Christina Schäffer, *The Brownies' Book: Inspiring Racial Pride in African-American Children*, Mainzer Studien zur Amerikanistik 60 (Frankfurt et. al: Peter Lang, 2012), 536 pp.

Gary D. Schmidt, *Making Americans: Children's Literature from 1930 to 1960* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2013), 318 pp.

Christina Schäffer's *The Brownies' Book* and Gary D. Schmidt's *Making Americans* are only two of the many recent contributions to an increasingly interdisciplinary field of research, which intertwines the study of children's literature with children's culture and a host of other academic disciplines, such as gender and media studies or the social and political sciences. In light of the explosion of publications related to children's literature and childhood studies, Sarah Wadsworth has proclaimed another "Year of the Child,"[1] and according to John Wall this dynamic field is presently entering its "third wave." After a first struggle for the recognition of children as social agents and subjects of human rights in the 1980s and demands for social equality since the late 1990s, children's studies now aim to radically transform social structures and norms (Wall 70-71).[2]

As a result, there has been a steady chipping away at one of the most cherished myths of the late twentieth century—childhood innocence. In his seminal introduction to *The Children's Culture Reader* (1998), Henry Jenkins explains that this powerful cultural construct, which developed from Romantic notions that children were not yet corrupted by society, served as a critique of the injustices and inequalities of Western industrial societies. By the late twentieth century, these ideas had given way to an understanding of children as pre-social, apolitical beings who needed to be protected from the dire realities surrounding them. Jenkins therefore calls for alternative models of children's culture which ac-

knowledge the ideological battles waged over such popular constructs and which recognize and advocate "children's cultural, social, and political agency" (32).[3] Schäffer's, as well as Schmidt's, book responds to these developments and challenges, albeit in different ways.

With *The Brownies' Book: Inspiring Racial Pride in African-American Children*, Schäffer provides a long overdue, comprehensive study of W. E. B. Du Bois's efforts at launching the first monthly magazine by black authors for black children. The study contains five major chapters. Chapter two, "Genesis of a Magazine for the Children of the Sun," introduces Du Bois's objectives and, using the first issue from January 1920 as an example, the chief concerns, themes, and philosophical concepts behind it. Chapter three, "Taking Pride in Being Black: Strategies of Composing an African-American Children's Magazine," gives an overview of the magazine's contributors and categorizes the contents of both text and image. Here, Schäffer highlights the collaboration between editors, authors, photographers, illustrators, and the audience and underlines the magazine's collage-like quality with its multiple genres and media, including advertisements. The fourth chapter, "Countering White Supremacist Attitudes: The Construction of New Images," sets off the magazine's textual and visual representations of black children as beautiful, dignified, and noble in body, mind, and character against the context of the perniciously racist and stereotypical representations of blacks in general and black children in particular. Chapter five, "In Search of a Usable Past: Possible Roots for Racial Pride," substantiates Schäffer's main thesis that *The Brownies' Book* successfully establishes a repository for an Afro-American historical and cultural consciousness and cultural memory. The magazine does so through African history, the memories of the trauma of as well as the resistance against slavery, the heritage of the South, the appropriation of European traditions, as well as the creation of a heroic ancestral gallery in which the iconic figures of male and female genii and freedom fighters occupy particularly prominent places. "*The Brownies' Book* and Beyond," the sixth chapter, traces the magazine's decline and

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[1] Sarah Wadsworth, "The Year of the Child: Children's Literature, Childhood Studies, and the Turn to Childism," *American Literary History* 27.2 (2015): 331-41.

[2] John Wall, "Childism: The Challenge of Childhood to Ethics and the Humanities," *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mac Duane (Athens and London: The U of Georgia P, 2013) 68-84.

[3] Henry Jenkins, Introduction, *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York and London: New York UP, 1998) 1-37.

legacy in subsequent issues of *The Crisis* and links it to the Harlem Renaissance.

Schäffer is clearly indebted to the scholarly work done on *The Brownies' Book* by Violet Joyce Harris.[4] One of the book's strengths is the in-depth examination of the major columns by Du Bois and his co-editor and co-author Jessie Fauset, but also of the contributions of the many other black writers. Schäffer provides novel insights with regard to the interplay of print and visual materials, the editorial struggles for contributions, subscriptions, and financial support, the advertisement strategies, the appropriations of European traditions, and the humanist and cautiously conciliatory pedagogy of this early Afrocentric project for children. Hence, her study makes visible not only Du Bois's perspicacious vision of a broadened, multicultural democracy and global citizenship of children, but also the collaborative efforts of black artists, intellectuals, and educators to realize this vision. In this way, Schäffer convincingly demonstrates that with *The Brownies' Book*, Du Bois and the many known and unknown collaborators sought to instill racial pride and a cultural and political consciousness into the young African-American readership by insisting on their rights and responsibilities as social and political agents as well as American and world citizens. The black readers, in turn, eagerly responded to the magazine and actively participated by contributing letters, stories, biographies, and photographs.

Schäffer is at her best when she mines the depths of the 24 issues of the children's magazine for the names of its lesser-known contributors and when she unfolds the interplay between the print and visual materials through detailed close readings. Yet the photos in particular raise the question whether the magazine can always successfully appropriate the dominant "white gaze" and visual conventions. In fact, some of the photo material stems from agencies such as "Underwood & Underwood, a company owned by two white brothers" (93). Schäffer avoids discussing racialized practices of looking and in how far vision, race, age, and power potentially counter the magazine's proclamations of black beauty and race consciousness. It would certainly be

impossible for any comprehensive study of a magazine as multifaceted as *The Brownies' Book* to do justice to the complexities of such questions. When it comes to the magazine's use of European traditions, however, Schäffer's study succeeds in illuminating Du Bois's indebtedness to the German Romantic tradition and hero-worship for the black ancestral gallery. She also convincingly outlines how *The Brownies' Book* appropriates European literary and iconographical fairy tale traditions to fashion the "brownie," or "African-American fairy" (343) as a hybrid figure that signifies on the supremacist ideology inherent in these traditions. While these subjects and their aesthetic renderings beg for further research, they confirm Du Bois's dictum that "all art is propaganda" and show that the makers of *The Brownies' Book* gave their child readers ample credit for their capabilities of coping with and surviving in a racist world. Neither did they hesitate to spell out the expectations they had for their young readers.

Gary D. Schmidt's *Making Americans: Children's Literature from 1930 to 1960* likewise examines the ways in which children's literature prepares its young American readers for a more inclusive democratic society at a time when literature for children became a popular literary category and genre of its own. Schmidt illuminates especially the roles and significance of the publishers, reviewers, librarians, and teachers, a network that Schäffer tends to neglect. *Making Americans* is structured into four parts, chronologically and thematically: part one from 1930 to 1940 ("Defining America as the Pioneer Nation"); part two from 1930 to 1955 ("Otherness within a Democracy"); part three the war period from 1940 to 1945 ("American Children's Literature and World War II"); and part four from 1945 to 1960 ("Positioning the American Democracy Globally"). Each of these parts has two chapters, in the first of which Schmidt outlines the changing functions and historical contexts. He also provides surveys of the increasingly multicultural children's literature published during each period. In the second chapter, he offers close readings of children's books by selected authors and book series, supporting his argument that American children's literature shows a progressive development of democratic inclusion and an emerging multiculturalism at the same time that it contributes to America's nation building with

    [4] Violet Joyce Harris, "*The Brownies' Book*: Challenge to the Selective Tradition in Children's Literature," diss., (U of Georgia, 1986).

all its cultural and ideological underpinnings. Here, he examines texts by the writer and illustrator James Daugherty (1930-1940); the Bobbs-Merrill Childhood of Famous Americans Series (1930-1955); the immigrant writers Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (1940-1945); and the authors and illustrators Virginia Lee Burton and Robert McCloskey (1945-1960).

Schmidt, who is both children's book author and scholar, renders an elegantly written and sophisticated cultural history of American children's literature from 1930 to 1960, seeking to complicate the claim of cultural critics that mid-century American children's literature overwhelmingly and optimistically affirmed an ideal version of American democracy. Instead, he argues, American children's literature is the history of a socially progressive process which, however flawed, attempted to revise and correct "the treatment of the immigrant" and "the place of the 'Other,'" "the role of the common citizen in shaping national affairs," "the desperate need for civil rights," and "America's role in global affairs" (xxvi). Reviewers have unanimously applauded Schmidt for illuminating the progressive agenda of not only writers and illustrators but also the other professionals involved in the publishing and marketing processes, the "minders"—librarians, teachers, and educators—a term Schmidt borrows from Leonard Marcus (xii).[5] However, reviewers have also criticized the book for its descriptive rather than analytical method and its limited contextualization.[6] Indeed, when read alongside Schäffer's study of *The Brownies' Book*, what becomes obvious is Schmidt's problematic usage of the term

"radical." He fails to distinguish between, on the one hand, the general move toward a more leftist political stance during the Great Depression and the New Deal, and on the other hand, the swing back to a more nationalistic stance in the subsequent decades, the postwar era in particular, when anticommunist feelings were on the rise. As Manning Marable states in his biography of W. E. B. Du Bois, "[r]adicalism is always a relative term" and there were many "democratic current[s] among many movements of social unrest" (83), all of which require to be placed within their specific historical and political contexts.[7] As it is, Schmidt's presumed progressive (and "radical") narrative of children's literature veers dangerously close to becoming a characteristically American success story in itself.

Revealing the ideological battles waged over the emerging category and genre of children's literature in the period from 1920 to 1960, Schäffer and Schmidt shed new light on important chapters in children's literature and culture. They demonstrate that the writers and illustrators as well as the "minders" treated children as political subjects and citizens with rights and duties. Nevertheless, their studies also show the racial divide between the lives of white and black children when read alongside each other. Notably, Schäffer and Schmidt's research raises more questions than it provides answers, which is a sure sign that the recent peak of scholarly activities in this vibrant field has by no means been exhausted yet.

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[5] Wadsworth 335; Gwen Athene Tarbox, "*Making Americans: Children's Literature from 1930 to 1960*, by Gary D. Schmidt," *Children's Literature* 43 (2015): 270-73; Sara L. Schwebel, "*Making Americans: Children's Literature from 1930 to 1960*, by Gary D. Schmidt," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 39.2 (2014): 297-99.

[6] Tarbox 273; Schwebel 299.

[7] Manning Marable, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (1986; Boulder and London: Paradigm, 2005).