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*Prizing Children's Literature:
The Case of Newbery Gold*

Kenneth Kidd

Despite repeated criticisms of their efficacy—they “have a predictability for literature on about the level of crystal gazing or astrology,” complains Fred B. Millett in 1935¹—literary prizes have mushroomed since the establishment of the Nobel Prizes in 1901 and especially since the 1960s. Literary prizing has been a remarkably effective mechanism for publicity, sales, and scandal, if not always for the production of Literature. Prizing, moreover, has middlebrow as well as highbrow features and effects; it encourages both the making and unmaking of canons, underwrites but also undercuts faith in popularity. So ubiquitous is cultural prizing more broadly that James English, in his recent study *The Economy of Prestige*, argues that the prize

*is cultural practice in its quintessential contemporary form. The primary function it can be seen to serve—that of facilitating cultural “market transactions,” enabling the various individual and institutional agents of culture, with their different assets and interests and dispositions, to engage one another in a collective project of value production—is the project of cultural practice as such.*² (26)

Prizes, English points out, are neither purely economic nor aesthetic, neither simply sacred nor profane. Moreover, prizing does not tend toward cultural saturation; rather, it generates what he calls a “logic of proliferation” within the relational field of culture. Each new prize makes possible yet another.³

While English's work is instructive, children's literature doesn't figure prominently in the analysis. In a discussion of pornography awards, English remarks that “[t]here are few fields of cultural consumption (children's literature is one) in which prizes have a more direct and powerful effect on sales” (97), and in a footnote points to the John Newbery Medal, the world's oldest prize for children's literature (1921) and the second major American literary prize to be established, just after the Pulitzers (1917).⁴ This is a slight improvement upon Pierre Bourdieu, who begins his chapter on “cultural goodwill” in *Distinction* with a discussion of literary prizes but excludes children's books from

the scene of analysis, asking in one of his surveys: "In the last year, have you bought any general books for adults, i.e. apart from textbooks or children's books?"⁵ Bourdieu assumes that children's books are utilitarian rather than literary texts, and English seems to agree, implying that consumers of porn and children's literature are motivated by practical rather than aesthetic or cultural needs.

To prize children's literature presumably means to assert its value beyond the merely or crudely utilitarian. Among the questions we might ask: What are the mechanisms of distinction in and around children's literature, how successful are they, and how do we in turn assess (perhaps prize) them? Given that children's literature is not generally held in high regard, does prizing boost its status or contribute to its devaluation? Do prizes ensure or threaten its literariness? What "cultural market transactions" are achieved by or through or against children's book awards? Who are those "individual and institutional agents," and how do they operate? How does the prizing of children's literature compare to and intersect with the prizing of so-called adult literature? The comparison between children's literature and pornography suggests that "adult literature" veers away from as much as toward a highbrow (and less utilitarian) classification. Do adult forms claim the high and low ends of the spectrum, leaving children's literature roughly in the middle?

Rather than examining children's literature prizing at large, or the tempting subject of pornography and children's literature, I offer here a provisional case study of the Newbery Medal, first examining how the Medal established a beachhead in the economy of prestige, and then addressing the culture of critique and proliferation characteristic of the more contemporary American children's book award scene. Founded in 1921 by the American Library Association (ALA) and named after the eighteenth-century publisher and bookseller, John Newbery, the Medal has been awarded annually to "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children published in the United States during the preceding year." To date, there are eighty-five Medal winners and several hundred Honor Books or runners-up.⁶ Honor Books are not mandated but are usually selected by the Newbery Medal Committee, largely made up of librarians specializing in children's materials. The Medal scheme proved so successful that in 1938, a second award was created for excellence in picture book art, named for the English illustrator Randolph Caldecott. Children's literary prizing is now nearly as varied as its adult counterpart, but the ALA, now some 60,000 members

strong, is the largest and most influential evaluating body, administering twenty book and media awards and reviewing most, if not all, of the roughly five thousand children's and young adult titles published each year in the United States.⁷ The Medal remains the most prestigious of the ALA awards, and has come to signify the broader culture of children's literary prizing as well as a critique of such.

Although the Medal carries no cash prize, it can more than double the sales of a book, as well as increase sales of the author's other books.⁸ More important, the Medal keeps titles and authors in circulation for decades. Whereas the average shelf life of a children's book today is roughly eighteen months, many Newbery titles are still in print, and most can be found in public and school libraries. People with only basic familiarity with children's literature often recognize Medal titles, if not also their authors.⁹ Walk into any large bookstore and you'll likely see a section or shelf of Newbery titles, their covers graced with the trademark gold seal.

On the one hand, the Medal is the oldest and arguably the most influential such award, and deserves focused analysis; on the other, it is not necessarily representative of American children's book awards (any more than Newbery titles are representative of American children's literature). A broader focus on children's book awards, one testing and contextualizing the arguments of English and Bourdieu through examination of multiple prizes, might seem a more worthwhile undertaking. For better and for worse, however, the Medal represents both a tradition of merit and a growing dissatisfaction with such. There's a tradition of professional commentary on the Medal that can be brought into dialogue with more recent theorizations of cultural capital and literary value. The Medal merits more than a footnote in the history of prizing, and this essay takes the Medal as its principal subject, in an attempt to discover what might be learned about the prizing of American children's literature more generally.

If, as English asserts, the Nobel Prize has served as a baseline for the modern prize, inspiring envy and imitation, the Newbery Medal arguably has had a similar role in the children's literature scene and its own particular "logic of proliferation."¹⁰ "Each prize that achieves a premier position in a particular field," he notes, "and that becomes, however contestably, the 'Nobel' of that field, produces a host of imitators with various legitimating claims of similitude and difference" (65). Giving coherence to a specialized market, the Newbery Medal helped establish the modern awards system for children's literature,

in the process ensuring that ALA librarians would continue to serve as tastemakers. With adult literary prizing, by contrast, critics and authors are usually the credentialed authorities.

The Medal was founded a year after John Erskine initiated the Great Books curriculum at Columbia, and five years before the launch of Harry Scherman's Book-of-the-Month Club. Janice Radway notes that the Book-of-the-Month Club gave modern readers "a way to cope with the demands of the modern tempo by placing in their hands the very embodiment of it, the new book" (172). We might say the same of the new book award: it embodied as much as managed that modern tempo. Like the Book-of-the-Month-Club, if at a different pace, the Medal responded to what Radway calls the "problem of singularity" (163) attendant on the idea of literature—how to market and sell new books without undermining ideals of distinction and talent. Like both the Club and the Great Books plan, the Medal linked texts to a tradition of merit while responding to the pressures of the day. Medal books are instant classics, the selection process an ostensible simulation of the test of time. They are "minor" classics in at least two senses of the phrase: classics for kids, and respectable if not remarkable achievements in their own right. If not exactly a canon, the Medal is part of the canonical architecture of children's literature. At the same time, the Medal stands for a good education, for what we might call "edubrow" culture—the middlebrow culture of public schools and libraries.

That said, the Medal's pre-eminence within the field of American children's literature has been challenged on the grounds that it doesn't, in fact, sufficiently promote the common good, or that its ideology of distinction is incompatible with a democratic program of literary citizenship. It's clear that the Medal has long been a selective, even separatist affair. We can see in the history of the Medal a representative shift from meritocratic, formalist expectations about excellence to a more pluralistic understanding of literary and cultural merit. The Medal, in fact, has come to embody our ambivalence about distinction in the wake of progressive social movements, canon reform, and widespread faith that literature, especially that for children, should be an equal opportunity employer.

Browbeating the Medal: The Newbery Economy of Prestige

In her important study *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*, Beverly Lyon Clark reminds us that nineteenth-

century American authors often wrote for children and adults alike, contributing to *Youth's Companion*, *St. Nicholas*, and other children's periodicals—so much so, in fact, that the contents list for such read like a *Who's Who* of American letters. Children's books were reviewed regularly in *The Nation*, *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *Lippincott's*, *The Dial*, *The Critic*, *North American Review*, and *Catholic World*. All three editors of the *Atlantic Monthly* on the job between 1871 and 1898—William Dean Howells, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Horace E. Scudder—published children's books without jeopardizing their reputation as men of letters (Clark 55). Soon after, however, luminaries such as Henry James and Bliss Perry claimed irreconcilable differences between children's literature and literature for adults, such that the former “generally disappeared from the purview of the cultural elite” (181). Clark blames not merely cultural elitism, but also anxiety about American immaturity:

Not for nothing was a 1915 manifesto of early-twentieth-century criticism by Van Wyck Brooks—a book whose memorable contribution was the coining of *highbrow* and *lowbrow*, thereby providing terms for discussing and indeed fostering such separations as that between children's and adults' literature—titled *America's Coming of Age*. (58)

Advocates for children's literature responded to this devaluation by insisting upon levels of distinction, in effect creating a middlebrow tradition of children's literature, and perhaps positioning “children's literature” as a middlebrow formulation more generally. While Clark concerns herself more with the devaluation of children's literature then and now, her gloss on Brooks points the way to a reconception of children's literature as part of what historian Joan Shelley Rubin has called “the making of middlebrow culture.” Even as space for adult literature was being carved out, anxiety about ostensibly lowbrow forms such as the dime novel and the series book led to arguments for more respectable or legitimate writing for children. Better books were sorely needed, it was thought, along with better venues for their display and distribution. To this end, more and more people—most of them middle-class women—got involved in the children's book scene. In 1917, Macmillan created the first children's book department within a major publishing house, with others soon following. Just the year before, Bertha Mahony had opened in Boston the first children's bookshop, described by Alice Jordan as “a center for those who choose to take children's books seriously as a branch of literature” (qtd. in

Viguers 429–30). Mahony and partner Elinor Whitney distributed book lists, which evolved into *The Horn Book Magazine*, still thriving today, as well as into library science and education textbooks. The Medal and subsequent ALA prizes also have partial origin in those lists.

More immediately, the Medal was the brainchild of Frederic G. Melcher, editor of what was then called *The Publishers' Weekly*. As a boy, Melcher devoured Alcott, Twain, and Pyle; he also regularly read from *St. Nicholas*, *Harper's Young People*, and other children's magazines. Familiar with children's literature from Newbery forward, Melcher is a transitional figure after Newbery himself. Like Newbery, Melcher helped reinvent the idea of children's literature at a crucial moment, as genteel East Coast tradition was yielding to new urbanism, modern writing, and dramatic changes in the book business. Inspired in part by the success of Children's Book Week—a collaborative effort among publishers, librarians, and Chief Librarian of the Boy Scouts of America, Franklin Mathews—Melcher proposed that the ALA establish an award for children's literature and name it after John Newbery, often dubbed the father of children's literature. The Medal was a more selective affair than Children's Book Week, with the book list dramatically compressed and taking center stage. Melcher and his cohort were no doubt also inspired by the early twentieth-century culture of artistic as well as athletic competition, in which nationalist energies commingled and sometimes collided with an internationalist pride in human achievement.¹¹ A more analogous institution is the Academy Awards, launched in 1917, and likewise focused on American cultural production.¹² In any case, Melcher put the Newbery name to good American use.¹³ John Townsend observes that Melcher finished an Americanization process began by Revolutionary printers who pirated Newbery's work. "John Newbery never heard of the United States of America," he writes, "but thanks to Mr. Melcher and the ALA, millions of Americans have heard of him" (154).

Librarians, of course, were the mainstay of the Medal. Mostly white women of genteel or middle-class backgrounds, they saw library work as a form of public service as much as a modern profession. By 1900 they already were focused on the reading lives of children; as Dee Garrison reports, the first publication of the ALA was Caroline Hewins's book list *Books for the Young* (1882), and the first specialized area within librarianship was children's services. In 1918, Anne Carroll Moore of the New York Public Library began reviewing children's books in *The Bookman*. She insisted upon the importance of the children's reading

room, and of professional commentary on children's literature. By the 1920s, librarians were working closely with the book industry to set standards for production and reception. Whereas earlier librarians pushed for mere acceptance of children's books, Moore and her cohort stressed their aesthetic value, linking that value to the public good. "Despite their perceived passivity," notes Anne Lundin, "librarians can be defined as canon makers who reproduce social hierarchy in a systematic act of tradition bearing (also known as collective development)" (30).¹⁴

Children's Book Week and the Medal arguably helped revitalize faith in the idea of the public sphere, very much at issue in the period, the subject of treatises by Walter Lippman and John Dewey among others.¹⁵ Children's Book Week was designed explicitly as an exercise in character building through books, and the Medal, though a more literary project, endorsed the association of literature with character and citizenship. Revisionist scholarship on the public sphere, notably that of Michael Warner, points to the centrality of self-reflexive textual circulation to the formation of publics and counter-publics. The self-reflexive circulation of books, lists, booklists, and other written materials qualifies this children's book culture as a public in this sense. Moore and Melcher clearly saw themselves as participating in and even reshaping public life. Melcher's formal agreement with the ALA Executive Board describes the Medal's purpose as "emphasiz[ing] to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels" (qtd. in Irene Smith 50). "We should not forget," he elsewhere notes, "that by creating a greater audience, we are also creating literature itself . . ." (qtd. in Irene Smith 47). In "The Reviewing of Children's Books" (1926), Moore notes that the librarian-publisher relation was originally more fraught: "It was before librarians and publishers really began to know each other, and to vision a public as yet unreached by either" (225). The ALA still sees the vetting of children's books as a public service. Nor was this sense of advocacy restricted to literary types. The Medal itself was designed by sculptor René Paul Chambellan, known for his work on public buildings in New York City.

At the same time, ALA leaders insisted on certain standards in shaping their public. While originally the selection process involved the larger membership of children's librarians, since 1928 that process has been a committee affair, due to practical concerns as well as anxiety about the process of selection. Writing in 1922, Clara Hunt insists that

the judges be “people of high standards and experience,” for “[i]f a majority vote of all so-called children’s librarians determines the award, it is entirely possible for a mediocre book to get the Medal” (qtd. in Irene Smith 40). Thus the formation of a special committee, the structure of which remains principally unchanged. Of the fifteen librarians who serve each year, seven are elected by the general membership, as is the Chair, who appoints the other seven.¹⁶

The first Newbery Medal winner was Hendrik van Loon’s *The Story of Mankind* (1921), a Eurocentric history of the world approaching five hundred pages. Rubin cites van Loon’s book as an example of the middlebrow “outline” genre devised by Will Durant and H. G. Wells (216–19). Although Rubin doesn’t mention the Medal, and dates the term “middlebrow” to 1933 (xii), the appeal of van Loon’s tome to adult as well as child readers is telling. H. L. Mencken called it “stupendous”; Carl Van Doren described it as “the chief historical primer of the age.” Anne Carroll Moore predicted it would be “the most influential children’s book for many years to come” (qtd. in van Loon 128).¹⁷ Although subsequent Newbery titles weren’t as widely lauded—van Loon was already something of a celebrity, and outlines were all the rage—the Medal books from the 1920s were generally admired by the literati. At first, then, Newbery literature seemed destined for literary or proto-highbrow status. As the decades wore on, however, and as the Medal succeeded as a middlebrow project beyond the specificity of its titles, the Newbery books were understood primarily as minor classics rather than as classics that children might read. Thanks largely to its association with the ostensibly feminine professions of librarianship and teaching, the Medal became less a public affair and more a professional domain. Furthermore, writing for children was and remains a highly gendered enterprise; most of the Newbery titles were written by women.¹⁸ In the end, Anne Carroll Moore was right; van Loon’s history became “the most influential children’s book” rather than a work of Literature.

The attempt to legitimize children’s literature through the Medal contributed to the ongoing separation of children’s and “serious”/adult literature. There were other factors at play here—among them, the turn toward realism in adult writing—but as Anne Scott MacLeod notes, the professionalization of children’s literature by the ALA effectively removed children’s literature from broader public ownership, despite (or rather through) those claims about fashioning a public. As a result, writes MacLeod,

children's literature became an enclave. All the creative activity, all the knowledgeable producing and reviewing and purveying of children's books, took place a little apart from the larger world of literature. By about 1920, children's literature was a garden, lovingly tended by those who cared about it but isolated as well as protected by the cultural walls that surrounded it. (125)¹⁹

The sphere of children's literature launched in the 1920s wasn't just middlebrow, but also edubrow. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, librarians successfully lobbied public schools to introduce supplemental reading into their programs, and to furnish school libraries much in the manner of public libraries. As a result, teachers as well as librarians became invested in the Medal. Contemporaneous schemes such as Scherman's Book-of-the-Month Club, notes Radway, capitalized on the desire for educational goods in the wake of the expansion of the educational apparatus but also helped shore up that apparatus, with its systems of evaluation and accreditation. "Indeed," she writes, "these enterprises played an important role in defining the parameters of an extracurricular public space where school-derived knowledge might be further exercised" (162). So, too, with prize-winning children's literature, claimed as a curriculum of enrichment. Generally speaking, teachers and librarians have seen themselves as partners in edubrow culture. Granted, there have been some struggles for authority staged around the Medal. As Christine Jenkins reports, in the late 1930s some cantankerous male teachers, editors, and authors challenged the jurisdiction of women librarians over the Medal, accusing them of bias against boys and boy books. While the gender politics of this turf-war are significant, the turf itself is what I want to emphasize: by the 1930s, the Medal had come to be as closely associated with the educational mission as with library work.

By the 1920s, arguments for the traditional humanities curriculum—such as that of William Torey Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education in the 1890s, who advocated the five "windows to the soul" (grammar, literature and art, mathematics, geography, and history)—were modified by more practical concerns about teaching practices. To counter the student passivity of traditional instruction, reformers recommended thematic projects, group work, and other more active forms of learning.²⁰ They did not, however, always say much about what literature should be emphasized. In elementary schools, traditionalists and reformers alike emphasized skills over the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility. The handbooks I've examined from the period give priority

to reading skills, spelling, vocabulary building, and pronunciation. By the mid-twentieth century, "language arts" was firmly ensconced as a foundation for more complex symbolic activity. This relative unconcern with literature at the elementary and secondary levels stands in sharp contrast to a strong investment in literature at the college level. The 1920s, in fact, saw the first formalization of the American literary curriculum, as professors of oratory and rhetoric began to supervise student reading, develop courses in literature, and displace the literary clubs that had long been a feature of campus life.

At the same time, this focus on skills at the pre-college level was hardly divorced from five-windows thinking. In his 1927 handbook *Psychology of Elementary School Subjects*, Homer B. Reed, Professor of Psychology at Fort Hays Kansas State College, argues that reading should both help with practical tasks and "supply an open window through which we may view the world and may experience in imagination human activities in unseen places and the drama of the human race as it occurred in past ages" (44). To that end, Reed evaluates phonetic and sight reading methods and invokes the Stanford-Binet Scale. In a chapter titled "Reading: Motivation and Materials," he notes that school readers were usually used in reading instruction. Those readers included selections from fairy tales, picture books, "nursery rimes" (sic), various classics of children's literature—among them *Black Beauty*, *Pinocchio*, and *Robinson Crusoe*—and a few American works like "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

As I've noted, the early Newbery books were strongly invested in history, geography, and comparative cultural study, which resonated with John Dewey's praise of geography and history as "the information studies *par excellence* of the schools" (*Democracy* 210) and his linking of these subjects with the cultivation of aesthetic "appreciation . . . enlarged, an *intensified* prizing, not merely a prizing" (237).²¹ While they are sometimes incorporated into curricula, often in geographical/historical or social studies units, and in "gifted and talented" classes, Medal books are not usually primary teaching texts. Instead, they form a kind of secondary or supplemental curriculum, part of that "extracurricular public space." The existence of Newbery-themed pedagogical materials affirms such and also tacitly acknowledges doubts about the appropriateness of Newbery titles for elementary students especially.²² The Medal is thus an edubrow project with literary tendencies or aspirations.

In passing, I note that the early twentieth-century scene of children's literature has interesting resemblances to the character-building move-

ment and may be a reinvention or extension of it. It's no coincidence that the Chief Librarian of the Boy Scouts (a man) was involved in Children's Book Week. Librarians presided over reading and reading rooms in much the same way that Scoutmasters and other boy workers supervised more outward-bound pursuits. Children's literature might be understood as a less masculinist and more literary venture in character building as well as an edubrow formation.

Medal Privilege and American Subjects

Newbery excellence is defined loosely, with interpretations of the terms, definitions, and criteria as set forth in 1921 largely left up to the annual Committee.²³ At the same time, the founders of the Medal were more specific about who could participate in the contest and about what work was eligible. While "there are no limitations as to the character of the book, except that it must be original work" ("Terms and Criteria"), the award is restricted to citizens or residents of the United States, and books originally published elsewhere are ineligible. Authors had to be certifiably American, and their work had to make "original" contributions to American literature.

At the same time, most of the Newbery Medal titles in the first two decades of the award were set in other countries and/or indigenous North American cultures. Historical fiction, folklore, and comparative cultural fiction dominated the early Newbery scene. Of the 1920s Medal winners, only one is set in the United States. Arthur Bowie Chrisman's *Shen of the Sea* (1926), for example, is a collection of reinterpreted Chinese short stories and fables. The trend continued in the 1930s: Laura Adams Armer's *Waterless Mountain* (1932) tells the story of a Navajo boy in Arizona, while Kate Seredy's *The White Stag* (1938) reconstructs the life of Attila the Hun from Magyar legends. Other titles from this period are set in fifteenth-century Krakow, seventeenth-century England, colonial India, and pre-Revolutionary China.

For all their worldliness, the early Medal books had little in common with either progressive education or with the progressive children's books of the day. Even so, the trend was so obvious that Sophie Goldsmith, in a 1931 essay for *The Bookman* assessing the first decade of the Medal books, irritably calls for authors to turn homeward and to "interpret some phase of the last ten years, or even the last twenty or thirty" (314). Goldsmith didn't see that the early titles affirm WASP American society precisely by depicting other cultures as exotic, primitive, and

“historical,” subject to the inexorable processes of modernization. Janice M. Alberghene puts it more generously when she notes that the 1930s winners were about the frontier and/or about folk cultures—either way, they functioned to clarify “that which is American—even when the books are ostensibly about other cultures” (10). In any case, had Goldsmith surveyed the scene again in the 1940s, she likely would have been pleased. Whereas some earlier winning authors had been born abroad, all ten in the 1940s were born in the States, and only one spent any significant time abroad. More to the point, six of those authors wrote about non-indigenous American life, and declared more explicitly their patriotism, as in *Daniel Boone* (1939) and *Johnny Tremain* (1943). Since the 1940s, books set outside the contemporary United States have appeared with some regularity, but no longer dominate the scene. Books with decidedly American settings and themes have since been a staple. While historical fiction remains a preferred genre, the Newbery books are now more varied than they once were with respect to subject, setting, and even style.

For the first several decades, then, Medal committees and thus the larger credentialing body of the ALA gave priority to American work, defined not by setting but by authorship, theme, and values. What was American was established through and against contact with the cultural other, usually safely removed across time and/or space. If we include the Honor Books in our analysis, our picture of the Medal shifts somewhat, as the Honor Books are often more progressively engaged with the vexing theme of Americanness. Doris Gates's *Blue Willow* (1940), for example, narrates the trials and triumphs of an itinerant worker's family in California, and Florence Crannell Means's *The Moved-Outers* (1945) was the first children's book to focus on the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. Arna Bontemps's *The Story of the Negro* (1948), the first title by an African American to garner Newbery laurels, was an Honor rather than a Medal Book. Moreover, while the Medal heavily favors the genre of historical fiction, the Honor Books are more diverse with respect to genre.²⁴ To some extent, then, the Honor Books offset the relative conservatism of the Medal books, forming a shadow-canon of sorts that's safely contained.²⁵ Very few Honor Books are as widely known as the Medal winners.²⁶

Whether asserted through portraits of exotic folk cultures or through the later domestic/patriotic turn, Medal faith in literary American talent was not extended to African American authors or their works. Whereas immigrant subjects were granted Newbery citizenship, African-

American subjects were excluded from the scene, in keeping with social practices of segregation. The institutional racism of the ALA can be traced both within the Newbery tradition and within ALA prize culture at large. What makes this resistance particularly disturbing is the contemporaneous existence not only of African-American children's literature, but also of African-American literary prizing, which, like ALA prizing, was linked firmly to ideals of education and uplift.

The Newbery Medal was founded in 1921, one year after the NAACP, under the guidance of W. E. B. Du Bois, launched *The Brownies' Book* magazine. Although it folded a year later, the magazine achieved a monthly circulation of around five thousand subscribers. *The Brownies' Book*, moreover, is only the best-known example of an expansive children's literature of the Harlem Renaissance, as Katharine Capshaw Smith demonstrates in her engaging study of that material. By her account, the black child became the "race leader" (xix) and an icon "of emerging cultural nationalism" (xxiii), and children's literature was central to the movement. Du Bois and others "prized" children and their material, if not through children's book awards. Literary prizing *was* a core element of the adult literary culture; David Levering Lewis even reads the Renaissance as a broad assertion of artistic capital, undertaken in hopes that such would translate into political gains. Hence the promotion of literary stars such as Jean Toomer and Countee Cullen. Toomer's *Cane*, published in 1923, was described as "a book of gold and bronze" (qtd. in Lewis 59), and gold and bronze medals for artistic achievement by African Americans soon followed.

All along, however, many prominent figures had their doubts about prizing, including Du Bois. Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, themselves prize winners, came to see prizes as part of an infantilizing white patronage system. Jessie Redmon Fauset, editor of *The Brownies' Book*, voiced similar concerns, and Claude McKay, in a letter to Arthur Schomburg, even called the prestigious NAACP Spingarn Medal (established in 1915) "an insult to the intelligence of the American negro—like a tick attached to a thoroughbred horse."²⁷ African-American authors took issue with the ethos of competitive individualism that made difficult a sense of community.

Two Renaissance writers who would go on to write children's literature, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, were well aware of the dangers of prizing, but also understood its power. The economic devastation of Harlem was difficult to escape, and authors needed to court a wider public in order to survive through and beyond the

Depression. In the 1940s and 1950s, Hughes and Bontemps, who had greater access to white publishing structures than most African-American writers, were particularly sensitive to being excluded from Newbery recognition, and complimented each other's work as worthy of that award. In an undated letter to Hughes, Bontemps says this about Hughes's collection of poems, *The Dream Keeper* (1932): "Wouldn't it be great if your book would take that Medal and of course it stands a chance no matter who the publisher, though of course I wish it were Macmillan" (Nichols 19). Writing again to Hughes, this time in reference to his own Newbery Honor Book *The Story of the Negro*, Bontemps calls the Newbery Medal "the Pulitzer of juveniles," but also remarks that "near misses don't make me happy. I'd like a jackpot, a bull's-eye, or something—sometime" (Nichols 252).

The dominant Newbery genre has long been historical fiction, and as Dianne Johnson emphasizes, historical fiction was likewise a dominant genre of African-American children's literature from the 1940s forward. That's partly why Bontemps's *The Story of the Negro*, in part a corrective to *The Story of Mankind*, was the first title by an African American to garner "near miss" laurels. Separate and unequal traditions of children's literature long prevailed. Not until mid-century did a title about African Americans actually win the Medal, and that title was a historical novel of assimilation written by a middle-class white woman, Elizabeth Yates. Yates was one among a handful of white authors in the 1950s writing about slavery and its ills.²⁸ Based on the life of a man who was born an African prince, became a slave in Boston, and died a free man in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, *Amos Fortune, Free Man* (1951) is a compelling tale, which unfortunately downplays the horrors of slavery, emphasizing as traumatic Amos's capture and Atlantic passage but refusing to subject him to indignities on American soil. Upon arrival, Amos is bought by a loving Quaker family. Though Amos was royalty in Africa, Yates implies that his life in America is better. Amos forgets his former life, and concentrates on learning a new trade, gaining freedom, and acquiring property.

Difference is tolerated until it threatens native soil; then it must be contained. Hence the comparativist ethos of the early Newbery books yields by the 1950s to a more anxious insistence on the universality of human experience, as racial otherness at home became harder to handle. Nearly twenty years passed before the Medal went to another book about African-American life, also written by a white author: William H. Armstrong's *Souder* (1970), a melancholic novel about father-

son separation and the compensatory power of letters. Finally, in 1974, the Medal went to an African-American writer, Virginia Hamilton, for *M. C. Higgins, the Great* (1974). In fits and starts, the ALA began to respect and honor African-American literature. A common assumption is that the Medal is now more often awarded to books that grapple directly with social issues. But even now, most of the Medal books that address racism, for instance, are historical novels that give priority to the folk/vernacular and are set no later than the Depression.

Concomitant with this slow assimilation of African-American writing was a universalist rhetoric of art and culture, which held sway even in (especially in) the face of social upheaval. The pluralization of prizes for children's literature came later, along with awards that honored minority writers alongside their work. In the 1960s, the only Medal winner to reckon at all with race was Elizabeth Borton de Treviño's *I, Juan de Pareja* (1965), a historical novel set in early seventeenth-century Spain. Treviño tells the story of a slave, Juan de Pareja, and his relationship to his master, the great Spanish painter Diego Velázquez. Diego is the royal painter for the King of Spain; he paints the King's portraits and other commissioned pieces. More an apprentice than a slave, Juan is also an artist, having observed his master and painted in secret. At the novel's end, Diego frees Juan just before the great painter dies. Juan remarks, "You are still Master. My Master, as you were master to the apprentices, and to other painters. Master means teacher, does it not?" (157). Diego dies and is canonized by the King; Juan survives to tell their story. *I, Juan de Pareja* expresses nostalgia for Renaissance ideals of art, apprenticeship, and patronage. It imagines the evolution of the black artist through loyalty to Master, recasting mastery as artistic achievement and freedom as the freedom to paint.

Two years later, in 1968, the Medal went to E. L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. Unlike Treviño's work, this novel remains a favorite title, not only because it is well written and amusing but also because, like Treviño's work, it offers a seductive fantasy of private mastery of public culture, set in more familiar territory: New York City, specifically the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In Konigsburg's story, Claudia and Jamie Kincaid run away from home and hide out in the Met. The novel includes a map of the Met so that readers can follow along. Claudia burns with intellectual curiosity, while Jamie is obsessed with money; Claudia calls him "Mr. Pinchpenny" (96). Capital and the desire for cultural capital inform their every move. They show "cultural goodwill" toward art, sensing "the magic of the

name of Michelangelo" (65), and set off to determine the authenticity of a statue named Angel. Is Angel an original work of art, everyone wonders, or is it merely a copy?

Their search takes them on a select institutional tour of New York, first to the public library, then to the United Nations, and finally to the private mansion of Mrs. Frankweiler, which resembles a museum. The childless Mrs. Frankweiler is culture's custodian, guarding the secret of Angel. Mrs. Frankweiler exchanges the secret of Angel for the story of their exploits, giving them a sketch that authenticates Angel as the work of Michelangelo. Rather than make that knowledge public, however, Claudia in turn keeps it private. Konigsburg thus writes a book that likens reading to museum going, and literature to art. She firmly distinguishes art from its imitations, appealing at once to a rhetoric of superior workmanship and to the realities of the market, whereby authenticity is commoditized. The Angel statue is an analog for the novel itself, for its literary potential, and for the authenticity of the artist.

More so than most Newbery titles, *From the Mixed-Up Files* endorses the accumulation of capital and cultural capital alike, distinguishing between the trustees of culture and the clueless masses. If the Medal helped to make a middlebrow public of children's literature, then, it also has come to represent the selectivity of that public as well as the pleasures of private consumption. Of course, a fair assessment of the Newbery tradition would have to grapple at length with the ideological energies of these eighty-five titles, but my sense is that the Medal books aspire to and sometimes approach Literature in ways that now seem troubling. If one of the Medal's original functions was to modernize the classic and reconcile it with the children's book, the Medal now also preserves its own reputation as a prizing institution.

All That Glitters

Nonetheless, the value of Newbery gold isn't what it used to be. One factor, which English emphasizes, is the post-1960s proliferation of prizes, in and around the general ascendancy of cultural capital (as "information" or "knowledge") in what economist Danny Quah has called a "weightless economy," marked "at least symbolically by the abandonment of the dollar/gold standard in 1971" (qtd. in English 77). The Medal is no longer the only game in town; several hundred prizes are now awarded to children's titles in English alone. The proliferation of prizes has in turn given rise to an apparatus of bibliographic

summary, pedagogical application, and collection management. This expansion is hardly incidental to shifts in literary content and context; it embodies and accompanies new contingencies of value.

To be sure, civil rights and other progressive social movements have helped diversify prizing, through the creation of new awards and through critique of the Medal. Debate about the Medal's value has been heated of late. In her 1998 essay "What Color is Gold?" for example, Bonnie J. F. Miller deems the Medal a racist institution, taking issue not with the basic concept of the award (or of awards more generally) but rather with the selection process, and arguing that children's literature should be more representative of diversity.²⁹ "When . . . a body of literature with the power of Newbery gold lacks even one text by a minority writer or about a minority lead," writes Miller, "the message sent to children is that the 'most distinguished' protagonists and authors are white" (34). Others defend the Medal's aims and ends. From the other end of the prizing wars, in an essay entitled "Slippery Slopes and Proliferating Prizes," Marc Aronson deplores the expansion of prizing and chalks it up to the success rather than (as for Miller) the failure of identity politics. Citing the Coretta Scott King (CSK) Awards and the Pura Belpré Medal, founded in 1969 and 1996 for distinction in African-American and Latino/a children's writing, respectively, Aronson holds that children's literature has yielded to special interests. Aronson urges judges to "honor content alone, not identity. Use the very best judges and set the very highest standards" (278). Otherwise, he implies, to quote the Dodo in *Alice in Wonderland*, "everyone has won, and *all* must have prizes." "Who will bet," asks Aronson, "how soon mixed-race authors, those with disabilities, Muslims (and thus Jews, which, of course, then means Christians), will demand awards of their own? How can ALA say no to any of them?" (277).

Miller is right: the Newbery Medal has slowly and inadequately adapted to social change. Aronson is right, too: new prizes have shifted or at least pluralized the terms of distinction. The CSK Awards, for example, go to titles that help young readers "comprehend their personal duty and responsibility as citizens in a pluralistic society."³⁰ What Aronson and other defenders of the Medal fail to see is that the identitarian critique may be the logical outcome of the Medal's edubrow mission. Still unclear is the impact of progressive prizes on the institution of the Medal as well as the field more broadly. On the one hand, after the critique of Miller and others we've seen some improvement in the Medal's identity politics. Replacing yesteryear's explora-

tions of world culture are more self-consciously pluralistic titles like Linda Sue Park's *A Single Shard* (2002 Medal) and Cynthia Kadohata's *Kira-Kira* (2005 Medal). On the other hand, the Newbery's contemporary track record isn't that impressive overall, and newer awards have done more to alter the scene of prizing. Progressive prizes may have forced greater consideration of social identity within the Newbery evaluation process without necessarily improving its representational politics. The CSK Awards have gained influence even as few books by and/or about African Americans have since won the Newbery.³¹ After the 1977 selection of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, the Medal did not go to another African American-authored book until 2001. Some observers have declared the 1980s and 1990s a golden age of African American children's literature, while others disagree, pointing to the white sheen of the Medal and to the low numbers of books published annually by and/or about African Americans.³² And never has a book with lesbian/gay/bisexual content received Newbery recognition (not even Honor status), in spite of or perhaps thanks to the ALA's creation of the Stonewall Book Awards in 1971.³³

The Medal remains the ALA's pre-eminent award, at once continuing its mission of certifying achievement while also serving as a touchstone for debate about the politics of representation. In a 1946 essay titled "Books in Search of Children," Louise Seaman Bechtel, the first head of a children's book department, affirms the larger mission of the Medal by remarking that "Mr. Melcher knew there was no one 'best' book! His awards focused a wider public interest on this field, and also focused the judges' thinking on the problem of merit, the eternal problem of what is a good book" (189). Then as now, that problem is linked to the project of (literary) citizenship. If the Medal has no intrinsic merit, it attempts to generate merit, thereby establishing children's literature not only as a form of legitimate culture but also as a vital component of public life. Progressive prizes are likewise understood as useful tools for publicity and public making; prizes get the word out. Such is the paradox that prizing represents, at once the stuff of distinction and democratization.

The debate about prizing and its value(s) seems another version of the canon wars. Rather than argue about aesthetic vs. cultural value, we should ask to what extent John Guillory's critique of the liberal pluralist faith in "representation" in and around the canon wars also extends to prizing and to edubrow culture. In our sorry society of the spectacle, we mistake the syllabus for the canon, he asserts, and confuse both with

the real work of political struggle and democratic change. Is prizing also a distraction from rather than an engagement with class issues and the politics of schooling? And if, as a number of scholars have argued, the idea of the public sphere is likewise smoke and mirrors to some extent—in Eric O. Clarke’s words, is “necessarily subjunctive,” always already presented *as if* it were real—how do we address the lingering belief that children’s literature builds good citizens, amounts to a form of public service? We operate *as if* we are a democracy, *as if* we know our best books, *as if* those books are by and for the people—*as if* our scholarship matters. Are we fooling ourselves?

Whether approving, skeptical, or somewhere in between, analysis of prizing must consider the institutional and disciplinary dimensions of distinction, in this case not only those of the ALA but also the MLA and the ChLA. Academics, too, are individual and institutional agents of culture. The “market transactions” to which English refers include academic ones, which play out in various ways. My work on the Newbery Medal is itself an attempt to prize children’s literature, to convert the cultural capital of the Medal into academic capital for myself and others in the field.³⁴ I’m pleased that children’s literature is now more prized or appreciated within English studies, that the MLA Division on Children’s Literature is almost thirty years old, that three of our major journals are published by Johns Hopkins University Press. But I recognize that the academic prizing of children’s literature shouldn’t be treated in isolation and/or seen only as progress. *Professing Children’s Literature* has yet to materialize, but as Clark makes clear in *Kiddie Lit*, the articulation of children’s literature has a history, one involving not only devaluation but also certain formations of expertise. The rise of children’s literature as a field within English has come partly at the expense of other professionals concerned with children and books. Within English studies, of course, we see familiar hierarchies. I’m intrigued by the odd identity politics of being a children’s literature scholar in a Research 1 program, and of being a man within the field. Wherever and however we work, the study of prizing can help us better grasp the origins, current status, and future possibilities of our profession(s) in and around other professions and within the broader context of academic and popular culture.

Notes

My thanks to Julia Mickenberg, Katharine Capshaw Smith, Trysh Travis, and two anonymous readers for helpful feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

¹"It is extremely doubtful," writes Millett, "whether the awarding of literary prizes furthers the cause of good literature" (269); all too often, the prize goes to a "pseudo-talent." Vague terms and criteria, in tandem with the inconsistency and/or ineptitude of judges, render the business of prizing all the more dubious in his eyes.

²*The Economy of Prestige* is the only book-length study yet to appear on the subject of prizing. While commentary on individual prizes is plentiful, scholarly treatment of prizing as a cultural phenomenon is in shorter supply. For notable exceptions in addition to English, see Huggan; Marrouchi; and Strongman. In October 2003, Oxford Brookes University hosted a conference on "Culture and the Literary Prize," convened by Claire Squares of the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies and Daniel Lea of Oxford Brookes University. English was one of the keynote speakers.

³See especially chapter three of English, "The Logic of Proliferation" (50–68).

⁴See English 360 n. 35.

⁵"While the propensity and capacity to form opinions on book prizes vary with reading and with knowledge of the prizes," writes Bourdieu, "a good number of those who do not read books (especially not prize-winning books), and who have no knowledge of literary prizes, nonetheless state an opinion about them, and on the whole a favourable one" (319).

⁶As Linda Kauffman Peterson and Marilyn Leathers Solt warn in their introduction to a special forum on the Newbery and Caldecott books in the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, "[i]t is a difficult task to determine which works still function as distinguished pieces of literature and illustration without considering the other literature of the time and without imposing our own contemporary biases on the books" (7). They and their contributors focus instead on what the Medal books can "tell us of the field of children's literature in any given year or decade" (7). The overview essays of Peterson and Solt were subsequently republished (along with book lists) in Peterson and Solt, eds., *Newbery and Caldecott Medal and Honor Books: An Annotated Bibliography*. The ALA has also taken this summary-analysis approach, publishing *The Newbery and Caldecott Awards: A Guide to the Medal and Honor Books* intermittently since 1992 (based on the work of Christine Behrman). For more detailed summaries of individual Newbery and Honor Books, see Gillespie and Naden. For book collections of acceptance speeches and other Newbery materials reprinted from *The Horn Book Magazine*, see Kingman.

⁷As with adult awards, emphasis sometimes goes to general excellence, sometimes to achievement within a certain genre, as with the Edgar Allan Poe Prize for juvenile mystery. In addition to the ALA prizes, U.S. awards are sponsored by individual states, among them the Colorado Children's Book Awards, the Georgia Children's Book Award, the Nene Award (Hawaii), the Mark Twain Award (Missouri), and the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award (Vermont). Not surprisingly, children's book awards now tend toward the multicultural and the pedagogical, as with the Carter G. Woodson Book Award, sponsored by the National Council for Social Studies and designed to promote social science books that "treat topics related to ethnic minorities and race relations sensitively and accurately." For an overview of children's book awards, see *Children's Books Awards & Prizes*. The Children's Book Council, the publisher of this guide, also hosts a subscription database called Awards and Prizes Online: <<http://awardsandprizes.cbcbooks.org/>>. Another online resource is the Book Award Annals Web site: <<http://bookawardannals.com/home/>>.

⁸For example, Diane Roback reports that when the 2005 winners of the Newbery and the Caldecott were announced in late January, both were out of stock in many venues. Greenwillow Press, publisher of the Caldecott-winning picture book *Kitten's First Full Moon*, scrambled to provide another 100,000 copies within the week. Only five hundred copies of the Newbery-winning novel *Kira-Kira* were warehoused by Atheneum Press at the time of the award's announcement, but the Press quickly produced 75,000 additional copies, with more on the way. In short, children's books are big business these days, with award-winners dominating the scene alongside Harry Potter and Lemony Snicket.

⁹For an updated list of Medal and Honor Books, see the ALA Web site: <<http://www.ala.org>>.

¹⁰As English observes, prizes date back at least to the eighteenth-century scientific and philosophical academies, but the early twentieth century witnessed a distinctive surge of literary prize establishment. The Nobel Prize for Literature was founded in 1901, followed by the Prix Goncourt two years later. As “perhaps the oldest prize that strikes us as fully contemporary” (English 28), the Nobel Prize has been especially influential; its only major rival is perhaps the Oscar, which operates more in the realm of mass entertainment.

¹¹Children’s book authors are hardly Olympic athletes, and they tend not to write about sports, but with the advent of the Newbery, authors too could go for the gold, even if the Medal is actually bronze. On one side of the Medal, a man stands over a boy and girl, representing the author sharing his gift of imagination; on the other, an open book displays Newbery’s name and the phrase “For the Most Distinguished Contribution to American Literature for Children.”

¹²In *Cultural Capital*, John Guillory wryly notes that canon wrangling is not “like the Academy Awards” (8). But in a sense, book awarding is like the Oscars, having comparable (if less televisual) traditions of celebrity, ceremony, and even scandal.

¹³Newbery was a farm boy who made good in London, hawking books alongside patent medicines. He pioneered the first children’s magazine, *The Lilliputian*, and is best remembered for his children’s books, beginning in 1744 with *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*. F. J. Harvey Darton thus proposes 1744 as the provisional birthdate of modern children’s literature. Acknowledging that children’s books had been produced before Newbery, Harvey nonetheless dubs him “Newbery the Conqueror” (7).

¹⁴Lundin offers a comprehensive account of the canon-making ideals and efforts of children’s librarians, both individually and as a cohort, in Part 2 of her study *Constructing the Canon of Children’s Literature*.

¹⁵See Walter Lippman’s *Public Opinion* (1922) and *The Phantom Public* (1925) and John Dewey’s *The Public and Its Problems* (1927).

¹⁶In 1922, Irene Smith reports, all ALA members, not just children’s librarians, were allowed to participate in Medal selection by the Children’s Librarians’ Section, although a provision was made that, in the event of a close vote, a jury composed of the Section officers and four leading children’s librarians would make the call. That first year, 212 votes were cast, 163 for van Loon’s *The Story of Mankind*. Just a few years later, however, the Book Evaluation Committee of the Section recommended that the popular vote be discontinued. In 1924, a special award committee was set up, although Section members were still invited to nominate titles for consideration. By 1928, only 150 nominations were sent in; the award committee officially took over the entire process of nomination and evaluation. The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the ALA, is now responsible for awarding the Medal. Committee members serve for one year and are not eligible to participate again for five years, unless elected Chair. The members use a weighted voting system and the results are presented at the annual ALA mid-winter meeting.

¹⁷Son Gerard Willem cites these and other reviews in his biography of father Hendrik Willem; see 127–29.

¹⁸The scholarship of Botshon and Goldsmith on women-authored “middlebrow moderns” suggests just how powerfully assumptions about gender determine canonicity and/or cultural status.

¹⁹Anne Lundin takes the garden metaphor further, arguing that the librarians and their collaborators were heirs to Romantic ideals about childhood, nature, and the imagination; the centerpiece of their vision was the children’s reading room, that Edenic space or secret garden wherein children could experience the natural joys of literature.

²⁰At the turn of the century, for example, a high school English class in Dayton, Ohio, had studied classical mythology in the following way: students read the myths in their

textbooks at home, and then reproduced the myths in a series of recitation exercises. See Cuban 111.

²¹Librarians were also strong advocates for the study of history; many were involved with the American Historical Association, formed in 1884, just eight years after the ALA.

²²To some degree, the Medal's status has been asserted against the child or at least the average child's reading abilities—a fact not lost on teachers, who have studied the Medal's popularity with children and/or assessed its pedagogical usefulness. See Leo Miller; Rankin. For teacher's guides using the Newbery books, see Licciardo-Musso; Lamb and Smith; and Kelly.

²³In identifying distinguished writing in a book for children, Medal Committee members must consider the following criteria:

- * interpretation of theme or concept.
- * presentation of information, including accuracy, clarity, and organization.
- * development of plot.
- * delineation of characters.
- * delineation of setting.
- * appropriateness of style.

Works under consideration need not show excellence in all of these areas, but a book should be distinguished in all of the elements pertinent to it. Also, the committee members must consider excellence in presentation for a child audience, even though the book need not be written exclusively for children. They are to focus on a book's literary and social value, and ignore aspects such as illustration and design unless they distract from the actual narrative. Reprints and compilations are ineligible. For more information, see <<http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/literaryawds/newberymedal/newberyterms/newberyterms.htm>>.

²⁴Burns reports that in the 1970s, Caldecott Honor Books were likewise more diverse in theme and style than the Medal winners.

²⁵Within the Medal books, gender has been easier to negotiate; early on, winning authors turned to proto-feminist ends the trope of the spunky tomboy, as in Caroline Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935) and Ruth Sawyer's *Roller Skates* (1946). Girl characters populate the Newberys and are typically smart and adventurous. For an analysis, see Houdyshell and Kirkland. Plus, many Newbery authors are women.

²⁶E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* is the most obvious exception.

²⁷James C. Davis came across this letter while doing research for his work in progress on Harlem Renaissance prizing, sections of which he presented at the Oxford Brookes conference in 2003. Thanks to James for encouraging me to cite McKay and for providing source information.

²⁸On juvenile black biographies, see Mickenberg.

²⁹Miller faults the selection process as "completely dependent upon an individual's standards for what should be considered excellent—i.e., an individual's opinion" (35). She cites the experiences of former Committee members: "1992 Newbery Committee chair Pat Scales openly acknowledges that the Newbery Committee members understand that *literature is subjective*, and they approach the experience knowing that *everyone has a different definition of 'distinguished'*" (35; italics in original). If individual Committee members can't be trusted, however, individual Medal titles apparently can be; Miller rescues exceptional titles from her critique of the institution. "Individually, these books are not the problem . . . It is only when combined that they fail to represent the full range of 'American literature for children' they collectively represent" (38).

³⁰This is criterion "g"; see <<http://www.ala.org/ala/emiert/corettascottkingbookawards/corettascott.htm>>.

³¹Not until 1982 did the ALA officially claim the CSK awards as its own. The awards originated out of an encounter between two librarians over a poster of the late Dr. Martin Luther King at a publisher's booth at the ALA meeting in 1969.

³²The Cooperative Children's Book Council provides annual statistics on children's books by and about people of color published in the United States. See <<http://www.soemadison.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/pcstats.htm>>.

³³The ALA's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table has sponsored the Stonewall Book Awards since 1971, honoring a total of forty-eight books for "exceptional merit relating to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered experience." Aronson, however, prefers the Lambda Literary Awards, given by the Lambda Literary Foundation, saying "nowhere do they specify anything about the sexual orientation, or even gender, of the author. The book wins, no matter who wrote it" (277). Yet most books with LGBT themes are written by LGBT authors; if author and subject aren't necessarily linked, they aren't necessarily distinct either, and to insist on such amounts to "don't ask, don't tell."

³⁴The Phoenix Award, awarded annually by the Children's Literature Association for a book published twenty years prior that was not given due recognition, is worth some critical attention as a mechanism of evaluative reparation, as is the children's poetry award recently launched by *The Lion and the Unicorn*.

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