

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

At the beginning of the nineteenth century children's literature was primarily morally improving and didactic. Developments in Victorian society such as increased literacy and the improved technology of the printing industry encouraged the evolution of a wealth of varied, and frequently light-hearted, writing for children. Fairy tales achieved respectability, new fiction genres were created, nonsense verse was firmly established and, by the second half of the century, periodicals were thriving.

Fairy tales had long been accessible to children through oral tradition and chapbooks. Victorian parents and educators viewed them as unsuitable for a number of reasons. In the 1840s Henry Cole, under the pseudonym Felix Summerly, edited the Home Treasures series (1843-1847), a selection of mostly traditional material, illustrated by such prominent artists as Henry Corbould and J. C.

Horsley, and published by Joseph Cundall in an attractive format designed to overcome the prejudices of middle-class parents. Its success opened the door for innumerable pretty and readable books of fairy tales, legends, rhymes and fantasy. A few collections had appeared before Cole's, notably the first English translation of *German Popular Stories* (1823) by the Brothers Grimm (with illustrations by George Cruikshank). In 1846 Hans Christian Andersen's tales were first translated into English (by Mary Howitt) under the title *Wonderful Stories for Children*. Three other translations appeared in the same year. Drawn from folklore, Andersen's stories were distinguished by a more intense and dramatic morality than that of wholly traditional tales.

By the late 1850s, several general folktale collections had been published, as well as some individual English tales, including "The Three Bears", which first appeared in print in Robert Southey's *The Doctor* (1837). With the publication of James Orchard Halliwell's collection of rhymes and tales, *Nursery Rhymes of England* (1842), the respectability of this traditional material increased. John Ruskin's arguments, presented in his preface to the 1869 edition of *German Popular Stories* and embodied in his own *King of the Golden River* (1851), did much to secure the position of fairy tales. This was confirmed by the work of the eminent folklorists Joseph Jacobs and Andrew Lang. Jacobs's collections of English, Celtic, Indian and other tales were published in the 1890s with scholarly notes, while Lang's beautifully bound but moderately priced Fairy Books (1889-1910) made a broad international selection of tales available to a wide audience of children.

This growing interest furthered the development of fantasy, though many of the early created fairy tales retained a strong moral flavor. Early examples include F. E. Paget's *Hope of the Katschopfs* (1844), Thackeray's *Rose and the Ring* (1855) and Francis Browne's *Granny's Wonderful Chair* (1856). Inspired by Bunyan, many authors incorporated allegory into their work and wrote fairy tales designed to inculcate religious or moral messages. Charlotte Tucker, a convert to evangelicalism who wrote extensively and well under the pseudonym A.L.O.E. (A Lady of England), blended allegory with what were almost pure tract tales.

With increased respectability, fairy tales also became vehicles for propaganda. In 1847 George Cruikshank was converted to the cause of temperance and altered four traditional tales to convey his arguments. Although the series, George Cruikshank's Fairy Library (1853-1864), contained some of his best drawings, it was not a commercial success. Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* (1863) was both a charming fantasy and a damning social commentary on the condition of chimney sweeps' climbing boys. George MacDonald's *Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and his other fairy-tale fantasies were heavily imbued with Christian allegory. Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland* was the first fantasy entirely free of moralizing. Lewis Carroll up-ended the moral tale, parodying it with nonsensical characters and absurd lessons. M. L. Molesworth, writing from the 1870s, and E. Nesbit, whose best work appeared from 1899, further developed the genre.

The moral tale of the eighteenth century had been moderated in the work of such 1830s authors as Harriet Martineau, Agnes Strickland, Frederick Marryat and William and Mary Howitt. Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839) was the first work of fiction to break away from this pattern, and, despite an orthodox conclusion, depicted chronically mischievous children.

Also important in the evolution of children's fiction were the evangelical publishers, especially the Religious Tract Society (est. 1799). Their earliest publications, directed at a general semiliterate audience but easily read by children, presented religious conversion stories as factual accounts. With time, the stigma attached to fiction lessened, and by mid-century such firms had developed the more middle-class genres of juvenile adventure and school, family and "street arab" fiction. This last arose principally in imitation of philanthropist Hesba Stretton's stories and remained overtly evangelical. The charitable motives of Amy Catherine Walton, Mrs. G. Castle Smith, and others are readily apparent, but their formula tales in melodramatic prose about innocent, abused, and starving children lacked the freshness and immediacy of Stretton's work. Anna Sewall's *Black Beauty* (1877), on the other hand, made an informed and effective use of pathos to plead its cause—the prevention of cruelty to ani-

mals. While many books advocated active philanthropy, some of the periodicals organized activities for their readers. *Aunt Judy's Magazine* (1866-1885), for example, maintained cots in the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children.

From the 1860s, writers and publishers directed very different messages at male and female children. R. M. Ballantyne, W. H. G. Kingston and others wrote wholesome tales of high adventure in which the manly Christian hero performed feats of daring for the glory of God and, as the century progressed, Empire. Placed on a desert island, at sea, in a tropical jungle or arctic waste or in the British army, this figure became a staple of boys' fiction until World War I. The evangelical message already secondary to the portrayal of the manly hero, had almost disappeared by the 1880s and 1890s, when the extremely popular G. A. Henty was writing. Equally strong on adventure but considerably weaker in moral purpose were the "penny dreadfuls" and the novels less specifically geared to a juvenile market. Their heroes drank, smoked and engaged in adventure for personal glory and gain. Better writers such as the popular French author, Jules Verne, had already added the appeal of popular scientific knowledge. Robert Louis Stevenson and H. Rider Haggard broke away from previous patterns to create plausible romantic adventures with realistic characters.

The first "school story" was Thomas Hughes's famous novel about Thomas Arnold's newly reformed Rugby, *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857). Equally popular, though ridiculed by later generations for its extreme sentimentality and naiveté, was F. W. Farrer's *Eric, or Little by Little* (1858). As the public schools evolved according to Thomas Arnold's principles, an audience for the school story was created. Numerous novels and series of stories by such well-loved minor writers as Talbot Baines Reed developed and confirmed the formula, even after the character of the school hero was tarnished with the publication of Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (1899). Girls' school stories only developed after the appearance of large schools for middle-class girls. L. T. Meade, a diverse and prolific writer and editor of the periodical *Atalanta* (1887-1898), produced a much imitated formula for the girls' school story.

hero, her model heroine reflected a popular mythology of contemporary youth. The High Church response to evangelical fiction was exemplified in the girls' stories of Charlotte Mary Yonge and Cardinal Newman's sister, Harriet Mozley, who painted domestic family scenes in which the absence of a wonderful incident served to emphasize the home as the appropriate background for humble faith and charity. Yonge edited the *Monthly Packet* (1851-1898), the first girls' periodical and one which clearly reflected her High Church views. Girls were also likely to read the literature of an earlier generation—Jane Austen, Fanny Burney or Walter Scott. Cheap romances, frowned upon by parents and critics, were the girls' equivalent of penny dreadfuls.

Juvenile periodicals, a thriving institution from the 1860s, evolved partly in imitation of developments in the adult and family markets, including the spread of literacy. Religious periodicals, largely geared to the Sunday school market, predominated in the first half of the century. Of over forty such publications, two of the most successful were the *Child's Companion or Sunday Scholar's Reward* (Religious Tract Society, 1824-1932) and the *Children's Friend* (1824-1930). The latter was edited by Baptist minister William Carus Wilson, the model for Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Brocklehurst. Many of these were acceptable Sunday reading in all but the strictest households, in which only *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible were approved reading.

Prompted by an increase in the number of secular periodicals and penny dreadfuls, the Religious Tract Society and others began to publish less overtly didactic but still highly religious magazines. *Sunday at Home* (1854-1940), the juvenile and adolescent offshoot of *Leisure Hour*, contained the work of Hesba Stretton and G. E. Sargent. The Religious Tract Society made a further concession and created the *Boy's Own Paper* (1879-1967), consisting of suitable adventure stories and improving activities.

Periodicals outstanding for their literary merit also appeared. *Aunt Judy's Magazine* was established and edited by Margaret Gatty to provide a forum for the lively writings of her daughter, Juliana Horatia Ewing, and numbered Carroll and Andersen among its contributors. *Good Words for the Young* (1868-

1872) was edited by George MacDonald and included his work and Kingsley's. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) first appeared in *Young Folks* (1876-1897) and his *Catriona* (1893) in *Atalanta*.

The squat, heavily informative volumes of *Peter Parley's Annual* (1840-1892) were in a different vein. The name of Peter Parley, initially the pseudonym of American author Samuel Griswold Goodrich, was adopted by several English authors and publishers, among them William Martin, who edited the *Annual* for many years. The inculcation of as many facts as possible and the strict avoidance of any imaginative literature were the hallmarks of this school of writing, particularly popular in the 1830s and 1840s. It was parodied by Charles Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854), and Cole's Home Treasury series was intended as an attack on this earnest fact-peddling.

More domestic in nature were the practical girls' periodicals, chiefly the *Girl's Own Paper* (1880-1956), which offered information and advice on such subjects as house-keeping, fine sewing, music, health, careers and marriage. It was, in fact, the most consistently profitable of the Religious Tract Society's publications, although it does not seem to have had the same influence as the *Boy's Own Paper*, which molded the attitudes and beliefs of its readers.

In poetry, as with the classics of adult fiction, children read some works of major poets such as Blake and Wordsworth. The satirical humor of Goldsmith and Cowper was later annexed by children through Randolph Caldecott's picture-books. Lewis Carroll's parody of "How doth the little busy bee" in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) demonstrates the continuing popularity of the joyful hymns of eighteenth-century nonconformist Isaac Watts.

Edward Lear's collection of limericks, *Book of Nonsense* (1846), firmly established the genre of nonsense verse. Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*, published in Germany in 1845 and translated into English in 1848, was the first comprehensive attempt to parody the "awful warnings" of earlier moral verse and encouraged a rash of imitations. By the end of the century, Hoffmann's blatant parodies had been transformed into the gentler satire of Hilaire Belloc's cautionary verses. Most often parodied, and itself reprinted frequently

throughout the century, was Ann Taylor Gilbert's "My Mother", first published in 1800 but in spirit quintessentially Victorian.

In a different tradition, *Poetry for Children*, by Charles and Mary Lamb, published in 1809 and remaining popular throughout the century, heralded the cheerful, friendly verse of the Howitts, William Brighty Rand and the American, Eugene Field. Christina Rossetti's *Sing-Song* (1872), intended for young children, was illustrated by Arthur Hughes.

Rossetti's *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) contained two designs by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and the 1893 edition was illustrated by Laurence Housman. With the evolution of the picture book came the fashion for separate publication of illustrated nursery rhymes and poems. In 1888, for example Robert Browning's *Pied Piper of Hamelin* (1855) appeared with drawings by Kate Greenaway. One of the most delightful collections of verse to come out of the Victorian age was Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885).

New technologies in printing and book illustration were vital to the development of Victorian juvenile literature. To the new breed of large commercial publishers looking for an area in which to specialize, children's literature had vast market potential. Dean and Son, for example, was known for its novelty books and George Routledge produced large numbers of toy books as well as reprints of juvenile classics. Institutional publishers such as the Religious Tract Society and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and commercial publishers with evangelical leanings such as James Nisbet and Thomas Nelson, published morally improving tracts, books and periodicals, including work by major children's authors. These and other firms used reward books—distributed by schools and Sunday schools for good conduct or proficiency—as a stable source of income.

In the late eighteenth century Thomas Bewick's innovative technique of wood engraving and the invention of lithography by Alois Senefelder had encouraged the use of illustration. Lithography was not commonly used in children's books until the 1840s, with chromolithography becoming increasingly popular by the 1860s, which also saw a revival of wood engraving. Many of the early *Punch*

artists, including John Tenniel, Charles Bennett, Richard Doyle and Ernest Griset, illustrated children's books, some by fellow staff members such as Mark Lemon and Henry Mayhew.

Children's book publishers were particularly interested in color work. From the 1850s engraver Edmund Evans worked to improve the quality of illustration and color reproduction. He printed for both Routledge and Warne and encouraged prominent illustrators, including the "nursery triumvirate" of Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott and Kate Greenaway, who were responsible for the form of the modern picture book with its interdependence of illustration and text.

Artistic and literary critics were becoming increasingly aware of children's literature. In 1844 Lady Eastlake wrote a critical survey for the *Quarterly Review*, and in 1887 C. M. Yonge published *What Books To Lend and What To Give*. Edward Salmon's *Juvenile Literature As It Is* (1888) is of interest as much for its study of children's taste as for contemporary critical attitudes. Children's periodicals frequently included reviews, and a special issue of the fine arts journal, the *Studio* (1897-1898), was devoted to *Children's Books and Their Illustrators*.

Another development was the study of historical children's literature. Yonge wrote three articles on "Children's Literature of the Last Century" for *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1869. E. M. Field's *The Child and His Book* (1891) was also a historical account and Andrew Tuer's massive *History of the Horn-Book* (1896) included facsimiles. Charles Welsh published a biography of John Newbery (an early juvenile publisher) and was responsible for a series of facsimiles of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century juvenile classics. This rise in critical and historical interest reflects the maturity of an independent literature for children. The increasing separation of work and play contributed to the creation of books written to give pleasure and judged on literary merit rather than social message.

JILL SHEFRIN

### Bibliography

Avery, Gillian. *Childhood's Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children's Fiction, 1770-1950*. 1975.

- Salmon, J. S. *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction*. 1981.
- Sharon, F. J. Harvey. *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*. 1982.
- Stammers, Patricia, ed. *A Garland from the Golden Age: An Anthology of Children's Literature from 1550 to 1900*. 1983.
- Stair, Percy. *English Children's Books: 1600 to 1900*. 1954.
- Suzanne. *Children's Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of the History and Criticism*. 1981.
- Swain, Lance. *A Peculiar Gift: Nineteenth-Century Writings on Books for Children*. 1976.
- Thwaite, M. F. *From Primer to Pleasure: An Introduction to the History of Children's Books in England, from the Invention of Printing to 1900*. 1963.
- Toronto Public Library. *The Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books: A Catalogue*. 1958, 1975. 2 vols.