

## A Companion for the Future and for Future Children's Literature Studies

**Clémentine Beauvais and Maria Nikolajeva, eds. 2017. *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 376 pp. ISBN 978-1-4744-1464-7.**

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*The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature*, edited by Clémentine Beauvais and Maria Nikolajeva, gathers, both in volume and content, an impressive body of recent thinking about children's literature texts and scholarship. The companion and its individual chapters have a clear focus and an easily accessible structure, which is of great help in navigating through its diverse subject matter. In general, the chapters are assembled around three focal points or sections: new directions in children's literature research, forms of contemporary children's literature production and reception, and future lines of research. The book ends with a coda by Juliet Dusingher and her reflections on the state of the field over the past thirty years since the publication of her seminal book *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Literature and Radical Experiments in Art* (1987).

The first section presents some of the prominent contemporary theoretical approaches to children's literature: posthumanism (Victoria Flanagan), animal studies and transgression of the human/animal binary (Zoe Jaques), age studies and children's books in the context of analysing age ideology (Vanessa Joosen), cognitive narratology (Roberta Seelinger Trites), reader-response theory and so-called multicultural picturebooks (Evelyn Arizpe), scaled reading and the potential for (eco)political implications (Alice Curry), as well as intersections of carnality, power, adolescence and literature (Lydia Kokkola). Furthermore, this section discusses "re-memorying" as a phenomenological method that pays attention to childhood reading and how it can be remembered and re-experienced in adulthood (Alison Waller), the sociohistorical origins of the representation of diversity in children's literature and its importance to the formation of individual identity (Karen Coats), empirical approaches to place and the construction of adolescent identities (Erin Spring), and the functions of landscapes in literature and methodological and theoretical frameworks for the critical analysis of the literary geography of children's literature (Jane Suzanne Carroll). In short, the chapters in this section connect and confront recent critical debates with children's literature research and texts, both broadening the reach of these debates and testing their scope.

The second section, "Contemporary Trends in Children's and Young Adult Literature", focuses on transformed, new, and emerging forms and formats of children's literature, as well as the institutional life of children's books and their production and reception, primarily among publishers and in schools. Contemporary children's literature production, its linguistic diversity and technological abundance are discussed from the perspectives of canon and canonicity (Anja Müller), the specifics of counterfactual historical fiction for children and young adults (Catherine Butler), the multiplicity of formats of digital children's stories (Junko Yokota), multimodality and multiliteracies with respect to children's literature

production and reception (Margaret Mackey), translations for children in the UK (Gillian Lathey), the use of picturebooks in teaching English as a foreign language (Sandie Mourão), as well as the specifics of print and non-digital modes of children's book production (Martin Salisbury). The chapter about prequels, sequels, and other concepts of serialisation in which a multi-layered poetics of seriality is developed with respect to the specific nature of popular serial structures and narratives, as well as the historical and cultural circumstances they presuppose, could be of special interest for popular culture and children's literature scholars (Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer).

In an attempt to reintroduce the question of the adult-child relationship to discussions about children's literature, the first chapter of the third section addresses the kinship-model approach or, more precisely, kinship readings as potential ways of counter-reading children's literature or reading against the usual stances of suspicion and cynicism (Clémentine Beauvais). In general, the third section of the companion is dedicated to the most recent and currently under-studied perspectives and areas of children's literature, such as ecocriticism and critical plant studies (Lydia Kokkola), evolutionary criticism (Maria Nikolajeva), genetic study (Vanessa Joosen), and distant reading (Eugene Giddens). In this section, children's literature about health and sickness, including "Sick-Lit" (Jean Webb), hybrid (visual-verbal) novels (Eve Tandoi), game adaptations of children's literature (Andrew Burn), and the impact of digital technologies on printed children's books (Victoria Flanagan) are also addressed and analysed, often with a focus on the empowering and productive aspects of literature. As in previous chapters, selected theoretical approaches, problems, and concepts are connected and tested with regard to the specificity of the field of children's literature and a selection of texts from children's literature that are predominantly from the USA and the UK. This may come as a surprise, considering the almost traditionally strong transnational bias of children's literature research, as well as the fact that many authors included in this companion are familiar or even experts in children's literatures in languages other than English.

As this brief overview of chapters and areas of interest hopefully shows, *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature* goes beyond familiar categories, keywords, genres, and approaches established in recent decades. Engaging with connective methodologies and exploratory writing, this companion does not dedicate separate chapters to, for example, feminist criticism or psychoanalysis. The same is true of the history of childhood or book history, which for decades functioned as two inevitable and widely perpetuated approaches to children's literature, while today they are burdened with the alleged banality of their observations that the child or the reader are concepts, cultural and historical constructs, and thus constructed while also constructing. Instead, this companion builds on new materialism, actor-network theory, and related approaches dedicated to questioning and dismantling cultural, social, and analytical preferences and boundaries between the human and non-human, affect and reason, and methodology and ethics. In this context, critical focus shifts to hidden connections, unexpected resemblances, invisible encounters, and fluid networks, as well as all agents in the world, "including those previously robbed of agential role in great human narratives: an electronic chip, an ant, a virus, a child" (4). By following such lines of interest while being supported by informed insights into the topic, explicit methodological

and conceptual positioning, and in-depth analyses of selected texts, this companion indeed re-conceptualises the field and presents not only new but also future directions of enquiry into children's literature research. Today, some of these future directions are inevitable parts of the field of children's literature research, which adds to the relevance of this companion for future reading and for the future itself.

## One Story from Several Points of View

**Perry Nodelman. 2017. *Alternating Narratives in Fiction for Young Readers: Twice Upon a Time*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 258 pp. ISBN 978-3-319-50816-0.**

Marita Pavlović

The book under review analyses youth fiction written from various perspectives and consists of nine chapters covering a wide array of topics. Writers of young adult fiction are becoming increasingly more comfortable with composing novels based on alternative narratives, which has proven to be a form that offers ample potential for experimentation with structure, perspective, and storytelling. Using the first and the third person, narrating in the past and the present, and presenting different characters' narratives all contribute to a more complex representation of characters and the groups they exemplify, the dynamics in which their relationships succeed or fail to develop, as well as the themes that such texts foreground. Overall, this type of narrative provides readers with an interesting reading experience, in which they are sometimes asked to piece together the story, suspend their judgement until all the evidence is found, and use a familiar or initial story as a schema for a more complex one that follows, encouraging them to discover how the characters will behave based on the limited knowledge they possess.

Despite the potential for variation and creativity in constructing stories and their presentation, such novels still regularly abide by some common young adult novel expectations, such as a happy ending that sees the characters coming together or their relationship improving, as well as providing a safe space for discussing the topics that concern them. However, Nodelman does not find that all such novels execute their goals successfully or at the same level of quality.

There are some basic concerns to be considered before approaching an in-depth analysis of novels with alternating narratives for young readers. Constructing a story using alternating narratives allows for the selection of perspectives to highlight or juxtapose, as well as for the selection of voiced characters, while respecting some well-established rules of youth literature. The reader is invited to reconstruct events based on the limited knowledge each character possesses, piecing together implications about the true version of events. The characters' understanding of events might vary significantly; they might be mistaken in their interpretation of them; they might knowingly suppress or misrepresent them; their voice might be silenced altogether; or a number of other devices might be employed. Perry Nodelman recognises and details many such devices and their implications, and begins the book by establishing that this is a very sophisticated form of writing, using the following phrase to describe it: "twice upon a time". Such narratives involve a more sophisticated