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*Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children's  
Literature* ed. by Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris (review)

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(Review)

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visual, textual, and material sources nevertheless do permit some forms of access to historical childhoods (8–9). For more detailed models of interdisciplinary childhood studies research within the humanities, Anna Mae Duane’s edited collection *The Children’s Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (2013) may be a helpful resource.

Overall, *Critical Childhood Studies and the Practice of Interdisciplinarity* is a welcome contribution to childhood studies scholarship, particularly because of its explicit embrace of the field’s diverse epistemological practices and commitments. Its wide-reaching scope attests to the importance of children and childhood across multiple disciplines, and each chapter’s extensive bibliography represents a network of connected resources to facilitate and anchor ongoing critical engagement from readers. The book’s central promise to explore the notion of disciplinarity itself surfaces across individual contributions, and the book may find especially relevant application within the childhood studies classroom.

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**Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris, eds. *Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children’s Literature*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014. Print.**

This volume, a collection of nineteen essays (including a coda by Chinese children’s writer Mei Zihan), is part of a growing body of scholarship on children’s literature in Asia. It follows John Stephens’ collection *Subjectivity in Asian Children’s Literature and Film* (2013) by just one year, and, as such, effectively answers Stephens’ previous call for “a reciprocal exchange of literary theories and methodologies between Eastern and Western scholars of children’s literature” (7). The essays included in the collection provide a model for the kind of intellectual exchange that Stephens identifies as woefully absent from the bulk of children’s literature criticism and is also a useful starting point for exploring the rich history of Chinese children’s literature. Originally intended to create a dialogue between U.S. and Chinese children’s

literature scholars, the book identifies its audience as “English-speak[ers]” (3), and thus shifts its purpose to educating this group of scholars about rhetorical traditions and literary movements in the Chinese tradition. Indeed, these aspects of the book are its strongest points and will be the focus of this review.

The book is divided into five sections, which include essays on topics ranging from fantasy fiction, picture books, middle-grade readers, and young adult novels. In Section I (“Theorizing Children’s Literature: Journey as Metaphor and Motif”), Roberta Seelinger Trites revisits a familiar classic of American young adult literature, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and considers how embodied metaphors related to Huck’s physical journey are used to conceptualize his psychological growth. Ban Ma contrasts this motif of “dynamism” (represented by the active, travelling child) with the “quietness” of Chinese children’s literature from the mid-Ming dynasty (1368–1644), which often required children to be still and stay within the home (23). Sections II and III primarily contain individual author studies, but the former, which deals with the May Fourth Movement, is broader in scope and considers how Chinese authors participated in this pivotal cultural movement that erupted after a 1919 student protest in Beijing. Section IV is devoted to didactic children’s literature and features essays by leaders of Chinese and American children’s literature. In “Children’s Disposition and Children’s Views,” award-winning author Cao Wenxuan describes the difference between children’s views and dispositions, and resists collapsing these two terms into a single descriptive category. Michelle Martin and Katharine Capshaw write about a different form of resistance, stressing the importance of picture books in challenging what Nancy Larrick, in 1965, referred to as the “all-white world of children’s books.” Importantly, the need for diverse books is a concern that is shared by Chinese scholars, as is evidenced in Tan Fengxia’s essay on American realistic novels for young adults, where she draws upon the American literary tradition in search of inspiration for a nascent body of young adult literature in China and calls for more books that “deal with the challenges regarding the image of adolescents” (218).

For me, Section II was one of the most informative and best aided in the editors’ goal of educating English-speaking scholars about the rich history of Chinese children’s literature. In this section, contributors Wang Quangen, Xu Yan, and Zhu Ziqiang provide a fundamental introduction to the May Fourth Movement, a period that many Chinese scholars agree to be the starting point of modern Chinese children’s literature. With over five hundred children’s publishers currently active in China, children’s literature is now a substantial part of the publishing industry and is meeting new demands of a rising middle class. However, it was in the period of the May Fourth Movement, which flourished in the 1920s, that new ideas about children and literature

written specifically for this age group emerged. At this time, Chinese authors, including Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Bing Xin, and Ye Shengtao, among others, began to consider the special nature of children. With the last of the Chinese dynasties just behind them (the Qing Dynasty ended in 1911), authors were eager to break with traditional Confucian values and embrace new ideas about childhood that would help to modernize the nation. For those unfamiliar with this literary history, Wang Quangen provides a useful overview of the major developments in Chinese children's literature over the last one hundred years, while Xu Yan and Zhu Ziqiang provide a closer analysis of the work of Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren. As Zhu Ziqiang hints, a closer study of May Fourth writers may in fact have a benefit beyond simply learning about Chinese children's literature since this was also a period of child study within China. Western studies of children, namely by prominent child psychologists and psychoanalysts, including G. Stanley Hall and Sigmund Freud, shaped the work of brothers Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren as they sought to rethink the structure of Chinese families (71). In his famous essay, "What Is Required of Us as Fathers Today" (1922), Lu Xun urged Chinese parents to adopt a selfless love instead of enforcing narrowly defined forms of filial piety (孝) that he felt hindered the child's as well as China's cultural development (Lu loc. 339-43). With rising interest in childhood studies, Ziqiang and other contributors in this section offer an intriguing glimpse into an as yet understudied aspect of the child study movement, indicating that this movement was much more global in scope and, at least for the May Fourth writers, included an evaluation of both Eastern and Western ideas and values.

Wide in scope in terms of the historical periods, methods, and themes that are represented by its contributors, the book still provides a useful way to reflect on the different rhetorical traditions and the unique histories of children's literature in the United States and China. While Western ideas and values have had a large impact on Chinese children's literature, historical events such as the May Fourth Movement, the Cultural Revolution, and the economic "reform and opening up" (改革开放) in China led to a very unique literary trajectory, as authors continually sought to balance modern concepts of childhood with traditional Confucian values. Tang Sulan explains how in feudal China popular educational texts for children, including the *Three Character-Classic* and *The Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety*, were already emerging and paralleled early works of didactic children's literature in the West in their goal to frighten children into good behavior (109). By the time of the May Fourth Movement, more realistic children's fiction began to appear; Tang mentions Ye Shengtao's *The Scarecrow* (1923), a heart-wrenching fairy tale about a scarecrow who is helpless to save the suffering people that he observes while he stands guard in a field. This story and others like it

paved the way for the social realism that flourished in the 1930s, which one contributor describes as a time when “writers of children’s literature had to put aside the child-oriented views of the 1920s and adopt subjects such as revolution, class, and saving the nation in order to meet the needs of the times” (39). The constraint associated with this period would loosen in the 1970s when China began its economic reform and opening up policies, which Fang Weiping notes was a turning point for Chinese children’s literature (185).

The book is commendable in its efforts to bring together such wide-ranging scholarship, and readers can see how the editors and collection contributors work hard to make connections between the different literary traditions of the United States and China. For example, Tan Fengxia refers to contributor Dennis Berthold, whose essay on Alice Cary highlights the prominence of realistic portrayals of death and other life experiences in American children’s fiction, as she argues that the “negative realism” in work like Cary’s novels would be less accepted in a Chinese context, where authors are more likely to shelter their young readers from such harsh truths (216–17). Kenneth Kidd similarly provides a unique window into ideological differences between the United States and China by focusing on the way that American authors sought to translate these differences for young readers. Using Newbery award-winner Elizabeth Foreman Lewis as an example, Kidd argues that Lewis’s work deserves more credit than previous children’s literature scholars have given her (88).

While such efforts at coherence are commendable, there are admittedly times when the connections between essays are loose at best, leaving readers to do this comparative work on their own (an act that editors Nelson and Morris encourage in their introduction). This may partly be attributed to the fact that the collection is based on essays originally presented at the 2012 China-U.S. Children’s Literature Symposium in Qingdao, China. Because the scholars who attended this event have very different interests in children’s literature, it is understandable why some essays may not connect as closely with the thematic content of the book. Since it is largely the contributions on Chinese children’s literature that provide the greatest benefit to English-speaking children’s literature scholars, these lapses in continuity do not deter from the book’s primary contribution to the field.

With China continuing to develop an international presence in children’s literature, most notably with Cao Wenxuan’s receipt of the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award, it seems safe to assume that more scholarship on Chinese children’s literature will be desired. In the meantime, *Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children’s Literature* is a welcome contribution to our understanding of this rich yet underrepresented literary tradition.

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**Robert Douglas-Fairhurst. *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland*. Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2015. Print.**

Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books have always been curiosities. For generations, readers and scholars have debated their depth and literary merit. While some scholars look for allegorical interpretations of Carroll's characters and narratives, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst takes a different approach by examining how the *Alice* books are a product of the rich tapestry of ideas and experiences of Carroll's entire life. In many ways, Carroll is as enigmatic as the works themselves, and this literary biography elucidates the connections between Carroll's brilliant, quirky personality and the wonderful world he created.

The word "story" aptly appears in the title of Douglas-Fairhurst's work because it truly does read as engagingly as a novel. Douglas-Fairhurst begins the work describing Alice Liddell Hargreaves's trip to New York City in 1932, noting how the press insisted on creating the narrative that the literary Alice had strayed into modernity from her mid-Victorian world, and was once again off on a strange adventure. The aging Alice Hargreaves seems to have played along by giving interviews and posing for pictures. At any rate, the media's attention to Hargreaves's visit and their need to conflate her with the literary Alice demonstrate just how deeply ingrained the *Alice* books had become in popular imagination, a popularity that continues to this day as movies and television still produce adaptations of Alice fairly regularly.