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American Writers for Children, 1900-1960

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American Writers for Children, 1900-1960

Edited by
John Cech
University of Florida

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Foreword

The first six decades of this century have been called "Childhood's Golden Era," and indeed it was an extremely important time for American children. During these decades a growing national awareness emerged concerning the needs (social, material, emotional) of children and the responsibility of public institutions to address these needs. One of the most striking and tangible evidences of this concern occurred in 1909, when Theodore Roosevelt convened the first White House Conference on Children and Youth, thus creating a national forum for examining issues related to the health, education, and general welfare of American children. In 1912 the U.S. Children's Bureau was created and charged by Congress to "investigate and report upon all matters pertaining to the welfare of children and child life among all classes of our people." By 1921 the first national legislation had been enacted to provide adequate standards of maternal and infant care. By 1938 Congress was proposing the American Youth Act that would provide jobs for unemployed youngsters and financial aid for deserving, needy young people to go on to study at universities—this, and more, so "that the traditional American ideal of opportunity for youth be preserved." In 1940 when Franklin Delano Roosevelt called the White House Conference on Youth in a Democracy, the general report of the conference expressed the national ideal even more fervently, concluding that "what we might wish to do for . . . [a] future President, we must be willing to do for every child."

The recognition of national responsibility to children also had dramatic effects on the literary habits of children in this century. By 1900, the first children's libraries were being established within the expanding national public library system; these libraries soon had specially trained staffs to help shape the literary experience that children had there. The second White House Conference on Children and Youth, convened in 1919, officially recognized the significant role that reading played, or should play, in a child's daily recreational activities, but missed the deeper, more powerful implications of providing free libraries to the nation's youth. The point was not lost, however, on Paul Hazard, the French critic who lived and taught in the United States during the 1930s and who wrote one of the first and most often quoted works on the nature of children's literature, *Books, Children and Men*, first translated into English in 1944. Hazard realized the consequences of such an innovative, uniquely American idea as children's libraries: "They are a home. And how many children, in these huge cities without tenderness, have n › other one but that! Outside, the rhythm of life tells of fever. A great human stream roars by. Millions and millions of men, so crowded against each other that space is lacking and houses fuse together towards the sky, keep in motion those gigantic factories called New York or Chicago. Everybody works hard, everyone is breathless until the evening signal sends him back to his suburb, where even his leisure will still be mechanical. Meanwhile, it is a different leisure that delights the children in those peaceful libraries peopled with books. There, where they feel so much at home, they are cultivating those qualities of spirit and soul which alone will be able later to solve the meaning of all this unbridled activity that must be controlled or condemned."

The first children's book department in a publishing house (in this country and probably the world) was started by Macmillan in 1919, and May Massee became its first children's book editor. Also in 1919, shortly after the end of World War I, national Children's Book Week was inaugurated in order to encourage more reading and reading at higher levels among American children. In 1922, the American Library Association established the first of its major annual awards, the John Newbery Medal, for "the Most Distinguished Contribution to American Literature for Children." In 1938 the ALA's first Caldecott Medal was awarded to the artist of the best picture book of the year—a response, it may well have been, to the tremendous advances in the art of the picture book for younger children that took place in this country during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1918, what is usually thought of as being the first "sustained" body of criticism about children's literature was begun by Anne Carroll Moore, the first head of the children's library at the New York Public Library, a regular reviewer of children's books for major newspapers and journals, and a critical force to be reckoned with. By 1924, the *Horn Book Magazine*, for years the most influential journal in the field of children's literature, began publication in Boston. And so the attention to children's literature—its study, its selection, the dissemination of information and ideas about it to the general public—had begun. In the 1920s there were recommended reading lists, regular reviews of children's books, and other sources

of suggestions and advice available to parents, teachers, librarians. Publishers quickly recognized this vital new realm of commercial possibilities and within a few decades capitalized upon it. Hazard was astounded by the rapid development of the juvenile book market: "Do many people know how many books are printed in the United States, for the use of children? In 1919, twelve million; in 1925, twenty-five million, two hundred thousand; in 1927, thirty-one million. In 1919 appeared four hundred and thirty-three new works intended for young people; in 1929, nine hundred and thirty-one. Every bookshop of importance has a juvenile department with its own employees and organization that functions alongside the large one. I have before my eyes a splendid volume, *Realms of Gold in Children's Books*. Presented with taste, illustrated, it contains in eight hundred pages the notice, and sometimes the analysis of all the books in the English language, original or translated, that a child could wish for. What publishing house, what bookshop, in our country would do as much for him?"

Hazard went on to praise the America he observed through its children's books as a country "where they seek to arouse not only the love but the habit of beauty from early childhood." Here he was alluding to the development of the picture book for younger children in this country during the 1920s and 1930s. Though the roots of this form reach deep into the nineteenth century with such artists as Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway in England, and Maurice Boutet de Monvel in France, many feel that this art form reached maturity in the United States in the twentieth century with the work of such artists as Maud and Miska Petersham, Wanda Gág, and, most recently, Maurice Sendak.

The 1920s and 1930s were a time of rapid technical innovation and exhilarating experimentation in the picture-book form, and major breakthroughs were beginning to be made in terms of the subject matter that could be dealt with in these books for very young children. For example, Margaret Wise Brown, one of the most prolific and important creators of books for younger children, had been significantly influenced by the progressive movement in education, which in turn was interested in understanding the "here and now" immediacy of children's lives and their ability to learn directly through sensory experience. Lucy Sprague Mitchell, an early teacher and friend of Brown's, had incorporated many of these ideas into her methods for training teachers at the Bank Street School of Education in New York City. It was from Mitchell, as well as from her own close observation of the children at the school, that Brown began to develop her own poetic applications of these ideas which resulted in her Noisy Books and, through the alchemy of her own imagination, in her classics for younger children, *The Runaway Bunny* (1942) and *Goodnight Moon* (1947).

In his remarks about American libraries and publishing, Hazard noticed another quality in the surge of interest in children's books in the United States—that is, a kind of loving indulgence, an impulse to protect and shelter. One perceives this quality in L. Frank Baum's introduction to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which, in one of history's wonderful coincidences, was published in 1900 to welcome the "Golden Era." Baum was obviously reacting against the traditional, imported folktale, as well as the repressive, didactic literature of the nineteenth century, when he wrote: "the time has come for a series of new 'wonder tales' in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all horrible and bloodcurdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale. . . . 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz' was written solely to pleasure children today. It aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out."

Whether or not Baum was able to banish the "heartaches and nightmares" completely is debatable at best. Certainly the movie version of Baum's story which was released in 1939, soon after the phenomenal success of Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the *E.T.* of its day, gave American children some of their most memorably hair-raising moments in cinema history. But this, of course, was not Baum's fault. He had attempted to present a gentler story for his contemporary child audience, and in doing so he was evoking and invoking several cherished (and paradoxical) ideas that are leitmotifs of American children's literature.

On the one hand, Baum allows his main character, Dorothy (and the reader through her), to indulge in a marvelous fantasy; but on the other hand, Baum carefully controls the results of that fantasy, bringing Dorothy home to the "here and now" of Kansas, no matter how dull, drab, and "grey" (the most repeated word in the first few pages of the book) that reality may be. It is an ambivalent, uneasy ending, one that Judy Garland and the MGM studios still could not resolve nearly forty years later. In his *Little Nemo in Slumberland* comic strip, which began to appear in 1905, Winsor McCay faced the same restrictions with his use of

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dream fantasy. Like the bump on the head that takes Dorothy to Oz, Little Nemo's nightly ride on his nightmare is predicated on his having had something disagreeable to eat. Dreams, it seems—especially the kinds that Nemo and Dorothy have—must be somehow explained or accounted for. As a natural, spontaneous psychic function, fantasy itself was certainly not understood, much less accepted. Freud, of course, had not yet arrived in America at the time of *Little Nemo* or *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. In fact, quite literally, he would not visit this country until 1909. Even then, it would take decades for his ideas about infantile sexuality and psychological development to be transformed, through such spokesmen as Erik Erikson and Bruno Bettelheim, and taken into the mainstream of American child-nurture theory and practice. One of the more popular notions of the late 1940s and 1950s that derived from Freud as he was interpreted in the United States was that permissiveness in child rearing was preferable to harsh restrictiveness, and one of the related results was that an active fantasy life for children was thought to be normal, in every sense of the word. By 1937, when Dr. Seuss's *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* appeared, the secret was out: kids fantasize; they know it, and adults know it, too. The sad part of it is that they must repress the fantasies unless they want lectures from their fathers about what is truly, empirically real and sane. E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) and distrust of fantasy had led us to create an ambivalent kind of literary fantasy that only began to change in the late 1930s with Dr. Seuss's anarchic works and later with its bold assertion that fantasy is not synonymous with insanity. By the time Maurice Sendak sends Max to where the Wild Things are in the early 1960s, no apologies (at least on the part of the author) need be made for a child's disappearance into the jungle of his own feelings.

Related to this general suspicious denial of the "reality" and the sanity of fantasy is another thread that runs through a great deal of American children's literature in the first half of this century—that the dark side of the child's character or experience be sweetened and lightened. There is a fundamentally optimistic belief in an innate human innocence that turns every "bad" child into a good one or, rather, reveals the goodness that has always been there. Take, for example, one of the more popular books for younger children of the 1930s, Hardie Gramatky's *Little Toot* (1939). The mischievous little tugboat who causes nothing but trouble in the harbor ultimately shows his courageous heart of gold by selflessly rescuing a foundering ocean liner when none of the other older, bigger tugboats can. The fact that Little Toot is a machine, albeit a very human one, shows us just how mechanical this imagery can become. But perhaps the epitome of these mechanistic metaphors of human psychology and behavior occurs in *The Little Engine That Could* (1930), which shows, in one of the most famous and remembered refrains of the century ("I think I can. . . . I think I can"), that even the most difficult of problems is solvable, a matter for optimistic self-assurance. Even though this work is not a particularly distinctive piece of art or literature, it touches deep, resonant chords in the American character, and, I've been told, has been the reason why some people have been able to endure crises from doctoral dissertations to difficult divorces to severe illnesses. It is uncannily fitting that the "author," Watty Piper, is not an actual individual, but one of many, now unidentifiable, people who produced books under the Platt & Munk house name—an anonymous cultural mythmaker.

There have been more realistic moments, though, in American children's literature from the "Golden Era." One thinks, for instance, of the sobering view of a dislocated migrant workers' family life in Doris Gates's *Blue Willow* (1940), or of the harsh frontier existence that Laura Ingalls Wilder portrays so effectively in her Little House books (1932-1943), or the difficulties of rural life in Lois Lenski's regional novels (such as *Strawberry Girl*, 1945, and *Cotton in My Sack*, 1949), or in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *The Yearling* (1938), in which the reader discovers that some problems are only resolved with pain and time, and even then scars will remain. This reaching back to capture the reality of our roots or into the "here and now" to fathom the truth of our immediate present would continue to grow as a concern for our writers as the century moved along, so much so that many critics feel that realism in children's books today has gone so far in its quest for the truth about our own and our children's lives that it has drained both of hopes and dreams.

One of the more disturbing episodes involving one of the writer-illustrators of the "Golden Era," Garth Williams, reminds us that this was a period that, generally speaking, turned away from confronting difficult or sensitive social issues in children's books. Williams's *The Rabbits' Wedding* (1958), in which Williams believed he was portraying a "soft furry love" by having a black rabbit and a white rabbit fall in love and get married, made front-page news around the world and became a cause célèbre. One Alabama legislator called for the book to be

burned, and although it did not meet that end, it was withdrawn from many library shelves. A Florida newspaper columnist accused Williams of "brainwashing" readers into accepting racial integration and sent copies of his column to every legislator in the state. *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*, as well as many foreign publications, carried detailed stories about the controversy over Williams's book.

With the sweeping national and global changes brought about by two world wars, the advent of nuclear weapons, and, closer to home and our own time, Korea, the McCarthy hearings, and the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, the time of innocence was in many respects drawing to a close. Of course, this innocence in children's books could not have been artificially preserved forever, just as nineteenth-century didacticism had to give way to Baum's new fantasies. Children's books, so the truism goes, reflect the times and the culture which produces them. Much as Baum may have wished it, he could not have forbidden the "heartaches and nightmares" from creeping in from where we always knew they had been waiting all along.

The intent of this volume is to present many of the major figures of this period, as well as important though perhaps less well-known writers and author-illustrators about whom one is unlikely to find much biographical or critical information. These may be writers, such as Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, who have written only a few volumes for children, but still have made a valuable contribution to children's literature. Also included are several figures who were not, strictly speaking, writers of children's books—Winsor McCay and Walt Disney—but who have significantly influenced the writing and art of others. In the case of both McCay and Disney it could be argued that through their imaginative visions they helped create new art forms that embraced the basic elements of literature. Those whose work was purely in the realm of illustration have not been included here.

A few words are necessary about the criteria for selecting the writer-illustrators who are included in this volume. Most of the figures are frequently mentioned in historical and critical studies of the period. Others have been recommended to me by colleagues as deserving of more biographical and critical attention than they have yet received. Almost all writers included produced their most famous work prior to 1960, though in a few cases these assessments may appear to be subjective judgments on my part. For instance, Dr. Seuss did write several of his important works prior to 1960; but, on the other hand, he has remained productive throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and he tends to be identified with contemporary issues and attitudes—and so his work falls beyond the scope of the present volume.

I hope that my main intention in editing the volume is clear: to present a representative and, in a sense, comprehensive view of the range of writers and writer-artists who played vital roles in creating "Childhood's Golden Era."

–John Cech

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Dorothy Aldis

(13 March 1896–4 July 1966)

Joyce Kinkead
Utah State University

BOOKS: *Everything and Anything*, illustrated by Helen D. Jameson (New York: Minton, Balch, 1927; London: Medici Society, 1929);
Here, There and Everywhere, illustrated by Marjorie Flack (New York: Minton, Balch, 1928);
Jane's Father, illustrated by Margaret Freeman (New York: Minton, Balch, 1929; London: Humphrey Toulmin, 1931);
Squiggles; or, The Little Red Cape, illustrated by Freeman (New York: Minton, Balch, 1930);
Murder in a Haystack (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1931; London: Cassell, 1931);
7 to 7, illustrated by Freeman (New York: Minton, Balch, 1931);
Any Spring (New York: Minton, Balch, 1933);
Magic City, illustrated by Freeman (New York: Minton, Balch, 1933);
Hop, Skip and Jump, illustrated by Freeman (New York: Minton, Balch, 1934);
Their Own Apartment (New York: Putnam's, 1935);
Time at Her Heels (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937; London: Hale, 1937);
All the Year Round (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938; London: Hale, 1938);
Before Things Happen, illustrated by Freeman (New York: Putnam's, 1939);
Cindy, illustrated by Peggy Bacon (New York: Putnam's, 1942);
Poor Susan (New York: Putnam's, 1942);
Dark Summer (New York: Putnam's, 1947);
Miss Quinn's Secret, illustrated by Rowena Fry (New York: Putnam's, 1949);
Lucky Year, illustrated by John Dukes McKee (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1951);
We're Going to Town, illustrated by Mary Gehr (In-

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dianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952);
All Together, illustrated by Jameson, Flack, and Freeman (New York: Putnam's, 1952);
Ride the Wild Waves (New York: Putnam's, 1957);
The Boy Who Cared, illustrated by Charles Geer (New York: Putnam's, 1958);
Hello Day, illustrated by Susan Elson (New York: Putnam's, 1959);
Quick as a Wink, illustrated by Peggy Westphal (New York: Putnam's, 1960);
The Secret Place, illustrated by Olivia H. H. Cole (New York: Scholastic Book Service, 1962);
Is Anybody Hungry?, illustrated by Arthur Marokvia (New York: Putnam's, 1964);
Dumb Stupid David, illustrated by Jane Miller (New York: Putnam's, 1965);
Nothing Is Impossible: The Story of Beatrix Potter, illustrated by Richard Cuffari (New York: Atheneum, 1969);
Favorite Poems of Dorothy Aldis, illustrated by Jack Lerman (New York: Putnam's, 1970).

For more than forty years, Dorothy Aldis remained at the forefront of children's literature, beginning in 1927 with her first book of poetry aimed at young children. During her busy writing career she produced twenty-nine books, including children's poetry, biography, and adolescent literature; in fact, for her "outstanding service by an author over a long period of time," she received the Children's Reading Round Table Award, 1966-1967. After her death, *Elementary English* hailed her as the "Poet Laureate of Young Children." Her popularity continues, substantiated by the posthumous publication of a volume of her favorite poems and by the assured place of her collected poems *All Together* (1952) in the elementary classroom and on the family's reading shelf. Her sprightly, optimistic verse about the everyday lives of children pleases three audiences: teachers, parents, and especially children.

Born on 13 March 1896, in Chicago, Illinois, to James and Gertrude Small Keeley, Aldis—the first of four daughters—was an enthusiastic, adventurous child, full of joie de vivre. She enjoyed the outdoors, especially at the family's summer farm in Wheaton, Illinois. The unpleasant experiences of her childhood were limited to her sister's death when Aldis was four and to her attendance at the private Girl's Latin School. At sixteen, she attended Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut; at seventeen, she went to Smith College where she enjoyed her writing courses. After two years at Smith, she returned to Chicago at her parents' request to rejoin her family and community. Following in her mother and father's footsteps, she applied under a pseudonym for a position on the *Chicago Tribune*, where her father was managing editor and her mother reported for the Sunday paper. There, for a weekly salary of ten dollars, she wrote the "Interior Decoration Department," the "Cat and Dog Department," and the "Love and Near Love Column," in addition to answering the Lillian Russell beauty-queen mail. Her first poem was published in *Poetry*, but her writing was put on the back burner when she married Graham Aldis, a real-estate executive, on 15 June 1922. They had four children: Mary Cornelia (1923), Owen (1925), and twins Peggy and Ruth (1927).

Aldis's children provided the impetus for her first book of poetry, *Everything and Anything* (1927). This volume contains some of her best work and foreshadows her later poetry in which the same subjects appear: the child's everyday world, family, nature, and animals. "Little" describes a child showing her toys to her baby brother:

> So every morning I show him
> My doll and my book;
> But every morning he still is
> Too little to look.

In contemporary literature, this situation might provide a Sendak-style look at the frustration of sibling rivalry; for Aldis, though, there is no tone of overt frustration but more one of wonder and longing demonstrating her sympathy for the child. "Hiding" looks at the loving relationship between a son and his parents who pretend to look for him. The happy marital relationship is reinforced by the husband calling his wife "darling" and, of course, by the fact that the couple takes time to play with the son. This warm poem is a favorite for teachers, since it is easily pantomimed. The theme of "The Reason" rests on answering the question of why children cannot go outside when it is raining by comparing the protection offered by animal fur and feathers to that of human skin. Weather—always a source of concern for children—is also the focus of several other poems. Among them, "Ice" uses original words to suggest the ice's laughter: "crickle" and "crrreeet." In "Snow" Aldis skillfully uses personification to paint word-pictures of the weather, describing fenceposts with "marshmallow hats," bushes wearing "night gowns," and "silver-skirted" trees. These poems often grew out of her observations of her own children and her own memories of childhood, both lighthearted and happy periods of

time, judging from the mood of these first poems. Seventeen poems from this book were set to music by Herbert E. Hyde and published in the late 1920s.

The second book of poetry, *Here, There and Everywhere* (1928), published one year later, continues the same themes found in her first book. For instance, "Blum" centers on a child's facility to make up words which do not mean anything. The whimsical "Blum" is such a word, a word which is reassuring to the child since it is his own and one which cannot be inflexible because of an attached definition.

> It is very nice to hear
> Or you can shout it: BLUM BLUM BLUM
>
> But shout or whisper, hum or sing,
> It doesn't mean a single thing.

As one reviewer commented, "The poems are fresh and gay as a buttercup in the sun, and with a quaint child-like humor like dew upon them."

With *Jane's Father* (1929) Aldis tried a different genre, children's fiction, and met with commercial and critical success. Aldis used her own Aunt Hattie, who had often taken care of Aldis's mother and then the Keeley children, as one character in the story, but focused on the title character, a typical middle-class male at the office but at home an unconventional father whose predispositions for eating "eggs-in-a-mess," wobbling his head while he reads, and stealing the safety pins from the twin babies' diapers leaves Jane and her mother frustrated by his eccentricities. Fortunately, the female members of the family finally realize that they can accept the lovable but eccentric man of the house, especially when he manages to straighten out the family's problems with Aunt Hattie. Aldis's recurrent themes of idyllic—if slightly screwball—family life and loving relationships, found consistently in her poetry, are developed in more detail in this first novel.

Aldis managed to complete seven novels and three books of poetry in the following decade, and she did so in an unusual style. Unable to find privacy in a house with four children, she would drive to a deserted subdivision and, armed with mosquito repellent, "dangle my typewriter on my knee and have a very fine private office, invaded only by occasional lovers, chipmunks, and children being taught how to drive." The first of the ten books, *Squiggles; or, The Little Red Cape* (1930), features a feud between a family of chipmunks and Patsy the dog, who finally is routed and stunned when the chipmunks begin to wear red capes. Although an interesting story, Aldis overuses repetition of phrases. Switching from animals to mystery, Aldis's next book, *Murder in a Haystack* (1931), for older audiences, succeeded with the critics because of its plot structure. In it, a group of sophisticates gather for a house party and treasure hunt, but the beautiful, unscrupulous Mrs. Symond meets her death in the orchard.

Returning to children's poetry in *7 to 7* (1931), Aldis created an alphabet book which gives the events of the child's day in pictures and short rhymes. As in many previous poems, the child's daily regimen of getting up, eating, playing, and running becomes the focal point of these poems. Again, she uses uneven rhyme to avoid the singsong patter of much children's poetry, but repetition, as in *Squiggles*, is overdone. *Any Spring* (1933), the offering two years later, comprises forty-five poems for slightly older children. The daily activities described are more difficult, for example, "Setting the Table." These unassuming poems include "May," "Summer Moment," "Maternity," "Cosmic," and "Portrait," rarely reprinted now.

That same year, Aldis produced *Magic City* (1933), a timely contribution about John and Jane's visit to the World's Fair in Chicago under the supervision of Uncle Dick. This book is really a report of the features of that fair and, while of interest to Aldis's contemporary readers, it has not held up with time.

Hop, Skip and Jump (1934) returns to children's verse, lightheartedly celebrating daily regimen and holidays with such poems as "Windy Wash Day" and the exuberant "Fourth of July Night." In the former, wash day becomes a fanciful chance for the clothes to "beckon," "bow," "dance," and "skip" while drying on the line.

> Stockings twisting in a dance,
> Pajamas very tripping,
> And every little pair of pants
> Upside down
> And skipping.

In the latter poem, the celebration of a holiday seems of primary importance at first as the fireworks become blossoming flowers; but, for the child, the celebration becomes less important than the fact that there will be a delayed bedtime. Again, the child's everyday existence is the focus of Aldis's poetry. The child will always be concerned with himself first, an attitude of which Aldis is acutely aware but never censures.

For adult readers, *Their Own Apartment*, the story of newlywed Ann Emmett living with and

adjusting to her husband's family while waiting for her own place, provided light summer reading in 1935, mainly for a feminine audience. Likewise, *Time at Her Heels* (1937) follows the trials of another woman, Mary Strong, whose husband is a college professor. The plot covers one day filled with a variety of activities—a funeral, a hospital visit, a birthday surprise party, family problems. In *All the Year Round* (1938), Aldis covers a weekend in the life of Mrs. Conover, mother of three teenagers and wife of an alcoholic husband. Realistic in its portrayal of an American family with problems, the book fails to provide a matching realistic ending and settles for the trite resolution of moving the family to the healthy atmosphere of the country. Fortunately, *Before Things Happen* (1939) returns to children's poems, simple verses dealing with standard themes for children.

Cindy (1942), one of Aldis's most popular stories, uses the common theme of the tomboy who must accept her female role. The eight-year-old heroine despises dresses and dolls, preferring football and her toy gun and holster. During the summer, she is accepted as one of the gang, but with the beginning of school, she is ostracized by the boys suddenly conscious of sex roles. By mothering a baby squirrel and being befriended by the garbage man, she learns that growing up female is not so terrible, and the party dress replaces the football uniform. Though the book was well received on its publication, many modern readers dislike its reinforcement of traditional sex roles.

An older heroine is the focus of *Poor Susan* (1942), the story of a fourteen-year-old who dislikes her parents, brother, and twin sisters. Susan learns during the course of the novel to appreciate her family. Aldis is such a master at accurately picturing home life of the middle-class family that young readers might be uncomfortable with Susan. However, parents can probably read *Poor Susan* with relish.

During World War II, Aldis remained rather inactive, but in 1947 she returned to adolescent literature with *Dark Summer* (1947), the story of Judy Burr, a high-school student faced with the possibility of blindness in one eye. Her friends, her mother, and her own courage help her make the summer less miserable, however, as she faces her problems. *Miss Quinn's Secret* (1949) offers a change of pace for a younger audience of eight- to eleven-year-old children. It features a librarian and offers information on a career in library work and on the history of Illinois and Indiana pioneers as the librarian and a group of children find a home for Miss Quinn's secret treasure, pioneer relics, in pioneer cabins displayed on the courthouse yard. History also figures importantly as the premise for *We're Going to Town* (1952), showing how three children and their mother do their Christmas shopping in Chicago in the first part of the twentieth century. This story was well received as was its predecessor, *Lucky Year* (1951), a Junior Literary Guild selection, for which Aldis researched the actual events that led Madison, Indiana, residents to raise funds so that Jenny Lind could sing in their town. With its striking woodcut illustrations, the book was called a "delightful period story" by *Kirkus Reviews*.

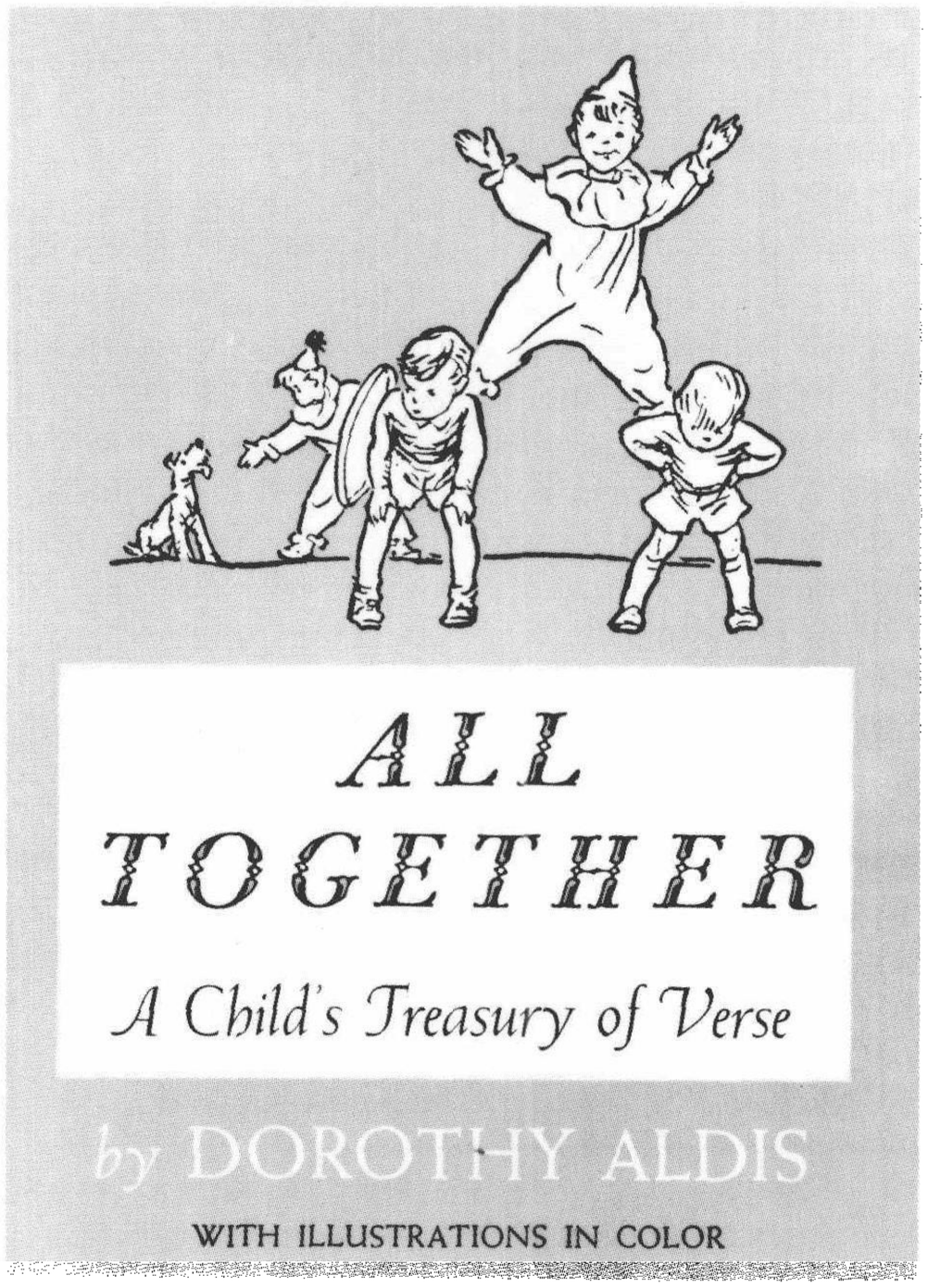
All Together (1952) collects 144 poems, many of which were published in earlier books. This book, directed mainly to kindergarten-aged children, has become a standard on library shelves. Aldis understood that the egocentric young child views with frustration comparisons between himself and other members of his family. In effect, he cries out for recognition of his individuality. The self is asserted in such poems as the witty "See, I Can Do It" in which the child describes brushing his "upstairs and downstairs teeth" and humorously proclaims the ending "spit" as the best part. In contrast, "Not That" suggests that there are some responsibilities undesired by the child. Brushing hair, washing, and buttoning clothes are all signs of the child's increasing ability to function alone; on the other hand, tucking into bed is one task for which the child has no wish to be independent, as Aldis emphasizes by her use of italics in "I Can Do That."

> And though I'm very glad indeed
> To help myself instead
> *I hope that I won't have to try*
> *To tuck myself in bed.*

The child's security in a safe, warm bed is again the subject of "The Storm" in which thunder is noisy "like little boys" and lightning "can cut the dark in two." "Brooms" features Aldis's lively imagination finding the effective metaphor of trees turning into brooms to "wash and sweep" the sky blue.

Animals catch the imaginations of children, a fact which Aldis celebrates in many of her poems. "In Spring in Warm Weather" reflects children's delight in newborn animals, while in "Our Tame Baby Squirrel" the child experiences the loss of a pet that returns to the wild. Loss is also the subject of "The Picnic," a poem in which a minor disaster occurs: the child drops a jelly sandwich on the sandy beach.

An introduction to the charitable organization



Dust jacket for Aldis's 1952 collection of poetry for young children (Putnam's)

CARE is provided in *The Boy Who Cared* (1958). Tom Duncan, through his stamp-collecting hobby, learns of the need of families in Greece, Mexico, Germany, and other places, and with his classmates' help, he earns money to donate to CARE. *Ride the Wild Waves* (1957) returns to historical fiction, a more comfortable mode for the author. In it, two children travel with Elinor Shaw—a suspected witch—to the New World; this book shows how people react to superstition and to the perils of a sea voyage. Aldis followed this novel with another collection of poems, *Hello Day* (1959), which contains thirty-four poems for preschoolers about their everyday lives.

In *Quick as a Wink* (1960), illustrated by Aldis's daughter Peggy Westphal, the poet turns to insects and beetles as subjects, combining poetry and prose to explain these creatures' lives. Similarly, *Is Anybody Hungry?* (1964) draws on the eating habits of animals, insects, and young people. The poems here are longer and more structured than previous work, and perhaps because their purpose is informative, they lose spontaneity. In short, much of Aldis's characteristic playfulness is missing.

Dumb, Stupid David (1965), a long prose poem, regains that playfulness. Dedicated to her grandson—and inspired by her several grandchildren—the book returns to the subject of the early poem "Little." In the later verse, however, the older son definitely dislikes the favoritism shown his baby brother David who cannot do anything. After an assortment of people have admired the baby, the envious brother, too, is won over when David walks toward him. Again, Aldis, perhaps responding to the times, reaffirms the value of familial relationships, this time including a more realistic picture of sibling frustration.

Throughout her lifetime, Aldis was recognized as a major contributor to children's literature. Her method of writing involved working on two manuscripts at the same time—one in poetry and one in prose—in order to compare and judge her writing as it progressed. By the time of her death in 1966, twenty-seven of her books had been published. Two more were published posthumously. *Nothing Is Impossible: The Story of Beatrix Potter* (1969) relates how the author of the popular tales of Peter Rabbit, Miss Moppet, and other animal characters grew up in a strict Victorian English family which kept the daughter practically a recluse. Using ex-

Dorothy Aldis at the time she wrote Dark Summer *(Putnam's)*

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