

Returning to the Shelf: Memory, Reading, and the Afterlives of Childhood Books

A call for abstracts for an edited volume to be published with University Press of Mississippi
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Call for Abstracts: Chapters for an Edited Volume

Submission of Interest/ Abstract deadline: Tuesday, March 31st, 2026

Contributors Notified: May 15th, 2026

Full Chapters Due: November 16th, 2026

Final Chapters Due: August 31st, 2027

Anticipated Publication: January 2029

Editors:

Dr. Erin Spring, University of Calgary

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Abstract:

This edited collection explores the enduring presence of childhood reading in adult life. The books we encounter as children shape our imaginations, moral sensibilities, and sense of self; yet the meanings we draw from them change as we do. As adults, we return—sometimes deliberately, sometimes unexpectedly—to these formative texts through acts of re-reading, recollection, teaching, or cultural re-encounter. *Returning to the Shelf* gathers interdisciplinary voices to examine the affective, intellectual, and cultural afterlives of childhood books. It invites contributors to consider how memories of early reading continue to inform reading practices, identity formation, and scholarly work across a lifetime. The collection illuminates reading as a temporal, recursive, and deeply embodied practice—one that binds together past and present selves.

Rationale and Scholarly Context:

In *One Child Reading* (2016), Margaret Mackey demonstrates how the reading life of a single child can illuminate larger questions of literacy, imagination, and cultural formation. Allison Waller's *Rereading Childhood Books* (2019) extends this inquiry into adulthood, exploring how the return to childhood reading can reveal the dynamic nature of reading memory and identity. Both scholars model ways of taking seriously the interplay between personal memory and cultural text, showing that *what* and *how* we read in childhood continues to shape our ways of knowing, feeling, and belonging.

Building on this scholarship, *Returning to the Shelf* positions childhood reading not as a closed developmental stage but as an ongoing relationship. It asks how readers live with the texts that once formed them, and how such living-with participates in broader cultural narratives of nostalgia, loss, critique, and care. The collection invites contributors to consider the ethical, pedagogical, and aesthetic stakes of returning: What does it mean to re-open the pages of books that once comforted or troubled us? How do adult re-readings of childhood texts engage with shifting understandings of gender, race, coloniality, and belonging? And what happens when these texts resurface in the classroom, the archive, or the creative imagination?

This volume arrives at a moment when childhood reading is being reshaped by digital media, adaptation culture, and political contestation. As book bans, curriculum disputes, and nostalgia marketing reframe what counts as “classic,” the collection situates adult rereading as a site of cultural critique and renewal. By interweaving critical, autoethnographic, and creative methodologies, *Returning to the Shelf* contributes to an emerging interdisciplinary conversation about the temporal life of reading and the imaginative continuities between child and adult selves.

Aims and Guiding Questions

The collection aims to:

- Reframe “childhood reading” as lifelong practice rather than as a discrete developmental phase;
- Foreground memory as method and archive, exploring how adult readers narrate and reinterpret their formative encounters with texts;
- Map the afterlives of children’s books across adult reading, teaching, writing, and research practices;
- Encourage multimodal and affective scholarship that recognizes reading as an embodied, emotional, and social act.

Key guiding questions include but are not limited to considerations of the following:

- How do adults re-engage with the texts that first shaped their sense of story and self?
- What forms of memory—personal, collective, material—anchor our ongoing relationships to childhood reading?
- How do rereadings transform (or reaffirm) the cultural and ideological meanings of these texts?
- What ethical, pedagogical, and creative possibilities emerge when scholars foreground emotion, nostalgia, or discomfort in their research?
- How do questions of access, privilege, and representation shape which childhood books are remembered, forgotten, or reclaimed?

Proposed Structure

The collection will be organized around four interwoven sections:

- *Reading Lives and Lifetimes* – Autoethnographic, narrative, and life-writing approaches that trace the enduring presence of childhood reading in adult identity and imagination.
- *Rereading and Rewriting* – Analyses of adult encounters with childhood texts through re-reading, adaptation, rewriting, or teaching; explorations of how meaning shifts across time and context.
- *Archives of Feeling* – Investigations of material and cultural archives: libraries, classrooms, fandoms, and digital platforms that preserve or reinvent the reading past.
- *Critical Returns* – Theoretical and cultural analyses that interrogate nostalgia, ideology, and power in the act of returning to childhood texts.

A short *Creative Returns* section will conclude the volume, featuring reflective or arts-based pieces—poetry, visual essays, or hybrid work—that reimagine what it means to revisit the reading past.

Submission Guidelines/Instructions:

The volume will bring together established and emerging scholars from diverse geographical, methodological, and disciplinary contexts. Potential contributors include scholars of children’s literature, literary education, life writing, and memory studies, as well as writers and educators engaged in reflective or creative inquiry. The editors will curate a balance between reflective and critical voices to reflect the affective and intellectual dimensions of reading memory.

- Abstracts of 300-500 words, with proposed title, authors, and their affiliations should be sent to erin.spring@ucalgary.ca no later than Tuesday, March 31st, 2026.
- Notification of acceptance and invitation to submit full manuscripts will be no later than May 15th, 2026.
- Contributors will be invited to submit chapters of 7,000-8,000 words, or for shorter creative or hybrid pieces, 4,000–5,000 words, for peer review by November 16th, 2026.

Please note: all correspondence to the editors, including abstract and full paper submission, should include *Returning to the Shelf* and author surname in the subject line.