



Imaginary Geography of Children's Books: Adding One More Dimension

Jackson, K. M., & West, M. I. (Eds.). (2022). *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives*. McFarland.

Abstract:

This review paper explores the 2022 collection *Storybook Worlds Made Real: Essays on the Places Inspired by Children's Narratives*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West. The 18 chapters of the collection cover a range of theme parks and literary playgrounds related to children's literature, spanning Europe, America, and, to a lesser extent, Asia. The chapters combine historical and theoretical approaches with detailed descriptions of the parks and engaging first-person travel narratives. Inspired by diverse book characters – from German fairy-tale gnomes through Peter Rabbit and Alice to Pippi Longstocking, Moomins, and ubiquitous Harry Potter – numerous theme parks became a fertile ground for discussing many important topics, including children's imagination, reading encouragement, authenticity, simulation, commercialisation, Americanisation, Disneyfication, and Pottermania.

Key words:

children's literature, commercialisation, imaginary spaces, literary playgrounds, theme parks

* Olga Bukhina – MA, a translator, writer, children's books specialist, and independent scholar. Her research interests include contemporary American and Eastern European children's literature, the depiction of orphans, death, and city landscapes in children's books, and translation studies. Contact: bukhina.olga@gmail.com.

Wyobrażona geografia książek dla dzieci. Poszerzanie horyzontów

Jackson, K. M., West, M. I. (red.). (2022). *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives*. McFarland.

Abstrakt:

Niniejszy artykuł recenzyjny poświęcony jest antologii *Storybook Worlds Made Real: Essays on the Places Inspired by Children's Narratives* [Ożywione książkowe światy. Eseje o przestrzeniach inspirowanych dziecięcymi narracjami] pod redakcją Kathy Merlock Jackson i Marka I. Westa (2022). 18 rozdziałów zawartych w zbiorze obejmuje różnorodne parki tematyczne i literackie place zabaw związane z literaturą dziecięcą, rozciągające się na Europę, Amerykę i, w mniejszym stopniu, Azję. Rozdziały łączą podejścia historyczne i teoretyczne ze szczegółowymi opisami parków oraz angażującymi pierwszoosobowymi relacjami z podróży. Zainspirowane różnorodnymi postaciami książkowymi – od niemieckich baśniowych krasnoludków, poprzez Piotrusia Królika, Alicję, Pippi Pończoszanke, Muminki, aż po wszechobecnego Harry'ego Pottera – liczne parki tematyczne stały się punktem wyjścia do dyskusji na wiele ważnych tematów, takich jak dziecięca wyobraźnia, zachęcanie do czytania, autentyczność, symulacja, komercjalizacja, amerykanizacja, disneifikacja i potteromania.

Słowa kluczowe:

literatura dziecięca, komercjalizacja, przestrzenie wyobrażone, literackie place zabaw, parki tematyczne

When I was about ten years old, I invented a country. The idea was not entirely original; I borrowed it from a book where two boys, dissatisfied with the injustices of the world in which they lived, created their own country called Shvambraniia.

Everything was right and just in Shvambraniia, unlike in the real world where:

All seven continents were ruled by adults. They took charge of history, they rode on horseback, hunted, commanded fleets of ships, smoked, crafted real objects, went to war, loved, saved lives, abducted others, and played chess... And children stood in corners. Adults probably just forgot about their childhood books and games – the things they could not get enough of while they were children. They must have forgotten! (Kassil', 1931/2015, p. 73).¹

¹ Translated by Ben Hooyman.

As these boys did, I meticulously drew maps of my country and its capital city, producing physical artefacts from my imagination. I did not become a writer like Lev Kassil', one of the boys who invented Shvambraniia; I did not elevate my childhood game into a popular children's book. Instead, I delved into numerous books that depict imaginary spaces, dreaming about visiting and exploring their physicality. The almost 300-hundred-page collection *Storybook Worlds Made Real: Essays on the Places Inspired by Children's Narratives*, edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West (2022), does exactly that. Each of the book's nine parts consists of two essays connected by a common theme. This organisation successfully allows a reader to explore each theme explored from two different perspectives. Each pair of essays offers a strong discussion of the topic, making it interesting and engaging to read. I will not be able to discuss every essay at length, so I will focus on some texts in more detail than others, with the understanding that this often will be an arbitrary choice. The book is both a scholarly enterprise and a guidebook for those who want to travel to the magical lands of their favourite books. In these parks, children feel that they are not forgotten and are at the centre of the story. Adults, who are often there just for the sake of kids, may suddenly remember that they also were once children.

The topic is not entirely new in the research on both children's and adult literature. Places and spaces in children's literature have become the subject of several books and collections of articles, such as *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* by Humphrey Carpenter (1985) and *Children's Literature and Imaginative Geography* edited by Aïda Hudson (2019). While Carpenter's book centred on classic British children's literature, Hudson, at least partially, expands these explorations to include American and Canadian children's books. The border-crossing aspects of imaginative geography as well as real and metaphorical mapping have been explored in two edited volumes: *Space and Place in Children's Literature, 1789 to the Present* by Maria Sachiko Cecire, Hannah Field, Kavita Mudan Finn, and Malini Roy (2015) and *Maps and Mapping in Children's Literature* by Nina Goga and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (2017). These collections broaden the geographical scope by including works of European authors. More recently, Nikolai Epple (2024), a Russian author currently residing in Germany for political reasons, has published a book *Volshebnyaya Strana i Ee Okrestnosti* [The Magical Land and Its Surroundings], devoted to imaginary spaces and their creators in British children's literature.

Imaginary spaces, transitional portals, and their connections to a child's psychological development were examined by Monica A. Grandy and Steven

Tuber (2009) in their insightful article, "Entry into Imaginary Space: Metaphors of Transition and Variations in the Affective Quality of Potential Space in Children's Literature." Their work focuses on explaining the psychological needs for these spaces that provide children with "a sense of agency within the play space," and the opportunity to "move in and out of the space, for the most part, at their own choosing" (p. 279). While the above-mentioned works emphasise the act of travelling or transitioning to imaginary spaces, the reviewed collection, *Storybook Worlds Made Real*, uniquely explores the physical manifestations of these spaces in the very real world of commercial activities connected to children's literature around the world.

How can the imaginary world be made real? How can one journey inside a favourite story? How did the idea of a theme park connected to a particular book or author come about? Though I have never visited any of the places mentioned in the collection, I was very happy to learn about them. I probably will never be able to visit most of these amazing parks, but the essays, together with contemporary visual resources, helped me to get acquainted with them. Inspired by the book, I hope to visit at least some of these places.

The history of theme parks starts with Copenhagen's famous park Tivoli. In his essay "Tivoli Gardens and Hans Christian Andersen: A Tale of Confluence," one of the editors of the collection, Mark I. West (2022b) gives a tour of the magical garden that inspired Andersen and where Andersen's fairy tales come to life. Another editor, Kathy Merlock Jackson (2022), in her essay "Fairy Tales, German Heritage, and a Vision of Roadside America: See Rock City," describes how European, and particularly German, fairy tales acquired physicality in America and allowed their readers, young and old, to enjoy seeing their beloved fairy-tale characters spring to life. In the American context, Disney's movies have always helped to embody and visualise fairy-tale characters, but Rock City Garden provides an even better opportunity to get closer to them. The brightly coloured statues that inhabited the park – Red Riding Hood with her "vivid red cape and bright yellow apron," along with the entire dioramas of dwarfs – were able "to illustrate popular fairy tales and nursery rhymes" (p. 19). Such materializations of fairy tales served some political purposes. Jackson claims that in the post-WWII environment, when everything German was not welcomed, these characters from the Grimm's stories helped to reduce the harm and to diminish "ill feelings" (p. 19). One of the conditions of the Rock City Garden's success was familiarity. The image of Cinderella in her "sparkling glass slippers" provided a necessary combination of familiarity and excitement (p. 20). By mixing reality and fantasy, and employing all possible details, such physical representations of favourite characters allowed visitors to

become part of the story. As Jackson put it, this “extended the fairy-tale experience for children from book reading to the physical world” (p. 20).

The entire Mother Goose Village, adorned with representations of nursery rhymes most famous and familiar to American readers, served as a compelling advocate and promoter of reading. The dioramas and sculptures were qualitatively different from book illustrations. While any illustration helps children to envision the characters and magical spaces described in the book, the Rock City depictions of fairy-tale personages literally added a new dimension to the perception of literature as part of the material world. The diverse company of almost 100 gnomes made the lore of the Old World real and palpable. The effect was quite different from that of theme parks with the full immersion into the experience of a particular book by a particular author. Alongside the heroes of specific fairy tales in Rock City, multiple generic gnomes and elves provided a general atmospheric impression. As Jackson (2022) noted, many fairy tales and nursery rhymes are quite scary and have “a common theme: the child or youth in jeopardy” (p. 22). The skilful visual representations of the scary and dramatic moments in the park helped children not to be afraid.

The wooden boy Pinocchio does not need an introduction, and this story also provides many scary moments for young readers. In “Visiting Pinocchio in Tuscany,” Lucy Rollin (2022) discusses the global reception of the Pinocchio story more than Pinocchio Park in Tuscany, Italy. Rollin convincingly analyses the book’s popularity and shares her personal impressions of the village of Collodi, where the writer lived as a child and from which he borrowed his pen name. Describing this ancient village rather than an actual theme park makes perfect sense, as the village contributes more to understanding the book’s atmosphere.

In the next essay, “For Anne Fans Only: Romanticism and Narrative Simulacra in Cavendish’s Avonlea,” Sue Matheson (2022) claims that “[i]n *Anne of Green Gables* art imitates life” (p. 35). Matheson continues: “Many children’s books are inspired by places, but few, in turn, have inspired places themselves” (p. 35). Lucy Maud Montgomery’s place of birth, Cavendish, was developed into a tourist attraction as early as the 1950s. Upon visiting, I observed that the entirety of Prince Edward Island transformed into Anne’s Land, not only the region around Cavendish/Avonlea where “life imitates fiction” (p. 36). Tourists do not need to reach such destinations as the Avonlea Theme Park and Cavendish Figurines store to buy an Anne Shirley red-headed doll of any size and price range. Matheson emphasises the hyperreality of Anne’s Land, enabling fans to perceive it as a tangible place and space, bringing to life what once existed solely in the author’s imagination. What never was real is now real.

Soon after the publication of the novel, “people began visiting Cavendish in search of Green Gables and other people and places in Montgomery’s fictional Avonlea” (Matheson, 2022, p. 35). Drawing upon Jean Baudrillard’s idea of simulacra, the author of the essay describes various buildings connected to Lucy Maud Montgomery’s whereabouts, including her grandfather’s and aunt’s. The Green Gables House is at the centre of this simulation game. The enthusiasm of Anne’s fans helps to break down the “[d]istinction between the real and simulacra” (p. 42). The plastic cow in the barn works perfectly well in the new environments of fictional Avonlea, surrounded by its tourist industry, golf courses, amusement parks, and countless shops. Commercialisation falsifies both fictional and real places. Cavendish/Avonlea suffers from commercialisation the same way as, for example, the Auschwitz Memorial suffers from the MacDonal’d’s advertising on the road to the town of Oświęcim. Both children’s literature and tragic history, as different as they are, are overshadowed by a shopping mall.

Matheson describes and analyses the reactions of many visitors to Cavendish, noting their disappointment with first-, second-, and even third-order simulacra. Nevertheless, according to many respondents she quotes, it remains a happy moment of connection to the beloved character from their favourite book. Matheson also highlights the Japanese connections, noting that among Japanese tourists, only visits to New York, Paris, and London rank higher than trips to Prince Edward Island. She suggests that one of the reasons for this is that the translated book resonated with the stories of post-war orphans and became part of the school curriculum in Japan.

Different essays in the collection employ various theoretical approaches and stress different aspects of theme parks: from the creation of a place celebrating children’s literature through German fairy tales to the explicit commodification of a children’s book in the case of the Winnie-the-Pooh story. According to “Winnie-the-Pooh: Resisting Commodification of a Beloved Childhood Narrative” by Terri Toles Patkin (2022), one of the strongest cases of commodification is Disneyfication, and Disney’s approach to Winnie-the-Pooh is not unique. I would add that among other examples of stories that underwent significant transformations by Disney, one might mention Felix Salten’s *Bambi* (1923). This book nearly lost all its tragic features in its 1942 movie rendition. According to Patkin, the Winnie-the-Pooh story “became simplified, unidimensional, and attuned with other Disney productions” (p. 58). However, the most frightening tale of a lonely fawn had been turned into a fully sentimental narrative meant to reassure a child that everything will be okay. In the case of Winnie-the-Pooh, as Patkin argues, by sanitising the original version,

and what is more essential, Americanizing it, Disney's production brought "sentimental modernism' in which the real and unreal are blended together using Victorian tropes such as disarming cuteness and sentimentalism" (p. 59). How much adaptation and appropriation, by means of the "double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (Hutcheon, 2012, p. 20), results in altering the original work? This important question helps us understand the challenges of transferring a book into a different medium, be it an animated movie or a theme park.² Catering to the needs of popular culture, which aims not to frighten or overwhelm children, is not necessarily a negative quality. However, this is not a topic of Patkin's essay.

What is imitating what – life imitates art, or art imitates life – is a crucial aspect in Patkin's discussion on several alterations of the wooden bridge where Pooh and his friends played the game of Poohsticks. Regrettably, the essay focuses extensively on the reconstruction of the bridge, revisiting the bridge story repeatedly. The physical incarnations of beloved children's books – be it imaginary Avonlea or real woods in Hartfield – attract hordes of tourists, bringing both financial profit and the inconveniences of traffic jams to the locals. But Hartfield differs from Prince Edward Island – it is an "entire low-key experience" (Patkin, 2022, p. 63). In Hartfield, the "Pooh Country Code" includes, among many other directives: "Park considerately"; "Keep to footpaths across farmland"; "Make no unnecessary noise"; and, of course, "Eat more honey" (p. 61). Some 'false' places also celebrate Winnie-the-Pooh – to name just a few, Patkin quotes Philip Long and Mike Robinson (2009) who, in addition to the Disney properties, mention two more places: White River, Ontario, and a shopping complex in Dubai (p. 109). The 'real' one, in a quiet English village and the adjacent Ashdown Forest, is almost overlooked by the commodifying spree (Patkin, 2022, p. 64).

Much like in the case of Winnie-the-Pooh, numerous elements of actual environments found their way into the books of Beatrix Potter. According to "Beatrix Potter World, Hill Top Farm, and a Legacy of Conservation" by Sarah Minslow (2022), Potter's "attention to details informs every illustration, many [of] which visitors can still recreate in her house at Hill Top and in the surrounding town" (p. 73). Standing at the staircase landing of the Hill Top's house, visitors may find themselves, for example, on page 15 of *The Tale of Samuel*

² The discussion of adaptation is represented in one of the collection's essays, "Worldly Wonderlands: Alice-Inspired Places Across the Globe" by Francesca Arnava (2022). For a general discussion of adaptation and appropriation, see the works of Linda Hutcheon (2012) and Julia Sanders (2015).

Whiskers (1908). The garden path leading up to the front door is recognisable from the illustrations to *The Tale of Tom Kitten* (1907).³ Potter's ability to see little critters as real animals of the forest, garden, or even the house, while simultaneously endowing them with human characteristics and emotions, allows readers/visitors to enjoy these connections between the images from the books and their prototypes. Minslow believes that "Potter does not over-sentimentalize the natural landscape and its inhabitants" (p. 73). The soothing chamomile tea that follows Peter Rabbit's perilous adventures coexists with the pie into which Mr. McGregor put Peter's father. It is a risky world where everyone can be eaten by someone else – a world very different, according to Minslow, from that of Winnie-the-Pooh, written two decades later. In that world, the innocence of a child is mostly preserved.

The materialisation of children's literature often starts with the toy that corresponds to a character from the book. In 1903, Beatrix Potter designed the first Peter Rabbit doll and registered a patent for it, making Peter Rabbit the very first licensed literary character in the world (Minslow, 2022, p. 77). The author of the essay reminds us that Potter also "worked to create tea sets, bedroom slippers, painting books, and board games based on her characters" (p. 77). Potter used this income to buy and conserve more land in the Lake District. Due to Potter's efforts, the area remained intact and pristine, making it a valuable tourist attraction. Authenticity – the atmosphere of the place that evokes feelings akin to those in the books and reflects the ideal of "old England" – attracts people who are drawn to the "rural fantasies in contrast to urban landscapes" (p. 78). That is exactly what, according to Minslow, Beatrix Potter wanted and "carefully orchestrated" (p. 78).

Minslow particularly underscores the significance of gardens – in Beatrix Potter's books and in British children's literature as a whole. In the Hill Top Farm garden, visitors can effortlessly immerse themselves in the spirit of Beatrix Potter's books. However, on the other side of the lake, the modern world and the spirit of commerce have encroached upon the tranquillity of Hill Top Farm. Numerous lodgings, restaurants, bars, shopping options, and ice-cream parlours have sprung up The World of Beatrix Potter Attraction. Minslow states that the museum maintains a modest and straightforward ambiance, despite her own description of it, which mentions 3D figurines of diverse characters from the books, along with numerous interactive digital devices. The title character of my favourite and the only Potter's book I knew in my childhood,

³ The author of the essay mistakenly refers to this book as *The Tale of Tom Whispers*.

The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle (1905), is, of course, present in the museum and faithfully “irons Lucie’s lost pocket handkerchiefs” (p. 80).

In the next essay, Potter’s tranquillity gives way to storms, or rather, to the illusion of tornados that need to be created to ensure the reality of a book experience. In her essay “Somewhere on Top of a Mountain: A Real Journey to Oz,” Dina Schiff Massachi (2022) discusses The Land of Oz theme park. Several Dorothies on staff, Tin Men, and other characters allow visitors to follow the girl’s journey. This Oz-themed park in North Carolina went through a challenging history that triumphally started in 1970, underwent a deep decline, only to be resurrected in the late 1990s. Original Dorothies now play Glinda or Aunt Em. The stories of two girls, Dorothy and Alice, are juxtaposed in the section entitled “Paths for Girls’ Journeys,” moving from Oz to experiences in Wonderlands. To visit Oz, you may go to North Carolina. Where do you go to visit Wonderland? All the way to Japan or to New York, for example. In her essay “Worldly Wonderlands: Alice-Inspired Places Across the Globe,” Francesca Arnavas (2022) analyses Alice’s representations and adaptations in many parts of the world. For Arnavas, it is essential to examine “how a literary dimension can be turned into a physical environment” (p. 105). Describing a sculptural group of Alice, with other characters from the book, in New York’s Central Park, Arnavas stresses its nonlinear representation, and its “additional impromptu quality” (p. 107). The statues “are not meant to be just looked at”; they “actually invite children to play among and on them, making it a lovely, ever-changing attraction: children have *modified* it through the years, smoothing parts of the sculptures with their hands and feet [emphasis in original]” (p. 107). Arnavas also makes a very important observation that Wonderland, or some other literary space, may be recreated by creating a map – whether a paper map or a digital one. She describes the use of maps in the town of Llanudno in North Wales where Alice Liddell spent her seaside summer vacations.

Many authors emphasise the importance of food experience connected to various children’s books; Arnavas stresses that nothing can be more important than dining with Alice: “Eating and drinking cannot be left out from any experience aiming at evoking Alice’s Wonderland” (p. 111). In my chapter “How Does It Taste: Eating and Drinking with Alice at the International Table,” I argue that the relationship with food set by Lewis Carroll’s writings has influenced many cultures. For example, “the appropriation of Carroll’s ways of ‘playing with food’ manifests itself in two very different cultures, American and Russian,” and in their prose and poetry for children (Bukhina, 2022, p. 35).

Arnavas’s essay discusses a fascinating topic: how to recreate the atmosphere of a book written in a particular time and place in locations very distant

from the original setting. In Japan, particularly in Tokyo, Alice is an incredibly influential figure, and the Japanese reaction to Alice is truly three-dimensional with their Alice-inspired restaurants, tea-rooms, and 'Victorian' tea shops. Arnavas (2022) also explores the "grotesque and creepy aspects" of Carroll's books, claiming that, when examined in the Japanese context, they transform Alice into a symbol of counterculture, symbolising "rebellion towards rigid impositions" and invoking "performative subversion and sexual liberation" (p. 112). Removed from Victorian British culture and even contemporary English language spaces, Alice easily becomes a subversive figure. Thus, "Japanese Wonderland re-actualizes and re-interprets Carroll's subversive potential" (p. 113). As I noted in my earlier article, the settings of children's books bring forth these subversive powers and dark matters: "All these fantastic and dangerous settings are intimately connected not only to the creative Child of the writer but also to the dark depths of id where all wishes, without any limitations, come true" (Bukhina, 2019b, p. 173; see also Bukhina, 2019c).

The difference between a theme park or a place where a famous writer lived and an amusement park with literary components is clearly evident throughout the book. As the narrative progresses, it focuses on various European and American theme parks, such as Astrid Lindgren's World in Vimmerby, Sweden; Efteling in Kaatsheuvel, the Netherlands; Children's Fairyland in Oakland, CA; and Seuss Landing in Orlando, FL. Two essays in the section entitled "Dramatic Playgrounds" foreground the importance of children's play. In his essay "Playing in Astrid Lindgren's World: Developing Empathy Through Dramatic Play," Mark I. West (2022a) shares his own experience of visiting a literary playground in the town of Vimmerby, the birthplace of Astrid Lindgren. Preparing thoroughly for the experience, he even reread three Pippi Longstocking books on the plane to Sweden. West highlights the theatrical performances in Astrid Lindgren's World, which are an intrinsic part of its playful atmosphere: "[W]hen the actors are not performing on the stages, they often stroll about the park in character, and they interact with the visitors in an improvised fashion" (p. 122).

West's impressionistic account of Vimmerby celebrates the idea of children's play echoing the studies of pioneers of childhood psychology such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Traditionally, Piaget (1923/2001) delineated four stages of cognitive development based on how children play and what games they are capable of mastering. Vygotsky (1933/2004) focused on the importance of children's play as the primary activity of a small child and highlighted the influence of culture on child cognitive development. Carissa Baker's (2022) essay "Magic Keys and Musical Mushrooms: Storylands and Early Dramatic

Play” continues the discussion of children’s play, describing children’s parks “based on the fairytale themes” (p. 127). These parks include multiple playgrounds connected to stories, as well as puppet shows and other theatrical performances; these spaces “can be powerful for children’s imaginations” (p. 128). Baker’s essay is richly illustrated with photographs, helping readers visualise both Efteling and Oakland’s Children’s Fairyland.

In the essay “Oh, the Places You’ll Know! Universal’s Seuss Landing and Surrealism Made Real,” Carl F. Miller (2022) discusses in detail the “Disneyfication of Dr. Seuss” (Philip Nel’s term, 2003). Miller does not shy away from the debates surrounding the controversy over the contemporary reading of some of the books by Dr. Seuss. He describes the situation as complicated for the park without offering any simplistic answers to the problem of re-examining these books. Instead, he raises the question of how this controversy will affect the existing rides and the store whose names are associated with the books in question. He also considers the possibility that “Seuss Landing as a whole could be eliminated and replaced with a less politically charged franchise” (p. 156).

Next, the book delves into the discussion of adult involvement in activities suggested by different theme parks. In her essay “The Hidden Child: Considering the Adult Visitor at Moominworld and the Roald Dahl Museum,” Anna Cohn Orchard (2022) states that, unfortunately, the park almost does not involve adults in potential activities, despite the growing number of adults who are now an essential part of the community of avid readers of children’s books. The phenomenon of adults revisiting places they visited as kids, now with their own children, gives opportunities for adult involvement that may tap into “the inner child” hidden within, using the terminology of Perry Nodelman (2008). Orchard suggests that museums or parks targeting adult visitors should not solely rely on accessing nostalgia and “the memory of childhood past,” but also on “accessing their inner child” (p. 164). This approach could be a productive way to transition adults from merely accommodating caregivers to active enjoyment of the experience. Orchard cites C. S. Lewis (1966/2002), who asserted that “a children’s story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children’s story” (p. 24). It would be beneficial to compare the perceptions of various parks, especially those connected to crossover books like the Harry Potter series, not only from the perspective of child visitors but also from that of adults.

Suzanne Rahn’s essay (2022) “Peter Pan, Snow White, and Toad: Disneyland’s First Dark Rides” is another personal account, this time detailing a family visit when the author was as an 11-year-old child. Two-hour-long lines “under the broiling sun” in 1955, during Disneyland’s first days when nothing was working smoothly, created an experience that produced “still vivid

recollections” (p. 172). Rahn explores the connections between Disney’s movies and the eerie yet fascinating “dark rides” in the park (p. 172). As years passed, Snow White, Mr. Toad, and Peter Pan made room for the Boy with a Scar. This move is inspected in detail in the next essay, “– yer a wizard’: Immersion and Agency in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter,” by Susan Larkin and Travis B. Malone (2022), who offer a fully engrossing experience in the parallel universes of the famous story. These universes include the one presented in the seven books, another in the eight movies, and a third in several theme parks located in Florida, California, Japan, and many other places, some of which are discussed in the essay. According to its authors, “the theme park guest’s own anticipation plays into their willingness to immerse themselves in the experience [...]. With each step, the magical world of the books and the films come to life” (p. 188).

However, some researchers argue that theme parks are, at the very least, debatable in their ability to reflect the true essence of the books and the child’s experience with them. The essay’s authors discuss whether, in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme parks, “the simulation becomes more real than reality,” stripping a child of the power of imagination (p. 189). This perspective sees these parks as a mere evil spawn of consumerism. In response, Larkin and Malone argue: “The theme park provides the immersive space that can be read and interacted with in many ways” (p. 189). Agency may begin with choosing a wand at Ollivander’s shop and continue with enjoying Butterbeer – a drink invented by J. K. Rowling and “brought to life in the park” – or purchasing Chocolate Frogs (p. 194). There is a comforting claim that, in the park, guests to the Wizarding World are wizards: “They do not attempt to become Harry, Hermione, or Dobby. Instead, they attempt to play in the world” (pp. 195–196). Thus, the Wizarding World creates a strong immersive experience. Describing this experience as cosplay, if only partially, the authors stress its freedom from rules or judgement, as well as its non-compulsory quality. As much as the Harry Potter theme parks are profit-driven, the same is true for publishing the original volumes and, especially, for the production of the movies. Therefore, in my opinion, the heavy criticism directed by many researchers towards the theme parks should be “distributed” across the numerous reiterations of “Potteriana.”

The popularity of Harry Potter has brought him to many distant locations. While a full-scale theme park has not yet emerged in Karagandy, Kazakhstan, the Hogwarts Express transports local tourists from platform 9¾, complete with its iconic luggage cart and owl cage on top, along the route of an old children’s railroad in Central Karagandy Park. The station is adorned with the flags of the four Houses of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (Dergunova,

2022). Harry Potter stands out as perhaps the most powerful contemporary inspiration for both theme parks and their researchers. Nevertheless, only one essay in the entire collection dwells on the wizardly world, and the authors of this essay refrained from overwhelming the reader with an all-encompassing list of works cited.

The designated place of children's imagination can even be found in the store: for example, the Harry Potter store in New York has areas for play and fun, such as the Ministry Phone Box and Butterbeer Bar. The next two essays introduce a new topic, exploring not theme parks, but theme stores, and discussing how a chain store functions as an interactive and educational playground. In "Unique, Yet United: Empowering Individuality and Sisterhood at American Girl Place and *American Girl Live*," Haley Flanders Anderson (2022) takes a look at another cultural icon, American Girl dolls, although this one is primarily limited to the US. Since these dolls are quite expensive, their creators and sellers feel the need to provide something extra for the money parents pay. The commercialised sisterhood of the dolls, nevertheless, supplies enough historical context and reminds the buyer that each "doll has a valuable story and the era to be remembered forever" (p. 208). To stress the individuality of each customer, the company launched the TrulyMe collection, allowing each buyer to "name the doll and create his or her story and style" that "teaches girls to be empowered by individuality and autonomy, proudly selecting what defines them and their unique dolls" (p. 211).

To enjoy the luxury of autonomy and individuality, a child typically needs to come from at least a middle-class family that can afford these dolls, along with their extensive array of belongings – clothing and accessories including orthodontic headgear, glasses, wheelchairs, or service dogs – which overflow the store shelves. For Anderson (2022), "[w]hat the doll wears, likes, and looks like reflects its owner" (pp. 211–212). Anderson's constant assurance that American Girl Place and the show *American Girl Live* (2018–2019) are all about sisterhood and helping others raises serious doubts. On the contrary, the idea of a doll that is a copy of oneself becomes quite appealing if – and when – individuality is replaced by individualism. Far from convincing is the notion that empowerment should be represented by creating your own double rather than choosing a doll that is different from yourself, more akin to choosing a real friend. Anderson does not address this issue, assuming that a child-buyer is always seeking the "likeness" of the doll. Even the heavily emphasised idea of "sisterhood" as one of the most important features and goals of the entire project does not necessarily require such a strong focus on "likeness." In the theatrical version, *American Girl Live*, each girl-performer "bears a noticeable resemblance to her

doll based on skin and hair color. Moreover, it quickly became clear that each camper and her doll have matching interests” (pp. 214–215). The author’s statement that “the focus is more on meaningful interactions in the store and less about what is purchased” does not seem convincing, nor does the essay’s conclusion about “prioritizing experience over merchandise, the girl over the doll” (pp. 215, 220).

The next essay, “Revisionist History: How American Girl Place Revolutionized and Abandoned Immersive Storytelling in Shopping” by Emily Sullivan (2022), presents a more realistic view of American Girl Place. Sullivan acknowledges these stores employ a successful marketing technique. A café, a hair-dressing salon for dolls, and regularly scheduled live theatrical performances help offset the high price of the products by adding some “educational and emotional value” (p. 225). Switching gears from historical dolls to contemporary ones in the Girl of the Year product line, as well as altering the accessories of the historical characters, the stores further prioritise sales versus experiences. In Sullivan’s essay, the idealisation of the American Girl enterprise is mostly absent. The glorifying portrait of the company in Anderson’s essay is interestingly juxtaposed with Sullivan’s reports of lost profits and financial turmoil of the company in recent years. Reading the two essays together creates the odd feeling that they describe different realities of American Girl Place, including even variations in the spelling of some product names. Sullivan’s conclusion seems quite realistic: “American Girl has always been a financial venture, a company looking to sell customers as much product as possible, just like any other company” (p. 232).

Mixing education and entertainment became a source of profit not only for American Girl Place but also for multiple Walt Disney company enterprises, one of which is the focus of the next essay, “Places That Inspire: Figment, Shamu, and the Thin Line Between Education and Advertising” by Andrew J. Friedenthal (2022). Figment, a newly invented character created specifically for the theme park, enters the realm of commercial educational videos and finds a proper home there. In his essay, Friedenthal states: “Clearly, Figment did not exist outside of the world of commerce for which he was created” (p. 242). Friedenthal convincingly demonstrates the inextricable connection between the “cynical side” of using the imaginative characters and the attempt to create an attraction meant to inspire, educate, and delight, resulting in a complicated “mix of advertising and idealism” (p. 243). That is almost a universal characteristic of all theme parks described in the collection.

The last essay, Amy Lantinga’s “Martin’s Park: A Disaster Narrative in a Children’s Space” (2022), radically shifts from the ‘literature into the real

world' paradigm into the 'real world into literature' one. After all the stories of theme parks with their uplifting connections to beloved children's books, the collection ends on a much sadder and darker note, remembering the 2013 Boston marathon bombing and the creation of Martin's Park in Boston – a memorial to the youngest victim of the bombing. In its sombre mood, Lantinga's essay claims that "[d]isaster and tragedy *are* hard to discuss with children [emphasis in original]." Difficult, "but not impossible" (p. 262). The essay advocates talking to children about such tragedies as the Boston marathon bombing using the narratives of parks like Martin's Park. Just as adults discuss the messages of favourite books with children, caregivers can also help kids understand the world around them through the story of the boy who was killed by the bomb blast. Many children's books help children cope with the fear of death and with the experience of death in real life. Lantinga suggests using books written by child psychologists that deal with grieving. I would add that it could also be beneficial to use various children's books where death and dying are central to the story. Particularly helpful books include the classic Astrid Lindgren's *Bröderna Lejonhjärta* [*The Brothers Lionheart*] (1973), along with works by many European authors – Ulf Stark and Ulf Nilsson (Sweden), Wolf Erlbruch (Germany), and Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt (Belgium), among others – as well as numerous American publications.⁴

The book concludes with "A Bibliography of Childhood Narratives and the Places They Inspire," an extensive compilation of books, book chapters, and journal articles by Camille McCutcheon (2022). Overall, this collection presents a captivating blend of scholarly articles and personal narratives recounting visits to different theme parks. Many essays in the collection skilfully intertwine analytical perspectives with the authors' memories and emotions, offering a multifaceted exploration of the theme park experience. Much like Bodleian and Benjaminian flâneurs leisurely exploring the town, children, accompanied by adults, meander through the theme parks and literary playgrounds without specific goals or well-defined plans, simply relishing the experience as casual wanderers and curious wonderers (Bukhina, 2019a; Tribunella, 2010). This collection offers a diverse array of descriptions of various spaces where children may cultivate their flâneur-like qualities.

Throughout the collection, readers gain valuable insights into theme parks, museums, and other spaces associated with children's literature worldwide.

⁴ For the significance of Astrid Lindgren's book, see, for example, Alan Richards's 2007 article. The bibliography of death-related books for children and adolescents is provided in Charles C. Corr's 2002 article.

The rich material underscores the significance of physical, three-dimensional representations of children's literature, providing an opportunity to perceive and experience it in a manner different from reading book pages. The relationships between a book's narrative and a three-dimensional theme park built around its characters, places, and stories evoke the concept of a multiverse mothering multiple universes, including our own. Each physical incarnation of literature is a universe born from the book's multiverse, since "we are part of larger cosmos, home to many universes – multiverse, of which our universe is simply one humble number" (Mersini-Houghton, 2022, p. xvii). The core of the story remains the same, yet its multiple reiterations and representations are distinct and well-defined. The printed book is not the end of the story. A children's book is a multiverse capable of giving birth to a diversity of universes, galaxies, stars, and planets.

References

- Arnavas, F. (2022). Worldly wonderlands: Alice-inspired places across the globe. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 101–118). McFarland.
- Baker, C. (2022). Magic keys and musical mushrooms: Storylands and early dramatic play. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 125–148). McFarland.
- Bukhina, O. (2019a). A Child as a flâneur and a voyeur: The imaginative space of streets and museums. *Filoteknos*, 9, 221–237. <https://doi.org/10.23817/filotek.9-16>.
- Bukhina, O. (2019b). Why are they so afraid of children's books? The subversive power of imagination (part 1). *Dzieciństwo. Literatura i Kultura*, 1(2), 170–187. <https://doi.org/10.32798/dlk.163>.
- Bukhina, O. (2019c). Why are they so afraid of children's books? The subversive power of imagination (part 2). *Dzieciństwo. Literatura i Kultura*, 1(2), 188–208. <https://doi.org/10.32798/dlk.164>.
- Bukhina, O. (2022). How does it taste: Eating and drinking with Alice at the international table. In A. Sanna (Ed.), *Alice in Wonderland in film and popular culture* (pp. 35–51). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carpenter, H. (2009). *Secret gardens: A study of the Golden Age of children's literature*. Faber and Faber.
- Cecire, M. S., Field, H., Finn, K. M., & Roy, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Space and place in children's literature, 1789 to the present*. Routledge.
- Corr, C. A. (2002). An annotated bibliography of death-related books for children and adolescents. *Literature and Medicine*, 21(1), 147–174. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2002.0006>.

- Dergunova, I. (2022, May 31). *V Karagande Hogwarts-express budet ezdit' vse leto*. Karaganda.kz. Retrieved April 12, 2024, from https://ekaraganda.kz/?mod=news_read&id=117598.
- Epple, N. (2024). *Volshhebnaya strana i ee okrestnosti*. Illuminator.
- Flanders Anderson, H. (2022). Unique, yet united: Empowering individuality and sisterhood at American Girl Place and American Girl Live. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 203–221). McFarland.
- Friedenthal, A. J. (2022). Places that inspire: Figment, Shamu, and the thin line between education and advertising. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 237–250). McFarland.
- Goga, N., & Kümmerling-Meibauer, B. (Eds.). (2017). *Maps and mapping in children's literature*. John Benjamins.
- Grandy, M. A., & Tuber, S. (2009). Entry into imaginary space: Metaphors of transition and variations in the affective quality of potential space in children's literature. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 26(3), 274–289.
- Hudson, A. (Ed.). (2019). *Children's literature and imaginative geography*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Hutcheon, L. (2012). *A theory of adaptation*. Routledge.
- Jackson, K. M. (2022). Fairy tales, German heritage, and a vision of roadside America: See Rock City. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 11–28). McFarland.
- Jackson, K. M., & West M. I. (Eds.). (2022). *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives*. McFarland.
- Kassil', L. (2015). *Konduit. Shvambraniia*. Izdatel'skii proekt "A i B," Avgust. (Original work published 1931).
- Lantinga, A. (2022). Martin's Park: A disaster narrative in a children's space. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 251–270). McFarland.
- Larkin, S., & Malone, T. B. (2022). "– yer a wizard": Immersion and agency in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 186–202). McFarland.
- Lewis, C. S. (2002). *Of other worlds: Essays and stories*. Harcourt. (Original work published 1966).
- Long, P., & Robinson, M. (2009). Tourism, popular culture and the media. In T. Jamal & M. Robinson (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of tourism studies* (pp. 98–114). Sage.

- Massachi, D. S. (2022). Somewhere on top of a mountain: A real journey to Oz. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 87–100). McFarland.
- Matheson, S. (2022). For Anne fans only: Romanticism and narrative simulacra in Cavendish's Avonlea. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 34–52). McFarland.
- McCutcheon, C. (2022). A bibliography of childhood narratives and the places they inspire. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 271–274). McFarland.
- Mersini-Houghton, L. (2022). *Before the Big Bang: The origin of our universe from the multiverse*. Mariner.
- Miller, C. F. (2022). Oh, the places you'll know! Universal's Seuss Landing and surrealism made real. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 149–156). McFarland.
- Minslow, S. (2022). Beatrix Potter World, Hill Top Farm, and a legacy of conservation. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 71–86). McFarland.
- Nel, P. (2003). The Disneyfication of Dr Seuss: Faithful to profit, one hundred percent? *Cultural Studies*, 17(5), 579–614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950238032000126847>.
- Nodelman, P. (2008). *The hidden adult: Defining children's literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Orchard, A. C. (2022). The hidden child: Considering the adult visitor at Moomin-world and the Roald Dahl Museum. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 157–170). McFarland.
- Patkin, T. T. (2022). Winnie-the-Pooh: Resisting commodification of a beloved childhood narrative. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 53–70). McFarland.
- Piaget, J. (2001). *Language and thought of the child*. Routledge. (Original work published in 1923).
- Rahn, S. (2022). Peter Pan, Snow White, and Toad: Disneyland's first dark rides. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 171–185). McFarland.
- Richards, A. (2007). Stepping into the dark: mourning in Astrid Lindgren's *The brothers Lionheart*. *Barnboken*, 30(1–2), 66–74. <https://doi.org/10.14811/clr.v30i1-2.49>.
- Rollin, L. (2022). Visiting Pinocchio in Tuscany. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 29–33). McFarland.
- Sanders, J. (2015). *Adaptation and appropriation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Sullivan, E. (2022). Revisionist history: How American Girl Place revolutionized and abandoned immersive storytelling in shopping. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 222–236). McFarland.
- Tribunella, E. L. (2010). Children's literature and the child flâneur. *Children's Literature*, 38, 64–91. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.0.0849>.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). Igra i ee rol' v razvitii rebenka. In *Psikhologiya razvitiia rebenka* (pp. 200–223). Smysl. (Originally a 1933 lecture).
- West, M. I. (2022a). Playing in Astrid Lindgren's world: Developing empathy through dramatic play. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 119–124). McFarland.
- West, M. I. (2022b). Tivoli Gardens and Hans Christian Andersen: A tale of confluence. In K. M. Jackson & M. I. West (Eds.), *Storybook worlds made real: Essays on the places inspired by children's narratives* (pp. 5–10). McFarland.