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doi: <https://doi.org/10.15330/clid.2.1.113-122>**UKRAINE'S VOICES TO THE WORLD:*****FIELDWORK IN UKRAINIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE*****Reviewed book:** Świetlicki, M., & Ulanowicz, A. (Eds.). (2025). *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Children's Literature* (1st ed.). Routledge.**ГОЛОСИ З УКРАЇНИ ДО СВІТУ:*****FIELDWORK IN UKRAINIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE*****Рецензія на книгу:** Świetlicki, M., & Ulanowicz, A. (Eds.). (2025). *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Children's Literature* (1st ed.). Routledge.**Larysa Krul**

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Abstract. This review evaluates *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Children's Literature* (Routledge, 2023), an innovative interdisciplinary collection edited by Mateusz Świetlicki and Anastasia Ulanovich. It offers the first full-scale English-language scholarly analysis of Ukrainian children's literature, tracing its development from folkloric roots to contemporary poetry, prose, picture books, and literature for young adults. It emphasizes its role in shaping national identity and cultural resilience amid historical challenges and prolonged conflict.

The book is praised for its well-structured composition. It is formed by three thematic sections that explore the origins of Ukrainian children's literature, its development during periods of repression and Soviet censorship, and its vibrant contemporary revival. The authors of the chapters consider folklore, classical adaptations, Soviet ideological control, diasporic literature, and the resurgence of new genres and themes following independence. Particular attention is given to the function of literature as a cultural and political instrument that reflects and shapes Ukrainian identity, memory, and resistance. The book rightly emphasizes the growing international significance of Ukrainian children's literature, especially through picture books that serve as cultural ambassadors in the context of the ongoing war.

Fieldwork in Ukrainian Children's Literature is recognized as a significant academic and cultural achievement that places Ukrainian children's literature within the global literary discourse. It demonstrates how literature for young readers acts as a powerful tool for forming identity, historical memory, and hope, offering both Ukrainian and international audiences a fresh perspective on a rich and evolving literary tradition.

Keywords: Ukrainian children's literature, national identity, cultural sustainability, interdisciplinary analysis, contemporary prose and poetry for children and youth, picture books.

INTRODUCTION

The collective monograph *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Children's Literature* (Routledge, 2023) is a unique and highly relevant contribution to the international scholarly discourse on children's literature. For the first time, the English-speaking academic audience is presented with a comprehensive and in-depth study of Ukrainian literature for children and youth – from folkloric sources to contemporary picture books and young adult fiction.

Edited by renowned literature scholars Mateusz Świetlicki (University of Wrocław, Poland) and Anastasia Ulanowicz (University of Florida, USA), the work brings together perspectives of Ukrainian researchers and diaspora representatives, offering a multifaceted understanding of how Ukrainian children's literature has been formed, transformed, and functions within historical, political, and cultural contexts.

The merit of the volume lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining fieldwork research, literary analysis, educational critique, and cultural studies. *Fieldwork in children's literature* is not only about texts, but about lived experiences, cultural practices, and interactions between texts, readers, and contexts.

This collection emerges from a compelling and urgent need to assert Ukrainian children's literature within an academic field where it has historically been marginalized or absent. The longstanding invisibility of Ukrainian voices is not due to a lack of literary richness, but rather to entrenched perceptions of Ukraine as a “minor” or “post-Soviet” nation of limited relevance in Western scholarship. By foregrounding Ukrainian texts, the monograph challenges these reductive views and insists on their rightful place within global discourse.

A central aim is to highlight Ukrainian children's literature as part of a broader post-colonial one, thereby positioning its study as a crucial intervention in the evolving landscape of world literature for young readers. This dual focus – both global and intimately Ukrainian – enables an “immanent critique” of texts selected for their “literary excellence”, cultural weight, and historical significance. Importantly, the volume acknowledges the sociopolitical forces, shifting tastes, and institutional histories that shape how these works are produced, received, and canonized.

I fully agree with the editors' reflections in the Preface regarding the importance of establishing a canon of Ukrainian children's literature as a necessary cultural and scholarly project. While the term “canon” may evoke concerns about exclusionary practices in Western contexts, its deliberate construction here is vital for Ukraine's post-colonial cultural sovereignty. Establishing a canon is an act of resistance that asserts a distinct Ukrainian literary genealogy – one that contests dominant Russophilic narratives deeply embedded in Western Slavic studies. In this light, the canon is not merely a scholarly tool but a cultural safeguard “against Russian forces intent on erasing Ukrainian culture and eliminating the young people who embody it” (Świetlicki & Ulanowicz, 2025, p.5)

By tracing this lineage from Slavic mythology and folklore to the powerful new works emerging in the wake of the 2022 full-scale invasion, the collection maps both the resilience and evolution of Ukrainian children’s literature in the face of historical and ongoing challenges.

MAIN PART

Tamara Hundorova’s Foreword in *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Children’s Literature* offers a profound and nuanced reflection on the role of Ukrainian children’s literature in shaping national identity within its complex historical context. She shows how children’s literature serves not only as art but as a vital cultural means forging national consciousness amid postcolonial challenges.

Hundorova highlights Ukraine’s “double colonization” under Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, where children’s literature acted as a bridge across diverse social, ethnic, and regional divides. Emphasizing children’s literature as a form of national resistance, especially during Russification when the “infantilization” of the nation was a colonial strategy, she shows how these texts preserved historical memory and ideals for future generations. Her reflection becomes especially poignant in the context of the ongoing war. Drawing from personal and pedagogical experiences, Hundorova illustrates how literature can offer children a way to process the trauma of violence and displacement. In this light, Ukrainian children’s literature emerges as not only a historical or cultural phenomenon, but also as a form of psychological shelter. As Hundorova concludes, “All children’s literature tries to protect its readers from such traumas. It teaches how to live, dream, desire, and act. Ukrainian children’s literature has done and continues to do the same” (Świetlicki & Ulanowicz, 2025, p. xx).

The monograph is organized into three sections. The first, “*The Sources of Ukrainian Children’s Literature*”, examines folk tales and mythology that reflect Ukraine’s ancient traditions and highlights classic authors like Shevchenko, Franko, and Ukrainka, whose works shaped national identity in children’s literature.

The chapter “*Fairy Tales, Folk Traditions, and the Formation of Ukrainian National Identity*” by Katarzyna Jakubowska-Krawczyk offers a compelling and well-contextualized examination of how Ukrainian folklore – particularly fairy tales, folk narratives, and Cossack legends – has shaped and reinforced a distinct national identity across historical periods. Jakubowska-Krawczyk skillfully frames folklore not only as cultural memory but as a foundational force behind Ukrainian children’s literature. A major strength of the chapter lies in its diachronic structure: it traces the transformation of folk traditions from pre-Christian mythology to Cossack epics, through 19th-century nation-building efforts, and into the Soviet era, when such stories became subversive tools of cultural resistance. The chapter’s emphasis on oral storytelling as a co-authored, performative act underscores its community-building

power, while its analysis of print institutionalization highlights folklore's ideological function. Ultimately, the author shows that Ukrainian fairy tales have consistently served as vehicles for political expression and cultural survival, contributing not only to a literary canon but to the very continuity of Ukrainian nationhood. A view that resonates with Olha Horbonos's characterization of folklore as "a dominant expression of the spiritual culture of the Ukrainian people" (Horbonos, 2016, p. 85). This insight also finds a broader echo in Mariama French's (2014) reflections on the enduring cultural and political power of fairy tales in times of national crisis.

In the chapter "*Ukrainian Classics for Children and Crossovers into Children's Literature*" the authors Mateusz Świetlicki and Anastasia Ulanowicz address an important and understudied topic – the transformation of "adult" classical Ukrainian literary works into the canon of children's reading. Using the examples of Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Lesia Ukrainka, the authors demonstrate how canonical texts, despite their initial orientation toward an adult audience, gradually cross age boundaries and become part of children's cultural memory. As aptly noted, "the various re-interpretations and adaptations of these canonical texts – both in Ukraine and the diaspora – demonstrate the ways they are living documents, rather than mere antiquated works, that afford new and unanticipated expressions within an increasingly expanding and globalized field of children's literature" (Świetlicki & Ulanowicz, 2025, p. 58 – 59). Special attention is given to the analysis of Lesia Ukrainka's poetic fairy drama *The Forest Song*, which, thanks to the animated film *Mavka. The Forest Song*, has gained global recognition and simultaneously "crossed over" into the realm of children's popular culture. The authors show that such "crossovers" not only contribute to the wider dissemination of Ukrainian classics but also provide grounds for critical reflection on how the perception of national literary heritage changes in the context of a hybrid media environment. This chapter also highlights contemporary visual and book interpretations of Shevchenko's poetry for children (*The Children's Kobzar*) and Ivan Franko's poem *Fox Mykyta*, which demonstrate that the classics are not only preserved but are actively reimagined in new artistic forms. Thus, the authors convincingly show that national literary canons in the postcolonial context – especially in Ukraine – are not frozen structures. On the contrary, adaptations, reformulations, and new interpretations of the works of Shevchenko, Franko, and Ukrainka in children's literature testify to a dynamic process of decolonizing cultural memory and its reinterpretation in a globalized media field. These reflections, along with others on various aspects of cultural memory and the role of children's literature in this process – as demonstrated in Mateusz Świetlicki's monograph *Next-Generation Memory and Ukrainian Canadian Children's Historical Fiction: The Seeds of Memory* (Świetlicki, 2023) – are systematic and theoretically well-founded. In this sense, the classics cease to be merely an educational obligation and become instruments of emotional engagement, artistic play, and self-identification for young readers.

The deep historical and cultural background, rich source base, and subtle combination of literary and cultural approaches make this chapter a significant contribution to rethinking the role of the classics in shaping contemporary Ukrainian children's literature.

The second section "*Ukrainian Children's Literature in the Century of Repressions*", explores the challenges of Soviet-era censorship, language policies, and ideological control, including the impact of the "Executed Renaissance" and the role of Russophone literature. It also considers the diaspora's efforts to sustain Ukrainian identity abroad.

The chapter "*Moms at Factories*" by Snizhana Zhygun offers a thorough analysis of Ukrainian children's literature of the 1920s and 1930s as a powerful tool for shaping the new Soviet citizen through the promotion of collectivism, industriousness, and the transformation of traditional gender roles and family duties. By exploring themes such as the school as an institution of social engineering, the figure of the homeless child as a model Soviet citizen, and popular genres like adventure and historical stories, Zhygun reveals how literature both reflected official ideological mandates and uniquely embodied the national context of "*korenizatsiya* policy", which fostered the development of Ukrainian language and culture within the Soviet framework. At the same time, the chapter highlights the contradictions of the era – the abrupt end of "*korenizatsiya*", intensified Russification, repression, and ideological control – which severely constrained Ukrainian children's literature. This study deepens our understanding of how children's literature became a contested space between Soviet ideology and the aspiration to preserve Ukrainian cultural identity, reflecting the complex social, political, and cultural transformations of the time.

The chapter "*Russophone Soviet Ukrainian Children's Literature*" by Anna Boginskaya is important for understanding the paradoxes of "Ukrainian" children's literature written in Russian during the Soviet era in Ukraine. The author analyzes how imperial discourse erased national identity through children's literature while simultaneously employing local Ukrainian color. Soviet Ukrainian Russophone children's literature served as a tool of Sovietization and Russification, adhering to Socialist Realism and promoting idealized child heroes involved in revolutionary and wartime struggles. These texts reflect a complex bilingual reality with Ukrainian linguistic interference and glorify Soviet patriotism, the Great Patriotic War, and the space race. After Ukraine's independence, many authors continued writing in Russian, forming a distinct Russophone Ukrainian literary tradition shaped by historical political and language policies. However, this segment of literature has now been almost entirely marginalized in the Ukrainian cultural space. Since the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, the publication and distribution of Russian-language literature in Ukraine have been largely suspended. In the field of children's literature, the shift is especially decisive: Ukrainian literature for children is now expected to be published exclusively in the Ukrainian language, as a vital means of cultural

sovereignty and identity formation. In my opinion, the language of the text is not a neutral medium but a marker of belonging, especially in a postcolonial and wartime context where the stakes of cultural independence are exceptionally high.

The value of Mateusz Świetlicki's chapter, "*Children of Genocide and War*" (Depictions of Post-War Soviet Ukrainian Childhood in the Works of Vsevolod Nestaike and Hryhir Tiutiunyk), lies in its exceptional exploration of how two contrasting Ukrainian authors grappled with the traumatic historical legacy of Soviet Ukraine through children's literature. Unlike previous studies that often focused on broader historical or literary contexts separately, Świetlicki integrates political, social, and biographical perspectives to reveal how censorship, Russification policies, and personal trauma shaped the narratives and themes in children's literature after 1945. His comparative analysis of Tiutiunyk's realistic and somber prose alongside Nestaike's magical and adventurous stories highlights the diversity and complexity of Ukrainian children's literature under Soviet rule, offering fresh insights into how literature served both as a means of coping with trauma and as a form of cultural resistance. I consider this method of comparative analysis of children's literature to be highly productive.

In the chapter "*What Is Your Identity?*" Ukrainian Idea in Diasporic Children's Literature, Maryna Vardanian explores Ukrainian diasporic children's literature from 1940 to 1980 as a key tool for preserving national identity. Analyzing works by over 50 authors from North America, Australia, and Europe, she shows how these texts resisted Sovietization, conveyed collective memory – especially of the Holodomor and repression – and nurtured the Ukrainian language, traditions, and intergenerational continuity.

Her analysis of identity formation through literature, the role of public institutions, and the use of bilingual and bicultural strategies enhances our understanding of how displaced Ukrainian communities have nurtured their cultural memory and identity across decades and continents. This topic is particularly relevant in the context of Russia's current atrocities and war against Ukraine, as well as the forced emigration of millions of Ukrainians, including a large number of children.

The third, "*The Present and Future of Ukrainian Literature for Young People*", presents the post-independence literary revival featuring new genres and themes. Notably, picture books emerge as cultural ambassadors, while contemporary adolescent literature engages with issues like gender, war, and national identity, reflecting today's realities for young readers.

In the chapter "*Contemporary Ukrainian Children's Poetry and Prose*", Tetiana Kachak and Tetyana Blyznyuk offer a thorough overview of Ukrainian children's literature in the post-independence era, emphasizing its vital role in restoring national identity, language, and cultural memory. A key focus is on contemporary Ukrainian poetry for children, which serves not only as a linguistic and educational tool but also as a form of cultural resilience. The works by Ivan Malkovych, Mariana Savka, Ivan Andrusiak and others exemplify this trend.

In the prose, Kachak and Blyznyuk trace a thematic and stylistic shift from traditional topics to complex sociocultural realities, including war trauma, labor migration, orphanhood, and gender roles. They highlight the significance of the adventure-realistic-fantasy genre, as seen in the works by Halyna Malyk and Volodymyr Rutkivskyi, which blend realism and imagination to explore themes of identity and resilience. Detective fiction (e.g., Andrii Kokotiukha's *Ghost Hunters*) and therapeutic realist stories (e.g., by Maryna Pavlenko and Halyna Kyrpa) further expand the emotional and intellectual scope of Ukrainian children's prose. The chapter also examines the renewal of fairy tales and the return of religious narratives as acts of cultural continuity.

In the chapter "*The Coming of Age of Ukrainian Young Adult Literature after 1991*", Halyna Pavlyshyn analyzes the development of Ukrainian young adult (YA) literature following independence. The author identifies three main genres: fantasy, historical, and realistic fiction.

I agree with the author's observation that fantasy combines folk myths, legends, and fairy tales with contemporary plots, offering young readers an escape into fantastic worlds filled with magic and heroes. Historical fiction allows readers to immerse themselves in Ukraine's past, reflecting national identity through detailed descriptions of traditions and events. Realistic literature addresses complex social issues – from violence to gender stereotypes – often carrying an educational purpose.

However, the chapter overlooks some important works, including fantasy novels by Nataliya Dovhopol and Halyna Pahutiak, as well as the adventure historical prose by Oleksandr Havrosh (*Museum of Adventures series*). Additionally, the contributions of other realistic fiction authors such as Olena Ryzhko, Dzvinka Matijash and Stepan Protsiuk could also have been considered. The works of these authors constitute a significant segment of contemporary literature for adolescents and are part of the school canon, as noted by scholars such as T. Kachak (2025) and N. Marchenko (2024).

The position of Anastasiia Ulanovich is sound, as she thoroughly analyzes in the chapter "*Ukraine's Cultural Ambassadors*" the significant role of contemporary Ukrainian picture books in shaping and promoting national identity on the international stage. She emphasizes that since Ukraine's independence - and especially in the context of the ongoing war - children's literature has become a powerful means of cultural diplomacy, helping to transform global perceptions of Ukraine.

Ulanovich highlights how these publications, which combine national traditions, historical narratives, and modern themes such as war, transcend traditional literature to become tools for fostering empathy and understanding among international audiences. She pays particular attention to bilingual Ukrainian-English picture books that support cultural exchange and the global dissemination of the Ukrainian language.

Moreover, the chapter underscores that modern Ukrainian picture books are not only artistically sophisticated but also strategically important for reinforcing Ukraine's image worldwide through international recognition, festivals, and awards. It also draws attention to the emergence of unique themes – such as the portrayal of war in children's literature – that bear significant artistic and humanitarian value. We also paid attention to this (Kachak & Krul, 2024).

Overall, this chapter makes a timely and valuable contribution by systematizing knowledge about the transformation of Ukrainian children's literature amid national revival and global cultural integration. It convincingly argues that picture books serve as a powerful cultural tool, expanding dialogue between Ukraine and the world while strengthening internal cultural identity.

The chapter “*Children's Voices and the Metaphor of Light in Contemporary Ukrainian War Literature for Young Readers*” by Aliona Yarova and Björn Sundmark offers a timely and moving exploration of Ukrainian children's literature shaped by the Russo-Ukrainian war. It identifies three overlapping themes: Memories of Home, which connects readers to cultural roots and identity; Light in the Darkness, symbolizing hope and resilience; and Children as Witnesses and Narrators of War, emphasizing authentic child perspectives. Based on a set of forty books, the chapter highlights that “The topic of war is a key and one of the most relevant in publications in recent years” (Kachak & Blyzniuk, 2024).

The authors' contrast between adult-authored coping texts, child-authored war accounts enriches our understanding of children's authentic voices during conflict. Their insightful analysis of the light versus darkness metaphor creatively captures both hope and the complexity of war, with visual contrasts, such as those in *Good Night Astronaut*, adding important depth.

It is worth noting that the thoughtful explanation of the omission of explicit references to Russian aggression respects Ukrainian children's realities while emphasizing visions of peace grounded in justice and sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

Thus, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Children's Literature* not only systematizes the history and current state of Ukrainian children's literature but, through interdisciplinary analysis, demonstrates how literature for young readers serves as a vital tool for shaping identity, memory, and hope even amid a prolonged struggle for survival. It is the first comprehensive English-language scholarly project dedicated to the analysis of Ukrainian children's literature in its historical, social, linguistic, and cultural entirety.

This work merits attention not only as a significant scientific achievement but also as a cultural act that internationalizes Ukrainian humanities scholarship. It opens Ukrainian literature to a global audience while enabling Ukrainians themselves to view their literary tradition from a fresh perspective.

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У рецензії зроблено аналіз наукової монографії “Польові дослідження в українській дитячій літературі” (Routledge, 2023), інноваційної міждисциплінарної колективної праці під редакцією Матеуша Светліцького та Анастасії Уланович. Вона пропонує перший масштабний науковий аналіз української дитячої літератури англійською мовою, простежуючи її розвиток від фольклорних джерел до сучасної поезії і прози, книжок-картинок та літератури для молоді, підкреслюючи її роль у формуванні національної ідентичності та культурної стійкості в умовах історичних викликів та тривалого конфлікту.

Книга отримує схвальні відгуки за свою добре структуровану композицію. Вона складається з трьох тематичних розділів, що досліджують витоки української дитячої літератури, її розвиток у періоди репресій та радянської цензури, а також яскраве сучасне відродження. Автори розділів розглядають фольклор, класичні адаптації, радянський ідеологічний контроль, діаспорну літературу та відродження нових жанрів і тем після здобуття незалежності. Особлива увага приділяється функції літератури як культурного та

політичного засобу, що відображає та формує українську ідентичність, пам'ять та опір. Книга справедливо підкреслює зростаюче міжнародне значення української дитячої літератури, особливо через книжки-картинки, які слугують культурними послами в контексті війни, що триває.

“Полюві дослідження в українській дитячій літературі” визнані значним академічним та культурним досягненням, яке вписує українську дитячу літературу в глобальний літературний дискурс. Авторські внески демонструють, як література для юних читачів діє як потужний засіб для формування ідентичності, історичної пам'яті та надії, пропонуючи як українській, так і міжнародній аудиторії свіжий погляд на багату літературну традицію, яка розвивається.

Ключові слова: українська дитяча література, національна ідентичність, культурна стійкість, міждисциплінарний аналіз, сучасна проза та поезія для дітей та юнацтва, книжки-картинки.

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