

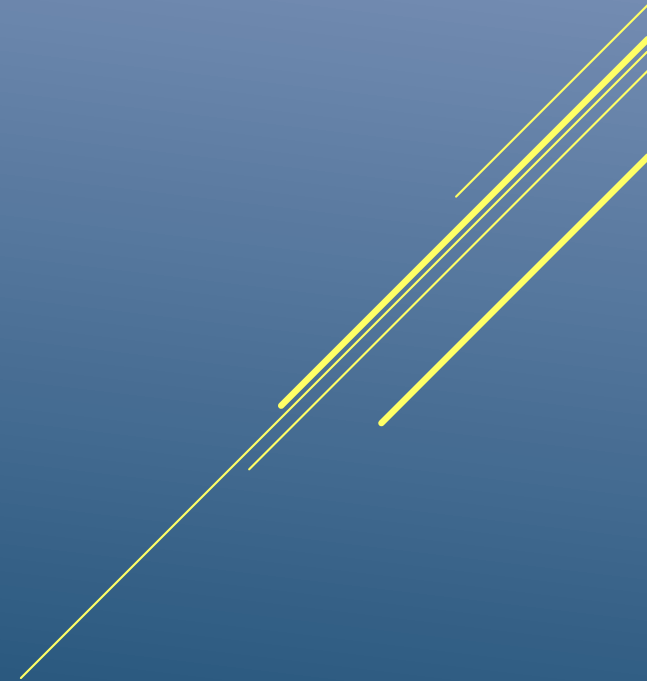
*MENTALITÉS*  
OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:  
1991–2021

Roberta Seelinger Trites  
Distinguished Professor of English  
Illinois State University



- ▶ Part 1: “Getting to 1991”
- ▶ Part 2: *Mentalités*, 1991 – 2001
- ▶ Part 3: “2021 and Beyond”

# *MENTALITÉS* OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: 1991–2021



- ▶ Excluded because of its “simplicity”;
- ▶ “It lacks the verbal sophistication and complexity with which people in higher education have been traditionally trained to deal”
- ▶ It also lacks of “clear critical standards”
  - ▶ Francelia Butler, editor
- ▶ (ISU’s very own Prof. Taimi Ranta had an article entitled “What Finnish Children Read” in this issue)

*CHILDREN’S LITERATURE:  
THE GREAT EXCLUDED, VOL. 1, 1972*

The Pueblo people were a peace loving, religious people, and by no means ignorant. If the Spaniards had settled near them and not disturbed their way of life, the Pueblos would never have rebelled.

The Spaniards were cruel, greedy, and unjust in their treatment of a people they found living in the valley of the Rio Grande. They enslaved and killed unnecessarily the Pueblos, who took all they could stand of this unjust treatment, then planned carefully their revolt. And they succeeded in their attempt to free themselves and live again as they chose. The thesis of the book is that this is a big country and all people who want to live peacefully with their neighbors, with nature and with their God should be left to work out their own destiny. Disturbing them causes unhappiness on both sides, for *you cannot keep someone in a ditch without staying in the ditch yourself to keep him there, either in 1680 or in 1980.*

*PRINCESS REDWING, WAMPANOAG  
NATION (CH LIT, VOL. 2, 1973)*

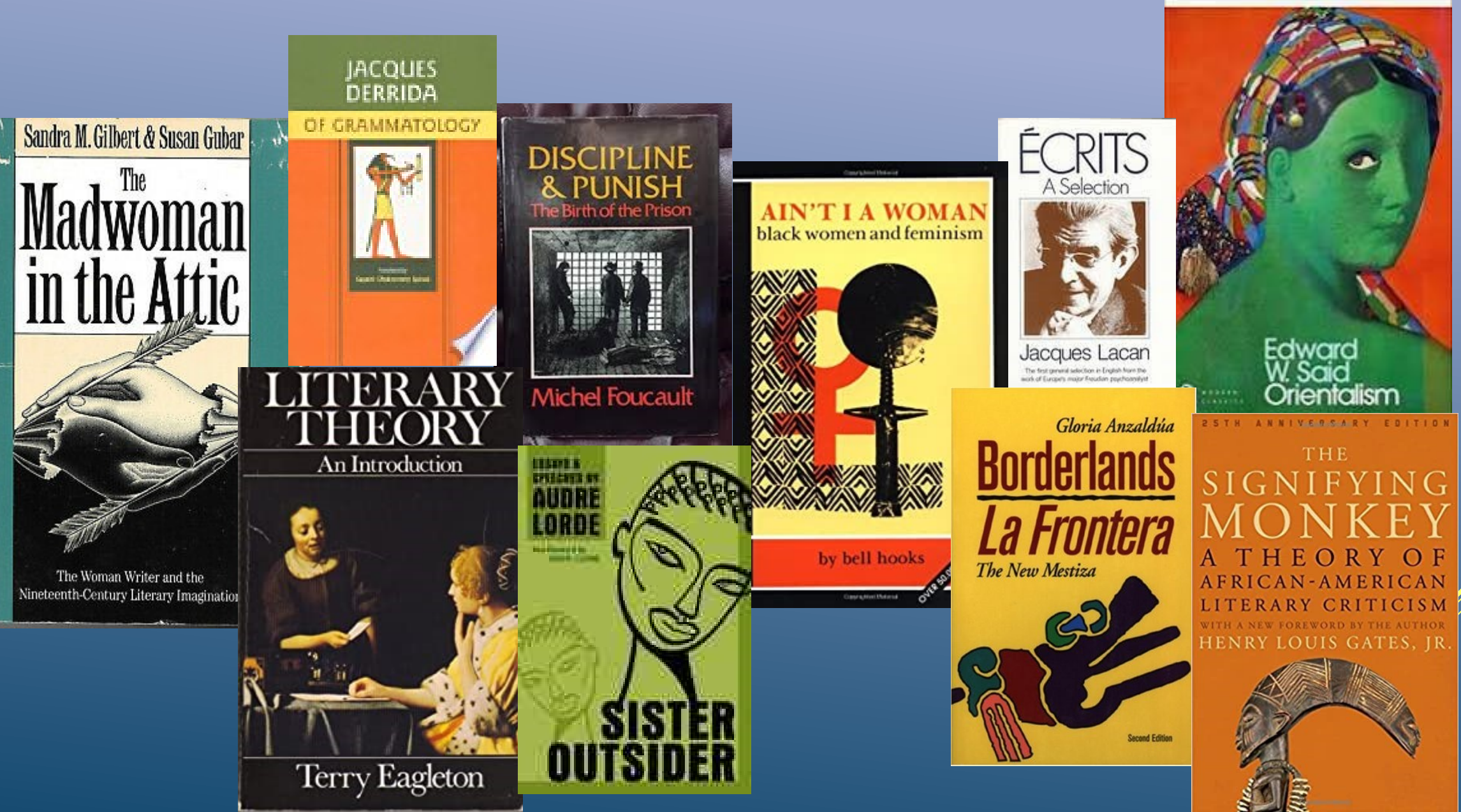
## 1970s

- ▶ Appreciation
- ▶ Aesthetics
- ▶ Awareness:
  - ▶ International concerns
  - ▶ Gender concerns
  - ▶ Censorship concerns
  - ▶ (and a LOT about fairy-tales!)

## 1980s

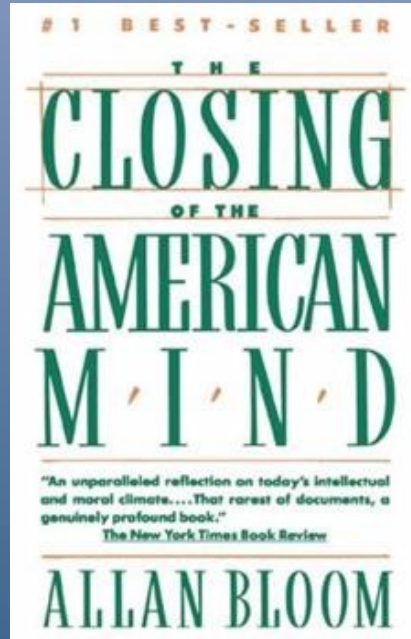
- ▶ (still more on fairy-tales, LOTS more)
- ▶ A growing awareness of theoretical concerns, especially New Historicism
- ▶ Hugh Keenan edits a special issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 1985
- ▶ The road is paved for post-structural theorizing

APPRECIATION, AESTHETICS, & AWARENESS,  
PAVING THE WAY FOR LITERARY THEORY

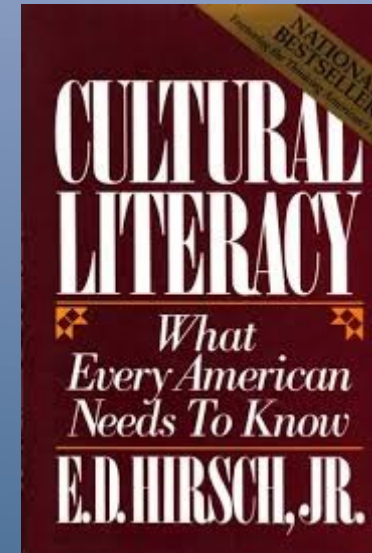


# LITERARY THEORY, 1975 – 1991

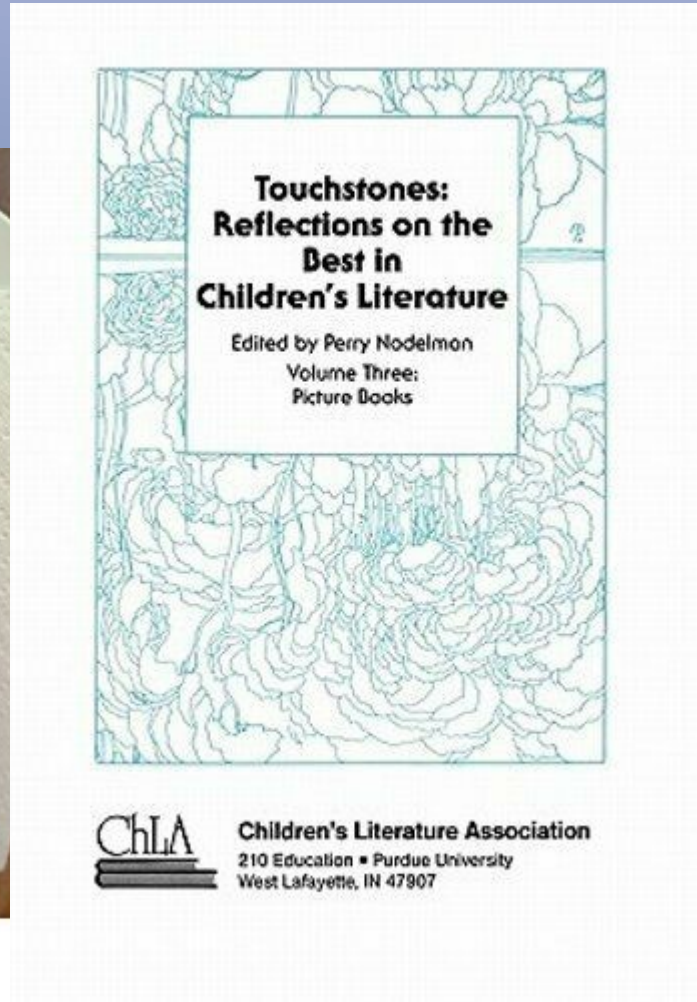
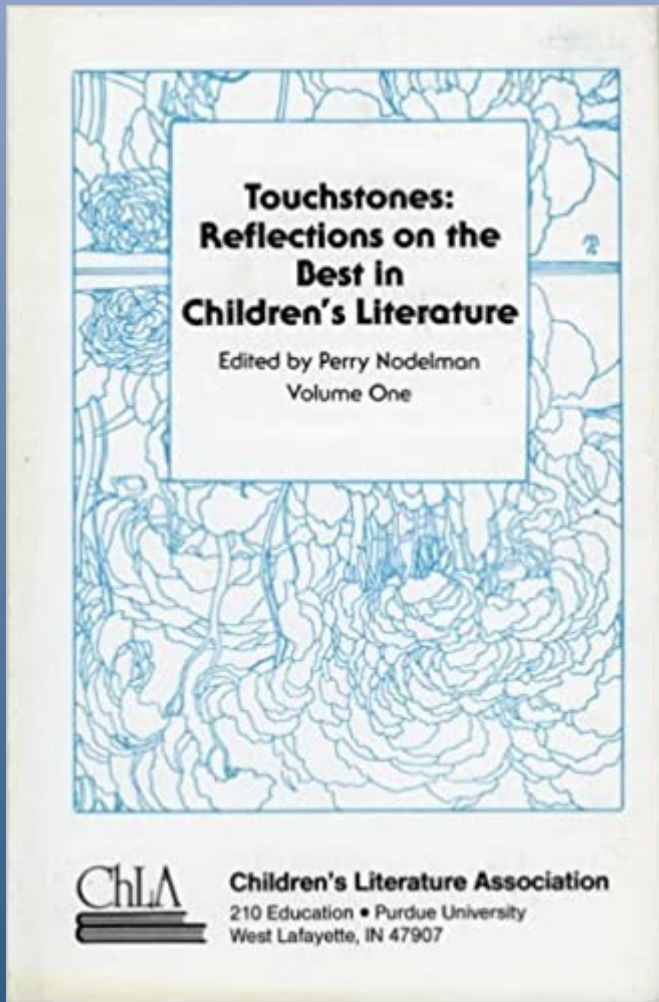
March 1987



March 1987



THE CULTURE WARS (1987.. )

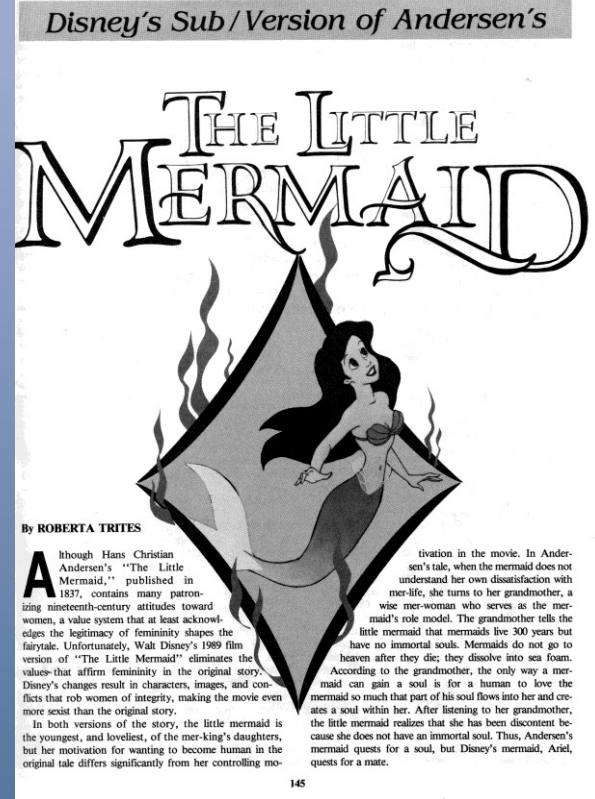


# THE 1990 MLA IN CHICAGO OR, HOW JAN SUSINA AND RST MET



- ▶ (1988: Invited to join ChLA)
- ▶ February 13, 1991: Roberta receives job offer from ISU
- ▶ May 20, 1991
- ▶ May 30 – June 2, 1991 ChLA is hosted in Hattiesburg, Mississippi
- ▶ An infamous southern fish-fry: Friday, May 31, 1991

# ROBERTA TAKES AN EPIC AND EPOCHAL ROADTRIP



- ▶ Attitude, outlook, or worldview
- ▶ “the increasing interest of academics, particularly those in women's studies and the ‘new’ as well as traditional cultural historians, in children's literature as an essential key to the *mentalités* of a given time and place....”
- ▶ “The *mentalités* that appear to most interest critics and cultural historians at present are those which have to do with *exclusion, whether unconscious or overt and whether based on gender, race, religion, or social class*” (98).

*MENTALITÉS: ROD MCGILLIS*  
*CH. LIT. ASSOC. QUARTERLY, FALL 1991*

- ▶ Jan offered a job at ISU in February 1992
- ▶ Theme: “The Child in the World”
- ▶ Patricia MacLachlan is one of the keynote speakers
- ▶ Held at Trinity College in Connecticut
  - ▶ which means we got to tour Mark Twain’s home
  - ▶ (and George and I toured Alcott’s Orchard House, too)

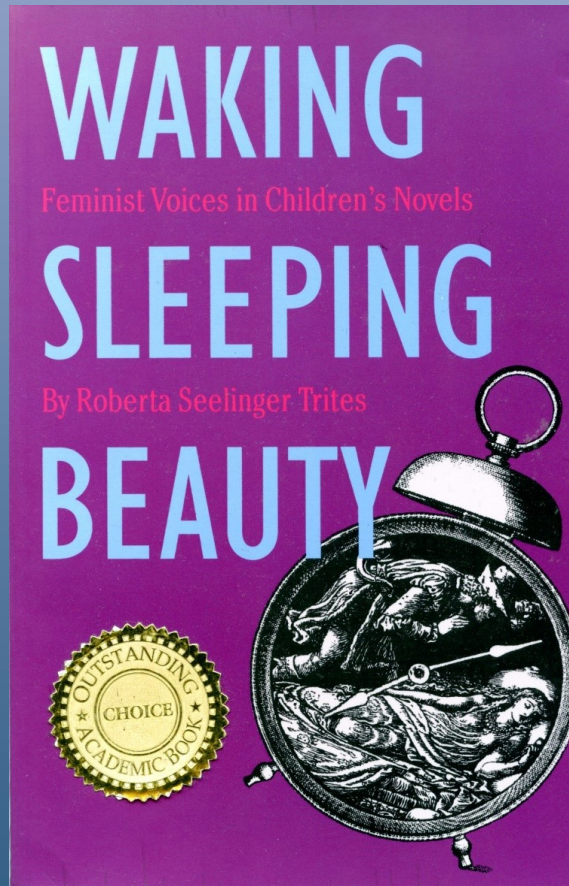


JAN AND ROBERTA TAKE CH.L.A. BY  
STORM (OR, WELL, SORT OF ... )



- ▶ I met Lissa Paul at the 1990 MLA;
- ▶ Starting in 1992, I taught her 1988 essay “Enigma Variations” multiple times, focusing on her analysis of how women and children are entrapped in literature:
  - ▶ Physically
  - ▶ Linguistically
  - ▶ Economically
- ▶ The feminism I taught in my courses, along with my articles about Patricia MacLachlan, led me to develop a more positive than negative style of feminist analysis for children’s and adolescent literature.

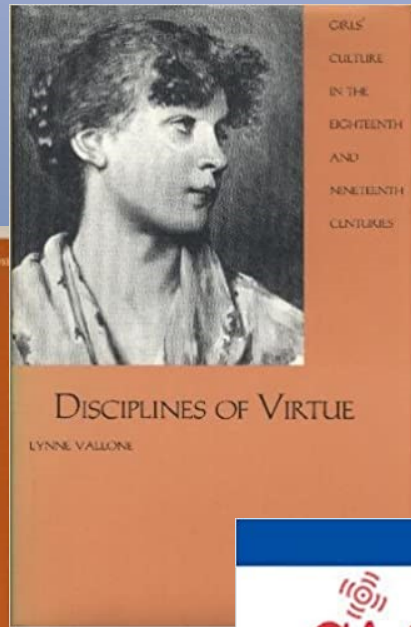
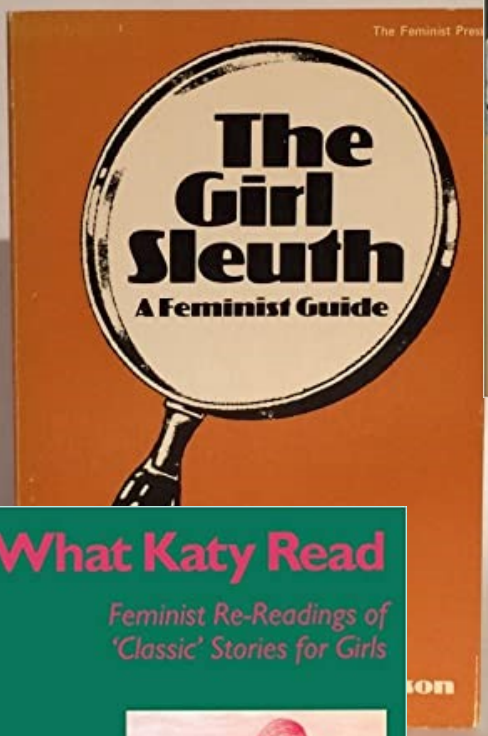
*MENTALITÉ: FEMINISM*



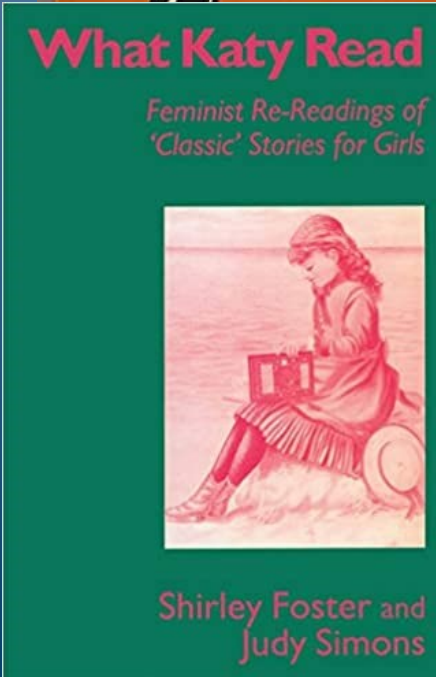
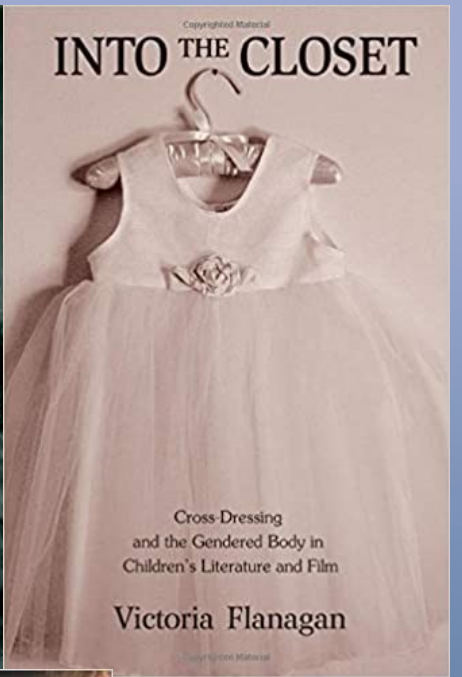
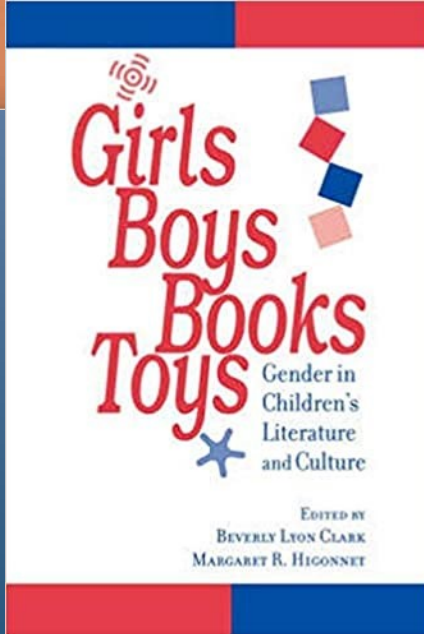
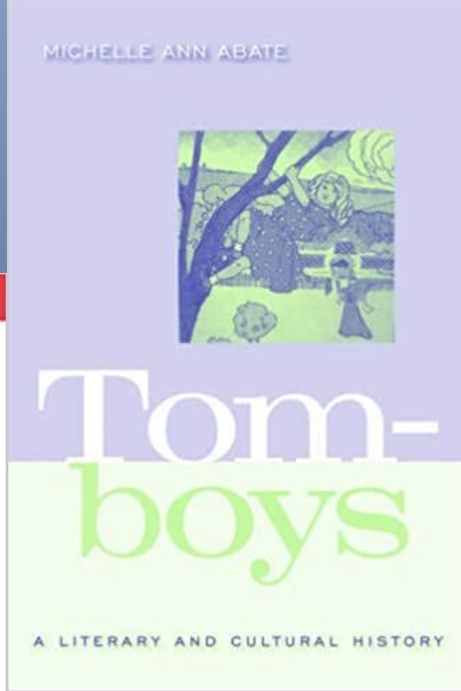
- ▶ VOICE
  - ▶ being able to speak and create art
- ▶ CHOICE
  - ▶ having agency to take action
- ▶ COMMUNITY
  - ▶ caring relationships with other females

*MENTALITÉ: FEMINISM  
WAKING SLEEPING BEAUTY (1997)*

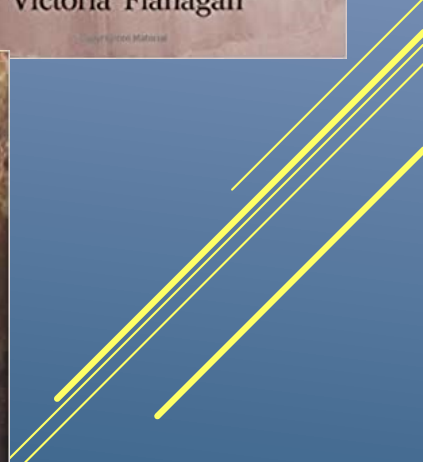
Before

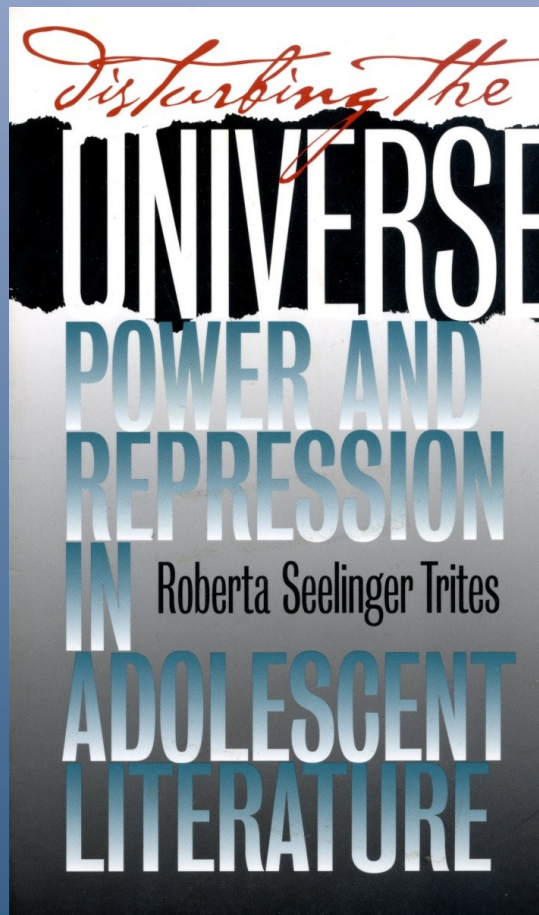


After



MENTALITÉ: FEMINISM





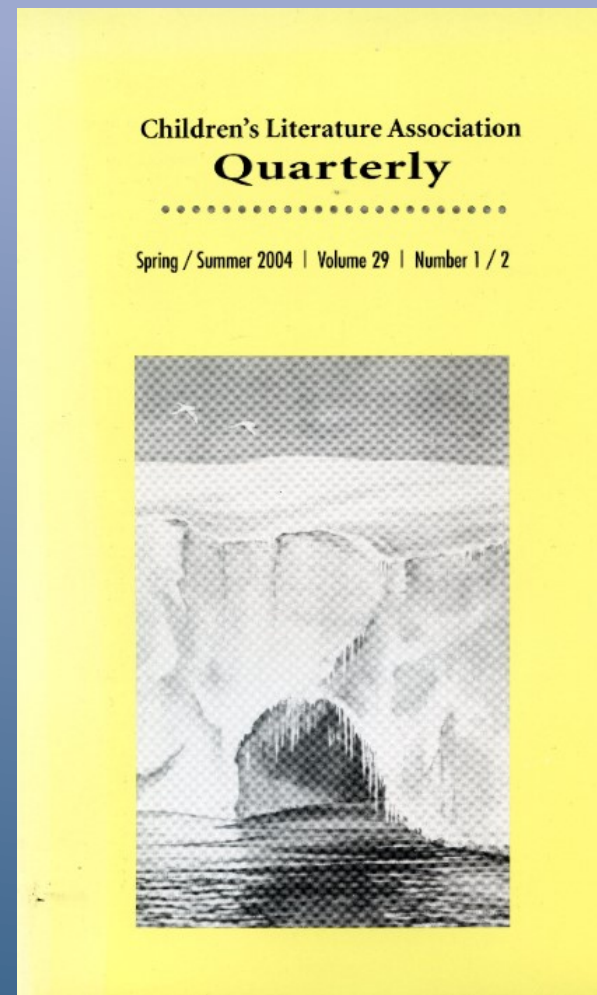
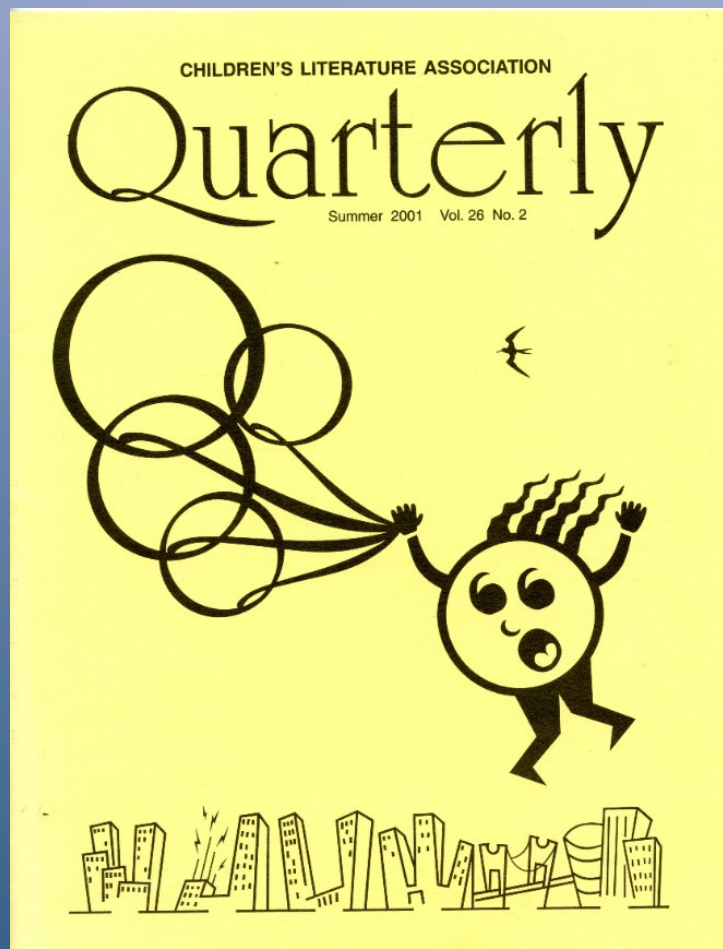
- ▶ Influenced by Foucault,
  - ▶ And his argument that “Power comes from everywhere.”
- ▶ YA lit is a socializing institution:
- ▶ The Paradox of Authority;
- ▶ Death and sex;
- ▶ Everything I know about YA literature I learned from teaching ENG 375

*MENTALITÉ: NARRATIVE THEORY  
DISTURBING THE UNIVERSE (2000)*



- ▶ Increasing interest in issues of race
  - ▶ Moore & MacCann's "Cultural Pluralism" column (1986)
- ▶ Increasing interest in literary theory
  - ▶ Perry Nodelman's "Literary Theory and Children's Literature" column (1988)
- ▶ Increasing interest in ecocriticism
  - ▶ Special issue (1994)
- ▶ Increasing understanding of ch lit as different from YA lit
  - ▶ Special issue (1996)
- ▶ Increasing interest in international children's literature
  - ▶ Nikolajeva's "International Column" (2002)

## *CH.L.A. Q:* A BRIEF HISTORY



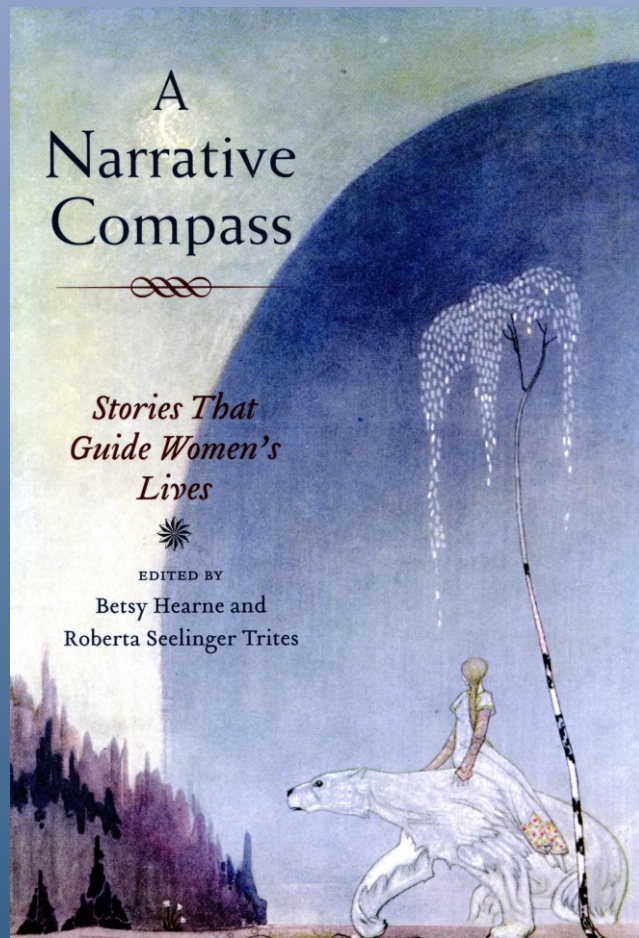
*CH.L.A. QUARTERLY:*  
FROM GRAY (1999) TO RAINBOW (2000) TO  
JHUP (2004)

- ▶ 5 presidents: ♀
- ▶ 5 presidents: ♂

MEANWHILE, AT CH.L.A...  
(1995–2005)

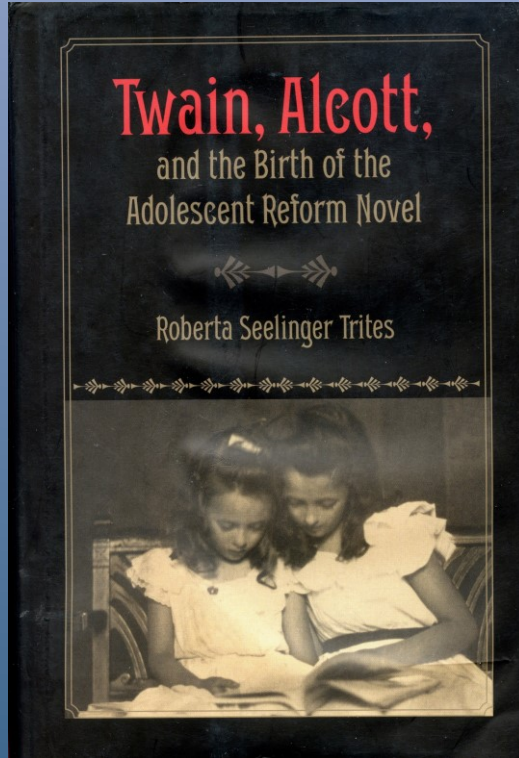
- ▶ 9 presidents: ♀
- ▶ 1 president: ♂

AND THE NEXT DECADE  
(2006–2016)



- ▶ A “narrative compass” is a story that inspires and shapes one’s life.
- ▶ Many women academics report having one.
- ▶ Mine is *Little Women*.

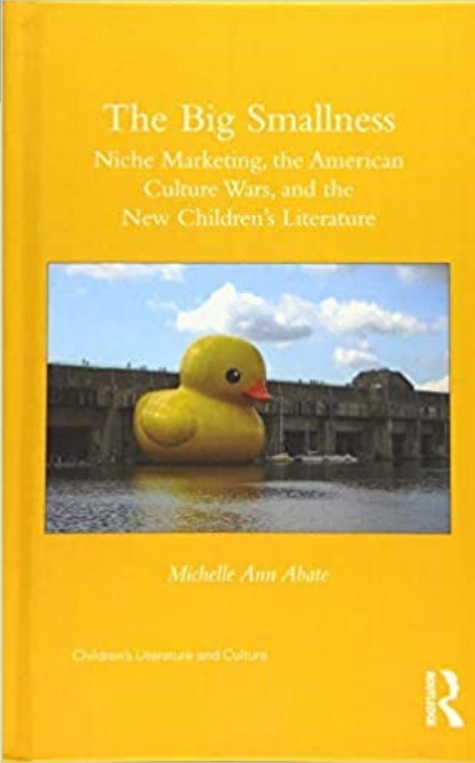
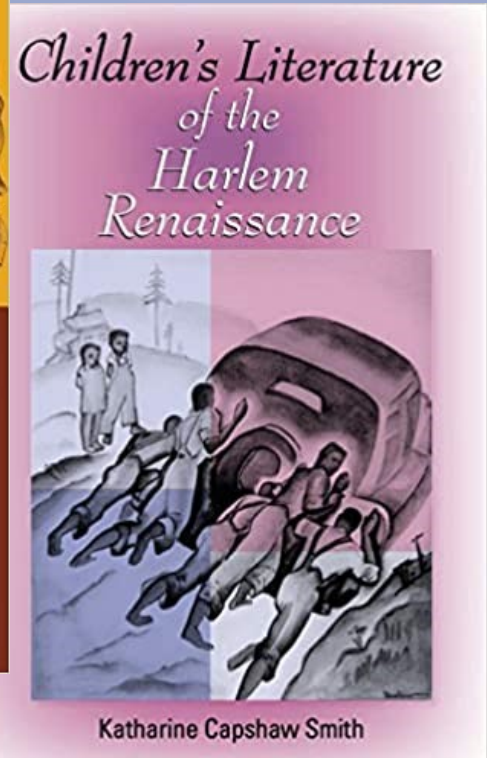
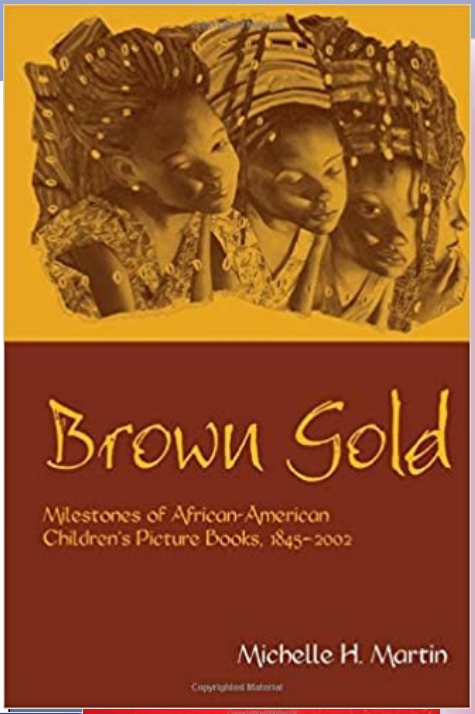
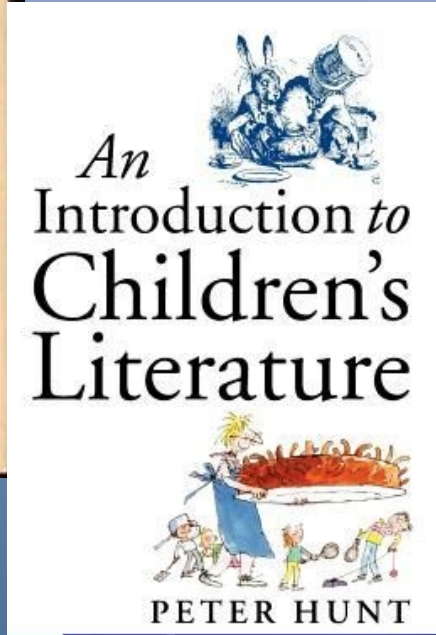
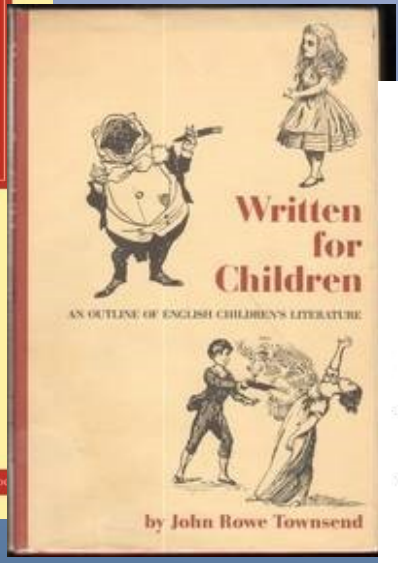
***MENTALITÉ: PERSONAL NARRATIVE,  
WRITING, AND HEALING***



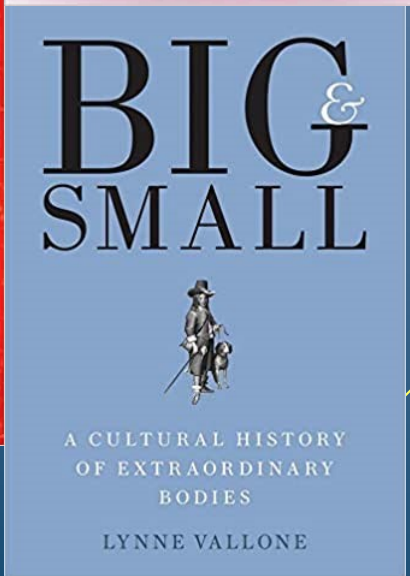
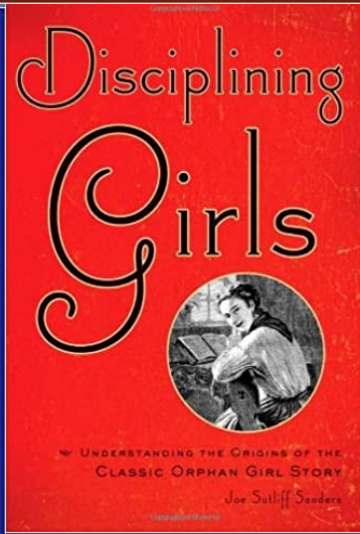
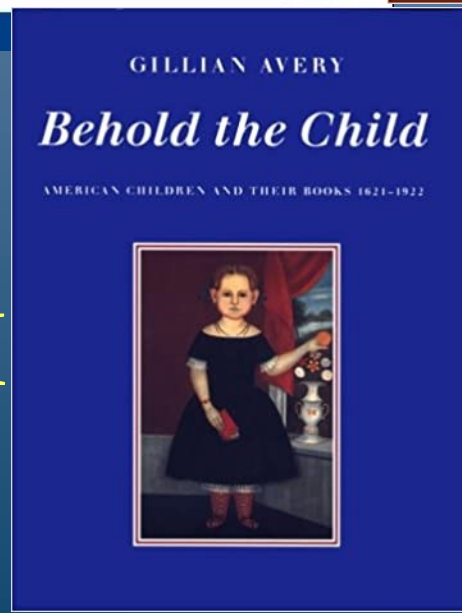
- ▶ Alcott (b. 1832); Mark Twain (b. 1835)
- ▶ First novels about childhood romanticized their own youths:
  - ▶ *Little Women* (1868/1869)
  - ▶ *Tom Sawyer* (1876)
- ▶ Both wrote ideologically, reform-minded novels;
- ▶ Both turned a profit doing so, paving the way for U.S. ideologically progressive novels for youth.

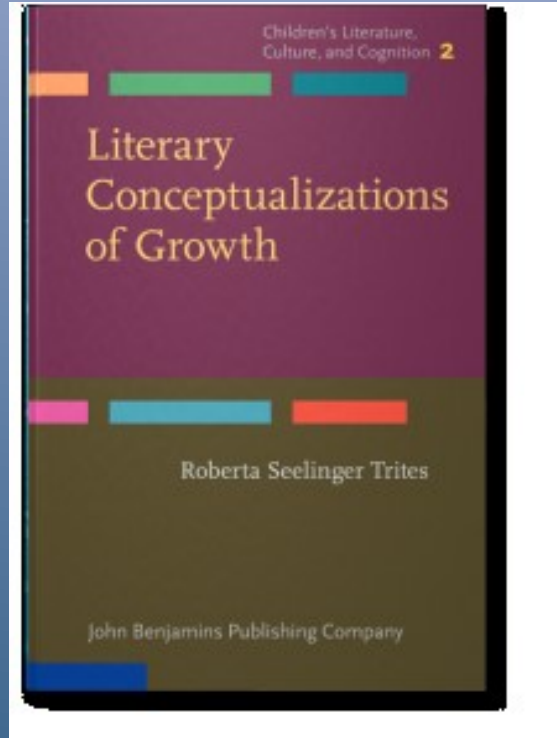
*MENTALITÉ*: HISTORICISM

CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION  
**CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN ENGLAND**  
FIVE CENTURIES OF SOCIAL LIFE  
FREDERICK JOSEPH HARVEY DARTON



# HISTORICISM





- ▶ Influenced by Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980)
- ▶ The prevalence of “up is good” and “growing up”;
- ▶ Understanding ourselves as embodied mind.

*MENTALITÉ: COGNITIVE NARRATOLOGY  
LITERARY CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF  
GROWTH (2014)*



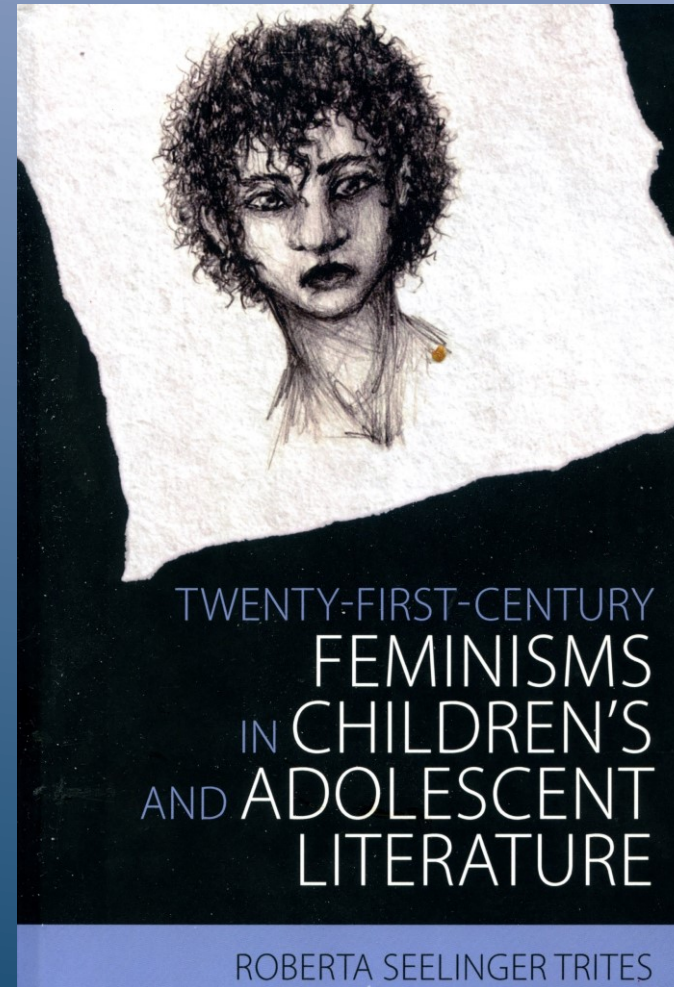


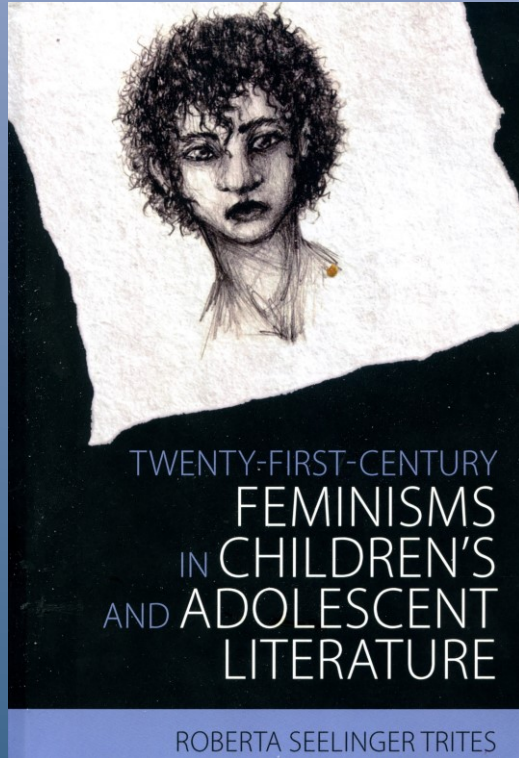
- ▶ Based on Mackey's embodied learning of literacy;
- ▶ Writing the Foreword was an honor...
- ▶ ... but also helped me better understand the embodied mind as a function of feminism.

*MENTALITÉ: COGNITIVE NARRATOLOGY*  
*MACKEY'S ONE CHILD READING (2016)*

# *21ST CENTURY FEMINISMS IN CHILDREN'S & ADOLESCENT LITERATURE (2018)*

Cover art by Katharine Seelinger,  
Age 19

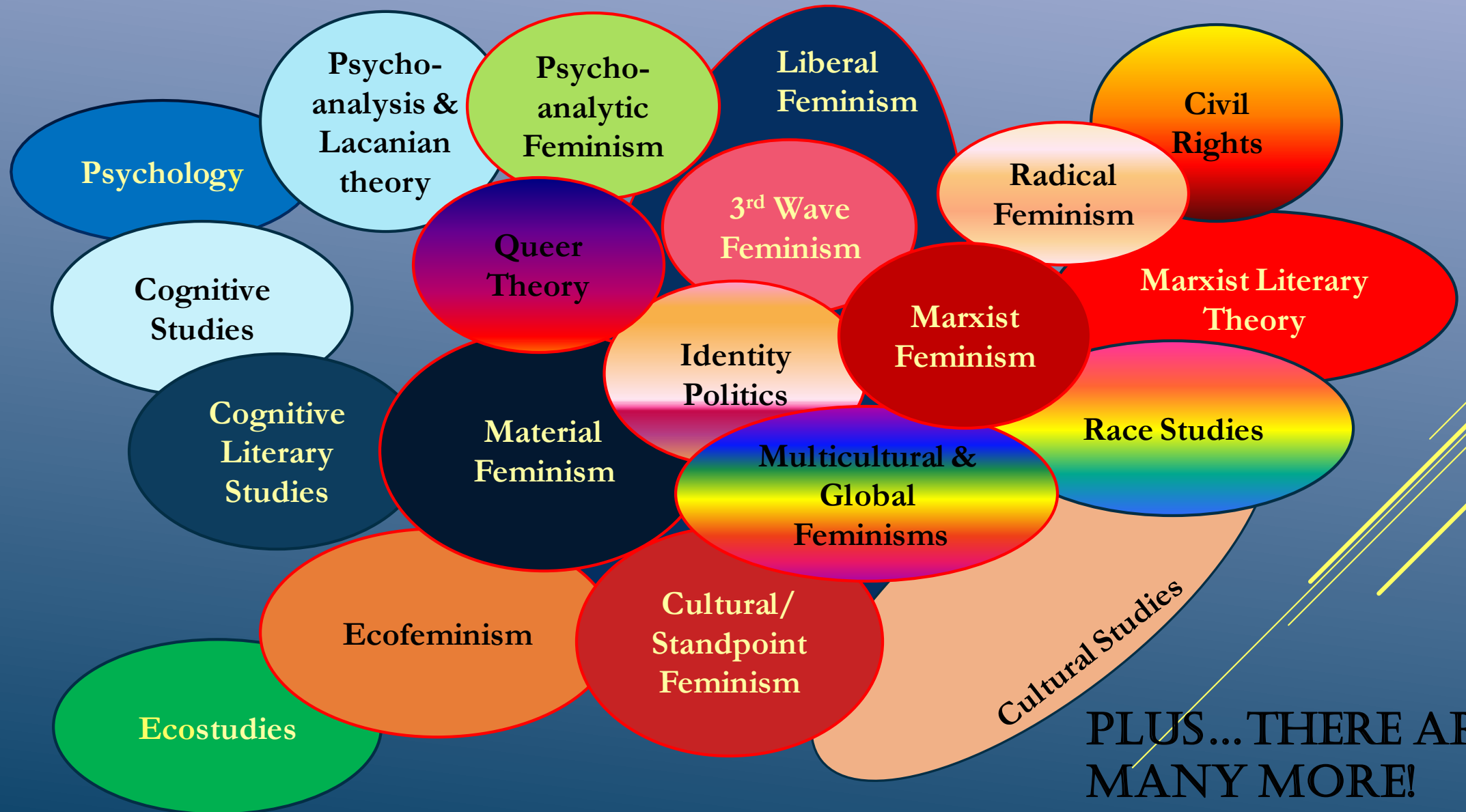




- ▶ Relies on many feminisms,
- ▶ including material feminism
- ▶ Women of Color Feminism
- ▶ Ecofeminism
- ▶ (Feminist) Ethics of Care

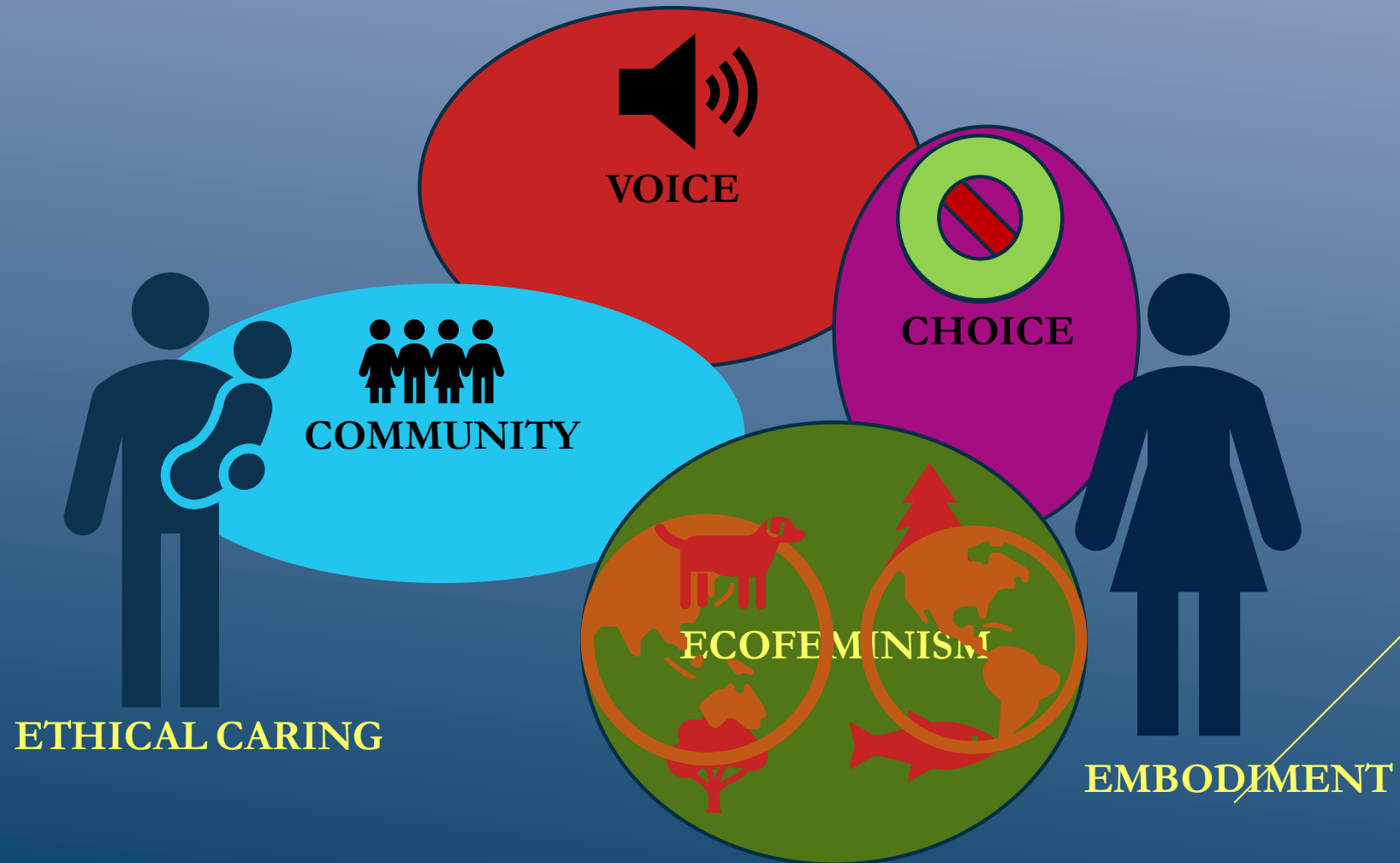
*MENTALITÉ: FEMINISM*  
*21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY FEMINISMS ... (2018)*

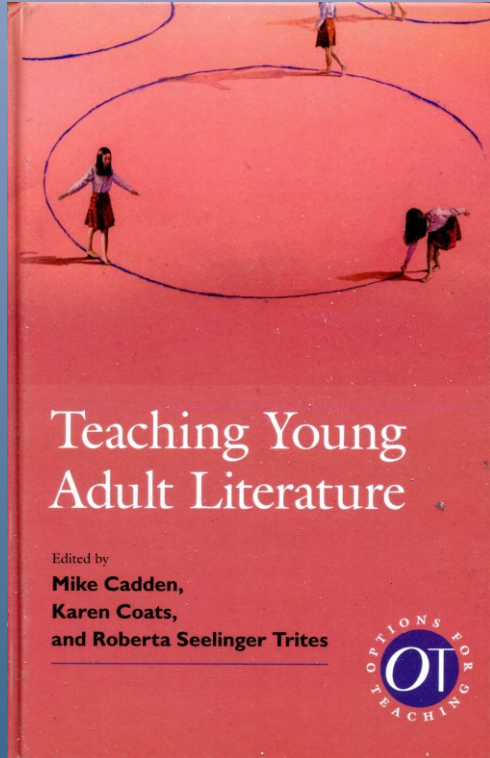
# FEMINISMS ARE OUTLINED IN RED:



PLUS... THERE ARE MANY MORE!

“Power comes from everywhere” -- Foucault





- ▶ Theories, Themes & Issues
- ▶ Genres & Forms
- ▶ Assignments
- ▶ Resources

*TEACHING YOUNG ADULT LIT:*  
CADDEN, COATS, TRITES, EDS. (2020)



Copenhagen  
2004



U of Antwerp  
2005, 2018



Kyoto  
2007, 2017



Copenhagen  
2004



Cambridge UK 2014





Beijing & Qingdao  
2012



第16回 国際グリム賞 贈呈式  
主催 (一財)大阪国際児童文学振興財団・(一財)金蘭会・大阪府立大手前高等学校同窓会 金蘭会

Osaka 2017



Taipei 2012



Antwerp 2018



Taipei 2012



# Critiquing Neoliberalism and Postrace Discourse in Narratives for Young People

Using the dystopian novel *Orleans* as an example, the authors outline a framework for questioning the discourses students encounter in texts written for young adults.

In 2014, eighteen-year-old Michael Brown was shot six times and killed by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. In the days that followed, some media commentators made much of the fact that Brown, who was Black, had marijuana in his system at the time of his death, that he had been suspended from school in the past, and that the Ferguson Police Department had identified him as a suspect in a local convenience store robbery (though this had nothing to do with why the officer stopped him). Others countered these racialized representations of Brown by noting that his family and friends described him as a "good kid" and a "gentle giant," and by pointing out that he was just days away from beginning college when his life was taken. For us, this raises the question: Would Brown's life have been any less valuable had he *not* planned to attend college? By making the debate about whether Brown was a "Good Person" or a "Bad Person," rather than whether the state has the right to take the life of an unarmed citizen, the media enacted a racial hierarchy that is steeped in neoliberalism and postrace discourse, and which conceives of people as more or less disposable depending on their ability to contribute to society.

At a time when people of color are incarcerated in mass numbers, the children of immigrant asylum seekers are separated from their parents, and unarmed Black men are killed by law enforcement officers, one might think that postrace discourse, which holds that US society has progressed to the point that race no longer affects a person's life

chances, has been debunked. Yet it continues to be felt in books and films (see Connors and Trites, "Literature and Neoliberalism" and Trites, "Neoliberalism"). In this article, we draw on Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans*, a YA dystopian fiction, to outline a framework that teachers can use to critique of neoliberalism and narratives for young people.

## EXAMINING NEOLIBERALISM AND POSTRACE DISCOURSE

An economic theory that emerged in the late 19th and early 1980s, neoliberalism is based on the assumption that the primary goal of government "is not the care and welfare of its citizens but rather the promotion of market efficiency" (see Connors 2). A related assumption is that the free market of goods and services is improved when actors are forced to compete. Neoliberalism thus opposes government intervention and regulation, as it is thought to stifle businesses and corporations from their creative potential.

In the past few decades, neoliberalism has extended its reach beyond the economy into people's experiences in social, cultural, and political contexts. For example, proposals to privatize and oppose government investment in infrastructure, such as public education and universal health care. Instead,

# THE ALAN REVIEW

ENGLISH JOURNAL

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# 2021 AND BEYOND: SEAN P. CONNORS

## Chapter 3

# Neoliberalism

## A Framework for Critiquing Representations of the "Superspecial" Individual in *Marcelo in the Real World*

Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites

During the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher deregulated much of the economy. Their goal in doing so was to make economic markets as free as possible. They believed that "free trade" and "free markets" unrestricted by trade agreements, tariffs, or government interventions created expanding economies. This movement came to be called "neoliberalism" because it evoked a "new" form of the liberal economic theories that were popular in the 19th century: those that advocated for *laissez-faire*, noninterventionist economic policies, ultimately providing a rationale

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Journal of Children's Literature  
Volume 33, Number 1  
Spring 2007



### "Literature In Our Lives"

#### CONCEPTS & THEMES

Scieszka's Subversive Little Red Hen: AKA "One Annoying Chicken"  
Sylvia Pantaleo

Why We Read Stories: One Family's Response to Literature  
Adele Greenlee

What Would Cleopatra Do? Applying the Wisdom of the Past to Today's World  
Myra Zarnowski

*MENTALITÉS*  
OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:  
1991-2021

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Distinguished Professor of English  
Illinois State University