Children's and Young Adult Literature and Culture

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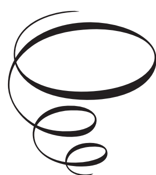
A Mosaic of Criticism

Edited by

Amie A. Doughty

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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For Reynold James Doughty, my newest nephew

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INTRODUCTION

AMIE A. DOUGHTY

The study of children's and young adult literature occupies a unique position in literary and cultural studies. In an article published in 2010, I applied the linguistic theory of markedness to the study of children's literature, arguing that children's literature occupies a marked position in literary studies in relation to the unmarked—"normal"/"natural"—literature for adults (193).[1] Peter Hunt similarly calls children's books "marginalised," noting, "Childhood is, after all, a state we grow away from" (1). Since adults are the primary creators, editors, publishers, marketers, and buyers of children's literature, they often see children's literature as something for children alone rather than appropriate for themselves. Young adult (YA) literature falls into a similar marked position. As a result, the study of children's and YA literature is fairly young: while criticism does exist prior to the 1970s, it is limited, if quite varied, and it is only in the past few decades that children's literature criticism has expanded to its current level. Hunt comments that

> marginalisation has had certain advantages; because it has been culturally low-profile, "children's literature" has not become the property of any group or discipline: it does not belong to the Department of Literature or the Library School, or the local parents' organisation. It is attractive and interesting to students (official or unofficial) of literature, education, library studies, history, psychology, art, popular culture, media, the caring professions, and so on, and it can be approached from any specialist viewpoint. (1)

[1] This marking is evident from the names alone: "literature" is associated with adults and does not need an adjectival marker to indicate "adultness," whereas children's literature is marked by its adjectival. The same type of marking is associated with young adult (YA) literature and with various other literatures that do not fit the unmarked literature of the adult white heterosexual male—African American, women's, queer, Native American, Latina/o, etc.

Though it is true that children's and YA literature appeals to such a variety of fields, most criticism falls into two primary categories: audience/educational and literary.

First, because of the nature of the nominal audience of children's and YA literature, a large portion of the criticism focuses on audience and educational issues. Some of the earliest analyses of children's and YA literature, in fact, deals with the educational value of the literature and its messages. Authors who examine children's and YA literature from this perspective may look at how children (specific children or children generally) read; how to engage child readers; how books can engage various social/ideological issues (disability, manners, homosexuality, etc.); how books can be used to help children cope with various situations (death, divorce, sharing, etc.); and how books can be used to teach subjects besides language arts (sustainability, history, math, etc.). Criticism from this perspective focuses on children's and YA literature as purposeful rather than as enjoyable, though naturally purposeful books that are also enjoyable are desirable. This collection contains several essays examining children's and YA texts from an audience/educational perspective.

The second way in which children's and YA literature is examined is through literary analysis. Much of the early literary analysis is reader-response focused, tying this type of analysis to the audience/educational analysis mode discussed above. However, as children's and YA literature has begun to develop as a field and more English departments have offered classes in the areas, the same lenses of criticism applied to adult literature are being applied to it.[2] Psychoanalytical, archetypal, feminist, post-colonial, structuralist, deconstructivist, and queer readings, among others, are increasingly popular, and journals such as *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* publish highly theoretical analyses of children's and YA literature. There have been objections to some of these types of readings, with some adults questioning the need to use these apparatuses to analyze literature meant for an audience not expected to read the books so deeply. As Hunt notes, "Children's literature is an obvious point at

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[2] In 1963, Frederick Crews published *The Pooh Perplex*, in which he parodies schools of literary criticism by using New Critical, Freudian, Marxist, and Aristotelian models (among others) to analyze *Winnie the Pooh*, and in 2001 he published a follow-up parody called *Postmodern Pooh*, using more lenses. His use of a classic children's text to parody literary criticism indicates both children's literature's marking (by using it, Crews is indicating that children's literature isn't worth analyzing like literature for adults) and its analyzability (he is able to use a seemingly simple text to garner a total of twenty-three readings).

which theory encounters real life, where we are forced to ask: what can we say about a book, why should we say it, how can we say it, and what effect will what we say have?" (2). The two categories of criticism, audience/educational and literary are seemingly at odds with each other, especially when literary criticism delves into taboo areas such as sexuality.[3] Yet these critical apparatuses offer new insights into texts and reveal just how complicated children's and YA literature truly is.

This collection of essays contains a small cross-section of topics that encompass the wide-ranging fields of children's and YA literature and culture. Most of these essays began life as conference papers from the Children's Literature and Culture area at the 2015 National Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana,[4] and have since been expanded and developed to their current form. My goal in compiling this collection has been to present some of the depth and breadth of current children's and YA literature and culture scholarship. The essays have been organized by the approximate age of the audience, starting with texts for young children and progressing through YA texts.

The first three chapters examine different aspects of picture books. Chapter One, "Why No One Helps the Little Red Hen: Picture Book Interpretations of a Folktale" by Deidre A. Johnson, offers a history of "The Little Red Hen" folktale and examines ways in which different picture book versions of the tale represent the primary characters textually and visually. These varied representations (re)shape the meaning and

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[3] In Shelby A. Wolf's *Interpreting Literature with Children*, she tries to balance audience/educational analysis and literary analysis. In the chapter "Critical Perspectives" she presents a scene from E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* in which White describes the children swinging on Mr. Zuckerman's rope swing. Then she offers five types of criticism and shows how the passage can be analyzed through each lens (22-39). However, an obvious interpretation of the passage parallels that of the boy in D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner," an adult text in which the repetitive motion of rocking is often paralleled to masturbation, is ignored completely. While ignoring the interpretation makes sense given the nature of Wolf's goals for the book—giving educators new ways of interpreting literature with children—it also demonstrates some of the limits often placed on what is appropriate to discuss in children's and YA literature. When I have pointed out this interpretation to students in my children's literature classes, there is often strong rejection of it, for students (like many adults) do not want to see these taboo elements in literature that is associated with the innocence of childhood, even if that innocence is a construct.

[4] The conference featured fifteen Children's Literature and Culture panels with a total of forty-eight presentations.

message of the tale. In Chapter Two, "Big Bad Bullies: Bullying in Children's Literature," Patrice A. Oppliger analyzes ninety-five picture books that contain bullies and examines different ways in which bullies and their victims are portrayed. She also explores types of bullying and the effect bullying has on the characters, as well as different ways in which the characters cope with bullying and the roles of bystanders, both children and adults, in the stories. Chapter Three, "Boys Will Be Boys and Girls Must Be Good: Gender and Positioning Children as Comestible in Contemporary Picture Books" by Bréanna J. McDaniel offers an examination of how gender is presented in several different picture books featuring black and multiracial children, *Homemade Love* by bell hooks, *Chocolate Me* by Taye Diggs, and *The Blacker the Berry*, *Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea*, and *Gingerbread Days* by Joyce Carol Thomas. These books, McDaniel argues, reveal great differences in how boys and girls are treated in relation to food and domestic space.

Chapter Four bridges the gap between picture books and chapter books. In "African American Girls in Children's and YA Sports Fiction: Encouraging Participation?" Dawn Heinecken presents an analysis of an array of children's and YA books, both fiction and non-fiction, featuring African American female athletes as main characters. She first explores some of the problematic ways in which white supremacy and/or male superiority remain part of many of these books. Then Heinecken offers a couple of examples in which the athletes' gender and race are both addressed effectively and demonstrates how the multifaceted problems that African American female athletes face can be represented successfully.

The next four chapters focus on texts, both written and visual, for older children. In Chapter Five, "Riddles in the Dark: An Explication of Chapter Five from *The Hobbit*," Harry Eiss examines Chapter Five of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* as a psychological test in Bilbo Baggins's hero's journey. The contrasting riddles that Bilbo and Gollum exchange in this chapter, Eiss argues, represent aspects of their psychological qualities: Bilbo's riddles reveal his humanity, while Gollum's represent his despair. In Chapter Six, "Ghosts, Health, and Nation in Eva Ibbotson's *The Haunting of Granite Falls*," Rebecca A. Brown presents the intertextual elements of Ibbotson's novel and shows how Ibbotson reverses the cultural appropriation of the texts on which it is based. Chapter Seven, "'The Poo Quotient Needs to Be Higher': *Horrible Histories* and the Carnival of Children's Educational Programming" by Thomas Grochowski, explores the popular BBC program based on Terry Deary's chapter books. Grochowski examines the ways in which the series' use of elements of everyday life, particularly the material bodily lower stratum, offers

children the chance to question the way in which they are taught history and the facts that they learn. Chapter Eight, “Pretty Little Monsters: The Reification of Beauty and Gender Norms in Monster High” by Lindsey Hanlon, examines Mattel’s Monster High franchise in various forms: books, videos, webisodes, the franchise’s website, and the dolls. She argues that, despite its tagline “Be yourself. Be unique. Be a monster,” the franchise acts to reinforce gender and beauty norms for its target audience.

The next six chapters in the collection focus on literature for young adults. In Chapter Nine, “Gaea’s Last Stand: Uneasy Environmentalism in Rick Riordan’s *The Heroes of Olympus*,” I compare Riordan’s series’ antagonist Gaea to scientist James Lovelock’s characterization of Gaia in his Gaia Theory. This parallel, in which Gaea threatens to remake the earth and start over, forces fictional people (in Riordan) and real people (in Lovelock) to work together to stave off the threat, but it also leads to an uneasy, incomplete resolution, for the threat is never truly gone. Chapter Ten, “Katniss and Tris: Two Teens in Dystopian Societies” by Joyce Litton, offers a comparison of *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* trilogies. Focusing on the development of the two main characters, Katniss and Tris, Litton explores character development and the series’ resolutions. In Chapter Eleven, “The Gospel of Severus Snape,” Aedon Young parallels J. K. Rowling’s infamous character Severus Snape with Judas Iscariot, arguing that Snape is like the Gnostic Judas. Then she examines some of the Christian outcries over the *Harry Potter* series and explores some of the other Christian analyses of the series. Chapter Twelve, “‘We are beasts and this is our consolation’: Fairy Tale Revision and Combination in Joyce Carol Oates’s *Beasts*” by Staci Poston Conner, explores the ways in which Oates retells, combines, and revises “Cinderella,” “Beauty and the Beast,” and “Bluebeard” in her novella *Beasts* to present a main character with more agency than her fairy tale counterparts. Oates’s work with fairy tales in this manner, Conner argues, places her alongside such canonical fairy tale revisionists as Angela Carter and Anne Sexton.

While the previous articles focusing on YA texts examine specific series or books, the final three take a broader approach. In Chapter Thirteen, “Othered Girls on Fire: Navigating the Complex Terrain of YA Dystopia’s Female Protagonist,” Sarah Hentges examines the “Girl on Fire” figure in YA dystopian fiction. She gives some of the background of the “Girl on Fire” before exploring the lack of racial diversity in the texts and the problems with “colorblind” texts. Finally, she presents several examples of recent texts that represent “Othered Girls on Fire.” By contrast, Chapter Fourteen, “Closing the Gap with Experimental Texts: Literacy Connections in the Post-Modern World” by Jennifer Bean,

presents ways in which diverse types of experimental texts can be used to engage reluctant readers. Bean offers examples of hypertext, graphic novels, and music-focused texts to demonstrate how educators can incorporate experimental texts into their classroom.

The final chapter of the collection, "Harry Potter and the Adults Who Read YA" by Josh Thompson, explores the controversy surrounding the popularity of YA literature and its growing adult readership. Thompson begins with a historical overview of young adult literature before presenting some of the recent arguments in the YA debate. He then presents his argument that the increase in readership of YA literature can largely be attributed to *Harry Potter* and the fact that a generation of readers grew up with the series and continue to search for "the next *Harry Potter*."

Each of these essays offers new insights into aspects of children's and YA literature and culture that adds to the mosaic of criticism available in these growing fields.

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CHAPTER ONE

WHY NO ONE HELPS THE LITTLE RED HEN: PICTURE BOOK INTERPRETATIONS OF A FOLKTALE

DEIDRE A. JOHNSON

The story of the little red hen is a familiar one to most children and adults. It has been used as a parable by politicians and advertisers, a means of reading instruction by ESL teachers and educational publishing companies, and a source for retellings and parodies by children's authors and illustrators. Lesson plans and crafts appear on teachers' blogs, publishers' websites, and YouTube videos.[1] Its ubiquitous appeal is reflected in its history. An Irish or English import, the tale surfaced in American periodicals in the 1870s and made the transition to a single-volume picture book format about forty years later. Since then, more than sixty-five different picture book editions have been published in the United States, with at least a dozen issued since 2000—and that count excludes parodies,

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[1] Many of the references to the Little Red Hen in politics are versions of "A Modern Little Red Hen" or "A Modern Day Little Red Hen," sometimes attributed to Ronald Reagan, other times, as in a *National Review* item sponsored by Milliken & Company, with authorship uncredited. Examples of the tale's use in advertising can be seen in "Then I Will" promoting The New York Stock Exchange and "Why Buy Now" marketing furnaces. Items illustrating educational practices include the "Little Red Hen Theme Pack" from *TeachersPayTeachers,* Laura B. Smolkin's "A-Book-A-Week: Classroom Instruction: The Little Red Hen," and Pattie Moss's account of her classroom's activities during a study of the tale. The author gratefully acknowledges the help of reference librarian Jane Hutton, West Chester University, in tracing the *National Review* item, and the invaluable assistance of the dedicated staff of West Chester University's Interlibrary Loan, especially Tracie Meloy, Jennifer O'Leary, and Neal Kenney, in locating many of the editions of *Little Red Hen* cited in the study.

radical reworkings, and illustrated retellings in periodicals, story collections, and textbooks. The multiplicity of retellings offers evidence not only of the tale's popularity but also its malleability. Even though many picture book versions retain the basic plot, they vary in their visual and textual depictions of the characters and their ideas about themes. A closer examination of such works can thus demonstrate the interpretative possibilities of picture books as well as the ways in which illustrators' and authors' decisions can shade readings of a folktale.

Narratively, picture books are a unique art form: meaning resides not only in words but also in pictures and in the interaction between the two. In "Learning the Language of Picturebooks," Lawrence R. Sipe refers to the latter as synergy, where "the illustrations and the verbal text [combine] to produce an effect which is greater than the sum of their parts. The total effect of the picture book depends on the perceived interactions between text and illustrations" (71). The picture-text relationship can range from complementary, where illustrations do little beyond supplement the text, to expansion, with illustrations adding details, characters, or even subplots that go far beyond anything indicated in the text, to counterpoint, where illustrations and text offer contradictory versions of a narrative (Landes 52). Additionally, because of its visual element, the picture book format throws greater interpretative weight on the physical paratext—covers, endpages, frontmatter—than is found in other types of print publications.[2] When picture books retell folktales, all of these elements work together to convey ideas about characters and themes.

Many commentaries on folktales attest to the importance of illustrations in creating meaning or affecting interpretations. In her study of folktale reworkings, Amie A. Doughty notes that the visual nature of picture books means each illustrator's conception and representation of the story essentially creates "a new version of the traditional tale" (11). Even when a retelling is accompanied by only a few illustrations—far fewer than in a picture book—those images affect perceptions of characters and situations. In "Fairy Tale Illustrations and Real World Gender," Ruth Bottigheimer observes that "illustrators frequently incorporate more in their drawings than is delineated in the text" (143), adding "whenever an illustration differs from the text it accompanies, each added (or deleted) element constructs an interpretive bias" (145). This sentiment is echoed in Perry Nodelman's study of illustrative techniques, *Words About Pictures.*

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[2] See the chapter "Picturebook Paratexts" in Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's *How Picturebooks Work,* as well as the Sipe and Sonia Landes articles for discussions incorporating analysis of peritext. The introduction to *How Picturebooks Work* also considers various ways pictures and text interact.

Nodelman reflects that with folktales, "What everyone knows—the essential story underlying all the different versions—is a series of specific events in a specific order"; he explains that illustrations create differences in "the character of the people these events happen to, the reason they happen, and the relative amount of information we are offered about . . . what they mean" (265).

Despite recognition of the impact of illustrations on folktales and the potential for studying visual variations of characters and plot structure, relatively few comparative studies of multiple picture book versions of a folktale exist. Among those scholars who have examined numerous versions of a tale are Linnea Hendrickson, Sandra L. Beckett, and Perry Nodelman. Hendrickson's close study of Paul O. Zelinksy's award-winning *Rapunzel* compares and contrasts Zelinsky's choices with those of other illustrators, assessing how they reflect the tale's themes of "family, motherhood, love, longing, . . . holding on and letting go," especially in light of Zelinsky's decisions about which scenes to illustrate and his artistic choices concerning depictions of the witch, the tower, the prince, and Rapunzel (212). Beckett devotes a chapter of *Recycling Red Riding Hood* to surveying picture book retellings of Red, considering the effect of such elements as style of illustration, level of abstraction, choice of scene, visual allusion, and medium in works "by illustrators whose visual interpretations . . . constitute truly original retellings . . . cast[ing] the familiar text in an entirely new light" (30). Nodelman's "Little Red Riding Hood Rides Again—and Again and Again and Again" pays particular attention to an often-overlooked segment of folktale picture books, the "rack[s] of Golden Books and Wonder Books and Tell-a-Tale Books and Pop-Up Books . . . [that] were the books that gift-giving parents and grandmothers had the easiest access to" (70). He observes that offerings even of a single tale are "all different from each other" (70), sometimes because of the effect of narrators' additions or emendations to traditional texts,[3] a situation also found with Little Red Hen.

History of the Tale

"The Little Red Hen" has received only limited study as a folktale or picture book narrative. Even its early history is clouded with misinformation.

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[3] Nodelman appears to be one of the few scholars who has examined modifications in inexpensive "grocery story" editions of folktales, yet a perusal of such works suggests that they tend to alter text more extensively than do many of the versions found in libraries.

Despite claims to the contrary, it is *not* in any of Joseph Jacobs's collections, nor does it appear to be a Russian tale.[4] Instead, it may have evolved from "The Wonderful Cake," an Irish tale included in Patrick Kennedy's *The Fireside Stories of Ireland* (1870). That story opens with "a mouse, a rat, and a little red hen" sharing a home; it quickly introduces the familiar situation of the hen asking for assistance in preparing food and being refused, though her requests pertain to baking a cake rather than growing grain (19). When the cake is finished and the hen announces she will eat it, the story segues into a variant of "Gingerbread Man" or "Johnny Cake": the cake runs away followed by the hen and her housemates, picking up pursuers until it is eaten by a fox.[5]

Although "The Wonderful Cake" may have been known to American audiences through Irish or British imports, it does not appear to have attracted an American publisher. Instead, the tale's history in the United States involves two different stories—one related to "Wonderful Cake" and a second based on another Irish tale about a hen's encounter with a fox. The April 1867 issue of *The Riverside Magazine for Young People* carried the poem, "The Story of the Little Rid Hin" [sic], recounting a hen's capture by a hungry fox, her escape by cutting a hole in the fox's sack and substituting a rock, and the fox's death soon after (A. Q. C. 158-60). Subsequent versions expanded the cast to include lazy housemates for the hen and mention of her industriousness, with titles sometimes reflecting the alterations. Thus, in the 1873 "The Cat, the Mouse, and the Little Red Hen," credited to "Mrs. Battesby," the hen asks the others—"a lazy pair"—for assistance making the beds, baking the bread, and sweeping the rooms, and is regularly refused, before the plot introduces the confrontation with the fox.[6] The bread-baking occurs as one of many

[4] The current Wikipedia entry and some retellings claim the tale may be of Russian origin, but it does not appear in Leonard Magnus's translation of *Russian Folk-Tales*, nor is it discussed in Adolf Gerber's "Great Russian Animal Tales." Those attributing it to Jacobs never supply the name of the tale, and no tale with a hen and similar plot has been found in either of his English or Celtic fairy tale collections.

[5] "The Wonderful Cake" also appears in an 1866 article, "The Old Fireside Stories of Wexford," in *Dublin University Magazine* as "one of the *bona fide* recollections" of stories heard in the unnamed author's boyhood (699, 708-09) .

[6] The story is credited to "Bright Side," but that source has not been located. The 1863 girls' book *Faith Gartney's Girlhood* may actually contain the earliest version of this variant published in the United States. One of the characters sometimes entertains children with stories. At one point, a boy asks her to "tell us about the little red hen," and, in heavy Irish dialect, she responds with the story of the hen and the fox (Whitney 38-40).

chores; it does not receive special attention. Later versions replace the cat with a rooster,[7] and in the 20th century, picture book editions of "The Cock, the Mouse and the Little Red Hen" were often issued by some of the same publishers handling *The Little Red Hen.*

The story of the grain-planting hen first appeared in American periodicals several years after that of the fox-escaping fowl, and, like its counterpart, went through several modifications. The earliest account surfaced in September 1874, in the popular children's magazine *St. Nicholas.* In "The Story of the Little Red Hen"—published anonymously as a tale told by the narrator's mother "about twenty-five years ago"—a red hen finds a grain of wheat and asks different animals to plant it, reap it, take it to the mill, and make it into bread (680). There is no mention of the characters sharing a house nor explanation of their refusal to help the hen, and the named animals—a rat, a cat, a dog, a duck, and a pig—suggest a barnyard setting rather than a household. At the conclusion, instead of eating the newly-made bread, the hen picks up the loaf and runs off with it, an indication that the tale may be a truncated or imperfectly remembered version of "Wonderful Cake." A rhymed version from about 1876 titled "The Mouse, the Frog, and the Little Red Hen" conflates the initial circumstances of "Wonderful Cake" with the plot of the traditional version. The animals live together, and their introduction specifies their slothful natures: "The frog was the laziest of frogs / And lazier still was the mouse." The poem also marks the first appearance of the phrase "Not I" for the animals' refusal. Over the next few years, the poem was reprinted in newspapers and periodicals, often with the abbreviated title "The Little Red Hen."[8] Then, in 1885, *St. Nicholas* published yet another rhymed version, "Lit-tle [sic] Red Hen" by Eudora M. Bumstead. A headnote explains it is "The Good Old Story of 'the Little Red Hen and the Grain of Wheat' told in verse," suggesting the tale was becoming better known. Bumstead's verse draws on the 1874 tale for plot and characters, adding a mouse to create three pairs of animals, and, in the conclusion, picks up the assessment of the animals as lazy from the other

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[7] Philip Redmond's "Irish Folklore: The Little Red Hen: A Nursery Tale" from 1899 establishes that version's connection with Irish folktales; in it, the housemates are a cat, a rat, and a little red hen—a grouping notable because of the rhyming of the first two animals' names, even though the story is in prose (116-18).

[8] See, for example, "The Little Red Hen," in the January 1881 *Our Dumb Animals* (62). A search of the *America's Historical Newspapers* database finds four versions from 1881; *Newspaper Archive* shows five more between 1881 and 1883. All bear the title "The Little Red Hen."

rhymed version. Bumstead also introduced changes in the conclusion, writing,

> [The hen] clucked to her chicks—she was moth-er [sic] of six;
> And that was the end of the wheat. (873)

The food is thus consumed, presumably in front of the other animals, and the hen acquires offspring. The added elements—especially eating the baked item—would become part of many retellings, including picture books.

Perhaps because of the story's brevity, it took over forty years for the bread-baking hen to make the transition to a single-volume picture book format, and almost another two decades for it to flourish.[9] The earliest picture book edition identified is a 1918 retelling written and illustrated by Florence White Williams, which greatly expands the text by adding detailed characterizations of all the animals; that same year, illustrator Frederick Richardson paired the story with "Henny Penny," possibly because a second tale was needed to fill the required thirty-two pages. The 1920s saw two new releases, *The Little Red Hen* issued by Samuel Gabriel Sons in 1921 and *The Little Red Hen and the Grain of Wheat* published by Platt & Munk in 1927. As the Depression deepened, the tale of a character whose hard work put food on the table may have exerted greater appeal, for by the late 1930s several of the earlier picture books had been reformatted and reissued in less expensive versions, and the story was becoming a staple for firms such as Whitman, which specialized in inexpensive books for children (Marcus 7-8). In the 1930s, Whitman issued at least five different editions of *Hen*.[10] Then, as now, inexpensive editions of the tale predominated: In the 1940s, *The Little Red Hen* was among the titles selected to launch Simon and Schuster's Little Golden Books (and, as of this writing, is still in print in a Golden Books edition)

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[9] The alternate version of the hen and the fox, with its longer story and more dramatic plot, appeared in picture book format as early as 1907. Other picture book editions of the fox story sometimes misleadingly carried the title *The Little Red Hen* or *The Story of the Little Red Hen*; such is most notably the case with several McLoughlin Bros. publications.

[10] Whitman editions from the 1930s include a 1932 version illustrated by Nina R. Jordan, which also contains the fox version of the tale as a second story; a 1935 edition illustrated by Keith Ward; a 1937 edition illustrated by Ruth Easthill that reuses the text from the Jordan edition (but contains only the first story); a 1938 edition by Ethel Hays; and a 1939 edition illustrated by Thelma Gooch (as T. G.). Information about the Ward edition is from its WorldCat entry. The author gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Patricia Goolsbey in loaning a family copy of the Easthill edition for study.

(Santi 12).[11] Since then, new editions have appeared regularly—at least ten per decade from 1980s to the 2010s—preserving the core story but varying greatly in the representation of the hen, her companions, and their surroundings.

Interpretations: Pictures and Text

With minimal illustrations and brief text, the 19th-century print versions provide little information about the hen, and, other than some versions' reference to laziness, no characterization of the other animals or explanation of their refusal to help. When "The Story of the Little Red Hen" appeared in *St. Nicholas,* the only illustrations were line drawings—probably stock images—of the individual animals. Each animal had its own illustration, separated from the others, randomly inserted throughout the text; all animals were drawn realistically, without clothing, with faint backgrounds vaguely suggesting a farmyard. Several of these cuts were reused for the 1885 rhymed version in *St. Nicholas*, which added a picture of a group of chicks (but no hen) as the last image. No 19th-century retelling seen illustrates the hen's work process or shows the final product. With the transition to picture books, however, the tale acquired a format more conducive to inserting greater detail and visual characterizations and, for those retellers who so desired, more space for added commentary.

The central conflict in "The Little Red Hen" is between the hen and the animals who reject her requests for help. A key question, then, for artists and authors becomes how to interpret the others' refusal and the nature of the conflict. Is the tale about industry versus indolence? Responsibility and irresponsibility? Do other factors affect the animals' responses? When source versions lack such information, it falls to illustrators and retellers to provide visual and textual clues to the animals' personalities and motivations. Their decisions—authors' modifications of the text and illustrators' representations of characters and choice of scenes—result in overt and covert interpretations of the story. Based on a study of almost fifty editions, this paper surveys some of the more popular interpretations and examines various ways authors and illustrators shape readings of the tale.

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[11] According to Steve Santi's *Warman's Little Golden Books Identification and Price Guide*, the initial Golden Books edition was published in 1942 and illustrated by Rudolf Freund. In 1954, a new edition with different text and with illustrations by J. P. Miller was issued. The Miller edition was later replaced with versions by other authors and illustrators, but brought back into print in 2001, as a "Golden Book Classic" (95). Currently, Amazon.com shows it available in a 2015 edition.

Indolence and Industry

One explanation for the animals' actions—echoing that found in some of the first print versions—is that they are lazy. Adopting the dictionary definition of *laziness* as being "disinclined to activity or exertion" frames the story as a conflict between indolence and industry. This interpretation goes beyond the concept that those who don't contribute to a task don't enjoy the result, and instead attributes non-participation to a character flaw—sloth.

Picture book retellings that adopt this reading do so with varying degrees of emphasis—in other words, applying it to some or all of the animals in some or most of the scenes. Paul Galdone's popular version from 1973 offers one of the best examples of the latter, regularly accentuating the contrast between the hen's energy and the other animals' lethargy, both visually and textually. Even before the story begins, the hen is seen on the cover carrying gardening tools and on the half-title page hanging laundry. Galdone introduces the supporting cast via three double-page spreads, one per character, showing them at rest; his text employs parallel structure and repetition when describing the indolent characters, further linking their personalities:

> The cat liked to sleep all day on the soft couch
> The dog liked to nap all day on the sunny back porch
> And the mouse liked to snooze all day in the warm chair by the fireside.

The three images of the slumbering characters are bracketed by illustrations of the hen at work, sweeping the front porch on the first opening and washing the dishes on the fifth, reinforcing the contrast.[12] Additionally, the text on the fifth opening underscores the hen's industry by cataloguing all of her household tasks—in a list that continues onto the next opening. To accentuate the other animals' lethargy, each time they refuse the hen's request for help, Galdone draws them with their eyes closed. Throughout the story, Galdone's page layout and design build contrasts between the hen and the other characters. He often places the three lazy characters close together on one page, arranged in similar poses against a plain white background, while the hen stands on the facing page

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[12] An opening is the two facing pages in a picture book. In "Learning the Language of Picturebooks," Lawrence R. Sipe explains that since many picture books are unpaginated, "By convention, the *first opening* is the two facing pages where the text of the book begins, and the openings are numbered consecutively after this" (71).

amid busier scenery related to her actions. She is thus separated physically by the gutter of the book, visually by the different style, and ideologically by her attitude toward work.

One significant difference in Galdone's retelling, however, is the addition of a final episode in which the other animals have awakened—literally and metaphorically—to an awareness of their responsibilities. The last page depicts the trio with eyes open, engaged in housecleaning; moreover, they now wear housekeepers' caps similar to one previously seen on the hen, symbolic of their change.

While Galdone's version offers the richest and most consistent visual depiction of the contrast between the busy hen and her indolent companions, his interpretation and some of his visual and textual strategies can also be found in other retellings. Two inexpensive editions from the 1950s offer early examples of this approach. Like Galdone's, the text of a 1953 Whitman edition quickly establishes the contrast between the hen and her neighbors by stating, "Every day, while Little Red Hen hunted for food, the Cat, the Duck, and the Pig slept in the sun" (Wilson). And, again as in Galdone, the accompanying illustration by Beth Wilson underscores the disparity by placing the sleeping animals on one page and the busy hen on the other. Not only is there a physical separation reinforced by the book's gutter, but Wilson has also drawn the hen with her back to the others, signaling her different outlook. Several subsequent openings again anticipate Galdone's method of grouping the somnolent animals on one side of the page and the bustling hen on the other and even employ the contrast between plain backgrounds for the animals at rest and busy backgrounds for the hard-working hen.

In a second version, from 1957, illustrator Ruth Bendel introduces the contrast between laziness and activity in the peritext: on the endpapers, the three non-participants doze while the hoe-toting hen marches across the page. On one side of the title page, the trio continues to slumber; on the other, the hen studies a cookbook. Like Wilson and Galdone, Bendel frequently places the sleeping animals on one side of an opening, separated from the hen and her chicks by the gutter—and, like Galdone's, Bendel's version concludes with some self-awareness on the part of the other animals. After being denied bread, the goose reflects, "What a lazy dunce I have been," and the pig remarks, "A little work and a little less sleep wouldn't have hurt me any."

The same ideas about indolence and industry but without the final awakening are found in a 1995 Willowisp version illustrated by David Drotleff, which may have been influenced by Galdone's text. It, too, introduces each animal with a separate sentence describing its slothful nature:

The cat loved to sleep in the sun.
The dog was fond of napping in the shade.
And the pig liked to rest wherever he could.

Drotleff's scenes early in the book show the animals reclining on the porch while the hen works in the garden; although there is no additional commentary about their actions in the text, they are usually found lounging or passively observing the hen as she goes about her tasks.

Several retellings not only depict the animals as lazy in the illustrations or make textual reference to actions implying that trait, but also specifically label them as such in the narrative. Like the 1876 "The Mouse, the Frog, and the Little Red Hen," a version published by Addison-Wesley in 1989 sets up the contrast between industry and indolence immediately: on one side of the first opening, the hen energetically sweeps the porch steps above the words "Once upon a time there was a busy little red hen" (Smath 2). On the other side, the text continues with "She lived on a farm with a lazy duck, a lazy cat, and a lazy dog," and illustrator Jerry Smath has drawn the three animals dozing near the porch (3). The second opening of a 2005 retelling by Christianne C. Jones and Natalie Magnuson announces, "The cat, the dog, and the mouse were a lazy bunch. They slept all day while the little red hen worked," and the picture mirrors the description (6-7). Violet Findley's text from a 2006 edition, which Scholastic also offers as a free reproducible for teachers, follows the animals' first refusal with a direct address to the reader, remarking, "You see, they were all quite lazy" (3), and four of Lynne Cravath's illustrations show the animals sleeping—with their slumbering state reinforced by ZZZZZs in the picture (Findley 4, 7, 10, 13). All three are beginning readers, intended for children learning to read independently, and their texts employ controlled vocabulary and short, simple sentences. In such retellings, the labels may substitute for the longer descriptions found in picture books such as Galdone's and Drotleff's.

A similar situation occurs in a bilingual version from 1969 by Letty and Herb Williams, which also appears designed as a tool for language acquisition. Several illustrations show the animals sleeping, and a summary section following the tale characterizes the animals and their actions. It begins "The little red hen worked hard. / She was not lazy." Commentary for two of the three animals—the pig and the dog—describes them as "lazy," with an additional statement of "He did not work." (The cat's reason for not helping is that he doesn't like the food the hen is making.) Once again, the illustrations depict sleeping animals with a string of ZZZZs to emphasize their slumbering state.

In the cases just described, text and illustrations work together to convey the same ideas. In several other editions, however, illustrations that represent the animals as sleepy or lethargic do so in apparent contradiction to the text, as if author and illustrator had different understandings of the story. In a retelling by Brenda Parkes and Judith Smith, for example, each animal initially refuses the hen's request with the statement, "I've got better things to do"—yet Mary Davy's illustrations show three of the four at rest. Similarly, Reggie Holladay's pictures for Carol Ottolenghi's *Little Red Hen* frequently depict the animals lying on the ground, even though the accompanying text is one of the few where the animals offer many reasons for saying no. Some of the excuses are frivolous ("I have to curl my tail," replies the pig), but a few indicate the animals are engaged in practical activities such as swatting flies or guarding the farm, potentially valid justifications for refusal. The cow also, quite reasonably, points out she cannot help with the baking because she will not fit in the kitchen—but appears to be lying down when she makes the statement, thereby undercutting its effectiveness. Consequently, the illustrations subvert the text's potential for offering another reading. Indeed, they might even be seen as further accentuating the animals' sloth by implying that to them "better things to do" means sleeping or, alternatively, suggesting their excuses are falsehoods. (Such is actually the case in a retelling published by Lowe in the 1940s, where the animals offer reasons for not helping, but the text adds, "They went away from the little red hen as fast as they could, and stayed over at the other end of the farmyard where they could be idle" [*Little*].)

A few versions rely primarily on the text to provide character assessment, sometimes with commentary at the end serving as a moral. A 1927 edition by Platt & Munk conveys little information about the personality of the animals in the illustrations but concludes with the hen reciting an eight-line poem addressing the others' laziness. It is perhaps worth noting that the other animals are never seen lying down; the closest they come to sleep is in one scene where the pig and goose stand upright with eyes closed. Nonetheless, the hen tells them,

> Lazy folk must hungry go,
> For they would not help me sow,
> Neither would they help me reap,—
> They had rather rest and sleep. (Piper n.p.)

In the 1927 edition, the poem is printed as one stanza; a reformatted 1932 edition breaks the verse into two four-line stanzas, the second of which begins:

All alone I baked the bread,
Lazy folk shall not be fed . . . (Piper)

further emphasizing the animals' slothful natures.

Even when indolence is not the primary cause for the conflict, it can figure into some aspect of the interpretation, sometimes in relation to other shortcomings. Florence White Williams's 1918 retelling adopts this approach, obliquely referring to three of the seven deadly sins. The initial description of the first non-participant, the cat, explicitly characterizes her as lazy. The pig, a traditional symbol for gluttony, is equated with that trait: he "did not care what happened so long as he could eat and grow fat," while a later reference to the rat describes him as the "vain rat" who "powdered his nose and admired himself in a mirror." Williams is not consistent in these characterizations, however: at times, each trait is attributed to one animal; elsewhere, all three animals share the same flaw.

Two versions published decades after Williams again draw on some of the same shortcomings as in her retelling, though they assign each character a specific flaw which is then referenced several times visually and textually. A 1996 edition by Rebecca Allen, illustrated by Bob Ostrom, introduces each animal by highlighting its character defect—the cat likes to sleep; the dog, to eat; the pig, to wade in the mud—in the text and with an image depicting the action (or inaction). Although the illustrations throughout the middle of the story do not always reinforce these traits (the animals sometimes collectively engage in recreational activities, possibly for visual variety), at the climax Ostrom creates an image strikingly similar to the introductory one, showing the animals interrupted in their dozing, eating, and wallowing by the scent of the baking bread—a visual reminder that these choices are the cause of their being denied food.

Another edition in which pictures and text contribute to an extended characterization of the non-participants and their shortcomings is a 1985 retelling illustrated by Lucinda McQueen. Again, the text assigns each character a particular flaw, drawing on two of same sins as in Williams:

The cat was very vain.
She brushed her fur,
straightened her whiskers,
and polished her claws all day long.
The dog was always sleepy.
He napped on the front porch swing all day long. (6-9)

McQueen devotes a full opening to each of these traits, using a montage to emphasize the amount of time the cat spends preening and the dog dozing.

The third character, the goose, is "a gossip," who "chatted with the neighbors all day long" (5). Several subsequent illustrations reinforce these traits: in the background of one scene, the dog dozes under a tree and the goose chatters to a rabbit and a squirrel while the practical hen surveys the sprouting wheat in the foreground; on a later opening, the cat admires her face in a hand mirror after refusing to carry the wheat to the mill. As with Allen and Ostrom, just before the climax a double-page spread and its accompanying text reiterate these shortcomings: when the scent of the "baking bread" reaches the animals, "It smelled so delicious that the goose stopped chatting, the cat stopped brushing, and the dog stopped napping" (McQueen 26-27)—though the story does not indicate any actual reform.

Play and Work, or Immaturity and Maturity

A second popular interpretation shifts the primary conflict to work versus play, sometimes coupled with the idea of maturity and immaturity or responsibility and irresponsibility. One tactic found in a number of versions is that of suggesting an age difference between the hen and the other characters so that her emotional maturity thus stems in part from or is visibly conveyed by her physical maturity. Although the nouns used for the animals in most retellings code them as fully grown—"cat" rather than "kitten," for example—in versions contrasting maturity and immaturity, often only the hen assumes the role of an adult; the others engage in childlike activities. In editions where characters are clothed, their attire further accentuates an age difference: the hen usually wears a practical apron and, occasionally, a woman's bonnet, while the other characters sport outfits resembling children's playclothes. An additional method of highlighting the hen's role as a responsible adult occurs when picture books reference her position as mother in the text, illustrations, or both. No other prominent character in any of the traditional versions is ever depicted with offspring.[13]

Many versions that contrast a mature, maternal hen with childlike, playful animals seem pitched at very young audiences, such as preschoolers and toddlers, reflecting situations in their own lives. In 1993, Byron

[13] A recent Australian import by Tina Matthews—where the hen plants a tree that provides shade for her egg and then for her chick's play—does show the other characters as parents: they have children about the same time as the hen does, and their children want to play in the shade of the tree along with the chick. The resolution—allowing the children to play together—seems less about non-participants sharing rewards and more about not punishing one generation for a previous generation's actions.

Barton, well known for his work for that age group, created a retelling that introduces the contrast between work and play on the book's covers: the front portrays the hen and her chicks surrounded by work implements; the back shows the other three animals boating and swimming in a pond. On the inside pages, the carefree non-participants play on swings or fly kites together while the responsible hen, accompanied by her three chicks, threshes and grinds the wheat. Like Galdone, Barton uses the gutter to separate characters with opposing traits. The hen and her chicks labor on one side of an opening, while the frolicsome trio amuse themselves on the other.

Four years after its initial appearance as a traditional picture book, Barton's *Little Red Hen* was reissued as a board book, a format geared for toddlers. Several other versions with similar interpretations also appear in this format. *Richard Scarry's The Little Red Hen,* issued as a "Little Nugget [Board] Book," introduces the contrast textually and visually, beginning with the first two openings. The narrator announces that "The Little Red Hen had to do everything around the house herself," and Scarry draws the hen in a matronly outfit, busily sweeping the walkway while the other characters amuse themselves amid an assortment of toys. On the following page, the text continues, "All the Pig, the Cat, and the Dog wanted to do was play," and the illustration shows the trio flying kites and riding a teeter-totter. Throughout the story, the young characters are surrounded by a variety of playthings—scooters, toy drums, marbles, dolls, jump ropes; only at the end, having learned that they should "[a]lways be helpful," do they handle baking implements instead of toys. Karen Schmidt's 1984 "Pudgy Pal Board Book" signals the contrast between responsibility and recreation on the cover: the mature, aproned hen holds a workbasket as she walks to the left in her fenced-in garden; on the road outside, the three childlike non-participants ride a bicycle facing right. Not only do the characters thus have different outlooks, but they are also literally on opposite sides of the fence.

Several more editions suggest an age difference—immaturity versus maturity—even when the animals are not regularly engaged in play. Often, this is accomplished through the characters' apparel. Milo Winter's illustrations for a 1937 Merrill edition show the three non-participants in outfits with large buttons and rounded collars, indicative of children's clothing, while the hen's only attire is a red-and-white checked apron. As if to further accentuate the characters' youth, the 1938 edition sported a new cover illustration where one of the animals plays on a swing, and the hen has acquired a brood of chicks, which, like the three non-participants, look on with interest as she works. In Margot Voigt's illustrations for a

1941 Samuel Lowe edition, the hen dons a bonnet and apron, while the other animals are shown in short pants or a play dress; two even wear ankle socks and strap shoes not unlike those seen on the era's child star Shirley Temple. Although the characters in Susan Gaber's drawings for Heather Forest's 2006 retelling are not clothed, the illustrations nonetheless hint at very young animals: The dog carries a small blanket everywhere, and the cat plays with—and occasionally tangles herself in—yarn. When all the characters in Gaber's illustrations are together on a page, the hen is often the largest figure, again suggesting the others are not fully grown. Forest's retelling—like several other recent editions—substitutes cake for bread as the final product, thus essentially denying the children dessert rather than dinner until they reform.[14]

In other retellings. rather than being depicted as children, characters simply choose play over chores or otherwise participate in activities suggesting their carefree nature, again implying a lack of responsibility. Often, illustrations rather than text supply this characterization: indeed, many of the versions employing this method use minimal text, with no written reference to the activities depicted. In such versions, multiple openings depict the animals engaged in recreational activities while the hen goes about her tasks. In Janina Domanska's illustrations, for example, the three non-participating animals spend several sequential openings engaging in hijinks over a well until one falls in. Margot Zemach shows the hen toiling while other animals are absorbed in a card game that occupies several spreads. Barry Downard's more frenetic trio sample an assortment of games—cards, pool, and checkers—and even watch "Hairy Trotter" on a television set as the hen assembles the ingredients and bakes the bread. In Dennis Hockerman's illustrations for Patricia and Fredrick McKissack's *The Little Red Hen*, the characters engage in activities ranging from playing marbles and monopoly to bouncing balls, jumping rope, and chasing butterflies.

Other Interpretations

While the two interpretations just described are by far the most common, a few retellings employ what might be considered more politicized approaches. Two versions, by Ethel Hays from 1938 and William Curtis Holdsworth from 1969, perhaps explain why political philosopher Hillel Steiner recalled seeing the story in socialist and communist bookstores in

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[14] See for example Rebecca and Ed Emberley's version for another that ends with cake.

his childhood (80). Both imply a class-based conflict, with the privileged hoping to enjoy the fruit of others' labors. In the 1938 retelling, Hays's introduction of both non-participating animals foregrounds markers of class status and hints at their belief that such status excuses one from manual labor. The first opening places the hen and her chicks, all outfitted in simple rainwear (because even though "it was raining, they were searching for food"—perhaps suggesting greater need) on one side of the page; on the other, a duck with top hat and cane and a goose with high heels and feathered hat look on (5-7). The text states that the goose "cared only for her fine clothes and strutted along with her head in the air," while the duck "thought that since he had a high hat and a monocle and a cane he should not soil his hands" (5-7). The pair's later actions reinforce the initial impression: the goose, shown in pearls and an elegant dress, refuses to help because she is "having a singing lesson and . . . [is] too busy to do any hard work" (17), while the duck "liked to go down to the shore" in warm weather (11); he is later seated with pipe and smoking jacket, declining to help because "he did not want to work in the kitchen" (19). Consequently, although the hen feels she has "done her share of the work" (9), she "roll[s] up her sleeves" (19) and makes the bread. She is thus the only one who dirties her hands and engages in manual labor. Unlike most illustrators, Hays reveals the hen's anger at such treatment; on three openings, rather than heading passively off to her tasks, Hays's hen scowls as she works—in one instance, glaring across the gutter at the pipe-smoking duck.[15]

In a 1969 retelling illustrated by William Curtis Holdsworth, the text contains no characterization of the animals, but the illustrations again suggest a class conflict. Throughout the story, the hen's only piece of attire is an apron, the garb of a servant. In contrast, the cat wears a dress with lacy trim and carries a dainty parasol; she is later seen playing a grand piano, seated beneath her framed portrait (an image similar to one in Hays). The other characters are outfitted for leisure: the dog, in country gentleman's garb, fishes and reads the *Sporting News*; the pig wears a schoolboy's cap and jacket; the turkey carries his archery set. Later, only the hen labors as the others enjoy tea at a linen-covered table. Holdsworth, however, does suggest a belated recognition of the value of communal effort: a final illustration after the last page of text depicts the entire cast working together cultivating a garden.

[15] In 1942, Whitman issued another edition of *The Little Red Hen,* with new illustrations by Hays. Although the text has been pared down to remove references to the characters' attire, activities, and excuses, the three non-participants still wear more elegant attire than the hen, leaving some trace of the concept.