

Introduction

Charlotte Appel, Nina Christensen & M.O. Grenby

Across Europe, a new commodity emerged during the century or so from 1750: books unambiguously and specifically designed to capture the interest of young readers. Authors and illustrators began to dedicate themselves to this new branch of print. Specialist publishers and booksellers emerged to meet, and stimulate, new demands. Philosophers and educators promoted new educational ideas, based on changing views of childhood. New technologies of printing, illustrating, and binding were quickly deployed to make these books ever more eye-catching and steadily more affordable. Gradually, these children's books became a feature of more and more homes and schools across Europe, so that by the turn of the twentieth century, in almost every part of the continent and in almost all European languages and dialects, children's literature had become a recognizable part of the book market.

This story of the invention of children's literature has been told many times. In almost all cases, however, it has been expounded from the perspective of a single country in a series of (often excellent) national bibliographies and histories. Moreover, these histories have generally focused on a selection of canonical texts. After all, when literary scholars wanted to establish research in this field, it seemed an obvious choice to draw the attention to "good" and "important" children's literature. More recently, in those studies that have taken an international perspective on children's literature, this tendency is still discernible, as for instance in the *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* edited by Peter Hunt (2004), which included chapters on canonical works in selected countries, or *Beyond Babar: The European Tradition in Children's Literature*, edited by Sandra Beckett and Maria Nikolajeva (2006). In contrast, the studies contained in this present volume will focus on transnational aspects of children's literature and often range far beyond the canonical. They examine how a wide variety of texts and books, producers and users often crossed national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, and what happened in these processes. Implicitly, they rest on the idea that children's books need to be understood as cultural artefacts, which

are produced, circulated, and consumed in particular sets of circumstances, and which involve a range of actors, networks, and technologies.¹

Indeed, one of the best ways to advance beyond the canonical approach is to consider the early history of children's books as the transnational phenomenon they evidently were in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whether it was ABCs or catechisms, moral tales or fables, fairy tales or picturebooks, children across continents were reading noticeably similar texts, both in content and appearance. And just as texts, images, and ideas were moving across borders, so too did individuals – authors, printers, translators, teachers, missionaries – many of whom played an important role in diffusing this emerging children's print culture. As examples of this, the sixteen chapters in this volume each give a new and compelling account of how books for children, or a particular genre, subject, or individual, crossed geographical, linguistic, cultural, and religious boundaries. Taken together, they shine new light onto the development of a shared textual culture of children's books, even in an age of ascendant nationalism.

Our main interest in this volume is on books that travel, and books that are being used by children. Many of the chapters concern relatively neglected genres and media formerly placed at the margins of children's literature studies, such as primers, catechisms, almanacs, and children's magazines. These texts were published in the largest numbers, they had the lowest prices, and were therefore also perhaps the most mobile: the easiest to translate (if indeed any translation was needed), or to import (since they were so small in size and seemed so insignificant), or to print and reprint with impunity (their authorship and legal standing often being obscure). Other examples are texts written by authors who were once highly popular but are completely forgotten today, or texts that were even published anonymously. Thus, the chapters gathered here often focus on texts outside the major (national) canons.

The focus on users, actors, and a broad concept of literature has led the contributors to include methods and approaches from a number of fields beyond straightforward literary studies, including translation studies, childhood studies, educational history and – as a relatively new approach in children's literature studies – book history. Famously, book historian Robert Darnton introduced a “communications circuit” that pointed to the processes and interventions carried out by the various actors in the production and distribution of books (Darnton 1982). When we adopt a transnational focus, however, Darnton's model has to be extended. For instance, translators must be included in the “communications

1. The idea for this volume goes back to two academic conferences on “Books for Children: Transnational Encounters” (I–II), in Copenhagen in 2018 and at Princeton University in 2019. Details in our Acknowledgments.

circuit”, as a number of other studies have already demonstrated (Bachleitner 2009, Belle & Hosington 2017). Other connections and actors are also pointed to in the essays collected here: those who imported books across borders, either physically or by adapting or repackaging texts for new national contexts, changing illustrations and bindings as well as texts, and including such people as teachers and missionaries alongside authors, printers, and publishers. Book history’s focus on the materiality of the book, including its formats, typography, and illustrations, is evident throughout this volume. So too is attention to practices of reading. This latter interest in user perspectives overlaps with recent tendencies in childhood studies and children’s literature studies, where increasing attention is now being paid to children as users and producers of books and other media.

The aim of this volume has not been to present a single model of how to study children’s books as a transnational phenomenon, but rather to suggest a hopefully inspirational array of possibilities. Therefore, the chapters present different approaches to the analysis of children’s texts in a transnational perspective. Several chapters study the transnational transformations of specific publications across borders, sometimes with a focus on just one or a couple of texts, or over a relatively short period of time, and concern neighbouring countries or short geographical distances. In other contributions, transnational movements of commonplace genres are traced throughout centuries and across more than one continent. Other chapters focus on specific transnational actors, such as educators or publishers, who either travel themselves or adapt form, content, and medium for local audiences. Another approach presented is to trace the development of a transnational phenomenon and its representation in children’s literature, such as the story of slavery, or children’s own creations of transnational texts.

The chapters of this book contain studies relating particularly to Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, England, Ireland, France, Spain, Italy, Russia, China, the United States of America, and the Caribbean. All of the chapters deal with transfers and connections involving more than one country or language, and some even move across multiple continents. Yet, there is an undeniably Eurocentric approach. This is due partly to the predominance of Western researchers and research traditions when it comes to the study of early children’s literature. But it is also due to the history of children’s literature itself, an important element of which was the wholesale and often aggressive exportation of European children’s books to other parts of the world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as part of processes of Western colonial and commercial expansion and coercion. Some of this history is considered in this volume, with chapters examining children’s books in South and South-East Asia, China, and Central, South and North America, as well as Europe. It is to be regretted that huge parts of the world are poorly represented here, and when non-European regions are discussed, that