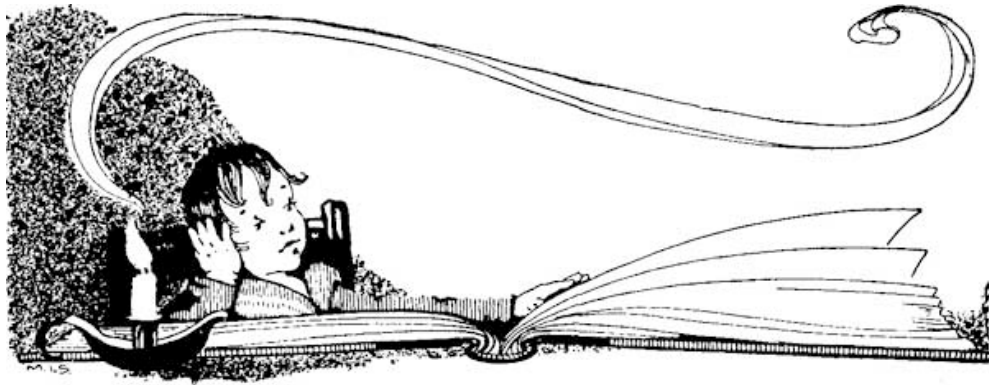


ENGL 5200: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Spring 2014, Wednesdays, 9:30 am – 12:00 pm



Professor: Victoria Ford Smith

Contact: CLAS 122, (860) 486-3959, victoria.f.smith@uconn.edu

Office hours: Mondays, 10 am to noon, Tuesdays 10:30 am to 12:30 pm, and by appointment

Seminar Description

Children's literature is messy. It refuses to fit into a historical period or cultural movement. Its generic boundaries are fluid and unpredictable. Scholars struggle to define its audience and place in literary history. It confuses categories such as high and low literature, adult and child, orality and textuality, literature and culture. This semester, we are going to interpret that confusion as critical flexibility. After all, it is in part because children's literature is so unpredictable and polyvalent that we can productively approach it through a spectrum of critical lenses. In the coming weeks, we will consider perennial questions related to the field—including matters of definition and history, audience and author, and word and image—as well as newer debates—including matters of child agency, shifting generic boundaries, and the advantages and challenges of interdisciplinary approaches to child culture. Our goal is to understand, and to enter into, the critical conversations taking place in children's literature studies.

Required Texts

Many of these texts are available at the Co-op. The starred titles are not. Some of the early texts (such as the texts by Heinrich Hoffman and George MacDonald) are available for free online through services such as Google Books or Project Gutenberg. You also can purchase these texts elsewhere or borrow them from a library. We will supplement this list with literary and critical readings, provided through HuskyCT.

- Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess* (0141321121)
- Roald Dahl, *The Witches* (014241011X)
- * Kate DiCamillo and K.G. Campbell, *Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*
- * Neil Gaiman, *Coraline*
- Heinrich Hoffman, *Struwwelpeter*
- Angela Johnson, *Toning the Sweep*
- Thanhha Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again*
- Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*

- * Astrid Lindgren, *Pippi Longstocking*
- George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin*
- * George MacDonald, *The Light Princess*
- Patrick Ness and Jim Kay, *A Monster Calls*
- Robert O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*
- Pam Muñoz Ryan, *Esperanza Rising*
- * Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses*
- * P. L. Travers, *Mary Poppins*

Grading and Assignments

All seminar participants will complete the following three assignments. Together, these assignments comprise your participation, worth 25 percent of your final grade:

- **Weekly writing.** Each Tuesday by 5 pm, post 2–3 paragraphs on our HuskyCT message board responding to the week's reading. (I'll provide an opening thread for each week.) These are informal responses, so feel free to take risks. You might suggest discussion questions, make connections to other material on the syllabus or previous class discussions, or examine a particular passage from a primary text or critical source. You can skip one of these responses without penalty.
- **Leading the seminar.** You are responsible for leading half of one seminar period. During the first week of the semester, I will explain this assignment in more detail and ask you to sign up for a date.
- **Weekly participation.** Come to class prepared, listen respectfully to your colleagues, and engage in our discussions each meeting.

For your remaining research and writing, you have three options. Choose one of the options described below. Within the first two weeks of the semester, meet with me to discuss your choice and to set deadlines. Please note the weight of each of these assignments in relation to your final grade.

Option 1: Cumulative Writing

- A book review or an annotated bibliography, relating to a topic that interests you (20%)
- A conference paper delivered in class (15 minutes) with abstract of approximately 500 words (25%)
- A 12-15 page paper, drawing on the above, suitable for revision into an article (30%)

Option 2: Pedagogical Writing

- A book review or annotated bibliography, relating to a topic that interests you (20%)
- A complete, annotated, college-level syllabus for a children's literature or special topics course (25%)
- A 12-15 page "approaches to teaching" essay, related to an author or text for children (30%)

Option 3: Writing and Revision

- A book review or an annotated bibliography, relating to a topic that interests you (20%)
- A 12-15 page paper, drawing on the above assignment, suitable for revision into an article (30%)
- A significant revision of your paper, accompanied by a reflection on publishing venues (25%)

Students with Disabilities

Students who may need accommodations because of a disability are encouraged to meet with me privately early in the semester. Students should also contact the Center for Students with Disabilities as soon as possible to verify their eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For more information, visit the Center for Students with Disabilities: <http://www.csd.uconn.edu>.

Reading Schedule

This syllabus is subject to change. We may discover we want to spend more time on certain topics and less on others (or inclement weather may foil our plans). I will announce changes and, if necessary, update the syllabus.

August 27: Origins and Benchmarks

What are the competing histories of children's literature? What assumptions about childhood and children's literature underpin these histories? What are the particular challenges of tracing the history of children's literature? How can we make use of (rather than be stymied by) these tensions? What are the best methods and strategies we can use to examine early children's literature?

- Comenius, *Orbis Pictus*
- *The New England Primer*
- Thomas Boreman, *A Description of Three Hundred Animals*
- John Newbery, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*
- Ellenor Fenn, *Fables in Monosyllables*

September 3: The Golden Age, or, Periodization and Canonicity in Children's Literature

What do we gain and lose when we identify a particular moment as the "Golden Age" of children's literature? How does children's literature accommodate and resist periodization? Canon formation? Who has—and who should possess—the authority to establish a canon of children's literature? Do we need one? Are there differences between an expert's canon, a reader's canon, and a teaching canon? What considerations should contribute to forming a canon?

- George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Light Princess*
- Karin Westman, "Beyond Periodization: Children's Literature, Genre, and Remediating Literary History"
- Deborah Stevenson, "Sentiment and Significance: The Impossibility of Recovery in the Children's Lit Canon"
- Kenneth Kidd, "Prizing Children's Literature: The Case of Newbery Gold"

September 10: Fairy Tales and Fear

How can we trace, understand, and theorize the shifting connection between children's literature, fairy tales, and folklore? What are some of the most productive approaches to this type of literature? How do fairy tales and folklore respond to critical readings, and how do they resist them? What is the role of fear in fairy tales and folklore—both inside and outside the text? What does fear "attach to" in these texts?

- Heinrich Hoffman, *Struwwelpeter*
- "Baba Yaga I" and "Baba Yaga II" from Silbelan Forrester, *Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales* (available as an e-book through UConn's library)
- Andrew Lang, excerpts from *The Blue Fairy Book*

- J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories” from *Tree and Leaf*
- Bruno Bettelheim, “The Struggle for Meaning” from *The Uses of Enchantment*
- Jackie Stallcup, “Power, Fear, and Children’s Picture Books”

September 17: More Modern Monsters

Fairy tale plots, patterns, and themes resonate throughout literature for children and adults. How can we use ideas about fear often associated with fairy tales to read contemporary children’s fantasy? Does fear function in the same way in these novels? How can we situate the “monsters” in children’s literature—here, monstrous mothers—within a larger tradition of historical, social, and psychological anxieties?

- Roald Dahl, *The Witches*
- Neil Gaiman, *Coraline*
- Marina Warner, “Monstrous Mothers: Women Over the Top”
- Elizabeth Parsons et al., “The Other Mother: Neil Gaiman’s Postfeminist Fairy Tales”

September 24: Word and Image I, Using the Archive

How can we use archival materials, like those available at the Dodd, to understand the form of picture books and the process of creating them? What role can that information play in our scholarship? What questions can you bring to an archive as a children’s literature scholar?

- Visit to the Dodd Center: Terri Goldich’s presentation on picture books and process

October 1: Word and Image II, Hybrid Texts

What critical tools are most useful in reading text and image together? How can we apply techniques commonly associated with picture book to the trend in these “hybrid texts,” which unite the features of children’s novels with the picture book, graphic novel, or comic? Is the place of illustration in children’s literature—the market, the classroom, academia—changing? If so, how?

- Patrick Ness and Jim Kay, *A Monster Calls*
- Kate DiCamillo and K. G. Campbell, *Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*
- Scott McCloud, excerpt from *Understanding Comics*

October 8: Poetry on the Brain, or, Cognitive Theory in Children’s Literature

What is the place of poetry in children’s literature scholarship? Has this genre of children’s literature been neglected, as many contend? If so, why? How do we read children’s poetry differently than poetry for adults? What can cognitive theory contribute to our understanding of children’s literature—and of poetry in particular? What are the possibilities and limitations of approaching children’s literature this way?

- Mary Cooper, *Tommy Thumb’s Pretty Song Book*
- Lewis Carroll, “Jabberwocky”
- Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child’s Garden of Verses*
- Thanhha Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again*
- Shel Silverstein, excerpts from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*
- Karen Coats, “The Meaning of Children’s Poetry: A Cognitive Approach”

October 15: The Wealthy Girl of Empire

The terms “colonizer” and “colonized” are particularly fraught in children’s literature studies since Perry Nodelman used them in landmark essay. How can we understand those terms more deeply, or put pressure on them? How should we understand these terms in relationship to their use in criticism of literature for adults? How can we think about the representations of race, class, empire, and power in Burnett’s novel?

- Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess* and “The Boy Who Became a Socialist”
- Perry Nodelman, “The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism and Children's Literature”
- Mavis Reimer, “Making Princesses, Re-making *A Little Princess*”

October 22: Generations

What questions are at the center of current critical conversations about children’s literature and race? How do those questions account simultaneously for class and gender? What cultural, historical, and institutional conditions have shaped the ways children’s literature and children’s literature criticism responds to and represents these identity categories? What is the place of history (familial, cultural, national) in children’s literature about race and class?

- Angela Johnson, *Toning the Sweep*
- Pam Muñoz Ryan, *Esperanza Rising*
- Rudine Sims Bishop, excerpt from *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children’s Lit*
- Kate Capshaw, Francelia Butler lecture from ChLA 2014

October 29: Constructed and Constructive Children, or, the Possibilities of Child Agency

What are the contours of the contemporary debate in children’s literature regarding child agency? What does that phrase mean? How do scholars interested in child agency respond to criticism, in the vein of Jacqueline Rose, that reads children’s literature as an “adult practice”? How can we situate debates about child agency within children’s literature itself?

- W. B. Rands, excerpts from *Lilliput Levee*
- Astrid Lindgren, *Pippi Longstocking*
- Janusz Korczak, introduction to *When I Am Little Again and A Child’s Right to Respect*
- Maria Nikolajeva, “Why Does Pippi Sleep with Her Feet on the Pillow?”
- David Rudd, “Theorising and Theories: The Conditions of Possibility in Children’s Literature”
- Marah Gubar, “Risky Business: Talking About Children in Children’s Literature Criticism”

November 5: Greening Children’s Literature

What is environmental literature for children? What is the role of didacticism in this literature, and what is the place of aesthetics? Are these two motives mutually exclusive? How do environmental texts for children imagine the potential agency of young readers, inside and outside the text? What relationships do these texts assume between children, animals, and the natural world? How can we align ecocriticism of children’s literature with other critical lenses, such as feminist criticism?

- Robert C. O’Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*
- Catherine Sigler, “Wonderland to Wasteland: Toward Historicizing Environmental Activism in Children’s Lit”
- Marguerite Holloway, “In Amongst the Green Blades”

November 12: Turkish Delight! Food in Children's Literature

What ways does food signify in children's literature and culture? How can we interpret scenes of hunger, satiety, gluttony, cookery, cannibalism, and desire in the context of food studies? What are its material, symbolic, psychological meanings? What didactic, aesthetic, narrative purposes does food serve? How is food raced, classed, and gendered, in children's literature and elsewhere?

- C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
- Wendy R. Katz, "Some Uses of Food in Children's Literature"
- Lynne Vallone, "'What Is the Meaning of All This Gluttony?': Edgeworth, The Victorians, C. S. Lewis, and a Taste for Fantasy"
- Scott Pollard and Kara Keeling, "Introduction: Food in Children's Literature"

November 19: Wired Bad and Wired Mad, or, Intellectual Disability in Children's Literature

What is the current relationship between children's literature and disability studies? What can the two fields learn from one another? How do we, as scholars, build intellectual bridges between fields? What is the place of intellectual disability in disability studies and in children's literature? What are the boundaries of that term, disability, and how does it intersect with mental illness, chronic illness, and other categories?

- Jack Gantos, *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*
- Margaret Price, "Mental Disability and Other Terms of Art"
- Marah Gubar, "'Whacked-Our Partners': The Inversion of Empathy in the *Joey Pigza* Trilogy"
- Abbye E. Meyer, "'But She's Not Retarded': Contemporary Adolescent Literature Humanizes Disability but Marginalizes Intellectual Disability"

December 3: Adaptations and Emendations

What tools are available to theorize the translation of children's literature into film? What questions do such adaptations pose about audience and form? How can we situate those shifts within a larger understanding of children's culture?

- P. L. Travers, *Mary Poppins*
- Karen Kline, "*The Accidental Tourist* on Page and Screen: Interrogating Normative Theories About Adaptation"
- Disney's *Mary Poppins* (dir. Robert Stevenson) and *Saving Mr. Banks* (dir. John Lee Hancock)