

**Sara Schwebel:** Welcome to the Center for Children’s Books 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary lecture series!

We had hoped, of course, that we might gather in person to celebrate this important moment in our history, but COVID-19 has conspired against us. The upside is being able to welcome so many visitors, including alumni, from afar. We are delighted that you are here to help us mark this occasion!

Before we begin, I want to thank those who helped to make this anniversary series possible – our four faculty and alumni speakers, Drs. Betsy Hearne, Kate McDowell, Sarah Park Dahlen and Dipesh Navsaria - Diana Stroud, in the iSchool Advancement Office, for connecting me, as a new director, with our fabulous alumni - Jen Anderson and her team at the Help Desk team, and the CCB GAs Josh Altshuler, Alexandra Byerly, and Helen Salkeld, for quickly pivoting this series to zoom’s webinar platform.

Before I introduce Betsy Hearne, our distinguished speaker, I’d like to share a very brief history of the CCB, and in doing so, I must acknowledge MLIS student Josh Altshuler, who has spearheaded the creation of an online exhibit on the CCB for our anniversary year. My overview stems from that work, which builds, in turn, on the history of the Center written by Lila Fredenburg, a CCB graduate assistant in 1997-98 and subsequently director for Administrative Services at Rutgers University Libraries. We will be making the online, multimedia exhibit live through the new CCB website late this spring.

### **So, a very brief history of the CCB:**

What is now the Center for Children’s Books has its origins at the University of Chicago, where in 1945 librarian Alice Brooks McGuire, director of the Center for Instructional Materials, began reviewing newly published children’s books and collecting her reviews into a memorandum distributed, on a small scale, within the university and among the Center’s patrons. This memo proved quite popular and in 1947, McGuire and Mary Katherine Eakin, librarian at the university’s Reader’s Center, published Volume 1, Number 1 of the newly titled “Service Bulletin” of the Center for Instructional Materials. **This was the beginning of what would become the Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books.** In the late 1940s, the Center received from publishers approximately 75 percent of the 900+ new children’s books released in the United States annually. (Today, the CCB receives nearly 4,500 titles for review annually)

What to do with all those books? Beginning in the early 1950s, the Bulletin staff began retaining for a period of five years the books that it had received from publishers and which they had “Recommended” in their *Service Bulletin*. At the end of that five year period, some books were retained for a permanent collection and others were sent to the Midwest Inter-Library Center, located close to the University of Chicago campus. These books—both those retained at the Center for Children’s Books and those transferred to the Midwest Inter-Library Center (later Center for Research Libraries)—play an important role in both today’s CCB collection, housed in Daniel 5, and in the S-Collection in the UIUC main library.

When the University of Chicago closed its Library School in 1990, then Bulletin editor Betsy Hearne worked with UIUC dean Leigh Estabrook to bring the Bulletin, the Center’s books,

herself, and her staff to Urbana-Champaign. In addition to bolstering the study of youth librarianship at UIUC, the **move helped to make the University's S-Collection the largest collection of children's literature in the US outside of the Library of Congress**—25 percent of today's cataloged collection can be traced directly to the movement of books from Chicago to Urbana. Moreover, each year since the early 1990s, the CCB has transferred boxes and boxes and boxes of children's books to the S-Collection, forming a rich base for researchers and an accessible, working collection for students training to be librarians, K-12 educators, and youth advocates.

Professor Hearne will be taking up the story from here, placing the Bulletin's book evaluation in context of both other review journals and the changing nature of youth literature, from the postwar years to the pandemic present.

I know she needs no introduction to this community, but I'd like to formally, if briefly, introduce her nonetheless. Betsy Hearne is Professor Emerita at the School of Information Sciences, where she served as Director of the Center for Children's Books between 2004-07 and Editor of the *Bulletin* between 1985-94, continuing as a consulting editor until 2007.

A renowned expert in folklore and storytelling, as well as in evaluating children's literature, her scholarly writings include *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* (1989), *Beauties and Beasts: The Oryx Multicultural Folktale Series* (1993), *Choosing Books for Children: A Commonsense Guide*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1999), and *Evaluating Children's Books: A Critical Look* (1993). She is the author of more than ten works of fiction and poetry for children published by HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, and Macmillan, and Atheneum.

At the CCB, Hearne not only navigated the successful institutional move from Chicago to Urbana-Champaign, thereby ensuring that we reached this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, she also innovated. When she took the reins from Zena Sutherland, whose editing tenure stretched three decades, Betsy transformed the Bulletin and Center from a planetary system that orbited around one into a webbed hub of collaboration.

As we pause to celebrate 75 years of accomplishment at the CCB, current Youth Services faculty take seriously that model of melding our expertise in service of children; and we remain cognizant of the limitations of any one of our own worldviews.

As I've stepped into the role of CCB Director these past 18 months, I stand in awe of all that Betsy accomplished under her watch. It's been a great pleasure to listen to her spin stories about the CCB and her career, and I'm honored to pass the mic to her now so you, too, can be the beneficiary of her wisdom.

CENTERED: The Life and Times of a Book Review Journal

Betsy Hearne, 2/25/21

***Betsy Hearne:*** *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* was just turning 40 years old when I became editor in 1985, and I was turning 43. Now I'm 78, she's 75, and we've each changed considerably. What has stayed the same is our mutual engagement with stories, pictures, and nonfiction, though both of us became more nuanced in critique and its varieties of expression. But let me begin with a birds-eye view of book evaluation and selection in review journals dedicated to youth literature.

A logical starting point would be the founding dates of the "The Big Four," as we called ourselves with a certain self-satisfaction. *Booklist* was founded in 1905; *The Horn Book Magazine*, in 1924; *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, in 1945; and *School Library Journal*, in 1954. A few reminders: *Booklist*, which is published twice a month, is owned by the American Library Association; and the *Bulletin*, published monthly, owned by the iSchool. *Horn Book*, published every other month and *School Library journal* published monthly, both include articles as well as reviews and are owned by Media Source, Inc. *Booklist*, *Horn Book*, and *The Bulletin*, with their in-house staff reviewers and small stable of outside reviewers, are the most consistent in terms of literary evaluation. *School Library Journal*, relying primarily on widely distributed field reviewers, is most consistent in terms of varied exposure to youth in the field.

The *Bulletin*, I might add, was consistent in the extreme: For 27 years, from 1958-1985, Zena Sutherland wrote ALL the reviews, with a weekly committee who considered her ratings of R, Ad, M, NR, or SPR but who were not encouraged to talk.

That changed when I became editor and hired my first full-time reviewer and associate editor, the inimitable Roger Sutton—whom I wrote into the budget despite administrative resistance. At that point there was suddenly a LOT of talking.

I worked as editor in two of the Big Four journals and published reviews and/or articles in all of them. Book review editors and book editors knew each other well. Book review editors also knew many authors and illustrators personally through frequent conference meetings and panel presentations. I still have a photograph of Lloyd Alexander's bony hand pointing toward my pregnant belly at a 1969 party thrown by another *Booklist* reviewer, Lloyd's observation being the ever-evolving presence of new readers.

I was certainly acquainted with all the major authors, illustrators, and editors or publishers in the world of youth literature then, and especially close friends with some of them—Virginia Hamilton, Julius Lester, Susan Cooper, Trina Schart Hyman, and Margaret McElderry, for example. But I never hesitated to pass their books on to other reviewers if I had doubts—and would of course be challenged on judgment calls by staff and my always outspoken review committee. In preparing for this celebration of *BCCB*'s 75<sup>th</sup> year, I paged through all the volumes during my association with the *Bulletin*. It was a humbling experience. Navigating the quantity and quality of the journal's content, its close encounters with extinction, and the deadline pressure of all those years was unsettling. But reconnection with authors, illustrators, publishers, and memorable titles, which I duly listed in alphabetical order\*, also brought back the exhilaration and comradery that sustained our whole endeavor. Short of money and glory, good company goes a long way. This was not unlike the alliance formed by the first women to become

children's book editors during the 1920s-1940s publishing world dominated by men. But it was quite unlike the children's book world that was taken over in the 1980s and '90s by a different kind of competitive system akin to adult publishing, which featured revolving acquisition mergers, royalties-driven celebrity contracts, and ownership by business corporations unrelated to books or even media.

Amidst the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century sense of togetherness, though each journal had a different approach, review policy, and staffing system, all were oriented toward the major youth literature market of public and school libraries. Publishers and editors courted librarians as their primary buyers, especially librarians on award committees, which guaranteed significant and permanent presence as authoritative book evaluation meters. Librarians were the gatekeepers of book evaluation throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their purchase power sometimes negatively or positively affected by federal funding, including a 1960s surge that meant school library budgets could afford to buy everything they wanted without much discrimination. Commonly, large library systems got review copies, had their own internal children's and young adult evaluators, and also used the Big Four journals, while smaller systems relied variously on one or two journals, often shared.

Bookstore sales didn't grow till the 1980s, with phenomena like increasing emphasis on parental involvement with early literacy and an expansive genre of baby board books. Family buyers were oriented differently from professional library buyers. Picture books made better impulse buys than less visually appealing novels or nonfiction for older readers. Harry Potter and his film presence would not amaze the market till the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; nor would direct communication among book creators, their

audiences, and lay reviewers thrive on widespread social and commercial media till then. Meanwhile, youth literature reviewers who were rooted in the library world ruled. Their reviews largely determined what books would be bought and therefore what books might enter the canon.

Book reviewing at its best is craft, art, criticism, advocacy, and a partnered waltz between knowledge of literature and knowledge of young people. Experience counts, but which experience? A fulltime staff who see all the books published annually make different calls than a librarian in the field who writes only an occasional review and sees a limited selection of what's published, but who works with many children. Someone who brings awareness to long-term cyclical publishing trends brings a different perspective than someone who keeps tabs on what books are circulating currently with young patrons, parents, and teachers. One of the assignments I often gave in my courses on children's literature was to review the reviewers, comparing the same book as reviewed across the Big Four journals.

Brevity and balance count. The reviewer must both generalize about a book and document her or his overview with selective details. And as in scholarship or research, balance is elusive. Objectivity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was *the* gold standard for judgments and conclusions. Only slowly did acknowledgement spread that to all conclusions, even scientifically determined ones, researchers bring biases shaped by personal experience and social environment. At *Booklist*, there was a lot of resistance when I initiated the children's staff signing our reviews, and we were the first section to do so. The resistance stemmed from the fact that to some extent, signing reviews diluted the powerful imprimatur of the American Library Association as an anonymous

institution and revealed the personal identity behind book recommendations—which, by the way, were only positive, according to long-established *Booklist* policy. *Harriet the Spy*, as I've written elsewhere, was not reviewed at *Booklist*, arguably because of its subversive nature, nor did it appear on the ALA children's Notable Books list in 1964. For those who relied solely on ALA for selection, the book could have been as good as buried.

The intricate issues of censorship were and sometimes are, impenetrable. As an aside from the Harriet type of problem: Though I won the battle for signing reviews at *Booklist*, trying to introduce negative reviews went nowhere. To some extent this was historically understandable. *Booklist* was the oldest journal, and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period when librarians worked desperately to prove the value of literature for youth. They didn't want to tear down its reputation in any way.

Famously, of course, all hell broke loose in the 1960s when social taboos were broken in youth literature, with resulting objections to reviewers' recommendations of the taboo-breakers. When I started publishing some of those letters of objection in the children's books section of *Booklist*, the range of objection—from details of sex and reproduction to swear words—was predictable, though there were a few surprises. Someone, for instance protested Trina Schart Hyman's illustration of a bottle of wine included with Little Red Riding Hood's goody basket for Grandma. Challenges to the literature in *toto* as racist, from publication to consumption, was revolutionary in nature if much more eventual and still evolving in effect. Ignorance and socially willed myopia count in assessing both substance and attitudes expressed in youth literature. In addition to socio-cultural awareness, coverage of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for all age groups

is an impossible challenge, so reviewers have to learn their strengths and weaknesses, admit them, and work hard to overcome them.

Perhaps this is a moment to back up for a more detailed timeline of my own professional history as it entwined with the *Bulletin*'s. After working in public and school libraries and getting my MA at the University of Chicago's Graduate Library School (GLS), I started reviewing for ALA's *Booklist* in 1968, was appointed editor of the children's book section there in 1973, and then moved on to editing *BCCB* in 1985, after I got my PhD at the University of Chicago and joined its faculty. In some ways, my 13 years at *Booklist* barely prepared me to lead an academically affiliated book review journal, the only national one of its kind (though collections such as the University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Center for Children's Books, and many libraries' special lists served other purposes). My 22 years of involvement with the *Bulletin* as either Editor or Consulting Editor/Faculty Liaison were filled with dramatic developments in books for youth, in the art of reviewing them, and in the vicissitudes of the journal itself. Spoiler alert: We are about to enter the stormy waters of academic politics that some of you may recognize as having drowned a fleet of library schools.

Shortly after I started at Chicago's GLS, the dean called me in to say that he was leaving to take a position elsewhere. The Chicago administration, under new budget constraints, took this opportunity to put GLS under review, and although we had been the #1 library school in the country, managed to close it down within seven years, based on the provost's opinion that the Internet would make us obsolete. With the development of computer technology, he asserted, every scholar would be his (!) own librarian. No further expertise or guidance through the brave new world of information was needed!

The University of Chicago Press wanted to keep the journal there, but without departmental affiliation, *BCCB* would have lost its distinctively academic affiliation and the important ways that reviewing, teaching, research, and service—though presenting conflicts of time and energy for an editor—deeply enrich each other.

When GLS closed in 1992, Leigh Estabrook, then dean of GSLIS, now the iSchool, navigated the journal's and my move to UIUC. The Center and *Bulletin* emerged successfully from disaster and not only survived but thrived here, forming a magnetically active venue for the many graduate students specializing in youth services librarianship, both public and school—about 33% of the student body at that time. Together *CCB* and *BCCB* have provided a source for classroom readings and research assignments, a place to meet for joint research projects and storytelling presentations, an opportunity to expand critical expertise through exposure to new books and veteran reviewers' assessment of them, and a force in influencing what's bought for children's and young adult library collections nationally. But watching and experiencing library school closings in relation to budget cuts taught me that critical book reviewing requires institutional or organizational support and becomes endangered when that is withdrawn.

In this context of impermanence, adaptation is a requirement, and one of the most compelling aspects of *BCCB*'s successful adaptation has been technology, though not in contradiction to print tradition. Throughout its history, *BCCB* has required adaptation to innovative formats and equipment while maintaining reliance on traditionally proven knowledge and experience. When I took over the *Bulletin*, my predecessor Zena Sutherland, used a manual typewriter. My first assistant at the University of Chicago, John DeBacher, did not trust the university's mainframe computer and insisted on

installing Mac desktops, which gave us the flexibility we needed long after the mainframe became outmoded. Later on, Roger Sutton programmed my new computer to open with the words “I am not my work,” which I did not understand or embody till well after retirement. Nevertheless, while confused by my daily introduction to the concept of “I am not my work,” I continued to be my work on that computer.

In 1995, GSLIS initiated its LEEP program, and we began teaching online, including core courses in children’s and young adult literature, storytelling, and youth services. In February 1996 during Roger’s editorship, *BCCB* also went experimentally online, though without the success of current versions. Now I listen breathlessly in the Covid-19 era as Deborah Stevenson—who joined *BCCB* as an editorial assistant at the University of Chicago in 1989 and, after years of incomparable work, became Editor in 2001—describes reading review copies that are submitted electronically, writing and editing reviews electronically, meeting with the reviewing committee electronically, and overseeing the electronic *BCCB* website content.

Clearly, a new generation will take *CCB* in new directions, and I look on with grandmotherly affection, curiosity, and suspense as that happens. I also wonder what would be useful to pass on from a legacy of experience. During my decades of reviewing children’s and young adult books, I cannot generalize what “we” learned, but I can say what I learned. The following is my catechism, based on the three most significant elements in my life as a book review editor: Community, Reading, and Writing.

**First, here are some things I learned about community:**

--I learned to foster and rely on a serial staff of brilliant professionals for reviewing and discussion; and on proficient, energetic graduate assistants who answered reference

questions, maintained the *Bulletin*'s book processing, and organized many Center events, from book sales to storytelling festival arrangements.

--I learned that although drafting reviews is a solitary endeavor, the final assessment and edits gain significantly from interactive feedback among internal staff and outside evaluators who work with young people on a daily basis—and I watched as public voices online broadened diversity of opinions and backgrounds.

-- I learned, from all this, to listen to others' opinions but not to abandon my own without good reasons.

--And I learned to share laughter about gauche titles, maladroit writing, or simply “publishing puzzlers” (what on earth were they thinking?)

**Second, here are some things I learned about reading:**

--I learned, in the midst of hosting 5,000 books a year, how to be selective in choosing what deserves attention either positively or negatively; and then how to critique each book both on its own merit and in context of other books.

--I learned to identify new trends without becoming trendy.

--I learned to turn over genres I did not embrace to reviewers who did, and to deepen my understanding of those I embraced. Among many other topics, I reviewed everything Jewish or related to the Holocaust and Israel, where I had studied anti-Semitism at the Hebrew University in 1962-63. I also reviewed almost everything folkloric, which was my primary research area and which involved new surges of traditional, multicultural, and satirical versions of tales, legends, and myths. For a long time, I reviewed all things dog. And during a publishing period of expanded baby books, I reviewed many of those,

as well as deepening a focus on picture book illustration and introducing new aesthetic aspects of the journal, such as full-color covers.

**Third, here are some things I learned about writing:**

--I learned that the book will tell you what to say if you listen attentively: it can't help itself—it is what it is.

--I learned to be clear, with supportive evidence, in service of the book and its consumers rather than showing off what I knew.

--I learned to think long and write short, which served me not only in reviewing but also in writing scholarly research, children's books, and poetry. (You might not believe that from the length of this lecture.)

--I learned to write fast and meet short deadlines, reviewing about a book a day—there was no time for writer's block. One of my first priorities at *BCCB* was to become more current, reviewing from galleys so that librarians could order as soon as the books came out without a big lag time.

--I learned to push our limits. On my watch, the reviews got longer and more specific, including the monthly "Big Picture," which not only highlighted a special title but also extended the critical analysis to contextual commentary. Other new features included the Blue Ribbons best books lists, Professional Connection reviews, periodic explanations of our editorial rationale for book selection and review policy, and occasional columns by experts like Nancy O'Brien on children's literature special collections and Janice N. Harrington on African American children's books.

--I learned both the power of strong writing—and the limitation of its power. At *Booklist* in 1974, I wrote an editorial about the lack of nuance among the villains in Robert

Cormier's theoretically realistic novel, *The Chocolate War*. My literary training at the University of Chicago and many years of education beforehand suggested that nuance was a valuable aspect of characterization. In brief, the human condition is complicated, and complicated depictions deepen our understanding of it. My piece, titled "Whammo, You Lose," incited a backlash against what was perceived as criticism of negativity in young adult literature. As you know, Cormier's book became a classic in the genre. Whammo, I lose!

Another experience was a *BCCB* Big Picture that I wrote about Disney's books based on his film version of "Beauty and the Beast," an evaluation to which I brought decades of folkloric, literary, and historical research. The title was "You Did It, Little Teacup," a reference to all those dancing dishes that helped save the day when the Beast's castle was stormed by a crazed mob, another element that Disney's company introduced into the story. So Beauty, the real hero, gets edged into obscurity by singing china. "You did it, little teacup" has now become an ironic byword in our family folklore, and Disney's book versions of "Beauty and the Beast" did quite well on the commercial market, thank you, despite my exceptionally well informed intervention!

On the other hand, here's some perspective. By its very nature, book reviewing is transient but not transitory. We review new books; see them go out of print, even the good ones; and give our best to producing intelligent, articulate critiques that are quickly replaced by the next round of new books and critiquing. And yet, the eventual, cumulative effects of our work can be surprisingly significant. The depth of my folkloric research led to many years of criticizing White authors and illustrators for appropriating Native American lore without attribution of tribal identity, permission, and financial

contribution for what they appropriated. The power dynamic of stealing from an already oppressed minority would seem self-evident, but the practice was predominant in picture books. My call for source notes in every review and several widely cited articles eventually got the attention of publishers, authors, and illustrators, and source notes began appearing much more frequently. Coincidentally, while I was writing this lecture, I received some evidence of long-term impact. I'd like to quote parts of a letter emailed to me on February 13, 2021—14 years after my retirement. It comes from author-illustrator Roy Freeman, son of Don Freeman of *Corduroy* fame.

“Dear Professor Hearne,

Wrestling with a book I recently published, *Tseremsaaks and Nagunaks, the Whale Chief* (a Tsimshian legend), I came across your article "Swapping Tales and Stealing Stories: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Folklore in Children's Literature." ... I wish I had read it earlier!

I have decided to pull *Tseremsaaks* from further sale and distribution .... Although I believe that I, as translator of the tale and with my personal experiences on the BC coast as a fisherman (like Tseremsaaks, the fisherman in the story) retell the story that I feel has universal meaning in a respectful way, and offer a percentage of the income to the Metlakatla People, I feel that in the present cultural context it is inappropriate that I, with my very individual (not Tsimshian) illustrations, publish this book under my name.

... you ... discussed the many subtle sides to the issues ... [of] who can write and illustrate what and how ... I do not know if there is a clear "solution" to the problem of who can retell whose story, who "owns" a story, and all the subtle differentiations....

My father, the late Don Freeman, wrote and illustrated *Corduroy*, one of the first children's books for the general audience featuring an African-American main character. Could he do this today as a White person? I know that for my father, then living in New York, loving all kinds of people, Lisa and her mother were just "his" people, maybe his neighbors, from the great human mixing pot of New York, like he was himself. There was nothing special about them in terms of color, there were simply people of the city. The color of people around him was no theme, but treating all people of all color fairly and with respect, that \*was\* a big theme for him.

[BH: Note that this fits into Rudine Sims Bishop's "Melting Pot" stage of representing Black characters.]

...

I could go on.... can I write a story about whales if I am not a whale...? ;- ) I do not know the situation today (you published that article in 1999) ... but all that you wrote is still very relevant to me, and helped me further with Tseremsaaks and with my own directions in future books - no more illustrating and publishing Native American folktales. (Although I think they are incredible and should be better known, that is appropriately for their own people to do.) I have enough of my own stories to bring to life. I am going to focus on these – onwards ! ... ”

Ironically, Roy Freeman’s book, which is published by a small press and hard to acquire, has a commendable source note. I was impressed with the care and attention he gave to the source and history of the story as it passed from native oral lore, to anthropological record via Franz Boas, to his own aesthetic interpretation. I especially appreciated his impressionistic art's giving so much room for imaginative perception of the narrative. It may sound contradictory, but he seems to me an ideal translator of folklore from cultures other than his own. I take his point about whales being the only legitimate writers about whales, which reflects a long-standing and complex literary debate often carried to extremes. What I argued for in my reviews and articles is not forfeiture but respect for, and understanding of, folkloric power dynamics, which I think he showed strongly in his source note and donation to the tribe. By my own standards, I actually encouraged him to consider a new print run, though I understand that’s an arguable position to take.

Beyond this specific example, Roy’s letter summarizes the importance of reviewers’ knowledgeable and experienced attention to the power dynamics of diversity, and specifically, here, the power dynamics of folkloric diversity, about which we’ll undoubtedly hear more from our coming speakers. And beyond folklore to a different genre, I believe that *Booklist* reviewer Hazel Rochman’s crusade for better documentation in nonfiction for youth had enormous impact on the nature of information

available to youth in print sources. Roger Sutton's reviews of LGBTQ books for youth has had lasting impact, as has Deborah Stevenson's expertise in detailing the intricacies of picture book illustration, and Janice Del Negro's deeply informed estimation of storytelling sources during her *BCCB* editorship. Of the five major editors in the *Bulletin's* 75-year-history, each has enhanced our understanding of youth literature in far-reaching ways. Founding editor Mary K. Eakin promoted the importance of children's books in education after World War II, and the indefatigable Zena Sutherland championed minority rights as well as high literary quality.

Let me turn now to a final reflection on the most important aspect of any research project or think-piece, in this case, the history and value of *BCCB*: What's the big so-what question? What does it all mean? What are the ramifications and implications? What visions are assumed and projected?

First of all, without *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, there would never have been a Center for Children's Books. In 1945, free books arrived for review at the University of Chicago's Education Department. Educators reviewed them. The books needed bookshelves. Bingo, The Center for Children's Books! But so what? Well, the Center for Children's books anchored the youth services specialization, informed it, embodied it, specifically located it, signified it as an ongoing but constantly changing socio-cultural *adventure*. But so what? Well, *adventure* by its very nature involves risks, exploits, trials, victories, defeats, boredom, fun. *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* was fun. *Bruce Learns About Life Insurance* was not.

Also, adventure, even episodic adventure, involves a beginning, middle, and end. Both folklore and history are filled with beginnings, middles, and ends—because things

change. The *Bulletin* was an arbiter, reflector, and thrall of change, sometimes serially, sometimes all at once. In the course of its history, here are some of the things that changed: the nature of books for youth; of childhood and adolescence; of reading; of libraries; of library professions; of library schools; of academia; of scholarship; and finally, of the nation's social, cultural, economic, and political climate. And all of these elements changed both cyclically and permanently.

Change is a human condition. Remember that in various periods and places, novels were considered corrupting, folk and fairy tales were considered trash, print was considered less reliable than word of mouth. Once upon a time, English Departments considered children's literature less important than adult literature, Education theorists considered children's books less important than skills and drills. Administrators considered Library Science and Information Science to be antithetical. Even children's librarians, generally the heroes of this adventure, for a long time condemned children's reading of "substandard" materials—like "commercial" mystery or romance series—that they considered perfectly fine for adult readers to relax with. There was the famous, broadly circulated 20<sup>th</sup> century analogy of junk reading and junk food, both unhealthy! Some of these attitudes I studied, some witnessed, some experienced.

I mention these tectonic shifts to introduce my last big "So What?" question, the current role of book review journals in relation to youth literature and literacy. Today's readers are tomorrow's leaders. Unfortunately, we've recently experienced the singular national disaster of a non-reading leader. Knowledge is power, as we say in the profession, but which knowledge—and how that knowledge is accessed—make a difference to the nature of power. We see that in the damaging false conspiracy theories

perpetrated by some television and social media platforms. Twentieth century book evaluation tools contributed to collection development and readers' advisory, which certainly varied with community-affected value systems but which at least had access to a currently threatened variety of professional sources.

What we see now, as in the case of newspapers and print journals in many disciplines, is either closure or the invisible alternative, absorption into predatory, profit-driven "bundles" where knowledge essentially gets "locked up" behind unaffordable paywalls. *BCCB*, for instance, is bundled with the very expensive Project Muse. An analogy to "bundling," as Deborah Stevenson points out, would be requiring TV viewers to buy an expensive package of all channels in order to watch the two channels they really want. The economics of this scheme result in an ultimately anti-social monopolized merger system. Open source distribution systems offer a relatively small counterbalance to published research, given that big-name journals are now mostly bundled into corporate packages, either databases like JSTOR or companies like Pro-Quest that host them. The same, of course, applies to youth literature review journals as well as book-based research in youth literature. And to school and public library collection development and readers' advisory as they are starved for affordable review resources or overly dependent on the few sources left. Online access was a lofty ideal; unfortunately, like universities, it has sometimes been corporatized out of reach. Open source access is a far horizon.

As Laura McKenna summarizes in a succinct think piece for *The Atlantic*:

QUOTE: "Step back and think about this picture. Universities that created ... academic content for free must pay to read it. Step back even farther. The public -- which has indirectly funded ... research with federal and state taxes that support our higher

education system -- has virtually no access to this material, since neighborhood libraries cannot afford to pay those subscription costs. Newspapers and think tanks, which could help extend research into the public sphere, are denied free access to the material. Faculty members are rightly bitter that their years of work reach an audience of a handful, while every year, [150 million attempts](#) to read JSTOR content are denied ....” END QUOTE

Please note that the distinguished research lecturers following me in this miniseries—two PhDs and an MD—were all trained with access to books in the Center for Children’s Books, which are there, as mentioned, because of the *BCCB* review journal. Other UIUC units, including English and Education, also use the collection as a resource. The UIUC Education library, like other units of the library, has a fast-diminishing budget for books. What would future iSchool students in youth services do without access to new books for youth? How assess the trends, as well as the best, the mediocre, and the sometimes painfully worst new books, along with older ones that shed light on previous mores, socio-cultural dynamics, and aesthetics? How develop experience in judgment calls on evaluation and its mechanisms? Although the Covid 19 pandemic has temporarily—and perhaps to some extent, permanently—affected publishing, distribution, and evaluation, there will remain new books for youth and the need to evaluate them. Who will do that, and how? It’s not that there aren’t a LOT of opinions out there on the Internet, accessible to a LOT of people, but something is surely lost without the rigor of training and experience behind professional assessment.

As universities and educational non-profit organizations currently support research in other disciplines, will they continue to support research on books for youth, which requires actually having the books in hand and the expertise to assess them? In

spite of lip service to the primacy of literacy, this question has burned a hole in my intellectual and professional life. How would I have written a dissertation without access to collections of children's books and varied opinions about them? How could those who work with children, young adults, and the books they *should* or *want to* read be trained at all? The answer at the University of Chicago was a package deal. Liquidation—elimination of both its library school and its education department.

I've revisited that extreme situation of irreversible cause and effect only to raise collective and deeply concerning issues of priority. As my colleague Liora Bresler says, we are shaped by what we shape. And as I've written about folklore, "the stories that we tell, tell us who we are." This is a prophecy, if you will. Make of it what you will. But ask the question, what will be central to the construction of literature and reading? How and by whom will that construction be shaped and told? I commend those questions to you the audience, all more currently attuned than I am, and all eminently qualified to put your heads together for active thought and thoughtful action. But I will close with the assertion that some part of an answer lies in the iSchool's visionary investment in the Center for Children's Books and the review journal that birthed and nourished it.

I have finished my story. Now it is yours.

## References

1. “Whammo, You Lose,” Hearne, *Booklist*, July 1974, p.1199
2. “You Did It, Little Teacup,” Hearne, The Big Picture editorial in the *Bulletin* 44:145 (February, 1992)
3. Rudine Sims Bishop describes this as the “Melting Pot” stage of representing Black characters. Later stages are “culturally conscious books” and “social conscience” books *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children’s Fiction* (NCTE, 1982)
4. Janice Radway, “Reading Is Not Eating: Mass-Produced Literature and the theoretical, methodological, and Political Consequences of a Metaphor” (*Book Research Quarterly* 2, 7-29 (1986)
5. Laura McKenna’s quote in *The Atlantic* can be found at:  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/01/locked-in-the-ivory-tower-why-jstor-imprisons-academic-research/251649/>

\* Out of thousands, here are a few (120 !) authors and illustrators I especially enjoyed seeing again as I reviewed my own reviews.

Verna Aardema, Lloyd Alexander, Alike, Mitsumasa Anno, Natalie Babbitt, Nina Bawden, John Bierhorst, Erik Blegvad, Francesca Block, Anthony Browne, Joseph Bruchac, Ashley Bryan, Eve Bunting, John Burningham, Betsy Byars, Ann Cameron, Eric Carle, Brock Cole, Joanna Cole, Barbara Cooney, Susan Cooper, Christopher Paul Curtis, Tomie DePaola, Kate Di Camillo, Donald Crews, Demi, Paul Fleischman, Sid Fleischman, Douglas Florian, Paula Fox, Russell Freedman, Jean Fritz, Leon Garfield, Mordecai Gerstein, James Griblin, Paul Goble, Mary Downing Hahn, Virginia Hamilton, Kevin Henkes, Lee Bennett Hopkins, Nonny Hogrogian, Shirley Hughes, Ted Hughes, Warwick Hutton, Trina Schart Hyman, Paul Janeczko, Angela Johnson, Diana Wynn Jones, X.J. Kennedy, Eric Kimmel, Dick King-Smith, E.L. Konigsburg, Nancy Larrick, Madeleine L'Engle, Ursula Le Guin, Julius Lester, Patrick Lewis, Penelope Lively, Myra Cohn Livingston, Anita Lobel, Arnold Lobel, Lois Lowry, David Macaulay, Margaret Mahy, James Marshall, Patricia McKissack, William Mayne, Milton Meltzer, Eve Merriam, Dean Meyers, Jim Murphy, Donna Jo Napoli, Naomi Shihab Nye, Iona Opie, Helen Oxenbury, Barbara Park, Katherine Paterson, Gary Paulsen, Philippa Pearce, Chris Raschka, Mary Rayner, Faith Ringgold, Colby Rodowsky, Glen Rounds, Cynthia Ryland, Louis Sachar, Robert San Souci, Alan Say, Alvin Schwartz, Maurice Sendak, Seymour Simon, Marilyn Singer, William Sleator, Zilpha Keatly Snyder, Janet Stevens, Gary Soto, Suzanne Fisher Staples, William Steig, John Steptoe, Mary Stolz, Rosemary Sutcliff, Mildred Taylor, Chris Van Allsburg, Jean Van Leeuwen, Cynthia Voigt, Jill Paton Walsh, Mildred Pitts Walter, Rosemary Wells, Jerome Wexler, Marcia Williams, Vera Williams, Jacqueline Woodson, Valerie Worth, Patricia Wrightson, Laurence Yep, Jane Yolen, Ed Young, Paul Zelinsky, Paul Zindel, Charlotte Zolotow.