BOOK REVIEW

Pasts at Play: Childhood Encounters with History in British Culture, 1750-1914 edited by Rachel Bryant Davies and Barbara Gribling
(Manchester University Press, 2020) 258 pp., hardback, $85.00

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In *Pasts at Play*, Rachel Bryant Davies and Barbara Gribling have compiled essays examining how British children in the long nineteenth century encountered 'diverse, juxtaposed pasts' (p. 7). While this book deals with how children learned in the long nineteenth century, it is focused less on pedagogy than on the emphasis on a certain codified body of knowledge that was either expected as a prerequisite of understanding or was being strategically marketed to children. The burgeoning children's market created literary, ludic, and experiential encounters with history and heritage that prioritised a shared national past while shaping citizens of the future.

Davies and Gribler acquaint their readers with the term 'multiple pasts,' their foundational understanding of the '[simultaneity]' of pasts 'experienced in different ways and through different media' (p. 6). The book's multidisciplinary approach is evident in the compelling introduction that introduces the subject and its relevance by examining the 'New Game of Universal History and Chronology' (1814) by John Wallis, which exhibits not only the 'multiple pasts' of British heritage but also the prior knowledge required to interpret and interact with those pasts (p. 6). Additionally, Wallis's game displays the turn in commercial practices as children are recognised as consumers. This game serves as an excellent introductory example as it highlights three focal points of the book as a whole: 'consumerism, knowledge, and interaction' (p. 10).

The editors have assembled nine essays that examine the 'contemporary fascination with universal history…mythical, legendary and religious traditions' and 'world history' steeped in British nationalism (p. 1). The chronological arrangement is helpful to the reader in understanding the cultural norms and situational nuances of play, education, and commercial practice as well as the rise of new media and experiential platforms with which to encounter them. In chapter one, Melanie Keene looks at Noah's Ark playsets as having both 'intrinsic

spiritual heft' and the potential for '[conjuring] a multi-layered series of pasts' (p. 25). This set, along with 'the doll's house, rocking-horse, [and] spinning-top', would have been found in any Victorian nursery and often were kept as 'intergenerational heirlooms' (p. 25, 30). Keene lists the ways that the playset might be played with, including ways that have nothing to do with the biblical story. This chapter is ideal for furthering the reader's understanding of 'multiple pasts' in that the Noah's Ark playsets 'demonstrated how such objects' and the narratives that inform our understanding of them 'simultaneously…[invoke] actual, mythological, moral and personal pasts' (p. 43).

In the second chapter, Virgina Zimmerman investigates how domesticated, familiar language opens the mysteries of ancient Egypt, a popular subject in Victorian England. By looking at visitor's pamphlets for The British Museum, the author shows how prior knowledge was demanded of children to understand that which was foreign. The Egyptian exhibit at The Crystal Palace, for example, offered a familiarity and connection to the present that transcended time and space, 'domesticating the ancient past' (p. 54). While experiential exhibits offered full immersion, accessing Egypt at home was possible through literature, allowing children to travel to exotic places in their imagination. This literature '[frames]' Egyptian adventures 'with a domestic setting and a Christian, English morality,' that functions as a safe, familiar space to experience the exotic—which eventually '[serves] to confirm the familiar' (p. 57). The 'packaged' past is always subordinated to the present and is furthermore entwined in the safest version of the present – the home (p. 57).

Part II, 'Classical Pasts', addresses the revivification of ancient tales through recategorization. Helen Lovatt explores how the Argonaut Myth moved into children's curriculum in the 1800s as a result of Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* (1856), an adaptation that sticks closely to the *Orphic Argonautica*. Differing greatly from Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* (1853) and William Morris's *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867), Kingsley's version has important implications for how the story is read in years to come as he shaped what episodes were included, steered certain 'attitudes of masculinity', and used '"plain Greek spelling"' (p. 74-75). Overall, Kingsley 'sanitises' the Argonaut myth for the young reader by removing or editing scenes that are overly grotesque or sexual (p. 78). Though he emphasises the competitive games in the Argonaut myth, moral character for Kingsley supersedes fun, adventure, and learning, a move that

allows his version to 'recuperate Jason…without alienating his young readers' (p. 89).

Chapter four, an investigation of *The Boy's Own Paper* by Rachel Bryant Davies, focuses on the way '"puzzle mania"' was utilised for pedagogical (but fun!) purposes in popular children's publications (p. 97). What makes these papers interesting is the way the readers interacted not only with the puzzles themselves, but also with the creators: often offering up their own riddles, anagrams, and puzzles. The rigor and difficulty of the puzzles juxtaposed with the humorous wordplay and anachronisms illuminate 'the delightful paradox', allowing for fun and '[commiseration]' (p. 115). A second interesting detail is how these papers offered a more democratised, affordable option for 'working class children' while still demanding 'extensive and detailed classical knowledge' (p. 100-101). Davies' engaging chapter shows that playfulness and pedagogy intertwined in these entertaining papers.

Part III, 'Medieval and early modern pasts', begins with Stephen Basdeo's study of Robin Hood and Wat Tyler tales in the penny periodicals. Basdeo emphasises the discrepancy between the reception of the reader and the intended effects of 'respectable reading matter' (p. 137). Basdeo shows that both tales had political implications. While Robin Hood was adopted by conservatives, Wat Tyler's tale proved more difficult to commandeer because he was a 'ruffian'. Wat Tyler, therefore, was cleaned up a bit for the child reader. Though used for conservative aims, reviewers from the time still saw these stories as 'subversive', viewing them as a 'scapegoat for late Victorian fears surrounding the rise of juvenile crime' (p. 135).

Rosemary Mitchell's chapter looks at the way the Victorians extolled historical women as models for young ladies. While many women were exemplars, two Stuart women, Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, and Rachel Russell, wife of William Russell, proved less than perfect. A problematic figure, Henrietta Maria was viewed as 'too French, too Catholic, and too prone to absolutism' (p. 144). Russell, meanwhile, was praised as a model wife and mother. Mitchell concludes that we can learn more about the historical moment in which these women lived than we can about them as individuals by how they were perceived then—and in how those judgments were passed on in the Victorian period. This is made evident by how the representations of Henrietta Maria and Rachel Russell were 'internalised by the young consumer' (p. 158).

Part IV, 'Revived Pasts,' begins with M.O. Grenby's look at children's tour books as a form of 'heritage education', that links 'historical data to physical space' (p. 184). Looking at more than seventy publications, Grenby argues that these tour books functioned 'less as a guidebook for actual travellers and more as an exercise in nation-building', with each historical site depicted 'as part of a coherent national whole' whose existence is part of a continued national heritage (p. 171, 181). Thus a 'collective national identity' is formed (p. 187). These guidebooks coincide with a newly realised children's educative market, making them extremely popular. The guidebooks offered 'democratization' in that the intended audience for such guidebooks were those that might never travel to such places, 'debarred by distance, class and perhaps gender' (p. 181).

In chapter eight, Barbara Gribling looks at British history games. The market for games was a thriving one in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. While such games 'became a hallmark of elite and middle-class British education', they could also be found in seedier ranks, such as the London Female Penitentiary because studying the historical subjects of such games was thought to encourage good character and citizenship (p. 194, 197). These games allowed the player to experiment with multiple pasts and, in some cases, create new outcomes of familiar historical situations. Like other chapters, this one notes that a great amount of prior knowledge may have been needed to win.

The final chapter by Ellie Reid focuses on the 1909 Stepney Children's Pageant. This pageant, coordinated by playwright Louis N. Parker and 370 committee members, had over 600 children involved in its production. Notably, 'the organisers attempted to create equal opportunities for boys and girls', as well as opportunities across lines of class and faith (p. 225, 229). 'Educative value' was found in the socialization, memorization, observation, and the 'construction and design of beautiful objects', such as props and costumes (p. 225). Notably, this chapter marks one of the few instances in which material edited for children was not sanitised, 'but laid bare', 'with a rounded picture, detailing their subjects' shortcomings as well as their virtues' (p. 232-234). Parker indicated that the pageant represented 'right teaching of right patriotism: to love our home, to love our street, to love our city, and to love our country' (p. 236).

Pasts at Play not only shows how children encountered multiple pasts, but also how those pasts were presented to them, making this collection a valuable tool with which to examine social mores and pedagogical practices during the long nineteenth century. Children during this period encountered a past informed

by their present, using familiarity to deescalate the threat of the foreign. While their games and playthings came with rules, scripts, and metatexts imbued with national rhetoric, their imaginations expanded them, allowing for new ways to encounter – and even reinvent – the past.