

INVITED CONTRIBUTIONS

Founding the Juvenilia Press

Juliet McMaster

University Professor Emerita, University of Alberta

ON DIFFERENT occasions I have explained how the Juvenilia Press was born after I had taken on illustrating an early work by Jane Austen. But the last time I told the story, at my Community League, an audience member asked, “But what got you interested in kids’ writing in the first place?” So I had to think back further.

Yes, I wrote up a storm myself when I was a kid, usually illustrating as well as writing. But as an adult and a professional? I remembered an ongoing project with my kids and their neighbourhood friends. The school my kids went to didn’t do art lessons. So I thought, being already a dedicated picture-maker, that I would take on their art instruction myself. And other kids joined in. It became an on-going project. Every Sunday afternoon about ten kids (the numbers fluctuated, and so did their ages) would assemble at our house, and I’d supply large pages and boards for each (no hole-in-corner compositions!). We used good black sharpies for outlines, and non-toxic markers for colours.

Rather than more formal branches of art training—figure drawing, still life, and so on—I settled for compositions that were essentially illustration. I ransacked history, myth, and literature for subjects: we did Odysseus and the sirens, Samson in the temple, Rapunzel in her tower, the Pied Piper, Gulliver among the Lilliputians,

EDITORS’ NOTE: The two essays in this section are revised versions of speeches given by Juliet McMaster and Christine Alexander on Wednesday, 14 June 2023, as part of the 8th International Literary Juvenilia Conference and AGM of the International Society of Literary Juvenilia (ISLJ), which was held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During a Special Session in honour of these two scholars, the ISLJ executive announced the creation of two awards: the Juliet McMaster Award for Emerging Scholarship in Juvenilia Studies and the Christine Alexander Award for Mentorship and Services to Juvenilia Studies.

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the three Wise Men, Spiderman, the Easter Bunny, the Annunciation, the Nativity. We did knights and witches and Vikings and cowboys on bucking broncos, and the old lady who swallowed a fly. We branched out into watercolours (“Tiger, tiger, burning bright!”) and then into ceramics, getting their work custom fired. First we did low-crawling critters like crocodiles, turtles, and mermaids. Then they wanted to do a stand-up human figure. Wet clay legs tend to buckle; so I said we’d do a King in his robes. (The gold crown called for an extra firing.) He stood at about four inches. “Now the Queen,” they said. So we did the Queen, crown and all. “Now the rest of the chess set!” they said. (Turned out they were all precocious chess players.) That was some project!

Someone in my Department of English at the University of Alberta was organising a conference on Children’s Literature, and I was on the conference committee. I proposed a paper on “The Home-Made Children’s Book.” And my proposal was accepted. And the “children’s books” I was talking about were *by* children, not just *for* them.

“You’re all going to make a book!” I declared to my Drawing Class students. Not just a story or a poem on loose sheets of paper, but a *book*, to be bound between covers and stored alongside other books on a shelf. They took to it like ducklings to water. I had the materials to hand: blank index cards of different sizes, pens and markers, sturdy coloured cardboard to be cut to size for covers. By now they were a bunch of young pros. For those who felt the need of some assignment, I provided a suggestion or two: Write a story about a toy you are fond of; or a story or poem with the title *Trapped!*

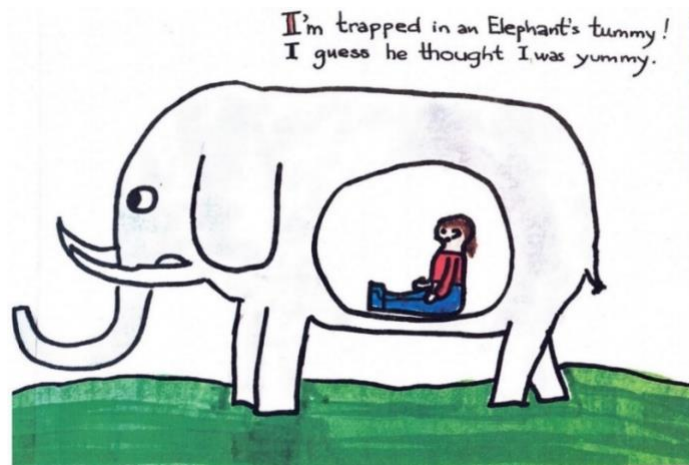


Figure 1. Cath inside the Elephant, first illustration to Trapped!, by Catherine Smith. With kind permission.

Ten-year-old Catherine swung into action, and produced this gem (Fig. 1):

Trapped!

I'm trapped in an Elephant's tummy!
I guess he thought I was yummy.
Yesterday at the Zoo
I was tying my shoe
By the elephant's cage with my mummy,
And that big brute of a dummy
He swallowed me whole;
And I ended up down in his tummy.

My mom was so desperate out there in the breeze
That she sprinkled pepper to make the elephant sneeze.
Her idea was wonderful, great as can be,
And I think she thought of it 'cause she loves me.
At last the great beast sneezed a big sneeze,
And I was blown out to the cool autumn breeze.

Now I warn you, all folks of different ages,
Stay far, far away from elephants' cages.

I'm proud of helping to make that youthful creation happen.

The many other books the kids produced—*The Foot That Stamped*, *Mr. Bunn Goes to the Rockies*, *The Hunchback*, and others, with pictures and in various collaborations, were on display at the conference. Publication!—of a kind.

SO, WHEN an audience member at my Community League talk on the Juvenilia Press asked me how I became interested in writing by children, out came this story about the drawing lessons! I have had happy times enabling and promoting the creative work of children.

My kids and their friends in the drawing class grew up and took wing; and I proceeded with my university teaching and more academic studies, teaching, writing criticism, and giving papers. Then in 1987 came the conference organised by Jack Grey, co-founder of the Jane Austen Society of North America (or JASNA). This AGM was specialised to Austen's juvenilia. Jack was a fan of Austen's early writings: he used to say that only two artists had produced world-class work before they were adults: Mozart and Jane Austen. It was on that occasion that I fell in love with Austen's cheeky tale written at twelve, *The Beautifull Cassandra*. It was my inspiration to turn the characters into small animals, *à la* Beatrix Potter. Cassandra was to be a mouse (I'm fond of mice); the Marquis a lounge lizard, the coachman a frog in a caped great-coat, his horse a tortoise (I could show him cheerfully immune from the coachman's long whip!)

By now I had some standing as a Jane Austen critic; but I had none as an illustrator. It took me long to find a publisher. But finally, with a kind grant in aid from JASNA, the small press Sono Nis took it on; and *The Beautifull Cassandra*, in full glorious colour, was launched at the JASNA AGM of 1993 in beautiful Lake Louise (Fig. 2). It had been a labour of love; and the emergence of my first published picture book was an occasion more joyful than the publication of my more academic critical books.

A further serendipity was that Joanne Foreman, a composer in Taos, New Mexico, fell in love with my version of *The Beautifull Cassandra*, and put it to music for flute and Celtic harp; and presently a choreographer was inspired to create a children's ballet: I could see my Marquis and Pastry-cook and Widow turned into children dancing the roles. The whole can still be viewed among "AGM Publications" on the JASNA website.

Most of that—the work with children, the making of the pictures and my picture book—is pre-history to the Juvenilia Press: but that project grew out of joy and delight in the creative work of young people.

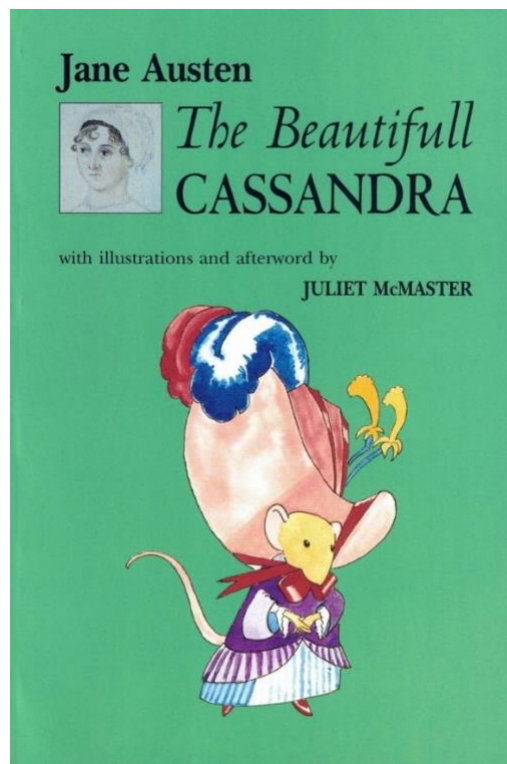


Figure 2. Cover to Sono Nis edition of *The Beautifull Cassandra*, 1994.

I found that in thinking hard about young Austen's *The Beautifull Cassandra*, as one has to do when illustrating a work, I had learned things about her vision and

development. If it works for me, why not for students? In a senior-level course on Austen I offered, as one essay topic among many, “Make an edition of *Jack and Alice*.” Two students took it on, and did a good job—one with the introduction, one with notes. With their permission I decided to invite illustrations from other class members (including me), and I printed up the result, in a slender saddle-stitched pamphlet, as a souvenir for class members. To recover my expenses, I printed some extras, which I sold. And I found to my embarrassment that I had made a profit!

The next specialised course I taught was on the Brontës: and I offered a similar project on Charlotte’s *The Twelve Adventurers*. It was a student who told me that the best copy text would be the edition of Charlotte Brontë’s juvenilia by one Christine Alexander at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. We wrote for her permission: it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship! (I nearly wrote “Beautiful Freindship”—I wonder why.)

Again we had fun contributing pictures, though they hardly qualified as professional. And this time I found I could sell some copies to the Brontë Museum at Haworth. Ah yes, we received recognition in high places.

Next, in another course specialised to Austen, came a pamphlet edition of *The Three Sisters* and *Amelia Webster*. One student in that class, Michael Londry, went on to do a master’s thesis on juvenilia; and from there to Oxford. At the Bodleian Library, no less, he typed in a request for recent work on “Jane Austen”; and what should appear but the little pamphlet that he had co-edited!



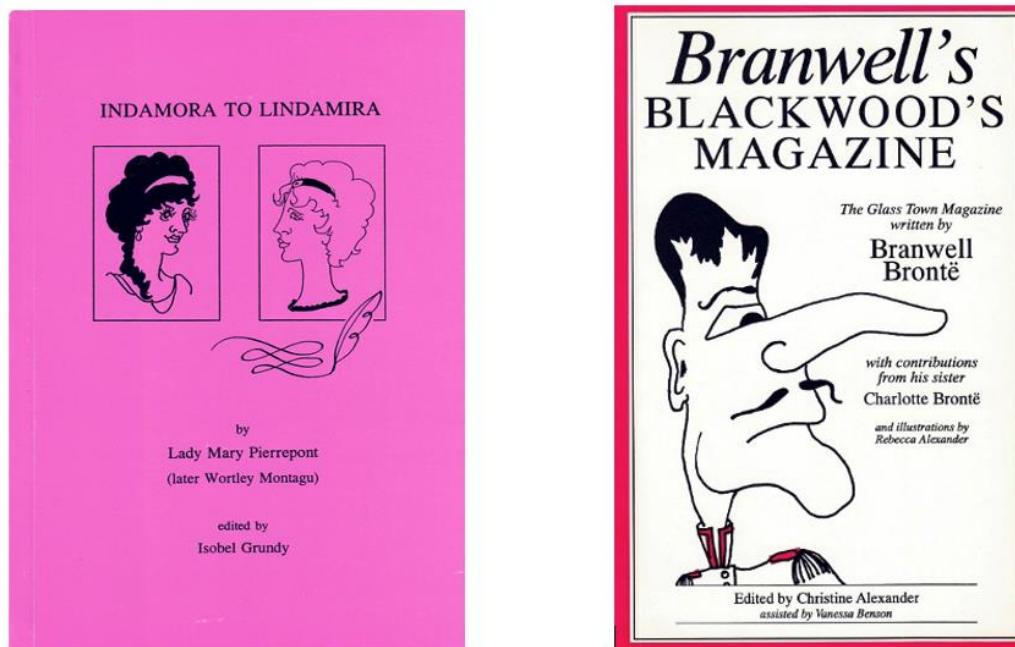
Figure 3. *Juvenilia Press logo.*

Then came a game-changer. My friend and distinguished colleague Isobel Grundy was completing her biography of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu; and she had her hands on an unpublished manuscript Lady Mary had written at fourteen, *Indamora to Lindamira*. Isobel had enjoyed the little books my classes had produced. And she asked me to produce and illustrate this narrative, which she proposed to edit with a student assistant, Susan Hillabold. Ha! I thought: an edition of an early work by a major author, hitherto unpublished, edited by a major scholar. Time for a Juvenilia Press.

I sought permission from our Department Chair; put together an Editorial Board (including Isobel and Christine); started a competition among students in Art and

Design for a logo: and lo, The Juvenilia Press was launched upon the astonished world (Fig. 3).

Because the project had started in the classroom, I made it part of the Press's mandate that one or more students, or apprentice editors, should be involved in the editing process, working alongside experienced scholars; and so learn by hands-on experience such skills as textual editing, annotation, even book design—skills not usually available to them. The university liked the pedagogic element, and put up a modest grant as seed money: so did Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; and I won a grant for research assistance. Isobel's *Indamora to Lindamira*, now not merely saddle-stitched but “perfect-bound,” was our first volume with the Juvenilia Press imprint (Fig. 4).



Figures 4 and 5. Cover *Indamora to Lindamira*, *Juvenilia Press*, 1994; cover of *Branwell's Blackwood's Magazine*, *Juvenilia Press*, 1995.

The pedagogic element has proved an eye-opener for many a student co-editor. Students in English courses use edited texts of classic works all the time; but they take the texts of such works as *Great Expectations* or *Wuthering Heights* as ready-made and God-given. They seldom read the “Note on the Text,” or wonder about editorial principles or choice of copy text. But when they come to edit from manuscript to print—as is often the case—they realise that an editor is making critical decisions all the time about the best presentation of each text. Should underlining be turned into italics? Should spelling errors be corrected, or preserved? Once they become aware

of the issues, these fledgling editors can become passionate. I have heard fierce arguments, for instance, on whether or not “&” should be rendered as “and.” Writing a “Note on the Text” becomes a challenging enterprise.

Book design? Our designer Winston Pei is ready to share his expertise on this front. As part of his project for a course in book design at the Banff School of Fine Art, he took with him the files of our *Love and Freindsnip* edition and *Branwell's Blackwoods Magazine*, edited by Christine Alexander and illustrated by her daughter Rebecca. Winston gave us our “look” (Fig. 5), and he has been our designer ever since.

Annotation too is a discipline worth learning. A good note, students learn, should be informative, yes; but also succinct and relevant and if possible elegant. When I launch on an edition with an editorial team, an early exercise is to identify what needs annotating; and team members can define themselves by the division of labour: who takes on the notes on, say, historical reference?—or literary allusion, period dress, carriages and transport?—all depending on what text is undergoing editing.

My last year of teaching was 1999–2000; and in the same year Christine Alexander invited me to speak at a conference in Sydney on “The Victorians and Their Children.” I took the occasion for asking Christine if she would take over the *Juvenilia* Press. Very fortunately, she was amenable—but not for another two years. I applied for another two-year grant from our Research Council. Since I was retired I was technically ineligible. But they recognised a special need and bent the rules for me, because they approved of the Press and the opportunities it offers for students’ professionalisation.

Meanwhile, said Christine, we should co-edit a collection on the child writer for Cambridge University Press. So we swung into action on that, while she guest-edited volumes of Charlotte Brontë’s *Tales of the Islanders*, and I wound up my General Editorship with editions of Opal Whiteley and Anna Maria Porter. (Lesley Peterson, now Editor of the *Journal of Juvenilia Studies*, was a co-editor on both.)

In November of 2002 Christine threw another conference in Sydney, this time specifically on *juvenilia*. I came with a fat suitcase of *Juvenilia* Press volumes for the hand-over.

Our co-edited collection for CUP, *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, came out in 2005, and it received a front-page review in *TLS* by Dinah Birch. She praised “the quiet work of the *Juvenilia* Press,” and went on, “The larger intention [of the collection] is nothing less than the definition of a new genre within the literary academy” (2). Ha! Now this was something like proper appreciation.

Christine has been Director of the Press since that hand-over. And though I’m retired from teaching, I have continued to edit some volumes with such apprentice editors as volunteer. Having added art history to my research interests,¹ I have brought out some early diaries by artists, such as *Dick Doyle's Diary*, written and illustrated at fifteen by the famous *Punch* artist Richard Doyle, and extracts from the early diaries of Elizabeth Thompson Butler, who stirred the Victorian art world by her dramatic renderings of military heroism. She was inspired by a visit to the field of

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Waterloo; and we brought out *Waterloo Diary*, illustrated with her splendid paintings, on the bi-centenary of Waterloo. This volume was nominated for the Burger Prize in British Art History. And—lucky me!—I continue to snatch the chance at illustrating some of the Press’s volumes. The editing and illustrating continue to offer enjoyment, as well as professional training and opportunity to emerging scholars, and visibility to young writers. It has been a joyful and productive journey.

NOTES

¹ My latest book is a biography of the distinguished Victorian painter James Clarke Hook, R.A.

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