two novels, Hobomok and The Rebels. In 1826 she began
The Juvenile Miscellany, a bimonthly magazine for children.
It folded in 1834, when her antislavery stance cost her
many subscribers. In 1828 she had married David Lee
Child, lawyer, journalist, and impractical idealist. Ulti-
mately, Child's writing supported them. She published
extensively in periodicals, as well as publishing domestic
advice books and anthologies of her prose and verse.
Child's marriage was not a success. David Child was
imprisoned for libel of a state senator; his law practice
disintegrated; and the Massachusetts Weekly Journal (vari-
ant titles), which he edited, failed. The Childs supported
William Lloyd Garrison and the abolitionist move-
ment, especially during the 1830s and 1840s. Child
wrote anti-slavery tracts, pamphlets, and books. Simulta-
eously, David Child pursued poorly conceived ventures
and even borrowed money from Child's father to
buy a farm and grow sugar beets. Nothing succeeded.
Finally, Child and her husband separated when, in 1841,
she accepted the editorship of the National Anti-Slavery
Standard in New York City, which she edited until 1843.
She remained there and published Letters from New York,
but in 1849 the couple reconciled and soon moved to her
father's home in Wayland, Massachusetts. They
lived a frugal, retired life, although Child continued to
write and once again took up the abolitionist cause.
David Child died in 1874, but Lydia lived there until her
death, on October 20, 1880.
Although Child's poetry is less familiar than her
prose, "A New-England Boy's Song About Thanksgiving
Day," in Flowers for Children II, stands out with its familiar
lines "Over the river and through the wood, / To
grandfather's house we go." Each volume of Flowers for
Children targets a particular age group. Volume 2, for
children eight or nine years old, contains poems such as
"The Spring Birds" and "Father Is Coming." Volume 3,
for children eleven or twelve years old, introduces more
complex topics, as in "The Hen and Her Ducks," in which a hen tries to rear a chick like a chickening. Most of
Child's poetry is unsubstantial but charming. For exam-
ple, in the Wordsworthian "To the Fringed Gentian," Child
uses natural imagery to teach that "Thus buds of
virtue often bloom / The fairest, and the deepest gloom./ . . . / To ripen in affliction's gleam." It appeared under
varying titles in The Juvenile Miscellany (1828), the Massa-
chusetts Weekly Journal (1828), and, finally, The Coronal.
Not all of Child's poetry was for children. "Lines. To
Those Men and Women, Who Were Avowed Abolitionists
in 1831, '32, '33, '34, and '35" lauds the abolitionists
(The Liberty Bell for 1839). "Lines. Suggested by a Lock
of Hair from Our Departed Friend, Catherine Sargent"
eulogizes her fellow abolitionist (The Liberty Bell for
1856). Moreover, Autumnal Leaves contains six of her
poems interspersed between the prose. The last piece,
"The Kansas Emigrants," her powerful argument against
slavery in Kansas, is followed by the poem "I Want to
Go Home." The narrator, musing on a child's premature
death, laments, "Father! I'm tired. I want to go home."
Several poems are also included in the two series of Let-
ters from New York, including one welcoming the return
of Ole Bul, a violinist with whom Child became infatu-
ated (Second Series). As a whole, Child's poetry employs
conventional, sometimes simple rhythms and rhymes,
freely uses couplets, and just as frequently uses a four-line rhyming stanza (abab, cd ed . . . ). She avoids
dense and complex diction and figures of speech in
favor of a straightforward presentation of ideas. Her
poetry demands little of its reader, but frequently leaves
a charming impression.
Child wrote in many genres, but she was always
guided by a democratic impulse advocating equality for
all human beings. She marketed her works with a keen
understanding of her audience and was one of the most
prolific and renowned nineteenth-century American
women writers. Although her poetry is little re-
membered, its charm and simplicity appealed to young
and old, and the didactic poems for youth cloak their moral
lessons within natural images and simple narrative. The
sum total of her work renders her well deserving of Wil-
liam Lloyd Garrison's commendation naming her the
"first woman in the republic."

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Mary Rose Kasraie

CHILDREN'S POETRY

English-language children's poetry in the United
States has a rich history. It begins with the largely reli-
gious and didactic poetry of the European settlers of the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, continues on to
the rhymed narrative and light verse of the nineteenth
century, and extends to more stylistically varied contem-
porary verse. Contemporary poetry, composed predom-
inantly of secular work, is sometimes socially conscious,
sometimes bawdy and nonsensical, sometimes didactic, and sometimes designed simply to delight and entertain.

The poetry read by eighteenth-century American children was diverse and included imported English poetry, such as Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs, Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1772). Furthermore, children chanted and recited less religious and often subversive street cries and nursery rhymes. These they learned from parents, inexpensive chapbooks, and the oral folk traditions of their peers. However, the best-known and most solidly rooted in English influence, most obviously American children's text is probably *The New England Primer*. First printed in Boston by Protestant dissenter Benjamin Harris in the 1730s, *The Primer* is a miscellany of poetry and poetical writings supporting New England Puritan values.

The most famous of *The Primer's* contents is undoubtedly its rhymed alphabet, containing the oft-cited couplet: "In Adam's Fall / We Sinned all." *The Primer* also includes lists like "The Dutiful Child's Promises," which strike contemporary ears as poetry, as do the various prayers and catechisms that appear throughout its many editions. The oldest surviving copy of *The Primer* is dated at 1772, although advertisements suggest it may have been in publication as early as the late 1760s. For over one hundred years, *The Primer* was the dominant tool for teaching Anglo-American children to read, and, outside of English translations of the Christian Bible, it functioned as the American child's primary introduction to poetry. Millions of copies of *The Primer* were printed in its day, each printer revising its contents somewhat. Nevertheless, early editions are now scarce, probably due to its poor production quality and the rough handling of its child readers.

The American Revolution ushered in increasingly secular primers, such as Noah Webster's *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* (1783) and, even later, *The Illuminated American Primer* (1841), which includes its still-Protestant alphabet in overtly nationalistic images, including the rhyme "U is for Union—this the good will approve; / V is for Virtue—whom I hope you will love." Within the shape of the letter U stands both a virtuous George Washington and a fluttering flag.

A boom in the publication of periodicals for children marked the nineteenth century: *The Youth's Companion* (1827) and *St. Nicholas* (1873) were among the most popular. Found in such magazines are a flood of domestic-produced poems and rhymes, often composed by women. Predominant children's poets of this period include Clement Clarke Moore, in whom authorship of "A Visit from St. Nicholas" is commonly ascribed, although this belief has recently been cast into doubt by Don Foster, who suggests that poet Henry Livingston, Jr., is more likely the author. Another well-known childeren's poet, Eliza Lee Follen, collected *Little Songs, for Little Boys and Girls* (1853), a book that includes the popular "Three Little Kittens" who "lost their mittens," often erroneously attributed to her. Sarah Josepha Hale penned the celebrated and often parodied "Mary's Lamb," found in her *Poems for Our Children Designed for Families, Sabbath Schools and Infant Schools* (1833). Hale is also well known for editing the periodical *Juvenile Miscellany*, in which Mary and her famous lamb first appeared.

The line between poetry for adults and poetry for children blurred in nineteenth-century America, a state of affairs that would recur in the 1950s and 1960s, when poets like Randall Jarrell and Theodore Roethke, heavily influenced by nursery rhymes and fairy tales, composed works that resist easy classification. Well-known nineteenth-century poets like William Cullen Bryant, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, John Greenleaf Whittier, and even Edgar Allan Poe produced adult poetry that was nonetheless deemed appropriate for children. Longfellow's "The Children's Hour" and Poe's "The Bells," for instance, are commonly appropriated by children and those who collect verse for them. The work of these nineteenth-century luminaries appeared regularly in periodicals produced for children.

Late-nineteenth-century children's poets in America favored nonsense, had a predilection for natural settings and animal characters, and aimed for a lightness of tone that would remain the norm until the mid-twentieth century. Eugene Field and Laura E. Richards were some of the period's most striking poets. Richards, who received the Pulitzer Prize for *Julia Ward Howe, 1819-1910* (1915), is best remembered for her last collection of verse, *Terra Libra: New Rhymes and Old* (1932), an overview of her career. Other poets of this period include Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Edith M. Thomas, and Katherine Pyle.

Most poets writing verse for children during the first half of the twentieth century shared the aesthetic sensibilities of those in the previous century; Sara Teasdale, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and David McCord were among the most famous of those century-bridging poets. However, the experimental spirit of modernism did influence children's poetry to some degree. Carl Sandburg, famous for his rambling, rambunctious lines and marvelous *Rootabaga Stories* (1920), brought populist politics and a Whitmanesque poetic to children's poetry in 1930 with *Early Moon*, a lively collection set apart by Sandburg's frank "Short Talk on Poetry" that opens the volume. Composed in unrhymed free verse that embraces political subjects unflinchingly, the poems in *Early Moon* are quite different from most of the verse written for children at the time. "Street Window" is a characteristic piece, beginning "The pawn-shop man knows hunger."
Langston Hughes published *The Dream Keeper* in 1932. Like Sandburg, Hughes questions common assumptions regarding what is appropriate for children. *The Dream Keeper* includes ambiguous poems about death, old age, poverty, love, and, as the title suggests, dreams. Less formally experimental is Countee Cullen, who, like Hughes, is associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Though not written for children, Cullen’s melancholy “Incident” is commonly anthologized for them. However, Cullen also wrote poetry especially for children. His *The Lost Zoo* (1940), which is more conventional children’s fare, features nonsensical, rhymed verses involving fantastic, pre-diluvian animals.

Like Hughes, modernist Gertrude Stein questions mainstream conceptions of children’s poetry. Her *The World Is Round* (1930) is a wildly experimental and underappreciated children’s book. Although it can be read as an extended prose poem, *The World Is Round* also features more conventional, laced poetry, most famously the lines “I am Rose, my eyes are blue / I am Rose and who are you.” Stein also wrote a poetic alphabet book for children, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, which remained unpublished until 1959. Like much of Stein’s work, *To Do* crackles with an energized mix of laced and prose poetry: “And that is the end of the sad story of N which is not as sad as the story of M which is much sadder and sadder, of course it is.” Stein wrote *The World Is Round* at the suggestion of Margaret Wise Brown, known for her publication work for the Bank Street School of Education. Although widely acknowledged as a capable picture book author, Brown is less commonly acknowledged as the fine poet she is. Counting among her influences Stein and Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), Brown crafts delicate, musical verse that suggests her experimental roots and is extraordinarily popular with children, as these lines from *Goodnight Moon* (1947) demonstrate: “And a comb and a brush and a bowl full of mush / And a quiet old lady whispering hush.”

Another modernist, Thomas Stearns Eliot—nicknamed Old Possum by Ezra Pound—also tried his hand at children’s poetry, composing *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* in 1939. Less formally experimental than Stein’s work, Eliot’s text features irrepressible characters like Macavity, a criminal cat who is “called the hidden paw / For he’s the master criminal who can defy the law.” Poet and artist Edward Gorey, who masterfully illustrated a regularly republished 1982 edition, played a role in invigorating *Old Possum’s* reputation, as did Andrew Lloyd Webber’s immensely popular adaptation, *Cats*, playing from 1981 to 2002 in London and from 1982 to 2000 in New York. Perhaps no single book of children’s poetry has proved as profitable or influential.

The publication of *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) by Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel), and *The Reason for the Pelican* (1959) by John Ciardi heralds an important change in both the market for and perspective on children’s poetry in the United States. These poets, along with poet and illustrator Maurice Sendak, added a little vinegar to the oversweet verse common in the 1940s and 1950s. They reminded readers that children are sometimes naughty, even vicious people who delight in bad behavior and humorous verse devoid of moral or lesson, thereby paving the way for later poets like Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein. Ciardi’s wit and verbal skill often took aim at his child readers, mocking them playfully in poems like “Sleepless Beauty,” concerning “a girl who never went to bed,” ending “Some people might tell you, ‘Well, now, serves her right!’ / But what I feel most is: she just wasn’t bright.” Never cruel, Ciardi delights his readers by treating them as equals, by mocking and teasing as if he were one of the gang, evoking the tropes and commonplace of childhood playground rhymes. Many of his books are illustrated by Gorey, his former student.

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw many adult poets begin to write for children. Gwenbolya Brooks, Sylvia Plath, William Jay Smith, May Swenson, Richard Wilbur, and the aforementioned Ciardi, Jarrell, and Roethke. That these respected poets found the composition of poetry for children an aesthetically rewarding and professionally acceptable enterprise suggests that children’s poetry was beginning to be taken seriously as literature. Doubtless the end of World War II had a great deal to do with this invigorated interest in childhood. As incomes grew, middle-class Americans began spending more on household goods and the children inhabiting those households. This period ushered in the youth market and the very notion of a youth culture.

Robert Frost got his start in children’s poetry; before the publication of his first book, three of his early poems were published by *The Youth’s Companion*: “Ghost House” (1906), “October” (1912), and “Reluctance” (1912). However, it was not until 1959 that Frost published *You Come Too: Favorite Poems for Young People*, his first and only book especially for children. After the publication of this book, Frost quickly became what might be called the United States’ official school poet. His poems are regularly collected in children’s poetry anthologies and commented upon in education textbooks. “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” remains one of the most commonly taught poems in U.S. schools. The edition illustrated by Susan Jeffers is a perennial winter favorite. Many of the adult poets who began writing for children during the late 1950s and early 1960s are closely associated with Frost. X.J. Kennedy, for instance, became a strong advocate for and writer of children’s poetry, commenting on the subject in essays and editing with his wife, Dorothy Kennedy, *Knock at a Star* (1982 and 1989) and *Talking...*
Like the Rain. 1962. Two successful anthologies of children’s poetry. Donald Hall, one of the editors of the poetically conservative Neo- Poets of England and America 1937—for which Frost wrote an introduction—also edited the impressive Oxford Book of Children’s Poetry in America, 1943. He later refashioned this scholarly edition into a collection marked for young children, calling it The Oxford Illustrated Book of American Children’s Poems 1989.

The more formally experimental poets of the 1960s also grew interested in writing for children and teaching them to write. New York School poets Kenneth Koch and Ron Padgett, for example, were active in the Teachers and Writers Collaborative, a landmark poets-in-the-schools program. Koch, Padgett at Columbia, wrote a pair of seminal works about teaching children poetry: Wishes, Lies, and Dreams 1970 and its companion anthology of poetry by children, Rose, Where Did You Get That Red? 1973. Over the next several decades, these books would spark much debate on how poetry should be taught to children. Koch’s position that children are “natural poets” tackled most strenuously by Myra Cohn Livingston. However, Koch did not limit himself to teaching, for in 1983 he and Kate Farrell would edit Talking to the Sun: An Illustrated Anthology of Poems for Young People.

The late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States saw an unprecedented interest in poetic experimentation. This openness to new forms set the stage for the acceptance of visual poetry, a kind of verse in which the boundary between word and image is blurred or erased. Although visual poetry, or, as poet critic Dick Higgins calls it, pattern poetry, has a long and complex history, America’s interest in it was announced through the publication of two landmark anthologies for adults, E. E. Cummings’s An Anthology of Concrete Poetry, 1967, and Mary Ellen Solt’s Concrete Poetry: A World View 1968. Shortly thereafter, Robert Frank composed and published some of the first visual poetry for children in America, collected in his Street Poems 1971, and Seeing Things: A Book of Poems 1974.

A large number of visual poems for children were written in the 1970s, with even relatively conservative poets like Livingston trying their hand at visual work. Livingston’s A Slice of Life 1979 contains several such pieces, “Winter Tree” and “Piano Lesson (Carissa)” among them. Furthermore, her “4 Way Stop” anthologized by the Kennedys in Knock at a Star, uses found and visual elements to interesting effect. Echoing the opinion of many critics, Livingston later decried such experimentation, championing the more formally conservative work of McCord, who, incidentally, also experimented with typography and visual elements in his poetry, particularly in “The Grasshopper” in Far and Few 1972, and “Summer Shower” in Far, Me to Say 1970.

Visual poetry for children is still being published today. Examples are found in J. Patrick Lewis’s Doodle Dandies: Poem That Run Away, 1988, Sharon Creech’s The Great Wide Somewhere, 1999, and Jean Bransfield Graham’s Splish Splash, 2001. However, more common are books in which the poems are highlighted by exceptional graphic design. For instance, the poems in Robin Hensch’s FEG: Suicidal Riddim: Poems for Intelligent Children 2002 may verge on visual poetry, but in fact they are simply accentuated by illustrator Hais’s computer-generated art and layout. Maria Kalman’s picture book Max Makes a Million 1999 is similar. In a dog poem whose years for Paris, is another compelling example of the productive interface between graphic design and poetic text. Similarly, in Poems for Children Nearer Near Old Enough to Vote 1999, Istvan Banyai’s compelling visual designs radically refashion nineteen of Sandburg’s previously unpublished children’s poems.

Arnold Adoff also experiments with the elements of his children’s poetry, creating work that is both visually and aurally arresting. As the late 1960s and early 1970s were marked by an interest in identity politics as well as formal experimentation, Adoff often combined radical politics with experimental form. His Black Is Brown Is Tan 1973, for instance, is the first picture book to feature an interracial couple. Adoff’s Stone Dance Heart Break Blues 1985 extends his earlier visual experiments, typographic puns and other visual cues creating rich layers of meaning. A capable poet and outspoken advocate for poetry and childhood, Adoff is best known for his anthologies: I Am the Darker Brother 1968, a collection of poems written by African American poets, is perhaps his most famous.

Like Adoff, Naomi Shihab Nye is a poet and anthologist with her feet in two worlds, writing poetry for children and adults; her 1992 Varieties of Geniuses: Poems of the Middle East was a National Book Award finalist. Preoccupied with cultural difference and ethnic identity, Nye endorses the need for cross cultural and intergenerational empathy. Sult’s Secrets 1991, a picture book illustrated by Nancy Carpenter, involves an American girl and her Palestinian grandmother. Separated by distance, by “many miles of sand and water...”, fish and cities and houses and fields, they are nonetheless bound together by culture and family. Adoff’s and Nye’s insistence on social relevance in children’s poetry is by no means rare in contemporary children’s poetry, though their high aesthetic standards are. The children’s poetry of June Jordan and Nikki Giovanni also engages the political in complex and poetically rich ways. For instance, the speaker of Jordan’s Who Look at Me, 1969, originally titled “Portrait of the Poet as a Little Black Girl,” returns the gaze of the adult—perhaps white—viewer: the poem ends with a direct challenge: “WHO LOOK AT ME!”

From the late 1970s to the turn of the century, the U.S. children's poetry scene has been dominated by the nonsense work of Prelutsky and Silverstein. These poets, borrowing from the gross-out traditions of playground rhyme, have developed irreverence to a fine art, although they sugar their irreverence with just enough didacticism to appeal to the adults who, more often than not, do not buy the books. Nevertheless, Silverstein, who first made his name drawing cartoons for Playboy, is often challenged for developing inappropriate themes in his work, despite such sentimental verses as “Hug o’ War,” in which the narrator prefers hugs to hugs, because in a hug of war “everyone kisses, / and everyone grins, / and everyone cuddles, / and everyone wins.” No other U.S. poet has so effectively balanced the coarse and the sweet.

Another trend in contemporary children's poetry is the novel in verse. With the rise of literacy programs and the desire to help so-called reluctant readers, the turn of the century has seen a proliferation of these largely free verse novels. Karen Hesse's Out of the Dust (1997) and Witness (2001) are the most successful, artistically and poetically. Other novels in verse include Creech's Love That Dog, Ron Koertge's Shakespeare Bats Clean-up (2003), Maria Testa's Beaming for Dinaggio (2002), and Jacqueline Woodson's Locomotion (2003). Perhaps better characterized as a biography in verse, Marilyn Nelson's award-winning Carver: A Life in Poems (2001) stands out as one of the finest collections of its kind, setting a new standard for well-crafted narrative poetry.

However, the more things change, the more they stay the same: Stephen Michelli's The Wishing Bone and Other Poems (2003), winner of the 2003 Lee Bennett Hopkins Award for U.S. children's poetry, is a collection of evocative and technically accomplished rhymes rooted in the nonsense of Laura E. Richards and Eugene Field. Doubtless the twenty-first century will see children's poetry continue to reinvent itself.


Joseph T. Thomas, Jr.

CHIN, MARILYN (1955–)

Marilyn Chin's poetry unravels the complexities of the immigrant experience through the convergence of Chinese cultural history, Chinese American familial/ generational relationships, and contemporary urban landscapes, thus marking her poet as a powerful voice in American poetics and a significant presence in Asian-American poetry.

Born Mei Ling in 1955, Chin came to the United States from Hong Kong soon after her birth. Raised by her mother and grandmother, she grew up in Portland, Oregon, and in 1977 she graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst; she earned an MFA from the University of Iowa in 1981.


Chin's poetry solidifies her position as a poet who often renders the personal political. The theme of the immigrant's assimilation into white America recurs in her work. However, Chin also writes of loss and exile, cultural history and family relationships, sadness and sacrifice, as well as gender, and through her foregrounding of the complexity of assimilation, Chin refuses to render a one-dimensional depiction of this process, representing instead the fear, hatred, and "wonderful magic