



The Disappearing Childhood of Children's Literature Studies

—Perry Nodelman

Grenby, M. O., and Kimberley Reynolds. *Children's Literature Studies: A Research Handbook*. Houndsmills: Palgrave, 2011. 234 pp. US\$85.00 hc, US\$28.95 pb. ISBN 978-0-230-52553-5, 978-0-230-52554-2. Print.

Mickenberg, Julia, and Lynne Vallone, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. 584 pp. US\$150.00 hc. ISBN 978-0-19-537978-5. Print.

Nel, Philip, and Lissa Paul, eds. *Keywords for Children's Literature*. New York: New York UP, 2011. 282 pp. US\$25.00 pb. ISBN 978-0-8147-5855-7. Print.

In his introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, David Rudd remarks that "Children's Literature Studies has seen remarkable progress since the 1980s, when it was very much a minority interest" (xiii), and in their preface to *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*,

Rudd, David, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*. London: Routledge, 2010. 320 pp. US\$120.00 hc, US\$36.95 pb. ISBN 978-0-415-47270-8, 978-0-415-47271-5. Print.

Wolf, Shelby A., Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso, and Christine A. Jenkins, eds. *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2011. 555 pp. US\$315.00 hc, US\$124.95 pb. ISBN 978-0-415-96505-7, 978-0-415-96506-4. Print.

M. O. Grenby and Andrea Immel affirm that "children's literature now receives considerable attention from scholars" (xiii). The existence of these two *Companions* from major presses is itself evidence of these developments, as is the publication in recent years of a number of other important guides to the field:

Philip Nel and Lissa Paul's catalogue of *Keywords for Children's Literature* from New York University Press, Grenby and Kimberley Reynolds's *Children's Literature Studies: A Research Handbook* from Palgrave Macmillan, Shelby A. Wolf, Karen Coats, Patricia Enciso, and Christine A. Jenkins's *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature* from Routledge, and Julia Mickenberg and Lynne Vallone's *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*. Together, the 150 or so essays by emerging and already prominent scholars of children's literature contained in these volumes offer not just a clear overview of children's literature studies, but also a substantial sense of the strengths and limitations of those studies as currently practised.

In a review of the *Cambridge Companion* previously published in *Jeunesse*, Margaret Mackey concludes that, "[i]n terms of a book to 'accompany' the reading or viewing (and, more likely, the study) of children's stories, this collection has much to offer" (180). The same could be said about all these guides. For the most part, the essays in them are clearly written and carefully researched, and they offer important insights into the texts they discuss. Nevertheless, as Mackey says in her review, "the topic is so large and the units of analysis so small that there are bound to be omissions" (180). What interests me most about the guides as a group is how they tend to omit more or less the same aspects of the field. If they do represent

children's literature studies accurately, then the discipline seems to be downplaying a range of kinds of texts for young people and a range of ways of thinking about them.

The titles of these books represent them as companions to, handbooks of, and "keywords" for the same subject: "children's literature." As used here, however, the phrase "children's literature" almost always refers not to the literature itself but to the academic subject that concerns itself with that literature—as only the Palgrave Macmillan research handbook acknowledges in its title, children's literature *studies*. Those studies occur in a variety of academic milieux, but according to the editors of the Routledge *Handbook of Research on Children's and Young Adult Literature*, "For far too long the fields of English, Library and Information Science, and Education have pushed ahead in various directions—exploring theoretical ideas, conducting wide-ranging research, writing books and articles, and attending conferences within our separate figured worlds" (xii)—in other words, in our different interpretative communities. Covering everything from reading literature in secondary schools to surveying museums devoted to children's literature, this *Handbook of Research* is an attempt both to represent those separate worlds and to bring them closer together. Because it covers so much, it tends to say less about each of its topics than might be desirable. Mike Cadden's one essay on fiction stands



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in for a number of potential others on specific genres, and while Rudine Sims Bishop refers in her discussion of “African American Children’s Literature” to a body of criticism of “the children’s and young adult literature emanating from diverse groups within our nation” (234), the volume contains no essay on the other groups she mentions, including Latinos, Asian Americans, and the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, while some of the essays express an interest in the circulation of ideas globally, the book deals, for the most part, with American books, schools, and publishing. “While I seek to provide a global perspective,” says Joel Taxel in his essay on marketing, “admittedly much of the discussion does have a distinctly American and British slant” (480). The *Handbook of Research* as a whole shares that slant.

Even so, its effort to represent work in a variety of disciplines gives it a broader focus than the other guides under consideration here. While Nel and Paul, the editors of *Keywords*, rightly assert that “[c]hildren’s literature’ itself has become a kind of umbrella term encompassing a wide range of disciplines, genres, and media” (1), the terms their guide includes are most significant in literary and cultural studies approaches and discussed almost exclusively from those perspectives. Similarly, while Mickenberg and Vallone claim that the *Oxford Handbook* “attempts to reveal the possibilities of children’s literature criticism” (5), they and most of their contributors limit their approaches to those current in literary and cultural studies, and while Grenby and Immel’s preface to the *Cambridge Companion* promises to “try to present a useful sample of the different critical approaches that have been taken to children’s literature” (xv), those approaches are again almost exclusively the ones used in literary and cultural studies. More

forthrightly, the introduction to the Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook* acknowledges that, while “many of those who have been drawn to this field have come from backgrounds in education, librarianship, and child development, each of which has its own disciplinary agendas, . . . this book is primarily intended for those studying children’s literature as literature” (3). Rudd is equally assertive about the focus on literary studies in his *Routledge Companion*: “this volume approaches the children’s book from a literary and cultural studies perspective, so it omits many of the debates more central to those in education or librarianship” (xiii).

A similar narrowing of focus makes a book called *Keywords for Children’s Literature* particularly problematic. Its title implies an homage to *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, the groundbreaking 1976 book in which the ideological theorist Raymond Williams introduced his concept of “keywords”: “they are significant binding words in certain activities and their interpretation; they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought” (15). Nel and Paul claim that their *Keywords* “follows the spirit” of Williams’s (2). But Williams was particularly interested in how the words he included meant different things to different people not only in different academic specialties but also in different areas of life. He understands that his book therefore lacks the stable certainty one might find in a guide to the vocabulary of

a specific area of study—like, say, children’s literature studies: “since my whole inquiry has been into an area of general meanings and connections of meaning, I have been able to achieve neither the completeness nor the conscious limitation of deliberately specialized areas” (25). While Nel and Paul acknowledge that “one of the challenges of children’s literature studies is that scholars from different disciplines use the same terms in different ways” (1), the authors of the entries in their *Keywords* rarely address such disciplinary differences.

This is not to say that many of the entries in Nel and Paul’s *Keywords* are not helpful guides to aspects of the field as they have narrowly redefined it; as they acknowledge, they have a more immediate model than Williams in books like Bruce Burgett and Glen Hendler’s *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, which also claims Williams as a model but focuses on “shifting interpretations in the context of a particular field” (2). But that disciplinary focus ignores Williams’s insistence that what most concerned him “is significantly not the specialized vocabulary of a specialized discipline, though it often overlaps with several of these, but a general vocabulary ranging from strong, difficult and persuasive words in everyday usage to words which, beginning in particular specialized contexts, have become quite common in descriptions of wider areas of thought and experience” (14). By focusing on the specialized vocabulary of a relatively arcane discipline in a way that mostly ignores

the ways in which not only children, parents, teachers, librarians, and children's book editors but also specialists in faculties of education and information science talk about children's literature, Nel and Paul's *Keywords* becomes a less politically challenging book than it might have been and a less challenging and less useful book than its title promises.

Its limitations become apparent in comparison to the Routledge *Handbook of Research*. While most of the essays on specifically literary topics in this guide are as politically disengaged as the entries in *Keywords*, other contributors from other disciplines often consider the part literature plays in the lives of children and reveal a strong commitment to exploring possibilities for change. For instance, Shirley Brice Heath offers an energetic critique, based in her own youthful experience, of the idealized versions of middle-class childhood she believes are taken for granted in discussions of literacy, and Eva-Maria Simms raises an important question that almost never seems to occur to literary practitioners of children's literature studies: "I have always wondered what other abilities of our children's perception, imagination, feeling, and cognition we have sacrificed when we taught them how to read" (21). By and large, though, this *Handbook of Research* confirms the situation the editors outline in their preface rather than challenge or change it, revealing the large extent to which specialists in any of the three fields it represents not

only remain ignorant of each other's work, but also are driven to do that work by quite different goals and interests.

For the literary scholars represented here and in the other four guides, the focus on the text-centred concerns of the academy results in what strikes me as a surprising lack of interest in the potential effects of their work on the lives of young people. In the *Oxford Handbook*, the only essays that have much to do with how various child readers respond or even how the texts might be inviting them to respond are Philip Serrato's discussion of the potential effect of Francisco Jimenez's *The Circuit* on its audience and Karen Sánchez-Eppler's analysis of how books made by some nineteenth-century children reflect the published books they knew. The focus in the *Routledge Companion* on critical approaches seems to prevent much discussion of the effect of texts on audiences, and there is no essay on approaches centred on such concerns. While one of the subdivisions of the *Cambridge Companion* is called "Audiences," the essays in it are primarily readings of how the characters in the texts address or sometimes represent the children we then might imagine to be in their audience, so that "audience" is more an aspect of the textuality of a text than a group of people who actually interact with it. The Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook* does offer a short section on "child-oriented" approaches, once more referring mainly to approaches that focus on

the reading experiences texts might be said to offer their implied readers. In *Keywords*, Beverly Lyon Clark's entry on "Audience" explores the theoretical implications of differing views of what the audiences for texts for young people might consist of in a way that precludes any mention of actual child readers—as do the other *Keywords* entries. While it might not seem surprising that literary scholars bypass discussion of how texts actually do affect some of their young readers, there is currently a strong interest in exactly that among those pursuing work in childhood studies and related cultural-studies approaches—an interest in investigating matters like online communities and fan fiction that these guides rarely reflect.

More surprisingly, these guides also do not reflect much interest in the ideas about childhood that underpin the very idea that there should be a "children's literature" produced by adults for young people. In his piece in the *Oxford Handbook*, Peter Hunt suggests that the "fundamentals" of children's literature criticism include a key concern: "can we deduce what we mean by 'children's book' or a 'book for children'—as opposed to any other book?" (36). Surprisingly few of the scholars represented in all these guides appear to have much interest in that topic, for it rarely comes up in their work. Indeed, a few of the contributors suggest that an interest in it might actually be counterproductive. After noting in the Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook* that "research in

children's literature generally looks to other disciplines for its critical approaches and methodologies" (124), Kimberley Reynolds says this:

[I]t could be concluded that the lack of a widely recognized body of theoretical work indicates that studying children's literature as if it were a cohesive area analogous to, for instance, the work of Shakespeare, medieval literature, nineteenth century arts and letters or detective fiction is misguided, and that it would be preferable to redistribute materials now studied as "children's literature" across the sphere of literary and other relevant areas of study. Medievalists would then look at medieval writing for children; those working on texts from former colonies would include the materials created for and read by children in their cultures, and so it would go until writing for children was absorbed into the mainstream of academic research. (125)

The logic here is not persuasive. Studies of Shakespeare and detective fiction are, surely, as much influenced by theoretical work by scholars outside their fields as children's literature studies are; should there then also be no specific fields of Shakespeare studies or detective fiction that concentrate on how that theoretical work might help us to understand what is distinct about Shakespeare or detective fiction? Reynolds does go



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on to admit that the development she envisages—the end of children's literature studies—might cause scholars of children's texts to lose sight of specifically child-oriented matters. But her insistence that “much could be gained by incorporating children's literature into the mainstream of academic study” (125) in the context of a guide to those studies is depressingly instructive.

So, I think, is Marah Gubar's plea in her *Keywords* entry on “Innocence” for children's literature scholars “to move away from the binary thinking that sets children up as blank, alien others, and toward a more flexible paradigm which acknowledges that they are akin to adults in their diversity, complexity, and embeddedness in particular sociocultural milieux” (127). On the surface, that seems sensible and eminently humane; I have no problem accepting its truth in terms of actual children. But I feel much less certain about the validity of such a claim in relation to the “children” of children's literature—the audience its name announces—who, for all the variety of their historical and cultural contexts, must inevitably share the one quality that leads adults to produce texts addressed to them, their difference from adults that requires older people to write for and to them. In other words, it is children's literature itself that emerges from and builds on the binary thinking Gubar is objecting to. A scholarly field that ignored that basic distinguishing quality would be missing a central aspect of it.

A lack of interest in the connections between children's literature and children as well as between children's literature and childhood also expresses itself in terms of the kinds of texts these guides cover and, more importantly, the kinds of texts they tend not to cover. By and large, the more texts for young people differ from mainstream fiction for adults, the less attention they get. The texts most frequently discussed might best be characterized as literary fiction for older young readers, or what the marketplace calls “young adults.” There is less about realistic fiction than

about fantasy, less about poetry than one might have hoped, little about non-fiction or children's drama or series books. There is little about the vast body of Christian literature produced for young people over the centuries, surprisingly little about picture books and early chapter books for younger children of any period (although the Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook* does offer a brief guide to pursuing research on them), surprisingly little about movies, TV shows, video games, and such, and especially little about formulaic examples of these genres that have no connections with well-known novels. While the editors of the *Oxford Handbook* claim it covers "works that may not immediately spring to mind as 'literature'—including film, children's writing, comics, and musical recordings" (5), the essays in it discuss exactly one film, very few examples of children's writing, one comic strip, one graphic novel, and one recording. While there are exceptions to these general tendencies, the overall effect of the guides as a whole is to circumscribe children's literature in ways that make it much more like adult literature, specifically adult literary fiction, than it in fact is.

There is also a frequent insistence on the idea that texts for young people might actually be adult literature anyway—or at least what these guides identify as "cross-writing" or "crossover" literature, with serious adults as well as childish children in their real and/or implied audiences. One of the *Keywords* is "Crossover

Literature," and both the *Routledge Companion* and the *Cambridge Companion* devote an essay to the topic. In their introduction to the *Oxford Handbook*, Mickenberg and Vallone speak of the "'cross-written' nature and formative effects of children's literature" (9) generally, assert that it "is foundational to our purpose of bringing new scholarship on important children's works to . . . an adult audience of students and educators" (10), and go on to argue that

in the contemporary moment we seem to be at a point where the lines dividing children's literature and literature for adults often cannot be easily drawn, which may come down to the fact that without "innocence" as a clear demarcation of the line between childhood and adulthood, we are losing a sense of that boundary as well as the need for it. (17)

In what I myself see as a time of increasingly repressive surveillance of and protectiveness toward children and of ongoing commodification of the cuteness of childhood innocence in the marketplace, the unconvincing assertion that we are moving beyond our cultural commitment to the idea of childhood as a safe preserve comes across as yet another way in which these guides are attempting to downplay the connections between children's literature, children, and childhood.

Not only is children's literature as represented in these guides more palatable to sophisticated adult readers than texts for young people as a whole, it is also more benign, less involved with potentially malign forces in the world outside it. While contributors to each of the volumes make the point that children's literature began when John Newbery marketed his first book for children along with some tie-in toys, few remember that mainstream children's publishing has continued to be a business primarily interested in profitability. The guides have surprisingly little to say about the influence of business matters and bottom lines. In addition to Joel Taxel's "Marketing" in the *Routledge Handbook of Research*, Brian Alderson, Andrea Immel, and Deborah Stevenson do discuss marketing concerns in the *Cambridge Companion*, as does June Cummins uniquely in *Keywords* in her piece specifically on "Marketing" and Margaret Mackey uniquely in the *Routledge Companion* in her essay on "Media Adaptations." Mackey says quite rightly that "material conditions . . . affect print and digital texts every bit as much as productions of 'mass media'" (113). Most of the scholars represented in these volumes seem unaware of it, and a consideration of material conditions might have enriched or complicated the conclusions that some of them reach. In the *Oxford Handbook*, for one example, Kevin Shortsleeve makes a case for the carnivalesque anarchy of Dr. Seuss's *Cat in the Hat* as a progenitor of the radical movement of the sixties without saying

anything about the commodification of that text and its immense profitability for its mainstream publishers—factors that might well lead to serious questions about the actual extent to which it creates dissent from the values of the marketplace.

Much of the content of these guides ignores not just the marketplace but the contemporary world altogether. In their preface to the *Cambridge Companion*, Grenby and Immel complain about "a strong presentist streak" (xv) in children's literature criticism, "a tendency to be hostile to works that no longer conform to current models of childhood or judgements about children's capabilities, concerns, or best interests" (xv). If such a bias does exist, then these guides do a poor job of representing it; discussion of texts produced in the past and even fairly recent texts no longer widely read by young people occupy a surprisingly large proportion of the space available in most of them.

As well, those discussions often tend to downplay further the significance of the texts as having been produced for young readers. While much of the discourse in all the guides works, often persuasively, to show how the specific contexts under consideration can throw light on the texts, many of the contributors suggest that their purpose is in fact the opposite of that: that the right sort of consideration of the texts can throw light on the contexts. In the *Oxford Handbook*, Katharine Capshaw Smith claims that, "[a]s readers of [Langston] Hughes, we can discover much about the

child's place within the Harlem Renaissance and about the dynamics of literary production by attending to *The Dream Keeper*" (130); Kelly Hager says that "*Five Little Peppers* provides the opportunity for an exploration of assumptions about class, birth, and taste operative at the end of the nineteenth century in U.S. culture" (314); and Kimberley Reynolds argues that "it is possible to use texts such as *Froggy's Little Brother* as primary evidence about constructions of the poor" (271). For these critics, the fact that the texts they focus on are intended for young people seems to be fairly insignificant.

When contributors to these guides do consider the intended audience, they sometimes do so in ways that tend to imply that children's literature itself might be more benign than it often actually is. One of the ongoing purposes of children's literature is an effort to educate children in ways that adults understand as being for their own good, an effort that seems to fly in the face of the declared allegiance of contemporary adult societies to individual freedom and individual choice. One might then expect guides to this literature to focus on the ways in which children's literature works to constrict young people. Instead, many of the scholars represented in these guides insist that the literature is not actually repressive. In her *Routledge Companion* essay on "Race, Ethnicity, and Colonialism," Clare Bradford says, "it is also the case that individuals and groups are not bound by dominant discourses as by a straitjacket but are capable of scepticism or resistance"

(40); and in his *Keywords* entry on "Culture," Richard Flynn says, "Children are also capable of creatively misappropriating the cultural artifacts they inherit from adults and transforming them into their own texts. . . . [T]here are increasing numbers of scholars who respect children's subjectivities and take them seriously" (66).

As an example of such scholars and their work, Marah Gubar's essay in the *Oxford Handbook* explores her "contention that young people had more to do with the development of children's theatre than we think" (477). Gubar concludes that, "without denying that adult desire drove the creation of *Peter Pan*, and that an adult wrote it, we can still acknowledge that actual children did participate in its genesis" (483). Their participation, under the guidance of James Barrie and of the adult authors of the texts for young people he drew on in creating his Neverland, was never in doubt, but it hardly suggests that children resist the impositions of adult culture upon them, or that Barrie's *Lost Boys* did more than improvise within the framework provided by the adult in charge. I know enough about cultural constructions of subjectivity to suspect that the wiggle room for children's agency in relation to culturally powerful adult ideas about childhood is not as substantial as scholars like Gubar and Flynn assert. Blinding ourselves to the repressive potential of texts as these scholars seem to wish to do seems at least a little unrealistic.

John Stephens reveals the pull between awareness of



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repressive potential and the wish to downplay it in two of his contributions to the "Names and Terms" section of the *Routledge Companion*. In "Subjectivity," he focuses on "the possibility of a subject constituted intersubjectively, that is a subject which participates actively in the discursive processes through which it comes into being" (245). But in "Agency," he suggests that "children's literature since the middle of the twentieth century has tended to reduce the degree and define the contexts in which the agency of young people is possible" (142). I have the sense that many of the contributors to these guides are fully aware of the second of these characterizations, but hope for and concentrate on the first one, thus, apparently, making children's literature more palatable and therefore, presumably, more worthy of study.

That question of worthiness seems to be at least part of the reason for the various omissions and distortions in children's literature studies as represented in these guides. According to Reynolds in the introduction to the Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook*, "it has taken the best part of a century for academia to recognize children's literature as an important and rewarding field of research that has much to say to many other areas of literary and cultural studies" (2). In fact, though, the significance of children's literature has long been recognized in the branches of academia that deal with questions of education and sharing books with children; it is only in the context of literary and cultural studies that the study of texts for young people is a relatively new development. In that context, it is true that many scholars have tended to look down on fields like children's literature studies, in part because of the practical and therefore presumably less purely disinterested educational concerns associated with it—its ties with child readers—and in part simply because of the degree to which its texts are childlike, and so thought to be too simple to be worthy of serious intellectual consideration and analysis. From the evidence of these guides,

many literary-oriented children's literature scholars have responded to that lack of respect from others in literary study by reshaping the body of children's literature to make it appear less didactic, less connected with the marketplace and the schoolroom, less childlike and more mature and literary than it actually is, and the field that studies it as less practical, less tied to the world outside the academy, to children, and to childhood—in other words, a field more like other branches of literary study.

One further aspect of the move to make children's literature studies more like other kinds of literary scholarship is a sort of communal amnesia about the already extant body of children's literature criticism. Many of the entries in the *Keywords* and the descriptions of "terms" in the *Routledge Companion* relate to literary and cultural theory generally, often with little said about how extant children's literature criticism has engaged with the ideas the terms raise. Many of the essays in the two *Companions* and the *Oxford Handbook* explicate texts by referring directly to relevant theoretical texts, again often without reference to previous work by earlier children's literature critics that has already engaged with those theories. The *Routledge Companion* does, I am happy to say, include Roderick McGillis's essay about the connections between various kinds of general literary theory and some specific works of children's literature criticism, and a number of the "Names" included in the *Routledge*

Companion "Names and Terms" are those of children's literature critics (including mine). But otherwise, the contributors to these guides seem less interested in placing their work in the context of earlier critics in the field than they are in citing the same big-name theorists that figure significantly in other branches of literary study.

As with the use of Raymond Williams in *Keywords*, however, the theory referred to tends to be as cut off from what are often its roots in radical politics as the criticism it informs tends to be cut off from children. For a Marxist like Williams, ideological theory was a revolutionary effort to make the world different and better, and other groundbreaking theorists of the later decades of the twentieth century also often pursued their poststructural, postcolonial, deconstructionist, feminist, queer, or Lacanian thinking with liberatory intentions. The scholarship that refers to them in these guides—and for that matter, in the scholarly big leagues in literary and cultural studies generally to which these guides aspire to belong—reveals no such interest. Many of the essays in these volumes refer to the connections between the beginning of children's literature and the rise of middle-class and consumer societies in Europe; the field of children's studies as they represent it tends to be a primarily unquestioning middle-class mirror of the still, surely, primarily middle-class-positive literature it studies. It emerges as a very safe and quite harmless area of study.

Do these guides represent literary-oriented children's literature studies accurately? There are, of course, many exceptions to the bleak generalizations I have been making here—some of them to be found in these volumes themselves. There are, for instance, energetically committed and potentially liberatory pieces by Teya Rosenberg, Charles Hatfield, and Courtney Weikle-Mills in the *Oxford Handbook*; by David Rudd and Emer O'Sullivan in the Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook*; by Andrea Immel in the *Cambridge Companion*; by Clare Bradford and Karen Coats in the Routledge *Handbook of Research*. There are especially thought-provoking *Keywords* entries by Kenneth Kidd, Joseph Thomas, and Eric Tribunella; and Richard Flynn contributes passionate discussions of poetry to both the *Oxford Handbook* and the *Cambridge Companion*. But despite the presence of these and some pieces by others that suggest a commitment to finding justification for their work beyond the safely limited concerns of the academy, and despite the occasional similarly engaged essay or monograph in the critical environment outside these guides, I remain convinced that, by and large, the limited range of texts these guides focus on and the limited range of approaches they take to those texts do in fact represent the current tendencies of the field of children's literature studies accurately enough to act as useful introductions to it.

For more advanced scholars, though, these guides might be better used as a means of determining what

work still needs to be done—what gaps have been left, what kinds of concerns have been left unaddressed. In particular, they point to a need for more work on what distinguishes texts intended for young audiences from other kinds of writing, for more studies of how such texts emerge from and circulate in the marketplace and elsewhere, and, especially, for a deeper commitment to determining goals for the work that have ramifications outside the literature and cultural studies departments and even outside the academy, in ways that might have an impact on young people now and in the future.

These guides offer a surprisingly consistent view of the field they cover. There are, nevertheless, significant differences between them, differences that determine which ones specific readers might find most useful. I close, then, with a few comments on what each one offers more specifically.

Because it provides a collection of purportedly representative essays rather than a survey of the field, the *Oxford Handbook* allows its contributors to work out their arguments in the kind of detail that makes for eminently respectable scholarly discourse, but the relatively few texts and topics it focuses on make it a surprisingly incomplete "handbook" to the field. The *Routledge Companion*, the *Cambridge Companion*, and the Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook* all offer much more coverage, albeit in different ways. The Palgrave Macmillan *Research Handbook* directs itself

specifically to the needs of students beginning graduate studies in children's literature. As Margaret Mackey suggested in her earlier *Jeunesse* review, the *Cambridge Companion* is so concerned with avoiding a presentist bias that its essays on different topics nevertheless repetitively rehearse the same aspects of historical children's literature. Furthermore, the volume as a whole has little to say about religious, factual, and instructional material or about drama, film, newer media, fairy tales, comic books, and international and multicultural literature generally. The *Routledge Companion* also lacks coverage of most of these matters. What distinguishes it is what Rudd identifies as "a healthy scepticism" (6) about conceptions of childhood and the innocence of texts for young people; it is more interested in issues of ideology than the other guides. It also contains a lengthy section of "Names and Terms," many of which relate to the work of literary and cultural theorists inside and outside the specific field of children's literature studies.

Keywords offers short, often incisive essays on many of the same terms. But while some of the entries raise important critical and theoretical issues, others just

provide summary descriptions and/or histories of the areas or topics to which the words under discussion relate. Also, while Nel and Paul suggest that "each reader should follow the associations suggested by each keyword. . . . [P]ick a word and follow the signifying chain wherever it leads you" (3), their *Keywords*, unlike Williams's original, lacks suggestions of how the terms might connect with one other. The *Routledge Companion*, on the other hand, usefully boldfaces terms used in its essays to link them to the entries in its "Names and Terms."

Finally, as I suggested earlier, the *Routledge Handbook of Research* covers a wider spectrum of children's literature studies than do the other four guides. While that larger focus results in less coverage of specifically literary concerns, its more accurate picture of children's literature studies as a whole would make it my guide of choice. If I were looking for a guide specifically devoted to the literary aspects of the field but still hoping, as I do, for some sense of the relationships between the literature and the cultural milieu from which it emerges and in which it takes part, I would choose the *Routledge Companion*.

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Perry Nodelman's first critical essay on children's literature was published in 1977, his most recent in 2012. In between, he has been responsible for three books and a hundred or so articles and book chapters on various aspects of the field, as well as a number of novels for young people.