

Spring 2014

English 470: Studies in Children's Literature

Topic: History of Children's Book Publishing: The Invention and Development of Children's & Adolescent Literature

Professor Jan Susina

Tuesday 5:30-8:20 p.m. in STV 410

Course Description:

The children's author and critic, John Rowe Townsend, in his 1971 Arburthnot Lecture, wrote that in defining children's literature, "In the short run it appears that, for better or worse, the publisher decides. If he puts a book on the children's list, it will be reviewed as a children's book and will be read by children (or young people), if it is read at all. If he puts it on the adult list, it will not—or at least not immediately." Townsend's observation emphasizes that children's literature has a dual audience of children and adults. The blurry boundary between children's and adult books is often bridged by readers of both age groups. Townsend also acknowledges the important role publishers play in children's literature. Like all literature, children's literature is a cultural commodity affected as much by market forces as by aesthetic concerns while also reflecting the changing cultural assumptions of childhood.

This graduate seminar will survey the history of children's book publishing while reading landmark texts in the history of children's literature. We will address the ways that publishers, as well as authors, illustrators and librarians, help define children's literature. Texts focusing on the history, practices, and growth of children's book will include Leonard Marcus's *Minders of Make-Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature*, Jacalyn Eddy's *Bookwomen: Creating an Empire in Children's Book Publishing 1919-1939*, Leonard Marcus's *Dear Genius: The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom*, and Cheryl Klein's *Second Sight: An Editor's Talks on Writing, Revising, & Publishing Books for Children and Young Adults*. The seminar will examine how the design, marketing, reviewing, censorship, and awarding of prizes affect the literary status and reputation of children's books. Additional critical essays by Robert Darton, Mary Jackson, Richard Darling, John Tebbel, Barbara Bader, Anita Silvey, Jill Lepore, and Philip Nel will be read as well as articles from publishing sources such as *Publishers Weekly*, *Horn Book*, and *The New York Times Book Review*. Influential children's and adolescent texts that have helped create, expand, and redefine what is considered children's literature will be studied including: John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon*, E.B. White's *Stuart Little*, Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day*, S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

Course Format:

Each student will give an oral presentation on a prearranged topic. Students will write two short critical papers (5-to-8 pages) and a longer critical paper (14-to-18 pages). There will be short written assignments related to the primary and critical readings. This seminar should be of interest to graduate students focusing on the study of children's and adolescent literature as well as graduate students who are working in the areas of book history, publishing, and cultural studies.