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The Second Reading and Beyond: Exploring Re-Readability in Children's Novels

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Abstract

Writers for young people often know firsthand that when children love a novel, they may read it over and over, sometimes across many years. This reality, however, rarely influences conversations on craft. Aiming to write books children will love means aiming to write books that will remain rewarding or even deepen with every reread – books that feel practically inexhaustible. What craft features facilitate this? Can we reverse engineer this particular literary magic? This article investigates these questions via an analysis of Frances Hardinge's novel *Cuckoo Song* (2014). Drawing on ideas about rereading proposed by scholars and authors such as Alison Waller, Colette Drouillard, Joan Aiken, K.M. Weiland, and Donald Fry, this paper looks at how Hardinge constructs a beautifully complex web of a novel that cannot be fully apprehended in a single reading. Based on this analysis, the article then distills some techniques for building this sense of inexhaustibility into children's fiction, such as the deliberate inclusion of material that will only be noticed, gain meaning, or become emotionally impactful on a second or even later reading; the artful weaving of connections across the text; the creation of complex secondary characters; and the central placement of human paradox or unresolvable mystery.

Keywords: *creative writing for young people, craft of fiction, reading, Frances Hardinge*

WHEN ECOLOGISTS UNDERTAKE a reforestation project, they often plant a calculated diversity of seeds or seedlings at the same time, initiating a vast web of interconnected processes that will unfold and pay off over different timescales. Fast-growing pioneer plants will set to work improving the soil and building an understory. These in turn foster shady conditions that favor the development of slower-growing, longer-lived trees that, many years later, will create the canopy.^{1,2,3}

The best children's books work in a similar way. Sometimes, amid our fast-paced culture of consumption, it can be easy to forget that books for young people are not single-use items. Alison Waller goes so far as to think of them in terms of a "lifelong reading act" – a holistic experience unfolding over the entire lifespan due to the way these early books entangle with children's imaginations, memories, and emotions and then re-emerge through memory-triggering events and rereading.⁴ Returning to these touchstones offers both the comfort of the familiar and the opportunity for new discoveries and growth.^{5,6,7} This needn't be a simplistic binary process, where a literal meaning hits kids on the first reading and some grand, encoded allegorical meaning materializes when they're adults. In fact, this kind of sharply two-tiered story can cause disappointment or indignation, as some readers have recounted upon discovering the insistent Christian messages baked into the *Narnia* books they'd treasured as children.⁸ There may be more intricate and effective ways for children's novels to remain rewarding when read repeatedly – and some of these techniques are what this article will explore.

Of course, any individual book can become a beloved reread; every young reader will connect personally to different stories and may reread those stories to re-experience the warmth, joy, safety, or identification they personally found within their pages, regardless of any inherent craft features of these texts. Still, one quality that might help us describe books that are especially likely to shine across multiple rereads is *inexhaustibility*. Religious scholars, for example, have never stopped rereading sacred texts and producing new interpretations, insights, questions, and critiques. Similarly, Alan Jacobs suggests that one motivation to reread might be "some curious mix of gratification and a feeling of incompleteness" – an intuitive sense that

¹ Alice di Sacco, Kate A. Hardwick, et al., "Ten Golden Rules for Reforestation to Optimize Carbon Sequestration, Biodiversity Recovery and Livelihood Benefits," *Global Change Biology* 27, no. 7 (April 2021): 1328–1348, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15498>.

² Lorie Francheteau, "Forest Succession: Reforestation and Natural Regeneration Are Complementary," MORFO, June 30, 2023, <https://www.morfo.rest/article/forest-succession-reforestation-natural-regeneration-complementary>.

³ Sanne van der Meer, "The Art of Reforestation: Insights for Successful Ecosystem Restoration," IUCN National Committee of the Netherlands, May 13, 2025, <https://www.iucn.nl/en/story/the-art-of-reforestation-insights-for-successful-ecosystem-restoration/>.

⁴ Alison Waller, *Rereading Childhood Books: A Poetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *On Rereading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁷ Penguin, "On the Particular Pleasures of Re-Reading," July 25, 2021, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/discover/articles/re-reading-books-again-returning-literacy>.

⁸ Waller, *Rereading Childhood Books*, Chapter 4 ("Rereading Attitudes"), Section "As Scholars," Kobo.

there's still somehow more to reap from within an already satisfying book.⁹ He distinguishes this from "the fan's utter enchantment,"¹⁰ in which rereading stems from "a desire to dwell for a time in a self-contained fictional universe"¹¹ – but perhaps these motivations are more connected than he thinks.

According to a survey reported in 2007, the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling were the most reread books in the UK.¹² Colette Drouillard, investigating why young fans reread the *Harry Potter* books so many times, finds several key explanations; one is readers' love of finding the countless connections and hidden clues that proliferate across the seven-book series¹³ due to its "dense detail and complex intricacy."¹⁴ There are always more layers to discover, more secrets to excavate. These fans' "utter enchantment" and desire to return again and again to a world they love are bound up with the richness and seeming inexhaustibility of that world.

Patricia Meyer Spacks would likely agree. In *On Rereading*, she describes the way Jane Austen's novels continually offer fresh subtleties and nuances of characterization and theme despite Spacks having read them dozens of times.¹⁵ (Coincidentally, or not, *Pride and Prejudice* ranks third in that same survey of the UK's most reread books.¹⁶) Spacks writes, "we are likely to develop a sense, rereading beloved books, of infinite possibilities, countless tiny discoveries to be made. The novel will, alas, come to an end, but its riches remain endless, waiting for us to return."¹⁷

Interestingly, however, despite the abundance of scholarship on the practice of rereading, surprisingly little explores its application to children's novelists.¹⁸ I found myself wondering: what might it look like on a craft level to try and reverse engineer some of this inexhaustibility when building a novel?

Joan Aiken has engaged at least briefly with this question. In *The Way to Write for Children* (1982), she highlights the unique way children read and the implications for writers:

Children read their books over and over, very slowly or very fast; they gulp books or chew them, they believe passionately in the characters, and

⁹ Alan Jacobs, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹² Richard Lea, "UK a Nation of Rereaders," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/nov/09/news.richardlea>.

¹³ Colette L. Drouillard, "Growing Up With Harry Potter: What Motivated Youth to Read?" (PhD thesis, Florida State University, 2009), http://purl.flvc.org/fsu/fd/FSU_migr_etd-0659, 69-71.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁵ Spacks, *On Rereading*.

¹⁶ Lea, "UK a Nation of Rereaders."

¹⁷ Spacks, *On Rereading*, 69.

¹⁸ Re-readability is, however, brought up somewhat more frequently when discussing the craft of picturebooks (with good reason, as anyone who has seen a toddler demand the same book dozens of times can attest). See, for example, this article by Denise Vega: <https://lighthousewriters.org/blog/what-makes-good-picture-book>.

participate. In order to stand up to all this wear and tear, a book need almost be tested in a wind-tunnel before being handed to them. Furthermore, if it is going to be read and re-read over a span of perhaps ten years, a book needs to have something new to offer at each re-reading. A lot of children will miss humour in a story at first reading while they are concentrating on the plot. Richness of language, symbolism, character – all these may be noticed for the first time and appreciated only at later readings. Conversely, anything poor or meretricious or slipshod may be missed while attention is held by the excitement of the story, but will stand out hideously on a later reading.¹⁹

This description of children’s reading habits may appear dated now that kids seem to be reading for pleasure less and less frequently,^{20,21,22} but Aiken has captured something arguably timeless about the way children relate to stories. Children still do “believe passionately in the characters, and participate” in the sense that they build relationships with characters and books they love that may be practically as potent and consequential as real-life relationships.^{23,24} Drouillard reports that another crucial reason *Harry Potter* fans return again and again to the series is the close relationships they’ve built with the characters,²⁵ and the language of books as friends or loved ones is brought up frequently by both Spacks and Waller as well. It is perhaps for this reason that Joan Aiken insists that young readers should be able to retrieve something new from every reading of a given book. Relationships, after all, are alive; they can and must evolve over time, ideally deepening and becoming ever more rewarding.

Aiken’s counsel that “richness of language, symbolism, character,” as well as humor, can contribute to what we might think of as a book’s “sustainability” (its ability to function as a “renewable resource” of enjoyment and wisdom over the long term) is largely repeated by K.M. Weiland, novelist and author of numerous writing guides, in an article on what she calls “the re-readability factor.”²⁶ But Weiland adds a few more

¹⁹ Joan Aiken, *The Way to Write for Children* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 92–93.

²⁰ Christina Clark, Irene Picton, and Aimee Cole. *Children’s and Young People’s Reading in 2025* (London: National Literacy Trust, 2025), 1–3, 6, 13, 32.

²¹ Ella Creamer, “Report Finds ‘Shocking and Dispiriting’ Fall in Children Reading for Pleasure,” *The Guardian*, November 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/nov/05/report-fall-in-children-reading-for-pleasure-national-literacy-trust>.

²² Greg Toppo, “Why Are So Few Kids Reading for Pleasure?” *The 74*, September 3, 2025. <https://www.the74million.org/article/why-are-so-few-kids-reading-for-pleasure/>.

²³ Bradley J. Bond, et al., “Parasocial Relationships in Children and Teens,” in *Handbook of Children and Screens: Digital Media, Development, and Well-Being from Birth Through Adolescence* (Cham: Springer, 2025), 239–244.

²⁴ A particularly fascinating and insightful discussion of this phenomenon, focused on 10–19-year-olds, is Anne Lind’s “The Role of Fictional Narratives in Adolescent Identity Formation: A Theoretical Exploration” (2015).

²⁵ Drouillard, “Growing Up With Harry Potter,” 67–69, 94.

²⁶ K.M. Weiland, “The Re-Readability Factor: Does Your Book Have it (5 Ways to Make it Happen),” *Helping Writers Become Authors*, January 11, 2016, <https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/re-readability-factor-book-5-reasons/>.

concrete recommendations. She argues that the element of surprise – not knowing how the story will end – is not as central to our enjoyment of stories as we often assume; anticipating a known outcome can provide its own pleasure, and a reread can be just as powerful an experience as a first read.²⁷ Indeed, Weiland encourages writers to have in mind a “second story” during the writing process: deliberately building into the manuscript a distinctive experience aimed at re-readers. While extra-sharp first-time readers may spot clever hints or bits of foreshadowing, re-readers will pick up on the “obvious clues they missed the first time around,” and should also “be able to immerse themselves more and more deeply in the rich subtext of your story.”²⁸

It was with Aiken’s and Weiland’s writerly recommendations in mind that I decided to reread one exceptional children’s novel: *Cuckoo Song* by Frances Hardinge (2014). This dark historical fantasy, named one of the *Sunday Times*’ 100 Modern Children’s Classics,²⁹ hovers between the typical Middle-Grade and Young-Adult zones (Hardinge’s books tend to defy easy categorization and have found delighted readers of all ages³⁰). Its plot – difficult to describe without spoilers, though this article will attempt to spoil as little as possible – involves a girl named Triss³¹ in 1920s England who wakes up after a terrible event she cannot remember and discovers gradually that she is, in a deep sense, not herself.

With its web of mysteries and twists, *Cuckoo Song* perfectly illustrates the technique of planting “clues” that only re-readers will notice, doing so with the kind of rigorous insistence on “fair play” that we might associate with Golden-Age detective fiction.³² The novel is so packed with such clues that the second reading in particular feels like a strikingly new experience.³³ Take the first three sentences: “Her head hurt. There was a sound grating against her mind, a music-less rasp like the rustling of paper.

²⁷ Another reason why knowing the outcome might not diminish enjoyment is that “knowledge of what is to come changes speculation about outcomes to speculation about meanings—a deeper form of excitement” (Spacks, *On Rereading*, 137).

²⁸ Weiland, “The Re-Readability Factor.”

²⁹ Frances Hardinge, “The Observatory: Frances’ Biography,” 2024, http://www.franceshardinge.com/observatory/about_frances.html.

³⁰ Tom Pollock, “Endings Are Never Completely Endings: An Interview with Frances Hardinge,” *Strange Horizons*, June 23, 2014, <http://strangehorizons.com/wordpress/non-fiction/articles/endings-are-never-completely-endings-an-interview-with-frances-hardinge/>.

³¹ The protagonist’s identity is so complex that she is actually referred to by several different names throughout the book, but for simplicity’s sake, and to avoid needless spoilers, “Triss” will be used throughout this article.

³² In S.S. Van Dine’s original formulation from 1928, an author of detective fiction must “play fair,” meaning above all that the clues a detective uses to solve a mystery must all be available to the reader, if the reader is only clever enough to spot and correctly interpret them. Van Dine’s “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” can be found here:

<https://www.speedcitysistersincrime.org/ss-van-dine---twenty-rules-for-writing-detective-stories.html>.

³³ This contrasts with the thinking of one insightful Goodreads reviewer, who has argued here (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/257853116>) that a mystery novel may have more “re-read potential” if it focuses more on people and relationships than on the mystery itself. In *Cuckoo Song* we see that a careful focus on the plotting of the mystery itself *can* produce its own rewards on a second reading. However, the reviewer is right about the importance of characterization and relationships for long-term re-readability, and this is a topic that will be returned to later in the article.

Somebody had taken a laugh, crumpled it into a great, crackly ball and stuffed her skull with it.”³⁴ To the first-time reader, this appears only as a vivid metaphor for a headache and/or the fading remnants of an eerie dream. On the second reading, one is thunderstruck by these lines, because (as Triss later finds out) there actually is something raspy and crackly in her head.

Hardinge seeds subtler clues, too, as though aiming for them to be spotted only on later readings. These function less as plot hints than as allusions that tie together the novel’s vast web. For example, there’s an odd pattern in the first two pages, when a hoarse and befuddled Triss “croak[s]” twice and is referred to gently by her mother as a “froglet.”³⁵ At least for me, it took multiple rereadings for these words to chime in a haunting echo with the much later moment where a frog, buried alive, becomes an explicit symbol both for the way Triss is treated by her overprotective parents and for the horrifying fate the novel’s antagonist is plotting for her. Noticing such connections provides greater understanding, the insider’s thrill of discovery, and an aesthetic pleasure in the artful coherence of language, image, character, and plot.

Yet if *Cuckoo Song*’s only reward to re-readers was a wealth of clues, it might still wear out after a few readings. Luckily, this isn’t the case. In an unusual study of a child named Helen’s reading habits, Donald Fry theorizes that it is a seeming contradiction or “dilemma” baked into the children’s book *The Shrinking of Treehorn* by Florence Parry Heide that brings Helen back again and again in wonder or delight or fascination to specific moments within the story.³⁶ (The dilemma involves the strange way a parent can sometimes worry about, and sometimes ignore or dismiss, a child who is ill or experiencing something difficult.) He also suggests that Helen rereads because the unchanging story can teach her something about her own evolving self.³⁷ These two explanations may be linked. Precisely because the dilemma is so mysteriously unresolved and amenable to being seen from different angles – and so connected to an experience in Helen’s own life that she’s likely been trying to come to terms with³⁸ – it acts as the sounding board against which she can consciously or unconsciously chart her own growth.

Hardinge’s novel achieves something similar. The most shocking and unforgettable moment occurs when Triss’s loving parents Mr. and Mrs. Crescent, together with the kindly tailor Mr. Grace and friendly maid Dot, trick Triss into a cottage and attempt to force her into the crackling kitchen fire. Triss has been acting exceedingly strange and out of character for days, and at this point the adults all believe she isn’t truly the Crescent daughter after all; and in an important sense, she really isn’t. Yet the betrayal Triss and the reader feel in that moment is still staggering. On the second reading, the lead-up to this moment seems full of plot clues, such as

³⁴ Frances Hardinge, *Cuckoo Song* (London: Macmillan Children’s Books, 2014), 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

³⁶ Donald Fry, *Children Talk About Books: Seeing Themselves as Readers* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

Dot's blatant line (a daring inclusion by Hardinge), ostensibly referring to cooking: "What's the point of having a great hearth like this if you don't use it?"³⁹ Perhaps only on a still later reading will a child consciously notice the subtler emotional or atmospheric foreshadowing, like Dot casually skinning a rabbit. In fact, when Dot peels off the fur and the meat is described as looking "absolutely nothing like a rabbit," there's an uncanny resonance with what the adults are about to do to the girl they think is only pretending to be Triss: force off her "skin" to reveal something that looks nothing like her underneath.⁴⁰

But crucially, beyond these many types of clues, the scene retains its gut-wrenching effect when reread because its emotional power stems from something more profound than the shock of the twist itself. What explodes to life in that moment is the paradoxical parental expression of love and fear and nostalgia and rejection that any newly rebellious, angry, moody, or simply *changing* adolescent might recognize: *Who are you and what have you done with Triss?* This refusal of the new Triss, this need to pin Triss forever to the sweet little girl she once was, is the flashing lighthouse at the center of all the novel's many thematic rays. It connects remote (yet always plot-relevant) imagery like the frog who gets buried alive, Triss's dead brother Sebastian's room that is turned into a shrine or museum, a precious watch that has been stopped for years, a never-ending winter, and more: everything frozen, fossilized, forbidden to grow or change or move on, and all set up in part as counterweights to the protagonist, who is (like any adolescent, ultimately) practically the incarnation of change itself.

Here it is worth slowing down to dig even deeper into the remarkable ways the novel is built around this fundamental battle of change versus the forces that refuse it. This dynamic has in fact been alive (if less explosively) in Triss's relationship with her parents for years. We see the first hints of this early on, when Triss realizes with "a tiny worm of shame and wonder" that she's too old to "carry a doll around" and thinks, "*It's as if I'm still six years old. It's as if I'm still the age I was when Sebastian died.*"⁴¹ But the full extent of it only comes to light in a much later scene that makes clever allusion to *Peter Pan*⁴² and suggests that Triss has been taught to believe she can only be loved if she "never grows up."⁴³ Elsewhere, in yet another link in the criss-crossing web of the story, the novel highlights the long-term danger of arrested development, of a person remaining a child on the inside forever, by repeatedly describing the adult arch-antagonist as someone prone to terrifyingly childish tantrums;⁴⁴ he represents what Triss (without the dramatic changes instigated by events in the novel) would risk becoming.

³⁹ Hardinge, *Cuckoo Song*, 163.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–163.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 319.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 107, 391–392.

What's more, the novel is so well constructed that its historical setting helps dramatize the same central tension (and even mirrors the plot), offering yet another layer of buried treasure for the re-reader to uncover and marvel at. In the rollicking Jazz Age, England – just like Triss herself at the novel's opening – is waking up after a cataclysmic event that has altered everything. The devastation of World War I has knocked the country's assumptions and traditions off balance; some people throw themselves into the new, while others cling firmly to the old.⁴⁵ Triss's quest to discover or build her new identity in the aftermath is England's quest as well.

The scene in the kitchen, then, is a crucial focal point, the node that gives the novel's greatest thematic interests their rawest, most dramatic and heart-rending plot consequences. And even though the novel eventually comes down firmly on the side of embracing change and the possibility of transformation, the awful, resonant mystery still burns bright within that scene: a parent, so full of love for the child that was, cannot accept the child that is, and could end up destroying her altogether. How could a parent do such a thing?

There is no real answer to this question. The closest the story comes to resolving it only deepens the mystery: as Triss realizes near the end of the scene, her parents' ally Mr. Grace "was a good man, and [...] good men sometimes did terrible things."⁴⁶ This is precisely the kind of human "dilemma" or contradiction that can feed inexhaustible reflection and that makes for a rewardingly re-readable book.

All in all, *Cuckoo Song* exemplifies design for the long term. Much like the forest-restoration process, the novel calibrates the timed release of different parts of its enormously rich content across multiple encounters or even stages of maturity. Reading becomes a process of peeling back one layer of text at a time, while simultaneously returning again and again to some core tangle so vivid, profound, and unresolvable as to be timeless. As Hardinge herself has commented, "I don't believe that resolution is a natural state for an environment."⁴⁷

So let's now return one last time to the beginning of the novel ourselves, like re-readers. With the kitchen fire scene and the frog symbolism in mind, consider this line spoken by Triss's mother: "'Nobody could want to harm you, froglet,' she said very seriously, 'and even if somebody did, your father and I would never, *never* let anything bad happen to you.'"⁴⁸ The reader is likely to have forgotten this line by the time Mr. and Mrs. Crescent try to burn Triss alive 150 pages later. Its true impact can only be experienced on the second reading, when it elicits a potent brew of outrage, betrayal, and heartbreak because of the excruciating contrast with what comes later.

A beloved novel, then, isn't experienced exclusively in linear form. Because we don't remember every part equally when we go to reread a book, the lingering memory of major moments changes our experience of smaller, forgotten moments that occur

⁴⁵ See, for example, pages 61–62, 66–69, 228–230, and 243.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴⁷ Pollock, "Endings Are Never Completely Endings: An Interview with Frances Hardinge."

⁴⁸ Hardinge, *Cuckoo Song*, 13.

earlier in the novel and seem to be read for the first time. I've come to see that this effect could open up meaningful opportunities in my writing. Perhaps, for example, I can enrich a manuscript by deliberately including minor passages that will acquire emotional power only through a particular kind of dramatic irony or poignant contrast for the reader who recalls major events that come afterward.

But there may be one final point to make here. Notwithstanding the harm her parents will inflict on Triss – and indeed, the harm they've already been inflicting on her for years via their parenting style – *Triss's mother really means what she says in that line*. Hardinge has taken great care to create exceptionally three-dimensional, flawed adult secondary characters who believe they're the good guys and have their own struggles that Triss is murkily aware of. Indeed, every family relationship dyad in the novel is richly complicated. As in *The Shrinking of Treehorn*, the authentic older characters and the way young characters wrestle with the inscrutable mysteries of the adult world may help the story remain vibrant as children grow up and move into that world themselves.⁴⁹

Children's novelists, then, may be able to build the infrastructure of inexhaustibility into their books with a variety of techniques (surely many more than the ones explored here). We can try deliberately planting clues, sly "winks" and allusions at numerous gradations along the subtle-to-obvious scale, aiming for meticulous "fair-play" plotting regardless of genre yet also thinking of clues as characterization, emotional foreshadowing, and atmosphere, ultimately envisioning the novel as a densely interconnected web of plot threads, themes, and imagery. This can also mean building in moments that will only acquire emotional weight or poignancy when read in light of major moments that occur later. Not skimping on the complexity of secondary characters is equally important, perhaps especially with older characters.

Perhaps most of all, designing for the long term means leaning into the aspects of children's experience and relationships that feel mysterious and unresolvable to a child – and not attempting to resolve them. It means identifying the most complex knot, paradox, or mystery at the heart of a manuscript's web and writing right into it, building the novel toward it. It means letting characters behave authentically in ways that are puzzling, contradictory, or even at times cruel. As Maud Casey has argued, "If stories are one of the ways we make sense of the world, they are also how we

⁴⁹ To return momentarily to *Harry Potter* in this light, it may not be a coincidence that a series known for its exceptional re-readability contains a notably wide and even age distribution of important secondary characters. As a reading of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* or any other volume in the series quickly reveals, Harry, Ron, and Hermione regularly interact with friends, siblings, and colleagues at school who are anywhere from 1 to 6 years older or younger, as well as with young adults, older adults, and much older adults, most of whom have their own preoccupations that occasionally intersect with Harry's. On a simple but perhaps important level, the reader can very easily return to this world at any age because they will always have peers.

experience whatever doesn't make sense, whatever cannot be fully understood. Stories are how we stand in the presence of mystery."⁵⁰

Tapping into some core mystery can beckon readers back⁵¹ – and the openness or incompleteness (not plot-wise, but meaning-wise) will create space for them to come away with different interpretations as they grow up. In this way, the child-character or child-book relationships that form such a key part of Waller's "lifelong reading act" will evolve and deepen, just the way they should. The forest – to return to our original metaphor – will continue its quiet transformation, the slow-growing trees climbing steadily, up through the hush toward the light.

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⁵⁰ Maud Casey, *The Art of Mystery: The Search for Questions* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2018), 6.

⁵¹ Although she defines "mystery" in a different, beautiful way and is referring mainly to picturebooks, editor Melissa Manlove has said something similar about mystery and re-readability in her analysis of *Over and Under the Snow* by Kate Messner and Christopher Silas Neal: "Mystery is what draws us back to a book again and again" (<https://medium.com/chronicle-books/the-surprisingly-complex-principles-of-a-successful-picture-book-da7b0b041fbd>).

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