

## CHAPTER 9



# May Hill Arbuthnot (1884–1969): A Pioneer in the Field of Children's Literature



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### Historical Research Process

RESEARCH FOR THIS chapter, mainly conducted by Susan E. Israel, came from a variety of sources. The Internet provided material related to May Hill Arbuthnot's work and employment. The bulk of information came from follow-up inquiries to the archives of Case Western University, successor to Western Reserve University, where Arbuthnot taught from 1927 to 1946. Among the items provided by Case Western were autobiographical forms that Arbuthnot had filled out. In them, Arbuthnot said she had received her

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*Shaping the Reading Field: The Impact of Early Reading Pioneers, Scientific Research, and Progressive Ideas*, edited by Susan E. Israel and E. Jennifer Monaghan. © 2007 by the International Reading Association.  
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master's degree (under her maiden name, May Hill) from Columbia University in 1924. A problem appeared when it was discovered there was no record of such a degree in the class of 1924. Could this esteemed teacher have falsified such information? It turned out, on further inquiries to Columbia University, that the degree had been awarded in 1925. Filling out the form 14 years later, Arbuthnot had forgotten the exact date the degree was conferred. The lesson for the aspiring historian: Even primary-source information cannot always be taken at face value.

Another valuable cache of primary-source material came from the library of Arbuthnot's undergraduate alma mater, the University of Chicago. It contained a series of letters from Dean William Scott Gray (see chapter 13, this volume) concerning Arbuthnot's employment as a summer school teacher at the university, including such details as her salary. Such information, often hard to come by, provides a human touch amid a career of accomplishment. Among secondary sources, a notable help was a biographical article on her by her friend Zena Sutherland in *Notable American Women, the Modern Period: A Biographical Dictionary* (1980). Also of value was a biographical essay by Blue (1976) for an education seminar at the University of Akron.

Thanks to these various sources, we were able to gain a fairly clear picture of Arbuthnot's life and work. We were fortunate to be able to do so because Arbuthnot left no diaries. Nor, because she married late in life, did she have children who might have given us further insights into her passionate absorption in children's literature and her unwavering belief that children's books had an essential contribution to make to children's lives.

## Personal and Professional Life

In June 1969, shortly prior to Arbuthnot's death, the American Library Association (ALA) decided to honor Arbuthnot by hosting an annual lecture named The May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lectureship. Arbuthnot, in her acceptance speech, said that the award, funded by her long-time publisher Scott Foresman, was "one of the greatest surprises and honors of my long professional years" (1969b). She was delighted, she said, that the lecture series would be administered by what is now the Association for Library Service to Children of the ALA because she felt as if she had been indebted to librarians all her life. "It began long ago," she recalled, "in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in a small choice library where sympathetic librarians permit-

ted a ten-year-old book-worm to browse happily in the adult sections and gave wise, patient guidance on the long road to more mature literacy” (1969b). She was to give wise, patient guidance herself for the next 75 years to those who cared about children and books.



The birthplace of May Hill (who became Arbuthnot through marriage in 1932) was in Mason City, Iowa, USA, but that was an accident: She appeared while her parents were on a visit there. She was raised in her early years in Newburyport, Massachusetts, USA, and testified that she had a happy childhood. One reason was her “absorption in books” (Sutherland, 1980, p. 30), strongly encouraged by her parents. She described her family as “cheerful, bookish [and] music-loving” (Corrigan & Corrigan, 1964, p. 337). Her mother introduced her to music, poetry, and literature, providing her with the works of Louisa May Alcott and, at an early age, the novels of Charles Dickens and Sir Walter Scott. Her father loved to read aloud books to his children, including works such as *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719/2001), *The Swiss Family Robinson* (Wyss, 1812/1994), and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Twain, 1876/2001). One of May’s favorite works was *The Book of Common Prayer* (1990), encountered as she regularly attended Episcopal Church services. She said it gave her “a sensitivity to the beauty and power of words” (quoted in Sutherland, 1980, p. 30). Arbuthnot remained a lifelong Episcopalian.

The family moved frequently, and May spent time in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, and Chicago, Illinois, USA, graduating from Chicago’s Hyde Park High School. Her family’s finances were too strained to permit her to advance immediately to college, but she seems to have dipped her toe into the waters of early education as a kindergarten teacher (Sutherland, 1980). It was a time when it was rare for those involved in early education to have a college degree. By 1912 she was on the faculty at the State Normal School at Superior, Wisconsin, USA (now the University of Wisconsin–Superior). The State Normal School had only graduated its first class in 1897 and in 1909 became the state’s first institution to offer a full program devoted to the rapidly expanding kindergarten field (History of UW–Superior, 2005). Arbuthnot was associated with this effort, describing herself later in a vita as

a "Demonstration & Training Teacher, Kindergarten-Primary" (Arbuthnot, circa 1947, p. 2).

At the same time, she began an association with the University of Chicago. In 1913, she received a kindergarten and primary-grade supervisor's certificate from the university, persevering to attain a Bachelor of Philosophy degree nine years later. Arbuthnot also became a fixture as a teacher in the School of Education's summer programs, giving courses in children's literature from 1913 to 1922 (Sutherland, 1980). One of her inspirations was the Chicago storyteller and folk tale translator Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen. Whenever Arbuthnot told any Norse folk tales, she testified, they always came out with Thorne-Thomsen's Norwegian accent (Blue, 1976, p. 3).

Arbuthnot had been recommended for the summer teaching post at the University of Chicago by Alice Temple, chair of the kindergarten and early education department there and a leading progressive educator. There is a record of Arbuthnot's salary for this job in her correspondence, as May Hill, with William Scott Gray, who was then Dean of the School of Education. Beginning in the first term of the summer quarter in 1917, she taught two courses for a salary of \$200. In 1919, her salary was raised to \$250. In 1920, it was \$300, and in 1922 it was \$350 for the two courses (Gray to Hill, 1916, 1919, 1920, 1922). (She was unable to teach in 1921 because of her mother's illness [Hill to Gray, 1921b].) The formal exchange of letters on her employment between Arbuthnot and Gray (Hill and Gray correspondence, 1916–1926) provides a small glimpse of her wit. One of Gray's letters was apparently addressed to West Superior, Wisconsin. "There is no West Superior," she replied. "At best and worst this is merely Superior" (Hill to Gray, 1918).

The University of Chicago connection also provided an opportunity to work closely with Gray, a rising star in education circles, that would yield benefits later when Arbuthnot became coauthor with him of the Scott Foresman Dick and Jane series. Indeed, at that moment in time, the University of Chicago was a perfect launching pad for a future career in education. Although it had only been founded in 1890 (backed by the largesse of John D. Rockefeller), the university had quickly developed a national reputation, enhanced in 1894 when John Dewey was lured there from the University of Michigan to head the new pedagogy department as well as the philosophy department.

One of Dewey's chief initiatives was the founding in 1896 of the University of Chicago Laboratory School. A landmark in progressive educa-

tion, the Laboratory School was designed both for teaching and for conducting research in educational methods. Although Dewey had left the University of Chicago for Columbia University by the time Arbuthnot taught there, progressive education was still very much in favor there.

In 1918, Arbuthnot moved to New York City. There seem to have been two reasons. The first was so she could become a teacher trainer at the famous progressive institution the Ethical Culture School, where she remained until 1921. The second reason was to take graduate work at Teachers College, Columbia University. The experience at the Ethical Culture School brought her in contact with yet another set of reformers, mainly centered around Felix Adler, founder of the Ethical Culture Society. Adler had a longtime interest in early childhood education and in 1878 had started the Ethical Culture School as a free kindergarten. It became one of the best-known kindergartens in the United States.

Meanwhile, Arbuthnot caught up with John Dewey at Columbia University: Dewey now headed the philosophy department and held a joint professorship at Teachers College (Cremin, 1988, pp. 25, 77, 170–171, 625). Arbuthnot's transcripts show that she took courses on "Mental Adjustments" with one of the few female psychologists in the country, Leta Stetter Hollingworth; on "Foundations of Method" with the progressive enthusiast William Heard Kilpatrick; and with John Dewey, who awarded her the grade of A- for his course on "Historical Relations of Philosophy and Education." She received her master's degree in October 1925.

In 1922, Arbuthnot had moved to Cleveland, Ohio, USA, to be principal of the Cleveland Kindergarten-Primary Training School. One likely influence in her move was Charles Hubbard Judd (see chapter 4, this volume), who had become director of the School of Education at the University of Chicago in 1909 while Arbuthnot was a student there; Judd had conducted a "monumental study" of the Cleveland schools in 1916 (Cremin, 1988, pp. 233–234). In several of her letters to Gray, Arbuthnot mentions Judd with fondness (Hill to Gray, 1921a, 1921b, 1926). She would make her principal home in the Cleveland area for the rest of her life.

May Hill's first book was published in 1924, a compilation of children's stories and poems titled *The Child's Treasury*. In Cleveland, she became identified with yet another development in education, the establishment of pre-K nursery schools. She founded nursery schools that were the first both for Cleveland specifically and for the entire state of Ohio (Sutherland, 1980).

The nursery school movement had originated in England in 1911 with the opening of a school in a London slum by Rachel and Margaret McMillan. The first such school in the United States was in 1916 at the University of Chicago, established by faculty parents (Cremin, 1988, pp. 301–302). In 1927, the Cleveland Kindergarten-Primary Training School, with Arbuthnot as director, became part of the elementary education department of Western Reserve University. She was given the rank of associate professor of education (Sutherland, 1980).

A hallmark of the education provided at Western Reserve's nursery school was "parental education" (Blue, 1976, p. 3). The involvement of parents as well as teachers in the school was a leading tenet of the nursery school movement. Writing later, Arbuthnot commented that the school was "born of a desire of intelligent parents to know more about child care and was never, as one educator feared, 'a parking place for the children of bridge-playing women'" (quoted in Blue, 1976, p. 3). Rather, Arbuthnot's credo was her oft-reiterated belief that "the child and his needs come first" (quoted in Blue, 1976, p. 4).

In addition to her work with the nursery school and with parental education throughout the city of Cleveland, Arbuthnot taught regularly at Western Reserve such courses as "Principles of Teaching," "Psychology of Childhood," and "Parental Education" (Blue, 1976, p. 3). Later in her career, she extended her plea for inclusiveness by pointing out the importance of teacher involvement in school administration (Arbuthnot, 1948).

It was not long before Arbuthnot moved to the national scene. From 1927 to 1929 she served as national vice president of the International Kindergarten Union, later renamed the Association for Childhood Education. In 1930, under U.S. President Herbert Hoover, she was invited to become a member of the planning committee for the first White House Conference on Children. Subsequently, she served on a national committee on early childhood education that was responsible for establishing what were called "emergency nursery schools" during the U.S. Great Depression (Sutherland, 1980). The schools were authorized in October 1933 as part of the New Deal's emergency education projects, designed mainly to help unemployed teachers. Some 300 emergency nursery schools were opened for children 2 to 4 years of age, including a number for African American children, during the first year after the authorization. The schools were an extension downward of the public schools and were also an extension outward because they includ-

ed such aspects of the child's development as health, physical growth and nutrition, play, social life, and mental hygiene. Providing an all-day program, including lunch and a nap, they became centers for medical care and the education of parents in the essentials of child growth and guidance (Cremin, 1988, pp. 302–303; Langdon, 1935). The parental component in particular may be a sign of Arbuthnot's influence on the program.

The 1930s were very busy years for May Hill. On her biographical data sheet at Western Reserve University in 1939, she reported being a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Pi Lambda Theta, the English Research Council, the Elementary English Council, and the Association for Childhood Education at both the national and local levels. A faculty data sheet in her handwriting at Western Reserve (circa 1947) provides additional information. (The manuscript is undated, but its latest internal date is 1947). In it, she reported giving speeches to education associations across the United States (in 48 cities in 18 states, she noted), including meetings in Dallas, San Antonio, and Denton, Texas; Raleigh, North Carolina; Nashville, Tennessee; Louisville, Kentucky; Washington, DC; Duluth, Minnesota; Grand Rapids, Michigan; New Haven, Connecticut; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, South Bend, and Evansville, Indiana; and Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio. For 10 years, beginning in 1930, she served as review editor for children's books for the *Journal of Childhood Education*. Her articles also appeared frequently in such venues as *Childhood Education* and *Parent's Magazine* (Arbuthnot, 1939, circa 1947).

In 1932, at the age of 48, Hill married a fellow faculty member at Western Reserve University, Charles Criswell Arbuthnot, a professor of economics. It proved to be a happy union, and Charles Arbuthnot fully supported his wife's work. The couple was much beloved on the Western Reserve campus and was noted for the gracious hospitality at their home. Their pet, Molly, a German shepherd, was also known on campus, and accompanied either Arbuthnot or her husband as they taught classes. (The couple maintained that a dog, just like a child, becomes too lonesome if left at home.) Charles Arbuthnot, who had taught economics at Western Reserve from 1908 to 1946, died in 1963 (Blue, 1976, p. 7).

In 1940, May Hill Arbuthnot embarked on another aspect of her varied career. She became coauthor with William Scott Gray, her mentor from the University of Chicago, of the Basic Readers in the Curriculum Foundation series, published by the house of Scott Foresman (Gray, Arbuthnot, et al.,

1940–1948). The series, better known as the Dick and Jane books, featured the youngsters Dick and Jane; their little sister, Sally; their parents; the dog, Spot; and the cat, Puff. The series reached its zenith in the 1950s when an estimated 80 percent of first graders were using Dick and Jane (“A. Sterl Artley,” 1998). The series made Arbuthnot wealthy, and she retired from Western Reserve University as associate professor emeritus in 1946.

The following year, Scott Foresman published Arbuthnot’s *Children and Books* (1947). In the early 1950s, she produced a series of anthologies (1951, 1952a, 1952b, 1953), gathered into one volume in 1961, to provide read-aloud matter to accompany and enhance reading instruction in elementary schools.

As her career drew to a close, Arbuthnot received numerous honors. The Women’s National Book Association awarded her the Constance Lindsay Skinner Medal in 1959 for distinguished contributions to the field of books. In 1964, the Catholic Library Association gave her its Regina Medal for her distinguished contribution to the field of children’s books (Corrigan & Corrigan, 1964). In June 1969, as previously mentioned, the American Library Association established an Honor Lectureship in her name. The lecture is delivered each April, published in the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), and made available on the ALSC website (May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Award, 2005). Case Western University gave Arbuthnot an honorary doctorate in the same year. (The honor may not have assuaged her. She resented being held at the associate professor level throughout her career [Blue, 1976, p. 8].) Her legacy was even formally recognized almost two decades after her death. In 1986, the International Reading Association established the Arbuthnot Award to honor an outstanding college or university teacher of children’s and young adult literature (International Reading Association, 2005).

Even in her 80s, Arbuthnot was apparently still engaged in bringing books to children, although her coauthors were now probably in charge of the anthologies that drew upon her earlier work. The decade of the 1960s saw the reissue of *Children’s Books Too Good To Miss* (a brief guide to children’s literature for parents, librarians, and teachers; Arbuthnot, Clark, & Long, 1948/1963) and the publication of *Time for Biography* (Arbuthnot & Broderick, 1969) and *Time for Old Magic* (Arbuthnot & Taylor, 1970). In the year of her death Arbuthnot’s last solo work appeared, reflecting her view of the importance of parents in education: *Children’s Reading in the Home* (Arbuthnot, 1969a).

Arbuthnot died in a nursing home at the age of 85 on October 2, 1969. Her long and very full career had spanned several areas and eras in the education of children. As coauthor of the Dick and Jane readers, she helped produce an iconic reading series first revered and later reviled, but one that was certainly an enormous commercial success and part of the literacy education of decades of children. A pioneer in nursery school education in the United States, Arbuthnot also oversaw the training of decades of teachers in kindergarten and early childhood education. She served on several important national committees on education and held high office in national early childhood organizations. She spearheaded the acceptance of children's literature as an important course of study for teachers, the "kiddy lit" courses of today. And she performed her multitudinous tasks with a vivacity, wit, and warmth that endeared her to colleagues and students alike.

## **Philosophical Beliefs and Guiding Principles**

What is most striking about May Hill Arbuthnot is the effect of her early academic education on her subsequent life and work. She came to adulthood in the first decade of the 20th century amid the fevered atmosphere spawned by progressive educational reform. At the University of Chicago and its Laboratory School, and later at that other center of progressivism, Columbia University, she came in contact with John Dewey and his ideas. Soon she was making her own contribution to progressive education at the Cleveland Kindergarten-Primary Training School. Hill's interest in the nursery school movement and in parental involvement in children's education as well as teachers' participation in school administration is an example of her creative adaptation of progressive ideas.

Arbuthnot's important work on children and literature in the latter part of her career may also reflect the rise of Herbartianism, which, like progressive education, held a positive view of children's potential. In the 1890s in the United States, as Nila Banton Smith notes, a wave of Herbartianism "swept the country" (1965/1986, p. 117). Herbartianism was based on the ideas of the German philosopher Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841), himself a disciple of Johann H. Pestalozzi (1746–1847). The Swiss educator Pestalozzi held that educators should respect the principle that young children acquire knowledge through concrete experiences appropriate to their stage of development, not through rote memorization. Similarly, Herbart emphasized the

duty of respecting and developing the individuality of the pupil, in particular capturing the child's interest in the world and his aesthetic appreciation of it, which in turn would help develop the child's moral character, while avoiding being didactic. "The intent to teach spoils children's books at once," Herbart wrote. "Interrupt a narrative with moral precepts and [children] will find you a wearisome narrator" (quoted in Smith, 1965/1986, p. 118). His ideas had undergone a revival with the establishment of a pedagogical seminary in Jena in 1874 that attracted visitors to Germany from around the world, including many U.S. citizens.

Herbart's books were translated into English, and the National Herbart Society was established in the United States in 1895. Herbart's ideas encouraged a movement that was already under way—Smith (1965/1986) calls it "Reading as a Cultural Asset" (pp. 115–156)—that emphasized the use of good literature in schools. Its adherents held that what children read (trash or uplifting literature) was as important as the fact that they read at all. These aesthetic and moral aspects of reading instruction differed both from progressivism's goal of integrating the child into society and from the didactic nature of earlier reading series. They fostered the publication of series such as The Heart of Oak series of readers, compiled by Charles Eliot Norton, professor of art at Harvard (e.g., Norton & Stephens, 1894), and Silver Burdett's Stepping Stones to Literature series, authored by Boston educator Sarah Louise Arnold (e.g., Arnold & Gilbert, 1897). These series and the theories that inspired them were much in vogue as Arbuthnot began her pedagogical training and surely contributed, decades later, to her enthusiasm for children's literature.

The influence of psychology can also be seen in Arbuthnot's work. In her introduction to the first edition of *Children and Books* (1947), Arbuthnot lays down a list of basic drives of children, listing the need of the child for material, emotional, and spiritual security; the need to belong; the need to love and be loved; the need to achieve; the need to know; the need for change (play); and the need for aesthetic satisfaction. The first group of these needs reflects Arbuthnot's adaptation of the "hierarchy of needs" philosophy of Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), but the last in particular is redolent of the Herbartianism of her youth. At the same time, the list also reflects a keen awareness of research and theories about children's cognitive abilities, psychosocial aspects, and moral and social development that were discussed by the social scientists and psychologists of her time, who may have included

Jean Piaget as well as Maslow. Maslow believed in the value of a humanistic education in helping individuals achieve self-actualization (e.g., Maslow, 1973), while Piaget explored children's moral growth as well as their cognitive development (e.g., Piaget, 1932). In her approach to children and literature, Arbuthnot seems effortlessly to incorporate this work, at least at the outset of her publications on children's books.

If progressivism, Herbartianism, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs played their part in the philosophical ideas and principles of Arbuthnot, so too did her convictions about the role reading should play in the lives of children. "Books," she wrote in her first edition of *Children and Books* (1947), "are no substitute for living, but they can add immeasurably to its richness" (p. 2). But, she continues,

a book is a good book for children only when they enjoy it; a book is a poor book for children even when adults rate it a classic if children are unable to read it or are bored by its content. (p. 2)

(This statement perhaps reflects the Herbartian emphasis on the importance of the child's interest.)

Arbuthnot was equally convinced about the positive role to be played by oral presentations of stories and poetry to children and adults alike. She declared herself delighted when the ALA honored her by sponsoring an Honor Lectureship, rather than yet another book prize, because, as she put it, she was "a strong believer in the efficacy of direct speech, the spoken word. For poetry it is the only way, and for more people than we bookish ones like to admit, it is the best way" (Arbuthnot, 1969b). Arbuthnot believed that "saying or reading poetry" to children should continue from their extreme youth until they were 13 years old, and she in effect explains the total absence of poetry from the Dick and Jane readers by maintaining that children who have to struggle with reading a poem as part of a reading lesson get "baffled and discouraged" (Arbuthnot, 1947, p. 166). But listening to the same poem read or spoken aloud by an accomplished adult is another matter entirely: Then children can "respond with delight" and eventually read it easily for themselves (p. 166). In the first three editions of her *Children and Books* (1947, 1957, 1964), she makes it clear that reading to children from books was by no means the same as storytelling, instructing teachers on when they should read stories and when they should tell them (Arbuthnot, 1947, pp.

240–242). By her third edition, she was asking dramatically, “Is Storytelling Dead?” (1964, p. 376).

Arbuthnot’s philosophy, then, was likely influenced by the important educational movements of her day—progressive education, Herbartianism, the emphasis on the cultural aspects of reading, and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Yet one aspect of her beliefs was more salient than any other—her conviction that children’s books could and should play a powerful role in the lives of their young readers.

## Contributions to the Field of Reading

Arbuthnot’s major contributions to the reading field took two forms. The first was unquestionably her coauthorship with William S. Gray of Scott Foresman’s Dick and Jane series of elementary readers. The series had begun life as the Elson Basic Readers in 1930, with William Elson as the leading author and Gray as his coauthor. It was retitled the Elson-Gray Readers in its 1936–1938 revision, with Elson continuing as the leading author. In the revision of 1940–1948, however, the series became simply the Basic Readers, now with Gray as the leading author and Arbuthnot one of its coauthors (Stevenson, 1985, p. 71). Gray had urged his publishers to persuade Arbuthnot to join him because she provided important credentials as a teacher of young children, thanks to her nationally known work on nursery schools, kindergartens, and children’s book reviews.

The Dick and Jane series was not without controversy, which came from two angles. Rudolf Flesch, in his best-selling *Why Johnny Can’t Read—And What You Can Do About It* (1955), attacked the whole-word method that had dominated U.S. literacy education since the 1910s and that was employed as the basic approach in the Basic Readers, as well as in its look-alike competitors such as the Alice and Jerry books, published by Row, Peterson & Co. (later Harper & Row). Flesch maintained that the Dick and Jane books and their competitors had failed in the job of teaching children to read because they did not take a synthetic phonics approach (as opposed to an analytic/intrinsic phonics approach) that would have helped children deal with unfamiliar words. The second attack on the Dick and Jane books stemmed from the U.S. Civil Rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Critics of the series claimed that its vision of a “perfect” white, middle class, suburban household ignored the realities of the urban United States, particularly in its failure to include African

American and Hispanic children in the texts, and that it cast women and girls in roles that were overwhelmingly subordinate to men and boys (Women on Words and Images, 1972). These criticisms spelled the demise of the series in that form. However, thousands of children who had learned to read through the Dick and Jane books retained a great affection for the series, and old copies of Dick and Jane books have become collectors' items.

Arbuthnot's second and even greater contribution to the reading field was her massive review of children's literature, *Children and Books*. Its first edition, in 1947, was a substantial volume of 626 pages. Expanded by Arbuthnot in a revised edition to 684 pages (1957) and in the third edition to 688 pages (1964), *Children and Books* was a ground-breaking historical survey of children's literature that over the next five decades became the standard college-level text in schools of education. Arbuthnot wrote the first three editions of *Children and Books* alone. After her death in 1969, revised editions were published about twice a decade by Arbuthnot's friend and collaborator, a professor at the University of Chicago, Zena Sutherland (1915–2002). Sutherland was aged 82 when the ninth and final edition of *Children and Books* appeared in 1997. Even into the late 1970s, the revised editions remained the largest-selling texts on children's literature in the United States used extensively in schools of education.

The first and subsequent editions of the book alternate between analyses of genres of children's literature (such as picture stories, folk tales, epics, poetry, animal stories, and fantasies) and examinations of—and excerpts from—key children's books, with the addition of bibliographies. Illustrations graced the first edition, and more of them appeared with each edition, with the first colored illustrations appearing in the third edition. Arbuthnot's exploration of topics such as myth and fable contrast vividly with the contents of the Dick and Jane books: Gray had banished such exotic topics from his series in favor of stories based on (white) contemporary life, an approach that was in harmony with John Dewey's view of schooling as training for life.

Arbuthnot's next publication, *Time for Poetry* (1951), was designed to reintroduce poetry into the elementary classroom. Its subtitle reads, *A Teacher's Anthology to Accompany the New Basic Readers Curriculum Foundation Series*. Arbuthnot's *Time for Poetry* was followed by two other "Time for" books: *Time for Fairy Tales Old and New: A Representative Collection of Folk Tales, Myths, Epics, Fables, and Modern Fanciful Tales for Children* (1952) and *Time for True Tales and Almost True: A Representative Collection of Realistic Stories for Children* (1953).

The four books were later published together in one volume as the *Arbuthnot Anthology of Children's Literature* (1961). What both the Dick and Jane series and Arbuthnot's publications on children's literature have in common is their attempt to meet children at their own level and on their own terms.

Sutherland (1980) reports that Arbuthnot's first edition of *Children and Books* in 1947 was "not warmly welcomed" by critics (p. 31). The published reviews the work received, however, do not support this judgment. One of the few criticisms was voiced by A.C. Moore in the *Horn Book* (1948), who considered the index to the work inadequate. He was also concerned about "the lack of sustained historical and critical consideration" of children's books and of those involved in writing, illustrating, and publishing them (quoted in James & Brown, 1949, p. 20).

Children's librarians, in contrast, were almost uniformly enthusiastic about the book. Siddie Joe Johnson, a children's librarian for the Dallas (Texas) Public Library, correctly identified the book's purpose: It could be used, she wrote in the *Library Journal* (1948), "either as a basic text or supplementary reading by students in teachers' colleges, or in children's literature classes in library schools" (p. 53). She praised the amount of research put into its writing, and she particularly liked the chapter on history and trends, the Mother Goose chapter, and the section on storytellers. "As a reference book," she wrote, "this large volume is outstanding" (p. 53). She urged all medium and large public libraries to buy a copy for their children's reading rooms and encouraged colleges involved with education to purchase the book as well.

In *The Elementary School Journal* (1948), Eveline Colburn, who worked at the famously progressive University of Chicago Laboratory School, had nothing but praise for *Children and Books*. She called it a "comprehensive study of the reading interests and needs of children from two to fifteen years of age" and commended it for its wide coverage of "all types of literature except textbooks" (p. 585), from poetry and myths to nonfiction. Unlike Johnson, who was less confident of its usefulness to parents, Colburn thought it would be "of great value" (p. 585) to parents as well as professionals. Both reviewers welcomed the large number of illustrations and the excerpts from the stories, but Colburn also remarked on Arbuthnot's style: Perhaps "never before," she wrote, had children's literature been presented "with such complete understanding and in such an interest-impelling style." The "freshness" of the presentation "could have been achieved only by an expert" (p. 586).

Like the Dick and Jane series, *Children and Books* has come under criticism from a later generation of scholars and teachers. Arbuthnot's language is highly evaluative, succinctly described by Del Negro as "somewhat fulsome and dramatic but always apparently heartfelt" (1999, n.p.). Del Negro examined the two folk tale chapters in all nine editions of *Children and Books* and found Arbuthnot's prose in the first three editions to be Eurocentric and "rife with unacknowledged biases of the time, using paternalistic, sometimes racist, language that would be intolerable today" (1999, n.p.). Arbuthnot does indeed treat Native American folk tales severely, condemning them as "neither sufficiently dramatic nor well enough organized to command intense interest" (1947, p. 221). Del Negro also cites the phrase "heathenness of the Orient" used in the first three editions (e.g., Arbuthnot, 1947, p. 203). To be fair, however, the phrase is not Arbuthnot's but a quotation from another author concerning Asian influences on the development of pre-Christian European folk tales. And although Arbuthnot's discussion of works from Africa and Asia, as well as of African American material, is lamentably thin to the eyes of a contemporary reader, she was writing in a context where there was a paucity of books about children from those cultures.

An example of Arbuthnot's approach to different cultures may be found in her treatment of one of the most controversial children's books ever published—*The Story of Little Black Sambo* (Bannerman, 1899/1905). The problem with this work lies not in its story line (the young hero uses great ingenuity to prevent the tigers from eating him) but in Bannerman's illustrations, which to modern eyes are grotesque caricatures. Worse still, these early illustrations seem to have inspired ever more overtly racist ones by later illustrators: The pictures in later editions of the book—Bannerman lost the copyright early on—are rightly condemned as poster boys for cruel racial stereotyping (see, e.g., Hay, 1981, pp. 148–149, nos. 38–41), and in the 1970s *The Story of Little Black Sambo* was banned from many libraries and reading lists. Although she never used Bannerman's illustrations in her own book, Arbuthnot seems to have been wholly insensitive to their impact, ignoring them in her first two editions and labeling them, euphemistically, "stylized" in her third (1964, p. 336). Yet she was fully alert to the story's racial significance: "Isn't it desirable," she writes,

that the first association of many children with people of a different color should be by way of a lovable character like *Little Black Sambo*? He has the

right kind of parents...[and] outwits the tigers over and over. He is happy and completely triumphant...That his euphonious name associates racial color with all these desirable attributes should be a basis for racial pride and interracial admiration. (1947, p. 288)

When Sutherland wrote the fourth edition of *Children and Books* after Arbuthnot's death, her much greater sensitivity to racially sensitive topics (Del Negro, 1999) led her to put the story in a new section titled "Books That Stir Controversy." She dropped Arbuthnot's description entirely and commented that the book was "offensive to many adults because of the illustrations and because the name 'Sambo' has derogatory connotations" (Arbuthnot & Sutherland, 1972, p. 263).

Another criticism of the three earliest editions of *Children and Books* is that neither Arbuthnot nor Sutherland (in later editions) kept up with the changing scholarship that lay behind various aspects of the work, such as the discussions and controversies over folk tales (Del Negro, 1999). Arbuthnot's rare contemporary critic, A.C. Moore, was on target when he objected to "the lack of sustained historical and critical consideration" of children's books (Moore, 1948, quoted in James & Brown, 1949, p. 20). Arbuthnot's works predate the interest that English department faculty began to take in children's literature as a legitimate scholarly enterprise, but once such criticism appeared, her work seemed further outdated.

## Lessons for the Future

May Hill Arbuthnot's lessons for the future, and for all educators, parents, and those who work with children, is to develop a love for children's literature. This love of children's literature became an overarching theme in her life. Arbuthnot was devoted to the promotion of quality children's literature and believed that teachers were not the only ones responsible for its delivery but parents and librarians were as well. And she believed that immersion in good literature plays a key role in the development of the love of literature.

Another important lesson that educators can learn from Arbuthnot's work is her dedication to bringing the right books to the right child. This lesson still needs to be brought to classrooms, particularly today when curriculum standards guide textbook selections. Arbuthnot has taught us that children should guide textbook selections. She believed that children are

engaged in a continuous process of learning about themselves and their world. As they get older, their world becomes much larger, with people along the way who have significant impacts on their growth and learning. For them to function successfully in society and achieve self-identity, children must first understand themselves. Books can greatly aid children in that task.

Arbuthnot's approaches to childhood education and children's literature were based on these philosophical beliefs. To be appreciated, she felt, literature should be shared. During her lectures she would remind her audience that each child must develop the inner resources needed to withstand the stresses of life. She used an analogy to describe the role of the teacher in furthering this goal: "The tree has roots to weather the storm. Educators must care for people, and grow in interests as the tree grows tall and wide" (quoted in Corrigan & Corrigan, 1964, p. 337). In her view, each of us must "make an effort to know life outside of his own immediate duties, to wave a little as do the topmost tree branches" (p. 337). Arbuthnot believed that the love of good books is acquired in childhood and the realm of children's literature should be made apparent to all children. Even textbooks should be satisfying experiences for every child, one child at a time.

The last lesson Arbuthnot has taught us is presented in the form of a goal. Toward the end of her acceptance speech at the announcement by the ALA of the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lectureship series, she fittingly acknowledged her contributions to the field of children's literature and education by giving a blessing to those who would continue the work she so dearly loved. She concluded her acceptance speech by saying,

Nevertheless, ...there is not much to be said for old age, and what there is has been honestly said by William Butler Yeats in that remarkable poem, "Sailing to Byzantium." Here are just four lines from it:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing and louder sing  
For every tatter in its mortal dress. [Yeats, 1989, p. 301]

And that is what I am going to do from now on, "sing and louder sing," for with this honor lecture Scott Foresman has lent dignity to the tatters and left the mortal dress with quite a jaunty air. (1969b)

The goal given to educators, parents, and children's literature lovers is to continue helping children develop a love of literature. We are to continue immersing children in books that they enjoy and can read at their developmental and interest levels, and continue growing professionally as educators so all children can have the opportunity to love literature throughout their lives.

## Reflection Questions

1. How is Arbuthnot's work a reflection of the philosophical movements of the early 20th century? How was her writing influenced by the eminent educators she worked with and near?
2. Arbuthnot believed we should communicate to adults the importance of telling stories and reading aloud to children. Do you agree with her? If so, why? And how can we do this effectively?
3. What did May Hill Arbuthnot feel about the role parents should play in literacy developments at home? Are there ways, using Arbuthnot's wisdom, to inspire more parents to get involved?
4. What do you consider to be Arbuthnot's single greatest contribution to the reading field?
5. Considering the scathing criticisms of the Dick and Jane basal reading series that Arbuthnot coauthored with Gray, why have some of the stories been recently republished? What value do they have for today's classrooms?

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