

better reading and better thinking, but also enable students to link what they are learning in the classroom to the much larger project and challenge of changing the world.

The editors are clear that “covering a [keyword] term’s history and use in the children’s literature of all 196 countries on this planet is well beyond the scope of what any of these essays can accomplish” (xi). The editors state that their goal is “a map with fewer blank spaces—a map that will, like all maps, need to be redrawn as the landscape changes” (xi). The editors also “acknowledge the absence—both on advisory board and among contributors—of Bangladesh, China, Cuba, Egypt, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Japan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Russia, among many others” (xi). In the new edition of *Keywords*, there are, however, references to China or Chinese in the essays on “Affect,” “Audience,” “Authenticity,” “Boyhood,” “Children’s Literature,” “Classic,” “Culture,” “Family,” “Fairy Tale,” “Gender,” “Identity,” “Multicultural,” “Postmodernism,” “Race,” “Story,” “Trans,” and “Translation.” But the misrepresentation of Chinese children’s literature still occurs now and then. It might be a wise choice to invite Chinese scholars to join the program in drawing the map. The diversity and changes of the landscape of Chinese children’s literature is becoming even more challenging and complicated. Serving such a large number of young people (3.7 billion) in China, Chinese children’s literature deserves more merit and due attention. It is obvious that the second edition includes more examples from regions beyond Anglophone, but examples from the Middle

East are still sparse and some specific regions are still under-represented. In my view, only with scholarship from Asia, Africa, and Latin America will it be possible to develop an edition more truly international.

Zhang Shengzhen is a professor of English at Beijing Language and Culture University, where she teaches courses in American and children’s literature. Her research in the field of children’s literature has been supported by National Social Science Fund of China. She was a Fulbright research scholar (2019–2020) at New York University.



Topologies of the Classical World in Children’s Fiction: Palimpsests, Maps, and Fractals. By Claudia Nelson and Anne Morey. Oxford University Press, 2019.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Hale

The past few years have seen a surge of scholarship on how children’s literature draws on the Classical world. Most recent scholarly work in this field has been driven by classicists, more interested (naturally) in how the classical world appears in children’s literature: the narrative patterns, ideas, texts, historical and mythical figures that children’s literature transmits to new generations of readers, and how particular cultural emphases shape their depiction, and use, of classical material. See for instance Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children’s Literature: Heroes and Eagles* (2015); Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood: The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults* (2016); Owen Hodkinson &

Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation* (2018); Sheila Murnaghan & Deborah Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965* (2018); Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture* (2020).

Morey and Nelson, on the other hand, are scholars of children's literature, interested in the uses to which children's texts put classical material, and the effect of historical engagement on children's literature. To that end, they take an approach drawing from recent scholarship on cognition (currently influential in some areas of children's literature scholarship), in order to show how authors shape representations of the past, and shape children's (i.e., child protagonists') ideas about their place in time and their view of the world. This work involves bringing together a range of ideas about literary cognition, and *Topologies of the Classical World* covers considerable ground in doing so, providing close readings of a wealth of British and American children's novels (and some poetry) from the twentieth century on.

Three main structuring metaphors shape the book: History is a Palimpsest, History is a Map, and History is Fractal, and these metaphors are explained in the introduction, which orients the argument within cognitive theory. The metaphors are convincing, though the discussion is quite dense, and a set of "sample exceptions" intended to test and challenge them

might have been better placed towards the end of the book.

In History is a Palimpsest, the "past and present exist in a many layered series of deposits" (6). Protagonists can find their way forwards and backwards through time, learning about the past as they go. Chapter 2, "The Layers of Ancient Rome in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and Its Successors" features stories about individual protagonists who travel in time to the past, solving mysteries or problems as they go. Focus texts include Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), Susan Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising* (1973) and *Silver on the Tree* (1977), and Joan Aiken's *The Shadow Guests* (1980). Chapter 3, "Time Zones, Scars, and Family in (Mostly) Realistic Works," explores how the ideas of trauma and the family connect through the layers of the past. Modern protagonists, who engage with the traumas of the past also uncover and resolve traumas of the present. Focus texts include Edith Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), Caroline Dale Snedeker's *Theras and His Town* (1924), *The Forgotten Daughter* (1933), and *The White Isle* (1940), Elizabeth George Speare's *The Bronze Bow* (1961), and Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954).

History is a Map 1 and 2 (chapters 4 and 5) focus on texts that use maps and other orienting devices to help young readers (and protagonists) understand the past: here, often in quest narratives, they learn about the shape and color of the ancient world. Chapter 4, "Navigating the Underworld," considers stories in which

protagonists visit the underworld (a dominant quest narrative in mythology and in fantasy literature), tracing the paths of figures such as Demeter and Persephone, or Orpheus and Eurydice. The discussion covers Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), C. S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair* (1953), Roger Lancelyn Green's *Mystery at Mycenae* (1957), Carolyn Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries* series (2001–2009), K. M. Peyton's *Roman Pony* trilogy (2007–2009), Katherine Marsh's *The Night Tourist* (2007) and *The Twilight Prisoner* (2009), and Tony Abbott's *Underworlds* series (2011–2012). Encounters with death, which affect the protagonists of these texts, map onto the idea of the afterlife, or underworld, requiring the use of maps and the ability to travel into unknown territories. (A minor quibble: examples chosen in this chapter engage with both real and mythical underworlds. I did wonder about this—is history only “real” or “literal,” or can the mythical be part of the framework?)

Chapter 5, “Carnivals, Grotesquerie, and the Antic(ue) Map Text,” takes readers further into non-literal territory, in a series of animal fantasies, emphasizing (as the authors indicate) grotesquerie and play. Here, history is seen through a comic lens, in texts such as Paul Shipton's *Gryllus the Pig* novels (2004–2006), Gary Northfield's *Julius Zebra* quartet (2015–2018), and Robin Price's *Spartapuss* series (2004–2010), stories that emphasize mayhem and silliness, but which also critique various pop culture assumptions about the ancient world, offering post-colonial and post-human takes on the subject. Other texts, such as

Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series (2005–2009), and Vaughn Edwards and Barry Creyton's *The Dogs of Pompeii* (2011), present the ancient world as a site for authorial play. Perhaps because I have a soft spot for silly stories, I enjoyed this chapter the most: the texts' liveliness offers a refreshing contrast to the serious qualities of the other works discussed. (And I did wonder if a discussion of Goscinny & Uderzo's *Asterix* comics might have been useful, though I realize its French origins may have disqualified it.)

Chapter 6, “Patterns of Conflict in Contemporary Young Adult Fantasies,” which focuses on the idea of History is a Fractal, takes us back into seriousness. Here, the authors use the idea of the fractal, an “irregular geometric shape in which each part is a scaled-down version of the whole, identical to it save in size,” to discuss the way that mirroring occurs within specifically dystopian texts, in which patterns of conflict are continually repeated (187). They focus on texts such as Diana Wynne Jones's *The Game* (2007), Alan Garner's *Red Shift* (1971), John Christopher's *Fireball* series (1981–1986), N. M. Browne's *Warriors* series (2000–2009), Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* series (2008–2010), Sabaa Tahir's *An Ember in the Ashes* series (2015–2018), and Megan Whalen Turner's *The Queen's Thief* series (1996–2017). They show that fictive dystopian worlds, influenced by ancient models (such as the power structures of Imperial Rome), present history as being embedded in the mind of protagonists, whose problems are “identical to the problems of

the larger society,” (8) thus drawing the child reader to understand that we are all part of history, all the time (and to understand that alienation and confusion are natural parts of that state of mind?).

The conclusion reinforces the metaphors used (History as Palimpsest, as Map, and as Fractal), and explains why the use of the classical world helps authors think about our own world using it as a lens (in the sense both as something to look through, and something to use to focus attention).

I did find the introduction to be quite dense, and though I appreciated how the authors drew on contemporary children’s literature scholarship, I am not entirely convinced that the cognitive model was absolutely necessary. I felt that it overwhelmed the already extremely interesting discussion of the way books engage with history more generally, and that the core ideas of Palimpsest, Map, and Fractal were strong enough to stand on their own. I also thought, given the range of texts discussed, some graphs, or tables, or diagrams might have helped clarify where different texts sit in the spectrum of engagement with history—i.e., providing a visual differentiation (a map, in fact!) between stories set in the historical past, stories involving time-travel backward or forward, stories engaging with legends and myth, and stories set in fantasy worlds that allude to the classical past. Another minor quibble is that I wondered about the overlap between historical and mythological—e.g., in discussions of narrative structures and mythological spaces (underworld and katabasis; labyrinth and quest).

But these are quibbles. In its overall argument and its extremely well-executed close readings, this book sheds new light on many well-known children’s texts, and provides insights into lesser-known ones as well. It will be of interest to students and scholars of children’s literature, classical reception, literary and historical reception.

Elizabeth Hale is an associate professor in English at the University of New England (Australia), where she teaches courses in children’s literature and fantasy and leads the Australasian wing of the Our Mythical Childhood project (European Research Council Consolidator Grant: K. Marciniak, P.I., University of Warsaw), 2016–2021.



***Behind Children’s Books: Backstories & Revelations.* By Jerry Griswold. Independently Published, 2020.**

Reviewed by Joel D. Chaston

I first became acquainted with Jerry Griswold’s literary scholarship years ago when I read *Audacious Kids: Coming of Age in America’s Classic Children’s Books* (1992), which had recently been named Outstanding Critical Book of the Year by the Children’s Literature Association. I remember being very impressed with Griswold’s keen insights into children’s literature and culture, and, especially, his personal and witty prose style. Over the years, various critics have praised Griswold, now an Emeritus Professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Diego State University, for his ability to speak simultaneously to general readers and academics.

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.