
Kiedra Burston Taylor  
*The University of Connecticut, Storrs*

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The discussion about the vague criteria for the prestigious John Newbery Medal continues to be a point of contention, as does the discussion about the lack of diversity in the prizing of children’s and young adult books that depict American identity. *Dust Off the Gold Medal*, edited by Sara L. Schwebel and Jocelyn Van Tuyl, adeptly attends to both conversations. The collection brings together the expertise of nineteen scholars who consider the intersections of race, class, gender, disability, and nationalism in early- to mid-twentieth century Medal winners. The collection traces the trajectory of the Newbery Medal while focusing on forgotten or controversial Newbery Medal winners. To facilitate this tracing, the chapters are arranged chronologically by the award year. This arrangement makes it possible to identify the emergence of potential themes and a narrative thread that runs through the Newbery establishment’s response to the call for diversity in the prizing of children’s and young adult stories.

Collectively, the contributors explore the harm caused by the vague criterion of “excellence” and the lack of transparency in the Medal’s awarding process. The establishment’s intentions, the contributors argue, move toward diverse representation, but the confusion about the approach has left some judges dismayed by some of the prized selections over the years. The contributors foreground the archive as a rich source for considering the social and political contributions of children’s and young adult literature in discourse about representations of American identity, which adds to the relevance of children’s literature scholarship, especially in conjunction with other disciplines of scholarship such as sociology and American studies. The chapters are organized in a way that reveals a slow increase in the number of minority-authored texts that engages a more diverse audience, while also highlighting the complexities associated with achieving diverse representation.
While the collection, as a whole, details the disagreements regarding the selection process, the first three chapters of this edited collection disclose an inclination on the part of the prizing committees to shift away from the replication of homogenous young White male protagonists toward a more diverse range of protagonists. The documentation of this shift substantiates both the homogeneity and the effort to diversify literary representations of what it means to be American. In Paul Ringel’s chapter, “The Dark Frigate (1924) and the Use of Masculinity in Early Newbery Culture,” Ringel notes the adherence to a narrative structure that follows a young male protagonist who must learn morality and independence by avoiding “bad role models” (19). Poushali Bhadury’s chapter, “Punching Up, Punching Down: Anticolonial Resistance and Brahmanical Ideologies in Gay-Neck: The Story of a Pigeon (1928),” makes clear the historical significance of the Newbery’s 1928 winner by noting its status as the earliest Own Voices narrative and its role as a “cultural conduit” (34-35). This represents an interesting shift in cultural expectations from 1924 to 1928. Kenneth Kidd’s chapter, “Sounding the Broken Note: The Trumpeter of Krakow (1929) and Polish History,” also notes the favoring of multicultural historical representation, and the author counters earlier criticism of Trumpeter by arguing that Eric Philbrook Kelly frames Polish history in America’s exceptionalism and Christianity (51). And in their co-written chapter, “Invincible Nina: Louisa May Alcott and the Depression-Era Feminism of Invincible Louisa (1934),” Anne K. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein point out the Newbery’s turn back toward female authorship during wartime, and thus indicates an interest in celebrating and documenting the contributions that women made to American culture. The authors consider the importance of individual freedom to American history that is found in biographies (87). This rumination underscores the rhetorical power of children’s literature, which also discloses the important cultural work done by children’s literature prizing.
Their mention of the great turn in the publishing industry implies a potentially collective desire to appreciate women’s contributions to American history.

But the prizing of *Daniel Boone* in 1940 nearly eclipses this feminist inclusion by again idolizing White masculinity in a way the appears to wreck nearly all of the progress the Newbery prizing had made. Beverly Lyon Clark calls the selection a “gender turning point” in her chapter, “The Most Scorned of the Newbery Medalists?: *Daniel Boone* (1940)” (83). Clark goes on to elucidate the ways in which this selection fails as a representation of Americanness and the simultaneous disregard for feminist historical strides. Also noted is the racist misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples and the fiction of their relationship with the colonialists. The prizing of *Daniel Boone* interrupted the little progress toward diversity that was made in previous years.

The chapters ultimately come together to contextualize the slow progression toward diversity in the Newbery Medal’s history and calls attention to the establishment’s struggle to recover its progress during its one-hundred years of prizing children’s literature. It traces the return to prizing misogyny and bigotry as the next few chapters progress. In the 1940’s, Newbery prizing continued the legacy of amplifying the masculinity and intolerance with the prizing of Armstrong Sperry’s tales of the sea. According to Mary K. Bercaw Edwards’s chapter, “In the Tradition of Cannibal Talk: *Call It Courage* (1941),” Armstrong Perry’s *Call It Courage* were exaggerated tales of seafaring that became Western literary favorites with its “long trajectory of cannibal talk” (100-101). This behavior discloses a celebration of and reverence for literary works that dehumanizes people from other lands, which could be credited with normalizing prejudice for American children of all genders from various cultural backgrounds.

By the mid-century, we see that the Newbery Medal tended to prize essentialized depictions of American identity that contradicts the aim to recognize excellence in the American
literary tradition. A brief shift in preference to drawing attention to animal cruelty while 
discouraging xenophobia and racism is marked by Megan L. Musgrave’s chapter, “Of Sultans, 
Studs, and Stable Boys: Equine and Literary Lineage in *King of the Wind* (1949)” (117). But 
Anna Lockhart’s chapter notes that selecting *The Wheel on the School* (1954; 1955 Newbery 
Medal) by Meindert DeJong “was a predictable and conservative choice” about America’s 
“cultural anxiety and fear” in times of war (145). Lockhart argues that DeJong’s text “highlights 
education’s restorative potential, its capacity to address the societal wrongs of neglect and 
exclusion” (145). Musgrave and Lockhart’s chapters suggest that although the Newbery’s mid-
century prize winners discourage both xenophobia and racism, they are haunted still by historical 
depictions of conservative American sensibilities.

In addition to the noted jostling between misogyny and gender diversity, this body of 
work reveals the Newbery committee’s brief turn from the prizing of biased representations of 
American views, beliefs, and behaviors in 1963. Kathleen T. Horning and Jocelyn Van Tuyl’s 
analysis of Emily Neville’s *It’s Like This, Cat* (1963; 1964 Newbery Medal) marks a historic 
pivot point in the collection’s narrative about the Newbery prizing establishment’s cultural 
contributions by focusing on the role of the librarians and their very public dissatisfaction with 
the selection process. Upon noticing a swing back to prizing masculinity, librarians in the 1960’s 
more vigorously demanded transparency in the selection process. Horning and Van Tuyl amplify 
the historic significance of this pivot in their chapter, “Lost Cat: *It’s Like This, Cat* (1964) and 
the Invention of Young Adult Literature,” by considering the impact of enthusiastic publishers 
and librarians as they tell of a growing interest in the work of the prizing committee.

Horning and Van Tuyl recount the scandal that surrounded Sarah Dickinson’s act of 
breaking the confidentiality agreement when she published a detailed account of her experience
titled “I Was There on the 1964 Newbery-Caldecott Awards Committee” (150). In this serious indiscretion lies a demand for something other than the essentializing depictions of American beliefs and representation. Lillian N. Gerhardt, likewise, broke with protocol and showed no remorse in her response to being chastised; she replied “‘Not a bit sorry. Now I’m going to look for the Caldecott’” (149). The latter part of the critic’s response implies concerns about gender bias, discrimination, and dehumanization are not exclusive to the Newbery, that other prizing industries, in this case the Caldecott, show evidence of similar biases. The break from the usual pattern of behavior marked by Cat, according to Horning and Van Tuyl, also describe a break from historical novels with the prizing of Cat as “a new literary trend” that also ushered in YA literature with its “contemporary realism” (155). Ironically though, prizing Cat also moves away from discouraging xenophobia and racism as in King of the Wind and addressing societal wrongs as in The Wheel on the School, and back to prizing “implicitly a male privilege” (151). It is important to note that this implied male privilege is also White.

Not until the 1979 does the Newbery prizing include representations of disability in literature. Sara K. Day and Paige Gray consider the turn to “evolving representations of disability in literature” in their analysis of the 1971 and 1979 Newbery Medal winners, The Summer of Swans (1970; 1971 Newbery Medal) by Betsy Byars and The Westing Game (1978; 1979 Newbery Medal) by Ellen Raskin. Day and Gray assert, “Given the cultural visibility conferred by their Newbery wins, The Summer of Swans and The Westing Game present us with the opportunity to reassess approaches to disability in children’s literature and in children’s literature scholarship” (180). This reassessment calls for an engagement that challenges the notion that disability is ‘Other.’ The co-authors’ assertion discloses another often disregarded category of children’s literary prizing.
We learn that the pattern of representation found in the Newbery’s prizing shifts back to women’s contributions to culture and history in the 1980’s, which shows the prizing committee’s frequent, recurring consideration for gender representation. This is expressed in Donelle Ruwe’s emphasis on the contributions to the feminist art movement in “The Women’s Poetry Movement and the Affordance of the Lyric: A Visit to William Blake’s Inn (1982)” (186). Ruwe writes about the sophistication of feminist art evidenced in Nancy Willard’s book of poetry, *William Blake’s Inn: Poems for Innocent and Experienced Travelers* (1981; 1982 Newbery Medal). The acknowledged return to feminist contributions to American culture continues the thread of decentering masculinity as children’s literary prizing continued to celebrate women’s creative work. But the issue of diverse representation is so much more than visibility. In other words, simply describing a character as non-gender conforming and/or non-white is not enough to rectify the scarce representation of diversity in children’s literature.

Diverse characters must defy stereotypical representation, and their character must be one of remarkable substance. Adrienne Kertzer “problematizes visibility” in “‘One Jew, One Half-Jew, a WASP, and an Indian’: Diversity in *The View from Saturday* (1997).” Kertzer also discusses the complexity of diverse representation and identifies “issues of labeling and identity, hybridity, and visibility” as barriers to our desired solution (216). The author goes on to suggest that memoirs encourage a more emotional response as it engages with multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion/exclusion.

In the final two chapters, the collection takes on racism and the telling of American History from the perspective of folks of color. Giselle Liza Anatol and co-authors Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino and Rebekah May Degener argue the significance of prize-winning books that critique Eurocentric American history and focus on the perspective of characters of color. Up to
this point, the work presented in this collection substantiates theories that consider the nuances of balancing individual identity with collective identity but easily leave much to be desired because no one book can single-handedly grapple with the numerous subtleties of overlapping identities. But for writers of color, the stakes of representation for the collective are higher. Anatol deliberates over the role of writers of color in the chapter, “Ghosts of Japanese/American History in *Kira-Kira* (2005)” (219). The author succinctly notes in her analysis of Cynthia Kadohata’s *Kira-Kira* (2004; 2005 Newbery Medal) that “Valuing the collective as much as, if not more than, the individual is key to the work of many ethnic authors and writers of color” (220). Anatol goes on to argue that although *Kira-Kira* “is problematic and deceptive” because it urges cultural assimilation, the author’s portrait of Japanese attitudes and behaviors post-World War II are indeed accurate (220-221). Anatol also highlights the “lessons about the ideal victim” evidenced in the telling of Lynn’s illness (222), which when read with Robin Bernstein’s *Racial Innocence*, can help to put into perspective the ways that populations of color are often excluded from notions of victimhood and innocence.

The final chapter of the collection qualifies the idea of innocence and children of color, which leaves the reader with the understanding that though the Newbery prizing establishment has taken steps toward more diverse representations of American children, there is still a long way to go. Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino and Rebekah May Degener make assertions about the treatment of race and national culture in their chapter on Kwame Alexander’s novel, *The Crossover* (2014; 2015 Newbery Medal) (235). The co-authors observe the embeddedness of racism and “the Whiteness of American youth literature” (237). And they argue that the Newbery Medal continues to experience a “paucity of children’s books featuring Black characters and the limited diversity of experiences reflected in existing stories have created what
youth literature scholar Ebony Elizabeth Thomas terms a ‘separate and unequal literary landscape’” (235). The chapter also provides a useful and extremely important discussion about the Black authored texts that have been awarded the Newbery Medal. In that discussion Rickard Rebellino and Degener note the “‘double-voicedness’” (238) and the artfully implicit way that *Crossover* promulgates the complexity of race and Black boyhood. Anatol and Rebellino and Degener’s respective chapters corroborate the need to center race in representations of American childhood, especially in the prizing of children’s literature.

After having read the introduction astutely contextualizing the book’s contributions, by the end of the collection, readers will appreciate the editorial arrangement. The book is a valuable resource for scholars interested in children’s literature and the cultural relevance of children’s book awards, particularly the Newbery Medal. Of course, no collection could cover every aspect of the Newbery Medal establishment’s response to America’s constantly changing culture and its engagement with aspects of identity such as race, gender, religion, ability, etc. nor could all the nuances of prizing in the American tradition be covered by a single collection. But, by focusing on these forgotten or controversial award winners and in tracing what has been represented in the one-hundred years of the Newbery Medal, *Dust Off the Gold Medal* expands the discourse by identifying and demonstrating the ways that academic voices could engage with literature for children and young adults. Moreover, it revisits earlier discussions about the scarcity of diverse representations of what it means to be American with renewed vigor.
Taylor: Schwebel, Sara L. and Jocelyn Van Tuyl. *Dust Off the Gold Medal*

Works Cited
