

Thwarted Prospects: A Reading of Saki's “The Toys of Peace”

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Abstract

Resonating in many ways with today's parents' concerns about how to teach their children peace and kindness, Saki's 1919 short story “The Toys of Peace” draws on the 1914 anti-war campaign of the National Peace Council to “indoctrinate” children with peace by introducing peace toys instead of violent toys, an experiment here ridiculed in the adults' attempts to make brothers Eric and Bertie play with them.

In this paper, I discuss how Saki contrasts two worlds, the adult world with the child world, using children's psychology. In a Swiftian fashion, he satirizes the adult world, which under the pretence of “knowing best,” turns out to be impotent against war at the backdrop. The story is also a critique of children's education, and an invitation to reflect on its failure, if any, when through their play, the children “mischievously” reveal that the history of mankind teaches us lessons of war rather than peace. Last, the story points to the universal moral dilemma of how to teach children and to the idea that despite the available modes of education, any attempt at manipulating or deviating children's wishes and desires results in failure because the child world is wiser than adults think.

Keywords: *adult world, child world, education, Saki*