Places (of Children's Literature) Under the Sun

Željka Flegar and Jennifer M. Miskec, eds. 2024. *Children's Literature in Place: Surveying the Landscapes of Children's Culture.* New York and London: Routledge. 280 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-40949-8.

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During the nineteenth century, science and art were generally preoccupied with the past and the flow of time; and at the end of the twentieth century we witnessed the transformation of this preoccupation into an obsession with space. Since then, space has been approached from the perspective of a wide variety of contemporary theories: Human Geography (Cultural Geography, Literary Geography, etc.), Philosophy of Everyday Life, Imagology and numerous other contemporary theories. A highly significant contribution in this field is the book edited by Jennifer M. Miskec and Željka Flegar *Children's Literature in Place. Surveying the Landscapes of Children's Culture*. The collection is introduced by the chapter "Children's Places, Spaces, Literature, and Culture" (1–10), followed by seven sections: "Place, Space, and Identity" (11–46), "Aesthetics of Place" (47–75), "(Dis)placement and Mobility" (77–109), "Place Attachment" (111–148), "Spectrality and Memory" (149–178), "Placing Readers" (179–221), and "Virtual and Archival Spaces" (223–259). The collection is also equipped with a chapter named "Contributors" (261–267), containing information on the authors, and an "Index" (269–280).

In the "Introduction", the editors start from the cultural relevance of place in children's literature. Drawing on the extensive literature on the meaning of place in children's literature, they "offer an overview or a tentative typology of place in children's literature, but also the place of children's literature in modern cultural and literary theories" (3). With full awareness of the different approaches to place in children's literature, "studies on borders, displacement, exile, and diaspora; the environment, environmental activism, and environmental education; the Indigenous experiences and understanding of place and home; gender and imaginative geographies; maps and mapping; and identity and media" (ibid), the editors seek to build new insights on such solid foundations. The collection contains 26 selected studies of place, each in its own way crossing the boundaries of genre, authorship, audience, aesthetics, academic field, modality, etc.

Papers in this collection are arranged into seven thematic parts, each focusing on different aspects and a wide variety of topics. The first part, "Place, Space, and Identity", explores place in connection with culture and cultural identity. In the opening chapter (13–20), Ben Screech examines themes of place and foreignness, as well as the blending of foreign and local settings in *The Unforgotten Coat*, a novel about two Mongolian brothers living in a suburb of Liverpool. Next, Björn Sundmark, in "Skiing and Being Swedish: Taking a Cold Look at Winter Picturebooks" (21–30), analyses picturebooks focused on skiing and Swedish winter landscapes to investigate the cultural significance of skiing in Sweden. Rhonda Brock-Servais contributes the chapter "Cows on the Cover. Dairy Queen and Regional Literature" (31–38), which discusses American literary regionalism, with a

focus on the Wisconsin area. This part concludes with "John Green's Peopled Places and Abandoned Spaces" (39–46) by Michael J. Martin, who explores how space can provide freedom and how place can offer definition and rest in young adult literature.

The second part explores the aesthetics of place and its role in the construction of meaning. In "Confronting 'Un-London': Charlie Fletcher's Stoneheart Trilogy and the Rejection of Nostalgic Landscapes" (49–58), Heather K. Cyr argues "that fantasy can offer child protagonists agency with urban environment" (49), while also examining how young readers interpret landscapes steeped in nostalgia. Catherine Olver (59–67) follows with a chapter analysing the architectural features of J.K. Rowling's imaginary worlds and how they convey authority. The final chapter in this section, "A Sleuthing Place: Child Detectives and Their Offices" (68–76) by Chris McGee, investigates how detective offices function as spaces that balance privacy, professionalism, freedom, and safety.

Part three, "(Dis)placement and Mobility", begins with Caroline Hamilton-McKenna's chapter "'Girl. Wherever the F*ck You Want.' The Contingent Mobilities of Literary Adolescence" (79–87), which examines adolescence as a period marked by contradictions and segregation. In "Whirlpooling Feminist Rage. Gang Rape-Revenge in *Foul Is Fair* and *The Nowhere Girls*" (88–95), Amber Moore explores water as a symbolic and fluid space where rape culture and feminist resistance coexist and evolve. The third chapter, "A Town Should Have Twenty-Five People. Harriet M. Welsch's Small-Town New York City" by Emma K. McNamara (96–102), analyses *Harriet the Spy* through rural and urban theory to understand New York as both a place and a cultural construct. Jennifer M. Miskec's chapter, "How to Develop a Children's Culture Study Abroad Program in Three Easy Steps" (103–110), serves not only as a practical guide for designing a short-term, place-based children's literature study abroad programme but also emphasises the importance of cultural immersion and the role of place in literary studies.

The fourth part of the collection contains chapters that deal with feminist and queer reflections on the home. The first chapter, "Making Home. The Queer Ecological Possibilities of Children's Picturebooks" (113–121) written by Kathleen Forrester, offers an analysis of Jilian Tamaki's picturebook *They Say Blue* (2018), in which the author criticises anthropocentrism, questions the truthfulness of "facts" about the world around us, and shifts the boundaries between species in the universe. The boy stretches and becomes a tree, thus becoming a symbol of the *becoming-withs* of humans and nonhumans.

In her chapter "*Maralinga – The Anangu Story*: Country, Multimodality, and Living Space" (122–131) Melanie Duckworth analyses a picturebook that tells of disease and the exodus of Aboriginal people after British nuclear testing in the Maralinga area of South Australia (1956–1963). Aboriginal people were distressed because in their consciousness different laws rule: everything is alive, everything is related and everything is participatory – they talk about the land as a living being. The illustrations in the picturebook are multimodal: a combination of characteristic Aboriginal acrylic painting, photographs, memories, narratives, stories and archival materials, as well as images from the picturebook workshops.

The chapter by Hatice Bay "Re-placing Indigenous Land and Children Within the Anthropocene: Carole Lindstrom's *We Are Water Protectors*" (132–140) points to the ways in which Lindstrom subverts the binary division and man's central position in nature in

her picturebook. First, nature is not just an empty stage for her. Second, Lindstrom places children within heterogeneous more-than-human environments – a "common world" for different species: the protagonist of the picturebook, a young Ojibwe girl, as a part of children's (Native) worlds mentions creatures that crawl, those with wings, four legs, etc. Ultimately, Lindstrom turns Native children into actors – the public's focus is always only on privileged, white girls. Bay concludes that Lindstrom does not consider children as subjects and nature as an object.

Meghan M. Sweeney, the author of the chapter "Beyond the Eco-Warrior Child in Children's Literature" (141–148), believes that the environmental activist Greta Thunberg includes other activists in her actions, while the books analysed in this chapter "resist the trope of the child as "eco-warrior"" (141). Sweeney observes the predominance of romanticised eco-warriors, but she notes that there are also those that emphasise the collective. The most significant such book is *Young Water Protectors: A Story about Standing Rock* (2018) by Aslan Tudor, published when he was just 10 years old and written in simple language about the rebellion at Standing Rock. Sweeney concludes that we need to engage in joint work in saving nature, although this is not often easy to show in books.

The fifth part of the collection focuses on presence and absence, their different modalities and all accompanying phenomena. In the chapter "Dearly Departed. *The Arrival*'s Spectral Refugee" (151–161) Katharine Slater analyses Shaun Tan's wordless graphic novel *The Arrival* (2006). The novel is about an unnamed protagonist who travels far to escape threats. In the new homeland, the refugee encounters uncertainty, and often becomes expendable. By comparing significantly different images depicting immigration officers and almost identical images depicting the migrant's reactions, Slater emphasises the emotional experience of the refugee.

Jose Monfred C. Sy's chapter "Someone's Missing. The Spectral Landscape of Martial Law in Selected Children's Picturebooks from the Philippines" (162–170) focuses on three picturebooks about disappearances, war and assassinations that were remarketed by children's publishers with the aim of instilling in children the need to remember the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. In all the picturebooks, the emphasis is on the missing person: Jhun-Jhun's older brother, Jenny's mother, and Ella's father. All disappearances take place in the sterile urban landscape of Bagong Lipunan, and the children deal with the loss in their own way: Jhun-Jhun keeps his brother's left slipper, Jenny collects the paper flowers her mother gives her during prison visits, and Ella is comforted by the stories her grandmother and cousins tell her about her father.

The chapter "*Charlotte Temple*, a Literary Landmark, and Nineteenth-Century Notions of Adolescence" by Ivy Linton Stabell (171–178) discusses what is perhaps the first fan club, as well as the title character of the first American bestseller by Susana Rowson from 1794. Charlotte Temple, young and gullible, is deceived by the lying Montraville, a lieutenant in the American War of Independence, and dies pregnant on the shores of New York. In her preface, Rowson addresses "the young and thoughtless of the fair sex", although she is probably not addressing the group we consider young readers today, but rather everyone under the age of 21, the legal age of adulthood at the time. Today, the grave of Charlotte Temple exists in the Holy Trinity Cemetery in Manhattan and is a true tourist attraction.

It seems that the tomb was thought up by the foreman during the reconstruction of the church. Perhaps the impetus for the grave (and the momentum of cemetery tourism) is the illustration of the sad Montraville next to the grave from the illustrated version of the novel or in the sequel of the novel, called *Lucy Temple*, which shows a happier future for her daughter.

The sixth part, "Placing Readers", is notably inter- and multidisciplinary, focusing on the reader's perspective. Margaret Mackey's chapter "Space, Place, and Readers. Understanding Setting as 'Placing-in-Process'" (181–191) opens the section by discussing the importance of setting. Madison McLeod, in "Child and Teen Demographics in Movement through the Fantastic Place of London" (192–203), examines London as a space of dynamic movement for child and teen characters, using tools from digital literary scholarship. An important contribution to literary translation studies comes from Smiljana Narančić Kovač in "Where Does Alice Come from? Places in Translation and Adaptation" (204–213), who notes that since "storyworlds are anchored in a specific national culture" (204), translation often involves the cultural transposition of place, which can result in the neutralisation of spatial indicators. Finally, Jennifer Slagus addresses issues of the literary canon, diversity, and representation in "Canon Out of Place. Centering Lived Realities in Neurodivergent Middle Grade Literature" (214–222), emphasising the need to include neurodivergent experiences in middle grade literature.

Virtual and archival spaces are the focus of the seventh part of the collection. Željka Flegar's chapter "'The *Ickabog* Illustration Competition'. Showcasing Reader Responses and a Transnational Poetics of Place" (225–235) is about a competition for illustrating the political fairy tale *Ickabog*, which J.K. Rowling published in parts on the Internet. Children from all over the world offered their solutions, and 34 winning illustrations were included in two (different) editions of the book. It is not easy to map or track virtual places, but the children offered creative solutions to illustrate the fairy tale set in the Cornucopia kingdom. The author concludes that the project is a confirmation of how powerful literacy is, and numerous illustrations testify to how culture is transnational. Furthermore, it is a record of a poetics of place "that draws on diverse mental models and images as a source adaptation, innovation, and transformation" (234).

Maretta Sidropoulou, in the chapter "Places and Spaces of/for Reading in Children's Literature. From Mysterious Dusty Libraries to Cities Made of Books" (236–243), explains the connection between the reader and the space – the real one in which we read, and the one contained in books. According to Foucault, the library is a heterotopia – time is accumulated in it (the age of the building, the books, the reader's age, and time represented in books), and is based on the system of opening/closing – it is possible to enter only with a membership card. The author provides examples of three different approaches to reading in three picturebooks: one is an example of a book about the joy of reading, the second promotes personal reading space, while the third (subversively) tells of a fictional country in which books are used for everything except reading. All three picturebooks encourage children to imagine themselves as readers.

In the penultimate chapter of the collection, "Pilgrimages in the First Season of *The Flying* House Anime Series" (244–251), Lance Weldy focuses on the first season, broadcast

in the 1980s. The series is about three children who find a house that travels through time, accidentally end up at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, and since then they are constantly trying to return home without success. Three ways in which time and space are connected (Tuan, *Space and Place*, 1977) – "the use of goals in finding a place, the amount of time spent in a certain place, and finding identity in places of the past" (245) – are applied by Weldy to the pilgrimage. The first goal is to return home. In achieving the second goal, the quality and intensity of the experience are more important than its duration, as exemplified by the children's nightmares in which they are tested by Satan and punished for their sins until Jesus saves them. In the context of the third goal, Nazareth has developed its own identity over time from a small village at the time of Jesus' birth to the tourist destination it is today. Weldy concludes that the places where the children made pilgrimages contributed to their evangelisation by allowing them to gain their own experiences.

In the last chapter of the collection, "An All-White World? The Cartography We Create in Adaptations for Young People" (252–259), Elizabeth Garri deals with American literature for children and young people that mostly included white people, while people of colour remained on the sidelines. Therefore, young people who make up large parts of the population but do not fit into the "mainstream" American image are excluded from the cultural maps they grow up with. The chapter studies contemporary adaptations of "classics", contemporary fantasy and magical realism that expand the cultural maps and include the previously excluded voices. Intramedial examples of adaptations of all three genres introduce coloured and Latino protagonists instead of white characters, and intermedial examples of adaptations in theatre plays and film are even more inclusive because non-white protagonists are played by non-white actors.

In sum, *Children's Literature in Place* is a significant and timely contribution to the field of children's literature and cultural studies. Aimed primarily at researchers, educators, and advanced students in the fields of literary studies, cultural studies, and education, this collection offers a broad and nuanced examination of how spatial concepts intersect with narratives for young readers. Drawing on a truly international and interdisciplinary range of contributions, the volume reflects the global relevance and adaptability of place-focused scholarship. It brings forward innovative perspectives rooted in ecocriticism, media studies, cognitive theory, and more, extending traditional literary frameworks to encompass digital, archival, and virtual geographies.

What makes this collection particularly important is its commitment to examining not only well-established spatial constructs such as home, mobility, and urban or rural settings, but also underexplored or emergent territories – both literal and conceptual – within children's culture. The volume invites dialogue across disciplines and geographies, and it challenges dominant understandings of place, identity, and childhood in literature and media. By incorporating voices from diverse cultural contexts and engaging with complex themes like displacement, spectrality, and multispecies relations, the collection provides critical insights into the changing landscapes of childhood itself. This book is not just a survey of the current state of place studies in children's literature; it is a compelling invitation to rethink how we locate, interpret, and teach texts for young audiences in a world where spaces – real, imagined, and virtual – are in constant flux.