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ENGL 339

Professor Hale

Précis

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### Changes in Form

Briggs, Julia, and Dennis Butts. "Changes in Form." *Children's Literature: an Illustrated History*. Ed. Peter Hunt. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. 130-165. Print.

#### **Evangelical Writing and the Children of the Poor**

During the first half of the century, Education Acts increased literacy among impoverished children. Evangelicals would frequently distribute 'reward books.' Gradually, the harsh and threatening tone of these works gave way to more hopeful examples that played on children's natural positivity rather than their fears. Poor children roaming the streets were such a prominent part of urban life that they were often the subject of literary works as well. Here, too, a "sentimental conviction of the child's innate virtue gradually came to replace the earlier emphasis on original sin" (131).

#### **The Romance of the Family**

This highlighted the everyday trials of the domestic sphere. Although these works attempted to bring hope to the underprivileged as well, they frequently depicted a family unit that was decidedly middle-class (133). Realism and fantasy remained very separate in these works and the children they depicted would always return to the wise and loving mother-figure for guidance (135).

#### **From Fairy-Tales to Fantasy**

Fairy-tales commonly drew on traditional fables, allegories, and folk and nursery tales (137). Although the debate about whether or not these stories were healthy for children picked up again in the 1850s, this genre had already been firmly established and it seems like most people were content as long as fairy-tales contained a lesson to be learned at the end of the story (138). However, it was also understood that fairy-tales' main purpose was to entertain, and they often contained jokes for the parents and well as children. Briggs and Butts note that in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* and *The House of Pomegranates*, "Wilde's elegantly wrought stories...play out the conflict between the Paterian desire for beauty and fine feeling and the impulse to pity and intervention on behalf of human suffering. Like all the best fairy-tales, these speak to children at the same time as they speak over their heads" (140). In the later part of the

century, the mirror that fairy-tales held up to society would become less and less recognizable and give way to fantasy.

### **Empire and Adventure**

During the second half of the century the British Empire was vastly expanded. Briggs and Butts note that “it is not surprising then that this interest in exotic places overseas, offering the possibility of exciting adventure within the hegemony of British imperialism, encouraged boys and girls to read adventure stories describing similar events in which the heroes and (less often) the heroines were young people like themselves” (149). Like all children’s literature during this time, adventure stories attempted to instill virtues in their young readers such as “honesty, loyalty, pluck, and resourcefulness” (151).

### **Schools and School Stories**

More than anything, these were a display of the significant increase in prosperity that Britain experienced from the middle of the century onward. More people than ever before belonged to the prosperous middle class that could afford to send their sons to boarding school (153). These stories often reflected the promotion of sport while still instilling more serious moral attitudes in their readers (154). Later on stories about girls’ schools would become increasingly common, but they would make little use of the instances of dormitory that were so common before (158).

### **Periodicals, Publishing, and Illustrated Books**

Publishing increased significantly during this time due to increases literacy. Methods for printing, binding, and illustrating books improved (162). This both allowed more books to be published and reduced the price of the books themselves. Often, young readers would access literature through magazines. As a result, a significant number of magazines arose during the nineteenth century that were specifically geared towards young readers. Children’s literature also became more gender divided in the last decades of the nineteenth century (162). Briggs and Butts conclude by saying that these factors had come together to bring children’s literature outside the nursery or classroom and establish it as something legitimate in its own right (165).