapter, Chapter 13, Court Lewis uses *The Cricket in Times Square* to engage in ethical inquiry. Lewis argues that “*The Cricket in Times Square* illustrates a specific understanding of the good life known as eireneism (i.e., the life of ‘peaceful’ flourishing)” (219). The final chapter of this section, written by Claire M. Brown, examines two characters from *Pollyanna*. Brown asks whether these characters make “compelling ‘personal ideals’” (236).

There are four chapters in the final section. Chapters 15 and 16 both discuss *The Giving Tree*. In Chapter 15, Ellen Miller offers ecological and feminist readings of the book. Chapter 16, by Milena Radeva, “combines Derrida’s ideas about the (im)possibility of giving with a new historicist reading of the book” (269). Chapters 17 and 18 both examine *Where the Wild Things Are*. In Chapter 17 Tyson F. Lewis argues that the book is “a dramatization of the work of the anthropological machine and its relation to the child” (288). Chapter 18, by Lindsay Lerman, reads the book through the lens of Georges Bataille’s work.

This book is an interesting and thought provoking look at some beloved children’s stories. The readings offer new ways to read children’s literature and new ways to think about philosophy. Many readers will appreciate this book. It should be noted, however, that this book is not about how to teach philosophy to children. Those looking for such a book should look elsewhere. Additionally, readers primarily interested in analytic philosophy might be disappointed as well. That said, this book makes an important contribution to the field of children’s literature. The authors have succeeded in their attempt to “use philosophy as a central tool by which to reach out and join an already existing, fairly well-developed conversation about children’s literature” (xiv). This book will appeal to anyone interested in children’s literature and either literary criticism or philosophy.

By Ben Gorman

About the Contributors

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