
Colonial Girls' Literature and the Politics of Archives in the Digital Age

Michelle J. Smith

The University of Melbourne

Kristine Moruzi

The University of Alberta

The history of colonial children's literature is intriguingly complex. Most of the books and magazines that colonial children read, by both British and colonial authors, were produced in London and then shipped to the colonies. Yet alongside these texts are others that were written and published in the colonies themselves, only occasionally making their way back to the metropole. Some colonial novels for young people remain well known, like Mary Grant Bruce's Billabong series or L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*. But what of the many other texts, the ones that were published in Canada, in Australia, in New Zealand, and seem to have disappeared from the history of children's literature? Attempts to recover this history are complicated by the canonisation of particular children's texts, a process that narrows the definition of the field to texts popularised by the academy through teaching and research. Moreover, historical children's literature can be difficult to make accessible to scholars and students because many of the texts are out of print, which may have contributed to the under-representation of certain texts in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Critical editions of historical children's literature tend to concentrate on frequently taught texts, which reinforces those texts as the most interesting and important in the field.

The politics of archival collections reveal other problems and complexities for those researching historical children's literature that are often related to the "value" attributed to these historic texts. Researchers of historical literature for young people often struggle to locate and access primary sources and find reliable biographical information for their authors. In an era in which digitisation is revolutionising historical and literary scholarship, our ability to not only indefinitely preserve, but to dramatically increase the accessibility of popular and non-canonical texts is revolutionary for research. Digital archives hold out the promise of increasing knowledge about historical children's literature in general, especially for maligned series books that were rarely collected by libraries and other publications deemed of little importance, such as books and magazines for girl readers.

The politics of how children's books are collected within print archives and digitised for online repositories have influenced our work with Clare Bradford (Deakin University) on the collaborative project "From Colonial to Modern: Transnational Girlhood in Australian, New Zealand and Canadian Print Culture, 1840-1940." The comparative nature of a project that brings together texts from three nations and a scope that includes a range of print culture – specifically books, magazines, advertising and school readers – has caused several difficulties in locating and accessing archival material. The significance of the archival challenges this project has generated and the likely ways to overcome them hold the potential to inform future digitisation and preservation work in the fields of children's and colonial literatures.

Our project aims to define and document girls' print culture, including ephemeral texts, in three former British colonies and, as such, needs to be comprehensive in its initial archival phase. Each of the three scholars involved has been assigned initial responsibility for identifying and reading texts within a national corpus. Each source text is then documented in a central database and important texts that need to be read by the other team members are flagged to enable the comparative aspect of the project. Many archives and libraries that we have visited only hold one or two titles of interest to our project, necessitating visits to dozens of different locations in different countries to enable the development of a comprehensive picture of colonial girls' reading. While colonial texts are often less accessible for private purchase and their holdings in colonial locations are scant compared to texts published in Britain, young people's novels and periodicals of this period published in New Zealand are exceedingly rare. Our comparative aims have been complicated by the fact that the smaller number of New Zealand girls' texts are often only available in hard copy in the National Library of New Zealand. Unless these books and magazines are photographed in their entirety – a laborious process – on a research trip, they are closed off to the rest of the project team and cannot be effectively compared with Australian and Canadian examples. Moreover, the technical difficulties of reading and commenting on a series of jpg files can prevent efficient comparisons.

Some of the most ephemeral texts are not collected systematically or at all. At the same time, our sense of the "missing" texts – those popular girls' books and magazines that have already crumbled to dust without preservation in libraries and archives – is inevitably incomplete. Better information is available for British girls' texts, where the commitment to preserving and protecting these texts was facilitated by institutions like the British Library and university libraries with long histories, like those at Cambridge and Oxford. Nevertheless, even colonial girls' periodicals that are well documented pose access challenges, with complete runs of individual magazines rarely located in a single library or archive. Some of the most important Canadian girls' periodicals for our project were published by religious organisations, and are located at a variety of different church archives, with difficult conditions for accessing and copying materials that once again inhibit collaboration and comparison.

This brief list of problems posed by our project invites questions about how young people's print culture is collected and preserved. However, in this age of digitisation, especially for out-of-

copyright items (which comprise the majority of the texts of interest to us), it might be assumed that a significant proportion of the three national corpuses might be no more than a Google search away. Our research on “From Colonial to Modern” suggests that physical archives are still absolutely essential in the research of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century children’s literature, as digitisation projects often overlook the relevance and usefulness of historical children’s texts or digitise isolated texts without a systematic rationale for their collection.

The Age of Digitisation

Resources such as the Internet Archive’s Text Archive provide freely accessible scanned copies of out-of-copyright books including a Children’s Library of more than two thousand items (as of writing, *Goody-Two Shoes* is the most popular title with 1.5 million downloads).¹ Project Gutenberg is similarly freely accessible; however many of the versions are not reliable for scholarly examination in that they have been transcribed and lack pagination. For our project, paratextual matter, such as advertisements for other titles by the same publisher, which provide valuable leads to additional ephemeral titles, is not present in transcribed editions. Nevertheless, both of these resources, as the popularity of *Goody-Two Shoes* attests, make some out-of-print and obscure books widely available to the general reading public, although fewer colonial girls’ texts are available than British or American texts.

Other useful digitisation projects that have overcome the problems of transcription are unavailable to independent researchers or researchers at universities without a subscription to a particular database. For instance, the Children’s Literature Digital Resources (CLDR) project, which includes approximately 1,000 mostly Australian pre-1945 children’s texts, is hosted on AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource and requires subscription access. As AustLit subscription is concentrated in Australian institutions, it means these digitised texts are largely unavailable to international scholars and complicates any collaborative research.

Though the scholars who created the CLDR preferred an open-access model (Mallan and Patterson), being part of AustLit (which ensures an ongoing digital presence) and the inclusion of scholarly content in the archive may have required closed access. Nevertheless, digitisation projects such as the CLDR are among the most useful for scholars because researchers have been involved in the survey of out-of-copyright texts and selection with regard to research potential. The ability to search for terms such as “girl”, “domestic” or “school” across the entire set of full-texts collected in such a database also enables efficient identification of novels that might be intended for girls, but which have not already been identified as such in existing bibliographies and criticism. The aim of the CLDR is to “preserve...a period of Australian history and literary culture” (Mallan and Patterson, 2008). While they constitute an extremely valuable resource, the digitised texts that comprise the CLDR, and the links it provides to pre-existing digital copies, are an incomplete and fragmented portion of that history and literary culture. For key Australian girls’ authors whose works are long out of print – such as Lillian Pyke, Constance Mackness, Marion Downes, and even Australia’s most famous colonial children’s author Ethel Turner – only a few works for each author are digitised within the CLDR. This incomplete digital archive, which is intended to preserve and

promote the history of children's literature, may have the unintended consequence of limiting the texts by a particular author to be selected for further research and publications.

The problem of gaps in individual archives and across digital archives is a prevalent issue. Despite extensive digitising work by companies like Google, not every published text is available digitally. Even those that have been digitised are not necessarily freely accessible. As Charles Henry and Kathlin Smith (2010, p.110) explain in their survey of digital texts available to humanities scholars, "Related to the problem of uneven collections is the question of what is missing from the digitized collections. Institutional collections do not overlap as much as people might think". Commercial publishers have different imperatives than scholarly digitisation projects or non-profit resources such as the Internet Archive. For example, Gale Cengage has digitised large swathes of British and American newspapers and magazines. Its "19th Century UK Periodicals" database has over two million scanned pages in its first two series ("New Readerships" and "Empire") and includes an immensely useful collection of British children's periodicals. Since it sells subscriptions to its databases to institutions such as universities and public libraries, it needs to ensure that its digitisation projects have broad possibilities for use.

Unsurprisingly, large-scale commercial projects like these have thus far largely ignored historical periodicals for young people from Canada, Australia and New Zealand, although they have digitised the internationally known *Girl's Own Paper* from 1880-1900. Even this digitisation can be limiting, however, since the company has taken a frustratingly literal approach to its definition of the nineteenth century (and in opposition to scholarly definitions that often extend to the advent of World War I), and the coverage of the *Girl's Own Paper* ends abruptly on December 31, 1900 despite a more natural break in the periodical's history of 1908, when the magazine changed editors, titles, and periodicity. The lack of comparable databases across colonial periodicals owes something to the relatively small number of texts produced in a colonial context, problems of access to original documents for an international publisher, and smaller markets in which to sell the finished database of scanned items.

Colonial girls' magazines are particularly scarce, with few complete print runs, yet they provide an intriguingly different perspective on colonial print culture. For example, the only two complete runs of Ethel and Lilian Turner's magazine *The Parthenon* (1889-1892) are held in Australian libraries at the State Library of New South Wales and Fryer Library at the University of Queensland. The Victorian and New South Wales school papers are another vital source of Australian children's culture, yet they, too, can be difficult to access. Scholars at Deakin University have indexed the contents of the Victorian papers from 1928-1930 and 1940, but the texts themselves are unavailable, in part because the number of contributors make copyright determinations difficult.

In Canada, access to children's print culture has been facilitated by the Canadian Institute for Historic Microreproductions (CIHM), which is responsible for the preservation of numerous early Canadian texts. As part of an ongoing digitisation initiative of the CIHM microfiche, Early Canadiana Online (which is available through libraries and to individual subscribers at a relatively modest fee of \$100) is currently digitising the microfiche as well as continuing to expand its online

presence by including periodicals that were not part of the original microfiche collection. At this point, some periodicals are still missing. For example, the United Church of Canada Archives holds the only complete runs of two girls' magazines, *Pleasant Hours: A Paper for Canadian Girls* (1926-9) and *The Canadian Girl* (1930-61), and they have yet to be digitised (nor do plans exist to do so). At the same time, however, through its Canadiana Discovery Portal, the digitisation efforts of other institutions, including universities, museums, and archives, are being consolidated within a single search engine. The University of Alberta, for example, has digitised over 35,000 newspaper issues (and 2.5 million articles) focusing on the settlement and development of the Canadian West. The full-text search capabilities of their database make finding specific articles relating to girls and girlhood relatively easy, although sometimes the sheer number of search results can be overwhelming. Nonetheless, these capabilities provide us with different kinds of information than we could have found through visits to the physical archive.

New possibilities for scholarship are available because of these efforts to make historical books and magazines available online. Jeffrey Rydberg-Cox (2006, p. 1) observes that

[d]igital technologies have had a profound impact on the way that many scholars in the humanities conduct and share their research. Once a text is digitised, even the simplest search facilities allow users to interact with and study texts in entirely new ways....At the same time, such electronic resources can radically change the audience and reach of the work undertaken by humanities scholars.

Digitisation projects clearly offer new opportunities for scholars to examine familiar materials in different ways. At the same time, the community made possible through digitisation and the internet can become much broader as more people in disparate locations can access and comment on these texts. The overall picture for research into colonial girls' print culture, however, is that a relatively small number of primary sources are available digitally, which is further complicated by our project's intent to draw in works with less cultural cachet, such as girls' magazines and school readers, alongside literary texts and our need to compare British, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand texts. Those novels that are available in scanned format from the Internet Archive, Project Gutenberg, HathiTrust, Early Canadiana Online and the CLDR are welcome contributions to a project that aims to document the history of colonial girlhood across hundreds of texts, but inevitably we are still reliant on visits to physical archives in three different countries in order to locate many of our resources. While our work on British girls' fiction indicates that many of these novels can be bought for affordable prices online, as can the most popular girls' periodical the *Girl's Own Paper*, colonial girls' fiction is not as readily available in affordable second-hand copies, perhaps due to smaller initial print-runs. Many Australian, Canadian and New Zealand girls' novels simply cannot be purchased at all, and others are sold at high prices to collectors of antiquarian books.

Physical Archives

Physical archives, which are often located in library special collections, provide the resources from which digitisation projects are made possible and are therefore vitally important for improving the

digital availability of texts that occupy these “digital gaps,” such as colonial girls’ print culture. Yet even as we endorse the increased digitisation of these texts, we must consider the implications of widespread electronic availability. As Christine L. Borgman (2007, p.217) explains,

Digitizing cultural records and artifacts makes them more malleable and mutable, which creates interesting possibilities for analyzing, decontextualizing, and recombining objects. Yet digitizing objects separates them from their origins, exacerbating humanists’ problems in maintaining the context. Removing text from its physical embodiment in a fixed object may delete features that are important to researchers, such as line and page breaks, front, illustrations, choices of paper, bindings, and marginalia.

For girls’ books and magazines in particular, the bookmarks, pressed flowers and slips of paper containing notes or drawings inserted by their original owners are also erased. The value of a magazine article often emerges from the context in which it is published, a context that becomes more difficult to uncover in digital form. The sense of a book’s weight and size disappears. The other contributors to, and the competing perspectives in, a particular issue can disappear if the researcher only examines a single article that meets her search criteria.

Although our research depends upon, and indeed is made possible by, the availability of digital repositories, the physical archive remains an important component of our project. At the University of Alberta, for example, many of the turn-of-the-century books that are typically found in special collections are located in the stacks. It is possible to physically browse the books that have to do with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada. Books by British author Bessie Marchant are located near to those by Canadian-born Agnes Maude Machar. This browsing ability led us to Beatrice Embree’s *The Girls of Miss Clevelands*, a 1920 school story dedicated “To Canadian School Girls – Past and Present.” The catalogue record for this book has no subject identification, making it virtually impossible to locate through a keyword search. The serendipity of this discovery, a little known text by a little known author, highlights the challenges of finding primary sources in the field of historical children’s literature. Yet even once the text is found, the research continues. Many of the authors of children’s texts have fallen into relative obscurity. Beatrice Embree, for example, seems to have published only *The Girls of Miss Cleveland’s*. She has no entry in the Dictionary of Canadian Dictionary online, and the Early Canadian Women Writers database has scant details.

Canada is home to a number of significant special collections of children’s books, among them the University of British Columbia’s Arkley Collection of Early and Historical Children’s Literature, which holds Canadian, British and American children’s books from the late eighteenth century to 1939. The Canadian material has helpfully been catalogued by Sheila Egoff, and the catalogue is available online. The Osborne Collection of Early Children’s Books at the Toronto Public Library has a large collection of British, American, and Canadian texts for children, based on an initial donation of 2,000 rare and notable children’s books by British librarian Edgar Osborne in 1949. Since then, the library has continued to expand its holdings and now has over 80,000 volumes in its

children's literature collections. In New Zealand, the Dorothy Neal White Collection contains about 8,000 titles published up to 1940.

Library special collections of children's literature have often been shaped with very different interests in mind than those of contemporary researchers and not all have dedicated children's literature librarians to develop them or the resources to catalogue their contents. A number of significant library collections of children's literature originated from private collectors, such as the Pound Collection of children's books at the State Library of Victoria. Ken Pound's collection of 25,000 books was sourced from market stalls and second-hand stores at a time when Australian children's books had not yet appreciated to the high values for which they are often sold to rare book collectors today. Pound's collection has depth in some areas, for instance in boys' adventure novels and edition variants for popular authors, such as more than ninety-five editions of Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians*.² Yet because of Pound's own interests and preferences as a collector, his holdings of Australian girls' popular fiction lack the same level of comprehensiveness.

Another important Australian site for children's literature is the Children's Literature Research Collection (CLRC) at the State Library of South Australia. The collection spans from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries and consists of more than 65,000 items. However, a large proportion of the CLRC titles are not yet indexed in the online catalogue. Researchers must travel to Adelaide and consult a card catalogue to even learn which non-indexed titles the collection contains, and those that are indexed in the electronic catalogue cannot be found by searching for the CLRC. For a project like "From Colonial to Modern," in which we aim to build a more comprehensive picture of girls' colonial reading than can be determined from existing bibliographies by Marcie Muir, Maurice Saxby, Betty Gilderdale and Sheila Egoff, the inability to search within a collection narrows the potential for discovery of lesser-known authors and titles.

The recently catalogued Marcie Muir collection of 7,600 items was acquired by the National Library of Australia in 2007. Across a lifetime of work in the field, Muir aimed to collect and document every single children's book about Australia or published within Australia, a process that helped her to compile the invaluable three-volume bibliography *Australian Children's Books* on the subject. The Muir collection, with its aims for comprehensiveness, does not suffer from the same "gaps" as other private collections of children's books and holds excellent potential as a source for digitisation, though at present only 16 titles from the period 1891-1946 have been digitised. Nevertheless, for our own project, the variable expanse of girlhood from young girls of approximately twelve to unmarried women in their early twenties means that even the NLA Muir collection of children's literature does not contain all of the Australian fiction that we need to consider.

The physical archives of children's literature discussed here vary in their comprehensiveness and the completeness of their cataloguing for identifying suitable texts. Yet even with the acquisition of such meticulous collections as the NLA Muir collection, the study of colonial children's literatures by scholars worldwide will remain rare if they must travel the long distance to Australia or New Zealand to access them. Similarly such books can never be set in university courses, as is possible

for British and American children's literature of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century that has been republished in new editions or is available freely online.

Significance and Implications

Ten years ago, as the digitisation of special collection materials was beginning in earnest, Peter B. Hirtle described the success of the Making of America collections of nineteenth-century American serials and monographs undertaken by Cornell University and the University of Michigan. Hirtle (2002, p.43) not only concluded that online, freely available special collections material with appropriate metadata results in much higher usage of the materials, but that digitisation can change the nature of the source itself: "In hard copy the material may have seemed obscure; when digitized it becomes a core resource". For the field of colonial girls' print culture and colonial children's print culture in general, the systematic digitisation of texts is essential to fostering future scholarship in an area that has been the subject of little scholarly attention but which has significant potential to contribute to national and transnational literary histories.

While the era of digitisation promises to break down financial and geographical barriers to literary research, our archival work on "From Colonial to Modern" reveals some of the major impediments to the creation of comprehensive digital collections of historical children's literature. The decisions of library collection managers of the past one-and-a-half centuries, who could not have foreseen the research potential of young people's texts, will continue to have a substantial impact on the comprehensiveness of digitised collections of children's literature into the future. The overwhelming commercial interest in canonical texts, or texts published in America and Britain, means that historical children's print culture produced in the colonies might become further marginalised as it is excluded from the digital revolution. Non-commercial Australian and Canadian digitisation projects could serve to mitigate this problem, but if international access by individual scholars is not free or affordable then such nationally-based collections become limited to scholars within the country of origin where database subscriptions will be concentrated.

While we have likely already "lost" some ephemeral print texts for children produced in the nineteenth century, the age of digitisation may foster a second set of disappearances. If digitised texts become the primary way that scholars source historical literature then those texts that are excluded will be situated outside a newly forged digital "canon." The scarcity of New Zealand colonial children's texts and small commercial potential for their digitisation, for example, might see them become invisible in a future in which the majority of research on historical literature is conducted with digitised copies. The present transitional moment, in which special collections of printed texts are still being maintained and developed, while digitisation projects are progressively scanning millions of pages of text, is the ideal time to consider how the politics that have influenced print collections, especially those relating to childhood and nation, might continue to be perpetuated in a digital research landscape.

Endnotes

¹The digital resources that will be discussed in this section include the following repositories:

- Children's Literature Digital Resources Project, AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource, <http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/ChildLit/CLDR>
- Early Canadiana Online, <http://eco.canadiana.ca/>
- Ebook and Texts Archive, Internet Archive, <http://www.archive.org>
- Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org>

²See Bradford for a fuller discussion of the Pound collection and analysis of its variant editions of *Seven Little Australians*.

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Biographical Note

Kristine Moruzi has recently completed a Grant Notley Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, where she examined representations of girlhood in Canadian children's literature between 1840 and 1940. Her book, *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850-1915*, was recently published by Ashgate Press. Refereed publications based on her research have appeared in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, *Australian Journal of Victorian Studies*, *Women's Writing*, and *Victorian Periodicals Review*.

Michelle J. Smith is an ARC Postdoctoral Fellow in English at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls, 1880-1915* (Palgrave, 2011), which was recently won the ESSE award for best first book (English Literature). Michelle has published numerous book chapters, primarily on the intersections of gender and empire in print culture, as well as articles in *Continuum*, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, *English Literature in Transition* and *The Lion and the Unicorn*.