

Dr. Kenneth Kidd
LIT 4334; Fall 2004
T 7; R 7&8
Section 5878

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Hours: T 8-9; R 9 &
by appointment
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The Golden Age of Children's Literature

This course is a literary, historical, and cultural exploration of the first so-called "Golden Age" of children's literature in Britain and the United States, which runs from about the mid-1800s to the early twentieth century. We'll take this group of books seriously, even as we question the very conceit of a golden age. To write for children during this period was neither an exclusive nor a problematic calling; many of the authors we'll meet wrote for children and adults alike, and would probably have found puzzling contemporary disdain for "kiddie lit." We'll consider the stratification of these books, some of which are known for their innovation, others for their affirmation of tradition. With the help of Rita Smith, Curator of our very own Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature, we'll look at one of the important periodicals for which many authors wrote, *St. Nicholas*, edited by Mary Mapes Dodge. Our scholarly resources will include articles from academic journals as well as chapters from longer studies of children's literature, selected and packaged carefully for your convenience and satisfaction.

Although I will sometimes provide you with background information, for which you are responsible, we will conduct class as a seminar, which means that participation is vital. Please come to class every day on time having read the assigned material. Be ready to share your responses. On occasion I may ask you to work in small groups.

Required Books

Johann David Wyss, *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812)
Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857)
Mary Mapes Dodge, *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates* (1865)
Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)
Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868)
Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick* (1868)
George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871)
Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty* (1877)
Robert Louise Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (1883)
Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (1894)
L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* (1900)
Gene Stratton-Porter, *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909)
Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (1911)

All books are at Goering's/Bageland near campus.

There is also a small coursepacket from Xerographic, available at their store (927 NW 13th St).

Attendance Policy

Your participation is vital, and attendance is mandatory. I'll allow three unexcused absences; beyond that, you'll need to document not to be penalized. For each subsequent missed class without a doctor's note I will reduce your final course grade one-half of a letter grade. If you are not here when I take attendance -- usually at the beginning of class, but sometimes at the end -- you will be counted absent. If you have attendance problems, please do not sign up for this class.

Assignments and Grading

Memos (10)	25%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	25%
Essay 3	30%

Your course grade will be based on the following assignments. There are no exams; your entire grade comes from your writing. This means that while you won't have to remember all of the texts in detail, you will be writing about most of them. Because we have a lot to do in class, I don't plan to devote class time to writing issues, but I'm very available during office hours for help. I'm always happy to read drafts.

I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes if I feel that students are too far behind in the reading or if discussion lags; should we have quizzes, they will be averaged with the memos.

Memos. Over the semester, you will write 10 reading responses of 1-2 s-s., typed pages each. Out of some thwarted business urge I call such a response a "memo." The memo is simply a short meditation on the reading. Your memo should offer a response to the book as a whole and to any article also assigned for that day; don't turn in a memo if you haven't finished all of the reading. You may address a number of issues or focus more in-depth on one or two; just be as specific as you can, and support your responses with examples and details from the text.

I do not expect you to have a thorough interpretation, but your memo should offer some kind of evaluation or analysis of the book as a whole. In other words, it should be more than simply random or unconnected thoughts about the work. If you like, you may make use of outside readings (biographical sketches, scholarly articles, websites, etc.). This assignment is designed to stimulate class discussion, and to help you remember the texts and generate paper ideas.

You may write these at any point in the semester, beginning with the second week, but you may not do more than one memo per week, and I will accept them only in class on Thursday. Do not email them to me, or leave them in my mailbox. I will return them the following week. They do not need to be perfect, but please try to correct spelling and typing errors. I will grade each memo and average the grades.

Essay 1. Reading Auto-ethnography. Why, what, when, and how do you read? Did reading play a formative role in your development as a child or teenager? Have reading and writing been therapeutic, helping you address personal and/or social issues? To what genres are you typically drawn -- science fiction, comic books, mystery, romance -- and why? Do you prefer fiction or non-fiction? Have your tastes changed? What might account for such shifts? Do you read for pleasure, knowledge, or distraction?

I don't usually ask students to write personal essays, and I do not expect this essay to be confessional in the modern talk-show sense. This is an exercise in reconstruction and speculation; you are both the ethnographer and the subject. Write a 4-5 pp. double-spaced pp. analysis of your past and current reading practices. Attempt to organize your observations around themes or periods of your life. I'm particularly interested in your childhood reading habits, but if they don't seem that crucial, that's fine. Obviously you can't address all of the above questions, so just answer the ones that seem useful. You are welcome to experiment with format, as long as you chronicle your history as a reader in some accessible way. Try to emphasize one or two particularly significant experiences -- I call these literacy anecdotes. Be prepared to discuss this history in class (I will NOT ask you to reveal personal information).

Essay 2. Report on *St. Nicholas*. For your second essay, you will read through and report on about six months' worth of the 19th-century periodical *St. Nicholas* (a monthly publication), easily the most important children's magazine of the nineteenth century, perhaps still the most important. I will assign each of you a six-month period in a given year, and you'll look at the volumes in the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature in Library East. Rita Smith, the Curator, will help with this process. In your essay, you will offer a descriptive analysis of *St. Nicholas* as a children's magazine based on the issues you've examined, focusing questions of narrative, textual sophistication, audience, and whatever else seems appropriate. You'll need some kind of organizing argument or observation that you can then support by examples. You'll probably want to provide an overview and then concentrate on two or three features that seem indicative of the magazine's purpose and nature. We'll talk more about this assignment in class. 5-7 pp. double-spaced.

Essay 3. Open Topic. Your final essay is open topic literary/cultural analysis. The only requirement is that you focus on literature from the period we're exploring, and that in your analysis, you make use of relevant scholarship. You may work with as few or as many primary texts as you like, but you need to draw from at least 4 scholarly sources (articles, books or book chapters -- NOT websites, unless they're also scholarly). You may return to texts we've read, read additional texts, or do more work with *St. Nicholas*. 7-10 pp. double-spaced.

Grading Scheme. I give A's to essays using an original and spirited argument to illuminate complexities of language and theme. I give B+'s to well-organized, well-developed, relatively error-free essays with sparks of originality or daring, and B's to competent essays needing more complex development and/or clearer focus. Lower grades mean greater problems with development, structure, and grammar. Recurrent grammatical errors lower the grade; occasional spelling errors and typos don't. The best essays sustain complex and or audacious arguments; a good B essay capably summarizes and compares themes.

Reading Schedule

August

- 24 Introduction(s)
- 26 Carpenter, "Prologue"; Griswold, "Introduction"

- 31 *The Swiss Family Robinson*

September

- 2 *The Swiss Family Robinson*; Rita Smith visits

- 7 *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
- 9 *Alice* continued; Carpenter, "Ch. 2. *Alice* and the Mockery of God"

- 14 *Tom Brown's School Days*
- 16 *Tom Brown* continued; Clark, "Introduction"

- 21 *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates*
- 23 *Hans Brinker* continued; Griswold, "Ch. 10. Sunny Land, Angry Waters"
- Essay 1 due.**

- 28 *Little Women*
- 30 *Little Women* continued

October

- 5 *Ragged Dick*
- 7 *Ragged Dick* continued; Hendler, "Ch. 3. Pandering in the Public Sphere"

- 12 *At the Back of the North Wind*
- 14 *North Wind* continued

- 19 *Black Beauty*
 21 *Black Beauty* continued; Hollindale, "Plain Speaking"
 26 *Treasure Island*
 28 *Treasure Island* continued; Wood, "Gold Standards and Silver Subversions"
Essay 2 due.

November

- 2 Kipling, *The Jungle Book*
 4 *The Jungle Book* continued; Kidd, "Ch. 3. Wolf-Boys, Street Rats..."
 9 *The Wizard of Oz*
 11 Veterans Day; no class
 16 *The Wizard of Oz* continued
 18 *A Girl of the Limberlost*
 23 *A Girl* continued; Copeland, "Ch. 4. The Wild and Wild Animal Characters..."
 25 Thanksgiving; no class
 30 *The Secret Garden*

December

- 2 *The Secret Garden*; Phillips, "The Mem Sahib..."
 7 course wrap-up and evaluations. **Essay 3 due.**