

Call for Papers— Special Issue / Edited Volume Laura E. Richards' Children's poems

Deadline for abstract submissions: March 31, 2022

Deadline for final paper submissions: September 30, 2022

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There seems to be an overarching understanding among scholars and lay readers alike regarding a clear division between adult and children's poetry. Whereas the first is revered as an elitist art form worthy of serious study, the latter is often associated with didacticism rather than with literature, and its status, mainly in the academic arena, is accordingly low. As children's literature scholar Peter Hunt observed: "[Y]ou produce a text: the dominant critical culture decides its status" (20). Certainly, most Victorians viewed nonsense as no more than a sophisticated form of children's literature. In England, Edward Lear (1812-1888) initiated this genre with the publication of his *Book of Nonsense* in 1864. In nineteenth-century America, it was Laura Richards (1850-1943) who became the genre's most renowned representative. Her poems were accordingly, and undoubtedly good-naturedly, described as "Joyful Noise" or as "cheerful rubbish." This criticism, though fondly rendered and well-intended, has nevertheless been dismissive. It may account for the fact that today Richards and her poems (see *In My Nursery* (1899), *The Hurdy-Gurdy* (1902), *Tirra Lirra: Rhymes Old and New* (1932), *The Hottentot and Other Ditties* (1939)), are long forgotten and are rarely subject to serious scholarly discussion. However, "[I]n an era when many poets labored under a set of stultifying literary conventions, children's poets were often able to break the rules" (Kilcup and Sorby 1). And while a close reading in Richards' verses reveals their writer's cultural limitations, it also uncovers their many incongruities with conservative late-Victorian views of family and gender roles, as well as their subversive content and surprisingly agile ingenuity.

Building on our own work and other recent scholarship that takes marginalized American women's literature of the long nineteenth-century as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, this special issue/collection of essays wishes to explore the coded reality that is encrypted in Richards' so-called nonsense poetry, deepen its budding study and establish a multifaceted approach towards both Laura Richards' life and her children's verses, while shedding new light on the society she was part of as well as on nineteenth-century American children's poetry by and large.

Accordingly, we welcome submissions that closely and critically read any single poem or of

groups of poems by Laura E. Richards. Poems may be grouped together according to topics (for example, animal poems, cautionary poems, food poems, nonsense poems) or may be read in the context of Richards' life and time, and in the framework of Richards' broader literary output (her children's fables and novels, her poetry for adults, and her biographical and autobiographical works, among others). Comparative readings of Richards' verses in conjunction with children and adult poems by Richards' contemporaries are particularly welcome, as are readings of Richards' poems alongside (adult) poems by Richards' mother, Julia Ward Howe.

We invite essays of about 7000 words (including bibliography and footnotes) that might address (but are not limited to) any of the following topics:

- Laura Richards and children's poetry in Victorian America (and beyond)
- Comparative readings of Richards alongside other children's authors -- of the same or other periods, American or otherwise, women and men writers alike, e.g. Carolyn Wells (1869-1942), Celia Thaxter (1835-1894), Frank Gelett Burgess (1866-1951), Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), Lucy Larcom (1824-1893), Sarah Piatt (1836-1919).
- The importance of not being earnest: humor in Richards' children's poems
- Richards' nonsense verses, literary nonsense, and the philosophy of nonsense
- The aesthetics of Richards' children's poems
- Richards' poems in light of her educational worldview
- Race, sex, gender, and class in Richards' children's poems
- Representations of family in Richards' children's poems
- Like mother, like daughter? Laura Richards and Julia Ward Howe
- The role of food in Richards' poetry
- Animal characters and animal illustrations in Richards' books of poetry
- The illustrated Richards: illustrations of specific poems; the role of illustrations in Richards' poems
- Richards' adult poetry
- Richards' prose writing
- Essays that focus on Richards' contemporaries, or on Richards' parents, poet Julia Ward Howe and Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, and that might shed light on her work, are also welcome.

Please send a **300-word abstract and a 100-word biography** by March 30th, 2022.

The abstract and biography should be in one Word file titled as follows: YOUR SURNAME_RICHARDS ABSTRACT. For example: MEYER_RICHARDS ABSTRACT