


5-29-2008

# Collections and Collaboration: The University of Worcester Research Collections in Partnership with the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity

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### Recommended Citation

Johnson, Rachel (2008) "Collections and Collaboration: The University of Worcester Research Collections in Partnership with the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity," *Inklings Forever*: Vol. 6 , Article 11.  
Available at: [https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings\\_forever/vol6/iss1/11](https://pillars.taylor.edu/inklings_forever/vol6/iss1/11)

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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume VI**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Sixth

FRANCES WHITE EWBANK COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

Taylor University 2008

Upland, Indiana

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## **Collections and Collaboration**

*The University of Worcester Research Collections in  
Partnership with the International Research Centre  
for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity*

**Rachel Johnson**

### **Abstract:**

The University of Worcester Research Collections reside within the Department of Information and Learning Services. Their purpose is to function as working research collections and to work in partnership with the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity. The Collections have a focus of childhood and range from historical children's literature with a bias towards adventure stories to contemporary multicultural children's fiction. A collection of biographical accounts of childhoods covering a late nineteenth to twentieth century time period forms a significant collection.

My paper covers the background of the Collections and an overview of the content, together with the relevance of the Collections to the field of children's literature research and the potential for research contained within them, concluding with a look towards their future.

Johnson, Rachel. "Collections and Collaboration: The University of Worcester Research Collections in Partnership with the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity."

[Inklings Forever](http://www.taylor.edu/cslewis) 6 (2008) [www.taylor.edu/cslewis](http://www.taylor.edu/cslewis)

## **Collections and Collaboration: The University of Worcester Research Collections in Partnership with the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity.**

In the first section of this paper I offer an overview of the rationale for the existence of the Collections, the background and use of the Collections, some of the challenges encountered in setting them up and the potential for research contained within them. I will then proceed onto the relevance of such research to the field of children's literature.

### **Rationale for the existence of the Collections**

It is the vision of University of Worcester (UK) Information and Learning Services for the Research Collections to be more widely recognised as a high quality and accessible research resource which is available, to all staff, students, external researchers and the public whether local, regional, national or international. In order to accomplish this, we aim to develop the web presence, the hosting and organising of conferences and other promotional activities that, over time, will ensure greater awareness of and accessibility to the collections.

The University of Worcester Research Collections reside within the Department of Information and Learning Services. Their purpose is to function as working research collections and to work in partnership with the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity. The Research Collections are already used by research students who contribute subject expertise within the scholarly community by conference presentation and publication both nationally and internationally. This recognition will, it is hoped, grow student interest and applications to work with the Collections.

The contextual position of the Collection within the University and in relation to the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity, lies in the focus on aspects of children's literature and the child. This focus links to the cross-University commitment to scholarship and research and to work with children and young people in a national and international context.

Since the first deposit in September 2005, the Collections have diversified through further deposits and donations and now comprise seven collections relevant to the focus on childhood, ranging from historical children's literature with

a bias towards adventure stories to contemporary multicultural children's fiction. A collection of biographical accounts of childhoods covering a late nineteenth to twentieth century time period forms a significant resource. Altogether, the Collections to date contain approximately 2000 items.

As a comparatively new set of Collections, and a resource that is growing exponentially, the greatest challenge has been keeping up with the rapid rate of change in terms of time collections growing faster than staffing could be set in place to deal with them and to disseminate information about them. Work to develop and implement a suitable staffing and resourcing structure is therefore an ongoing project. Resources for staffing, additions to collections and appropriate housing are still being put in place with the result that the Collections may not be as visible both physically and virtually as desired. In the longer term this would mean fewer students using materials within the Collections for their research than the Collections could support. Therefore we need to continue to develop the communication with local, regional, national and international communities.

### **University of Worcester Research Collections Background and overview**

Since their inception the Collections have been strongly attached to the work of the International Research Centre for Children's Literature, Literacy and Creativity. Collaborative working between ILS and the Centre has been in place since 2004 due to research student activity although the first collection did not arrive on site until September 2005. The major Collections are named after the collectors.

#### **The Brown Collection**

The Brown Collection includes works by and about the writer G. A. Henty (1832-1902), writing between 1865 and 1902. The Collection contains Henty's historical adventure stories and related historical and sociological material. There are approx. 400 items in the Brown Collection. A note on Henty - After an eventful career as a war correspondent G. A. Henty wrote historical adventure stories mainly for boys. Both his journalistic career and his writing coincided with the period of rapid British imperial expansion during the reign of Queen Victoria. The

Collection reflects current research interests in the area of children's literature and is of international interest.

### **Research potential**

The research potential of the Collection lies in the following areas:

- literary
- Historical
- Post-colonial
- gender
- sociological
- journalistic
- construct of child
- representation of otherness
- illustration, including pictorial bindings
- bibliographical
- paratext (catalogues and lists in particular)

The Collection is arranged to reflect the author's development as a writer. For example, the development of his formulaic approach to basic plot and his writing style can be demonstrated with reference from early to later publications.

### **Hentyana - items which include single articles or stories by Henty or critiques, comments and observations on his work.**

In the area of Hentyana, the change in ideological approach over the period can be traced in other writers' references to him or critique of him. Items about Henty or with references to him cover the dates from 1886 to 2002. The Brown Collection includes periodical material such as magazines produced for children, for example, Chums and The Captain, and for adults, for example, The Sketch and T. P.'s Weekly. This material is a valuable primary source for cultural, historical and sociological perspectives on Henty's nineteenth century context.

### **The Hawkes Collection**

Within the first year the University had been offered a collection of African travel books written for children and colonial adventure stories from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early

20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Fictional items covering the period 1856 – 1959 include not only these well-known authors:

- Marryat, Capt.
- Ballantyne, R. M
- Reid, Capt. Mayne
- Kingston, W. H. G.
- Haggard, H. Rider

but also lesser known female adventure story writers such as Mrs. R. Lee and Anne Bowman. Of particular interest is the item by Samuel White Baker, Cast up by the Sea (1869). Baker's own life reads like a 19<sup>th</sup> c. adventure story and he has been cited by his biographer as, "an inspiration for many of (G. A. Henty's), ... heroes", (Brander 16). This is a sweeping statement evidenced only by some characteristics similar to those of the Henty hero. Informational accounts of travels in the Hawkes Collection include material dating from 1800. The relevance of this Collection as an extension to the Henty material lies predominantly in the study of aspects of Empire and colonialism in terms of European history, ideology and nineteenth century culture which could be investigated from a post-colonial viewpoint. Many of the books are illustrated, which provides an additional field for potential study, as does the paratextual and bibliographical content of the material.

Examples for potential areas of study include:

- Historical
- Didactic intent – informational material
- Representations of otherness
- Illustration
- Ideological stance of explorers (information books)
- Ethnographical
- Post-colonial
- gender

## **The Manley Collection**

Written from a significantly different viewpoint, the books in the Manley Collection are school readers written for African children post-independence, that is, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of these 41 items were written by African authors, the remaining few by non-Africans who have worked over several decades in one or more of the nine countries represented. One of these authors is Deborah Manley. The Collection contains:

- African Reader's Library - 20 items.
- The Pilot Readers - 4 items.
- African Junior Library - 8 items.
- The All Africa Readers - 9 items.

This Collection represents a significant departure from the earlier, Eurocentric approach to African countries and demonstrates a conscious move towards foregrounding African literature and culture, thus enabling developmental study in the area of representation.

### **Research potential of the Manley Collection in conjunction with other collections**

- representation
- post-colonial writing for children
- Afro-centric position
- Ideology

The countries represented are; Ethiopia, Zambia, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Nigeria, Chad, Malagasy and Kenya.

## **The Williams Collection**

This collection is in two distinct parts, the first reflects the child focus of the Research Centre from a different angle, since it consists of autobiographical

accounts of childhoods in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, covering both British and international backgrounds. There is an overlap in subject matter between some items in this Collection and those in the Brown Collection since the Hentyana includes some childhood autobiography where there is a significant mention of G.A. Henty. The University of Worcester (UK) includes an Institute of Education with course in Initial Teacher Education, Early Childhood Studies and Education Studies, and there has been interest in this collection from students considering postgraduate study in the area of childhood experiences as well as from external researchers.

The second Collection returns to items designed for children, comprising alphabet books and counting books, covering the publication period 1836 – 2000. Apart from the sociological aspects depicted in what is chosen as representative and familiar for each letter, the illustrators evidence an embedding in their period and a developmental progression of emphasis from the real to the imaginary in objects or ideas chosen to represent the letters of the alphabet. In terms of literacy education, these items demonstrate an ideological sub-text which in itself is of interest to students from a range of disciplines.

### **Examples of potential areas of study**

Childhoods:

- - historical
- sociological
- regional
- construct of child
- adult perceptions of childhood – since all autobiographies are written by the adult the child became

### **Research potential in the Alphabet and counting books:**

- illustration (many major illustrators have created an alphabet book).
- ideology embedded in chosen representations
- historical
- construct of child
- paratext



## **The Elkin Collection**

The Elkin Collection is predominantly a collection of multicultural children's literature, deposited by Professor Judith Elkin. Professor Elkin is currently Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Worcester and a longstanding writer on aspects of children's reading, children's librarianship and an editor of children's books. She won the Eleanor Farjeon award for services to children's literature in 1986.

The collection contains, Books about children's books and publishing; Elkin publications; Fiction; Folk tales myths and legends, Information books; Japanese Books and other language editions; Picture books; Poetry; Prayers and Songs; Short Stories. Professor Professor Elkin has also deposited her Archive within the Research Collections, including manuscripts. This material gives the student the opportunity to trace the development of a book by Professor Elkin from inception to completion. It includes letters about a publication from the publisher and Professor Elkin's response and vice versa, proof copies of both the text and cover illustration, and review articles.

### **Examples of potential areas of study**

- literary
- construct of child
- representation of otherness
- illustration
- sociological
- Post-colonial
- Comparative
- Paratext

These are similar areas of study from an alternative initial position to that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century material.

## **Ronchetti Collection**

This collection belonged to a lady who had a scholarly interest in dolls and toys. Her collection of historical children's literature, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century arrived with markers specifically indicating references to dolls or to children playing with dolls. She also maintained scrapbooks containing

approximately 900 postcards and photographs giving representations of children, childhood and dolls.

### **Examples of potential areas of study**

- literary
- construct of child
- representations of childhood
- play
- illustration
- sociological

### **Percy Westerman Collection**

The most recent deposit is an exciting one in that it consists of six unpublished manuscripts by Percy F. Westerman, with annotations, and four scrapbooks containing information about boats, locality and history, some of which fed into his stories. Percy Westerman (1876 - 1959) wrote adventure stories from the 1920's to the 1940's and therefore provides the Collections with material that takes the adventure story into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These stories are written from an Anglo-centric viewpoint. As can be seen from the dates mentioned, Henty was writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Westerman in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup>, the potential for a study of the progression of the adventure story over a period of significant political change is considerable. The collection includes representative published titles by Percy Westerman which complement the manuscripts.

Detailed lists of holdings can be seen on the Information and Learning Services Research Collections. <http://www.worc.ac.uk/ils/635.htm>

### **Overview of the relevance of the Collections to the field of children's literature research**

All the areas of potential study indicated above link the field of Children's Literature to other disciplines. From an international perspective, their relevance to Children's Literature research lies specifically, for example, in the study of:

- points of view and ideology
- postcolonial viewpoints

- historical study

and, within the context of University of Worcester (UK), the resources will be linked to the new Masters course in Children's Literature International Perspectives.

**Why Collaboration with the Centre is important:**

- To establish the credibility of the Collections as a research resource within the long-term strategy and research vision of UW.
- To embed awareness of potential use of Collections in curriculum planning.

From an academic perspective the Collections will serve:

- To enhance research opportunities available to students.
- To widen the range of research opportunities currently available
- To provide support for the development of courses working in partnership with the Research Centre.

The Collections can provide support for current curriculum development in, for example:

- existing and potential children's literature modules.
- media and cultural studies.
- journalism – historical perspective (Henty)
- collaborative working and support for MA Children's Literature International Perspectives.

The Director of the Research Centre (Professor Jean Webb) is available to discuss the potential use of Research Collections material with researchers and other University students, including distance learners.

Collaboration is also important to foreground connections and synergies that are not readily apparent if the Collections are separated from academic collaboration since they cannot be reflected in the structure of the teaching or research. For example, study of themes in the boys adventure story such as, gender; representation of the child; and/or representations of race, enables the student to become aware of absences and silences within the writing that can, for example, then lead to further study of how the writing is embedded in the authors' historical, sociological, political and dominant ideological context. From a

narratological position, the investigation can be conducted into genre or mode within the adventure story. The uniqueness and focus of the Collections also contributes to the student's apprehension of such connections.

**Potential clientele**

- Postgraduate students of children's literature, national and international.
- Undergraduates pursuing research for their final year Independent Study.
- Students and postgraduate students working in any of the areas already mentioned (History, sociology etc).
- Non-affiliated researchers (e.g. any independent researchers whose work would be enriched by using the collections).

As full time research studentships become available they are advertised on the University website and are available internationally.

The UW Research Collections have already built up links beyond the University, for example with significant collections of Children's literature in the US and Japan and we have links with the Children's Literature Association India. Future development lies in links with the new Worcester Library and History Centre, a fully joint-use University and Public Library, to include the University Library, children and young people's library, County Record Office and Archaeological Services in a major new development.

Researchers and anyone else interested in the Collection please contact Rachel Johnson on email [r.johnson@worc.ac.uk](mailto:r.johnson@worc.ac.uk) or +44 1905 542093.  
Or Professor Jean Webb [j.webb@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.webb@worc.ac.uk) or +44 1905 855459.

*Rachel Johnson April 2008.*

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