

An Annotated Bibliography of Scholarship Related to *St. Nicholas Magazine* (1873-1943)

Prepared by Laura Berger and Tania Menjivar

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Erisman, Fred. "The Utopia of St. Nicholas." *Children's Literature* 5 (1976): 66-73. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013.

In this article, Fred Erisman examines fictional stories as well as non-fiction articles published between 1890-1910 in *St. Nicholas*, and ultimately suggests that the magazine presents a utopian view of the world. Erisman argues that the non-fiction articles published prior to World War I “[pose] and [answer] three didactic questions: ‘What is the world like?’ ‘How does the world operate?’ and ‘How can I best get along in the world?’” (67). Erisman analyzes a number of regular features and specific articles to demonstrate these aims. For example, Theodore Roosevelt’s “Hero Tales of American History” teaches children significant world events, while scientific and technological articles written by Lieutenant John M. Ellicott, such as a history of explosives, help them understand how the world operates, and Ernest Ingersol’s examination of city-planning in “Reasoning Out a Metropolis” offers readers practical knowledge to better grasp the workings of their culture and environment. The fiction pieces in *St. Nicholas*, however, function primarily as “quality entertainment” – though they simultaneously provide cultural ideas and standards (68). Authors of fiction, in contrast to non-fiction writers, were not “bound by facts,” and forced to “reconcile their ideal view with the real society of which they write”; in fiction writing, *St. Nicholas* contributors were “unfettered by the need to assimilate cold facts,” and thus “free to portray the ideal world” (70). Erisman references Karl Manheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* to help shed light on *St. Nicholas*’s brand of utopianism. Whereas ideologies “are ideas that, although never achieving realization, are the ones usually cited as the rules and values by which societies live,” utopias “are those ideas that can potentially change the existing order” (72). Put simply, ideologies “tend to preserve the status quo; utopias tend to change it” (72). *St. Nicholas*, according to Erisman, is rife with tension between ideology and utopia. He concludes that *St. Nicholas* does not actually prepare readers “for life as it is” as it claims to, but instead “[equips] them to change that life,” though “the contrast between the real and ideal is absent” (72).

Gannon, Susan R. "'But I Wanted it to be the Other Way': Fictions of Rescue and their Function in *St. Nicholas Magazine*." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 21.2 (1999): 259-88. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.

In this essay, Susan R. Gannon examines texts revolving around rescue in *St. Nicholas*, particularly “the way fiction on the theme of philanthropic rescue complicates and problematizes the blandly optimistic reform program of the magazine’s editorial discourse on poverty” (260). In other words, she argues that the fictional stories in *St. Nicholas* that portray child poverty and disenfranchisement offer a more nuanced

approach to the situation than the magazine's editorial features. The fiction, unlike the editorial discourse, "balance[d] attention to the experience of child-savers with interest in the objects of their charity, and tend[ed] to focus on the difficulties inherent in the whole enterprise" (260). Gannon observes that the editorial columns and articles about heroic philanthropy were predicated on the assumption that "certain questions would not arise, certain contradictions would not be acknowledged" (261): it was inconceivable to imagine that those who were being 'saved' "might have values worth preserving and virtues not shared by the middle class," and the psychological and emotional aftermath of being 'rescued' were often minimized or ignored altogether (261). The poor were represented as "threatening to society" while remaining "readily reclaimable"; they *had* to be saved, and *could* be saved, and thus order would be restored (261). Gannon points to various texts from *St. Nicholas* to illustrate the distinction she draws between the fiction and editorial content; for example, Charles Loring Brace's non-fiction articles reduced poor children to "cases" whereas Rudyard Kipling's "Mowgli's Brothers" and "Tiger! Tiger!" reflect the difficulty of being moved from one location and culture to another – "[c]aught between two worlds and belonging comfortably to neither" (271). By exploring *St. Nicholas*'s representations of the needy, Gannon considers the perspectives and discussions about the needy that the magazine inspires among both child and adult readers.

_____. 'The Best Magazine for Children of All Ages': Cross-Editing *St. Nicholas Magazine* (1873-1905)." *Children's Literature* 25.1 (1997): 153-180. Project MUSE. Web. 7 Feb. 2013.

Susan R. Gannon suggests that children were not the only intended readership of *St. Nicholas Magazine*, and expresses the importance of capturing an adult audience for the periodical. Gannon claims that the adult audience was brought forth by using diverse fictions, features, and editorial projects. More specifically, Gannon demonstrates how *St. Nicholas Magazines* used formula fiction, "particularly in the form of stories in which an adult intervenes benevolently in a needy child's affairs," to appeal to an adult audience (160). The vocabulary used and presence of child role-models in the magazines also indicate an attempt to attract, and maintain, adult readers. Lastly, the way in which editor Mary Mapes Dodge used Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885) to promote the magazine drew in both the child and adult reader as it is a story about empowering innocent children, primarily addressed to adults, but with pictures of parent-child that appealed to both groups. This article provides a different perspective to those who viewed the *St. Nicholas Magazine* as a children's magazine, demonstrating that it had another important audience – parents.

Little, Greta. "The Care and Nurture of Aspiring Writers: Young Contributors to our Young Folks and *St. Nicholas*." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 17.4 (1992): 19- 23.

Greta Little outlines the submission standards for young contributors to *Our Young Folks*, and *St. Nicholas*, analyzes the responses editors proffered to young readers, and describes

controversies surrounding plagiarism. Scribner and Co. bought *Our Young Folks* in 1873 and “absorbed [it] into” *St. Nicholas* (Little 20). Little’s account explains how sections devoted exclusively to young contributors, such as The St. Nicholas League, resulted from the high level of interest from readers. Little considers the editors of *St. Nicholas* hugely influential to a generation of writers: “[t]hrough the comments they printed to accompany children’s creative efforts, the editors passed along to their readers (and prospective writers) a sense of originality and style that has helped shape modern American literature” (23). Little’s piece makes an excellent companion to Anna M. Redcay’s more thorough examination of children’s writing in *St. Nicholas*, “‘Live to learn and learn to live’”: The St Nicholas League and the Vocation of Childhood.”

Phillips, Michelle H. "Along the 'Paragraphic Wires': Child–Adult Mediation in *St. Nicholas Magazine*." *Children's Literature: Annual of The Children's Literature Association and The Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature* 37 (2009): 84-113. *ProQuest*. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.

Michelle H. Phillips argues that “[r]ather than conceive of the child and adult as lives and identities a world apart, *St. Nicholas* invites its readers and contributors, regardless of age, to imagine themselves as members of hybridized community,” thus rendering readers able to “[inhabit] and [communicate] across ... vast sociological interiors” (85). Phillips suggests that *St. Nicholas*’s mediation between children and adults, or its “medial status,” is not representative of its time period or genre, but Mary Mapes Dodge “made a point of promoting community and connection among *all* of *St. Nicholas*’s readers and contributors” (86, italics added for emphasis). Phillips emphasizes that unlike most other editors of children’s magazines, Dodge’s vision of the editor was “not coincident with that of an author, parent, or other authority figure,” rather “to mediate and ‘stand ready’ until called upon, to be invisible as possibly, to be, even when called upon, the very vision of neutrality”(90, 91). Phillips identifies “self-meditation and mitigation” as “two of the primary approaches children take to acquire authorship in the magazine” (102). Children had the opportunity to express themselves rather than being simply being subject to an editor’s vision; young readers could respond to, take part in, and even initiate the dialogue. Phillips notes that many scholars “have located the polarization between adult and child in modern children’s literature and in *St. Nicholas* specifically,” but goes on to argue that “if the distinction is based not on age but on role and authorial status, then *St. Nicholas* operates under a different set of rules”: children *and* adults were both readers (consumers) *and* writers (creators) (108). “[More] importantly,” concludes Phillips, “writing and reading, the means of the literate and literary have been transformed in *St. Nicholas* from a set of tools secondary to those who wield them into a primary means of mediating selfhood” (108).

Redcay, Anna M. “‘Live to learn and learn to live’”: The St. Nicholas League and the Vocation of Childhood." *Children's Literature* 39.1 (2011): 58-84. Project MUSE. Web. 10 Feb. 2013.

Redcay compares the editor and chief of *St. Nicholas Magazine* Mary Mapes Dodge, and her contribution to the *St. Nicholas Magazine*, to St. Nicholas League editor Albert Bigelow Paine. The St. Nicholas League was a feature in the magazine from 1899 onwards: it published submissions from *St. Nicholas* readers including their poetry, prose, and artwork. Redcay claims that Dodge “shied away from encouraging ... young writers, fearful that engagement with the adult business of publication would mar their innocent existence” (59). The League’s editor Paine, on the other hand, “unabashedly fed directives to his youthful artists,” urging them to write realistically and about “what they know” (59. 60). Redcay demonstrates that Dodge was adamant about the importance of children freely exploring and experiencing the world without being distracted by recording it, whereas “Paine appears to have entirely lacked anxiety over the fact that his editorship held sway over not only his protégés’ compositions, but also the composition of their lives,” mandating that young authors write about prescribed experiences in prescribed ways (67). In other words, both Dodge and Paine pressured young readers and contributors to conform to particular understandings of who and what a child and is. Redcay concludes that both Dodge and Paine “operated from the paradoxical stance that the child’s liberation was best expressed in predetermined, circumscribed ways – both in life and in art” (79).

Sward, Barbara, and Dale B. Harris. “The reading ease, human interest value, and thematic content of *St. Nicholas Magazine*: a study of children’s literature.” *Journal of Education Psychology* 42.3 (1951):153-165. Ryerson University. Web.12 Feb. 2013.

Barbara Sward and Dale B. Harris examine the “readability” of *St. Nicholas* and *Child Life* magazine as well as the ideological content of the magazines’ content– “how it may have changed over the years, due to changing conceptions both of children and of social values” (153). Sward and Harris use *Flesch’s* formulae, a formula used by journalists and writers to indicate comprehension difficulty for children’s entertainment, to compare readability of the publications, and “the outstanding result of this analysis is the fairly uniform level of reading ease of the material over three-quarters of a century” (156). That is, despite being written and published in different eras, individual issues of the magazines remained consistent in their level of readability: no drastic change occurred. In order to identify the ideological content of the material, Sward and Harris use content analysis to analyze the behaviour of principle characters in selected stories, looking at the presumed motives of those characters and the consequences of their behaviour. They note that there is a low percentage of avoidance behaviour in the sample. Sward and Harris observe that as “stories become longer and more complex, there occurred a subtle shift in how child characters were portrayed” (164). Material from the later era did not have as many child characters as before, and also presented the children as more mature and competent problem-solvers in their own right.

***St. Nicholas Magazine*. Vol.3. 138-208 (January 1876). Print. The sample issue that we have selected to describe is the January 1876 Volume 3, No. 3 issue.**

It is the first issue that had well-known author Louisa M. Alcott (*Little Women*) included in it. Alcott wrote for *St. Nicholas* magazine frequently, but this was her first entry. In the January 1876 issue, the theme of Christmas and birthday is very evident. Alcott wrote a story titled “Marjorie’s Birthday Gift”, which is a story about a little maid girl who works away shelling peas on her birthday. Her grandmother tells her a fairy tale that she wishes could happen to her. Throughout the story, Marjorie encounters an old man who gives her a good-luck penny, a kind lady who tells her to keep being happy and Billy who ends up being similar to a prince. The fairytale Marjorie’s grandmother shares with her becomes real throughout Marjorie’s birthday as she receives the same three gifts as the fairytale: industry, happiness, and love. Another story that touches on the topic of birthdays in the issue is “What They Did Not Do On The Birthday of Jacob Abbot B, Familiarly Called Snibbuggedyboozledom” by M.S.B. I really enjoyed reading this story because it’s a paradoxical story about a birthday that was never celebrated. The story is very specific in describing how children celebrate their birthdays, going into detail about how your birthday should be celebrated from the morning until the night. The story provides the reader with description of a series of events that would normally occur on birthdays. The story not only shares the series of events that should happen on a birthday but also goes on to describe how birthdays are so eventful that they affect the following day. News about the birthday should have been shared, and remained a subject of conversation. The theme of religion is also very apparent in this issue as there was a story titled, “The Little Old Man in the Forest” by Hezekiah Butterworth. This story teaches a very important moral about trusting in God. The story begins with a German merchant who is traveling from city to city. On his way, the merchant gets lost in the forest and comes across a Collier. The Collier gives the merchant a place to stay and the merchant shares stories with the Collier’s family, feeling right at home. While the merchant is singing with the children, a little old man knocks on the door and comes into the house stating that it is the hour of prayer. Once the family has finished praying the old man slides out of the door, then re-enters and shuts the door violently while looking at the merchant. The Collier explains to the merchant that the old man is harmless as long as no evil thoughts come to his mind. As the merchant goes to sleep and starts to dream about the old man, he begins to fear him and the old man starts to grow and the only way to stop the old man is from the house spirit of innocence and prayer. I found the stories in *St. Nicholas Magazine* fascinating, particularly the articles that taught children about how plants grow. Many poems were published in this issue in addition to a short story titled “Les Aventures De Cinq Canards” which was written in French. This issue provided children a variety of fiction and non-fiction articles as well as creative poems and stories.