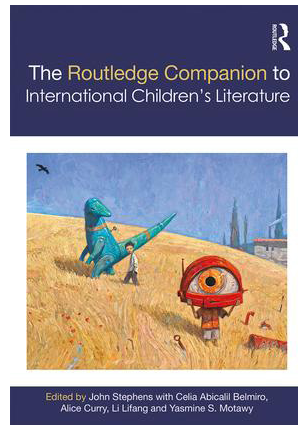


JOHN STEPHENS ET AL. (EDS.)
**THE ROUTLEDGE
COMPANION TO
INTERNATIONAL
CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE**

London: Routledge, 2018 (485 pp.)



Responding to the longstanding tradition of Eurocentric and Anglophone children's literature scholarship, John Stephens, Celia Abicalil Belmiro, Alice Curry, Li Lifang, and Yasmine S. Motawy position their edited collection *The Routledge Companion to International Children's Literature* as a counternarrative to dominant, scholarly paradigms. Their purpose, revealed in the introduction, is to highlight scholarship from the Majority World – that is, from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. They also explain that, where possible, they include “essays from ‘insider’, embedded scholars” (1). The inclusion of such scholarly voices is important and serves as a way to further reinforce the mission of this volume. In other words, because this book does not just highlight scholarship on children's literature from the Majority World but scholars and scholarly perspectives from historically underrepresented populations and locations as well, it succeeds in redressing the Anglocentric scholarship often held as the standard of the profession. For many who might seek this volume as an introduction to international children's literature, the simultaneous introduction to international scholars is an additional benefit.

The volume is separated into six parts, each dealing with a different theme. While the chapters within the sections are loosely grouped, I wonder if it might have better served the editors' goals to provide a survey of international scholarship wherein the chapters are grouped geographically. This organization would reflect the introduction, which provides both theoretical and geographical subsections, such as: “Ethnopoetics and local pressures: China and

Iran," "Children's literature in Africa and the Caribbean," and "Perceiving and erasing borders: understanding children's literature in Latin America." Yet, as it stands, one looking for chapters on Brazilian children's literature, for example, would need to look in several different sections to find all of this volume's offerings. Nevertheless, the thematic separation throughout the volume provides the reader the opportunity to understand the interconnectedness of children's literature across the world and provides a theoretical basis for reading throughout the volume. Incidentally, I also wonder if the collection might have benefited from brief introductions to each section, providing a rationale for why the editors grouped the volume as such and what their goals were for each individual section. Regardless, this volume's survey of international children's literature is both informative and engaging and the thematic organization does not detract from this.

Part One, "Concepts and theories," provides a theoretical basis for understanding international children's literature. Moving away from Anglocentric models of scholarship, the chapters in this section posit alternative epistemologies and worldviews attendant to the cultural milieu in which they were produced. For example, chapters highlight concepts like magical realism, animism, and the unhu gaze as frameworks with which to read international children's literature. Yet, there is a distinctly transnational feel to many of these chapters and their decolonial agenda should prove a much-needed shift in scholarship. These theories are certainly important within the context that produced them, but I am also inclined to believe that they will further children's literature scholarship, as a whole, by providing a richer understanding of transnational and intertextual movements within the field.

After establishing these theoretical frames, this collection moves into Part Two, "Historical contexts and national identity," which is dedicated to recovering the histories of children's literature across the world. For readers unfamiliar with international children's literature, this section, as well as Part Three, "Cultural forms and children's texts" provides, for the most part, intriguing and easily understandable mini-histories. Some chapters do presuppose that their readers are more familiar with the histories or cultural contexts of a particular country or region and are, thus, not as accessible for the uninitiated reader. Even so, the chapters that do require more prior knowledge are still in service to the volume's overall agenda to broaden children's literature scholarship. While some chapters serve as primers and introductions to international children's literature,

others delve deeper, challenging Anglocentric histories and scholarly perspectives.

Extending beyond the histories of international children's literature, Part Three offers several in-depth analyses of identity formation. Many chapters in this section offer transnational perspectives on identity, considering the effects of diaspora and postcolonialism on youth populations and their literature. What is more, the chapters in this part also place an increased emphasis on multiple genres of children's literature, highlighting how different forms impact identity. Chapters ruminate on topics such as Korean diaspora in picture books, trends in Brazilian poetry, comics in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as digital storytelling in Brazil. This emphasis on new and divergent genres is particularly interesting as the collection moves from this section into a section on traditional modes of storytelling.

In Part Four, "Traditional story and adaptation," chapters consider folklore and animal stories, among other traditional tales. While each chapter reveals a unique perspective on these stories, that they share a universal emphasis on the tradition of oral storytelling and other tenets of folktales is fascinating and provides the opportunity to look for intertextuality, both between the stories explored within the chapters, as well as within the chapters themselves. Additionally, many of the chapters in this section also reflect on the evolution of traditional stories, not just in terms of how they have grown throughout the history of a particular country or region, but also giving attention to the ways that they are contemporarily being adapted and may be adapted in the future.

Part Five, "Picture books across the majority world," furthers the agenda of Part Three to reveal new modes of children's literature with its focus on picture books. The chapters, here, take more radical viewpoints, positing such analyses as Arab women writers and their feminist picture books or the need to revolutionize children's publishing in México and Brazil to better accommodate infant readers. Part Six, "Trends in children's and young adult literatures," the final section of *The Routledge Companion to International Children's Literature*, continues this tendency with its analyses of young adult fiction. Ultimately, many of these chapters reveal tensions between shifting lifestyles and colonial/postcolonial epistemologies. Whereas the first few parts of this volume explore theoretical constructs or provide background knowledge via histories or discussions of identities, these last two sections make present the efficacy of studying international children's literature through close readings and textual analysis.

Ultimately, *The Routledge Companion to International Children's Literature* proves that studying international children's literature pushes past "the particular constraints of other scholarly domains," and establishes how vital it is for all scholars to understand international perspectives (1). Whether readers, themselves, be international scholars or are unfamiliar with international children's literature, this volume offers something for everyone and does so with critical fortitude and a mind to expanding the field.

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