

BOOKWOMEN

*Creating an Empire in Children's
Book Publishing, 1919–1939*

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Triumph and Transition

THE UNITED STATES CENSUS FOR 1930 revealed that nearly eleven million women were in the workforce, representing about one quarter of all gainfully employed Americans. Of these, the government recognized slightly over 14 percent, or about a million and a half, as professionals, but during the first half of the decade, nearly one third of them became unemployed.¹ Under the catastrophic financial circumstances of the decade, public opinion polls indicated that Americans continued their overwhelming opposition to the employment of women, especially those who were married.²

The effect of the Depression on bookwomen corresponded to its impact on the institutions employing them. In varying degrees, bookwomen were required to adjust to harsh economic realities, but none suffered the sort of hardship frequently associated with the decade.³ Despite cutbacks, adjustments, and shifts in employment among members of the “inner circle,” bookwomen, collectively, reached their zenith during this decade, largely as a result of their connection to the *Horn Book*. While the Depression gave little cause for celebration, they refused to allow those circumstances to rob them of their idealism, professional commitments, or sense of community. Networks and alliances, Children’s Book Week, Newbery award celebrations, and the *Horn Book* all dramatically expanded during the Depression.

The professional lives of most bookwomen also changed dramatically during the 1930s: May Massee left Doubleday; Louise Seaman Bechtel retired from Macmillan; Elinor Whitney and Bertha Mahony each married; the Bookshop for Boys and Girls was sold; Mahony both acquired ownership

of the *Horn Book* and stepped down as its managing editor. Some of these changes were directly attributable to the financial and cultural tensions of the decade, while the relationship of other changes to the Depression was more ambiguous.

The Depression, Libraries, and a Silver Jubilee

Like most institutions in Depression America, libraries experienced budget cutbacks, thus making the prosperity of the previous decade seem remote. Many libraries, in fact, cut their book purchasing budgets dramatically, often by 25 percent.⁴ Paradoxically, as fewer books were purchased, book circulation in many cities rose by as much as 40 percent, partly because, unlike other activities, reading could be free.⁵ On a deeper level, books were familiar and comforting artifacts, signifying stability in the midst of profound national turbulence. Books connected readers to the past, somehow reassuring them of a future and reminding them that they would survive the worst of calamities. On a more pragmatic level, books continued to represent important currency, influential reminders that with the right attitude and education, getting ahead was still possible, whatever the present circumstances. And never was belief in success potential more important than in Depression-era America.

Librarians, including Anne Carroll Moore and Alice Jordan, typically responded to budget restrictions with a no-frills, back-to-basics approach in book selection, relying on titles with proven track records for circulation.⁶ In addition to slashed book budgets, wage reductions were a common means of fiscal control. Librarians, on average, suffered pay cuts ranging from 20 to 30 percent, although the figure approached 60 percent in some cases. Federal resources allocated to the public library system allowed roughly fifteen thousand librarians to be shifted to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) payroll, but where WPA funds were not available, many libraries simply could not afford to retain staff.⁷ Consistent with national social attitudes and employment trends, library women who lost their jobs found little recourse or sympathy for their plight.⁸

Despite the library's grim financial picture, 1931 marked Moore's silver anniversary as supervisor of children's work at the library. This event served as a catalyst, drawing together a diverse community of bookwomen, publishing people, and librarians who were determined to acknowledge Moore's substantive contribution and vision with an event befitting their "commander-in-chief."⁹ Throughout the summer, therefore, preparations

were underway at NYPL for a surprise party in her honor. In addition to honoring Moore, the event symbolized collective achievement, provided a unique opportunity for reflection, and brought the interdependence of varied professionals in the literacy enterprise into sharp relief. Invitations for the September event went out to friends and colleagues nationwide and the response was impressive. Moore's biographer, Frances Clarke Sayers, described the event:

The scene was the Central Children's Room. . . . [Moore] came with [cousin and publisher] Storer Lunt, to find the place brilliant with candlelight and flowers, and men and women of the literary world, old friends and out of town guests waiting to greet her. She was escorted to the center of the room and there she was seated in a high, curved rocking chair that had belonged to Washington Irving. Frederic Melcher was master of ceremonies. He announced The Procession of Branches. Winding through the length of the children's room they came, the children's librarians. . . . A great portfolio of original drawings made for Anne by artists of the time was put into her hands, and at one point Mr. Melcher poured from a large cornucopia a shower of letters, telegrams, messages from everywhere, into her lap.¹⁰

The acclaim she received at the party was typical of tributes elsewhere. Eleanor Roosevelt cabled congratulations. Sara Teasdale declared that Moore's work would "live in mankind to the end of our civilization . . . planted where it can not die," bringing forth "fruit that our country needs more than any other thing."¹¹ Even Benjamin Adams, Arthur Bostwick's successor at NYPL with whom Moore frequently disagreed and over whom she nearly resigned her job, acknowledged Moore's "zeal and energy" and her "never failing loyalty and complete devotion to the cause."¹² May Lamberton Becker, a literary editor for *St. Nicholas* at the time, claimed that there was "not a department . . . in our country . . . that has not been strongly influenced . . . by her noble idealism."¹³ Moore's old friend Montrose Moses acknowledged her critical role in the "Great Transformation" that had "educated [publishers] in the faith that young people should rub elbows with the Great Books."¹⁴ Financial prosperity had diminished, but books, perceived to be an important stamp of civilization, remained reliable touchstones of cultural vitality.

Hundreds of letters expressed a similar sentiment: Moore had redefined the field of children's books. Writing the introduction for Moore's third and latest, *The Three Owls*, Bertha Mahony claimed that "no person living

in America today has exerted the same constructive influence in making the children's books what they are today. . . . There are three great names in the history of American children's books—Horace Scudder, Mary Mapes Dodge and—Anne Carroll Moore.”¹⁵ In recognition of her “commanding influence and authority in the choice of children's literature within and without the library profession,” Pratt Institute bestowed a Diploma of Honor upon Moore shortly after the silver jubilee.¹⁶

Publishing and the Depression

Like the library, publishing revealed signs of financial strain, although only two small houses went bankrupt during the Depression, further evidence of their remarkable durability. The industry survived by minimizing overhead costs, lowering profit expectations, cutting wages, reducing the number of titles published, and keeping prices low. Books, in fact, were commonly available for prices ranging from fifty cents to a dollar, the result of price wars to retain customers. By 1934, NRA coding stabilized the book market by forbidding price alterations within six months of publication, but after the codes were declared unconstitutional in May 1935 the price wars resumed. As the decade wore on and publishers' faith in the market was partially restored, the number of titles and sales gradually increased so that by 1937, more than six million books a month sold—some for ten cents—at various retail outlets around the country.¹⁷ Publishers, attentive to cost control, cut children's book production despite the fact that children's books had expanded more than any other category during the prosperity of the previous decade.¹⁸ As a result, Bechtel and Masee focused on reprinting popular stories, but ultimately both editors left their positions during the first half of the decade. Bechtel's position was never jeopardized because of the Depression; with nearly twenty thousand titles on backlist, Macmillan retained its prestige as the largest and wealthiest firm in America, and its sales were higher than ever.¹⁹ Her departure, instead, was the result of a horseback riding accident in 1933, in which she fractured her hip. Authors, illustrators, and editors she had mentored found standing room only when they visited her in the hospital; the outpouring of concern for their editor and friend was enormous. Bechtel's recuperation was protracted and, in light of her long absence, she considered leaving Macmillan but worried about the consequences of such a decision. She had published over six hundred books at an average rate of sixty titles a year.²⁰ Her intimate connection with the printing process, as well as with her authors and

illustrators, caused Bechtel, like Mahony, to become personally identified with her job. "To leave a list in the hands of others," she mused, "is a complicatedly bitter experience. Who will see that the next printing of WYZ is done on the right paper? Who will watch the binding of PQ? Who will follow up in those special letters to schools about AB? Will somebody be kind when CD simply must have his royalty check a week ahead of its due time?"²¹ What would happen, in other words, when market relations in America no longer rested on personal relationships?

During her convalescence, George Brett continued paying Bechtel's salary, even offering to put her on "advisory salary," but she thought this would be unfair to her successor.²² After an agonizing decision-making process, Bechtel left Macmillan in 1934 and returned to Bedford Four Corners. Although she remained an important advisor to Mahony at the *Horn Book*, thus maintaining a sturdy connection to children's books, many were troubled about the void Bechtel's departure represented in publishing.²³ Rachel Field lamented that "a very real force has gone out of literature for children," and even Moore, with whom Bechtel had a relatively distant relationship, wrote to Brett, warning him that he had "a good deal to live up to" in finding an adequate replacement for the editor.²⁴

May Massee's departure from Doubleday, by contrast, appears to have borne a more direct relationship to the national financial predicament. The firm's cutbacks in children's book production caused one of Massee's assistants to leave the company in 1930 and Massee herself to do so the next year.²⁵ Unlike many other working women, however, the editor found work quickly; in January 1932, she became the first children's editor for Viking. The firm, willing to give Massee "absolute control" in creating the department, was more to her liking. Viking had, Massee claimed, "the ability in these times to outline a policy and stick to it."²⁶ For Massee, this meant a budget allowing her to publish the elaborate children's books she could not produce at Doubleday.

While publishers temporarily cut children's book production, their interest in creating children's departments did not diminish. Several firms added juvenile editors to their staffs during the Depression years, including Laura Harris (Grossett and Dunlop), Rose Dobbs (Coward-McCann), Elizabeth Gilman (Farrar and Rinehart), Alice Dalglish (Scribners), Louise Bonino (Random House), Dorothy Waugh and Lillian Bragdon (Knopf), Helen Hoke (Julian Messner), Grace Allen Hogarth (Oxford University Press), and Marion Dittman (Rand McNally). Whether appointed during the 1930s or later, editors in many cases began their professional lives under

the direction of bookwomen. Alice Dalglish had gotten her professional start as an author and manuscript reader for Bechtel, while Edith Patterson Meyer, who had studied storytelling at Columbia under Marie Shedlock, had assisted Masee in work on the ALA Booklist and eventually became the children's editor at Abingdon-Cokesbury Press. Mary Silva Cosgrave (Houghton Mifflin) and Margaret McElderry (Harcourt Brace) began work at NYPL under Moore in 1936 and 1939 respectively. At least six of Bechtel's and Masee's assistants became children's editors: Eunice Blake, Doris Patee, and Gertrude Blumenthal at Macmillan, Dorothy Bryan and Margaret Lesser at Doubleday, and Annis Duff at Viking.

During the early 1930s, bookwomen also expanded rituals connected with the field of children's literature, deepening relationships among themselves and strengthening alliances with teachers. The important annual Newbery decision, now resting in the hands of a fifteen-member award committee consisting of ALA committee officers and chairs, had traditionally been a simple luncheon affair.²⁷ Despite the Depression, bookwomen decided to enhance the award ceremony by making it a dinner function and by expanding the guest list beyond members of the Children's Section of the ALA to include school librarians and prominent individuals, including Eleanor Roosevelt, who addressed one annual gathering during the 1930s. When Mahony began printing the text of Newbery acceptance speeches in the *Horn Book*, a dimension of permanence and prestige accrued to both the award and the magazine.²⁸ By doing so, Mahony connected the *Horn Book* explicitly to the Newbery, by now the "symbolic center" of jurisdiction over children's services.²⁹

The expansion of concern over children's books was also evident in the growth of the Children's Section of the ALA, whose membership, by 1937, rose to nearly eight hundred members, approximately four times more than in 1921. Likewise, most children's editors now attended the annual ALA conference, hoping to change librarians' notion that commercial interests in book production contaminated the field. One such instance occurred at the 1934 ALA meeting in Montreal, when Masee confronted children's librarians about the need to trust others in the book business.³⁰ Bechtel was more blunt: children's librarians, she claimed, had "remained childish too long."³¹ Librarians' attitudes about this issue persisted but, with Whitney, Masee, and Mahony as NERTCL guests, Jordan continued creating opportunities for interaction with publishers.³²

In addition to deepening alliances with those actively involved with children's book production, bookwomen continued reaching out to educators

and adolescents. Moore and Mahony, for example, collected a steady stream of information from G. S. Leland, superintendent of the New York public school system, who sent them monthly school bulletins.³³ At the Bookshop, Mahony strengthened ties between school age adolescents and books through the Amy Lowell Memorial Poetry Series, named in honor of an early Bookshop patron, by offering an impressive lineup of guest presenters, including Carl Sandburg, T. S. Eliot, Archibald MacLeish, and Robert Frost.³⁴ Beginning in 1934, she sent collections of children's books to state teachers' colleges nationwide to keep them abreast of children's literature.³⁵

The *Horn Book* and its managing editor underwent significant changes during the 1930s, altering both Mahony's relationship to the magazine and the magazine's relationship to the book industry. In her attempts to maintain the original vision of the magazine, ironically, Mahony was forced to intensify her relationship with publishers. As a result, the *Horn Book* was more firmly situated in commercial book trade territory, a process that she continued to resist. Likewise, it became clear that the *Horn Book* faced more than intrusion from profit-driven "outsiders." Further charges of censorship, and criticism of the magazine's editorial policy, came from insiders: bookwomen themselves. Attempts at combining service with business had taken its toll, resulting in the sale of the Bookshop in 1936 and, ultimately, the resignation of Mahony as managing editor in 1939.

For Bertha Mahony, significant change began long before her resignation when, in 1932, she married William Davis Miller, a wealthy furniture manufacturer whose home was Ashburnham, a large estate in central Massachusetts. She first met Miller and his wife, Celena, in 1918, and the three became friends. Both Millers were well educated, Celena at Wellesley and William at the Sorbonne. Instead of teaching French at Annapolis as he was invited to do, however, William Miller joined his father-in-law's furniture company and eventually became its owner. After meeting Mahony, and while her health permitted it, Celena served on the advisory board of the Bookshop as a book reviewer, but a heart condition made her involvement increasingly difficult. Celena died in July 1931 and on September 7 of the following year, Mahony and Miller were married in Weston, Massachusetts.

After her marriage, Bertha Mahony Miller moved to Ashburnham and, significantly, left her predecessor's belongings—including sentimental memorabilia—virtually undisturbed.³⁶ Two other behaviors after her marriage revealed that her desire to "blend in" was personal as well as professional and that she was uncomfortable with confrontation. First, she assumed

Celena's social obligations by joining the same organizations and committees to which her husband's first wife belonged. More bizarre, however, was her continuation of Celena's diary, whose last entry was dated July 25, 1931, just five days before her death. The very next entry, dated August 1933, is in Bertha's handwriting.³⁷

At the same time, she created a distinct identity of her own at Ashburnham. She had no intention of abandoning her professional life, but the one-hundred-year-old farmhouse was simply located too far for a daily commute to Boston. Miller selected for herself a second-floor room, overlooking gardens and woods, for professional work. Known henceforth as the Study, much *Horn Book* work took place in this room. Neither did she abandon the friendships so important to her; marriage, in fact, accommodated friendships rather than the reverse.

Like Edwin Bechtel, William Miller supported his new wife's professional life. On more than one occasion, he provided personal funds for a *Horn Book* publication to which his wife had committed herself, with the understanding that he would be repaid as the book made money. Just as she had insisted on timely repayment of her debt to the WEIU so many years ago, she insisted on repaying her husband as quickly as possible. In this sense, her marriage to Miller resembled her relationship to the union, since both provided financial stability for new or expanding career aspirations. Unlike the public library and the publishing industry, whose ability to survive the Great Depression could hardly be doubted, the survival of the *Horn Book*, despite its connection to the customary machinery of book production and distribution, could not be assumed. Miller nonetheless refused to view her husband's generosity as a substitute for the sound fiscal management that would bring the magazine economic independence.

While neither the magazine nor the Bookshop operated at a loss during the 1930s, business records divulge the financial worries of bookwomen and the precarious financial situation in which it sometimes operated.³⁸ Well-worn and carefully handwritten on pieces of cardboard held together with pieces of string, records represented the intensely personal nature of the editor's investment in the magazine's success. Stars were drawn or applied to the record in celebration of days when new subscriptions were added to the *Horn Book* mailing list. In the context of meager resources, every subscription was significant. The sense of both worry and victory evidenced by the records, however, was undoubtedly for nonfinancial reasons as well, since Miller knew that, if necessary, she could rely on her husband's financial resources. More important than the money they represented, the

growing number of subscriptions confirmed to the editors that, in the midst of what seemed to be profound change, an audience existed for their magazine and its abiding hope that the America of their childhood recollections continued to exist.

Miller devised a multidimensional strategy to assure the *Horn Book's* fiscal health and to minimize dependence on outside sources. Initially, the plan included conventional promotional schemes to enhance circulation. But by 1932, Miller believed that increasing production to a bimonthly rather than quarterly schedule was the best way to improve the magazine's financial circumstances. The advisability of this decision seemed doubtful, given the fact that the total income of the *Horn Book* for that year stood at \$3,936.58, while the total cost for the same period was \$4,640.06. On a quarterly publication schedule, the magazine ran a \$175 deficit for each issue, or an average of two dollars a page based on an average of fifty-eight pages of text per issue.³⁹ Miller and Whitney were nonetheless determined to carry out their plan, believing that expanded visibility meant expanded profit. Increasing publication frequency, however, meant higher production costs, and doubling the magazine's price in March 1934 proved inadequate to offset their expenditures.⁴⁰ Reluctantly, Miller again faced the undeniable usefulness of more advertising, although advertising in the *Horn Book* meant targeting parents, not children, as the actual consumers of children's books.⁴¹ Recognizing that, under the old quarterly schedule, each page of advertising generated \$47.43 of income, Miller calculated that, under the new schedule, the proper ratio of text to advertising was three to one. Her formula, thus, was thirty-nine pages of text for every thirteen pages of advertising.⁴²

Promotional schemes, increased advertising, and more frequent issues were designed to stimulate circulation, but Miller was convinced that establishing the reader's sense of personal belonging to the magazine was a cardinal element of success. Consequently, she invited subscribers into a partnership with the *Horn Book* by announcing that memberships to the new Horn Book Guild for Children's Books were now available. A membership form was included in the August 1933 issue, and subscribers were urged to join; membership was free, and annual renewal was merely \$2.50. Miller informed readers that "when the arts and crafts were threatened, the various trades and professions organized . . . to save their industries." It was not clear precisely what direct benefit subscribers received as a result of membership, but Miller's appeal resonated with middle-class joiners who valued her attempt to "form . . . an alliance [with subscribers] because as a

group they bear a closer relation to the aims and purposes of the *Horn Book* than magazine subscribers have ordinarily to the journal purchased. The Editors . . . have thought that to unite in a society . . . those who have a special interest in children's books might result in some dynamic influence upon the vitality of those books which combine the creative arts."⁴³ Elsewhere, Miller stated that the guild was intended to create "a family feeling."⁴⁴ Secondly, no doubt, she also hoped that guild membership dues, during the lean Depression years, would provide a critical cash reserve that potentially represented the difference between operating at a loss and operating in the black.

The announcement of the guild would not have surprised *Horn Book* subscribers, since children's magazines like *St. Nicholas* had an established tradition of creating such partnerships. Activities such as art and writing contests encouraged subscribers to engage with the *Horn Book* on a more personal level by creating a sense of group ownership. Similar to the act of signing pledge cards in the library, joining the guild constituted a commitment to the *Horn Book*, a sign of support and loyalty for the magazine and its editors. The guild intensified the investment of the subscribers beyond the impersonal act of sending a yearly check, exemplifying one of bookwomen's central beliefs: good business practices should be based on relationships that were, if not face-to-face, at least personal, involving mutual vows of integrity and goodwill. Additionally, bringing subscribers into a personal relationship promoted children's awareness of market relations and encouraged advertisers to view children as a potential market.⁴⁵

In the eyes of the editors, therefore, guild membership represented a momentous commitment between themselves and their readers. For their part, readers promised that format changes, including substantial advertising increases, would not diminish their support for the magazine. In return, editors promised that the noncommercial nature of the magazine would remain intact and that subscribers could continue to rely on all that was familiar about the *Horn Book*, including its tributes, its booklist, and, not least, the integrity and expertise of its contributors.

Miller also ensured the survival of the *Horn Book* by keeping a close watch on salaries. To accomplish this, she hired a new editor, a particularly urgent need since she and Whitney refused to consider themselves businesswomen, despite ten successful years of magazine production and eighteen years of bookstore management. In January 1934, therefore, Beulah Folmsbee was hired to build up the mail order department and handle the publicity aspects of both the *Horn Book* and the Bookshop.⁴⁶ Folmsbee was

a graduate of Emerson College in Boston and had been employed by the Atlantic Monthly Company in various capacities for fifteen years, including work on *Youth's Companion*.

Miller set Folmsbee's annual salary at \$1,300, making her by far the magazine's highest paid employee. By contrast, Miller allowed salaries of only \$600 a year for herself and Whitney, hardly reflective of the amount of work performed by either editor. Miller's economic status allowed her the luxury of making herself, virtually, a volunteer in service of the *Horn Book*. At the same time, her token salary allowed her the satisfaction of laying claim to a symbol of "modern" womanhood, the paycheck. In this sense, Miller was possibly able to reconcile her deeply felt beliefs about financial independence and service to others.⁴⁷

Once in full swing, the Depression made it nearly impossible for bookwomen to sidestep the issue of money, and it became a palpable issue of concern for those connected to the *Horn Book*. Economically comfortable marriages enabled Miller and Bechtel to scrupulously retain the service ideal, so deeply rooted in their upbringing and training, as the warp and woof of their professional behavior. Without fail, Bechtel refused payment for her contributions, and Miller persisted in her conviction that there was nothing she felt "less interested in than money."⁴⁸ Others, like Jordan, did receive payment for contributions, while Moore steered a somewhat unpredictable middle course, sometimes accepting and sometimes declining pay. Two obvious questions arose: how much should women be paid for doing what was only "natural," and how possible was it for a nationally acclaimed magazine to avoid interacting with the market? The answer to the second question seemed clearer than ever: it was not.

In any case, bookwomen voiced generous support for the "new" *Horn Book*. Bechtel offered praise for "clever" and "wonderful" editorials that "ought to be quoted widely" and acclaimed Miller as "*the most wonderful planner and dreamer for every side of the book world.*"⁴⁹ Others expressed satisfaction with the new format. Teachers and librarians around the country routinely used the magazine as a resource in their classes or research, partly the result of Folmsbee's efforts to convince library schools to adopt the *Horn Book* as a textbook in their children's literature classes.⁵⁰ Helen Smith, for example, an assistant professor of library work with children at Case Western Reserve and a researcher of the effect of book illustration on children, requested the *Horn Book* as research material, and Edith A. Lathrop at the Department of Education in Washington recommended the *Horn Book* in her guide for rural schools.⁵¹

Despite retaining the final right to “pass judgment on everything printed in the Horn Book,” Miller continued to rely heavily on senior bookwomen for support.⁵² Despite Folmsbee’s capable management of the *Horn Book*, Miller frequently turned to Bechtel, now at Bedford, for advice about fiscal and personnel matters.⁵³ Folmsbee might be an able business manager but, as later events demonstrated, she remained a “junior” bookwoman. Entrance into the inner circle was selective, open to “pioneers” and to those who spoke the language of Yankee cultural values.

In any case, Miller had particular need of Bechtel’s counsel by the beginning of 1935 when the issue of censorship once again arose, this time from among the ranks of bookwomen. Writing to Miller, May Masee demanded to know if the *Horn Book* was suppressing *Trigger John*, a book she had recently published. Noting that the book was not available at the Bookshop and had not been reviewed by the magazine, Masee threatened to withhold Viking advertising in the magazine if she felt that Miller denied a book to the public simply because she did not personally like it.⁵⁴

Viking had published *Trigger John*, written by Thomas Pendleton Robinson, in 1934. Reminiscent of Mark Twain in both style and subject, the book itself was about the mischievous behavior of a group of young boys. The book received praise from several reviewers, including children’s author Margery Bianco, who acclaimed it as “the best thing of its kind since *Tom Sawyer*.” May Lamberton Becker, likewise, gave the book a good review, saying that some men might find within it a “lost paradise.”⁵⁵ Given the publication date, the book represented one of Masee’s early projects at Viking. For this reason, it was especially important to her that the book receive favorable reviews, and few reviews were more important at the time than those in the *Horn Book*. Recognizing her dependence on publishers who purchased advertising space in the magazine, Miller anxiously reassured Masee by denying that censorship was practiced, either in book reviewing or in advertisement policy. Assuming a more defensive tone, she remarked that she “would not hesitate” to print comments with which she did not agree. Insisting that the *Horn Book* meticulously followed a policy of tolerance, she acknowledged that her editorial judgment was “no more important than that of someone else equally equipped to judge.”⁵⁶

The question was, who else was “equipped,” in the minds of bookwomen, to judge? Those individuals expressing differing viewpoints, like Becker and Bianco, might be respected but were given ancillary status in the children’s book world. Still, confiding her thoughts to Bechtel, Miller revealed the extent of self-doubt that arose from Masee’s complaints. Masee,

in fact, had not only complained about censorship, but told Miller that no children's magazine was presenting "attitudes that needed to be expressed." The statement is vague, but likely a reference to Massee's frustration with the magazine's reticence to take on difficult or controversial subjects. As a result, Miller told Bechtel that the magazine was "not good enough," stating that if she had enough money to endow the magazine, she would make Moore the editor.⁵⁷

Bechtel responded reassuringly, asserting that the growth of the *Horn Book* proved its value and expressed Miller "in a rare way." Encouraging Miller to stick with her current editorial policies, Bechtel insinuated that Massee's comments sprang from jealousy, and reminded her that the *Horn Book* was not intended to be a popular magazine. By maintaining a small, select subscriber list, she suggested, the editorial staff could take certain things for granted among its readers, whereas a more widely based magazine would be obligated to take a variety of viewpoints into consideration.⁵⁸ Still, the *Trigger John* issue left Miller upset; despite budgetary constraints and overextended commitments, she valued her relationship with Massee even in times of confrontation. Eventually, she decided that while Massee had "idiosyncrasies," her friendship was too important to lose.⁵⁹

She nonetheless made a point of crafting an institutional response designed to address the censorship issue in a revised editorial policy for the *Horn Book*. Acknowledging that the former policy had been to "give space . . . only to those books we wished to recommend," the *Horn Book* now welcomed other opinions. While her intention was to offer book reviews "honestly and sincerely," she denied that hers was "the only opinion worth having."⁶⁰ It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which Miller's announcement lined up with her personal feelings. On the one hand, there is little evidence to support the idea that bookwomen ever significantly altered their sense of what constituted a "good" children's book. On the other hand, the shift from "protector" to "advocate" of children's reading had intensified throughout the early twentieth century. While bookwomen typically claimed to reject only badly written books, their definition of that had sometimes included books with controversial themes. Bookwomen were now pressured to comprehend and respect the difference between the two.⁶¹ But there was more to respecting the opinions of others than becoming broadminded; for bookwomen, doing so carried a potentially significant price. In the "reading democracy," it was necessary to acknowledge variety, but acknowledging other standards risked professional authority.

Amid the turbulence of the censorship debate, the *Horn Book* did well

on its new publication schedule. In 1935, the magazine reviewed 267 books (58 percent of all new juveniles published), nine biographical sketches of authors and illustrators, three articles on bookmaking and publishing, and fourteen articles on either writing for or reading by children.⁶² At this point, 60 percent of the magazine's sales derived from schools and libraries with the remainder from bookstores, writers, artists, teachers, parents, and children.⁶³ In fact, by the middle of the decade the magazine was doing so well that Miller was increasingly torn between her responsibilities at the Bookshop and those at the *Horn Book*.

Not only did she bear enormous responsibilities for both enterprises, but she and Whitney were also now at work on *Five Years of Children's Books*, the sequel to *Realms of Gold*, due to come out early in 1935. Whitney spent several weeks in New York completing research and soliciting reactions from bookwomen, and at completion *Five Years* turned out to be as large a text as its predecessor.⁶⁴ In it, the authors asked why better books for children could now be found. Metaphorically, they responded to their own question: a "crystal-clear mountain brook," they insisted, now existed in children's rooms in public libraries and among editors with "fine intelligence and sensitive perception . . . [who believed in] books as a source of joy."

The "brook" was broader, in some ways, evidenced by the fact that while *Realms* covered five centuries of children's literature, its sequel dealt only with five years. But although bookwomen were quick to point to the rapid expansion of children's literature as proof of their influence, they themselves had not generally broadened their own definitions of good books, leaving them as only one, albeit distinctive, current in the brook of children's literature. In any case, *Five Years in Children's Books* was shepherded through Doubleday by Masee's successor, Margaret Lesser, in 1936, and was dedicated to Moore, Jordan, Bechtel, Masee, and Melcher.⁶⁵

The adjustment to a recent marriage, management of the Bookshop, editorship of the magazine, and a strenuous writing schedule took a toll on Miller. At the urging of the union, she tried to continue her responsibilities at the Bookshop on a part-time basis in addition to managing the *Horn Book* but, unable to devote the kind of time to the Bookshop it required, began feeling that a younger woman would be more suited to carry on its responsibilities. She had run the Bookshop for the union for eighteen years and resisted the thought of giving up the enterprise she had nurtured to prosperity, evidenced by \$101,000 in sales receipts in 1934.⁶⁶ But Miller's heart lay with the magazine. The *Horn Book* required the constant efforts

of its editorial staff to manage its fragile finances and tentative growth. Moreover, the idea of reaching a national—or even international—audience had long defined her vision for her professional life. Friends and associates, recognizing her struggle over the possibility of leaving the Bookshop, offered advice and comfort.⁶⁷ Assuming an optimistic stance, Bechtel wrote to Miller that “your personal influence through [the *Horn Book*] . . . speaks to the book world—which is . . . important. When I think of your vision, so long before Mr. Brett thought of a department, in starting that shop, your ideals for it, your enlargement of bookselling to be a creative force in the community—well, it makes publishing look puny!” At the same time, she encouraged Miller to set limits on how much she did for the shop. At all cost, Bechtel advised, she should not become a “stopgap for [the union].” While she was “generous hearted and really interested to have [the Bookshop] go on well,”⁶⁸ she reminded Miller that her strength had limits.

Miller considered various schemes that would allow her to continue working in both places or, at least, find a suitable replacement, but she became increasingly nervous and tired, confiding to Melcher that she did not want the Bookshop to become “just another Boston book shop.”⁶⁹ She and Whitney considered Folmsbee, but dismissed the idea. Failing to find what they considered a suitable replacement, they resigned their responsibilities at the Bookshop in 1934. After two years and a nearly “disastrous experience” under another director, on June 1, 1936, the union sold the Bookshop to the Old Corner Book Store in Boston.⁷⁰

Attendant on the sale of the Bookshop, the proprietary rights to the *Horn Book* were transferred to Miller, who subsequently incorporated the magazine. Its ties to the union were dissolved on friendly terms, but she remained distraught about the sale of the shop. Especially devastated by the union’s decision to sell to outsiders, since the shop had been a union-supported activity for twenty years, she turned, as usual, to bookwomen. In uncharacteristically harsh language, Jordan derided the decision, declaring the union “dumb,” “stupid,” and “short-sighted.”⁷¹ Miller confided to her old friend Clara Whitehill Hunt that she wished she could have done more to prevent the sale of the Bookshop, but consoled herself with the notion that the sale actually imbued the *Horn Book* with an increased sense of mission; in the absence of the Bookshop, it became all the more important that the magazine “carry on.”⁷² She also recognized that Whitney’s marriage to William Field on April 29, 1936, and subsequent move to Alstead Centre, New Hampshire, made it even more imperative that the two women confine their efforts to the magazine.

The sale had consequences for other Bookshop associates. Several staff members, including Lillian Gillig, Pauline Langley, Frances Darling, and Genevieve Washburn, opened bookstores elsewhere. Many of these women had been with the Bookshop for nearly as long as Miller and Field, devoting their time and creative energy to its success. They wrote about the experience with fondness, emotion, and faithfulness to metaphors that, by their vagueness, encouraged uncritical acceptance of bookwomen and their ideology of books. Although no longer formally connected to the *Horn Book*, the union continued providing space for the magazine at its offices on Boylston Street, in the heart of Boston's business district.⁷³ Despite continued physical proximity to the organization, the *Horn Book*, as Miller always dreamed, was now freed from its regional connection to Boston. As such, it became the critical intersection where relationships and professional authority were cultivated, nurtured, sustained, and consolidated in the ordinary and routine business affairs of the magazine. Miller continued meeting with publishers anxious for *Horn Book* attention and soliciting contributions from various children's authors and editors.⁷⁴ She also met increasingly with other bookwomen, either in person or in correspondence, to discuss future issues of the *Horn Book*.

When Miller assumed ownership of the *Horn Book*, Moore offered the now famous "Three Owls" to her as an expression of confidence in the future of the magazine. She was willing to do the column for one year without payment in order to strengthen the subscription list but told Miller that when "[the column] really does pay it will not need to be a free contribution."⁷⁵ Unlike Miller, Moore nowhere claimed that money was unimportant to her. Her offer demonstrated a belief both in the ideal of service and an assumption that financial remuneration could and should become part of women's professional rewards. Moore looked forward to rejuvenating the column and informed Miller that the owls were "preening their feathers for the flight." Her speculation about the resulting growth of subscriptions was accurate: circulation, which had grown steadily but slowly during the Depression, increased by nearly a third in one year with Moore on board as a regular contributor.⁷⁶

In the midst of support and generosity, significant differences of opinion still surfaced among bookwomen, the result of an editorial staff consisting of experienced, honest professionals who offered Miller unyielding advice.⁷⁷ In one instance, she proposed raising funds to provide storytelling in communities throughout the country in honor of Marie Shedlock. She intended to collect dues from *Horn Book* subscribers. Moore forthrightly

objected for several reasons: dues would be hard to collect; people generally disagreed about what constituted good storytelling; few remembered Shedlock in the first place; children's librarians would not necessarily support the venture. Instead, Moore advised Miller to stay focused. "This one thing I do' is as good a line today as it was for St. Paul," she admonished. "[Limit yourself to what you can] do practically to the community you can reach at first hand."⁷⁸

With ties to the Union cut and those to bookwomen strengthened, the *Horn Book* entered a decisive developmental phase in 1936. In terms of circulation figures, production quality, and time investment from the community of bookwomen, the magazine reached a high point in its history. Miller resumed her tributes to editors, beginning with one to Massee in 1936. Bechtel was now free of obligations to Macmillan, and Moore and Jordan, approaching retirement, dedicated significant amounts of time to the magazine. With such help, the *Horn Book* became a distinct current in the "crystal-clear brook" of children's book culture, evident in aesthetically appealing and well-written, if generally nonconfrontational, issues.

Beneath apparent consensus enhancing the richness of the *Horn Book*, however, deep and still unresolved questions about the magazine's overall editorial policy continued to punctuate bookwomen's relationships. In 1937, Moore confronted Miller about her editorial policy, challenging the magazine's very nature. NYPL children's librarians, she said, "found the Definition of a poet 'dull,' 'patronizing,' and various other derogatory things. . . . They also came down heavily on the lack of critical . . . notes for the lists. . . . [Certain books] are being 'boosted' rather than 'described.' . . . [The librarian's] criticism in general is that [the contributors have] no unified format of criticism." Deeply committed to literary criticism, Moore took her staff's charges of a weak editorial policy at the *Horn Book* seriously, recognizing that such accusations had the power to undermine the success of the magazine and children's books in general. The magazine needed librarians' support and she therefore urged Miller to "face the reality . . . and get a detached and objective view."⁷⁹ Moore's criticism, however well intended, caused Miller to consider resigning as managing editor. She wrote to Moore that the *Horn Book* needed a "fresh current of vitality," suggesting that she had "not been doing a good job" and wondering whether she should put herself "out to pasture for a while."⁸⁰

Moore's was not the only criticism. In 1938, Helen Dean Fish, editor at Frederick A. Stokes Company, also inquired into Miller's editorial decision making. This time, the issue was *Susan Beware*, a Stokes title that, like

Trigger John, had been ignored by the *Horn Book*. Fish avoided the level of direct confrontation that Moore and Massee had used, but echoed a similar concern: why were some books noticed and not others?⁸¹

Regardless of criticism and self-doubt about her fitness to continue as managing editor, Miller put aside thoughts of relinquishing her role for another year. And, for all their private questions, bookwomen continued to exhibit a public face of thoroughgoing support for each other and for the magazine.⁸² But the following year, Miller indeed began preparing to resign. As with the Bookshop, she contemplated her replacement carefully. This time, however, because she owned the *Horn Book*, no financial backer held the power to contravene her decisions. Field was not a possibility; although remaining strongly connected to the magazine from New Hampshire, she had removed herself from its day-to-day operations in 1936. Eventually selecting Folmsbee, Miller informed the bookwomen of her decision.⁸³ They expressed unanimous concern both for Miller and for the future of the magazine and braced for change. Jordan wrote to Miller, saying that the proposed change gave her a “pang,” but acknowledged that the burden of the editorship was heavy. “It is better,” she concluded, “for you to make the decision yourself rather than have it forced upon you.” The last phrase, “have it forced upon you,” implied that Moore was not alone in desiring a change in editorial style for the *Horn Book*. Further, while Miller owned the magazine, others were clearly empowered to enforce that desire. Jordan reassured Miller that Folmsbee was an able replacement, likely to carry on “the tradition” Miller had established, but that she would nonetheless be missed “dearly.”⁸⁴

Moore’s opinion was significantly more matter-of-fact, less concerned with Miller than with creating a plan that would allow for a smooth transition by establishing ground rules, philosophical and practical, for Folmsbee to follow. In the first place, she wanted it made clear to Folmsbee that Miller’s withdrawal from the *Horn Book* would leave an authority vacuum best filled by herself and Jordan. Jordan should prepare annotated lists to “represent the Horn Book’s claim to authoritative criticism of children’s books.” That, Moore insisted, meant that Jordan should be placed on the payroll because the prestige of Jordan’s name would have “immediate promotional value.”

Further, Moore made it clear that she wanted her own name to appear as associate editor along with Miller and Field. The associate editors should meet at least annually to provide “stimulating fresh ideas and a constructive plan for the Horn Book of the future.” Although Folmsbee would carry

the title of managing editor, her job, as Moore envisioned it, would be manuscript acquisition and correspondence. "Put any part of this [letter] as your own rather than mine," she advised, "only do be definite. Don't try to explain. . . . You are not 'retiring.' Merely . . . releasing certain responsibilities." She concluded the letter by reminding Miller that "you still *own* the [*Horn Book*]." ⁸⁵

As she had so often, Moore put her own words in the mouths of others. Before increasing Folmsbee's authority, Miller should take a firm hand with her, ensuring that "senior" rather than "junior" bookwomen remained in control of the magazine. This plan worked, for a time. In 1939, Jordan indeed became book editor, a position she held until 1949. Moore retained control over the Owls column, a prime feature of the *Horn Book* until 1960. Bechtel joined the board of directors. Miller temporarily relinquished her role as managing editor, trading it for the more vague and less market-related title of editor. She did this partly because she did not wish to change her editorial style and partly because she wanted, once again, to enlarge the boundaries of her professional life. During the 1940s, she turned to publishing books under the Horn Book imprint that subsequently formed the canon of thought about children's literature for many years. Between 1939 and her final retirement in 1950, Miller's movements within the Horn Book structure thus became distinctly fluid, allowing her to delegate more responsibility and devote herself to other publishing projects, of which the bimonthly magazine now represented only one. The relationship of other bookwomen to children's books also changed. Jordan and Moore retired from their library positions in 1940 and 1941 respectively, but while their institutional affiliations changed, bookwomen remained vitally connected to children's literature—and to each other—for the rest of their remarkably long lives.

Commenting in 1950 on the mission and dilemmas of early children's librarians, Louise Bechtel astutely described the bookwomen in this study as well: "At first it seemed clear what [they] were after: simply to have more children read more good books. But soon they were involved in as many battles as the wars they were living through. The book battles were waged but never were wholly won. . . . These literate book-lovers, embattled, were taking on new foes, trying to be, all at once, booksellers, nurses, . . . actresses, critics . . . and good business women. As custodians of the public taste, their challenge was terrific. For they were living in a new world."⁸⁶ Of all the metaphors bookwomen used, battle was perhaps the most consistent. Perceiving themselves in dramatic conflict with "the public taste"

while considering themselves friends of that same public, bookwomen simultaneously trusted and distrusted the public, both defending a public that did not necessarily ask to be defended and fighting a public that did not necessarily have a quarrel with them. Having drawn such ambiguous battle lines, what initially seemed so “clear” quickly became unclear. Bookwomen achieved authority on ground that was continually shifting, and this ambiguity was the real “foe.” By wanting to join the “new world” they saw without losing the old world they remembered, bookwomen inhabited a cultural “no man’s land” between the two and struggled with their own private paradox of uncertain certainty.