



American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

Anne MacLeod

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In this collection of fourteen essays, Anne Scott MacLeod locates and describes shifts in the American concept of childhood as those changes are suggested in nearly two centuries of children's stories.

Most of the essays concern domestic novels for children or adolescents—stories set more or less in the time of their publication. Some essays also draw creatively on childhood memoirs, travel writings that contain foreigners' observations of American children, and other studies of children's literature.

The topics on which MacLeod writes range from the current politicized marketplace for children's books, to the reestablishment (and reconfiguration) of the family in recent children's fiction, to the ways that literature challenges or enforces the idealization of children. MacLeod sometimes considers a single author's canon, as when she discusses the feminism of the Nancy Drew mystery series or the Orwellian vision of Robert Cormier. At other times, she looks at a variety of works within a particular period, for example, Jacksonian America, the post-World War II decade, or the 1970s. MacLeod also examines books that were once immensely popular but currently have no appreciable readership—the Horatio Alger stories, for example—and finds fresh, intriguing ways to view the work of such well-known writers as Louisa May Alcott, Beverly Cleary, and Paul Zindel.

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