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Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah Roberts, 2018. *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850-1965*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp.362. £80(Hbk). ISBN: 9780199583478.

Reviewed by Robin Diver.

Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850-1965 is a new contribution in the emerging field of reception studies in children's media, adding to Maurice (ed., 2015), Marciniak (ed., 2016) and Lovatt and Hodkinson (eds., 2018). This book is one of the first major publications which is not an edited volume. Doubtless it will be followed by many more.

Chapter one, '"Very Capital Reading for Children": Hawthorne, Kingsley, and the Transformation of Myth into Children's Literature' considers two influential children's authors who wrote anthologies of Greek myth for children: American author Nathaniel Hawthorne (1851; 1853) and British author Charles Kingsley (1855). Hawthorne's *A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys* and sequel *Tanglewood Tales* display a romantic view of childhood critical of academia and centring young female characters, whilst Kingsley's *The Heroes, or Greek Fairy Tales for my Children* focuses on selfless male heroics. Both authors depict Greek myths as oral folklore – 'fairy tales' or 'tales' – and play down their own reliance upon literary source material.

Chapter two, 'Classics in Their Own Right: Visions and Revisions of Hawthorne and Kingsley' considers the reprints and reception tradition of Hawthorne and Kingsley's anthologies. It argues that both these authors quickly assumed the classic status assigned to genuine ancient myth in the popular conscience and sometimes in fact became the default reference guide to myth, since so many adults had encountered them in their childhood. This chapter focuses particularly on the various illustrations and illustrators tied to copies of these books, including a case study of the ways in which the episode of Theseus and the Minotaur is illustrated. Murnaghan and Roberts argue that illustrators often undermine the version of reality presented by the accompanying text in various ways.

Chapter three, '"Steeped in Greek Mythology": The First Half of the Twentieth Century' considers children's anthologies of Greek myth other than Hawthorne and Kingsley, particularly Lang, Price, Colum, the Crawfords, Hamilton and the D'Aulaires. (One British author, Roger Lancelyn Green, is also considered in detail.) It then looks at fiction books in which American children encounter mythical creatures, such as Daugherty's *Andy and the Lion* (1938). These are set in the context of the American golden age of children's literature following World War I. Critical adult discourse regarding children's literature and the challenge to myth and fantasy as appropriate children's reading, such as Lucy Sprague Mitchell's claim that 'the myths and fairy tales given to children…really reflected the tastes and assumptions of adults' (paraphrased by Murnaghan and Roberts: 100) is also considered.

Chapter four, '"Be a Roman Soldier": History, Historical Fiction and National Identity', as the title suggests, considers children's historical fiction. (Non-fiction children's

ancient history books are also briefly mentioned.) Murnaghan and Roberts discuss the issues with writing historical fiction for children: ‘The demand for characters in whom readers can see themselves inevitably introduces a present-day perspective and fosters forms of anachronism that extend beyond the circumstances, motivations, and emotional valences of individuals to include contemporary social values and political ideologies – which may be reinforced even as they draw the reader into another period’. (139.) They argue that British fiction emphasised an equivalency between Britain and Rome. American novels, meanwhile, sought to portray ideals of democracy and freedom.

Chapter five, ‘Ancient History for Girls’, looks at how historical books marketed to girls dealt with issues of ancient gender constructions, often seen to be restrictive even in the early twentieth century. Anecdotes regarding the girlhoods of famous modernist woman writers are given. Murnaghan and Roberts compare Charlotte Yonge’s nineteenth century treatment of classical girlhood, which they argue shows the ancient world ‘as exemplifying appropriate limits on women’ (174), with Dorothy Mills’ early twentieth century treatment which is more conflicted. They consider historical novels such as those of Caroline Dale Snedeker and Erick Berry and argue that ‘these authors compensate for what is missing or unsatisfactory in the historical record and construct ancient experiences of girlhood that answer to the presumed aspirations of their modern readers’ (204). These novels also tend to be critical of ancient couple dynamics whilst implying that ancient girls must on some level have innately longed for romantic ideals reflective of early-twentieth century America.

Chapter six, ‘The Ancient Prehistory of Modern Adults’ considers the ways in which adults constructed the ancient world and spoke about it in relation to their childhood mythical encounters. Examples include H.D.’s belief that myth was a pattern through which adult life could be made sense of, Freud’s view that myth embodies the child’s psychic experience and Joyce’s use of the *Odyssey.* The presentation of myth and children in the writing of Naomi Mitchison and Virginia Woolf is also discussed.

Chapter seven, ‘Pan in the Alps: Child and Adult in H.D.’s *The Hedgehog’* considers this little-known work by H.D. which both is and is not a children’s book. It focuses on the experiences of a girl named Madge, based on the author’s daughter Perdita, and her relationship with the beliefs and values of her mother Bett. Bett’s lessons to Madge involve the idea of myth as symbol and as ‘timeless universal language’ (263). This is set within the context of H.D’s pacifism and the popular belief around the time of the Second World War in children as the key to bringing peace and uniting cultures across the world.

The essential hypothesis of this book, given in the epilogue, that adults since the mid-nineteenth century have acted on a broadly held belief that children will enjoy and benefit from classical myth and history and that child readers take possession of adult-given versions and make them into stories of their own (288), is highly convincing. Murnaghan and Roberts wisely treat essentially all ideas concerning the classical world and the purpose it might have to children as constructions rather than innate reality. They make appropriate use of children’s literature scholarship outside of the field of classics (e.g. the idea of the ‘invisible adult’) without allowing it to

overwhelm the work, and also draw on broader social and historical modernist scholarship. They avoid both sentimentality and the temptation to 'rank' receptions by such things as perceived accuracy to ancient sources or educational value.

One possible criticism, however, might be obvious from the chapter summary. This book examines several disparate themes regarding children's literature of this time period without always clearly justifying why these are the chosen topics and how they link together. However, this is perhaps to be expected in such a seminal, early work in an emerging field.

The frequent use of the anecdotes of famous modernist (largely) female writers regarding the role children's books of Greek myth played in their lives is interesting and insightful. It would have been better still if voices that did not belong to the intellectual subset of the privileged classes could have also been brought in. At the same time, finding working class or non-white voices might have proved a challenge, since the children's classical literature of 1850-1965 was arguably created for a white middle-class audience even more than the modern equivalent. Yet even having an elite middle-class perspective from someone who did not grow up to become a famous writer might have helped render this sample more representative. The field of classical receptions in children's literature is itself the domain of literary white middle-class women; these voices are therefore already privileged in analysis. The sample might also have been enhanced through use of newspapers and reviews, or publishers' archives.

In general, the greatest weakness of this book is its lack of discussion or definition of its examples and methodology. The children's books focused on generally appear to be the most famous/successful works in the field, but it would have been nice if the authors could have explicitly stated that was why they were chosen. Likewise, we are not told how the individuals quoted about their experiences with these books were selected, nor why the authors chose to examine the particular subsets of children's literature focused on. A paragraph on page 7 briefly states that 'Works from this period … are far too numerous to allow for complete coverage … our aim is rather to sketch general trajectories, identify personal challenges and strategies, and highlight particularly telling or interesting examples.' A later footnote recommends Brazouski and Klatt's guide to mythology books as a useful resource for locating children's anthologies, but does not state how big of a role it played in the selection of the sample used here. Overall, this is not really enough justification for the parameters of this project. Nor is the time period fully explained. The start date makes sense in light of Hawthorne and Kingsley's popularisation of the children's myth anthology at this time, but why the end date was placed where it was is not explained.

In spite of this weakness, *Childhood and the Classics* is undoubtedly an invaluable piece of research which will surely lead the way for further work in this fascinating and emerging field. The conclusions are extremely strong and well-supported, the book well- referenced and the text both invaluable to a specialist and able to be followed by the general reader. The authors' commitment to treating all ideas about the classical world during this period as social constructions and avoiding the trap of

suggesting too much inherent truth to any of them is a pleasure to see in a work that will surely influence the approach taken by future publications in the field. I would also be amiss in failing to acknowledge how valuable this book will be in my own research.