To Teach and Entertain:
An Exploration of Overlapped Trends in 19th Century
Children’s Literature through the Eyes of the Minns Collection

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“In a utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of
grave importance that fairy tales should be respected.”

Charles Dickens
Frauds on the Fairies, 1853

For Isabella.

Introduction

The Special Collections department at Wellesley College’s Clapp Library is comprised of twelve collections, which include works and portions of works ranging from the Book of the Dead (ca 500 BCE) to 19th-century songbooks. These items are usually received as gifts to the college and come from a variety of sources, including from living donors or at the bequest of deceased patrons.
In 1939, Wellesley College received an approximately 1500-item bequest from Susan Minns, a Massachusetts woman who had passed a few years earlier. “Louisburg Square to Wellesley College”, an article in *The Wellesley Magazine*, written by Wellesley’s Associate Librarian Lilla Weed, describes Minns’ bequest as “one of the most interesting collections which [the College had] received in recent years”. It included a sizeable collection of juvenile texts, including several volumes of fairy tales and other children’s literature, which were described as “valuable additions to [the College’s] growing collections of Juvenile books” (Weed).

More than 75 years later, the Special Collections department found me sitting in one of their plush, velvet-cushioned chairs, delicately turning through the pages of several old and, in some cases, rare fairy tale collections. I was attempting to determine the topic of a research project I would embark on - the one you are currently reading - when I came across a text titled *The Red Fairy Book*. The physical state of the book was less than optimum - it had to be kept in a wrapping so as not to fall apart the now-vitreous binding constantly threatened to snap even as the book laid in its cradle. Yet the interior surfaces were surprisingly well preserved: the pages were still shiny and the ink was not faded. But something else about the book stood out to me. On one of the first pages, a printed inscription read “Large Paper / Only one hundred and thirteen Copies of this Edition have been printed / THIS COPY IS NUMBER 97”. The number 97 was written by hand in blue ink that had faded to a light periwinkle. This rare find turned out to be one of Susan Minns’ books, which I found out later after coming across her name on another one of its pages. And so, fueled by curiosity, my research project had its start.

The purpose of this project is not to determine why Susan Minns owned juvenalia - the truth is, her ownership could have been the result of several factors. The publishing dates of a
selection of Minns’ books suggest she was an adult when she bought them. Several others were inscribed with the names of nuclear and extended family members, which could have been gifts from her grandparents - one grandfather was a publisher (of the New England Palladium) and the other an East India merchant. There is even evidence she may simply have been a bibliophilic pack rat - “there were books in almost every room” of her home in Louisburg Square (Weed; "Miss Susan Minns, 98, Dies in Boston.") However, what we can gain from looking critically at the texts in Minns’ collection is evidence of juvenile literature movements occurring during her lifetime. Her bequest presents a ripe opportunity for a case study on the state of the European fairy tale genre within 19th and early 20th century America.

I will first present a brief background of Susan Minns’ life and a timeline of the fairy tale genre. I will then describe changes in children’s fairytale literature during the 19th and early 20th centuries, focusing on the trend of overlap in moral didacticism and entertainment value during this time period. Evidence of this trend will be provided by way of texts from Minns’ private collection. Out of a list of 245 items from the Minns collection, six titles are explicitly centered around fairies and/or magic.

However, I will point out that though you will find it listed in the bibliography, I have chosen not to discuss *Fairy Tales, now first collected*, by Joseph Ritson (1831), along with the five other main examples. This choice was made after considering the possible intent of the text and an observation that suggests the book seems hardly made for children. Even from an aesthetic standpoint, the book is well-bound with ornate inside covers. Content-wise, the text opens with two dissertations - one on pygmies; the other on fairies - which, together, take up a large portion of the book. It finishes with a portion called “Fairy Songs”, which includes excerpts
from Shakespeare. The tales themselves are relatively short, and read more similarly to historical analyses than stories. They are hardly embellished with fantastic or magical elements. In fact, this particular text was moved to the English Poetry Collection within the Special Collections Department at Wellesley College - insinuating that it is better used as a source of poetry than as children’s literature.

As for the remaining five texts, they are: The Fairy Cabinet; Popular Fairy Tales, or a Lilliputian Library; Christmas Budget of Fairy Stories; The Red Fairy Book; and Parlour Magic.

I have examined these books’ prefaces and introductions, as well as a selection of the tales found within them which are likely familiar to a contemporary audience and possess strong moral backdrops. They are “Little Red Riding Hood”, found in Popular Fairy Tales and Christmas Budget of Fairy Stories; “Beauty and the Beast”, present in the same two texts; and “Snowdrop”, now commonly known as “Snow White”, found in the Christmas Budget of Fairy Stories and The Red Fairy Book.

The Life of Susan Minns

Susan Minns was born in Lincoln, Massachusetts in 1839. Throughout her lifetime, she never married, nor did she have any children. After ninety-eight years of life, she passed away in her home in Boston and was buried in the Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Yet, though she died a mere fourteen miles from her birthplace, Minns’ life was anything but commonplace.
Notably, she was one of the first few women to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, graduating in the Class of 1881 at the age of forty-two. There, she studied botany, an endeavor that coincided with her apparently acute interest in nature. Many of her philanthropic gifts revolved around nature, as represented by her obituary in *The New York Times*. It is recorded therein that she spent “more than fifty years” contributing “to the support of the Gray Herbarium of Harvard and to the maintenance of Arnold Arboretum,” and that she donated “20,000 feet of land on Memorial Drive for the construction of a laboratory for the study of river-flow hydraulics” to M.I.T. She also gifted “Little Wachusett, a mountain covering 127 acres at Princeton to the Commonwealth for a bird sanctuary,” and “gave $80,000 toward the construction of the botany part of Sage Hall” at Wellesley College.

Along with her other enduring charities remains the donation of her Danse Macabre collection to the University of Louvain in Belgium and the Minns Lecture Series. The Series, which was established at Minns’ bequest to honor her brother Thomas, continues to host annual lectures on religious topics presented by “ministers and members of First Church Boston and King's Chapel in Boston” ("The Minns Committee"), of which Susan Minns was a member during her lifetime. In order to place Susan Minns’ fairy tale texts on the shelf, let us first briefly trace the history of the fairy tale genre.

**A Brief History of the Fairy Tale Genre**

The ancient precursor of the modern fairy tale genre was the fable, a genre which has been traced back to 800 BC Mesopotamia, and subsequently traveled to Sumeria and Babylon.
By 600 BC, fables were written down onto clay tablets in Greece; circa 300 BC, Demetrius Phalereus of Athens established the Alexandrian library and catalogued around two hundred Greek fables written in prose form. Similarly to their later evolutionary counterparts, such as folklore and fairy tales, fables were understood to have “contributed to the civilizing process of all societies” (The Irresistible Fairy Tale 2) by featuring animals that taught lessons or exemplified different aspects of human morality (The Irresistible Fairy Tale).

Fast forward to mid-16th century Italy. Here, the printing press and a shifting socioeconomic identity prompted the publication and circulation of Giovanni Francesco Straparola’s “rise fairy tale” subgenre, in which a destitute protagonist rises in the ranks of life and eventually marries into royalty or riches (“Fairy Godfather, Fairy-Tale History”). In France, in 1697, the term “fairy tale” emerged from the imagination of Madame Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy when she published a collection of stories entitled Les Contes des fées - “Tales about Fairies” (The Irresistible Fairy Tale 12). Nearly two millennia after the establishment of the Alexandrian library, “the fairy tale [had] adapted itself and was transformed” - in fact, “it grew, became enormous, and disseminated information that contributed to the cultural evolution of specific groups.” (The Irresistible Fairy Tale 11).

The eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw the emergence of folklore scholars such as Giuseppe Pitrè of Italy (1841-1916) and the Brothers Grimm of Germany (Jacob and Wilhelm, 1785–1863 and 1786–1859, respectively). Giuseppe Pitrè had his traveling coach converted into a traveling “office”, where he stored bumpily scrawled Sicilian lore related by his primarily lower-class patients. The Grimm Fairy Tale collection, including “Little Red Riding
Hood” and “Snowdrop”, is generally regarded as a research project undertaken to unearth and record unpopularized German folklore.

As for the publication and circulation of the tales that were collected, scholars credit different variables for the dissemination of the genre. Some have found evidence that several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century folklorists knew each other at least through correspondence, and may have agreed to copy and incorporate each other’s stories into their own publications in order to promote circulation of the stories (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale*). Other scholars have taken a more cynical view, contending that publishers repeatedly and aggressively appropriated tales from other cultures in order to promote their own country’s cultural identity and therefore - hopefully - sell greater volumes of the texts ("Fairy Tales Old Wives and Printing Presses"). Though these contemporary scholars contest the likelihood of each other’s research, it is more likely that each view is correct within a different context, country, culture, and between individual publishers during those time periods.

What *is* clear is that by Minns’ birth in 1839, the fairy tale had meant many different things to many different people in several different cultures across several different time periods. For Straparola, they were an exploration of class ascension. For Madame d’Aulnoy, they were an opposition to the Catholic Church, promoting secularity and the fierceness of fantastical female figures. For Pitrè and the Grimms, they were a recognition of previously undervalued lower-class folk culture. And over the course of her own life, Minns, too, would play witness to changes in the genre as it spread through the northeastern United States.

*Trends in Children’s Fairy Tale Literature During the 19th and Early 20th Centuries…*
In 1991, New York’s Pierpont Morgan Library hosted an exhibit titled “Be Merry and Wise”, which traced children’s books through history from 1700 to the mid-19th century. An advertisement for the exhibit notes that it was during this stretch of time “when the prevailing conviction that children’s books must possess some didactic quality yielded to the idea that it was fine for a child’s book to merely entertain its readers” (Laroche). In the late 17th century, religious didacticism had a hold on English society, and as a result, fairy tales were transformed into stories with a heavy didactic bent - if they were published at all (When Dreams Came True 145).

In 1693, John Locke - one of the most remembered liberal thinkers of his time - wrote a treatise called Some Thoughts Concerning Education. In it, he praised Aesop’s Fables for “being stories apt to delight and entertain a child” but which could still “afford useful reflections” (qtd. in Lathey 22). But when it came to tales with more “magical” elements, Locke believed that wealthy children should not be exposed - several scholars believe this speaks to a form of literary elitism, as fairy tales where, at the time, considered the stuff of lower classes. However, fairy tales prevailed, and when “more respectable children's literature… began to emerge… in the 18th century [it] was far from devoid of fantastical elements” (Grenby; When Dreams Came True).

Current-day scholars have debated why these fairy tales reemerged as popular for the upper class in the 19th century, after they had seemingly become stigmatized as “lower class” literature. While the answer is not clear, and possibly differed between western countries, one hypothesis suggests that the stories’ success was due to cultural changes. Especially nearing the end of the 19th century, as industrialization became more rapid, Western cultures experienced
vast social and economic changes. Professor M.O. Grenby of Newcastle University suggests that because of these changes, fairy tales may have recaptured the imagination in an almost nostalgic manner, reminding people of “medievalism,” “honour and the ‘old ways’” - playing as an “antidote to the industrial and urban society whose advance they regretted” (Grenby). Even Dickens, in his *Frauds on the Fairies* (1853), wrote that “In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected”.

This movement towards urbanization, in tandem with the emergence of literary Romanticism, leads us to a time when the creative, fantastic and imaginative quality of fairy tales were once again heralded as desirable (*When Dreams Came True* 145). By the time publications with these elements reached the Minns household in 1800’s America, two trends in juvenile literature had overlapped to create a new one with a hybrid purpose: to teach and entertain.

In an article entitled “Fantasy and Fairytale in Children’s Literature,” Grenby assesses this “relationship between fantasy and morality in 18th- and 19th-century children’s literature”, as well as the centuries’ subtle transition of children’s literature from sources of instruction to ones of entertainment. Grenby writes that “[h]istorians of children’s books have often seen two forces – realism and didacticism on the one hand, and fantasy and fun on the other – as constantly in competition.” Many of the popular fairy tales and children’s literature during this time period had strong moral undercurrents. For example, Charles Perrault’s *The Little Red Riding Hood* (published in English in 1729), which predated the Grimms Brothers’, “contained morals alongside the supernatural elements… [including] a warning for ‘growing ladies fair’ against wolves [read: lustful men] ‘With luring tongues, and language wondrous sweet’ who ‘Follow young ladies as they walk the street’” (Grenby).
Turning to texts from the time, Laura Fry Kready’s *A Study of Fairy Tales* - published in Boston in 1916 - provides invaluable insight into an early 20th century New England view on how fairy tales should be utilized. Kready writes:

“In the home fairy tales employ leisure hours in a way that builds character. Critical moments of decision will come into the lives of all when no amount of reason will be a sufficient guide. Mothers who cannot follow their sons to college, and fathers who cannot choose for their daughters, can help their children best to fortify their spirits for such crises by feeding them with literature. This, when they are yet little, will begin the reason of a fortress of ideals which will support true feeling and lead constantly to noble action.” (Kready 9)

Furthermore, the introduction to Kready’s study is written by Henry Suzzallo, who served as President of the University of Washington from 1915-1926 ("University of Washington Presidents"). Suzzallo writes that “[w]hile the fairy tales have no immediate purpose other than to amuse, they leave a substantial by-product which has a moral significance” (Kready XVII). This theme is repeated constantly throughout Kready’s text, especially in the first chapter, entitled “The Worth of Fairy Tales”, where Kready writes of the “value of fairy tales in education.” These include positive impact on social development through play, reasoning between right and wrong, and, surely enough, moral development.

… As Evidenced by Minns’ Collection
Evidence of intertwined didacticism and entertainment value in juvenile literature during the 19th century is available upon examination of the prefaces, introductions, and content of Susan Minns’ personal collection.

Let us begin with *The Fairy Cabinet*, published in Boston in 1845. This text contains an explicitly purposed preface, a portion of which reads:

In making up this volume, care has been taken to select such as were supposed never to have been published in English, and such as were most adapted to the amusement of the young. As the French collection above named is not a common book, it is probably not accessible to many American readers, and it has been thought that a selection from it might not be an unacceptable present to the juvenile part of the community… Boston, November, 1844. (*The Fairy Cabinet*)

Here, we see evidence of the publisher’s intent for the book to reach a juvenile audience. Moreover, this juvenile audience is meant to be “amused,” by the stories within the book, differing from previous trends of reading for mere instruction. Several years before *The Fairy Cabinet*, we can see evidence of a more didactic tint in *Popular Fairy Tales, or a Lilliputian Library*, collected and revised by Benjamin Tabart and published in Boston in 1827. This text’s preface begins:
“The utility of tales of this description [fairy tales] has sometimes been doubted… The objection, however… would apply with equal propriety to all works of imagination, which overleap in the slightest degree the bounds of nature or probability, whether written for the juvenile or adult department; and were there aught of force in the doubt, not only would the fine moral lessons [emphasis added] of Aesop, and all other fabulists… [and] books written exclusively for the instruction of children, be banished from the juvenile library; but, in more advanced reading, from… Milton and the divine creations of Shakspeare [sic], down to Giant Despair and the Holy Wars of Bunyan, (fairy tales for more adult age,) all would be proscribed, as bordering on the improbable or impossible.

(Tabart, first page of Preface)

However, the publisher still warns against hypocrisy in literary standards, and therefore defends the fantastical elements of the fairy tales within the collection. The argument is this: that if one dismisses the utility of children’s stories that surround the fantastic, they must also do the same for similar, more “adult” works - including Milton, Shakespeare, and countless others that employ less-than-realistic elements in their works. The underlying result would be admonishable - to lose the “fine moral lessons” those stories provide.

A sampling of those “fine moral lessons” can be found in the text’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood”. “Little Red Riding Hood” is often recognized by a contemporary audience as a lesson in obedience. In some “modern” versions of the story, Red Riding Hood’s mother tells her not to stray from the path on the way through the
woods to her grandmother’s house. Despite this order, Red Riding Hood usually disobeys her mother - either after she meets the Wolf, who encourages her to stray from the path, or before she meets the wolf, at which point the reader may assume that it is her disobedience that causes trouble for herself and her grandmother.

However, in both the Popular Fairy Tales and Christmas Budget versions of the tale, there is no warning from her mother to stay to a path, and therefore no opportunity for Red Riding Hood to be disobedient. The little girl is faultless but for her ignorance. In Popular Fairy Tales, she, “not knowing how dangerous it was to talk to a wolf,” (Tabart 20) simply gives away the location of her grandmother’s house. She then proceeds to take a long, ambling time to arrive at her grandmother’s house and is quickly eaten up upon her arrival. Here, the story ends abruptly - there is no happy ending for the grandmother or the little girl who made the fatal mistake of sharing private information with a cunning stranger. The Christmas Budget version elaborates explicitly upon this point. In this version, Red Riding Hood and her savior - a woodcutter named Hugh - have the following exchange, which brims with didactic moral advice:

‘I am so glad you came killed the wicked dog.’ ‘Dog! It is a wolf, Red Riding Hood… You see, my darling,’ he said gently, as she paused, ‘that one should never loiter on errands nor tell one’s affairs to strangers, for many a wolf looks like an honest dog… ’ (Christmas Budget 11)
Other pieces of “fine moral advice” can be found in the *Popular Fairy Tales* version of “Beauty and the Beast”. The story opens by subtly championing the virtues of education: not only is Beauty “handsomer than her sisters,” but she is also “better tempered,” despite being “constantly jeered… for spending her time in reading, or other useful employments” (Tabart 95). Beauty’s physical appearance is not her single worthy feature - a facet of the story that has been carried into contemporary times in the form of the studious, book-bearing Belle of Disney’s animated film version of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). But this is not the only morally compelling take-away from the tale.

In the *Christmas Budget* edition, “Beauty and the Beast” also discourages judging a book by its cover. After residing for some time with an ugly but kind Beast, both the *Popular Fairy Tale* and *Christmas Budget* Beauties begin to fall in love. When the Beast is transformed into a handsome Prince upon Beauty’s agreement to marry him, the *Christmas Budget* Prince explains that a “wicked fairy” had turned him into a beast until “a young lady, both virtuous and modest” would “judge of [him] by the goodness of [his] heart” (*Christmas Budget* 77). The transformed Prince of the *Popular Fairy Tales* version shares a similar sentiment. In this version, a benevolent Fairy also appears and congratulates Beauty, saying that because she “preferred goodness of heart to sense and beauty,” she therefore deserved “to find these qualities united in the same person” (Tabart 107). This version also makes sure to end by assuring the readers that the Prince “passed with her [Beauty] a long and happy life, because their actions were founded upon virtue” (Tabart 107).

*The Red Fairy Book* also confronts the didactic-entertainment overlap of its stories. A collection of fairy tales organized by Andrew Lang, and published in London in 1890, *The Red
*Fairy Book* is the second of Lang's Coloured Fairy Books series. The intentions behind the book’s publication can be gleaned from an excerpt from the collection’s introduction:

The attempt has been to select stories which, as stories, are interesting, humorous, or dramatic. The right critics of them will be children, whose taste, in such matters, is classically excellent and pure. If they cry, ‘Tell us that again,’ and yet again, the purpose of the Editor will have been attained. If they waken, even in a few little boys and girls, the love of reading, if they open the door into a fairyland, not of science but of fancy, they have reached their proper aim and end. (Lang XV)

This excerpt is illustrative of the conflicting intentions of the stories within the collection: they should entertain the children that read them, but the ultimately didactic goal to “waken” a “love of reading.” Another portion of the excerpt of the introduction expands upon the Editor’s intentions that the book should reach an audience of children, explaining that the stories have been modified for their “pure” audience:

Here, indeed, a question rises, often asked by aunts, and occasionally by mothers - Are not the cruel punishments which are inflicted on the wicked in fairy tales unfit for children’s ears? Thirty years ago children were not shocked by any such matters: now they are said to be more sensitive… in one or two cases the barbaric
punishments have been slightly softened, and the evil have been let off more easily than in the original authorities. (Lang XIII)

Here, the adult publishers question a child’s ability to understand the moral reasoning behind the punishment of “the wicked” in the tales without becoming scared. This introduction acknowledges the stories’ didactic moral undertones and simultaneously claims to conform to the transition into sensitivity, with entertainment triumphing harsh lessons. However, at least one character of the *Red Fairy Book* collection does not encounter a happy ending. The Queen of *The Red Fairy Book*’s “Snowdrop” - who can also be found in a *Christmas Budget* version - is horrendously vain, and goes to great lengths to try and eliminate the greatest source of her competition: her own step daughter. Ultimately, even after three tries, the Queen fails to kill her stepchild. The ending commentary of this story is identical between the two versions, and reads:

“[R]ed-hot iron shoes had been prepared for the wicked old Queen, and she was made to get into them and dance till she fell down dead” (*Christmas Budget* 107; Lang 339)

Ironically, this ending does not seem to live up to the musings of the *Red Fairy Book*’s introduction and its professed attempt to soften the punishment of characters for their wicked deeds. Consequently, this story’s moral lesson remains clear - that no matter how beautiful the exterior, wicked deeds fueled by vanity and pride do not go unpunished.
We find even more explicit evidence of didactic and recreational overlap with moral undertones in the preface of Parlour Magic, published in Boston in 1838. Closer examination of book reveals an inscription of “Th[u or v]s. Minns. / Dec 25, 1842” on the first page - adjacent to the cover - in brown ink. “Th[u or v]s.” likely refers to Minns’ older brother, Thomas, who lived at 14 Louisburg Square with his sister and who also never married. He would have been five years old when the book was first published; nine if he received it in 1842, as the inscription suggests. A selection of the preface reads:

To furnish the ingenious youth with the means of relieving the tediousness of a long winter’s or a wet summer’s evening, - to enable him to provide for a party of juvenile friends, instructive as well as recreative entertainment, without having recourse to any of the vulgar modes of killing time, - to qualify the hero of his little circle to divert and astonish his friends, and, at the same time, to improve himself, are the principal object of the following little work. (Parlour Magic 5)

The preface mentions avoiding “vulgar modes of killing time,” likely referencing raucous mischief children were sometimes (and continue to be) inclined to, such as fighting or “gambling”. Instead, the publisher offers a solution that can take place in the calm of a parlour - and, much in line with the trends of children’s literature at the time, that solution is both fun and informative. The preface continues:
Another object of these pages is to inform, without being dryly scientific, - by imparting interesting facts, to stimulate the young experimentalist to inquire into the laws that regulate them, - by aiding him to acquire dexterity of practice, to smooth the road to the development of principles, - and, above all, to enable him to escape and imputation which every boy of spirit would consider the depth of disgrace, - that of being ‘No Conjuror!’ (*Parlour Magic* 6-7)

This passage is reminiscent of contemporary scholar Gillian Lathey’s argument that what made “Locke’s advice so radical [was] the notion that the child’s reading for pleasure might ‘draw him on’, [or] in other words promote learning” (Lathey 22). Here the publisher publicly broadcasts an intention of drawing “young experimentalist to inquire into the laws that regulate” the tricks they might practice from the book and spurring them on to learning by way of fun.

Despite the fact that *Parlour Magic* is not a collection of fairy tales - rather, it is a collection of magic tricks - I have chosen to include it because it provides unique perspectives on magic in comparison with the other five books listed from Minns’ collection. The last sentence alone suggests that “magic” tricks were popular for children to perform at this time. According to the publisher the ability to perform them was key in escaping the shame - indeed, “the depth of disgrace” - of being called “No Conjuror”. Through each fairy tale collection’s preface or introduction, we can see strong examples of overlap between moral didacticism and entertainment value, and through the addition of *Parlour Magic*, we can reaffirm the validity of the didactic-entertainment movement for the texts centered specifically on fairy tales.
Concluding Thoughts

As Jessica Webb of Cardiff University articulates in an article, didacticism was “a significant and centralised strand of Victorian children’s literature” (Webb 81). Yet so was entertainment value. In Minns’ personal collection of fairy tales - and even parlour tricks - we see evidence of the strong overlap between two “competing” facets of children’s literature present that was present in the 19th century. The dates of publication for the texts in Minns’ collection range from the 1820’s until the 90’s, and yet a unified intention is present throughout each text.

We may never know the exact origins of the fairy tale genre, or completely understand the psychological and cultural reasoning behind their endurance. But as M.O. Grenby points out, no matter the answers to those questions, two things are empirically clear: the 19th century saw an expanded publication base of fairy tales meant for a juvenile audience, and they were “not quite so different as we might at first think from the realistic and didactic texts that [they]... have sometimes been seen as displacing.” It can even be argued that the didactic-entertainment trend is still alive and well today - especially as numerous versions of fairy tales have been concocted and less restrictions apply to what literature is available to a juvenile audience.

I have provided a background of Susan Minns’ life and extensive contributions to the Boston area and presented a brief timeline of the fairy tale genre. A critical examination of her gifted texts presented an invaluable opportunity to open a door to the past. And that is a door which lent personalized evidence to historians’ claims of literary movements. Imagine what could be learned by looking into other private collections. We may never know how Minns came by her books or why she valued them enough to bequest them to Wellesley, but her gift - and
gifts from others like her - are unique in that they afford scholars a ripe opportunity to examine now-rare texts from a specific literary time period. In the case of Minns, I have both examined and provided evidence in favor of the didactic-entertainment trend of children’s fairytale literature during the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, this lone case study is far from exhaustive, and so I encourage further research into the personal collections of individuals made available through institutions like Wellesley College’s Special Collections Library. Through studies like this one, it is my hope that we will be able to contextualize a more nuanced version of literary trends at any point in time in the continuum of “once upon a time…”
Bibliography


Handwritten Interoffice Note between Librarians. Discussion of the Susan Minns bequest.

Administrative folder for Susan Minns’ gift to Wellesley College, Special Collections Library.


*Minns Gift to Wellesley.* Wellesley: Wellesley College Special Collections Library. XLSX file.


