

## Preface

LITERATURE for children is forged from the same enduring elements as literature for adults: powerful narrative, unforgettable characters, illustration that stirs the imagination, and insights that engage the mind and heart. Children’s books with these qualities often shine for generations, some achieving landmark fame. A few such books ultimately enter the canon of classics of children’s literature.

This catalogue presents one hundred children’s books of this caliber, printed between 1600 and 2000 and exhibited at The Grolier Club in New York City from December 10, 2014, to February 7, 2015.

*One Hundred Books Famous in Children’s Literature* traces its beginnings to The Grolier Club’s long-standing interest in mounting a legacy exhibition of children’s books. Coinciding with that interest was a question I explored with two fellow Grolier Club members in 2008: Is there a detailed chronology of children’s books for collectors? The subject arose at a seminar on children’s book history in London; however, we reached no conclusion there. I continued to consider the question, but like the seed that did not “come up” in Ruth Krauss’s 1945 children’s book, *The Carrot Seed*, no chronology arose that fully described key children’s titles in bibliographic and historic detail from the Western creation of movable type in the fifteenth century through the twentieth century, the burgeoning age of the picture book. My interest therefore shifted from finding a chronology to creating one for collectors. With Grolier Club encouragement and support, the project expanded in 2010 to become this catalogue and public exhibition.

Throughout the project I conferred closely with an advisory committee of nine international experts – scholars, curators, librarians, collectors, and dealers – who worked shoulder to shoulder with me for five years to bring this collector’s tool into existence. Their advice, expertise, and shared passion fueled our deliberations (always congenial and driving for consensus), and ultimately affirmed my decisions on selecting, borrowing, and describing the one hundred famous children’s books seen in this catalogue.



SELECTING these books began with the fundamental question that accompanies any list: what are the criteria for inclusion? Curators of the five previous *Grolier Hundred* exhibitions,<sup>1</sup> as well as the curator of the Club’s last major children’s book exhibition,<sup>2</sup> similarly faced this challenge. Our advisory committee began by defining the term “famous,” considering books so described as *widely known at the time of their creation, and admired over following generations*. Within this broad definition we focused more narrowly on a book’s *literary merit* and *popularity*. Assessing literary merit included considering scholarly and literary reviews, literary honors, and prizes bestowed. Establishing popularity required an examination of literary and public opinions of the time, as well as publication and sales records where available. Post-1850 books in particular required assessment of their cultural

contrail as they passed into the vernacular, where their social impact was seen in “spinoff” plays, operas, songs, films, games, toys, and the vast array of branded merchandise of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We agreed that “famous” was not always the same as “influential” or “important,” and that our selection of famous books was an effort to label them neither as “best” nor as “most” famous. We also took to heart author and essayist Adam Gopnik’s reflection that “a book that has crossed that three-generation barrier has a good chance at permanence.”<sup>3</sup> This is one of the reasons our list includes relatively few books published after 1960: such books have not fully withstood the generational test of time.

Many of the books selected have never been out of print and are still widely known; others are unfamiliar to present-day children, such as *The Governess* [13], *Hymns in Prose for Children* [16], *A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible* [17], *The Parent’s Assistant* [20], *Holiday House* [30], and *Jessica’s First Prayer* [37]. These books, exceptionally popular with children and adolescents for generations, had all but disappeared from the literary mainstream by the First World War, and typically are unknown today, even to adults. Some were the pre-to-late Victorian equivalent of today’s Newbery or Caldecott children’s book award winners, while others were mass market successes; their overwhelming fame in their own time, and their endurance for long periods thereafter, required their inclusion here.

Another selection decision was how to define the term “children.” For purposes of this exhibition, children are those through twelve years of age, with the result that such famous adolescent books as *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* were deemed outside of scope. This decision raised other thorny problems, including that of adult books appropriated by children. Three books of this nature achieved and sustained such great fame in juvenile form that they could not be omitted: *Aesop’s Fables* [8], *Robinson Crusoe* [7], and *Gulliver’s Travels* [9]; these last two are exhibited in adult and juvenile editions, giving clear evidence of this kind of appropriation.

Additionally, “literature” was defined broadly to include works of fiction and nonfiction (ninety-five and five books), as well as prose and poetry (eighty-seven and thirteen books). These diverse forms of children’s literature are displayed thematically in the exhibition to enhance visual interest; by contrast, this catalogue uses a chronological organization to enable readers to study the development of children’s literature, from early forms of instructional and devotional primers to exuberant expressions of rhymes, tales, stories, novels, and picture books. Presenting the books in these different ways assists collectors in seeing the significant categories into which the books fall, identified in exhibition cases under the headings of Fairy Tales & Fables, Nursery Rhymes, Faith, Learning, Poetry, Girls & Boys, Animals, Fantasy, Adventure, Novelties, and Toys.

Our attempt throughout was to select first or early editions wherever possible, subject to loan limitations or, in some cases, difficulties in bibliographically confirming precise editions. Children’s books published before 1800, as well as some later titles, tend to be very rare, their scarcity reflected in the less than perfect condition of some books exhibited. Such was the case with the earliest known surviving edition of *The New-England Primer* [4] (with a catechism by John Cotton, from 1727), whose time-worn upper wrapper has been sympa-

thetically conserved, allowing this historic holding at the American Antiquarian Society to be displayed as a treasure in the exhibition.

Our selections, constrained by the number “one hundred,” resulted in slim representation of nursery rhymes and fairy tales in the last century of our four-hundred-year time frame. We chose instead to include several earlier books that showcased individual nursery rhymes and fairy tales to great advantage, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* [40], shown as one of Walter Crane’s famous picture books, *The House that Jack Built* [43], shown as a celebrated picture book by Randolph Caldecott, and *Cinderella* [69], shown in its gift book edition illustrated by Arthur Rackham. We took a similar approach to *A Visit from St. Nicholas* (*’Twas the Night before Christmas*) [26], selecting the McLoughlin Bros. picture-book version of Clement Moore’s landmark poem, illustrated in glorious color by Thomas Nast.

As the two-year selection process drew to a close, we recognized that the books chosen would be most familiar to members of an Anglo-American audience, mirroring the collecting interests of many at The Grolier Club as well as our primarily American exhibition viewership. The final tally of titles by publishing origin was as follows: United Kingdom (fifty-six), United States (thirty-three), Germany (three), France (two), Switzerland (one), Italy (one), Denmark (one), Czech Republic (one), Canada (one), and Australia (one). Five books not originally written in English are honored in their own language as well as in early or otherwise important English translations in the exhibition (designated A and B): *Orbis Pictus* [1], the fairy tales of Perrault [5] and the Brothers Grimm [25], Hans Christian Andersen’s tales [28], and *Struwelpeter* [31]. Additionally, the first American edition of John Newbery’s *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (issued in Worcester, Massachusetts, by Isaiah Thomas) [11B] is shown with the earliest surviving British edition held in North America – both volumes extremely rare – because the American copy, held by The Morgan Library & Museum, is the only one known to have the ball/pincushion issued with the book still associated and intact.



BORROWING books for the exhibition was another two-year endeavor. The project was fortunate to receive warm support from twenty-two North American lenders, half institutions and half private collectors. This generosity made possible a number of borrowing choices. For instance, how best to represent a famous series of books? In one case the first book in a series, *The Blue Fairy Book* [51] from Andrew Lang’s twelve-volume *Color Fairy Books*, was indeed the most famous. In another, it was the eighth book in an initial series of twelve volumes, *The Poky Little Puppy* [87] from the first-issue *Little Golden Books*, that was best known and most frequently reprinted. Another choice was how to balance the hope to exhibit the earliest edition of a book with the desire to show it with its most famous illustration. This resulted in the borrowing of a slightly later edition of *A Child’s Garden of Verses* [49] that included Charles Robinson’s delightful illustrations (shown here in the limited edition), which are those associated with the book by many collectors.

I worked with children’s book historian and bibliographer Jill Shefrin to locate and borrow books of exceptional rarity or provenance, to provide the greatest viewing pleasure for col-

lectors. We were fortunate to be able to borrow many books that were rare, such as William Blake's illuminated *Songs of Innocence* [19]; some that were exceedingly rare, such as one of two known copies of the first known collection of nursery rhymes, *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* (vol. 2) [12]; and some that were unique, at least in their state, such as Lewis Carroll's working copy (of the 1865 uncut, suppressed first edition) of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [35], edited by the author in purple ink in preparation for *The Nursery "Alice."* In some cases provenance had priority over condition, so that books once owned by famous children's book collectors such as Elisabeth Ball, Lloyd Cotsen, and Betsy Beinecke Shirley could be included, regardless of their physical state.



DESCRIBING the one hundred books in the exhibition, in particular those from the twentieth century, provided an opportunity to catalogue them to a standard more often seen in the bibliographic treatment of books for adults. The Morgan Library's children's exhibition catalogue, *Be Merry and Wise*, was an inspiration in this regard. Additionally, those members of the advisory committee with bibliographical expertise were particularly helpful in developing the principles of bibliographic description detailed later in this catalogue.

Some twentieth-century books provided an unexpected challenge. Those published after 1926 are generally still in copyright, and as a result photographic permissions allowed only for the reproduction of dust-jacket or upper-cover images. Thus, many books seen later in the catalogue are accompanied by one, rather than several, photographs.

To provide greater cultural insight, the selected books are displayed with related historic artifacts, including original illustrations, autograph letters, manuscript drafts, antique horn-books, ivory alphabet discs, toys, dolls, and games, as well as other children's objects, all of great interest in their own right. Detailed in an appendix at the back of this catalogue, these help demonstrate the interrelationships between children's books and the culture of their times, showing how, as children's book historian and critic Leonard S. Marcus has said, "Children's books mirror the hopes and dreams of the society that created them."<sup>4</sup>

We worked in other ways to deepen the descriptions of the books. Four scholarly essays were commissioned to address various aspects of children and their books during different historical eras. The essays explore children's literacy and education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the impact of technological developments on children's book design, production, and marketing in the nineteenth century, and the evolution of the picture book genre in the context of important art and illustration movements in the twentieth century, together with a two-century history of children's book collectors, many of whose books are found in this catalogue. For the limited edition of this catalogue, two additional essays were commissioned, one exploring the history of leaf books as context for the bound-in leaf from Lewis Carroll's 1866 edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and the other providing a short history of Dutch floral papers – as found on *Gulliver's Travels* [9B], *The Gigantick History of the Two Famous Giants* [10], *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* [11A], and *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* [15], and as reproduced on the binding of the limited edition catalogue.

Additionally, catalogue entries are cross-referenced to show many literary connections between books. The bracketed numbers throughout the catalogue notes identify interre-

relationships among authors, illustrators, engravers, printers, and publishers. For example, readers who study the entry on *The Story of Ferdinand* [80] will see that author Munro Leaf is cross-referenced with Ludwig Bemelmans, author and illustrator of *Madeline* [82] and also the illustrator of Leaf's picture book *Noodle*. In the same note, readers will see that Leaf connects to Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel), author and illustrator of *The Cat in the Hat* [95], with whom Leaf collaborated on a military manual for malaria during the Second World War. Such interconnections are abundant and fascinating.

Readers and viewers will, I hope, also recognize certain less obvious themes that connect the selected books. Exhibition notes discuss such topics as a shared history of controversy (*Uncle Remus* [45], *Little Black Sambo* [53], *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* [98]) and characters whose names have become adjectives in everyday conversation (*Peter Pan* [63], *Pollyanna* [65], *Mickey Mouse* [76]). These and other rich motifs in the catalogue and exhibition notes illustrate the complexity, sophistication, and beauty of children's books.



I CONCLUDE with one of the hopes I shared with all of those who gave so much to the development of this catalogue and exhibition: that it might become a stimulus for collectors to consider literature for children with the same enthusiasm that we see in the collection of literature for adults, and an inspiration to new collectors to enter the field of children's literature.

Maurice Sendak, famed author of *Where the Wild Things Are* [97], believed that "You cannot write for children. They're much too complicated. You can only write books that are of interest to them."<sup>5</sup> This concept – that on its way to becoming famous, a book needs first and foremost to be of interest to children – underlies the choice of books represented in this exhibition. As we complete our work on *One Hundred Books Famous in Children's Literature*, the hope of all of us involved in this project is that the books presented here will long remain a source of interest, and of joy and wonder, to children of all ages.

CHRIS LOKER  
Curator



## NOTES

1. The previous *Grolier Hundred* exhibitions were as follows: *One Hundred Books Famous in English Literature* (1902), with an introduction by George E. Woodberry; *One Hundred Influential American Books Printed Before 1900* (1946), curatorial committee chaired by Frederick B. Adams Jr.; *One Hundred Books Famous in Science* (1958), curated by Harrison D. Horblit; *One Hundred Books Famous in Medicine* (1994), curated by Haskell F. Norman; and *A Century for the Century: Fine Printed Books From 1900 to 1999* (1999), co-curated by Martin Hutner and Jerry Kelly.
2. The last major children's book exhibition at The Grolier Club was *Famous Children's Books: American, British, and Continental* (1953), curated by Edward Naumburg Jr.
3. Adam Gopnik, "Broken Kingdom: Fifty Years of 'The Phantom Tollbooth,'" *New Yorker*, October 17, 2011, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/10/17/111017fa\\_fact\\_gopnik](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/10/17/111017fa_fact_gopnik).
4. Personal communication, February 4, 2014.
5. "Maurice Sendak: Ten Insightful Quotes," *The Telegraph*, May 8, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/9252605/Maurice-Sendak-ten-insightful-quotes.html>.