AN "IDEA FACTORY"

Bertha E. Mahony Miller
& Children’s Publishing in
20th Century America

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THE THIRD DECADE OF the twentieth century marks a period of rapid growth in the children’s publishing industry in the United States. While this late date cannot claim the introduction of the field of American children’s literature, which clearly had experienced several phases in the 17th and 18th centuries, it does mark the birth of the children’s book industry as it operates today. Several factors coincided to make this time a crucial one: a growing child welfare movement, increased women’s rights garnered through the suffrage effort, a burgeoning number of children’s rooms in public libraries, the spreading ideals of the progressive educators, and the establishment of Children’s Book Week and the Newbery and Caldecott Awards.

Certainly, these factors fueled one another and gave rise to other related endeavors. One significant development in this period is The Horn Book magazine, a clear “child” of this era which at the same strengthened its “parents”. Founded by Bertha E. Mahony (Miller) and recently celebrating its 75th anniversary, this magazine continues to be a trusted companion to teachers, parents, librarians, and publishers. True, a generation of librarians for children had already developed their profession significantly before this journal of criticism of children’s literature arrived on the scene in 1924; nonetheless, its 75 years roughly coincide with a history of the contemporary children’s publishing industry, and the record of that field can be read in its pages. This paper examines the influences upon Bertha1 and the power she then wielded, though gently, in children’s publishing in her long, productive career. It also investigates how key players interacted to change one woman’s educational experience into one shared by many. Called an “idea factory”2 by

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1 I have decided to refer to Miss Mahony and Mrs. Miller as simply “Bertha”, as many of the sources I utilized, both printed and manuscript, referred to her as such.

2 Genevieve Washburn to Eulalie Steinmetz Ross, 24 February 1970, Book Caravan folder, The Horn Book Papers, MS 78, The College Archives, Simmons College., Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter referred to as ”HBP, Simmons College.”)
one of her disciples, Bertha created educational and employment opportunities for herself and others, mostly women, at a time when they sought footholds in the economy.

_Young Bertha at The Union_

Bertha Everett Mahony, a homegrown heroine born in Rockport, Massachusetts in 1882, shared her talents generously, first on a local level and then nationally. As a senior in high school, Bertha’s principal told her, “There’s a new College starting in Boston in 1902 which will be of interest to you, Bertha, because it will have a Library School.” She followed his advice, although her father could afford to send her to no more than the one-year secretarial course at this school, Simmons. While there, Bertha joined The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston, also known as “The Union”, or WEIU. Later in life, Bertha wrote that she “felt real pride to be a member.” This pride grew into a position as a secretary for the Union after graduation from Simmons, and she continued in this capacity for a decade.³ She calls this period her “University.”⁴

³ Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1963, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.
⁴ Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1927, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.
Founded in 1877, The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union was known to some as The Mother of Women’s Exchanges. In her history of this “civic laboratory,” Cornelia James Cannon introduces its founder, “a pioneer woman physician” named Dr. Harriet Clisby:

She wrote that the society of the period represented for many women “an immense imprisonment of life” which was “stifling them.” Women everywhere felt the need of a spiritual release, an opportunity “to merge the narrow individual life into the wider and more universal.” Her ideal was that of an “association of men and women, acting together in all measures that shall build up, sustain, and vivify society.”

The Union gained the trust of the community because of the fine workmanship of the goods sold by its members and for the delicious fare served at its restaurant. Though it began as an exchange for selling wares, it constantly sought new ways to pursue the ideals of its founder.

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6 Ibid, p. 4.

After ten years of work at The Union, unmarried and 33 years old, Bertha became restless, and she then chanced to read an article which affected her profoundly. She wrote,

> It would be interesting to know to how many women’s lives this article gave suddenly purpose and direction as it did to mine…. I felt I did not know much about anything but perhaps a bit more about books than anything else because books were of prime interest to me.

In the August 1915 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Earl Barnes wrote the piece “A New Profession for Women” in which he cited the high unemployment rate among women college graduates. He sought to reverse this trend by suggesting that the nation follow the example of Melvil Dewey, founder of the Columbia College School for Library Economy: “Young women found in this work [librarianship] an attractive field for their energies; and their bookish habits made them quick students in the technical courses of preparation.” With such a surplus of qualified women available to fill just a few spots, Barnes claimed, these women’s earnings were nominal, if anything, in positions as librarians and also social workers. He asked why they could not “establish bookstores in their own cities and towns in all parts of the country?”

Barnes expressed the fear that “young college women have no financial skill and no interest in commercial life. Their whole tendency is to spend, and they are not only impatient of financial details but incapable of mastering them.” But Barnes concluded with the sentiment that bookselling

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9 Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1963, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.


… would give young women of ability and devotion a wide range of useful exercise for their talents. As industrial agents, they would be handling goods that would make for larger intelligence and for social betterment. They could help individuals and the community at large. The work would be active and varied but not too laborious; and they would be meeting men and women under conditions of freedom and security which might naturally lead to their largest possible life. Even if it did not, it would still be an interesting and useful life, independent of the caprice of directors, and admirably fitted for youth, middle age, and old age.12

Barnes’ argument persuaded, and Bertha was sold. Her only concern was how to raise the capital to open the store, an issue Barnes raised in his article. She approached Mary Morton Kehew, then president of The Union, for advice. Bertha recalled her mentor: “[Kehew] was the most wonderful listener imaginable…creative and dynamic. When she believed in a person she could give such courage that one found oneself busting one’s bonds and going further than had seemed possible.”13 Kehew modeled a mentoring relationship Bertha would later emulate with younger colleagues.

After a long interview concerning the idea, Kehew asked Bertha whether she would consider her bookstore as a department of the Union itself. The leaders of The Union found it to be a “fresh piece of educational effort.”14 Bertha remembered, “I had been thinking of it as a personal venture but this was ideal because it made possible to build this bookshop from the educational angle which was the angle that interested me, not the commercial.”15 Barnes stated in his article that booksellers would “have to educate the public to want what it needs.”16 Kehew and the treasurer Helen Pierce approved the plan, and preparations for the Bookshop began; their “vision and faith” offered Bertha

13 Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1927, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.
14 Ibid.
15 Bertha Mahony Miller to WEIU (probably—no authors noted), 13 August 1919, box 4, folder 23, HBP, Simmons College.
the freedom to face publisher’s salesmen, one of whom much later confessed, “We didn’t think so much of you but you had the Women’s Union back of you.”

Unfortunately, by the time Bertha decided to open a Bookshop the greater Boston area already was flooded with bookstores. In fact, unbeknownst to Bertha, a month after The Union’s Bookshop would open one flight up another competing bookshop would open on the first floor. According to Frances Clarke Sayers, biographer of the powerful New York City children’s librarian Anne Carroll Moore, a serendipitous moment provided Bertha with the inspiration she needed to make her shop stand out in a landscape of many booksellers. On a trip to Manhattan, Bertha happened to visit the New York Public Library,

_A Common Bookshop Becomes Uncommon_

2. Sketch by Catherine A. Hedlund included in the pamphlet by Eleanor W. Allen, _Boston Women’s Educational and Industrial Union_, published in Spring 1965, box 28, folder 20, HBP, Simmons College.
and as she sat in the Children’s Room, watching children and adults enjoying the place on terms of equality, it came into her mind that a bookshop similarly dedicated to a celebration of books, in a like atmosphere of freedom of choice, would be a grand undertaking in the cause of education....”

Bertha’s decision to specialize in children’s books spelled the shop’s later success. But the credit for the inspiration of this choice should not be so readily attributed to Moore, as Sayers proposes. Bertha’s biographer Eulalie Steinmetz Ross presents Bertha’s decision to specialize in books for children as a natural outgrowth of the series of popular dramatic offerings for children which Bertha initiated during her time as secretary for the Union beginning in 1910. An article on the Bookshop that Bertha wrote for Publisher’s Weekly corroborates this.

Regardless of the origin of her decision, the WEIU bookshop opened as The Bookshop for Boys and Girls. In those months before its opening in October 1916, Bertha threw herself into a vigorous crash course to explore her new field. She set up a private tutorial with Alice Mabel Jordan, the Superintendent of the Children’s Room at the Boston Public Library and joined her for a conference of the American Library Association in Louisville, Kentucky. She went to a book publishers’ convention in Chicago and met shop owners in several states.

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22 Bertha E. Mahony, clipping from Publisher's Weekly, 26 May 1917, p. 1701, found in HBP, Simmons College.
24 Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1927, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.
25 Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1963, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.
Bertha also compiled a 110-page *Books for Boys and Girls—A Suggestive Purchase List* using the lists from other libraries as a guide; this publication later provided extensive publicity for the new bookshop nationwide and overseas. In choosing the books,

She did not seek to apply an impossible standard; at the same time, she took pains to eliminate stories which gave untrue pictures of life or false ideals, however much the publishers’ catalogues might sing their praises as books that would be sure to appeal to children.

Her librarian-teacher, Jordan, reflected upon the collection in the bookshop, writing, “Chosen from all the great mass of publications because of their excellence in some respect or other, the collection can be taken as a model library of children’s books.” Yet Bertha did not want to make this a list appealing only to the elite:

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26 The reproduction of this photograph accompanies the report by Bertha Mahony Miller to (probably) Women’s Educational and Industrial Union on bookshop, 1926, HBP, Simmons College.


28 Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1963, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.

29 Clipping from *Christian Science Monitor*, March 1917, article begins “A new venture which seems to be meeting a real need…,” found in HBP, Simmons College.

[W]e are working with something worth while. We take great pleasure in helping those who are interested to find books written by persons of vision. This doesn’t mean “high-brow books,” and it doesn’t mean exceptional children.31

This list, Bertha writes, “showed the spirit of our work in this new shop from the beginning and having a social-educational institution back of us made it possible for us to put the emphasis where we wanted it.”32

The Bookshop as an Educational Resource

Appreciation for the Bookshop flooded The Union by mail and in the press. The influential librarian Moore, originally reluctant to endorse the Bookshop plan, visited it shortly after its opening and immediately became one of the Bookshop’s most ardent supporters.33 Boston librarian Jordan expressed her unbridled enthusiasm for the ideals which so closely matched her own:

When the Bookshop for Boys and Girls became a reality instead of a dream, no part of the community watched with more anxious eyes than those librarians whose work lay with children and their reading. We believed in discriminating selection for our libraries. We believed that long series are stultifying, that mediocrity in books for children is more universal and more baffling to combat than sensationalism. We believed in the value to the individual child of books well-chosen to fit mental stature, satisfy normal curiosity, to awaken aspirations, to free the searching mind.34

This same idealism characterizes a letter by Bertha, which a friend shared after her death:

We are living in a period of history when those interested in freedom, democracy, world government must necessarily be interested in education…we must have better teachers: people more imaginatively and sensitively aware of the possibilities in children.35

Bostonians came to think of the Bookshop as “primarily a service bureau.”36 The Bookshop toured exhibits to fifteen schools within 25 miles of Boston;37 for two summers

31 Bertha E. Mahony, clipping from Publisher's Weekly, 26 May 1917, p. 1703, found in HBP, Simmons College.
32 Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1963, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.
33 Ibid.
34 Alice M. Jordan, quoted in the Boston Transcript, 20 October 1924, originally from first issue of The Horn Book Magazine, clipping found in HBP, Simmons College.
35 Mrs. Whitton E. (Carol) Norris to Mary, 19 August 1969, box 24, folder 1, HBP, Simmons College.
sent a mobile Book Caravan inspired by the fictitious “Parnassus on Wheels” to New
England towns; featured contests, gallery shows, and plays in its store; and held
conferences. Their outreach work also included talks for adults, whose topics ranged from
“Romance and Reality in Children’s Books” featuring Anne Carroll Moore to
“Character Building through Books” to “Budgeting in Books.” When the Bookshop
moved to its first floor space, it opened “The New Room” whose contents included
books on the care of children; the conduct of the home; the history and philosophy of
education; new educational methods; religious training; dramatics and entertainments.
The relation of all these to young people is clear. These efforts by the Bookshop represented to Bertha the Union’s taking “the pioneer step
educationally” in order to do “once more what it has done in several important instances in the past—set a new standard which has re-acted in a wide radius….”

The Bookshop also offered story hours, unique as a bookseller in its time in doing so; these were later broadcast weekly on the radio station WEEI. These story hours
demonstrate a marked influence of Jordan and other librarians. Boston Public Libraries
had been telling stories in the schools since the turn of the century; and Bertha admired
their efforts:

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36 Clipping from *Christian Science Monitor*, March 1917, found in HBP, Simmons College.
37 Bertha Mahony Miller to WEIU (no recipient noted), undated, box 25, folder 20, HBP, Simmons College.
40 Pamphlet entitled *The New Room: For Parents, Teachers, Social Workers, Clergymen, and all who are interested in young people*, box 25, folder 19, HBP, Simmons College.
41 Bertha E. Mahony to Marion Churchill (President of Women’s Educational and Industrial Union), 10 October 1921, HBP, Simmons College.
42 Clipping from *Christian Science Monitor*, March 1917, found in HBP, Simmons College.
43 Bertha Mahony Miller to (probably) Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, report on bookshop including photographic reproductions, 1926, HBP, Simmons College.
It is the children’s departments of the public library which have restored this art to its honorable position and the Carnegie Library at Pittsburgh, and the Public Libraries of New York and Boston have lead the way, while the rest of the country has constantly added to what is now a fairly numerous procession.\(^45\)

In these days, then, when the Bookshop reached into the community and the schools in innovative ways, a natural alliance formed between the Progressive Education Association and the Bookshop. It regularly exhibited “examples of the working out of projects in progressive education.”\(^47\) The Bookshop printed at least two brochures for the PEA’s convention in Boston: one entitled The Bookshop for Boys and Girls: Its Relation to the School with a page labeled “How the Bookshop for Boys and Girls May Serve Progressive Schools”;\(^48\) the other describing “schools and other educational centers in Boston and vicinity,” in which it describes its role as a resource:

\(^{45}\) Bertha Mahony Miller, undated, box 24, folder 4, HBP, Simmons College.

\(^{46}\) The reproduction of this photograph accompanies the article “Story Telling in Boston,” Horn Book Magazine 9, no. 5 (1934 May):177.

\(^{47}\) Clipping from Boston Transcript, 20 October 1924, found in HBP, Simmons College.

\(^{48}\) Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, The Bookshop for Boys and Girls: Its Relation to the School, Summer 1921, HBP, Simmons College.
Its special book service has brought it into increasingly close touch with schools, and its work has been definitely influenced by the experimental school movement. The Bookshop is prepared to be helpful in all possible ways to school visitors coming to Boston at any time of year, either in giving information, arranging for school visits, or in other ways. It is also glad to answer questions about books, to prepare special lists, or to obtain information desired relating to general educational matters.  

In 1926 a committee of the Appointment Bureau (a vocational placement arm of the Union) convened to decide what the role of The Union in relation to progressive schools should be. Bertha played a key role in this discussion. The committee concluded:

The Bookshop has been asked several times this Spring to assist in the finding of teachers and the Progressive Education Association office at Washington has said that it cannot undertake the work and hopes the Union will do so.

The particular need for these so-called ‘Progressive Schools’ seems to be for teachers, since it is said that teachers trained in the old time conventional way do not, as a rule, give the original thought necessary to develop work which is not guided by established routine. Leaders among the young college graduates and women experienced in other occupations should be recruited to this service in elementary schools, a kind of work which they have been accustomed to consider lacks opportunities for initiative and imagination. Not only is there no Bureau in the whole country working along this line at present, but the Appointment Bureau seems particularly fitted to initiate such service because of its long standing connection with the colleges, and because well trained applicants are accustomed to come to us to learn of interesting opportunities of all sorts. At the time of the Bureau’s establishment it was needful to encourage women in finding their way in occupations other than the customary one of teaching; now, some phases of teaching which need outstanding personalities offer the newest educational opportunities.

In another memorandum, the committee recommended “that the building of the teacher-placing might be coincident with a survey of Progressive School work throughout the country…."

Cannon, in her history of the WEIU, further forecast that the “The

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49 Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, prepared for the Progressive Education Association conference by The Bookshop, *A visitors guide to schools and other educational centers in Boston and vicinity*, 26 April 1921, HBP, Simmons College.

50 Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, “Recommendations for the Board of Government: Teacher Placing by the Appointment Bureau,” 18 June 1926, box 28, folder 20, HBP, Simmons College.

51 Bertha E. Mahony to Mary of the WEIU (but not M. Tolman nor M. Kehew), 23 June 1926, HBP, Simmons College.
Union’s new Committee on Education organized to … help bring every enrichment of educational appliance into the schoolroom.”

“Bookshop into Magazine”

Perhaps the most influential and certainly the most lasting legacy of the Bookshop for Boys and Girls can be found in its *The Horn Book Magazine*, which it first published in October 1924. It began as an effort by Bertha and her close friend Elinor Whitney to “put the Bookshop for Boys and Girls on paper” to convey all their “joy and interest” from their bookshop into a periodical which could be shared with many—a satisfaction of their


53 Cover of *Horn Book Magazine* (1999 September/October), vol. 75, no. 5, the 75th anniversary issue

54 Bertha Mahony Miller, undated memoir, box 23, folder 3, HBP, Simmons College.
missionary urge to spread the delight and satisfaction and widening horizons that were to be found in the well-written, beautifully-made books that were now being published, under the supervision of gifted children’s editors newly appointed to separate departments of the leading publishing houses.\textsuperscript{55}

The two friends had discussed the magazine for several years before it became a reality.\textsuperscript{56} They chose the name not only because of its ties to the early juvenile texts—that is, horn books— but because, as the editors declared in the first issue, we are publishing this sheet to blow the horn for fine books for boys and girls—their authors, their illustrators and their publishers. Small and inconspicuous place in the welter of present-day printing is given to the description and criticism of these books, and yet the finest type of writing, illustrating, and printing goes into them.\textsuperscript{57}

They created something new and unprecedented, so they defined their goals. They did not want the magazine to be a

\begin{quote}
 a Public Library journal, nor a school library journal; it is not a School Magazine for teachers and educators. And yet it must be interesting to all these groups.…. [It is] not a sociological journal, nor a political one…. The presentation of new books was always important to us but we never saw as the main purpose of The Horn Book to publish the kind of long list of new books such as The ALA Booklist existed to make; not to mention [several others]\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

While its book recommendations and written articles grew out of the writing featured in the Bookshop's popular Suggested Purchase List, the magazine was not a direct offshoot of the List.\textsuperscript{59} The Horn Book deliberately aimed its content at the home market, with the intent of affecting professionals who worked with children\textsuperscript{60} who would make it their

\textsuperscript{55} Elinor Whitney Field, "Bookshop into Magazine", unpublished manuscript, n.d., box 32, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.

\textsuperscript{56} Bertha Mahony Miller to Irma K. Blum, of Cleveland, Ohio, 11 May 1960, HBP, Simmons College.

\textsuperscript{57} Jennie D. Lindquist, "A Horn Book Birthday," 1954, originally printed in The Horn Book Magazine, clipping found in HBP, Simmons College.

\textsuperscript{58} Bertha Mahony Miller, memoir, n.d., box 23, folder 3, HBP, Simmons College.


\textsuperscript{60} Bertha Mahony Miller to Irma K. Blum, of Cleveland, Ohio, 11 May 1960, HBP, Simmons College.
“tool magazine” and make people “aware of the importance of this field and the need to defend it against the encroachments of comics, radio, and television.” Influential librarian Moore expressed her delight in the magazine from the first issue:

Dear Publisher of the Horn Book—Having carried the March number wherever I’ve been the past week as the “real thing” to recommend to any-kind-of-a-person-interested-in-children’s-reading and having read the number from cover to cover as soon as it came, it is but fair to tell its editor-contributors how admirable I think it is in toto.

*The Horn Book* was Bertha’s “labor of love.” Although her official tenure as editor lasted over two decades, she kept a close watch on its goings-on and sat on its corporate board even after her stepping down; thus her publishing friend Grace Hogarth wrote that she “never seriously retired from the magazine that had become her life’s work until her death in 1969.”

”) The Fairy Tale War”) The pronounced interest in progressive education expressed by Bertha can be considered intriguing in light of this: the most powerful influence upon Bertha’s early thinking, New York Public Library’s Anne Carroll Moore, maintained a bitter disagreement with the innovative educator Lucy Sprague Mitchell, founder of the Bureau of Educational Experiments and writer of *The Here and Now Story Book*, full of reality-based stories which play with natural language. Leonard S. Marcus, the biographer of children’s author Margaret Wise Brown, described the argument in which “both sides presented a rather

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61 Bertha Mahony Miller to E.A. Miller of St. Paul, Minnesota, 23 February 1945, HBP, Simmons College.
63 Anne Carroll Moore to *The Horn Book Magazine* editors, handwritten note, 24 March 1926, HBP, Simmons College.
64 Bertha Mahony Miller to Laura Mackay, 06 March 1944, HBP, Simmons College.
mixed case of blindness and insight” as they trumpeted or degraded the use of folklore and fantasy with children. He quoted Mitchell:

> a child’s imagination will surely flourish if he is given freedom for expression, without calling upon the stimulus of adult fancies. It is only the jaded adult mind, afraid to trust to the child’s own fresh springs of imagination, that feels for children the need of the stimulus of magic.67

This aims directly at Moore’s rich fantasy life, which included her carrying around a wooden doll named Nicholas she used as a plaything, a mouthpiece, and a litmus test; she evoked his name when expressing an opinion (after seeing a play with her doll, she writes that “Nicholas came away with a grin…”68, and if her listener refused to play along she dismissed that person as unimaginative.69

Moore countered Mitchell at any opportunity, if not as a direct attack then merely to be consistent with her strongly held views. In a speech she praised the Bookshop as “a piece of idealism which has stood the test of realization in an era of educational experiments,”70 a clear jab at Mitchell’s Bureau. In her inaugural column “The Three Owls” which ran in *The Horn Book* from November 1936, Moore wrote,

> Children’s books took many a hurdle, during the years of depression, regardless of their quality. Times were hard and far and few were the publishing lands where risks were taken. Markets were sought and quickly found for books about this and that. Fairy tales became suspect and ideas were at a standstill.…

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68 Anne Carroll Moore to *The Horn Book Magazine* editors, handwritten note, 24 March 1926, HBP, Simmons College.
70 Annie Carroll Moore, speech entitled “The Bookshop for Boys and Girls,” read by John A Lowe at the Louisville Conference in Moore’s absence, HBP, Simmons College.
No more in our day of progressive education than in that of Charles Lamb can 'things in books’ clothing’ be made to take the place of real books. Pretentiousness, whether in the cause of education or of sheer entertainment, may impress the reviewer who puts kindness to the published book ahead of the book needs and appreciations of growing boys and girls. It may even impress whole committees of judges of manuscripts submitted for prizes.71

Did she consider Mitchell's Here and Now Story Book a "thing in book's clothing?"

Delightfully, this page full of Moore’s vitriol faced the end of an article written by Bertha, then editor of The Horn Book, on Mitchell’s Another Here and Now Story Book, in which she offers a ringing endorsement of a book which so contradicts Moore’s principles.72 The magazine also placed a biographical sketch of Mitchell previous to the review. This special treatment of an intellectual rival coincident with her column’s premiere likely incensed Moore.73 Nonetheless, both The Horn Book and Bertha managed to “stay above the fray,” and in the end, both Mitchell and Moore held correct views: fantasy and folklore may be more appropriate at one developmental stage, and here-and-now tales at another, earlier one.74

Moore undeniably influenced Bertha, especially early in her career. Hogarth wrote, “To my mind she [Bertha] had far too great a reverence for the dictates of Anne Carroll Moore; indeed, all of us who worked in this field were in awe of Miss Moore and were often blinded by her convictions.”75 Jordan, Bertha’s teacher, certainly adhered to Moore’s beliefs around storytelling. Bertha visited the New York Public Library as she

74 Anita Silvey, personal interview with the author, 16 December 1999.
planned the Bookshop and attended its annual children’s book exhibition in 1916.\textsuperscript{76} Moore’s library system bought mountains of books each year, and she determined the success or failure of any title through the power of her articulate reviews. It comes as no surprise, then, that all those involved in the book business heeded her words.\textsuperscript{77} On at least one occasion, however, Bertha publicly admitted that sometimes one could disagree with Moore,\textsuperscript{78} and in a private letter she doubted whether “Miss Moore would have liked \textit{Nicholas [A Manhattan Christmas Story]} if it had been written by someone other than herself.”\textsuperscript{79}

\textit{Bookselling Becomes Big Business}

Women dominated the children’s publishing industry in the 1930s, perhaps because an “aura of domesticity” around the endeavor drove men away.\textsuperscript{80} Historian Peter Hunt documents the rise of children’s publishing and women within it:

If reading declined between the wars with the growth of cinema and radio, the literate and educated population grew rapidly, and mainstream publishers demonstrated their commitment to children’s books by establishing juvenile departments. Louise Seaman (later Bechtel) was appointed head of their children’s Department by Macmillan in 1920, and her first catalogue contained around 250 titles.… Women were appointed to similar posts at Dutton, Longmans Green, Stokes, and Little, Brown in the next four years; the most famous were perhaps May Massee at Doubleday Page (1922) and Virginia Kirkus at Harper Brothers (1926.)”\textsuperscript{81}

The number of titles offered by publishers also mushroomed in the decades surrounding the foundation of the Bookshop.\textsuperscript{82} While this certainly cannot be attributed to its sales

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1963, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.
\item Grace Allen Hogarth, “A Publisher’s Perspective,” Horn Book Magazine 63, no. 6 (1987):771.
\item Bertha E. Mahony, unpublished manuscript of “The Three Owls—Third Book” mailed to Saturday Review, 20 October 1931, box 24, folder 2, HBP, Simmons College.
\item Grace Allen Hogarth, “A Publisher’s Perspective,” Horn Book Magazine 63, no. 6 (1987):773.
\item Ibid., p. 771.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
(the Bookshop often ran in the red), the Bookshop contributed to a trend which brought women into the book business and improved the quality of books offered by publishing houses. Upon Seaman’s retirement, Bertha wrote that she left “the field definitely better, richer, and finer because of [her] work…. [T]he publishing standards for children’s books in America will always be more brilliant and demanding because of Louise Seaman’s work.”

Not all were positive about these changes, however; Frederic G. Melcher of Publisher’s Weekly, who established the Newbery and Caldecott awards in 1922 and 1937 respectively, confided a sinking feeling to Bertha in 1944:

To you personally I would just like to say that it seems to me that in some ways our facilities to make fine books have gotten beyond our creative power to produce original and significant books for children…. I looked back as a check to what I knew was a great period in children’s books, the 1880’s, and am sure that it is not just the halo of distance that made me think that they were producing more books of real significance than we are now per season. With twenty-five or thirty special departments looking for books and talking with authors, and goodness knows there are enough agencies building up children’s reading interests, still we don’t seem to get what I call confident, self-poised books coming out of a full mind and a fine spirit.

A British librarian wrote with the same sentiment in 1951.

Children’s books are certainly receiving more attention in this country [Great Britain] now than a few years ago but the good work is still confined to Public Libraries in the main and very few publishers find that good children’s books pay dividends. The fault is partly that of the bookshops which devote their attention in the junior field mainly to … very popular writers.

Bertha wrote to Hartford librarian Clara Whitehill Hunt in 1946 that she remembered how few picture books there were in the early days of the Bookshop. One can trust that

84 Bertha E. Mahony, Horn Book Magazine 9 (1934 March): 71.
85 Frederic G. Melcher to Bertha Mahony Miller, 05 May 1944, HBP, Simmons College.
86 H.J.B. Woodfield to Norma Fryatt, 17 February 1951, HBP, Simmons College.
she was pleased with the increased volume, though not necessarily with the quality of product.\footnote{Bertha Mahony Miller to Clara Whitehill Hunt, 22 May 1946, box 8, folder 7, HBP, Simmons College.}

\textit{Bertha’s Wild Ride}

The story shared here is more than a history of children’s publishing. This story showcases the extraordinary experience of one woman who trusted the people who supported her in her “experiential” education (before there was such a term) in books. Unable to pay her way through school to be a librarian, Bertha instead pursued a career through an organization supportive of women in business, the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, and she eventually created several institutions of great value to librarians, teachers, and parents in New England and later throughout the United States.

Her efforts and successes in turn lifted up others as she carved out a niche for herself and other women entering this workforce. Grace Hogarth, for example, quoted several times in this essay, grew up near the Bookshop and later became a juvenile editor for Houghton Mifflin Company.\footnote{Grace Allen Hogarth, ”A Publisher’s Perspective,” Horn Book Magazine 63, no. 6 (1987):771.} Every step along her way Bertha trusted her instincts and listened to wisdom. She followed her “dream of a way of life and work which would combine also pleasure and joy,”\footnote{Bertha Mahony Miller, unpublished memoir, 1927, box 24, folder 9, HBP, Simmons College.} and she realized a dream for future readers.
Bibliography


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