

BOOKWOMEN

*Creating an Empire in Children's
Book Publishing, 1919–1939*

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Becoming Experts and Friends

THROUGHOUT THE 1920S, bookwomen advanced their individual careers by acquiring information necessary to support claims of expertise, improving the output—both in quantity and quality—of the products they supervised, encouraging recognition of achievement, expanding the specialized territory over which they presided, and cultivating relationships that resulted in both professional sustenance and personal friendship. Emerging or deepening friendships constituted networks of mutual reliance that each woman valued in affirming her own expertise.

In addition to the expansion of individual expertise, the beginning of a collective culture among bookwomen was evident by 1924. The creation of the Newbery Medal in 1922, the first professional reward in the field of children's books, lent prestige, encouraged new talent, bred a sense of competition, and heightened interdisciplinary interest. Children's Book Week, rich with the rituals of preparation, selection, anticipation, and celebration, became an important event around which bookwomen gathered as a community. The creation of children's departments in publishing houses provided formal institutional expression of bookwomen's vision of better books for children.

Professional culture, individual expertise, and networks of friendship assumed critical significance, but while bookwomen gained ground in many areas, they were also severely challenged by other child experts during this decade. The language of bookwomen, still heavily steeped in nostalgic metaphors of home and family, remained easily comprehensible, if ill defined, to those outside the book industry, but it put bookwomen at odds with new scientific child experts. The persistent use of "common

sense" language, initially useful for establishing professional claims, was in one sense *too* democratic to qualify as expert language, which typically utilized exclusionary discourse. In another sense, bookwomen's persistence in privileging certain books and certain kinds of knowledge over others was, on the surface, far from democratic.

"A book is . . . a friend and a dream":

Anne Carroll Moore and Alice Jordan

In the early 1920s, bookwomen voiced their conception of the model children's book. Alice Jordan claimed that it was "less often found among books of information than among books of any other class." It should, she argued, spark "contagious enthusiasm" and an "animating quality."¹ A fuller definition of the desirable characteristics of children's literature appeared in the writings of Anne Carroll Moore, who, in contrast to many Americans, remained optimistic in the aftermath of World War I. She hoped, in fact, that the war would ultimately produce better living conditions, not so much materially as mentally. She was even grateful for the paper shortages and labor unrest that drove up book production costs, confident that these realities would prompt publishers to become more discriminating in their publication choices.² Most of all, she continued to hope for a renaissance in children's literature. The commencement of Children's Book Week had been encouraging, but it was simply not enough, Moore believed, to prime the pump for better children's books. Thus, when Eugene Saxton, editor at George H. Doran, offered to compile her *Bookman* essays for publication, she readily accepted.³ Published in 1920, *Roads to Childhood* immediately became a key source of literary criticism about children's books while simultaneously establishing her international reputation. After its publication, European publishers viewed Moore as a "major critic" of children's books both in America and "without peer" in England.⁴

Tellingly, the *Library Journal* advertised the book as "human" and "informal," not "theoretical."⁵ Far from theoretical, indeed, *Roads* revealed both Moore's love of books and her beliefs about children, which had much to do with her own childhood. "The sense of wonder and mystery . . . the sound of music," she claimed in *Roads*, "are present in my earliest recollections." Her nostalgic personal recollections prompted her to attempt to recreate similar experiences for other children, although she was not insensitive to the fact that many children did not share her New England values or the relative affluence of her own upbringing. On the contrary, her

awareness of some children's lack of financial and social resources made her determined that, regardless of their circumstances, children were entitled to what she considered quality books. In Moore's opinion, two classes of books existed: creative and informative. Of the two, creative literature, she claimed, was more important, "belonging to the very essence of literature, timeless and ageless in its appeal."⁶

When discussing the purpose of books, bookwomen frequently employed metaphors of place and journey. In *Roads*, as the name itself implies, Moore's prevalent metaphor was a pathway. Regarding life as a journey, she insisted that books provided "assured companionship" along the way.⁷ Jordan also utilized the metaphor of place and companionship, declaring that books carried the reader "into a world outside his own experience . . . [like] gates opening on far horizons of fact or fancy."⁸ Language also frequently alluded to sacred images and texts, a common practice in some literary circles. The publisher Walter Hines Page, for example, once noted, "A good book is a Big Thing, a thing to be thankful to heaven for. . . . Here is the chance for reverence, for something like consecration."⁹ The editor Montrose Moses claimed that lost childhood was a "yearning that passeth understanding."¹⁰ As Christine Jenkins and Betsy Hearne have noted, bookwomen included in their writing hefty doses of such words as "joy," "spiritual," "truth," "hope," "excellence," "soul," "richness," "delight."¹¹ This vocabulary, while vague by contemporary standards, was familiar to many Americans as part of a religious preaching heritage. Resting on assumed common values, that tradition was less interested in precision than in inspiration.

In any case, *Roads* amounted to a call to arms for reversing what Moore saw as the dismal state of literary affairs in children's books. She was particularly annoyed with publishers, whom she accused of indifference to children. Believing that hastily prepared and ill-planned books were the cause of an early distaste for reading, she challenged one publisher to identify children who would be interested in such books. "I really don't know," replied the publisher. "They *are* dull of course, but children must learn a great deal from them unconsciously." The remark infuriated Moore, who saw children's books as "strewn with patronage and propaganda, moralizing self-sufficiency and sham efficiency, mock heroics and cheap optimism."¹²

Moore's overriding complaint was simple: there were not enough good books for children. Her belief was fueled by librarians' repeated complaints about book shortages; fairy tales and books for the youngest children were in particularly short supply. Branch librarians did their best to make use of existing resources, encouraging children to attend story hours and to

read books in the library instead of checking them out, to allow the greatest number of children to benefit from them.¹³ Still, book stock overall was chronically depleted, leading to “restlessness” among young patrons.¹⁴ Some publishers took Moore’s call for a new golden age in children’s books seriously and began attending a series of evening lectures she offered in the children’s room. There, publishers encountered librarians and solicited their opinions about publishing for children.¹⁵

Publishers were not the only recipients of Moore’s criticism in *Roads*. Authors were criticized for their lack of imagination and for their anxiety about being “juvenile” writers. Believing that writing for children was perceived as requiring less skill than writing for adults, some authors worried that their professional reputations would be adversely affected, and she viewed this as an occupational hazard to be overcome. Likewise, she disliked complacent authors who, she argued, treated children’s books as “an old-age pension.” Behind these attitudes, she claimed, were institutions of higher education that had failed to help develop a robust literature for America’s children and perpetuated in students a resistance to writing for children. She viewed the situation as a “grave defect in our national education.”¹⁶

Parents, according to Moore, were also remiss in their responsibilities. Holding up Theodore Roosevelt as a proper role model because he read aloud to his children, Moore predicted that “if several thousand fathers of American families would begin to read aloud to their children on a similar basis . . . we should see great changes in many publications we have recently reviewed.”¹⁷ By more direct involvement with their children’s reading lives, parents might serve dual roles, first as models of book appreciation, and second as discriminating consumers whose expectations would affect the market by pressuring publishers to improve book quality.

For Moore, books were clearly much more than what they seemed on the library shelf. Reading and books, as act and artifact, represented a code for discussing an entire constellation of behaviors and institutions, the litmus test of responsibility and intelligence, reliable barometers of both public *and* private matters. By them, the nation would be prevented from sinking into selfish materialism, thus preserving family and civic life. In an environment of brisk change, “classic” books provided mental grounding, a link with a past perceived to be quickly fading. To a bookman or -woman, books represented the protective barrier against the turbulence resulting from those changes, the blueprints for social stabilization and betterment.

Beyond ambivalent authors, indifferent publishers, and recalcitrant parents, Moore identified the lack of sustained literary criticism as the primary

deficiency in the field of children's books. Such a lack promoted "mediocrity, condescension, and lack of humour" instead of the originality, competition, and distinction she desired. Moore urged others to recognize that "children . . . are in themselves . . . far more interesting than anything which may be written for their benefit or improvement—that writing for their reading is an art . . . [that] can be sustained only by vigorous and informed criticism."¹⁸

Criticism, for Moore, was no mere intellectual exercise. She argued that the best literary criticism should include the opinions of children themselves, whom any credible critic had an obligation to consult.¹⁹ She routinely did so herself, eliciting the thoughts and opinions of patrons of the children's room before issuing comments about any book. Many library colleagues were pleased that Moore had "exposed all the worn-out platitudes and judgments that have grown up around the juvenile."²⁰ One librarian from Buffalo exclaimed, "I am *so* glad that real criticism of children's books has come in my day."²¹

Technically, Moore's claim to inaugurating literary criticism of children's books was inaccurate. During the nineteenth century, children's books were typically reviewed by literary monthlies, book trade journals, and children's magazines. Depending upon the availability of the book and their own attitudes about children, reviewers' assessments varied from simple two- or three-sentence mentions to more elaborate descriptions, such as those found in *Athenaeum* or those written by thoughtful editors such as William Dean Howells (*Atlantic Monthly*) and Susan Coolidge (*Literary World*). The *Nation*, however, assumed the most watchful eye over children's literature. Reviewing more than six hundred children's books between the end of the Civil War and 1881, the *Nation* represented the largest reviewer of children's books in America.

It seems peculiar, then, that Moore claimed uniqueness for her contribution to children's literature, or that other bookwomen, such as Louise Seaman, supported it. It is tempting to view Moore's claim as plainly fraudulent, or else agree with one historian who argues that Moore's claim represented "an appalling absence of scholarship."²² But since reviews were simply too prevalent for bookwomen to have been unaware of them, other explanations should be considered. First, for all her fond memories of the past, Moore wanted to separate herself and the new generation of experts from it, desiring that the business of evaluating children's books be left to those with a thorough knowledge of children's literature rather than to editors, for whom children's books represented only a fraction of professional

responsibility. Second, the importance of standard setting, particularly if tied to pioneering, can hardly be overestimated. Whoever set standards wielded tremendous influence over the cultural meaning of books and of knowledge itself.²³ Therefore, Moore's claim to be the first children's book reviewer is significant for two reasons. On one level, it further reinforced her advocacy of the rights of children to good books. On another level, the claim represented an acknowledgement of the fact that in addition to "mere" expertise about children's books, bookwomen sought the authority to define cultural artifacts that could only stem from being recognized as standard setters.

In part, bookwomen based their expertise on a repertoire of beliefs and attitudes that, they postulated, benefited children. In addition to perspectives about service to others, respect for ritual and tradition, and issues of child development, bookwomen were concerned that children view the world as community. Recalling prewar America with more nostalgia than reality warranted, many Americans embraced "100% Americanism" during the 1920s. But the intense nationalism captured by this slogan met with disapproval from some librarians, including Moore.²⁴ She found available books provincial, and demanded that internationalism take its proper place in American publishing, an attitude that, in fact, became a hallmark of children's publishing in the 1920s. In her opinion, the failure to establish internationalism in children's books rested with publishers who continued to publish "remnants of history and poorly drawn portraits of very dead heroes and heroines, and then have wondered why so few children or grown people seem to be interested in other countries or races." Picture books, she insisted, were central to internationalism, "not lithographs, not geographical readers . . . but pictures that make you want to go there."²⁵ Moore expressed her support for internationalism, in part, by a strong interest in library work in Europe. She was so concerned with the state of libraries there after the war that she went to see for herself what progress was being made. In France, she had the professional satisfaction of seeing librarians at work that she herself had trained at NYPL.²⁶

Others shared Moore's interest in internationalism. Jessie Carson, director of library work for the American Committee for Devastated France, was determined to open children's rooms in that country, viewing this as an exciting and pioneering opportunity for international library work. Consequently, she encouraged her staff to establish a fund for the purchase of a modest collection of books for the Children's Colony at Boullay Thierry and urged other libraries to follow suit.²⁷ Clara Whitehill Hunt emphasized

the role of children's librarians in promoting international friendships among children and, consequently, world peace. Literature, Hunt exclaimed, should be used as a means of "creating a closer friendship among . . . many races."²⁸ In Boston, Bertha Mahony observed that books had the ability to provide American children with an international set of "friends" who could recognize the "universality of life, love and art" necessary for a "unified conscience and unified consciousness symbolized in effective world government."²⁹ Yet more meanings of "book": friendship, unity, world peace.

Authors also frequently espoused international friendship, arguing that with the proper books, children could and should be trained to expand their thinking beyond nationalistic beliefs. Hugh Lofting, for example, declared that internationalism was essential to the very survival of civilization and called for an end to racism and prejudice in children's literature.³⁰ Notwithstanding the fact that authors, including Lofting, frequently wrote from "an outsider's point of view" that portrayed other cultures in unflattering and stereotypical ways, children's literature was more likely than ever to take up international themes, an idea with limited appeal in America at the time.³¹

Internationalism might be seen as one kind of progressivism, but Moore and Jordan remained equally connected to events much closer to home. America's infatuation with progressive reform might have cooled, but librarians' dedication to progressive attitudes as an effective strategy for achieving meaningful social change had not. In Boston, for example, Alice Jordan informed "her girls" that work at the Boston City Hospital was "a new opportunity for extending library work with children."³² The children's room at NYPL also remained intimately connected to the community. Month after month, New York's librarians submitted carefully constructed reports to Moore, often handwritten, describing branch activities in elaborate detail. Home, hospital, and settlement house visitation figured prominently as significant and time-consuming activities: the School for Crippled Children on Henry Street urgently called for storytelling; the Chatham Square staff was invited to a party at the settlement at Bowling Green.³³ Cognizant of the multitude of organizations providing active work with children, Josephine White reported to Moore the importance of realizing "how much the library is called upon to do its share."³⁴ Armed with several books, primarily fairy tales and history, NYPL branch librarians routinely made hospital and school visits to "bring the library to the children's minds."³⁵ They also visited youth organizations, such as scout headquarters, to obtain pamphlets for circulation in their branches.³⁶ Librarians

monitored the cultural composition of the surrounding neighborhoods by visiting public schools; when a shift took place in a neighborhood's ethnic composition, such as the increase in Italian registrants at the Chatham branch in 1921, Moore was notified promptly so that "adjustments" might be made in book stock to meet "quite different demands."³⁷

Some children, undoubtedly, came to the library seeking information and reading pleasure as many adults intended them to. But, as librarians were fully aware, children came to the library for other reasons as well, some having little or nothing to do with reading. However consciously, they made their own uses for the space and, thus, created their own power within it. The library might offer temporary escape from home life, the opportunity to make or meet with friends, or the chance to win both parental and nonparental adult approval. And while Moore tried to make the children's room "warm" in a metaphoric sense, New York children sometimes utilized the space for literal warmth in the cold winter months. But while children sometimes visited the library simply to stay warm, no urging was necessary to attend certain celebrations. Authors' birthdays were high holy days at NYPL, usually celebrated by exhibits and stories about the authors and encoded with the message of literary privilege. And scores of children attended the elaborate and festive Christmas celebrations. Whether they came in response to the storytelling and candle lighting rituals or whether they were interested in the goodies and presents Moore sent to each branch is difficult to unravel and highly individualistic. Children devised their own relationships with the library, deciding when and under what circumstances that relationship might be beneficial. For their part, librarians were unfazed by the mix of motivations. Whether children were in the library to read, escape chores, or receive presents, the main point was that they were *in* the library and, therefore, in unavoidable contact with its culture.³⁸ For many librarians, this sense of community was powerful. At the George Bruce branch, Judith Karlson spoke for many librarians, noting with satisfaction that "the children's room has been well used and is an important part of the neighborhood and community. . . . I feel in very close touch with the children."³⁹

Storytelling was more than a holiday activity at the library, and Moore continued making much use of it at NYPL. She was also delighted to discover that other bookwomen agreed with her about its importance. Seaman believed that children were "close to the rhythm of long oral cadences in old tongues."⁴⁰ The encroachment of modernity, Bertha Mahony declared, created a pressing need for storytelling. More than anything, it was valued

for its ties to tradition, its perceived potential to create community, and its usefulness in modeling for children what Anne Eaton called the “vivid sense of what it means to be able to open the covers of a book and find . . . the wonder and magic of a story.”⁴¹ The shared experience of listening to a story enriched it, creating memories and sociability that bookwomen believed were critical to human development. As new forms of entertainment—radio and motion pictures—emerged, they became more adamant that storytelling retain its place in children’s lives. Advocacy of storytelling therefore operated on several levels: as a critique of modernity, an instrument of human development, and a means of creating citizens who could transcend “mere” politics. As she was prone to do, Mahony situated her comments in gendered language that privileged male readers: “Never was story-telling more needed than now. Our leaders fill us with doubt and disappointment. Our citizenry, too, seems filled with small spirit; and bent upon small goals; incapable of thinking constructively for the common good. Why is this so? Partly because we have forgotten that men must have heroes. Reading, writing, arithmetic, even the social studies and the best courses in civics do not breed them. . . . The leading of the story-teller is of this kind. The soul of the listener is moved. . . . His perception of what is important becomes clearer. Matters small and mean drop away.”⁴²

By the 1920s, bookwomen explicitly connected storytelling to expertise. Although Marie Shedlock made it clear that a storyteller was not “the professional elocutionist,” she expressed the hope that one day stories would be told “only by experts who have devoted special time and preparation to the art of telling them.”⁴³ Likewise, although they still viewed storytelling as an art, bookwomen did advocate specialized instruction to prepare storytellers for their career. In 1920, Mahony arranged a lecture series, held in the union auditorium, to provide such training, which included the study of Moore’s writing.⁴⁴

In their respective institutions, Moore and Jordan continued to personally oversee storytelling because it was, as Moore put it, one of the library’s “gifts to youth.” She created the position of supervisor of storytelling at NYPL, a position held by such well-known storytellers as Anna Cogswell Tyler and Mary Gould Davis; at BPL, Jordan placed John and Mary Cronan in similar positions.⁴⁵ By 1923, the list of permanent and guest storytellers had grown impressively, now including Carl Sandburg, Louis Untermeyer, Stephen Vincent Benet, Anne Thaxter Eaton, Constance Lindsay Skinner, Theodore Seuss Geisel, and others whose stories often kept children in the library until after closing.⁴⁶

Children's Book Week, another aspect of Moore's work, had been so successful in 1919 that she was dedicated to its continuation and, almost immediately, viewed New York as headquarters for the event. Posters, stickers, and a summary of suggestions for booksellers and librarians were mailed to schools, libraries, and bookstores. The suggestion booklet outlined recommendations for exhibit development, press releases, and public speaking engagements to spread the word to civic clubs and social organizations.⁴⁷ Contests for best book reviews, best letters describing how children earned money to buy a book, best Book Week posters, and best costumes (children dressed as book characters) were held in a variety of settings to promote the event. Prizes consisted of books, of course, donated by local bookstores or clubs. Bookstore windows advertised Book Week, sometimes utilizing books loaned by citizens. Some ministers delivered sermons praising books and reading.⁴⁸ Frederic Melcher—still chair of the Book Week committee—went on WJZ in Newark to talk about the event, hoping to stimulate interest at other radio stations.⁴⁹ Moore, too, used the medium in weekly broadcasts on WEAJ, convinced that, if material were thoughtfully selected and tastefully presented, radio could constitute another avenue of expansion for librarians working with children.⁵⁰

These efforts paid off. In 1920, Book Week drew over one hundred librarians, booksellers, and publishers from the New York region alone. Moore presided over the day long conference, whose speakers included familiar figures in the children's book world—Melcher, Hunt, and Caroline Hewins. In acknowledgment of its success, "Children's Book Week, A National Movement" was the theme of the ALA's 1921 annual meeting, at Swampscott, Massachusetts. Such recognition no doubt strengthened the reputations of its organizers. But privately, Moore worried that the success of children's work would prompt the very commercialization she perceived to threaten traditional ideals. The market, she believed, had no use for values. The author Cornelia Meigs shared her concern. "It is very difficult," Meigs wrote to Moore, "to hold to one's ideals of what constitutes good writing and what children ought to have. . . . The rewards are not very great and as a result one is being urged constantly to be more practical and commercial and think more about money and less about children."⁵¹ Melcher, however, was more optimistic about the market, asserting that "no one can start out to make better books . . . without realizing that in order for such books to be published and distributed there must be three thousand other people interested in the same books. Without a growing market there can be no real improvement in the variety and quality of the books. With the

increasing of the quantity market the quality grows in proportion to the discussion and interest created.”⁵²

The Swampscott conference was important for other reasons; it was a moment for the organization to take stock of progress in its work with children. By now, a much larger percentage of librarians identified work with children as an exclusive or substantial part of their work experience, underscoring notable shifts in library service during the previous twenty years.⁵³

Also significant to the proceedings was the inclusion of “outsiders” on the speakers’ platform. Concerned about librarians’ continued resistance to connection with the commercial book markets, ALA leaders invited Melcher and Mahony to address the organization. The plan was for Melcher to discuss books from the publishers’ viewpoint, Mahony to offer the perspective of a bookseller, and, to speak for the library, Clara Whitehill Hunt.⁵⁴ The ALA’s choice of speakers is curious, since none of the three could truly be considered an “outsider.” Melcher was well known as a powerful sympathizer with librarians’ most deeply held tenets regarding “good” books. Mahony was a bookseller who, as noted, resisted commercialism and regarded books as more than merchandise. Hunt, believing that the library would hasten the return of Christ to the earth by improving the hearts and minds of readers, certainly offered no challenge to librarians’ traditional attitudes about “good” books.⁵⁵ The ALA pushed its members toward market awareness, but it was a gentle push.

Lastly, the Swampscott meeting was important because Melcher approached Jordan with an idea to improve both children’s books and librarians’ prestige. He wished to offer, at his own expense, an annual medal for the best new children’s title.⁵⁶ Moreover, he wanted librarians to select the winner. He hoped his idea would encourage librarians to become more aware of book production and view themselves as more than clerks distributing books. At the same time, he realized that the medal would offer an incentive to authors, thus stimulating the growth of children’s literature.⁵⁷ He proposed to name the medal after John Newbery (1713–67), the first British publisher of children’s books.⁵⁸

Jordan liked the idea at once, and encouraged Melcher to bring it before the general membership. Members enthusiastically passed a resolution acknowledging the influence of the award in “determining a future standard of excellence,” although the selection process remained undetermined. Some expressed concern about a “one librarian, one vote” process, fearing that a substandard book might be selected if the rank and file simply voted for the book they believed to be outstanding. Simple majority alone, they

argued, could not be trusted for such an important decision. Enlightened bookmanship prevailed; for the time being, ordinary children's librarians would be allowed to vote, but their opinions would be validated by a final jury of "a few of the people of recognized high standards and experience." That jury consisted of Mary Root from Providence, Effie Power from Cleveland, Alice Jordan, and Anne Carroll Moore. The next year, the jury, invested with final authority, consented to the overwhelming choice of the rank and file; of 212 votes cast by librarians, 168 favored Hendrik Van Loon's *Story of Mankind* to receive the first Newbery at the June ALA meeting in Detroit.⁵⁹

The typical working day of most librarians, however, was less tied to events at ALA conferences than to routinized tasks, and librarians were sensitive to what they considered dismissive attitudes about their profession, even from within their own ranks. Edwin Andersen, Arthur Bostwick's successor as chief of circulation at NYPL, compared the "irksome . . . minutiae of library technique" to "crochet work," while most librarians preferred to view their work as a profession of culture-distributing.⁶⁰ Notoriously poor wages did not help the profession's reputation; unable to attract applicants for this reason, some library schools, such as the Children's Library School in Pittsburgh, closed during the early 1920s.

Among those most critical of librarians were teachers who themselves had waged a long campaign for professional recognition. Librarians believed that teachers had easy hours; teachers believed that librarians had easy work. Librarians suspected that teachers regarded them as task-oriented subprofessionals and found evidence of this attitude in school libraries, poorly staffed by those "unqualified to teach any subject in high school, but doing police service over the assembly room [with] the dignified name of librarian."⁶¹ Insulted, librarians insisted that such poorly prepared individuals should not lay claim to the profession. Above all, librarians objected to having their profession denigrated as merely technical. "The greatest services," claimed the *Library Journal*, "are not the menial ones of checking books in and out at the loan desk, and hunting up references on a subject, marking pages with slips; but her greatest functions are to inspire the reading habit, and to teach self-dependence." The *Journal* conceded that librarians were occasionally overbearing toward teachers, but argued that condescending teachers who viewed librarians as task oriented were most at fault. Some libraries followed the *Journal's* advice for improving the situation by mingling library and school curricula, or by assigning a reference librarian to teachers.⁶²

Slowly, teachers responded to librarians' insistence that they play an integral role in public education. Interested in learning about a variety of subjects, teachers brought their classes to visit the public library, often claiming they "received as much help and inspiration as did the children."⁶³ Even parents occasionally patronized the children's room, most often to settle outstanding debts but also to make sure their children were truly at the library and not "spending their time shooting craps."⁶⁴ In Boston, the gap in teacher-librarian relations was bridged at Jordan's Round Table meetings.⁶⁵

The Child's "Rightful Heritage": Louise Seaman and May Masee

The immediate postwar publishing environment complicated publishers' ability to respond to Moore's demand for more and better children's books. The cost of book production was up 100 percent over prewar costs and consequently book prices rose by roughly 50 percent during the first two postwar years. Printers could not meet publishers' demands because pulp was in short supply. Job dissatisfaction and strikes among printers lowered productivity by one-third in some cities, and the resulting labor shortages, particularly in New York and Boston, made it nearly impossible for frustrated publishers to maintain a predictable production schedule. New York and Boston were particularly hard hit.⁶⁶ In the papermaking industry, similar disputes carried on throughout 1921, making a national strike in that trade seem likely.⁶⁷ By the end of the year, however, most disputes had been settled and publishers once again became optimistic about their production schedules, although printing plants were subsequently located in small cities or rural areas to minimize difficulty with unions.⁶⁸

At Macmillan, therefore, Louise Seaman struggled with multiple contexts that challenged her potential for success. In the midst of those challenges, she continued refining her conception of childhood. To Seaman—and many librarians—it contained powerful strains of poetic sentimentalism that were simultaneously value laden. She described children as "catapults of energy, dynamos of ideas, summer suns of affection, lonesome dark dreamers. Children—flaunting borrowed plumage, desperately flying ancient flags, laboring herculean-wise at nothing. Singing, grimacing, wide-mouthed, informative, earthy, ethereal, combustible, secretive, acrobatic."⁶⁹ She defined a "classic" as a book "so widely loved that it lives on long in print and in people's hearts. It doesn't have to be great literature . . . [or] what children like to read the most. . . . The finest and noblest of books intended for

children tell of heroism. They are the inspiration of those who, later in life, sacrifice themselves that they may secure the safety of others.”⁷⁰ Classics, in short, became part of a “continuous tradition of art, poetry, learning” that will not “have to be outgrown.”⁷¹

While Seaman doubted her ability to select “good” books for children when she accepted the editorship at Macmillan, she quickly developed a sense of legitimate authority to do so. What surfaces in her thought process are beliefs that seem, at very least, paradoxical. On the one hand, she claimed that “the moment when the book order is made . . . one of the greatest acts of a free democracy takes place.” Yet, while writers and artists had “a stake in that act,” she acknowledged they were “only a part of the whole”; readers, too, had a stake. On the other hand, she perceived readers’ opinions as freighted with social and cultural baggage, which she summed up neatly as “the war neuroses, the muddle of tastes, and the thin-spread culture of America.”⁷² Her sense of fair play in proper democratic process, in other words, compelled her to seek opinions about children’s books from members of a culture whose literary taste she did not trust. It is quite reasonable to suggest, however, that Seaman saw no contradiction in any of this. Along with others in the literary establishment weaned on the longstanding republican ideal of enlightened statesmanship, she felt the need to weigh many opinions about books, including those of readers. But just as enlightened statesmanship rejected universal fitness to rule, enlightened bookmanship rejected universal fitness to make decisions about good literature.

George Brett, himself the quintessential enlightened bookman and firm believer that children’s books should “influence the course of events in the world” and shape children’s character by introducing them to great writing of the past, occasionally reminded Seaman that mere education was secondary to these two tasks.⁷³ Not generally supportive of segregating children’s books from mainstream literature, Seaman regarded segregation as “a phase of an educational mood that will pass and should pass.”⁷⁴ Still, she recognized that segregating children created and expanded a distinct market crucial to the survival of the publishing industry. For the moment, it was also crucial to her job.

One of her first tasks as editor of the children’s department was to create the annual children’s book list, a task that did not at first appear difficult, owing to the fact that Macmillan was the largest holder of classics among American publishers. But despite the impressive number of titles, roughly half represented old English imports while the other half came

from the American backlist. As she began her task, she quickly discovered that, consistent with Moore's complaints in *Roads*, there were few new titles to include in the list. Children continued to consume nineteenth-century classics voraciously, but she anticipated that, as the decade wore on, children would want more recent books as well. Sitting at her "overflowing desk, stubbornly sure that my work could be, and should be, as creative as teaching," Seaman therefore recognized that building a truly successful children's department required more than old classics and European imports.⁷⁵ New authors and illustrators were desperately needed, and she meant to discover them, but finding time to scout talent and experiment was challenging. In addition to obligations in other departments, she was "The Story Book Lady" every Monday on WJZ radio in Newark.⁷⁶ Moreover, Brett wanted his new editor to develop a series of classics for children. For these, Seaman envisioned a series of artistic but affordable books for children and conceived of the Macmillan's Children's Classics Series (1923), the Little Library (1925), and the Happy Hour Series (1927).⁷⁷

Seaman wrote the catalog personally, as she did throughout her career, and was "terribly awfully" proud of it, confident that a child could find something of interest from its 250 titles. It was well received, and when the supply gave out, even after cutting bookshop requests by half, Seaman glimpsed the size of the market for children's books. Above all, the success of the first catalog convinced her that children could be "lured" into reading "great" books sooner if the proper books were available.⁷⁸

She was particularly impressed with brightly colored, high quality illustrations in European books, and interested in producing illustrations their equal.⁷⁹ But illustration—especially half-tone plates—was expensive, often costing as much as the text plates themselves. For this reason, publishers had generally eliminated or severely curtailed illustrated fiction before 1920.⁸⁰ Illustrations for children's books remained the exception to this general decline, and actually increased during the 1920s, due in part to Seaman's determination to nurture the careers of talented illustrators. Jordan applauded Seaman's efforts, encouraging her to find illustrations to "fit the text . . . a part of the very structure of the book. Everyone knows that the day of the merely pretty picture has gone for the illustration of books."⁸¹

Seaman's devotion to illustration was best expressed in her consistent support for artists from other cultures as well as America, including Boris Artzybasheff, Wanda Gag, Padraic Colum, James Daugherty, Lynd Ward, and Dorothy Lathrop.⁸² Working carefully within budgetary limits set by

Brett, Seaman could frequently be found in her office discussing the details of a book with the illustrator. One observer noted that Seaman, remaining intimately connected to details like cover designs, jackets, and paper type, had “one eye on the book-buying public and the balance sheets which must remorselessly take their part in the scheme of anything.” As editor, Seaman possessed or developed qualities of patience, energy, enthusiasm, and “an unlimited belief in the possibility of human beings” that enabled the ideas of her authors and illustrators to survive the arduous process of translating creativity into print.⁸³ The results were what Virginia Haviland called “living books.”⁸⁴

Seaman also encouraged a new individuality among book designers by utilizing both old and new forms of book production to bring specialization to children’s publishing.⁸⁵ Although photoengraving and photography produced the majority of the changes in illustration later in the period, older illustration techniques, such as etching, wood blocks, linoleum blocks, and lithography, enjoyed a renaissance. By supporting the use of traditional crafts in the context of mass markets, Seaman mirrored Brett’s motive mixture, combining the “best” of old techniques with a modern perspective and demonstrating that craft and profit were not necessarily incompatible.⁸⁶

Of all the aspects of bookmaking, Seaman was least informed about selling, though she quickly discovered that it was “the heart of the matter”⁸⁷ and therefore actively pursued professional contacts with potential clients like Bertha Mahony and Elinor Whitney.⁸⁸ Seaman also asked Brett for a sales route of her own in New York, a request that shocked the publisher. His prediction, that retail clients would resist buying books from a woman, turned out to be accurate. Seaman was most distressed by female book buyers, who often flatly refused to buy anything from her, but male book buyers at retail outlets like Gimbel’s were not much better. She observed that “being confronted with a woman made male buyers hyperventilate and get through the ordeal as quickly as possible. . . . The buyer at Scribner’s was so nervous when he saw me way down the line of waiting men, with my bulging briefcase, that he would beckon me up to his desk at once, hastily order *one* of everything, and literally push me off. The next day, the regular man on that route would get his usual big re-orders for juveniles.”⁸⁹

She encountered other problems in her role as a businesswoman. After persuading Brett to send her on a nationwide working tour and also to Europe to improve her knowledge of the business, Seaman was refused a letter of introduction. “I can’t give you a letter to Macmillan in London,” Brett explained. “They’d never understand my allowing a—well, a young

woman—to be head of a dept.”⁹⁰ Seaman, as it turned out, was better at selling the idea of children’s literature than at selling actual books.⁹¹ Throughout her tenure at Macmillan, she routinely spoke about children’s literature to various groups, including Rotary Clubs, PTAs, and university libraries. Though generally well received, she did encounter resistance from those who resented the part of her professional identity associated with business. Speaking before an ALA conference for the first time, for example, Seaman discovered that a member who disdained her as a “representative of commercialism” had hidden her slide projector.⁹²

Seaman remained the only commercial editor for children’s books in 1921, although Doubleday, Page and Company created a department for children’s books in 1922, selecting May Masee as the head of its new venture. Masee had come to the firm’s attention because, in her role as ALA Booklist editor, she had routinely visited Doubleday representatives to discuss their forthcoming titles. Impressed with her enthusiastic attitude toward children’s books, the publishing house decided to follow Macmillan’s lead and create a department of its own.

Masee, the second of four children, was born on May 1, 1881. Her father, Thomas, was French and English, but Masee’s early life was spent in a largely German community near Utica, New York. Born into somewhat less affluent circumstances than other bookwomen, she was nonetheless exposed to many of the same childhood literary experiences. The family subscribed to *Youth’s Companion*, and Masee frequently borrowed a neighbor’s copies of *St. Nicholas*. Responsible for reading to her two younger siblings, she became particularly fascinated with picture books, “gathering,” she later claimed, “a wholesome respect for a nice line and a good pen-and-ink drawing.”⁹³ The child was, in fact, “always reading.”⁹⁴ While Masee was still young, her family relocated to Milwaukee, where she attended public schools. She graduated from normal school in 1901 and then, after only one year of teaching, attended the library school in Wisconsin. Masee then worked as a librarian at the Armour Institute in Chicago and at Buffalo, where she briefly worked as children’s librarian before accepting the editorship of the ALA Booklist, which was intended by the ALA to guide library workers, especially in small public libraries, in their book selections. By 1908, the Booklist was moved to Madison, Wisconsin, in order to take advantage of university faculty expertise in writing book reviews for it.⁹⁵ This position offered her prominence by providing her with the opportunity to lecture at the Indiana Summer School of Librarianship at Indianapolis and by connecting her directly to publishers anxious that their books receive her

approval in the list.⁹⁶ Unlike her predecessors, Massee visited eastern publishers to discuss their forthcoming lists, felt comfortable moving among various traditional book trade territories, and was equally at home with librarians, booksellers, and publishers. In her role as the ALA editor, Massee met Seaman, a “new publicity slave,” who was instructed to tell Massee about forthcoming Macmillan titles. Although initially “awfully scared of her,” she quickly found that Massee quickly grasped the implications of Seaman’s “little new side job of editing the Macmillan children’s books.” She felt inspired by Massee and respected her high professional standards. For Massee, work was the center of life, and professional associates were her closest friends. At the next ALA conference, representatives of Doubleday, then one of the important publishing houses with retail networks nationwide, invited her to become the children’s editor of junior books.⁹⁷

Seaman and Massee, both allies and rivals, pushed boldly forward with plans to jump-start the children’s book industry, quickly surmising that editorship “is no ‘ivory tower’ sort of job.” Neither woman viewed her role as passive, and each intended to remain in direct control of the production of her books from start to finish. They discussed costs and profits, estimates and processes.⁹⁸ Because Doubleday printed onsite, something unusual for publishing houses, Massee had the opportunity to visit the presses on Long Island to learn the details of book printing.⁹⁹ For the same purpose, Seaman made frequent trips to Norwood, Massachusetts, where Macmillan titles generally were printed.¹⁰⁰

Like Seaman, Massee was required to create an annual catalog. Her first list contained some books that continue to be well known, including *The Story about Ping*. Although rivals by definition, Seaman openly admired Massee’s lists for their “cosmopolitanism,” noting with satisfaction that she “combated the banal.”¹⁰¹ Booksellers liked Massee’s books as well because, as one said, “she has been able to produce books that are not only works of art and of value as literature, but are also ‘good merchandise.’” She was, the bookseller remarked, “peculiarly alert to beauty.”¹⁰²

Most of the conversations between Seaman and Massee, however, focused on acquiring talent for the children’s book field since they viewed themselves as partners with authors and illustrators, members of a team with the same ultimate goal: better literature for children. But while Seaman and Massee encouraged unproven authors and illustrators, they nurtured close working relationships with librarians, the tried and true voices of authority in the book world. Moore had made it plain that she held editors accountable for their products, and she was often drawn into the loop of book

production to consult on a variety of issues.¹⁰³ Engaging librarians in the process was good for business, but the editors genuinely regarded librarians as indispensable contributors to the process of making books for children. For this reason, Seaman sent manuscripts to Jordan even before meeting her, considering her comments “clear-eyed,” “sane,” and “humorous.”¹⁰⁴

In the midst of the excitement of their new positions, pressure to return to a more conventional professional life occasionally surfaced. In 1920, Seaman received a letter from Laura Wylie, one of her professors at Vassar, advising her to give up publishing and return to an academic life. Wylie “suspected the rewards, mental and spiritual, of the commercial life I was leading, and urged me to return to teach English under her. Imagine saying *no* to Miss Wylie! Yet not so long ago I had decided I was not a scholar, and teaching young children well, did not mean one could teach college students well. I had no yearning to live in Poughkeepsie after life in New Haven. Yet, didn’t Miss Wylie know best? Well, I wrote *no*, and regretted it for months, during which time I would see the Wylie eyes twinkle sardonically as I read a silly manuscript, or ran to answer Mr. Brett’s bell. Once again, I had chosen between scholarship and ‘editing.’”¹⁰⁵ Seaman’s statement revealed the ambivalence with which bookwomen sometimes viewed their professions, uncertain of reconciling the connection between service and profit. For Seaman, it also raised a question: what *was* a legitimate “literary” career for women?

Bookshopping and Caravaning: Bertha Mahony and Elinor Whitney

Like Seaman and Masee, Bertha Mahony and Elinor Whitney found that enthusiasm and far-reaching goals were only part of professional life. At the Bookshop for Boys and Girls, as at publishing houses, competition was an unrelenting fact of life. For Mahony, that competition increasingly arose from department stores eager to share the profits in the children’s book business. Thus, when Filene’s in Boston created a book corner in 1919, they advertised stock of the “tried and true” variety, approved by “organizations of authority” and under the supervision of “a trained librarian and college graduate.” Its advertising pitch was “Filene’s: Parents can safely choose children’s books here.”¹⁰⁶ But to Mahony’s frustration, department store managers frequently treated books as part of seasonal toy stock, packing them away when the holiday buying season was over while she herself regarded books not as merchandise but as “the record of life itself.”¹⁰⁷

Despite worsening competition from other bookshops and department

stores, the bookshop made slow but steady progress. Business had increased at the encouraging rate of about 50 percent each year since it had opened, but the bookshop continued to operate at a loss. The deficit for 1920 was about two hundred dollars, despite the fact that she carried some books on consignment. On the other hand, Mahony's annual booklist enhanced the bookshop's reputation and a steady stream of visitors from around the country bolstered profits. And, fortunately, the Union seemed in no hurry for repayment of the money it had loaned Mahony to get started.

Like Jordan, Mahony found administrative responsibilities bothersome. She did not consider herself a good businesswoman; even the concept of stock turnover had to be explained to her by publishers' salesmen. Consequently, she developed a business credo consistent with her discomfort, keeping organization to a "certain businesslike procedure" that would keep her records in order without consuming too much of her energy. She preferred to spend the bulk of her time creating the pleasant surroundings and developing the "friendliness, helpfulness and sincerity of service" that defined the character of the bookshop and reflected the qualities of her benefactors at the union.¹⁰⁸ Jordan was a steadying influence on her in this regard, consistently reinforcing Mahony's belief that the cultivation of reading was her primary endeavor.¹⁰⁹

Staffing the bookshop, however, was one chronic administrative problem Mahony could not avoid, although several individuals hired during the early 1920s turned out to be long-term employees who stabilized the shop's high staff turnover rate. Elinor Whitney was, by then, not only a permanent employee but also assistant manager of the shop, and Whitney's sister, Mary, joined the staff in 1922 as assistant director of the children's level and remained for ten years. Frances Darling, another long-term employee, became "the upstairs wizard of finances."¹¹⁰

In addition to a nucleus of devoted and long-term employees, the bookshop never lacked a steady supply of willing clerks; young women recently graduated from college, like Edna Humphrey (Wellesley) and Greta Wood Snider (Smith), were eager to work there. For many, it was a powerful experience amounting to a unique internship for later professional endeavors. One employee, Lillian Gillig, wrote that "nothing I had learned in business courses at school prepared me for my first glimpse of the office of the Bookshop for Boys and Girls. . . . I know that I received my real education [there] and I am eternally grateful." The divide separating business and "reality" was, for Gillig, enormous. Moreover, she enthused, the shop "was itself a book, and we were the characters from a story."¹¹¹ For all the

enthusiasm of Mahony's employees, however, staff turnover remained significant. Professional opportunity competed with marriage, a fact that, according to Mahony, made "disconcerting inroads in [the bookshop] staff" throughout the decade.¹¹²

Mahony's trouble with employee retention after marriage was not unusual. While 35 percent of female workers were married in 1900, they represented less than 10 percent of all gainfully employed females during the 1920s.¹¹³ Public debate shifted from the generally well-accepted unmarried "working girl" to the consequences—social and economic—of having married women in the workplace. Indeed, by mid-decade, 96 percent of men surveyed were of the opinion that married women should stay home, at least while children were young.

In response, advocates of women's right to work developed two primary arguments during the 1920s. The first—and more radical—argument attempted to piggyback onto the somewhat fashionable notion that women should lead fulfilling lives (marketed, for example, in sex manuals) by contending specifically that women should be able to pursue careers simply to achieve self-fulfillment. But as general public support for the position of personal development and achievement waned, defenders of women in the workplace retreated to a traditional platform that portrayed woman in helping roles. In this instance, the help women offered was economic. The increasing trend toward heightened consumerism nationwide seemed to justify this argument by depicting wage-earning women as economic allies rather than as threats to male job security. But the high levels of consumerism in the postwar years were new relative to older and significantly more ingrained concepts of family. By the middle of the decade, therefore, careerism came under harsh attack by those who felt that the home was still the proper place for women. By the end of the decade, the public remained tolerant of only certain types of married women in the workplace, primarily working-class women, women with grown children, or, occasionally, women of exceptional ability. Perceived as a threat to men's ambition, married women who worked fell outside the bounds of middle-class respectability, inviting social stigmatization.¹¹⁴

While the tension between old and new social attitudes played out, however, some women *did* work, increasingly in new kinds of jobs. Domestic service, by far the largest category of working women in 1890 (42.6 percent), declined to 29.6 percent by 1930, replaced by employment in the growing white-collar sector. Across America, clerical work for women, such as offered by the Bookshop, increased steadily from 5.8 percent of the female working

population in 1890 to 7.3 percent in 1910 and 18.5 percent by 1930. In some cities, like Boston, the figure was even higher, with 25 percent of working women employed in clerical positions by the end of the 1920s¹¹⁵

Middle-class married women who worked utilized various strategies for improving their success and longevity in the workplace, many of which involved respecting the traditional gender line. Nearly 75 percent hired household help; some deferred motherhood or simply remain unmarried.¹¹⁶ Career women often attempted to blur the lines between work and home, as if by “blending in” they might draw less attention to themselves as career women. Children’s rooms in libraries and in children’s bookshops provide clear examples of how work with children, resonating with images of home and traditional female responsibilities, lowered the stakes of career decision making.¹¹⁷ Bookwomen used many of these strategies. For Moore, Jordan, Mahony, Seaman, Whitney, and Masee, marriage dropped far into the background while they enlarged and consolidated their individual areas of professional expertise and escaped the cultural opprobrium reserved for more uncooperative women.

In addition to staffing problems, Mahony’s attention was consumed by the Book Caravan, now ready for the road. She laid out the route carefully, enlisting in advance the cooperation of residents in many of the towns on the Caravan’s itinerary and heavily publicizing its departure day. Maurice Day had been enlisted to illustrate a lavish publicity folder, and the National Association of Book Publishers arranged to have the Caravan filmed by Fox, Pathe, Kinegram, and International, the four major motion picture news services, for distribution to movie houses nationwide. This fact is interesting since bookwomen generally viewed motion pictures as a cheap imitator of good stories and therefore not useful to their own aims. Marie Shedlock claimed that the “lurid representations at the cinematograph” inundated children with unhealthy sarcasm, satire, sentimentalism, and sensationalism, and Louise Seaman’s disapproval of Disney is well known. Nonetheless, publishers recognized the potential for motion pictures to increase book sales and to assist with the perennial problem of book distribution.¹¹⁸

With Genevieve Washburn, a Wellesley graduate, as driver, and Mary Frank, a Pratt graduate on loan from the New York Public Library, as book-seller, the Caravan rolled out of Boston on July 5, 1920, with some twelve hundred books in tow. Throughout July and August, the Caravan made its way as far south as Chatham, then north to Portsmouth. Along the way, stops were scheduled for New Hampshire, Vermont, and Bar Harbor.

Disappointingly, the Caravan showed a financial loss that might have been offset by eliminating one of the women from the payroll, but Mahony insisted that both driver and bookseller were needed. She was anxious to repeat the Book Caravan in 1921, hoping it would produce results more satisfying to its benefactors than the previous year. When the second venture produced no more profit than the first, publisher-backers reluctantly, but firmly, withdrew their support.¹¹⁹

Mahony was saddened by the failure of the Caravan, but had other worries. After five years in business, she was anxious to repay the union, but the bookshop had not prospered as quickly or as dramatically as she hoped. She identified two reasons: The store's location above street level kept patrons away, and the stock was limited to children's books. Her new plan, with Jordan's blessing, was to increase the bookshop's visibility by relocating it to street level and to increase patronage by diversifying stock to include adult titles, a decision that both conceded to the market and revealed book-women's ambivalence about age segregation.¹²⁰

By fall 1921, Mahony accomplished both pieces of her strategy. At its new location at 270 Boylston Street, the shop now offered books for adults as well as children, quickly improving both patronage and profits. Anxious that the mahogany antiques donated by members of the union not give the bookshop the appearance of clinging to the past, Mahony exhibited the latest art, including the work of such illustrators as Wanda Gag, Elizabeth MacKinstry, Dorothy Lathrop, Pamela Bianco, Maud and Miska Petersham, and others, who became friends as a result of these exhibitions. In 1922, she also inaugurated an art exhibit by children, so successful that she made it an annual event. Children from Boston and environs contributed to the exhibit during the first year, but gradually schools from around the country submitted the work of their students.

Just as Moore and Jordan did not wait for children to come to the library, the two booksellers did not wait for children to come to the Bookshop. In 1922, Mahony approved a new service program under the direction of Mary Whitney. The plan was to ship book exhibits—in wooden crates, hand decorated by Whitney—to schools before summer recess, so that children could make reading selections.¹²¹ The response was immediate and enthusiastic, prompting Mahony and Whitney to enlarge the exhibits, expand the audience to include women's organizations, summer camps, and libraries, and go nationwide in their efforts. The destination for some exhibits, unsurprisingly, was the Children's Room at NYPL, in time for Children's Book Week.¹²²

Despite enlarged stock and new quarters, certain features of the Bookshop remained the same. The “Poetry Afternoons” for young people and the “Bookshop Special Evenings” for adults, some led by Moore, continued to be well attended. To cement ties with school librarians, Mahony devoted Saturday mornings to book conferences in cooperation with the New England Association of School Librarians. At other meetings, professionals reviewed books and subsequently made book suggestions to school districts.¹²³ The lingering influence of the WEIU on Mahony is clear from these activities. Following the typical organizational formula, she envisioned a project, proved its value on a small scale, and expanded. In the process, Mahony, like the Union, demonstrated initiative and created alliances whenever and wherever possible.

The principal exception to this strategy was the child guidance movement. Achieving significant national prominence during the 1920s, child guidance offered little mutual ground for alliance building with bookwomen. For the most part, they ignored the movement, as they did many realities they did not like. Yet, the growth and significance of child guidance carried serious implications for bookwomen, eventually representing nothing short of the reordering of professional authority over children. Their relationship to guidance illustrates complex and widely divergent attitudes surrounding modern childhood, and their response to it reveals the limitation of their endorsement of expertise.

The “Fairy Tale” Wars: Bookwomen and Child Guidance

During the 1920s, it became conventional wisdom to suggest that children had become a problem.¹²⁴ Products of mass culture—radios, movies, cars—offered spare money and time, providing a growing number of children and adolescents with a level of social and economic freedom previously unknown. For many adults, such freedom signaled a crisis of youth; as “problems” as well as consumers, American youth were paradoxically both celebrated and feared.¹²⁵ Added to this fear were the failure of progressive child-saving institutions to produce the hoped-for reduction in delinquency, the continued growth of professional culture, and growing respect for science. All contributed to an unprecedented rise in the number of professionals whose primary concern was children.

Prominent among those professionals were psychologists and psychiatrists who, regarding delinquency as the result of personal emotional disturbances and complexes, urged individual outpatient psychiatric treatment

for troubled children. By 1922, the movement known as child guidance had experienced impressive growth by several means: the popularization of its message, the creation of a professional culture with distinct language and rituals, and the philosophy that all children required psychological intervention. The subsequent “medicalization” of children was sharply at odds with the beliefs of traditional child professionals, like bookwomen, who viewed children more sentimentally.¹²⁶ Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, battle lines in the popular press were sharply drawn between scientifically minded guiders and individuals such as librarians and teachers, many of them women, who continued their observance of the gender line vis-à-vis “natural” knowledge of children.

The means by which child guiders achieved authority were plainly evident in the movement’s central institution: the outpatient clinic. Each clinic offered the services of an interdisciplinary team, consisting of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. The interdisciplinary nature of guidance teams enhanced their authority by giving the impression of a broad, cooperative professional base upon which conclusions might comfortably rest. The wide range of disciplines and viewpoints appealed to many, and specialized language, eventually comprehensible only to guiders, further augmented the aura of expertise necessary for collecting authority.¹²⁷

Popularization of the guidance philosophy and early efforts at alliance building were also vital to the process. Although clinics remained unavailable to most Americans, guidance literature attuned the public to the “psychiatric perspective.” In addition to government literature, via the Children’s Bureau, that reinforced guidance principles to parents, the message was routinely disseminated in the popular press.¹²⁸ Guiders initially created alliances both with established professions and groups laying claim to expertise in child welfare. Billing themselves as “specialized consultants,” they assured such groups that guidance would be useful but nonintrusive. Instead, guiders portrayed themselves as mediators in the generational conflict widely perceived to have infiltrated American culture.¹²⁹

Beyond all these strategies, however, child guidance expanded its authority exponentially by introducing to the public the concept of “predelinquency.” Where progressive reformers had maintained that several kinds of children existed within America’s many ethnic groups, the general trend of the 1920s was to blur such distinctions. Since all children were potentially maladjusted, they claimed, and since prevention was the obvious solution, guiders undertook the supervision of children not previously understood to be in need of professional help. By the end of the decade,

they declared to a wide and accepting audience that “the normal child is the problem.”¹³⁰

Finally, and most relevant to bookwomen, guidance was characterized by its direct and relentless assault on traditional authorities—mothers. So thorough was this assault, in fact, that the assignment of maternal pathology became one of its hallmarks.¹³¹ Guiders confronted motherhood by attempting to show the inadequacy of intuition and “common sense” in child raising, consequently equating instinct with an “antimodern” perspective.¹³² Helen Woolley, a Detroit nursery school director, both denigrated parents’ ability to raise their children and redefined the ideal environment for children. Mothering, Woolley argued, was a complex task for which women were unprepared in terms of understanding stages of child development. The consequence of unprepared women serving as mothers was that unreasonable demands were made of children. Knowing the capacities of children, she claimed, required experts, and mothers were not experts. The nursery school was not a place for play; it was a “laboratory.”¹³³ If the home was no longer an adequate metaphor for child raising, then parents could no longer remain the presumed authorities. The replacement metaphor, a laboratory, implied that other experts needed to take charge of children. But while mothers were the particular targets of this sustained assault, anyone claiming “natural” knowledge of children, by extension, came under scrutiny.¹³⁴ Purposefully or otherwise, guidance called into question the legitimacy of female expertise resting on such knowledge.

The attack on “natural” knowledge and motherhood intersected with bookwomen most obviously in debates about appropriate reading for children. Guiders used the same psychological model to evaluate children’s books as to estimate all aspects of the child’s environment: their potential to create or exacerbate emotional disturbances in children. They largely approved of what Anne Thaxter Eaton referred to as the “steam-shovel school of literature,”¹³⁵ reality-based books such as Lucy Sprague Mitchell’s *Here and Now* series, because they grounded children in the exploration of their immediate, tangible surroundings, thus orienting them to “normal” roles in the social order.

By contrast, guiders were not so kindly disposed to imaginative literature. Fairy tales were least favored because, guiders insisted, they resulted in psychological damage by encouraging too much imagination and fostering undesirable traits. Some psychiatrists, such as Felix Adler, recommended the elimination of fairy tales altogether because of their “harmful, superstitious, and immoral elements, such as the success of trickery and

cunning.” Montessori likewise crusaded against fairy tales, declaring that they “plunge the child into the supernatural and merely prolong his period of mental confusion” creating a “dread of reality and terror of the actual.” One professor at Clark University stated that “fear, imagination, and ignorance make life hard for the child. In fairy tales, his own desires for himself are realized. It is his compensation for being little and helpless.”¹³⁶ According to Benjamin Gruenberg, president of the Child Study Association of America, fairy tales represented “abnormal gratification,” encouraging “primitive and archaic thinking” and hindering proper development. Fairy tales, Gruenberg warned, prolonged “the wishing stage,” thereby preventing children from exerting the “real effort” necessary to obtain goals in life. In addition to the possibility of future resistance to social roles, a child overly interested in books of any kind might be failing to socialize here and now. Gruenberg worried that “while it is legitimate to use books . . . as a form of entertainment, the danger suggested lies not in the books themselves, but in other elements of the child’s environment—such as the absence of stimulus or opportunity for interesting activities.”¹³⁷

Although child guidance gained significant momentum during the 1920s, the notion of viewing children scientifically encountered opposition from, unsurprisingly, those whose authority over children was now perceived to be at risk. Claiming to be “stuffed to the teeth” with scientific theories about children, Clara Whitehill Hunt continued to regard the ability to become a librarian as a “natural gift.”¹³⁸ Some authors also resisted the “modern” psychological notion of children. Charles Finger, author of *Tales from Silver Lands*, noted in *Publishers Weekly* that if child psychologists wrote children’s books, the result would be “a mess.”¹³⁹ The storyteller Ruth Sawyer added her thoughts:

Like many another I have been stormed with protests about the use of fairy tales. Child psychologists have done their best to create havoc in the field of children’s stories and literature; especially would they step in and dilute, remedy, or bar altogether that which has sprung, living, from the spiritual loins of the race or from the creative pen of those who knew the true nature of childhood far better than the psychologist. I have been told that the story of “The Three Bears” conditions a child to fear; that “Red Riding Hood” conditions against grandmothers; that “Jack and the Beanstalk” induced a fixation for stealing. . . . There is no reason to bar from the vigorous and buoyant minds of normal children legitimate folk-experience and fancies.¹⁴⁰

The coexistence of bookwomen and child guiders, while indirect, was awkward. Bookwomen's public posture on the subject was civil, as long as their professional territory was respected. Least tolerant of guidance, Moore recited the creeds and philosophies upon which literature traditionally rested, making it clear that she had no intention of modifying her literary beliefs to accommodate science. Scientific theories of childhood were fine, she claimed, insofar as they improved books for children and generated standards of intergenerational comparison. But for "intellectual honesty and spiritual clarity," she insisted, one must look to "rare poets and novelists and essayists" who see in children "a world of fresh exploration and discovery."¹⁴¹ Child guidance claimed psychologists as experts, but bookwomen preferred poets. To whatever extent she spoke for bookwomen, Moore's response to guidance revealed consistent and enthusiastic advocacy of expertise that did not exclude intuition and "natural" knowledge, as it did for guiders. While capitulating to science might have augmented their authority, bookwomen were steadfastly offended by the idea of reducing childhood to scientific formulas and equations.

Despite the steady stream of fairy tales that they created, encouraged, published, and favorably reviewed, bookwomen nonetheless claimed they did not oppose realism in children's books. They made this claim because they expanded the boundaries of their definition of "real" to account for imaginative literature, which they viewed as reflective of the "larger reality of human existence."¹⁴² Still, they had their own ideas about how much and what kind of reality children should experience. During the 1920s, those ideas shaped children's literature by enforcing traditional literary taboos, including divorce, psychological dysfunction, alcohol and drug dependence, suicide, prostitution, and sexual deviance. Other topics, such as racial conflict or sexuality, were either absent or approached with caution, yet these were precisely the issues that guiders sought to uncover.

The consequence of enforcing these taboos was a realism in children's literature marked by what has been called "protective optimism" and created in an atmosphere of "consensus and complacency." Upholding the family as the ultimate social and moral arbiter and headed by adults who could be counted on for wisdom and nurturing, children's books and their creators have been accused of representing an "island in the larger culture."¹⁴³ This view, however, fails to account for the complex relationships among bookwomen that confronted the notion of consensus, and their deeply ambivalent feelings about reading segregation. It was, admittedly, expedient for bookwomen to accept, or even endorse, segregation as a

means to distinct professional jurisdiction and culture. But the island metaphor implies that bookwomen were disconnected from mainstream culture, while their behavior does not support this suggestion. In soliciting outside opinion, they consistently interacted with employers, parents, colleagues, and children themselves and thereby formed often long-lasting alliances that provided them with continual feedback. Fostering children's comprehension of adults as wise, just, and caring was surely not simply the invention of bookwomen but a reflection of commonly shared cultural beliefs.

While bookwomen defined both their professional roles and their space among child experts, they also developed friendships with each other. In this, bookwomen displayed the sort of "emotional proximity" characteristic of other groups of women, quite acceptable in an age when gender lines were starkly drawn. Typically, groups formed networks that functioned well in a broad range of relationships and, as Carol Smith-Rosenberg notes, tended to integrate rather than isolate their members.¹⁴⁴ Seaman and Masee had both a personal friendship and a professional rivalry from the beginning of Masee's tenure at Doubleday. Seaman also became close friends with Mahony, Mahony with Jordan, and Mahony with Whitney. Jordan spent winters in Cambridge and summers with her sister at the Knolls, a home they built in Maine in 1922,¹⁴⁵ but was a frequent guest of Mahony at Mount Kisco or Moore in New York. Mahony recalled that time spent with Moore included such activities as "a visit to see the Kate Greenaway books of a private collector; a trip after the theatre to the high roof of her hotel overlooking the river on a wild night of wind and snow; many visits to storytelling in different branches; and meals in one interesting place after another. A jaunt with Miss Moore invariably spells surprises."¹⁴⁶

But although much evidence of "emotional proximity" exists, this does not equate to relationships unmarked by difference. Moore is, in many ways, illustrative of the relationship difficulties among bookwomen. When obtained, her friendship was treasured—sometimes a badge of accomplishment in itself—for its loyalty and honesty. But even Frances Clarke Sayers, Moore's sympathetic biographer, admitted that few who came in contact with Moore "escaped . . . an encounter of great bitterness with her."¹⁴⁷ She remained close to Jordan and, to a lesser extent, Mahony; her relationships with Seaman and Masee were generally respectful, but substantially more distant. On the surface, the editors shared some of Moore's views about what constituted "good" books for children. Beneath the upper layer of vague generalizations, however, differences were clear. They shared broadly similar beliefs about literature, but occupied distinctly different vantage

points from which to view books, creating ongoing tensions that were frequently palpable beneath the surface of apparent consensus. Age played a role as well. Seaman was younger than Moore by more than twenty years. Well into her fifties by the mid-1920s, and with established nationwide authority in children's books, Moore risked less by indulging static, unyielding patterns of thought than a young female editor seeking a successful career in publishing.

Some of Moore's behavior illustrates the dynamic of tension among bookwomen. The folklore surrounding her difficult and eccentric conduct is well known, brought into sharp relief by the infamous wooden doll "Nicholas." As 1920 drew to a close, Moore's staff at NYPL made a basket of holiday treats to send upstairs to room 105. An eight-inch doll, dressed in traditional Dutch clothing, purchased at Bloomingdale's at the last minute by the librarian designated to take care of the details, sat on top of the goodies. Promptly dubbing it "Nicholas Knickerbocker," Moore made the doll a highly visible part of her entourage. Friends noted that the doll, presiding over children's story hours throughout the city, visiting hospitals, and attending dinners at friends' homes, had "developed" a personality of its own.¹⁴⁸ Nicholas "wrote" letters to Moore's friends on his own stationery, and Moore insisted that her friends respond. Invitations of various kinds were sent to "Anne and Nicholas," and Nicholas received gifts—some extravagant—from artists, writers, and friends. Letters to Moore often included regards to the doll as though it was Moore's dearest friend.¹⁴⁹ Initially, this seemed a harmless and amusing eccentricity, and friends cooperated with Moore's bizarre insistence that Nicholas be treated as a human. Mahony cooperated, sometimes referring to Nicholas as "a diplomat *par excellence*."¹⁵⁰ So well known was Nicholas, in fact, that a young patron at NYPL suggested that Moore write a book about him, and, in 1924, G. P. Putnam published *Nicholas: A Manhattan Christmas Story*.¹⁵¹

Gradually, however, Nicholas became an annoyance to Moore's friends and colleagues. Anecdotes about the doll abound among those in the children's book industry, one of the most famous involving Virginia Kirkus, children's editor at Harper. When Kirkus confronted Moore about her disapproval of Harper's publication of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, Nicholas was perched, as usual, on Moore's desk. Each time Kirkus tried to speak, Moore responded by consulting the doll: "Nicholas, Miss Kirkus wants to know . . ."¹⁵² While, over the years, some individuals forgave such behavior, Anne Thaxter Eaton's claim that "no one ever held it against her" is clearly untrue. Like Eaton, Frances Clarke Sayers ignored those, like Kirkus, who

experienced such behavior from Moore, ascribed it to disrespect rather than eccentricity, and found it infuriating. The author Walter de la Mare discreetly said that Nicholas was Moore's alter ego. Many interpreted Nicholas as exemplary of Moore's increasingly rude and overbearing manner, and there is little reason to doubt that Moore was, to say the least, difficult.

The Nicholas phenomenon might be left at that, except for the fact that Nicholas, for Moore, symbolized all children.¹⁵³ Like children, Nicholas had no position or voice except as Moore gave it to him; without her, the doll was mute and opinionless. Moore nevertheless chose to speak through Nicholas, just as she spoke on behalf of children. As their spokeswoman, she paradoxically gave voice to them *and* silenced them since hers was ultimately the opinion that mattered. By consorting with Nicholas the child-doll as a peer, furthermore, her speech could remain safely childlike. Speaking through the doll allowed Moore, however transparently, to evade responsibility for opinions and attitudes whose popularity was waning and to avoid rising to the level of linguistic maturity demanded by expert discourse. As competitors developed new language about, and acquired authority over, children, Moore might have felt anxious about the fate of bookwomen's "spiritual" language among scientific and business experts who refused to base their understanding of children on "foremotherly adages"¹⁵⁴ and anachronistic metaphors.

The first half of the 1920s was an important moment of authority building for bookwomen, producing a potentially wobbly combination of both traditional and "modern" ideas and venues. In distinct ways, bookwomen utilized new technology, such as radio and motion pictures, together with "new" ideas of the professional woman, to secure authority. Simultaneously, they continued basing their authority claims on traditional notions of "instinct" and maternal "common sense." This combination succeeded in pushing bookwomen beyond expertise *about* children's books to positions of authority *over* them while also creating a level of vulnerability particularly susceptible to the growing demand for a neatly packaged, scientific understanding of children. In the second half of the decade, bookwomen turned increasingly to the intraprofessional relationships they had developed for support and affirmation.