

sion that here lies considerable untapped potential for research. Particularly given past and current concerns about the homogenizing effects of mass production and consumption, it seems that understanding how the meanings of products shift (or fail to shift) as they cross borders and how they are appropriated in different contexts could drive a new research agenda. More than mere comparison, investigations of networks could shed light on the production of global childhoods or play rituals, while detailing the limits of those networks can better clarify what remained unique about various local contexts.

A footnote on layout: both books are generally attractive, but readers may be dismayed by the number of typographical errors the publishers allowed into the final texts, especially Ganaway's—as in “mellow-dramatic” (p. 247). However, this obvious but ultimately minor flaw does not detract from the valuable contributions they make to the growing study of play.

—Jeff Bowersox, *University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS*

Barbie and Ruth: The Story of the World's Most Famous Doll and the Woman Who Created Her

Robin Gerber

New York: Collins Business, 2009. Bibliography, index. ix, 278 pp. \$24.99 cloth. ISBN: 9780061341311

While the title may lend itself to the assumption that this is a book about Ruth Handler and the invention of the Barbie doll, author Robin Gerber provides a much more detailed historical account of

the founding of the Mattel Toy Company, Ruth Handler's role in the company, the development of the world's most iconic doll, and Handler's fall from grace amid a probing investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Gerber presents her work as a nicely interwoven biography and business history of both Ruth Handler and Mattel. The author looks at Handler's early life and childhood in Colorado, her move to California in the 1940s, and her courtship, marriage, and business partnership with her soul mate, Elliot Handler. The Handlers founded Mattel in the 1940s, first as a Lucite picture-frame company before venturing into the toy business with the Uke-A-Doodle ukulele. Gerber explores Mattel's move to toy manufacturing and the struggles both Handlers faced, particularly Ruth, balancing a career and a family. The author analyzes Mattel's early marketing and production strategies and the financial woes of this start-up company. Through all of this stood Ruth Handler, portrayed by the author as a strong-willed, motivated, and savvy marketer and businesswoman. She was not afraid of trying new ideas, nor did she dwell on the company's early failures. By the 1950s, Gerber argues, Mattel began to make strides in the industry by reusing popular technology, such as a voice box mechanism, in a variety of toys and by gambling on a major advertising promotion on *The Mickey Mouse Club* television series, a move that shifted the entire industry towards marketing toys year round instead of the traditional time in the weeks before Christmas. Handler viewed this move as one of the best decisions the company ever made, and it provided a national platform for the introduction of the Barbie doll.

Gerber sees the design, manufactur-

ing, and marketing of Barbie as the toy that really forced Handler to think about the overall operation at Mattel. Through trial and error, Handler developed new reporting mechanisms and ways of gathering data. She also determined to expand Mattel. All of this occurred at a time when Handler became extremely passionate about developing a doll that looked like an adult, had appealing couture, and could assist little girls with the transition into womanhood. While Barbie received much criticism for her curvaceous looks, Handler seemed to pay little attention to naysayers. Barbie's success, albeit slow initially, empowered Handler to grow her company. She returned to school, studied organizational theories, restructured the company, and looked to other business models to better manage Mattel's product lines. She ascended to Mattel's presidency in 1967. Her management style was fluid. She gave her executives flexibility, but she was shrewd about reporting and forecasting. Under her leadership, Mattel soared in the 1960s, bought other toy companies, expanded its toy lines (including the popular Hot Wheels cars), and purchased the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

All was not smooth sailing within the company, however. The latter third of the book explores the challenges both Mattel and Handler faced at the beginning of the 1970s. The economic downturns in the first part of the decade led to the first significant losses for the company in years. There was staff competition, squabbling, and infighting. The purchase of the circus led to some shady accounting practices such as the bill-and-hold method that allowed retailers to order goods but then cancel the orders at a later date, all to make the company look more profitable. The latter practice led to a criminal

investigation that eventually caused the Handlers to leave Mattel. Ruth's struggles with breast cancer also left her without the fire and confidence she once exuded.

By 1973 the SEC investigation was under way, and within five years, Ruth Handler faced indictments on forty-five "overt acts" of fraud. These included the bill-and-hold orders and the manipulation of annualized financial statements, tooling costs, and royalty expenses. By 1978, however, Handler shifted away from the toy company she loved so dearly and focused on the manufacturing and sale of Nearly Me prosthetic breasts for breast cancer survivors. While publicly and privately she touted her innocence on all charges, in 1978 she acquiesced to a no-contest plea. She was sentenced to five years probation and five hundred hours of community service each year, at the time one of the longer public-service sentences ever given.

In the final chapters, Gerber does an excellent job of describing how Handler found redemption with the courts by developing a work program for probationers to help them regain a place in the work force. Her Ruth-ton Corporation and the Nearly Me invention brought her much joy and respect from thousands of women who were once ashamed of the scars of their breast cancer surgeries. Gerber concludes her book by looking at Mattel's changing guard and the decision to bring Handler back to the company, especially as Barbie approached her thirty-fifth anniversary. Handler still faced challenges after serving her community sentence. Her son, Ken, contracted AIDS in the 1980s and died in 1994. Handler had a second mastectomy during this time as well. Finally, in 2002, Handler herself succumbed to complications from surgery for colon cancer.

Overall, Gerber provides a thorough

and thoughtful history of this multifaceted and successful businesswoman. Gerber portrays Handler as someone who could rise above corporate adversity. There are some areas in the book, though, where the mix of business history and Handler's history is less well organized. And in some instances, the author seems too sympathetic to Handler's shady business dealings. Some readers might argue that Gerber portrays Handler in a light similar to Handler's own autobiography. Gerber does an excellent job, however, of drawing from interviews conducted by Fern Field for a film that was never produced, and the author is thoughtful in her explanation of Handler's decision not to include the details of Ken's illness in her autobiography.

Barbie and Ruth contributes to the history of business, of women, and of technology by looking at one woman's rise up the corporate ladder long before many had such opportunities. The world's most iconic doll was not the only woman to leave an imprint in the toy industry and on corporate America.

—Susan Asbury, *Elizabethtown, PA*

The Japanification of Children's Popular Culture: From Godzilla to Miyazaki

Mark I. West, ed.

Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009.

Bibliographical references, indices. xi, 294 pp. \$45.00 paper. ISBN: 9780810851214

This collection of nineteen essays provides a helpful overview of several media—live-action films, *manga* (graphic novels), video

games, and film and television *anime* (animation)—including such related commercial products as collectors' cards and Hello Kitty items and their appearances in Japan and the United States. Interspersed throughout are some anecdotal essays relating experiences with Japanese media, and within the analytical pieces, several authors confess to being fans themselves as children and as adults.

A number of the pieces discuss the deep interplay between Japanese and U.S. texts. A brief article by Dale Pike on the film *Gojira* (1954) and its transformation to *Godzilla* (1956) for theatrical release in the United States opens the book. The essay provides some concise background and acts as a teaser for what is to come. In "The Allure of Anthropomorphism in Manga and Anime," Fred Patten notes the intercultural popularity of talking animals and argues postwar Japanese popular culture was particularly influenced by U.S. products. Patten describes several shows initiated by Japanese artists and companies that aired on American television. In one case, artist Osamu Tezuka animated *Jungle Emperor* for NBC, making numerous changes requested by the network. The series aired to U. S. audiences as *Kimba the White Lion* without notice of its Japanese manga origins. Jan Susina's jam-packed article takes a close look at many episodes of *Rugrats*, noting that the Reptar and Cynthia characters are parodies of Godzilla and Barbie, repackaged via Japan. In "Early Japanese Animation in the United States: Changing *Tetsuwan Atomu* to *Astro Boy*," Brian Ruh meticulously demonstrates that, from its very beginnings, Japanese anime often considered the export market. The localization of the second season of *Tetsuwan Atomu* for the U.S. market served

“Barbie and her creator, the sharp-elbowed gal who built the biggest toy company, have a story to tell.” Time
Barbie and Ruth by Ruth Gerber is the remarkable true story of the world’s most famous toy and the woman who created her. It is a fascinating account of how one visionary woman and her product changed an industry and sparked a lasting debate about women’s roles. At once a business book, a colorful portrait of an extraordinary female entrepreneur, and a breathtaking look at a cultural phenomenon, Barbie and Ruth is a must read for anyone who ever owned a Barbie doll—a book Publishers Weekly calls, “a stirring biography—a fine study of success and resilience.”