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Patricia Kennon

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Childhood, Power, and Travel in Salvatore Rubbino's Picture Books: A Walk in the City

—Patricia Kennon

Abstract: *This article examines Salvatore Rubbino's three travel-guide picture-book texts and the ideological management of childhood, mobility, adult-child power dynamics, and the city that they reveal. Rubbino's books assume adults' pedagogic and social authority, characters' economic power (and tacitly that of readers), and an untroubled engagement with globalization, tourism, and consumption discourses. While guidebooks for children possess great potential for the promotion of child-centred discovery, literary tourism experiences for child readers, and the opportunity for young people to inhabit and explore "other" places and perspectives through literature, Rubbino's picture books are preoccupied ultimately with an ideological regulation of children's imaginative and physical mobility.*

Keywords: *picture books; guidebooks; the city; mobility; travel writing; Rubbino, Salvatore*

As Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson propose in a chapter in their influential work *A Companion to the City*, "Cities are not simply material or lived spaces—they are also spaces of the imagination and spaces of representation" (7). Scholarship across a wide range of disciplines has debated and explored children's capacity for agency and mobility within contemporary

urban environments, especially regarding traditional conceptualizations of young people's vulnerability and childhood innocence. Considering that "the home/away/home pattern" of stories for young people has been proposed as "the most common story line in children's literature" (Nodelman and Reimer 197), it is surprising that little scholarship exists in children's

geographies, tourism research, and recent mobilities research regarding travel writing for child audiences and children's associated literary tourism experiences. According to Heike Schänzel, Ian Yeoman, and Elisa Backer, adult-oriented study has dominated tourism research, with the result that children's tourism experiences have "largely been marginalised in academic research" (3). Mike Robinson argues for more research to address "a deficiency in our understandings of the foundational knowledges of 'being, becoming and meaning' in literary tourism, along with considerable scope for more critical uncovering of the role of culture and power" (74).

Robinson's statement confirms the importance of broadening critical analysis of the role of culture and power in literary tourism and has particular significance for the relatively under-researched genre of travel writing for children. In this article, I examine Salvatore Rubbino's travel-guide picture-book texts as a way to explore the ideological management of childhood, mobility, adult-child power dynamics, and the city. While these books ostensibly promote child-centredness and celebrate the potential for young people to explore other places and perspectives through literary tourism, Rubbino ultimately privileges a conservative presumption of adult authority and a didactic regulation of children's agency and movement.

Travel texts and guide books for children such as Rubbino's play a significant though neglected role

in the construction of hegemony, norms, diversity, nationhood, and stereotypes. To date, three picture books—*A Walk in New York*, *A Walk in London*, and *A Walk in Paris*—chronicle a day trip by the family dyad of a child and an adult relative to each city. Inspired by Rubbino's own walks with his son in New York and by his subsequent creation of a sequence of paintings of Manhattan, the series extols "the wonderful spectacle of street life" and was "carefully designed with families in mind" ("Salvatore"). The looseness of line and mixed-media illustrations in soft, muted colours attractively evoke each city's atmosphere and environment, while the use of present tense for dialogue and expositional text helps create a sense of immediacy and connection between characters and readers. Rubbino's strategy of using full-bleed illustrations with no borders so that each opening (two pages facing each other) is filled with the vista of urban landscapes encourages an immersive and engaging reading experience. Rubbino also makes rich use of the "extraordinary opportunity" that picture books offer "to explore the boundaries and possibilities of books as material objects," which includes deploying "page spreads, covers, and dust jackets to narrate and . . . a variety of dimensional print effects" (Do Rozario 151). His inclusion of interactive, fold-out pages further extends engagement and readers' sense of "being there" physically as well as imaginatively in the cityscape of each book.

The three books have won and been shortlisted for various prizes for their successful educational and pleasurable appeal. They have been age-categorized (by the School Library Association Information Book Award and the Walker Books publisher website) as suitable for children between the ages of five and seven. Each picture book follows the pattern of an adult family member (a parent or a grandparent) guiding a child or a grandchild around the landmarks of a famous city while explaining local customs and history and the iconic features of that urban landscape. Title pages, covers, endpapers, dedications, author notes, dust jackets, advertisements, promotional materials, and associated websites constitute what is known as the paratextual features of a book (Genette). Rubbino skilfully utilizes the opportunities that the endpapers and the dust jackets of a picture book offer, illustrating the affordances of these multimodal texts for exploring concepts of story, space, and representation. Each picture book starts and finishes with a map of its protagonists' respective routes marked in arrows across each sightseeing circuit, with child and adult positioned visually at the start of their particular tourist route holding hands and excitedly looking along the vector of their itinerary across the cityscape.

In contrast to the fluid processes and decisions involved in navigating through cityscapes, which, according to Jane Suzanne Carroll, highlights that "[t]here is no single path through the urban

space" (98), Rubbino explicitly limits the range of possible trajectories across each city and draws the protagonists' and readers' attention to just one pre-selected and determined route for the day tour. The map in each set of front endpapers includes a summary of the particular sights addressed sequentially by that guidebook while the front jacket flap offers readers an invitation to follow imaginatively the protagonists' literary journey across the city (see fig. 1). For example, *A Walk in Paris* asks readers to "visit a traditional street market, climb Notre-Dame, wander through the Tuileries Gardens and gaze up at the Eiffel Tower. . . . Join the girl in this book and her granddad as they explore one of the most romantic cities in the world" (n. pag.). The privileging of particular places and the guiding of readers' attention in the three books are informed by the concept of what Grady Clay termed "epitome districts," referring to the special places in the heart of cities that "carry huge layers of symbols that have the capacity to pack up emotions, energy, or history into a small space" (38). The journeys of the protagonists of all three books are focused within the financially and culturally exclusive zones of impressive Parisian arrondissements, the tourist area of midtown Manhattan, and the British capital's imperial bastions. As I discuss below, Rubbino's complacent glossing over of the economic and cultural privilege of access to and movement within such sites is problematic, especially regarding assumptions of

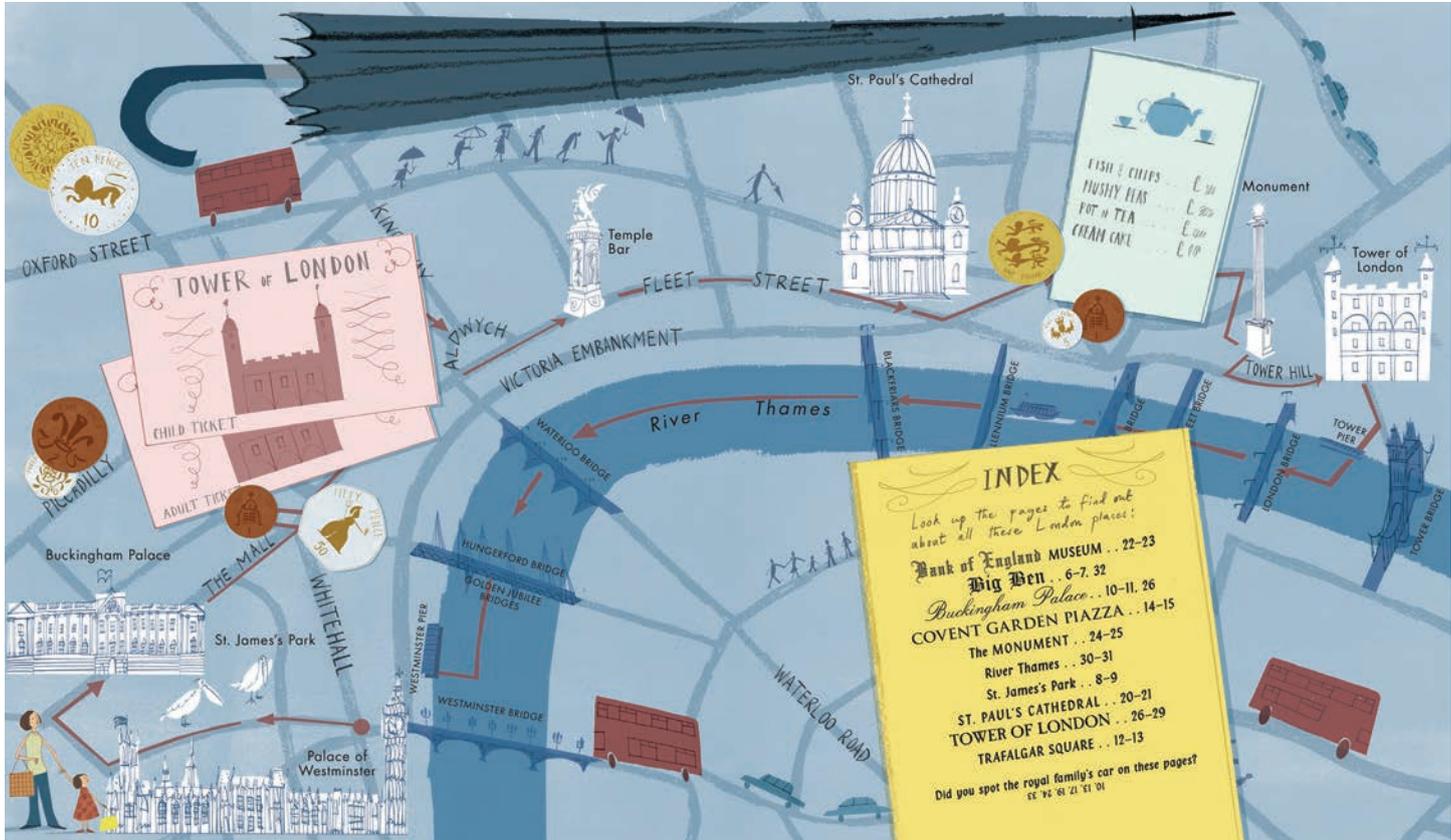


Figure 1: A WALK IN LONDON. Copyright © 2011 by Salvatore Rubbino. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA on behalf of Walker Books, London.

certain norms and the associated erasure of diversity, disadvantage, and other complicated dynamics of urban life.

In keeping with the ideological emphasis of the books on the supposed innocence and ease of children's travel experiences to cities and within cities, each narrative begins with a child protagonist looking directly at and greeting the reader with a friendly, excited refrain: "**Hello!** This is **me**, and that's my dad! We've just arrived in Manhattan—the busiest part of **New York City!**" (*Walk in New York* 7) (see fig. 2); "**Hello!** There's **me**, and that's my mum! We've just got off the bus in Westminster—in the heart of central **London!**" (*Walk in London* 7); "**Hello!** This is **me** and that's my granddad. We're in **Paris!**" (*Walk in Paris* 7). Frank Serafini has noted the impact of the powerful relationship, known as a "demand," when a participant in an image looks directly at the viewer/reader rather than onto a scene, participant, or object in the image: "Viewers are drawn to the participants who are looking at them and must consider what they are requesting. This is a more intimate interaction, and is used frequently in advertising and promotional campaigns to appeal directly to the viewer" (64). While Rubbino's use of bold letters for these first-person pronouns and the power of the demand of the child gaze would seem to suggest that these child narrators are positioned as the principal and presumably most important participants within the narratives, the young

protagonists are quickly co-opted to a subservient and novitiate status within the traditional hierarchy of adult-child relations.

A one-way transmission of knowledge and instructions is assumed repeatedly during the ostensible dialogues between the child and the adult protagonists in the books: the adult asks a leading question about what the travelling duo might do next while the child's reply and agreement is assumed without textual representation. For example, in *A Walk in London*, when mother and daughter are represented visually as exploring the acoustics of the Whispering Gallery in St. Paul's Cathedral with excitement, it is the adult speaker who is privileged and represented while the daughter obediently remains silent and listens to her mother's voice (21). These three adult family members presume their right to enact the role of guide and authority figure during the shared visits around the cities, didactically selecting and mediating information that they consider suitable and relevant for sharing with the less knowledgeable and experienced children. Furthermore, contextual exposition is supplied consistently throughout the books in much smaller type along with sophisticated terminology regarding concepts of distance, time, and socio-cultural knowledge. This typographic device assumes a social experience of a young child being read to by an older, more skilful, and experienced reader. Owain Jones summarizes the conservative nature of such

didactic socialization of young people (which informs works such as Rubbino's) thus: "Children are not there to disrupt the flow of citizen production, and through the flourishing of their own becoming re-make the world, but rather to grow into settled adult patterns of subjectivity and economy in order to sustain them" (6).

Rubbino's explicit use of dual address is embedded in traditional systems of adult-controlled processes of interpretation and the didactic assumption of adults' pedagogic and social authority in suitably shaping and teaching children who are perceived as incapable of learning or navigating their way through the world independently. Zohar Shavit has emphasized the centrality and ideological impact of this "double attribution" in texts for young people: "By definition, children's literature addressed children, but always and without exception, children's literature has an additional addressee—the adult, who functions as either a passive or an active addressee of texts written for children" (83). Rubbino's books and the commitment expressed in them to cultivating child tourism and educational experiences within a hierarchical adult-child status quo are therefore consistent with Emer O'Sullivan's observation about the socializing and regulating agenda of children's literature: "[I]t has a key function in establishing selfhood for its target audience of children. A secondary function lies in the maintenance of selfhood for the adults who produce, disseminate,

and co-read the texts" (334). Travel texts for children such as Rubbino's, while ostensibly emphasizing the importance of child readers and celebrating children's imaginative and physical mobility, all too often perpetuate the conservative, didactic tradition of children's literature to reinforce ideologically regimes of adult authority and vulnerable children in need of protection and guidance from their elders and betters.

The three day trips across the three books also function to replicate the tourism industry's strategy of creating and reinforcing the concept of the "happy family," the "good parent," and the rhetoric of successful familial bonding through shared holiday experiences. This strategy reflects what Neil Carr has termed the tourism sector's "traditional conceptualisation of the child as a passive entity rather than an active social agent" (16). Continuing this conceptualization of children as passive dependents rather than as mobile agents in their own right, Rubbino represents child protagonists and child participants repeatedly across the three picture books as holding an adult's hand, being protected physically within the arms of an adult, or being safeguarded and regulated within the proximity of a nearby adult authority figure. In all three books, this regulation of children's embodiment and associated requirement for children's docility to adult discipline is extended to the perfect synchronization of adult and child physical and emotional needs. Each child protagonist is depicted as conveniently attuned to and

cheerfully complying with the adult's energy levels to the extent that the children become hungry and tired at the same time as their adult guides. Tellingly, no child character in these books is ever depicted visually or verbally as bored, indifferent, critical, or complaining. For example, the child protagonist in *A Walk in Paris* has to wait and queue at various tourist and transportation sites, yet she is always docilely co-operative and never appears frustrated, resentful, or uninterested in the day's adventure (15, 35).

Throughout the three books, the capacity and the potential of children to navigate or even to exist independently within public and urban landscapes are effectively erased as adult characters incessantly guide, monitor, and manage physically individual children and groups of children. The adultcentric emphasis in the books on the visual and verbal regulation of children's interactions within space is thus in keeping with Sue Milne's argument that the "control of spatiality, and what constitutes acceptable behaviour, is part of the process of defining the social category of 'youth' and 'child' as 'non-adult'" (104). Rubbino's assumption about the presumed need for adults to safeguard these young dependents constantly is embedded within contemporary anxieties regarding the presence and presumed vulnerability of children within public spaces, especially the city. Sonya Fritz Sawyer has noted that, more than ever, twenty-first-century societies seem enmeshed in a "culture of fear" that

"frames public spaces, in general, and urban spaces, in particular, as threats to children: places they cannot move about safely on their own" (85). Moreover, in her study of the relationship between childhood and the metropolis, Jenny Bavidge concludes that "child and city are constructed as incompatible categories: any meeting between the two is fraught with tension and complication" (210).

Drawing upon Walter Benjamin's concept of the flâneur—"the idle wanderer or man about town" who is defined primarily by two activities: strolling and looking" (64) and "in part by his freedom to move about the city" (68)—Eric L. Tribunella examines the possibility of the flâneur as child and concludes that not only does the child flâneur thrive in children's literature but also the attributes unique to childhood, including "resilience, adaptability, and sense of wonder," also make the child "an ideal flâneur" (89). Although Rubbino's books operate within the ostensibly promising genre of travel literature for children, his conservative agenda is set ideologically in opposition to Tribunella's vision of children's potentially empowering facility for flânerie. Instead, Rubbino's explicit insistence on adult chaperones for children and his negation of children's autonomous movement denies his child characters the opportunity to act as independent mobile agents or observers. Despite the titles of the books, which celebrate explicitly the dynamics of walking cities and the



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mobility of child protagonists as they move within various cityscapes, the lack of imaginative and physical freedom experienced by these child travellers and their preoccupation with commodified interactions with the city render impossible their potential to act as traditional flâneurs.

While the original flâneur did not participate in acts of consumption, Rubbino's child and adult characters are involved constantly in consumer behaviours as they purchase entrance tickets to various landmarks, consume local delicacies, buy mementoes, and so forth. Rubbino's treatment of childhood, mobility, and tourism experiences and his emphasis on economic privilege and consumer culture, however, do have some compatibility with Kerry Mallan's investigation of the "commodification of the activities that accompany strolling through the (post)modern urban space" (57) and her accordingly revised paradigm of the "neo-flâneur." While Mallan acknowledges that "[t]he combination of tourist and *flâneur* is not an easy amalgam" due to tourists' often preplanned or packaged routes to see and collect obligatory sights in contrast to the flâneur's "less structured schedule, content in solitary strolling away from popular and prescribed routes" (60), her paradigm usefully incorporates factors "that take account of the changes wrought by postmodernity and globalization, particularly tourism and consumption" (56). Since Rubbino's protagonists operate within intersections of globalization, commodification, flânerie, and modern tourism practices, they do in some ways enact Mallan's figure of the neo-flâneur, who not only observes and appreciates but also is a consumer in the postmodern urban space. That said, Rubbino's books never acknowledge the tensions that Mallan rightly identifies as inherent in the combination of tourist and flâneur. Likewise, they never acknowledge any tensions between his supposed celebration of children's leisure during these

walks in the city and the deeply didactic educational and socialization regimes in which they operate. Instead, his characters' economic power and associated socio-cultural mobility (and tacitly that of readers of his books) under the suitable chaperoning of adult authority are normalized and assumed along with an untroubled engagement with globalization, tourism, and consumption discourses.

Throughout the three books, physical and consumer desires are immediately gratified and fulfilled with any temporary inconvenience being overcome instantly through the easy access to and purchase of a solution. For example, when rain threatens to hinder the protagonists' comfort and ease of strolling during *A Walk in London*, the shower is presented as a comic stereotype of the notoriously wet English climate with no unpleasant or debilitating consequences. Indeed, mother and daughter can afford literally and metaphorically to be amused about how they have forgotten to bring an umbrella and cross the road immediately to "a shop that sells exactly what we need!" (17). Money never seems to be an issue for the protagonists of these books, and they demonstrate an apparently endless capacity to consume and to have their wishes catered to without any anxiety or discussion about payment. Whenever characters express any level of hunger or thirst, they are represented visually as eating in an attractive, satisfying setting, and whenever they profess tiredness during their regime of

walking and sightseeing, they are depicted immediately as comfortably ensconced in various modes of transport such as taxis and leisure boats.

In *A Walk in Paris*, the grandfather and the granddaughter's economic capacity for nonchalantly purchasing tickets for climbing the tower of the Notre-Dame Cathedral and their ability to access this privileged view easily is conveniently elided. Each of the famous Parisian museums and cultural sites visited by the protagonists charges an entrance fee that presumes a certain level of economic ability as well as associated cultural prestige for those who can afford to visit. For example, the Cathedral tower charges €12 (approximately \$17.30 [*Tours*]) while an adult ticket to the Louvre usually costs €15 (approximately \$21.60 ["Billetterie"]). Later in the story, when the protagonists peek curiously into an open doorway into a residential courtyard during their exploration of the Marais district, hegemonic norms regarding financial power, status, and mobility are assumed on behalf of the protagonists and the readers: "This is a GIANT doorway! 'It has to be wide enough for a horse and carriage,' Granddad explains. 'That's how people travelled years ago'" (24). This casual comment about such "universal" travelling practices is predicated on a complacent assumption of socio-economic privilege and social class since only members of the middle and upper classes would have possessed the economic capacity for this mode of transport, including its employment of associated

servants. The conservative complacency of class privilege is embedded throughout these books with the protagonists' assumed right to gaze upon, access, and explore any place and any time they wish to go never being remarked upon or challenged. Similarly, Rubbino glosses repeatedly over the class-based power dynamics involved in such self-assured, panoramic mobility, and his protagonists' non-surveilled movement is at no point presented or questioned as inappropriate, suspicious, loitering, or as potential trespassing.

Mobility and access are assumed on behalf of both protagonists and readers throughout these books, and Rubbino never acknowledges any of the myriad power relations or presumption of hegemonic norms involved in such privileged systems of access. During the protagonists' visit to the Observation Deck in the Empire State Building in *A Walk in New York*, the cost of paying approximately US\$60 for both their tickets and the potentially unsettling fact that "a policeman shows us to a high-speed elevator" (15) are elided. Instead, the visual accompaniment to this textual statement shows the father proudly watching his son shake hands with the policeman while the adults and the children in the elevator behind them smile approvingly. The economic ability, white privilege, and the class and ethnic eligibility of parent and child for gaining immediate, sanctioned access to this security-patrolled site are never recognized, problematized, or questioned. Significantly, the traumatic events of 9/11

and the subsequent changes to Manhattan life and cityscape are never acknowledged textually or visually at any point in this guidebook. Rubbino's decision to avoid mentioning, explaining, or representing the physical, political, and emotional changes in the city in the aftermath of 9/11 is presumably informed by adult protective desires not to upset young readers with disturbing, complicated material. This editorial device of glossing over of the realities of post-9/11 New York even extends to the explicit erasure of any reference to the absence of the World Trade Towers in the double spread (16–17) dedicated to the view across the south of the island from the observatory deck of the Empire State Building. Rubbino's commitment to preserving ideals of childhood innocence and his innocent child readers from any "intratextual description of the 9/11 attacks," which might shadow his protagonists' idyllic trajectory around Manhattan, is in keeping with what Paula T. Connolly called the "danger" in recent children's picture books set in New York of softening the depiction of 9/11 "to the point of absence" (289).

As I noted earlier, a map of each city appears in the endpapers of each book, connecting the three books through a shared visual style. Teresa Duran and Emma Bosch have commented on the narrative purposes of endpapers for revealing changes that take place across the story and act as "the story's preface and epilogue" (134). Rubbino draws upon this potential and in the final endpapers overlays the original map of each

city supplied at the front of each book with significant mementoes that represent the characters' experiences on their respective day trip (see fig. 1). Revealingly, all these new items are products of consumer culture such as entrance tickets for the Observatory at the Empire State Building, the Tower of London, and Notre-Dame; currency notes and coins in U.S. dollars, sterling, and Euro; the Eiffel Tower souvenir bought at the conclusion of *A Walk in Paris*; and receipts for the various meals and snacks that the children and adults ate during the day. Significantly, the ticket receipts and price tags for the various souvenirs, meals, and entrance fees bought during each protagonists' trip are presented visually yet the specific details about the costs of the items on each receipt are literally blurred out (*Walk in Paris* 40–41; *Walk in London* 34–35; *Walk in New York* 38–39). This strategy to erase and deflect attention from the economic realities involved in tourist transactions and encounters assumes that both the fictional characters and the readers of the books share the same privileged consumer position wherein the necessity of money is not acknowledged and tourist products, mobility, and experiences are easily available, accessible, and acquirable by all.

Each city visited throughout the three books is commodified explicitly according to its stereotypical reputation, famous associations, and atmosphere. The visual branding of New York as the Big Apple is interwoven throughout *A Walk in New York* via visual representations of tourists' and New Yorkers' clothing,

storefronts, and merchandise. A double-page spread is dedicated to a visit to the Macy's department store, where both father and son admire its impressive range of products (20–21). The history and the importance of this consumer site in the city are noted explicitly in the expositional text, since it is "one of the oldest shops in New York" and "you can buy anything from a dustbin to a diamond" there (20). Several double-page spreads in *A Walk in London* are dedicated to sightseeing in the City, the financial heart of the capital, while a visit to the Bank of England—"Britain's oldest bank" (22)—is presented as a crucial site for tourists in order for them to "know" London. Both dialogue and expositional text supply details about the history of the currency of sterling and its production process while each of the eight denominations of coins is represented visually. The young female protagonist is depicted as trying to lift a twenty-four-carat gold bar in a glass display while her mother and other adult tourists look on with amused expressions and a security guard dozes in a chair on the other side of the room (23). Although the expositional text alludes to the Bank's impressive security procedures and states ominously that "criminals try all the time" (23) to counterfeit sterling, the potentially larcenous action of this white, middle-class child protagonist is represented as playful, harmless curiosity inspired by childhood innocence rather than perceived as potentially criminal behaviour that could result in the damage or even the theft of the gold.

A Walk in Paris commodifies the city experience further so that the urban landscape and the appearance and behaviour of all the participants in the story are saturated in consumer culture, globalization, and tourism practices. The background of every opening contains markets, stalls, and shops offering a wide range of leisure goods, with particular emphasis on the traditional “French” specialties of gastronomy and fashion. The commercialization of French heritage is epitomized by the repeated depiction of the iconic painting, the Mona Lisa, on posters, advertisements, and the side of newspaper stands throughout the book. While Rubbino poses an apparently innocuous challenge in the endpapers regarding “how many times” the young reader “spot[ted] the Mona Lisa” (40), the playful tone of this game masks a troubling annexation and commercialization of French distinctiveness and cultural identity for the entertainment purposes of a non-French reader of this English-language guidebook. Many scholars would agree with Helen T. Frank’s argument that while “[s]ome cultures more than others are strongly defensive of their cultural specificity or ‘otherness’ in an increasingly globalizing world and in the face of what is perceived as a growing Anglo-American cultural hegemony . . . France is certainly one country intent on preserving its unique cultural and linguistic heritage” (1–2).

The French language is othered conspicuously throughout the book by the italicization and explicit

translation of some French formulaic phrases (including “*s’il vous plaît*,” “*merci*,” “*bonjour*,” and “*au revoir*”) while English is left unmarked and tacitly assumed as the linguistic and cultural norm of both the author and the child audience. Tensions between methods of foreignization and domestication involved in the translation process take on even more significance in children’s literature when adults are making decisions on behalf of young people about the supposed levels of challenge, comprehension, and readability of the perceived “exoticness” of international texts for child readers. Critiquing the “domesticating” impact of these “strategies of adaptation and explicitation” in translated children’s literature, Frank concludes that children are all too often “placed in the position of someone who is alien to the culture into which they are being initiated, and is set up as recipient of various paternalistic or didactic issues in the translation” (14).

Evelyn Arizpe and her colleagues have called for the embedding of “intercultural literacy” in educational settings and texts for children to challenge biased systems of cultural stereotyping and to support “an awareness of self-identity/culture to a more empathetic analytical, critical reading of intercultural situations [and] the development of the capacity for understanding, empathy, welcome and the acknowledgement of others’ resilience” (305). Despite the educational and socio-cultural potential of the guidebook genre for encouraging imaginative engagement and respect for different

places, Rubbino disappointingly does not undertake this challenge of promoting critical reflection and intercultural dialogue. Instead, *A Walk in Paris* delights in deploying a range of traditional clichés about French society and “Frenchness”: the girl protagonist wears a red kerchief and a blue and white striped top, which suggest stereotypical French clothing, while pedestrians carry baguettes under their arms and all the shops consist of cheese shops, wine shops, bars, bistros, bakeries, restaurants, and patisseries. This stereotypical linkage of French identity with food is reinforced further in the jacket flaps: the front flap shows a French waiter holding out a tray of coffee while the back flap shows a replica of the Eiffel Tower made out of pastries including eclairs, mille feuilles, and religieuses, with the French flag poised on top for emphasis (n. pag.). While touristic materials and guidebooks in general often utilize stereotypical images and language in order to represent particular places and peoples, the multimodal interdependence of visual and verbal storytelling in travel picture books intensifies the impact of these disingenuously charming yet insidious national stereotypes for young and relatively inexperienced readers.

While a Parisian guidebook extolling the quality and pleasures of traditional French cuisine might be considered to be perpetuating a positive stereotype, Rubbino’s decision to include explicit dialogue, exposition, and nearly a full page of detailed information about the “familiar sight” (12) of public

fountains and the quality and purity of the city’s water supply is more problematic. Why should readers need to be explicitly informed that Baron Haussmann “improved Paris’s water supply and sewage system” during the nineteenth century (10) or that “special taps all over Paris” supply “water for cleaning” and “clean drinking water to anyone who needs it” and that the “water for drinking and water for cleaning run through separate taps” when this valuable space in the guidebook could be allocated to other aspects of the city and its sights (12)? Considering the rich range of dimensions to French urban life that a guidebook for young children could focus on, it is difficult not to interpret Rubbino’s emphasis on the sanitation and cleanliness of Parisian water as catering to a reactionary stereotype that European cities and French people are perceived as somehow “dirtier” than other places and nationalities.

The other two books similarly demonstrate a conservative, anglophone, and reactionary ideological framework through their ongoing assumptions and privileging of hegemonic norms and their ultimately superficial treatment of cultural diversity, multiple languages, and otherness. Keith O’Sullivan and Pádraic Whyte have argued that Manhattan “is a city that allows characters to create transnational identities that strengthen both their ties with New York and their country of origin” (3). In *A Walk in New York*, Rubbino does acknowledge occasionally the city’s multicultural and multilingual character through both words and

images. Diverse languages are exchanged as people greet each other in the double spread dedicated to Greenwich Park (26–27), while letters suggestive of Mandarin on a blurry sign for a shop in the background of one image imply the existence of a non-English-speaking community such as Chinatown (33). Recognition of non-Anglo cultures is rare, however, and African American and Puerto Rican communities—along with areas such as Harlem and Washington Heights that play an integral role in the history and culture of New York—are neither represented visually nor referred to verbally. Even when minority cultures are included in the three books, they are never granted equal status or attention relative to the protagonists’ whiteness and the unquestioned naturalness and hierarchical authority of this racial category. As Jayashree Rajagopalan states, “[W]hiteness largely functions as an invisible category of identity, as it is by remaining invisible that it instantiates itself as normative. . . . The cultural hegemony of whiteness . . . can only be displaced if the privilege attached to this particular identity is revealed and dismantled” (14).

Despite the invitation posed by Manhattan’s rich diversity, the privilege of whiteness is never problematized or explored, and the colonial history of the island is likewise elided. The use of the present tense and the inclusion of an Indigenous term in the exposition on one page—informing readers that the “American-Indian name” in an unspecified Indigenous

language for Broadway “is the Wickquasgeck Trail” (22)—appear to imply an awareness of “native” language and culture and an acknowledgement of the presence of these communities in contemporary American urban life. According to Darren Richard Carlaw, “The decision to retain Broadway” and its associated diagonal interruption of Manhattan’s “mathematically ordered urban space . . . imposes a certain cartographic chaos by ‘opening up’ sections of the tightly woven grid” (6, 9). This reference to Broadway’s Indigenous origin is fleeting, however, and the potential “opening up” of this city through the subversive nature of the road is not explained, contextualized, or referred to further. Moreover, later in *A Walk in New York*, the reader is instructed that the “American-Indian name” of the Hudson River is “‘Muhheakautuck,’ which means ‘river that flows both ways’” (31). The casual spelling of Muhheakautuck and the associated lack of care in representing Indigenous knowledge are even more ironic in light of the symbolism of New York city being liminally situated within a river that “flows both ways.”

Correspondingly, recognition of the colonizing processes, linguistic and cultural diversity, and the complexities of national identities is evaded in *A Walk in London*. Throughout the book, the nation-states of England, Britain, and the United Kingdom are presented as interchangeable, and young readers are expected to comprehend, accept, and apply these terms



. . . the physical and socio-cultural boundaries of the capital city as directly acknowledged and traversed in *A Walk in London* are troublingly limited to the imperial territory between Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London



automatically, without exposition or contextualization. At one point, readers are informed briefly that “the word ‘Thames’ comes from the Celtic ‘Tamesa’” and that “the first Romans to settle here came in 43 A. D.” (31), yet no information is supplied regarding the colonization experiences of the Indigenous peoples or the violent acts of the invading Roman “settlers.” Cardiff is briefly mentioned once in the book during the protagonists’ visit to the Bank of England since the Royal Mint is situated in that city, but there is no explanation of how Wales is positioned within the socio-political system of the United Kingdom, and it is assumed that readers accept the subordinate status of this capital city (and hence the nation of Wales) without question. Likewise, the physical and socio-cultural boundaries of the capital city as directly acknowledged and traversed in *A Walk in London* are troublingly limited to the imperial territory between Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London on the north of the river without any recognition or reference to neighbourhoods, urban life, and tourist sites beyond this hegemonic centre. For example, areas rich in cultural and immigrant histories such as Bethnal Green and Brixton, which constitute significant elements of urban history and identity in London, are not included visually or verbally in the maps provided in the front or back endpapers. This Eurocentric omission and glossing over of Britain’s slave trade and Black British experiences is in keeping with traditional, misleading notions of British society as monocultural in children’s literature as noted by Karen Sands-O’Connor in her book *Soon Come to This Island: West Indians in British Children’s Literature*.

The presumption of London as the “natural,” authoritative centre of British society is underscored when the child protagonist proudly stands on a landmark signifying “the very centre—of the centre—of London!” from which all mileage distances are measured (24).

Significantly, the route that Rubbino identifies as the best way to explore and to “know” modern London is dominated by institutions, pageantry, and ceremonial landmarks associated with royalty. Lorna Hutchison and Heather Snell have observed the power of collective memory and concepts of heritage in children’s literature and their role as “hegemonic tools in the name of nationalism” that cultivate “identity formation and a sense of belonging” and “provide the glue with which to hold a people together” (1). Reader are expected to follow with excitement the protagonists’ visits to St. James’s Park (a royal park that lies among three palaces), the Tower of London and its display of Crown Jewels, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Big Ben, and Buckingham Palace, and at no point are the discourses of power, historical ideology, and hegemony underling these imperial and magisterial sites challenged or critiqued.

In each of the books, the protagonists pause their sightseeing in order to recharge within an urban park or a garden environment. Yet even these green spaces are interpellated within didactic, traditional systems of power and surveillance. In *A Walk in New York*, the presence of music and independently owned green markets in Union Square Park would seem to suggest an open-ended and non-didactic space for creative self-expression and potential transformation. The strategic visual placement of both father and son underneath the park’s statue of George Washington, however, positions them symbolically within the

ideological pressures of U.S. patriotism, presidential authority, political history, and martial masculinity and draws a subliminal connection to U.S. economic power since Washington’s portrait adorns the one-dollar bill (an example of which is represented visually in the final endpapers of this book). In *A Walk in London*, the pedestrianized Covent Garden with its acrobats and jugglers seems to promise an environment for play and creativity, but this zone similarly is commodified and enmeshed in systems of systematized privilege wherein tourists presume the right to be entertained by economically dependent street performers who must operate within strict licence structures in order to perform there. When the protagonists of *A Walk in Paris* decide to rest in the Tuileries Gardens, their ability to move within the park is never challenged and the exposition states complacently that “you can drag your chair where you want in the Tuileries Gardens” (33). The visual depiction of the park, however, emphasizes the carefully controlled landscape while the exposition reveals the illusory nature of this ostensibly unregulated environment: “The head gardener checks that all the flowering plants range between 70cm, and 1.2m in height [while] the trees in the Tuileries Gardens are trimmed regularly to keep the view clear” (33).

The implied reader being addressed is assumed to share the economic, social mobility, and white privilege of the protagonists, yet once again Rubbino glides

over the prospect of what might happen if someone from a different class or ethnicity or if a homeless person were to try to move and occupy “wherever they wanted” in this seemingly open and unpatrolled public space. Instead, a relentlessly self-assured and nonchalant assumption of freedom of movement, socio-cultural mobility, and economic privilege dominates these books. Rubbino does not allow any disquieting or inconvenient questions regarding issues of exclusion, inequity, or containment to overshadow the buoyant and contented tone of the narratives. People of colour are occasionally represented as city residents in the background of scenes, yet the books emphasize relentlessly the delightful experiences that the white, middle-class protagonists have experienced, the subsequent increased bonding between these adults and children that the shared walks in the city have brought about, and the exciting possibility of readers following the fictional characters’ journeys and making their own trip to each city. Carr notes the importance of happy memories in the marketing of family holidays by the tourism industry, concluding that these communal emotional mementoes demonstrate “the desire of parents to construct enduring rather than merely transitory images of the happy family. This has implications for how the tourism industry satisfies both the surface and deeper holiday desires of parents and children to ensure satisfaction and thereby construction of the happy family image” (27).

The conclusion of each book reiterates the importance of enduring images of happy adult-child relationships (often through the consumption of artifacts and souvenirs) and the assumption of children’s docile satisfaction with these parental desires. In the penultimate pages of *A Walk in Paris*, the protagonists browse through stalls selling tourist merchandise, postcards, berets, posters, and French flags, and the grandfather selects a miniature of the Eiffel Tower as a gift for his granddaughter in order to capture their day trip together and to reinforce symbolically and physically their successful consumption practices as tourists. The exposition explains helpfully that “the word souvenir . . . means a memory in French” (36) and the child protagonist promises to reciprocate her grandfather’s gesture by making a souvenir for him so that he too will “always remember our walk in Paris” (38) after they both return to their tacitly Anglo-American home. The final page of the narrative depicts the drawing of the Eiffel Tower that the girl has been inspired to create along with a handwritten caption demonstrating a suitable level of gratitude to her adult guide, some introductory learning of the French language from this socio-educational tour, the desire for a return visit, and a suggested invitation to readers to undertake their own tourist trip to Paris: “Merci and au revoir!” (39).

At the end of *A Walk in New York*, the boy protagonist uses one of the postcards of Manhattan

that he has bought to communicate with the reader in direct address. The final page of the story is devoted to this postcard, which is chummily addressed “to you!” and which expressly invites the reader to replay this adventure in the city through a tourist visit: “Dear friend, I hope one day you’ll come for a walk in New York too? Xxxx” (37). Rubbino’s inclusion in the endpapers of an interactive envelope that contains four postcards with pictures summarizing the encounters that the boy protagonist had during his day trip continues this emphasis on happy memories, relationships, and the importance of shared experiences. Meanwhile, the end of *A Walk in London* adds a triumphant flourish to the pattern in these texts of a conventional happy ending as mother and daughter succeed finally in exchanging waves with members of the royal family who are being driven in the black car arrayed with the Union Jack flag that has been visually present in the background of the various landmarks that the protagonists have visited (32). The supposedly enviable specialness of such an encounter with monarchy—arguably the pre-eminent nostalgic and desirable national image of both Britain and the city of London—is designed to intensify the pleasure of the fictional day trip and its imaginative impact and memorability for the adult character within the book as well as for young readers.

Carole Scott has argued that picture books afford a unique opportunity for “a collaborative relationship between children and adults, for picture books

empower children and adults much more equally” (101) due to their multi-layered combination of word and image and to the subsequent potential for supporting more egalitarian and inclusive interpretative experiences between adults and children. While I admire Scott’s belief in the multimodal power of picture books and the potential they have for encouraging critical thinking and reflection, it is important not to underestimate how these texts are nevertheless produced within traditional systems of adult authority and adult conceptualizations regarding the vulnerability and innocence of childhood and the ostensible needs, interests, and capacities of child readers. Travel writing and tourist picture books for children are deeply embedded in regimes of education and economic, ethnic, and socio-cultural power that mediate idealized, conservative concepts of norms, national identity, and difference.

Despite the apparent child-centred premise of these books and the opportunity they create for promoting a vision of children’s capacity to act as confident and capable travellers, Rubbino’s reliance on adult exposition and his assumption of hierarchical and normative power relations perpetuate a socio-educational agenda of guiding the child’s attention to performing the particular knowledge, behaviours, and regulated mobility that adults deem suitable and comfortable for children to enact. As Perry Nodelman comments, young people are continually asked and required to accept “an adult view of themselves as

childlike—an understanding of being childlike firmly enmeshed in adult cultural assumptions and . . . especially adult desires—about how to be a child” (18). Guidebooks for children possess great potential for promoting child-centred discovery, literary tourism experiences for child readers, and the opportunity for young people to inhabit and explore other places and perspectives through literature. The ideological representation and mediation of hegemonic norms, power, national stereotypes, and processes of othering in Rubbino’s texts—and all too often in the wider genre of travel narratives for children—requires

particular critical attention in light of Mike Robinson’s observation that “[i]mages created” through reading literary touristic material in childhood “remain with us into our adult lives, shaping our pre-conceptions of places and communities and our expectations of experiences” (79). Disappointingly, Rubbino’s books are preoccupied ultimately with ideologically positioning and instructing young readers “how to be a child” within idealized, conservative adult-child relations, tourist consumption practices, national stereotyping, and regulatory systems embedded in white, Anglo-American, economic privilege.

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Patricia Kennon is a Lecturer in children's and young adult literature in Maynooth University in Ireland. She is vice-president of the Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature, a former editor-in-chief and features editor of *Inis: The Children's Books Magazine*, and a former president of iBbY Ireland, the Irish national section of IBBY.