

CONSTRUCTING THE CANON OF
**CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE**

BEYOND LIBRARY WALLS AND IVORY TOWERS

ANNE LUNDIN

ROUTLEDGE
NEW YORK AND LONDON

**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

CONSTRUCTING THE CANON OF
CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE

Children's Literature and Culture

Jack Zipes, Series Editor

Children's Literature Comes of Age

Toward a New Aesthetic

by Maria Nikolajeva

Rediscoveries in Children's Literature

by Suzanne Rahn

Regendering the School Story

Sassy Sissies and Tatting Tomboys

by Beverly Lyon Clark

White Supremacy in Children's Literature

Characterizations of African Americans, 1830-1900

by Donnarac MacCann

Retelling Stories, Framing Culture

Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature

by John Stephens and Robyn McCallum

Little Women and the Feminist Imagination

Criticism, Controversy, Personal Essays

edited by Janice M. Alberghene and Beverly Lyon Clark

The Case of Peter Rabbit

Changing Conditions of Literature for Children

by Margaret Mackey

Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction

by Robyn McCallum

Narrating Africa

George Henty and the Fiction of Empire

by Mawuena Kossi Logan

Voices of the Other

Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context

edited by Roderick McGillis

Translating for Children

by Riitta Oittinen

Children's Films

History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory

by Ian Wojcik-Andrews

Transcending Boundaries

Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults

edited by Sandra L. Beckett

How Picturebooks Work

by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott

Russell Hoban/Forty Years

Essays on His Writing for Children

by Alida Allison

Apartheid and Racism in South African

Children's Literature

by Donnarac MacCann and Amadu Maddy

Empire's Children

Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books

by M. Daphne Kutzer

Sparing the Child

Grief and the Unspeakable in Youth Literature About

Nazism and the Holocaust

by Hamida Bosmajian

Inventing the Child

Culture, Ideology, and the Story of Childhood

by Joseph L. Zornado

A Necessary Fantasy?

The Heroic Figure in Children's Popular Culture

edited by Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins

Ways of Being Male

Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film

by John Stephens

Pinocchio Goes Postmodern

Perils of a Puppet in the United States

by Richard Wunderlich and Thomas J. Morrissey

The Presence of the Past

Memory, Heritage, and Childhood in Postwar Britain

by Valerie Krips

The Feminine Subject in Children's Literature

by Christine Wilkie-Stribbs

Recycling Red Riding Hood

by Sandra Beckett

The Poetics of Childhood

by Roni Natov

Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults

edited by Naomi J. Miller

Representing the Holocaust in Youth Literature

by Lydia Kokkola

Beatrix Potter

Writing in Code

by M. Daphne Kutzer

Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young

Adults

edited by Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry

The Making of the Modern Child

Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth

Century

by Andrew O'Malley

Brown Gold

Milestones of African American Children's Picture Books,

1845-2002

by Michelle H. Martin

Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature

Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers

by Anne Lundin

CONSTRUCTING THE CANON OF
**CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE**

BEYOND LIBRARY WALLS AND IVORY TOWERS

ANNE LUNDIN

ROUTLEDGE
NEW YORK AND LONDON

Published in 2004 by
Routledge
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
www.routledge-ny.com

Published in Great Britain by
Routledge
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX14 4RN
www.routledge.co.uk

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.

Copyright © 2004 by Taylor & Francis Books, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from the publisher.

Lundin, Anne H., 1944–

Constructing the canon of children's literature : beyond library walls and ivory towers / by Anne Lundin.

p. cm. — (Children's literature and culture ; 31)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-815-33841-4 (alk. paper)

1. Children's literature, American—History and criticism—Theory, etc. 2. Children's literature, English—History and criticism—Theory, etc. 3. Children—Books and reading. 4. Canon (Literature) I. Title. II. Series.

2004001366

ISBN 0-203-31294-5 Master e-book ISBN

PS490 .L86 2004
810.9'9282—dc22

*To Emily, Karl, and Tom—
The Sweetness of Life*

Contents

Series Editor's Foreword	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Prologue	xiii
CHAPTER 1 Best Books: The Librarian	1
CHAPTER 2 Best Books: The Scholar	57
CHAPTER 3 Best Books: The Reader	109
Epilogue	141
Notes	149
Selected Bibliography	161
Index	167

Series Editor's Foreword

Dedicated to furthering original research in children's literature and culture, the Children's Literature and Culture series includes monographs on individual authors and illustrators, historical examinations of different periods, literary analyses of genres, and comparative studies on literature and the mass media. The series is international in scope and is intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology.

Children's literature and culture are understood in the broadest sense of the term *children* to encompass the period of childhood up through adolescence. Because the notion of childhood has changed so much since the origination of children's literature, this Routledge series is particularly concerned with transformations in children's culture and how they have affected the representation and socialization of children. Although the emphasis of the series is on children's literature, all types of studies that deal with children's radio, film, television, and art are included in an endeavor to grasp the aesthetics and values of children's culture. Not only have there been momentous changes in children's culture in the last fifty years, but there also have been radical shifts in the scholarship that deals with these changes. In this regard, the goal of the Children's Literature and Culture series is to enhance research in this field and, at the same time, point to new directions that bring together the best scholarly work throughout the world.

—Jack Zipes

Acknowledgments

My life's work, that's what I've called this book, as it weaves together so many threads. My family and my department are loving people behind me.

I am grateful to the University of Wisconsin, School of Library and Information Studies, for summer research grants and a semester sabbatical. My department, led by Louise Robbins, is very supportive. Colleagues Christine Pawley and Wayne Wiegand inspired me to explore children's library history and print culture history. Jack Zipes encouraged this research out of his own interest to know more, and Beverly Lyon Clark and I share conjoined interests. My relationship with the Children's Literature Association has been vital to my sense of community in the field.

Intertextually, this book draws together material from earlier publications on Victorian picture books and women's library history. I am grateful to the editors of *The Lion and the Unicorn* for permission to reprint "Everygirl's Good Deeds: The Heroics of Nancy Drew" from the January 2003 issue.

Prologue

Reading has always been used as a way to divide a country and a culture into the literati and everyone else, the intellectually worthy and the hoi polloi. But in the fifteenth century Gutenberg invented the printing press, and so began the process of turning the book from a work of art for the few into a source of information for the many. But it was not impossible, and it continued to be done by critics and scholars.

—Anna Quindlen, *How Reading Changed My Life*

The printing press promised the democratization of a print culture. Elizabeth Eisenstein's landmark study, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, illuminates the far-reaching, revolutionary implications of the printing inventions of the fifteenth century. Some of these phenomenal effects were the widening of scholarship, a collaborative approach to the collection of data, an ability to improve and correct texts once published, and an interchange between disciplines. She suggests that these cultural transformations are an ongoing process, effecting a museum without walls. Movable type meant the possibilities of a peaceable kingdom of scholarship, where the arts and sciences could unite in a shared discourse in print. While the causes of the modern fall of Babel are complex indeed, we have opportunities anew if we sense our rich shared culture. Professions seem particularly isolated from each other even in our interdisciplinary web of ideas. Only connect the prose and the poetry, the profession and the practice, the child and the book.

I wish to offer a kind of map where professionals engaged in the study and services of children's literature would build a community of scholars, practitioners, hosts of readers, a cloud of witness. We have two stories on parallel lines. Once upon a time that was and never was, a brave woman or two or three stepped into a new world: a professional life apart from family, perhaps far from family, an adventurous, risky endeavor, a living out of dreams, an experience with bringing books and children together. At first, they had to fight to let the children in. No dogs or children allowed. But they persisted even in the limited, gendered world of middle-brow culture and bureaucracy. They found a space

for some books and then a larger shelf and a room even, as inviting as a living room, a sense of place where children and books mattered. They fought for space and then for collections and then for child-centered causes. They lived in settlement houses, traveled rough-and-tumble routes to bring books to city neighborhoods and small lanes. These were educated, cultured, bright, creative women who fortunately through their efforts entered one of the only professions open to them. We will be grateful for a long while that these extraordinary women were both missionaries and managers of a new narrative. This story would be the gift they could give.

These revolutionary changes were somewhat like the invention of the printing press because the public could access books, readers could seek information for their lives, and be transported through stories to far-flung places. The fledgling women librarians who began this movement were indeed brave souls. They took the standards they had known in a cultured home, in their own education, and sought to bring these advantages to the less fortunate. They were a high-minded lot, full of ideals, ready to cross boundaries, to make a difference in the lives of children.

They certainly experienced the slings and arrows of outrageous patriarchal ideologies well in place that discouraged such women from working, especially in the grimy city streets, filled with immigrants, strange languages, and a fair amount of risk to their sheltered upbringing to be ladies. They were feminists by all means, whether they fought for voting rights or fought for books for children. They chose this campaign to be where they brought their strengths, their vision. Not only would these new children's rooms have materials to use, but books to discover through the guidance of a librarian who saw herself as a teacher, a cultural guide, and a critic. Unlike other librarians with more custodial, care-taking jobs, they would actually read the books and write about them and know good from bad. And they would go where the children were on whatever means: traveling librarians with their books at hand. The story of children's librarians at the turn of the century and many decades into the twentieth century is remarkable, an extraordinarily successful venture into literacy and literature for children and youth. Library ladies they were indeed, and books—good books—were their business. You would have a hard time finding a more creative group of women taking the world in their arms, filled with books.

I tell this rather triumphant story because their ventures into a culture resisting their mission and missing their potential is somewhat like another story: the academics treading lightly to establish a footing in a culture unreceptive to children and their literature. The struggles of academics to be taken seriously in their research, study, and teaching of children's literature is somewhat parallel to the path taken by librarians. Both gathered their resources, organized, and set high goals. While the librarians wanted to tackle their mission with the zeal of a social worker or a politician or an artist, the academic scholars wanted to use their scribal and pedagogical tools—and their political savvy to stake a claim for the study of children's books and the cause of children's reading in this culture. Not too dissim-

ilar, although they went their own ways, fought their own battles, and built their empires of books, readers, teaching, and writing, both groups organized—both knew to do that—and both sensed what would work in their setting. They had a common goal to promote children's books as literature, and they fixed on classics, old and new, as a way to make a name, to set a place at the table.

Curiously, they never met, or hardly ever. The children's librarians prevailed for almost a half-century of growth and change. They witnessed the awakening of publishers to fine books for children; they even had a voice in what was published. When children's libraries were an entity needing development—books on the shelf for a wide variety of interests—the publishers saw the potential of a new market. Most of the publishers were in the eastern United States, and most of the librarians were too. They had a lot in common, and together they promoted their wares and their mission. Librarians not only knew their books, but also wrote about them to a broad public. Women of Letters in a grand tradition of American Victorian literati shared that faith in the power of literature to shape lives, especially of the young and innocent.

The academics came into their own rather speedily. In just three decades they made their subject be felt within the academy. They wrote and wrote: scholarly articles, journals, whole books on the subject. They met colleagues in related fields and shared their knowledge. They taught vigorously, especially the classics that were so associated with their own childhood reading and with the Great Books. Together, alone, the librarians and the scholars set their sights on the Best, and the story that follows tells how and what they chose and the difference it makes.

I am intrigued with this blind partnership that exists in two collegial fields, which could easily collaborate. Those librarians were quite enterprising and knew how to spread the word in the media and to write their own sacred texts. The academics knew a lot about literature, and together they set out to demonstrate that acumen to the waiting world. Here is their story.

This book has been long in the making for me, as it weaves together so much of my background as a teacher and librarian—and a scholar and a writer. I started my career way back when, as an English teacher attracted to the classics, I taught *Alice in Wonderland* to seventh graders (imagine!) and coordinated a whole school curriculum around the finest of literature that would prepare these children for higher culture and higher education. On a summer leave to England, I experienced children's literature in its full regalia, its rich resonance, its ivy walls and flower boxes—so many gardens, which evoked for me my own affinity for enclosed, verdant places, for a sense of place I associated with books and landscapes I had known. I branched out in my literary life by becoming a librarian, who happened into a lovely position at a special collection of children's literature, where I could not only help eager scholars who came my way, but also help my own intellectual hunger for old books, manuscripts, art work, and all the ephemera of a special library with very generous collecting goals.

In the course of my work as a curator, I became aware of how much the other books on the shelf were important to the scholar interested in the one book.

I found great reward in bringing a wide context of materials to visiting scholars, all the while broadening my own horizons and longing for a life surrounded by books and readers wanting more. I merged my interests in teaching, curating, collecting, and researching the culture of books, the culture of children. Working on assessing a collection of original materials—a rare collection of Kate Greenaway items—I became intrigued with the thought: What did the Victorians think of her? She was phenomenally popular, and I sensed that they read her with different eyes. I started the search for the critical and commercial reception of Greenaway's first book, *Under the Window*, and then was hooked on Victorian periodicals and the thrill of turning the dry, foxed paper and meeting history all about. Working on my doctorate, I became interested in the field of cultural studies, drawing on postmodern studies that made me see the world differently, to see literature in terms of anthropology as well as aesthetics. Through cultural approaches, I could see that rich world of text and context at play and those tissues that tether literature and librarianship, so interwoven. I began plotting this book as a way to take these threads and weave a crazy quilt of the roles and contributions of both in defining a high standard—an adult standard—for the cultural valorization of the book in their midst. I saw the construction of a canon—a selective tradition—to be the way to begin to see these institutional cultures and their effects as a field, as a child-centered, literature-centered enterprise.

I became even more fascinated with power relations and cultural authority as I sat on various award committees: the Newbery, the Caldecott, the Hans Christian Andersen, and the Phoenix. My work in both organizations—the American Library Association and the Children's Literature Association—gave me more insight and skepticism about the whole process of valuing, whether it be in a ceremony with a sticker on every book and that book enshrined for a lifetime, or whether it was all the fuss on the best of this, the best of that. I bring some of that questioning spirit into this book, although my main focus is on relating the two professions in terms of institutional history and canonical resolve. This work is part of a larger discourse that critiques the canon as an ideological construct in its curriculum, its field of power, its choices to represent or not certain groups, certain ideas, which in a democratic society need the definition of print and the expression of story, poetry, art.

I am so convinced that values—those universals I was so sure about—are contingent and certainly not fixed. No list or award or selection or library collection or scholarship can change that shifting sense of truth. Classics are indeed political. The dynamic of a shared culture through literature is the Victorian idyll we wish to recover, and how to do that involves power relations and identity politics.

As I interchangeably use the words “canon” and “classic,” I offer some definition in a highly ambiguous cultural context. The idea of a literary canon is a fairly recent phenomenon, although its roots are in scriptural texts of law and religion. The word “canon” means “of the first class, of acknowledged excellence,” and derives from the ancient Greek word “reed,” used in classical times as

measuring rods, a shift in usage whereby the object of measurement becomes the object measured. In the fourth century, the canon signified the books of the Bible and writings of early theologians that were selected for their orthodoxy as genuine and inspired. In the world of musical traditions, a repertory of commonly performed pieces is considered a canon. In literature, the word “canon” was used primarily to discuss a body of works by one author. The word increasingly means “Literature,” with a capital L. and a certain resonance of tone. While considered to be timeless and universal, the canon is quite unstable, with works moving in and out of repute according to the taste and theory of the time. If a work fails to sustain critical and pedagogical fealty, it slips from the canon, largely a search engine of time and taste.

The canon’s main function is to position texts in relation to one another—and to exclude more than include. As a classificatory construct, the canon is a collection, much like a library collection. Despite its investment in perpetuity, a classic depends on changing standards of perceived needs for educating the next generation. The canon is a political proving ground where its uses shift according to the rhetorical and reading audience. Our sense of what is “literature” is a product of ideological struggles for a selective tradition at work. Just have a look around.

While canon wars have waged in the humanities, the family tree of children’s classics has remained relatively unshaken amid the storms about. Perhaps that stasis says something about our isolation from the discourse that engages the larger literary culture. I appreciate Beverly Lyon Clark’s work because she explores professions as intricately involved in literature for children. Jack Zipes also questions the nature of a classic, and questioned it at least three decades ago in a cultural critique of *Heidi*. In *Sticks and Stones*, Zipes asks questions about value and the institutions that assume such cultural authority, even mentioning the need for a social history of the female librarians of the early twentieth century. That was all the charge I needed, although I have been working on this project seemingly for a lifetime. I find his thinking and writing to be such a clarion call, as are the voices of Beverly Clark, Peter Hunt, Alison Lurie, Uli Knoepfelmacher (my first teacher), and the late, dearly missed Mitzi Myers. In the library field, Wayne Wiegand, Christine Jenkins, Christine Pawley, Besty Hearne, Virginia Walter, Kay Vandergrift are just a few of the best and brightest I know in these parts.

The book is divided into three categories of meaning-makers in children’s books: the librarian, the scholar, and the reader. My interest is to connect the fields in theory and practice, centering on their role and contribution as critics in the field. I wish to use that ubiquitous term “field” in new ways, following the wisdom of Pierre Bourdieu with his layers of social interaction, of systematic rules and relationships, of cultural production in a commercial culture. Individuals in this field aspire to position themselves by their literary taste and hierarchical standards of what literature is and does. I trace the origins of the canonical movement in librarianship, which was appropriated in the same, shared breath. I look at the matriarchs who made much of quality and relate where they found their stimulation as self-appointed cultural authorities. I look for the ideas

that moved them, a kind of intellectual history, a women's history. I spend a fair amount of time presenting the logic of literary criticism, in particular the scaffolding of a canon. I let the critics speak, which they do so eloquently. My hope is that these two critics, so sensitive to children and to literature as empowering, might see some traces where they meet and greet in the saving grace of a favorite book. I have at least introduced you. Now hand each other on.

Chapter One

Best Books: The Librarian

“Only the rarest kind of best of anything can be good enough for a child.”

—Walter de la Mare, *Bells and Grass*

What story to tell of Anne Carroll Moore, the great star in the sky over the landscapes of children’s libraries? Legends abound of her power over the national publishing scene, her children’s literature empire on 42nd Street, and her eccentricities and alter egos. I will tell one anecdote that illustrates the imagistic talents of Anne Carroll Moore. When New York Public librarian Anne Carroll Moore was offered the rare opportunity to write her own children’s book page in 1924 in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the first full-page spread on children’s books in the American press, she chose the title, “The Three Owls,” inspired by a library weathervane and symbolizing the equal powers of *author*, *artist*, and *critic* in the making of children’s books. The author is easy to figure; the artist is the illustrator, but who exactly is the critic in the early 1920s? Who but the children’s librarian in her prime, hooting in the dark?

When Moore later wrote a column for the *Horn Book* and compiled her writings into book form, she again chose that predatory night bird as her emblem. Not only did she regard owls as the most picturesque and human of all birds, according to her biographer Frances Clarke Sayers, but she also raised to an apogee of art the criticism of books for children.¹ Books were written, illustrated, and then appraised by none other than the children’s librarian as artist in her own right. Here was a dynamic profile of the librarian: not the mere custodian of books looking elsewhere for expertise, not the timid, bespeckled spinster dusting books on the shelf, but instead a figure of great prowess, of swooping cultural authority, equal to creators of art. Hardly a meek image, the owl is a sign of wisdom, and this third owl was indeed wise in the ways of the world.

This is the larger story I wish to tell: how children’s librarians took over the children’s book world in the first half of the twentieth century and made their mark on the literature, especially on a high standard for children’s books, one