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**John Stephens with Célia Abicalil Belmiro, Alice Curry, Li Lifang and Yasmine S. Motawy (Eds.)**

*The Routledge Companion to International Children's Literature*

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**Reviewer**

**Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer**

Commissioned by an international editorial team under the auspices of John Stephens, this companion is an ambitious project as it gathers chapters on international children's literature written by scholars from five different continents. As the introduction clearly states, it has been the purpose of this companion 'to leave the well-worn path of Anglophone and European scholarship and to explore some of the scholarship that concerns itself with children's literature and media in the Majority World – principally Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America' (p. 1). This statement definitely points to an often-deplored desideratum of children's literature research. Usually scholars working in the realm of children's literature have no idea of what is actually happening on the children's book market in countries beyond the European and North American borders, not to mention the fact that many countries (e.g. Brazil, China, Iran, and South Africa) can look back on a long history and heritage of children's literature. The knowledge of these different traditions may be hampered by the lack of understanding of the languages spoken in these, and other countries, as well as the observation that children's books from the 'Majority World' have usually not been translated into English. An exception to this rule is the Japanese *Moribito* (1996-2012) series by Nahoho Uehashi, which experienced an unforeseen success in the United States and is centre stage in a chapter written by Japanese scholar Yasuko Doi.

However, it is quite surprising to acknowledge that there are far more countries that produce children's books in English than one might expect at first glance. Besides several

African countries, where English is still the official administrative language (e.g. Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe), English children's books also appear in Hawai'i, India, Malaysia, and some countries in the Caribbean area, such as the Bahamas and Jamaica, side by side with children's books published in indigenous languages. The implications of these findings have an eminent impact on the history and development of children's literature in these countries, as they often straddle between two cultures – the culture of the previously dominant Western hemisphere, initiating a dialogue with colonialism, and the indigenous culture(s). How this specific situation has influenced the underlying images of childhood as well as the poetics of the respective national children's literature, is central in a host of chapters. They thus shed a new light on aspects such as globalization, the influence of orally transmitted stories, and the preference for specific genres and narrative modes.

The introduction explains the rationale of the companion. Drawing on the framework of 'ethnopoetics', developed by Dennis Tedlock, this term has been appropriated to cover pertinent aspects that distinguish the international children's literature(s) discussed in the companion. In this regard, the editors emphasize four factors: sociolinguistic embeddedness, flows of influence, glocalization, and preferred textualities (p. 2). They argue that these issues substantially determine the particularities of non-Western children's literature, thus opening new vistas on the investigation of children's literature beyond well-trodden paths.

Divided into six parts, the 47 chapters in this companion focus on different issues in relation to international children's literature. The first part introduces concepts and theories, starting with a chapter on the frameworks of globalization and glocalization, written by Anna Katrina Gutierrez. This chapter lays the basis for the ensuing contributions as it clearly highlights the intricate relationship of the global distribution of literary strands and aesthetic principles on the one hand and local traditions on the other, which has led to the emergence of hybrid formats, genres, and narrative modes. The resulting imaginaries, shifting between the global and the local, constitute the concept of 'glocal'. The author convincingly points out that this development is discernible in both directions, developing 'cross-cultural reconfigurations' (Gutierrez, 2018, p. 15) between Western and non-Western perspectives.

The subsequent chapters follow this line of argument as they introduce literary concepts, such as the ‘*unhu* literary gaze’ (Tagwiri, 2018, p. 22) – as a specific mode of perceiving people – in Zimbabwean children’s texts, the significance of magic realism in Latin American children’s literature (Fanuel Hanán Díaz), the impact of the Confucian tradition on Chinese books for children (Lijun Bi), and the close relationship between animism and ecocritical awareness in indigenous young adult fiction (Alice Curry). Other chapters deal with the depiction of violence and death in Brazilian children’s literature (Alice Áurea Penteadó Martha), the inseparable link between politics and ideology in children’s literature from Egypt (Nadia El Kholy), and the far-reaching impact of Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* on the emergence of a new concept of childhood in Chinese children’s books since the first half of the twentieth century (Xu Xu).

The second part addresses historical contexts and how they impact on the development of national identity. These chapters particularly draw on the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies as they discuss the shifts in the appreciation of indigenous children’s literature, for instance, in Brazil (Maria Inês de Almeida), the Caribbean area (Aisha Spencer), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Mickias Musiyiwa). Other chapters, deal with the rise of national identity in India and how this aspect is mirrored in Rabindranath Tagore’s works for children (Supriya Goswami) and the complicated relation between globalization and transcultural production in Taiwanese children’s literature (Andrea Mei-ying Wu).

Part three focuses on cultural forms and their impact on different media formats for children by analyzing storybooks, comics, picturebooks, poems, booklets, and digital narratives. Topics covered in this section are, among others, the depiction of intergenerational discourse in modern children’s books from India (Suchismita Banerjee), the representation of ethnic-racial relations in Brazilian children’s literature (Célia Abicalil Belmiro and Aracy Alves Martins), and the question of how religious precepts are considered in contemporary English and Arab books for Muslim children (Yasmine Motawy). Another chapter, in turn, addresses the critical engagement with migration and transnational adoption, and the impact of a traumatic past in picturebooks produced in South Korea as well as in the Korean diaspora in the USA (Sung-Ae

Lee). Two further chapters explore the changes on the Brazilian book market as they investigate the significance of cheaply produced and sold booklets containing stories for children as a means to foster literacy (José Héler Pinheiro Alves) as well as the challenges posed by the increasing dominance of digital media (Edgar Roberto Kirchof).

The close connection between traditional stories and their adaptations is in the fore in part four of the companion. The majority of the chapters in this section deal with folktales, often orally transmitted from one generation to the next, and their retellings or remediation in children's literature. Cases in point are the actual book production in the Bahamas (Patricia Ginton-Meicholas), Hawai'i (Stuart Ching and Jann Pataray-Ching), and Nigeria (Vivian Yenika-Agbaw). Two additional chapters point to the far-reaching impact of traditional myths on Indian children's literature, which is discernible in franchises and multimedia products centered on the epic of the child Hanuman (Anuja Madan) as well as the multiple retellings of the Pančatantra beast fable (Lalita Pandit Hogan). In a similar vein, the ensuing chapter shows that the development of the animal novel in Chinese children's literature cannot be understood without the influence of popular Chinese animal legends (Ying Hou).

'Picture books across the majority world', the title of part five, clearly indicates that picturebooks are key to the history and development of children's literature, whether in the Arab countries, Colombia, Iran, Japan, Mexico, Thailand, and Turkey. The chapters in this part discuss inter alia the relationship between illustrated books and picturebooks in Turkey (İlgım Veryeri Alaca), the emergence of picturebooks for small children under the age of three in Brazil and Mexico (Alma Carrasco and Mônica Correia Baptista), and the impact of the *shōjo* aesthetics on Japanese picturebooks (Helen Kilpatrick). Apart from these current issues, the contributions also point to the variety in artistic styles. While some chapters in this section include illustrations of selected picturebooks, others regrettably do not.

The concluding part engages with recent trends in children's and young adult literatures. This section gives a broad overview on what is actually happening in the book market in different countries all over the world, encompassing Brazil, Chile, China, Guatemala, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, and South Africa. As such, this final part smoothly closes the circle, as it

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clearly shows the richness of topics, genres, and narrative modalities in international children's literature, which definitely deserves more attention in international academia.

The breadth in scope cannot be fully transmitted by a short review but it should at least have become crystal-clear that this companion is an inexhaustible source for academics as well as teachers, librarians, and publishers. This companion has much to offer to teachers specialized in English language and literature, as it introduces English-written children's books published in regions and countries that are usually neglected in academia and educational circles. These books provide new insights into the linguistic, literary, and aesthetic intricacies they may offer, thus transcending familiar patterns and exploring lesser-known paths. This companion constitutes a landmark in the history and development of international children's literature and will hopefully inspire further research in this field.

**Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer** is a professor in the German Department at the University of Tübingen, Germany. She has written four monographs and (co-)edited more than twenty collections, dealing with children's classics and the canon, picturebooks, children's films, and the relationship between children's literature and the Avant-garde, among others. Most recently, she has edited *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks* (2018).