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Here and Now:

Margaret Wise Brown's Revolutionary Approach to Writing for Children

Diplomová Práce

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1 Introduction

Margaret Wise Brown is known as a prolific and widely recognized American-Irish writer of children's literature. Her best-selling bed-time stories *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* introduced her as a pioneer children's writer of the golden age of the American picture book and set the trend for colourful picture books.

This master's thesis aims to study Margaret Wise Brown's innovative approach to writing children's literature and determine the relevance of her books by means of critical analysis. The works subject to analysis are *Goodnight Moon*, *The Runaway Bunny*, and *The Little Fur Family*.

The initial chapter serves as introductory. It establishes the aim of the thesis and specifies the topics and issues under discussion in the following chapters and their sections.

The second chapter covers different aspects of Brown's personal life and writing career. It also explores the influence that Brown's educational background and surroundings had on her choice of becoming a children's writer. Owing to the fact that Brown had a rebellious personality and experienced difficulties in relationships with her parents, subchapter 2.1 elaborates on an uneasy period of her life spent in an effort to find herself and gain financial independence. The major concern of the following subchapter falls on Brown's early and middle adulthood which she spent in New York City. A span of four years (1936-1940) is analysed in order to observe Brown's tutorship at Bank Street College and the factors that influenced her selection of a niche in her writing career. Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 delve into the mission of Bank Street College and present a short biography of its founder and that of Brown's advisor, Lucy Sprague Mitchell. The last subchapter on Brown's biography provides a highlight of her private life.

The third chapter is entirely dedicated to her cooperation with publishing houses, illustrators and other writers. This chapter intends to demonstrate Brown's career ascent with a focus on various collaborations, especially with the following major names in literature and publishing such as Gertrude Stein, Esphyr Slobodkina, Clement Hurd, Harper and Brothers, and Doubleday.

The chapter on Brown's legacy reflects upon the author's literary output and identifies the role her family members and colleagues played in preserving the rights of both of her published and unpublished materials.

The chapter on the historical background of children's literature presents findings that are based on a summary of the following articles "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature" by Michael O. Tunnell and James S. Jacobs, and "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" by C. Lynch-Brown and C. M. Tomlinson. Such a retrospective view of this topic is meant to contrast issues and concepts promoted to juveniles in the past with those favoured now. The paper also mentions important events and landmark publications that facilitated the recognition of children's literature as an independent literary genre and availed such books to the general public.

Brown's insightful experience in working with children at Bank Street College is thoroughly explored in the following chapter. An emphasis is laid on the fundamental principles of the experimental 'here-and-now' approach invented by Mitchell and other Bank Street members that Brown integrated in her manuscripts. The analysis of her approach to writing explains the role of first-hand experience depicted in children's literature.

The critical analysis of the three selected picture books written by Brown *The Runaway Bunny*, *Goodnight Moon*, and *Little Fur Family* is presented in chapter 7. I will discuss issues raised by Brown in each picture book and attempt to present arguments for their relevance in respect of the here-and-now methodology the writer employs in her writings.

Finally, the conclusion provides explanations and findings for the arguments raised and summarizes Brown's considerable input to the popularization of the first-hand experience in children's literature.

2 Margaret Wise Brown's Biography

2.1 Early Years and Adolescence

Margaret Wise Brown was born in Brooklyn in 1910. When she turned five, her parents, Bruce and Maude Brown, decided to move to Long Island. They believed it was a more favourable place to raise their three children, Roberta, Margaret and Graz. As a child, Brown spent her early years in the countryside taking care of various domestic animals, in particular rabbits, fish, and even birds, which cultivated her love for nature and its inhabitants. This explains why naturalistic motifs would later feature many of her literary works. Brown's father would support her interest in hunting and fishing and encourage her adventurous personality. She was always considered to be the life and the soul of the party. The young Brown easily got along with new acquaintances and enjoyed being a thrilling and funny storyteller among the other children. Amy Gary in her book *In The Great Green Room* stresses her creativity and individuality:

She added an extra character, as she often did during their story time. In Margaret's version, Hansel and Gretel had a little sister with red hair. The heroines in Margaret's twisted tales usually had blond hair and blue eyes. Just as often, something terrible befell the red-haired little sister.¹

Brown's mother Maude Brown was a well-educated woman. Having earned a degree from Virginia's Hollins Institute, one of the oldest educational institutions for women in the US, she expressed a firm position on the necessity of the children's education and insisted on them attending good schools and colleges. Owing to free access to their small home library, the Brown children soon found joy in reading fantasy books. They often received a fresh issue of an increasingly popular monthly for young readers called *St. Nicholas*. Unfortunately, schooling was not an activity adventurous Brown relished and dedicated herself fully to. A budding role model

¹ Amy Gary, *In the Great Green Room: The Brilliant and Bold Life of Margaret Wise Brown* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2017), 38.

in the person of her sister Roberta did not enthuse her either. An educational institution with its rigorous standards and strict rules did not seem to be a right place for young Brown to unleash her potential and ambitions.

Teenage years spent in an elite boarding school in Switzerland were altogether tough and lonesome for Brown. For the sake of a job, her father had to relocate to India for two years and sold their house. At first, Brown's new trip to Europe seemed truly intriguing and auspicious to her. As some time passed by, her academic performance suddenly declined. She failed to grow accustomed to the demanding environment of the school and missed her family. Sadly, it did not work the way she dreamed of. Rare visits with her dad, then her mother started to develop anxiety that triggered some mental issues. To Brown's relief, she soon found a local library in which she devoured book after book so as to drive her thoughts away from the unfavourable reality. By the end of the two-year period in Switzerland, she was already dreaming of becoming a renowned writer.

In 1928, both sisters enrolled in Dana Hall, a private school for girls in Massachusetts. At classes, Brown preferred to be addressed with one of the following nicknames: Tim, Timothy, or the Bunny. "Timothy" or its shorter version "Tim" stuck to Brown since she had long fair hair that resembled the grass of the same name. "The Bunny" might be connected with her childhood fun – running in the fields chasing rabbits with dogs.

Brown was known as an individualist with an easy-going, yet sometimes rebellious manner. Right before her graduation from Dana Hall, Brown talked several girls into a night runaway from the dorms. Despite her being fully aware that this behaviour was incompatible with the principles fostered in the institution, she followed her impulses. As it became evident, the next morning the whole group was found out. Brown could have been dismissed from school if it were not for the fact that the most promising student of her class was caught red-handed as well. The administration reluctantly admitted that the reputation of the private institution would be destroyed once the case became known and the students expelled. The girls managed to evade punishment and graduated. Leonard Marcus adds that "Margaret later recalled Dana Hall with gratitude as the first school she had attended that made learning seem worth the effort."²

² Leonard S. Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown: Awakened by the Moon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 68.

After her graduation from Dana Hall, Brown still felt unsettled about what college to choose as her further alma mater. The absence of any certificate guaranteed her little chances of making a living. Brown was deeply concerned about her future and mainly desired her father's approval of her decisions. Gary recounts that once Mr. Brown tried to encourage Brown by sharing an exciting story of his ancestors who started as farmers in Ireland but managed to ascend to a higher social class.³ Brown was greatly impressed and decided to add her middle name Wise to her signature as a constant reminder of her decent ancestry.

In line with this thinking, she opted for Hollins College, formerly known as Virginia's Hollins Institute. The choice was mainly influenced by her family history, with her mother being an alumna there. At the same time, the financial obligations would lie on her father's shoulders who was the only bread-winner. Brown would have to convince him about the rightness of her decision so that he could agree to sponsor her education. The matter was that Mr. Brown did not consider his impulsive and rebellious daughter to be deserving of it, unlike Roberta and Graz. Having earned the reputation of the black sheep of the family, Brown promised her father to aspire higher as a person of serious employment – “a landscape gardener”.⁴

Despite Brown's ambitions and intentions to excel at college, the least wanted pattern repeated in her freshman year. The education she had received in Switzerland was French-based which had a rapid negative influence on her English spelling and grammar. The lecturer was uncompromising to this fact and did not excuse her insufficient linguistic performance. She failed her English course but managed to pass it in the following academic year.

The third year at college did not go smooth either. Brown was about to be expelled from school because of a failed chemistry course. Many of her teachers were kind-hearted and flexible when approached for consultations. Among those was Dr. Marguerite Hearsey who recognized Brown's creative potential and encouraged her to master writing techniques. She was a key figure in Brown's start on the literary stage. Dr. Hearsey believed her rich imagination could get her far, but drew her attention to the spelling problem. They began to cooperate in writing articles for the *Alumnae Quarterly*, the college press. Brown soon came to relish the task and handled it seriously.

³ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 90.

⁴ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 89.

After Hollins, Dr. Hearsey and Brown maintained a warm friendship. They addressed each other via letters sharing hopes and plans. In one, Margaret shared her dream to write great literature and in another she stated that she might as well give up and marry a good man. Dr. Hearsey encouraged Margaret to continue to write that her talent and literary foundation would eventually open the necessary doors.

Guided by Hearsey's blessing and support, she resolved to enrol in a short story course at Columbia University in 1933. She admired Gertrude Stein since Hollins. Gary writes that it was pure joy for Brown to reread her publications and explore her manner of narration:

Stein's repetitious style was meant to evoke clarity, but her use of minimal punctuation frustrated many American readers. In the interview, Stein claimed that punctuation crippled deep understanding of the written word. Margaret wanted to take colored chalk and write that theory all over the blackboard of the professor who had made her repeat freshman English.⁵

Fortunately for Brown, Stein was a regular guest in the United States to deliver various lectures that she would eagerly attend. She found them inspiring as they often produced a long-lasting impression upon her and encouraged her to write and discover her own style.

As some time passed by, Brown came to realize her manuscripts were not a financial success. The agreement to find a stable job and grow independent of her father that they had reached before, did not work out. Now it meant Brown was expected to return home.

⁵ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 104.

2.2 New York City and Steps towards a Writing Career

Brown did not give up the idea of pursuing art. After long negotiations with her father, she moved to an apartment in New York City in 1934. Still sponsored by her father, Brown decided not to waste her time and entered the Cooperative School for Student Teachers in order to figure out whether teaching was her calling. An educational programme she signed up for was offered by the Bureau of Educational Experiments, also widely-known as Bank Street.

At the beginning of an academic year 1935, Brown was accepted as a student and was also offered a position of a teacher's assistant at one of Bank Street's associated elementary schools. At the interview, twenty-five-year-old Brown showed herself as a mature smart person who could implement her rich European and American experience in teaching minors. To establish a contact with a child or to stay on the same wavelength with them appeared natural for her. Despite her feeling amused at the environment she would work in and the Bank Street staff finding her candidacy suitable, Marcus reveals that teaching was not included in Brown's perspectives:

Margaret, however, had already come to an important conclusion: "I don't want to teach". It was only for want of an alternative that Margaret proceeded to apply for admission to Bank Street's Cooperative School for Student Teachers.⁶

If it was not about the finances, Brown would obviously quit. With a crucial decision made in favour of the Bank Street, she gave a start to a new chapter of her life. She quickly fit the environment with its funny tradition to assign nicknames to trainees. Brown created a new one she would go by with – "Brownie"⁷, a derivative from her last name with the suffix *-ie* to sound softer. In the fall of 1935, Margaret Wise Brown joined innovators of Bank Street College in New York.

⁶ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 122.

⁷ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 157.

2.2.1 Bank Street College

The Bureau of Educational Experiments was founded in 1916 by Lucy Sprague Mitchell, alongside her husband Wesley Mitchell, and her colleague Harriet Johnson. Mitchell, driven by humanist works and ideas of John Dewey, set a goal to restructure the American educational system by means of conducting clinical research and studies on children's learning processes and establish educational institutions that would train people concerned about teaching. As a result, The Bureau of Educational Experiments brought together lots of amateurs and specialists from various academic fields to explore how children learn. The findings they collected by well-ordered observations and direct interactions with children are delivered in Mitchell's literary work, *Here And Now Story Book*.

In 1930 Mitchell expanded the bureau and set up the Cooperative School for Student Teachers, an institution to create and refine education programmes for teachers. In seven years, Bank Street Writers Laboratory was established so as to facilitate the production and maintain a stable flow of children's literature to the literary market.

Educational programmes offered within the Cooperative School drew the attention of psychologists, scientists, teachers, sociologists all over the United States. Applicants were eager to learn how to work with juveniles fruitfully and contribute to studies on developmental research. From the very beginning, the college positioned itself as an experimental platform that was the major attraction for the most of the newcomers. The focus was put on its laboratory – a unique feature of the college which enabled the observation of learning processes and collect empirical evidence. During the 1930s, Bank Street successfully conducted various research and workshops on innovative teaching and child's output in early learning and earned a reputation of “an internationally respected center of childhood development.”⁸

The Cooperative School was created to be a neutral space that had no intentions to be identified with any political or social stance. In spite of the fact that its community advocated for diversity in all its activities and welcomed everyone interested, Marcus notes that a dominant part of the applicants were white female

⁸ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 113.

middle-class former graduates of prestigious universities and colleges.⁹ With a good intention to change the narrative for the better, Mitchell announced a special scholarship in Bank Street Writers Laboratory which was to activate budding writers of baby books, and especially to support writers of other ethnic and cultural background.

In 1950, the Cooperative School for Teachers expanded its authority to a greater degree. The Board of Regents of New York State certified the school to award the Master of Science degree. Since then, the Bureau of Educational Experiments has been widely recognized as Bank Street College of Education, or Bank Street for short.

Concerning the organizational part of Bank Street, the college shared a common ground with the American progressive school movement. It was believed that “to teach children effectively one had first to understand how the young experienced reality at every stage of their natural development.”¹⁰ To be more precise on that point, Bank Street proved and adopted a new methodology of teaching according to which children process and comprehend the information given to them more effectively only when a teacher gains a broader understanding of the way a child’s mind pictures their every experience of the reality. The stronger a connection between the questioned and the reality, the faster a child forms an opinion about something.

As Keith Osborn tells in his book *Early Childhood Education in Historical Perspective*, in the past, the teaching model of traditional American schools did not presuppose a child being an individual.¹¹ Curriculums generally gave priority to lessons in discipline, teachers employed corporal punishment and aimed at cultivating certain skills so as to prepare a law-obedient decent man. In contrast to the previous statement, Bank Street was a novelty – a nursery school with its pioneers ready to promote a child-oriented approach which kept their interests and basic needs as a priority. Therefore, workshops carried a form of empirical research, meaning student-teachers were expected to study cases in a real environment, i.e. “to explore the inner workings of the school and the community in which it was

⁹ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 219.

¹⁰ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 125.

¹¹ Polly Greenberg. Review of “Lucy Sprague Mitchell: A Major Missing Link Between Early Childhood Education in the 1980s and Progressive Education in the 1890s-1930s,” *Young Children* 42, no. 5 (1987): 71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42726004>.

situated through field trips and related activities.”¹² In addition, both trainees and young learners could deepen their sensory awareness, for which the scope of available classes listed painting, dance, pantomime, and music. As soon as observations were collected and consulted with advisors, they could gradually implement gained knowledge in practice and soon develop a proper curriculum. Polly Greenberg comments on existing experimental nursery schools of that time:

During the 1940s and 50s, the experimental nursery schools that had evolved in the first third of the 20th Century through the initiative of a number of John Dewey's women students stabilized and were simply called nursery schools. Concepts of the learning- through-play school, learning through planning, doing, thinking, and discussing as the most natural and the most effective way for young children to grow into good people and a love of learning, the teacher as preparer of the learning environment, child guidance specialist, and parent relations person (not as giver of grades, prizes, and punishments), the pivotal role of parents in shaping their young children's present and future lives, the importance of choices for each child, and the importance of time and help to develop friendships and cooperative living styles.¹³

According to Bank Street's ideology, a curriculum should be based mostly on outdoor activities such as short city trips so that children could explore the surroundings. For instance, to meet its inhabitants, to perceive sounds, learn colours, and fulfil basic needs. Mitchell believed that a child should first learn the routine and then conceive the imaginary world. While curriculums were being tested at schools, the teacher-trainees of Bank Street were engaged in brainstorming and argued particular cases in order to adjust their teaching plans and meet planned objectives effectively.

Bank Street is currently a constantly developing platform that works on a solution for complex problems in the sphere of children's learning. The college offers its applicants a broad range of programmes, including bilingual and special education. In addition, in 2010 it enabled applicants to apply remotely for one of

¹² Sherry L. Field and Michelle Bauml. "Lucy Sprague Mitchell: Champion for Experiential Learning," *Young Children* 69, no. 4 (2014): 94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/ycyoungchildren.69.4.94>.

¹³ Greenberg, Review of "Lucy Sprague Mitchell: A Major Missing Link," 75.

the three master's programmes in Bank Street Online. The college is well disposed to collaboration and a long-standing partnership, with the NYC Department of Education's Division of Early Childhood Education, Pratt Institute, and New York City Public Schools also featuring among big partner names.

2.2.2 Lucy Sprague Mitchell

Lucy Sprague Mitchell, the founder of Bank Street College of Education, was born in 1878. Historically, the girls' upbringing of the nineteenth century was under a strong influence of the Victorian tradition that belittled the role of a woman in the society and rigidly defined her place and mission within the household. In spite of rigid ethical morals and norms promoted by the society, Mitchell knew she would not fit into these patterns. Instead, she had always aspired high and acted beyond limits so as to be later identified with the first women who received college education. Being the Dean of Women at the University of California during 1906-1912, Mitchell realized "how important learning through discovery is to people of all ages"¹⁴ and resolved to further advance her interests and seminal ideas in the field of teaching.

During the years spent at Teachers College, Mitchell was heavily impacted by lectures delivered by John Dewey, "a philosopher of social reform, of growth, change, and experimentation in societies and in their schools."¹⁵ In the series of his lectures, she adopted a framework that supported her in the rightness of her intentions. Her own ambitions and ideas corroborated Dewey's view that "education was essentially an organic process whose true end was the nurturing of human growth"¹⁶ and "democracy, as the social system that allowed for the freest possible exchange of information and ideas, provided the optimal conditions for education to flourish and that, conversely, every classroom ought to be viewed as a democracy in microcosm."¹⁷ From that point, Mitchell realized that an educational facility should be

¹⁴ Field and Bauml, "Lucy Sprague Mitchell: Champion for Experiential Learning," 95.

¹⁵ Greenberg, Review of "Lucy Sprague Mitchell: A Major Missing Link," 72.

¹⁶ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 139.

¹⁷ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 140.

seen as a place where individuality of a child would be put in first place and where everyone would learn to act as self-aware members of the society.

The post-civil war period of the first half of the twentieth century was unsettling times for both the social sphere and the system of education. With the rapid promotion of liberal reforms, the role of school in children's upbringing was refined and foregrounded. Besides, teaching model underwent profound changes with a child moving to its center. A great step was made towards popularizing children's psychology. People started to take psychology more seriously, while notable authors such as Wilhelm Wundt and Sigmund Freud began to publish their works and gain influence. Owing to the support of her husband, Wesley Clair Mitchell, and an inspiring model of John Dewey, Lucy Sprague Mitchell set up the Bureau of Educational Experiments in 1916, later to be renamed Bank Street College of Education. There she started to launch various educational courses and offer guidance, which made it possible to approach strategies for teaching early learners from a unique perspective. Gary adds that Mitchell also believed Bank Street would eliminate the disparity between women's educational programs and those of men.¹⁸ Mitchell was governed by a positive intent when she enabled women applicants to have a wide range of graduate programmes and thus fostered the advance in their future careers.

Starting from 1916, Mitchell worked as a lecturer at Bank Street in order to determine children's needs and abilities in learning and integrate a here-and-now approach to teaching in the system. The here-and-now approach recommended that teacher trainees explore everyday lives of young learners through a direct interaction with them, for example, storytelling and group reading, asking children questions and opinions on some matter, for the most important part was to mark the difference between an adult world perception and a child's. As a result, meticulously collected and processed findings inspired Mitchell to publish *Here and Now Story Book* in 1921. The publication was a literary breakthrough as the first illustrative and children's first true-to-life experience book. Next decade she felt more confident to introduce *Another Here and Now Story Book*, a more adjusted summary of her previously published theories and observations.

As Mitchell continued to author and co-author publications relating to pre-school learning, her writing career started to gather pace and soon earned her the

¹⁸ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 133.

status of a prominent figure in American children's education. She put effort to cultivate an interest in writing among the trainees and besides, to summon budding writers of children books, for which the next major step towards here-and-now approach was the establishment of the Bank Street Writers Laboratory in 1937.

Lucy Sprague Mitchell first met Margaret Wise Brown in 1935 on workshops taught by Mitchell herself at Bank Street. It was a class on children's literature that elicited Brown's potential in writing and turned out as a stimulus to choose the literary stage as her calling. Studying at Bank Street soon brought its fruit when Mitchell suggested her and other excelled trainees should join a collaboration on *Another Here and Now Story Book*. For them, the cooperation was Such a life-changing opportunity, which finally paved the way for promising Brown and other here-and-now authors.

One should not belittle Lucy Sprague Mitchell's substantial output in the sphere of education, yet it would be unfair to claim she was at the origins. Polly Greenberg in Review of "Lucy Sprague Mitchell: "A Major Missing Link Between Early Childhood Education in the 1980s and Progressive Education in the 1890s-1930s" pointed out that her role was "a link between historical figures".¹⁹ To elaborate on this point, Mitchell sought inspiration in theories translated by progressive educators of the United States such as Dewey, Thorndike and Hill. Consequently, Mitchell became aware of the direction to put the focus on and how to promote her beliefs, thereby refining existing concepts on first-hand learning and bring them to the common masses was the biggest challenge Mitchell successfully accomplished.

In 1948 she quit teaching at Bank Street, yet her role model still energized and encouraged people around her to advance in the research and further promote student counselling and juvenile writing. Through the agency of cooperative and gifted educators, Bank Street College of Education as a large-scale project did not stall. Indeed, the scope of workshops and programmes was immensely expanded as well.

¹⁹ Greenberg, Review of "Lucy Sprague Mitchell: A Major Missing Link," 73.

2.3 Private Life

Brown's most notable qualities were her innate rebelliousness and the love of freedom which explained her fascination with equestrian sports, hunting with dogs and Gertude Stein's works. She produced an impression of a person who knew her options very well and could stand up for herself if needed. Quite an illustrative example was her first serious relationships with George Armistead. The couple met after Brown finished her junior year at Hollins and set off for summer holidays in Kentucky. Armistead was exactly her type – handsome and fair-haired. In a year the couple announced their engagement and summoned both families to a formal engagement party. During the event Brown unintentionally overheard her fiancée exchanging laughs with her father about her personality. It was heart-breaking that her future husband unveiled his true nature too late. Despite her love for him, her firm personal boundaries compelled her to break off the engagement that very day. In order to avoid a potential conflict, Brown made a conscious decision not to tell Armistead that she had overheard them. She realized that he was not the man she longed to be with. Moreover, a notable difference between their background would emphasize their incompatibility, since Armistead originated from Texas and Brown came from Brooklyn. Gary notices "she longed for something more than being a cattle rancher's wife."²⁰

The year 1940 was full of uncertainty in Brown's employment. She was more hesitant about writing for children. It was then that her private life suddenly became a priority to her. She grew emotionally closer to Michael Strange, real name Blanche Marie Louise Oelrichs, an American writer and performer. They first met in 1939, when Strange was already known to be a controversial figure, for her name often featured in ambiguous and scandalous press headlines. Despite a twenty-year age gap and Strange's notorious reputation, Brown remained loyal and let her feelings for her friend develop.

During the year 1942, Brown became a regular guest at Strange's apartment and occupied one of her rooms as a writing den. Though their connection was growing intimate, and they had already decided to live together, they rarely attended public events together as a couple, not to mention a coming out. Their temperaments

²⁰ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 108.

did not prove to match and suddenly Brown's behaviour became another embarrassing episode for Strange, as Gary writes:

It was true that Margaret was fearful of speaking around that crowd for fear of embarrassing Michael because of her poor grammar and diction. However, the idea that she was merely a satellite hovering around Michael was insulting.²¹

Marcus also argues Brown's disturbing and repressive relationships and her not feeling complete:

One of the chief and abiding facts of their long, erratic, and emotionally difficult relationship was that Margaret and Michael each seriously misjudged the extent of her own and the other's talent, and that both benefited from the misunderstanding in some important way. [...] Margaret was the little poet writing little books for children while Michael was the big poet writing poetry and giving public recitations for the spiritual enlightenment of the world at large.²²

They were obviously incompatible with each other. The model of their relationships featured a clingy and demanding partner that constantly asked for reassurance, whereas the other was independent and expected her partner to rely on her instincts. Despite the ongoing arguments and scandals, the couple stood with each other when Strange's son, Robin Thomas, tragically died. To console Strange and memorialize her son, Brown wrote a story called *Robin's House*. The couple lasted for a total of 8 years, as Strange passed away in 1950.

At some friends' gathering in 1952, Brown met her future fiancée James Stillman Rockefeller, Jr. His last name revealed his affluent lineage, yet it was natural for the man to go with a simple nickname Pebble. In his twenties, he produced an impression of an easy-going and amiable person to Brown. She was charmed, though the traumatizing experience from the previous relationships still haunted her. Brown sensed she should trust the man, for she could not miss the chance. Both enjoyed each other's company and already knew it would work great between them

²¹ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 293.

²² Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 348.

long before Pebble proposed to her the same year. Brown was finally happy to be in the relationships she had dreamed of.

During a short trip to France in 1952, Brown started to suffer from severe pain in the side and was urgently carried to the hospital. The doctor insisted on an operation on the appendix after which she would have to stay under medical supervision for several days more. The surgery went without complications. After a few days in hospital, Brown recovered and was about to be discharged when she suddenly collapsed. As she briefly came to life, the nurse concluded it must have been a thrombus that provoked a stroke. Meanwhile Pebble was heading to the airport to meet Brown, but in two hours he learned from a telegram that she had unexpectedly died. Regrettably, the couple never registered their marriage.

Brown succeeded in heading the revolution in the juvenile literature. The popularization of here-and-now texts with fancy pictures proved trustworthy and effective in the broadening of young generations' mindset. Over the course of nearly a decade, her most admired books *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* have set a new benchmark in the modern children's literature of the twenty-first century. Despite Brown's untimely passing at the age of 42, her sophisticated output still carries much weight, and remains popular and impactful.

3 Cooperation with Publishing Houses, Writers and Illustrators

1936 was a year to mark a great achievement in Brown's starting career. Inspired, she decided to try her luck and sent off some of her stories to *The New Yorker* and Harper and Brothers. The first feedback came from the Harper editor, Louise Raymond. She found Brown's manuscripts good enough and sent her a letter offering to publish one of her stories as a picture book. The chosen material went to print under the title *When the Wind Blew*. Straight after, Raymond requested to see other stories she had already written. As for the *New Yorker*, it did not work out the same way due to an alleged miscommunication.

Brown's valuable contribution to *Another Here and Now Story Book* unexpectedly yet at appropriate time forged connections with Dutton publishing company. The unconventional book was selling great and aroused a lot of interest among reviewers and publishers. The president of Dutton, John Macrae, approached Brown with a proposal to write a children's collection, afterwards released under the title *The Fish With the Deep Sea Smile*. Leonard Marcus mentions Brown's willingness to involve new talents, "for Margaret the project was the first of many in which she took part not only as author but as an impresario enlisting new talent for the field."²³ Surprisingly, the position of the illustrator of the book was assigned to Roberta, Brown's sister.

By the succeeding year, Brown had expanded the list of her achievements. Harper and Brothers signed another contract with her to publish *The Children's Year: Adapted from the French of Lacôte*, a combination of a children's book and a calendar. For obvious reasons, Brown agreed to maintain such a promising cooperation, and her other manuscripts needed advertising as well.

By a lucky chance and certainly by Mitchell's referral, William R. Scott also consented to hire Brown as his editor and writer at William R. Scott Inc., because she displayed sound knowledge of editing and publishing, and children's psychology. Exactly as Gary describes, "Scott's aim was to produce unique children's literature that did not copy what had been done before. Exploring new ways to make books appealed to Margaret's sense of adventure, too".²⁴ More importantly, they

²³ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 211.

²⁴ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 156.

both had an educational background at Bank Street which enhanced their cooperation according to the school's here-and-now approach to children's literature.

William R. Scott was in his late twenties when he enrolled in a teaching programme for parents at Bank Street. He displayed a serious interest in books as well as in book design and a strong desire to launch his own business in publishing. An episodic acquaintance with Lucy Sprague Mitchell in 1937 was definitely a fateful moment for him. Mitchell as a leading name in early childhood education advised Scott to consider juvenile publishing. Clearly, this field was at its dawn, yet there were already plenty of opportunities to introduce an unconventional format and style of children's books. Full of aspiration and exclusive ideas, Scott followed Mitchell's advice to set up a publishing company, with a location in New York City close to a Bank Street office.

As the editor, Brown was responsible for the search of writers and illustrators who would voluntarily join the company or for a low wage. In this case, the word of mouth worked for Scott a great deal. Among those who responded appeared to be Brown's old Bank Street friend Edith 'Posey' Thacher. An artist Clement Hurd who would first feature as the illustrator of *For Bumble Bugs and Elephants* was also recommended to Brown through her friend.

Cottontails was one of the first books published by the company in 1938. Its design appeared unusual and amusing, because the book's shape resembled a rabbit with cotton elements sewn to main characters – bunnies.

Encouraged, Brown sent an invitation to her favourite Gertrude Stein assuming she could also fit in juvenile literature. Leonard Marcus explains that Brown was obsessed with a bold idea that such a big name could author their next children's book to be published – *The World Is Round*.²⁵ It would be beneficial for the publisher as well as for her to collaborate. The least expected, Stein's reply was affirmative, though, the firm received it with a several-month delay.

By fall of 1938, the draft of *The World Is Round* finally reached Scott. Due to Stein's unconventional grammatical structures, and in particular loose punctuation that complicated the comprehension of the story, the publication was delayed until the draft was refined. On the contrary, Brown voted to preserve Stein's unique

²⁵ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 296.

manner of writing even though such a risky and short-sided decision might negatively impact the company's budget. Finally, Scott rejected Brown's proposal and assigned her to edit the draft.

Through months of communication on the final version of *The World Is Round* with Stein, Brown found it challenging to maintain a friendly partnership with her. Stein's ideas were far from being conservative. For instance, she proposed the book's pages would be rose pink to reflect the main character's name – Rose. Such an extravagant idea and obviously no one from Scott was willing to test it. Nevertheless, several illustrators were invited to draw sketches which Stein would later examine and choose. All misunderstandings with the material that happened between her and Scott did not give rise to an irreconcilable conflict and finally, they both reached a mutual agreement on the illustrator. It is worth noting that the choice among the illustrators fell again on Clement Hurd, Brown's old acquaintance.

Still, Brown put forward another candidate for the illustrator of *The World Is Round*. It was a young talented artist Leonard Weisgard. Again, her proposal was not supported by Scott since Weisgard's style was found to be "too dark and sophisticated for American children."²⁶ Amy Gary explains Brown's motives:

Margaret loved his beautifully blended colors and intricate style. If she couldn't hire him for Stein's book, she had others in mind. Some of the major publishing houses had recently launched children's book divisions, so more and more juvenile books were making their way to the bookstore shelves. Too many of them looked the same. Margaret longed for more complex illustrations.²⁷

Indeed, Leonard Weisgard and his creative view on things was exactly what Brown was looking for to illustrate her new project at Scott – a book about sounds. The structure of the manuscript echoed the here-and-now style in which sounds, colours and shapes would picture the environment. No one had ever before illustrated sounds as pictures and engaged the reader to imitate these sounds in a playful style. Published later in 1939, *The Noisy Book* became a bestseller among children.

For her next book, *The Little Fireman*, Brown hired an influential Russian-Jewish illustrator, Esphyr Slobodkina. She already was a well-established avant-

²⁶ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 182.

²⁷ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 184.

garde artist when she first met Brown a couple of years ago at Bank Street to discuss her portfolio. Although, their meaningful alliance was meant to start at Scott in 1938. Pages of the humorous tale *The Little Fireman* were illustrated in Slobodkina's abstract style, for which she implemented a collage art. Her interesting poster-like illustrations introduced a new pattern of a graphic book design that would later feature sequels *The Little Farmer* (1948) and *The Little Cowboy* (1949). A picture book *Caps For Sale* that she authored and illustrated herself, was published by Scott in 1940.

In two years, a sudden conflict based on a racial ground harmed the previously warm relationships between Brown and Slobodkina. Brown, aware that her colleague was of a Jewish background, was prejudiced and released an anti-semitic remark in her presence.

By the beginning of 1940, Scott had published several of Brown's books that she either co-authored or edited. Owing to the notable collaborations with Gertrude Stein and Esphyr Slobodkina as well, the publishing firm earned a status of a reputable company.

Meanwhile, Brown was also present as a seminar lecturer and editor at Bank Street. She completely unleashed her writing potential when her manuscripts or editorial activities were in high demand not only at Bank Street, Scott, or Harper, but at the Walt Disney studio as well. Harper's editor, Ursula Nordstrom, also bought the draft of *The Runaway Bunny*. Brown finished the manuscript in tandem with the illustrator Clement Hurd, and submitted it to Nordstrom to set up a marketing campaign.

Fairly content with the way her children's books were selling, Brown started to challenge her writing skills. Her creative focus shifted to a completely opposite genre – adult books. Among short stories and publications in magazines, the scope of works included an essay about Virginia Woolf's life and a play on a military theme entitled *I Dare Not Die*. Even though there was enough material to submit, Brown was dissatisfied with slow progress due to publishers' refusals to buy manuscripts. In Brown's biography, Gary further comments on her failure:

The short stories she wrote still mirrored her life. [...] These stories were useful for purging her frustrations and rewriting unsatisfactory endings of relationships and arguments to her own liking, but they were little more than diary entries.²⁸

Apparently, Brown was incapable of writing anything that was meant for adult readership. She was still working on potentially appealing themes for grown-ups, yet she could not help but write materials for children. Writing seemed easier for her when she pictured the world through a child's perspective, a technique incompatible with adult books. On the other side, to handle both options at once was not possible either. Eventually, Brown decided to quit children's publishing for the sake of an adult audience. In spite of the fact that she terminated her activity at Scott and Bank Street, working relationships with few small publishing companies remained stable. Brown was ready to commit herself to writing for adults as she kept declining offers coming from other publishers.

Although the choice was made, it was obvious for Brown that a complete change of the role was not possible. She was worried she was missing career opportunities, since she sensed she was promising in children's publishing business. After a short pause, Brown gradually resumed projects on children's literature she had deliberately suspended.

In 1942 Leonard Wisegard introduced Brown to the Doubleday editor, Margaret Lesser. The publisher was interested in the here-and-now style and asked her for some manuscripts. As they agreed to publish her books, Brown announced to Lesser she would write for children under a new penname – Golden MacDonald. She assumed it worked effectively to switch between various names from time to time, since a narration would be viewed from a new perspective. MacDonald's most successful *Red Light Green Light* was published under Doubleday in 1944, and *The Little Lost Lamb* came out the following year. Both books were illustrated by Weisgard.

Brown continued to write during the war years. She pursued the goal to comfort children during hardships and also raise their understanding of a current military situation. A series of comical stories she wrote – *The Bombproof Bunnies* and *The War in the Woods*, were turned down and left at the draft stage because of

²⁸ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 215.

the strong censorship. The entire book printing and publishing sphere was in a rapid decrease. To secure her financial stability, Brown signed a contract with Golden that would prove to offer the most profitable deals.

A poem *Good Night, Room* was drafted in 1944. The story behind the text reflected Brown's dreams combined with childhood memories she once experienced when she was a little girl, in particular her own childhood ritual of saying 'good night' to the things in her room. The imagery of the poem mostly related to the light falling on all objects in the room and the full moon that inspired Brown to revise the title. After negotiations with the editor Ursula Nordstrom, the title was changed to *Goodnight Moon*. Clement Hurd, chosen as the illustrator, was still at war that stalled the publication of the story until 1947.

Of Brown's memorable collaborations at that time, there was the one with Jean Chariot, an artist of a French-Mexican background and also a member of the group of Mexican populist artists. They both met in 1930s when Chariot began as a tutor at Bank Street. He was a gifted illustrator who featured a picture book compilation of Toltec, Aztec, and Spanish legends retold by Amelia Martinez del Rio, *The Sun, the Moon and a Rabbit*.

By the end of World War II, Brown resumed her old projects. One of those was with Dorothy 'Dot' Wagstaff, one of her good mates with whom she was writing horse-related stories, a hobby that brought them closer. Golden agreed to buy the whole collection twice more expensive than publishers. The books came out in 1949 in a bigger format which was Brown's experiment. Among other books published under Golden there were a few Brown worked on together with Posey Thacher.

1946 marked the period when post-war book industry entered the so-called "golden age of picture books".²⁹ The following baby-boom, the advancement of printing techniques alongside with the emergence of new motifs are the three reasons that account for the broadening of creative opportunities many juvenile writers could finally avail themselves of. Publishers were working hard to exercise their printing skills and create winning marketing strategies. Book design turned another branch of the children's book production to advance considerably and to eventually cultivate the visual literacy among the young. The range of illustrated books, known as picture books, expanded as much as the quality of illustrations improved. The

²⁹ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 314.

picture books became another way for a child to make the most of creative thinking, and also explore the real world.

Brown's creative personality found its way to manifest itself in cover art, as she started to conceive various eye-catching book designs including sophisticated shapes or even fur applications placed on covers. She conceived and tested a plethora of methods to vary book covers of her short stories. Gary elaborates on some of her bright ideas and wholesome approach to art:

Pop-ups, die-cuts, shaped books, and novelty add-ons were a few of the ideas Margaret handcrafted in the dummy books she created to pitch to her publishers. She found a luminous paint that would glow in the dark and tried to get a printer to make an ink that would do the same on the pages of a book. That experiment didn't work, but she painted stars on the ceiling of her apartment that glowed down on her as she slept.³⁰

A thorough practical testing of various book designs resulted in Brown's forming useful connections with some artists to agree upon further detailed illustrations. Besides, she started to speculate on techniques to enable textured applications on book covers which were supposed to facilitate the development of child's sensory abilities.

In 1947, due to frequent arguments about her royalties, a ten-year term Brown had worked for Scott ended with the termination of their contract. They could no longer reach agreement on book illustrations either. At the same time, Brown together with Weisgard were engaged in an ongoing project about the essential for children. The book entitled *The Important Book* was intended to be published under Scott but their conflict compelled Brown to sell the manuscript to Harper. As it was inevitable, all her books that were to come out under Scott were immediately cancelled.

In two years, her books under Golden and Harper were either under negotiations or selling very well. Meanwhile, Brown contemplated ways to transform her writings into music and air them on television or radio. With this in mind, she began to rewrite her stories and poems into scripts and also found record companies to

³⁰ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 315.

broadcast them. Among those interested in her product were Young People's Records, Columbia and Golden. Later Brown learned about ASCAP, an Association for Songwriters and Composers. Established connections with musicians helped her improve the acoustics in songs and records. As a result of such contrasting experience, in the winter, a musical version of Brown's book *The Little Brass Band* was chosen to be performed by the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall.

The peak of Brown's career fell on the second half of the 20th century. The selling rate of *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny* levelled high. At the same time, Brown was invited to run a children's column in *Good Housekeeping magazine*. She was also actively writing daily menus for *The American Woman's Cook Book*. The aforementioned publications introduced her to the readership as a modern and witty children's book writer and finally made her name widely known across the US.

The publication of *My World* in 1949, another picture book created in a collaboration with Clement Hurd, was soon considered "a companion"³¹ of the two previous works *The Runaway Bunny* and *Goodnight Moon*. The book was to be a continuation of the little bunny's story about the exploration of the world. In comparison to the aforementioned companion books, *My World* gave the idea of the main character, a child, who was familiar with the setting they lived in and interacted with adults without assistance.

The period from 1950 to 1952, Brown spent giving interviews to newspapers and was in journeys to Europe and back in New York City. In between the trips she had to handle pending projects at Golden and Harper. Further negotiations with the editors did not solve the matter, so the situation pushed Brown to require her manuscripts back. Marcus explains such decision was based on her feeling that her editors deliberately controlled or even limited the production of the material.³²

Meanwhile, Brown was waiting for the beginning of a lawsuit Scott had filed against her. The case was the breach of contract to *The Noisy Book* series after she withdrew the manuscripts and handed them to Harper. Brown also planned to confront her former boss, but her legal advisor reasoned her out of submitting

³¹ Claudia H. Pearson. *Have a Carrot: Oedipal Theory and Symbolism in Margaret Wise Brown's Runaway Bunny Trilogy*. Birmingham: Look Again Press, 2010.

³² Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 661.

claims. Although it was impossible to restore their close friendship due to personal issues, they reconciled.

Owing to the extensive practice at Lucy Sprague Mitchell's Bank Street school and the joint authorship of *Another Here and Now Story Book*, Margaret Wise Brown was able to mindfully promote herself as a creative writer and editor of the children's literature. She continued to advocate for the here-and-now approach, taking pleasure in collaborations with well-established and ascending writers, illustrators, and publishers.

4 Legacy

Brown drafted her will shortly before she passed away in 1952. Quite unexpected for her relatives and her acquaintances, the will vested a certain Albert Clarke III with the full rights for her published and to-be-published manuscripts, plus future royalties from already published works. The principle heir appeared to be a nine-year-old son of Brown's friend Joan Clarke whom Brown once helped with accommodation during summer holidays in Vinalhaven. The choice of the heir, as Marcus speculates, might have been conditioned by the fact that Brown felt Albert was "first of kin"³³, in the sense that the boy's adventurous nature matched hers to a great extent and thus evoked the maternal instinct.

Alongside the published books, there was a plethora of unpublished and drafted manuscripts and notes found at Brown's property. In addition to them, there was a considerable number of poems she authored but never came to mention. To revise the material and ensure the protection of each piece by copyrights was no easy task but for her sister Roberta it seemed feasible. Roberta together with Bruce Bliven, Jr., Brown's old friend, and Leonard Weisgard mutually agreed to take control over that matter. From that moment on, publishers no longer had editorial rights for any material before and after its publication. Such restrictions considerably sped in 1952 the publication of a dozen more finished works authored by Brown. Among works published posthumously, Marcus especially mentions, *Wheel on the Chimney* that was announced a "Caldecott Honor Book for 1952."³⁴

Brown was a highly creative personality with boundless potential she wanted to elicit through the television and radio as well. She was planning to have TV series and programmes based on her published books broadcasted but multiple ideas were never negotiated with producers.

The full compilation of her children's books, unfinished works, songs, multiple drafts and related official papers was left in its original way and arranged as the so-called "the Margaret Wise Brown Collection"³⁵. At the suggestion of Brown's good friend Jessica Gamble Dunham, the collection was eventually handed over to the Memorial and Library Association of Westerly, Rhode Island.

³³ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 758.

³⁴ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 762.

³⁵ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 770.

Owing to the effort made by a large circle of her acquaintances and friends, more than a hundred of exciting stories on topics that concern the young readership was published and are yet to appear on bookshelves.

5 Philosophy Behind American Children's Literature in the Past

In order to analyse Brown's approach to the children's literature, it is important to approach the subject under discussion from a historical context. In particular, I would like to observe the dynamics of the development of the American children's literature. The focus will be put on the time span starting from the 17th century up to present days. Facts discussed will be drawn extensively from the following articles "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature" by Michael O. Tunnell and James S. Jacobs, and "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" by C. Lynch-Brown and C. M. Tomlinson.

During 1600-1800, children's literatures available in America were imported mainly from Europe. Reading materials were not decorated with illustrations or cover design, since both were considered a luxury at those times. Besides, the language of texts sounded rather determined and appeared bland. Such children's books largely promoted religious ideas and beliefs that were meant to cultivate a proper mindset and educate young readers. A limited access to children's educating materials should also be considered, since many families could not afford high fees and extra expenses. Similarly, few children who could read were either in charge of the household or had to work leaving little or no space for schooling at all.

Paradox as it was, the so-called children literature was not child-oriented. An entertaining story and pure joy were rather kept as the background leaving more space for a moral lesson. Michael O. Tunnell and James S. Jacobs explain that the situation continued roughly until the end of the nineteenth century when bookshelves could finally offer young readership books reflecting their interests and needs.³⁶ Instead, young readers made their choice in favour of adventurous and captivating books such as *Gulliver's Travels*, which was actually meant for adults.

With the gradual development of printing techniques and illustration, the 19th century discovered legendary folk and fairy tales authored by the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen: *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1835), *The Little Match Girl*, (1844), novels by Lewis Carroll *Alice in the Wonderland*, (1865), stories by R. Kipling, and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, (1876). Several years later the publishing industry introduced magazines for children. The first

³⁶ Michael O. Tunnell and James S. Jacobs, "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature," *The Reading Teacher* 67, no. 2 (2013): 80, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24573537>.

popular American monthly magazine for children was called *St. Nicholas Magazine*, which contributed to the establishment of high standards for children's literature in the US. Issues featured selected stories, poems, illustrations and book reviews. Publications featured influential and seminal novelists and playwrights, such as Louisa May Alcott, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Marcus in *Margaret Wise Brown. Awakened by the Moon* highlights that the juvenile book editorship at its dawn favoured mostly female candidates. The reason for men actively opting out of the editing of such books lies in a deep-rooted stereotype that everything connected to a child belongs to a woman's nature.³⁷ As soon as the children's literature gained ground, publishing houses also started to expand. Although editorial positions in these companies were ranked low and promised little career advancement, the employees were eager to improve and invest in book design and production. The first children's divisions were opened in such huge publishing houses as Macmillan and Doubleday.

By the beginning of the twentieth century book illustrators had earned a greater status as the demand for children's picture books was growing significantly. Importantly, illustrations in baby books acquired a new function owing to the position that pictures partially substituted long texts and could represent the whole story.

This period celebrated the appearance of modern picture books. The first to introduce this genre was Beatrix Potter, "the mother of the modern picture story book."³⁸ In 1902, she published a colourful book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Among other timeless fantasy novels one could also relish *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) by L. Frank Baum, and *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) by A.A. Milne. Other recognizable picture books included the so-called "American favourites"³⁹ such as *Goodnight Moon* (1947) by Margaret Wise Brown, and early publications by Dr. Seuss.

The post-war period marked the growth of publication of the children's literature. State programmes and government grants aided the spread of books in schools and other educational facilities. With the emergence of professional awards and associations, more writers were encouraged to join this field. In 1938, the Randolph Caldecott Medal, named after a prominent artist and illustrator Randolph

³⁷ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 332.

³⁸ Tunnell and Jacobs, "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature," 80.

³⁹ Tunnell and Jacobs, "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature," 82.

Caldecott, was established in America. Later in 1950s, novelists and writers were nominated for the first international award for children's writing, the Hans Christian Andersen Prize.

As soon as the field of children's literature had become widely acknowledged, a number of genres began to expand. C. Lynch-Brown and C. M. Tomlinson in *Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?* report the growth of series books often referred to as "formula fiction,"⁴⁰ and note their positive impact on leisure activity. Characters in these books were depicted according to precise criteria: "white complexion, conservative mindset and politically aware."⁴¹

The 1960s was considered a revolutionary decade for the children's literature. This historical period witnessed lifted taboos and upcoming changes in previously established social norms. Revisited themes and motifs featured in children's books provoked a significant cultural shift and began to manage attitudes among the nation – people were not afraid to express themselves freely and clearly. There appeared a new genre – new realism. Authors tended to publish books that highlighted topics and issues relatable to a real person. For instance, private life, death or uneasy parent-child relations. Besides, the literary world witnessed the growing influence of the civil rights movement, Black Power, and Black Arts movements as well as the development of independent black press. The volume of published books on cultural diversity, multiculturalism, races and minorities drew attention of many readers and brought about the promise of change for everybody. Owing to the establishment of The Mildred L. Batchelder Award and The Coretta Scott King Award⁴², African American writers were recognized as a part of the American literary scene.

The 1970s and 1980s raised poetry to a new level. Particularly relevant was The Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children established by The National Council of Teachers of English in 1977. The literary scene finally honoured and promoted promising poets who published for young readers. Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson emphasize the success of Silverstein's poem (1974), *Where the Sidewalk Ends* that was listed on the New York Times Best Seller list and lasted there for 3

⁴⁰ Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson, "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" *Peabody Journal of Education* 73, no. 3/4 (1998): 232, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1493206>.

⁴¹ Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" 232.

⁴² Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" 233.

years.⁴³ From that time, brief and humorous juvenile poetry was given a special place in the children's literature.

Progressive printing technologies of the 1990s has significantly advanced the production of colourful picture books. Now the visual part of a book appears more colourful and appealing. Finally, the readership could choose something based not only on cost but also on a cover art and the story line. Surprisingly, it has become a trend for adults to purchase children's books that would do well as a gift both for adults and for minors as well. For instance, Tunnell refers to the overwhelming and long-lasting success of the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling: originating from the United Kingdom, they are still ranked the first juvenile books to appear as both the adult and children's American bestsellers.⁴⁴

Clearly, experiments with the form and content of children's literature bear no limits. Recently, bookshops have started to display a wide range of various board books for toddlers. For instance, the market offers "virtually indestructible little books for babies"⁴⁵ and "toy (engineered) books"⁴⁶, the latter is a picture book with an integrated voice operated programme and tools a child can manipulate with. For instance, an electronic pen, sticky elements, beads or scratch pads. Modern children's books also raise public and political awareness with the aim of mainstreaming the agenda and encourage young ones to keep up with it.

The juvenile publishing industry demonstrates an inconceivable variety of issues introduced through creative visual representations and in various forms. In this sense, children's books have in fact been on a par with adults'. However, Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown treat this trend with scepticism. They call on those concerned about a favourable future of the children's books to be on the alert:

"Popularity of a book should not be considered the measure of worth, yet the profit motive seems to be at work here as well. Thus, selecting the best books and helping get them into the hands of young reader require that teachers and children's librarians be knowledgeable of excellent literature. That knowledge can only be gained by reading, discussing and evaluating books with other professionals."⁴⁷

⁴³ Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" 240.

⁴⁴ Tunnell and Jacobs, "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature," 85.

⁴⁵ Tunnell and Jacobs, "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature," 85.

⁴⁶ Tunnell and Jacobs, "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature," 86.

⁴⁷ Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson, "Children's Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?" 249.

6 Margaret Wise Brown and Her Approach to Children’s Literature

In this chapter, I would like to expand a discussion about the method of teaching and writing for children that was invented together by Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Bank Street members. This chapter includes two sections.

Section 6.1 delves into the essence of an experimental here-and-now approach. The major features will be discussed. Section 6.2 explores and analyses Brown’s experience in working as a student tutor and a follower of the here-and-now approach at Bank Street College. A special focus will be put on the writing strategies she developed to produce children’s books.

6.1 Here-and-now Approach

As it has been mentioned in the subchapter 2.2.2, Lucy Sprague Mitchell and her colleagues were enthusiasts who experimented with complex non-traditional learning in order to later prove that early learning based on active games, observation of the nature, communication and the first-hand experience would be the most effective means to educate toddlers and older children. This was the reason why Mitchell put forward a curriculum that advocated children’s choices and met their needs. Evidence of this was seen in the emergence of teaching programmes adapted to the way toddlers conceive their surroundings. One issue, pretty feasible, was to study nuances and detect potential stumbling points while contemplating a model of such teaching programme, whereas the other issue was trickier since an adult had to approach the world from a child’s perspective – “that total immersion was what she called the “Here and Now” world of the sensory realm.”⁴⁸

The core of the here-and-now approach lied in making young learners familiar with the essential first, be it a basic notion, a phenomenon or general truth. Bank Street pioneers believed children at the age of two or three were able to experience the world within a nursery school with necessary teaching aids provided.

⁴⁸ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 146.

Though, unfortunately, the vast majority of teaching materials for children available at that period of time did not suit requirements set by Bank Street methodologists and supervisors. An outdated concept presented in the books constituted the main problem. A conventional plot was trivial and revolved only around a child and their experience within a household. Published by Mitchell in 1921 *Here and Now Story Book* was to demonstrate to the child what a modern outdoor life in a city was like by means of catchy rhymes and word plays, since “stories about skyscrapers and airplanes, tugboats and trolleys acknowledged the demographic and social reality that in 1921 the majority of American children lived in cities.”⁴⁹

Another striking feature of the here-and-now approach was that it challenged old views held by children literature writers and publishers on how to introduce literature to the young. In fact, the content of a juvenile book used to be mainly a fictional material of the so-called legends and myths, that had loose ties with a real world. Mitchell agreed that fairy tales should be indeed listed in a child’s home library, yet she believed any child was fully capable of creating imaginary scenarios without the urge for any external stimulus such as fantasy stories.⁵⁰ In other words, Mitchell argued that their effect on the child’s imagination and emotional upbringing would be more sufficient only after this child recognizes their place in the society and could orient themselves in everyday situations.

6.2 How Brown Worked with Children

For Margaret Wise Brown, the period spent at Bank Street as the student-teacher appeared insightful and impactful. She composed short stories, songs or poems to later read them to her younger students. At the same time Brown carefully listened to how the children described the essential in order to note their instant reactions on various aspects such as form, content and an overall impression on a literary piece. She worked hard to encourage her class to make use of creative thinking. All these explains the way how here-and-now approach was applied in practice.

⁴⁹ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 149.

⁵⁰ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 150.

Such experimental technique was to help an adult gain deeper understanding of what topics and wording could not only arouse interest among children, but also keep them focused for the longest. By means of the every-day monitoring, Brown learned that for a child, the content of a story as well as the language should be both simple to comprehend and delightful to read again and again. She had to simplify her sophisticated adult vocabulary in favour of melodic nursery rhymes, that in fact would appear the best-fitting pattern for her made-up stories. Thomas Mintz accounts on the attraction of an infant to nursery rhymes in the context of the children's psychology: "It would seem that the infant's first pleasures on hearing the rhyme stem from two sources: first, the enjoyment of the rhythm and beat (the "music") of the rhyme, and second, the intense interaction with the orator (usually the parent) who recites the verse and conveys a meaning."⁵¹ It did not take Brown long to get expected results. The children soon became more responsive and proved no difficulty to learn such simple verses and repeat them. After a while, they even became engaged in reciting their own lines. It would not be fair to claim that children's books of the past did not include funny simple verses, they were there indeed, but the prevailing part of a literary piece was still in a form of a longish monotonous text. In contrast to modern picture books, its old-fashioned versions could not captivate a child's attention.

Apparently, it was a long thorny path Brown had taken so as to realize that she should incorporate her inner child in her manuscripts if she longed to receive children's approval. Gary mentions Brown's forcing herself to change the thinking for the reason mentioned above:

She returned to the fields and woods of Long Island and physically positioned herself to see things from a child's point of view. She picked daisies, watched bugs crawl, and gazed at clouds floating by. But it was going to take more than seeing the world from a child's physical vantage point to capture those moments clearly. She had to experience it as a child would, with a sense of awe and wonder. That was the real key to writing for children. She had to love, really love, what they loved.⁵²

⁵¹ Thomas Mintz. "The Psychology of a Nursery Rhyme," *American Imago* 23, no. 1 (1966): 24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26302260>.

⁵² Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 138.

The more Brown experimented with a child's perspective in her manuscripts, the bigger grew her potential as a good juvenile writer. Pure dedication to the subject matter stimulated her to finish a story or a poem as soon as an idea appeared. Then the finished material was tested in the classroom. It is worth being mentioned that for the sake of objective criticism, Brown never revealed to the children she was the author of a great deal of the material which was tested on them.

In the course of time, Brown maintained a cooperative attitude with Bank Street College of Education. First as a Bank Street student, and then as its staff member, she opted for coaching within the college. She felt certain she could host workshops for amateurs and teachers on how to interact with children in here-and-now style – that was when she manifested her commitment to the here-and-now philosophy. Robinson fairly sums up that “Brown filled an important ideological role. But ironically, much of her own work drew upon the imagination and that part of a small child's basic reality that is firmly rooted in fantasy.”⁵³

⁵³ Lillian S. Robinson. “Review of *Goodnight Mush*, by Leonard S. Marcus,” *The Women's Review of Books* 10, no. 1 (1992): 20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4021368>.

7 Critical Analysis of the Selected Picture Books

Three timeless children's classics written by Margaret Wise Brown will be critically analysed with respect to the here-and-now approach. In particular, I will discuss the message and ideas of each literary piece that contribute to its relevance for the contemporary audience.

The discussion is divided into three subchapters organized in a chronological order according to the date of publication. The materials selected for the analysis are *The Runaway Bunny*, *Goodnight Moon*, and *Little Fur Family*.

7.1 The Runaway Bunny

The Runaway Bunny (1942) is the first picture book in “the bunny trilogy”⁵⁴ that includes *Goodnight Moon* and *My World*. The plot revolves around a little bunny who intends to run away from the mother bunny, while she reassures her child that she will always be on the alert and accompany him.

The Runaway Bunny has a captivating backstory that adds depth to its context. Impressed with a medieval ballad about a person who pursued his beloved, Brown decided to employ its rhythmic pattern for this story. A ballad implies a story or a song that explores themes such as love, loss, or longing and exhibits rather a melancholic tone. The tone of a ballad can vary which is primarily determined by themes addressed or the attitude of a poet towards the listener. M.H. Abrams adds that “the popular ballad is dramatic, condensed, and impersonal: the narrator begins with the climactic episode, tells the story tersely by means of action and dialogue (sometimes by means of the dialogue alone), and tells it without self-reference or the expression of personal attitudes or feelings.”⁵⁵ Brown slightly modified the idea of the ballad so that an adult story would turn into “a stirring evocation of the universal need of two and three-year-olds to test the world beyond the mother's protection in such a way as to be assured that the mother will always be there should

⁵⁴ Claudia H. Pearson. *Have a Carrot: Oedipal Theory and Symbolism in Margaret Wise Brown's Runaway Bunny Trilogy* (Birmingham: Look Again Press, 2010), 8.

⁵⁵ Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Heinle&Heinle, 1999), 18.

something go wrong.”⁵⁶ Thus, an unusual form and style of *The Runaway Bunny* emphasizes its impact.

The Runaway Bunny is narrated in the third person. The narrative of the story features an omniscient perspective. It does not reflect upon the characters’ inner thoughts and feelings or provide an evaluation of their actions, but rather presents the setting, agents and events. In this case, the reader is able to view the conflict between the protective mother bunny and her curious child from a neutral side and form his own opinions on the matter.

In terms of the form, the whole story is presented by means of a dialogue between the mother bunny and her child. In the beginning, the little bunny says he is going to escape but his mother stays steadfast and turns his words into a verbal catch-up. The baby bunny personifies a child who is easily carried away with storytelling and fantasizing. His rich imagination manifests itself in his intention to separate from his mother and explore the world as a fish, a rock, a bird, a flower, a boat or an acrobat. Anaphoric repetition of the construction “If you ..., I will...” is a frequent pattern in the dialogue that reinforces the idea of a never-ending verbal battle. The following lines are to prove the point:

Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away.
So he said to his mother, “I am running away.”
“If you run away,” said his mother,
“I will run after you. For you are my little bunny.”
“If you run after me,” said the little bunny,
“I will become a fish in a trout stream
and I will swim away from you.”⁵⁷

The verbs of motion such as ‘run’, ‘swim away’, ‘climb’, ‘find’, ‘fly away’ observed in the text emphasize the motifs of running, chasing, changing locations that prevail throughout the whole story.

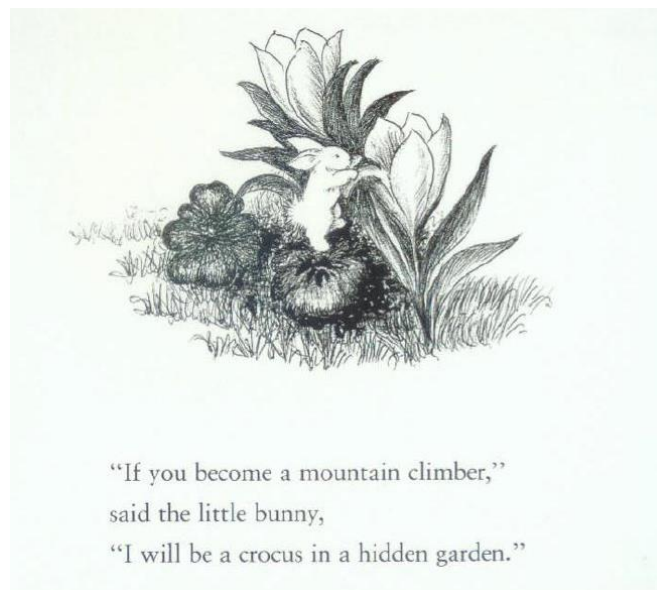
The imagery deserves a special attention. Brown extensively employs the image of the escaping bunny to foreground themes such as desire of a child to gain

⁵⁶ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 35.

⁵⁷ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny* (The USA: HarperCollins Publishing, 2005), 3.

little independence in order to explore the world. The bunny mother symbolizes protection, caress and unconditional love. The mother-son relationships are conveyed by means of the dynamic verbal game in which the mother bunny is willing to demonstrate her superiority over the child. The game ends as she replies thoughtfully “Have a carrot.”⁵⁸ when the bunny admits there is no need to escape. The last line of the story emphasizes her unwavering devotion and guardianship meant to rescue the little bunny from his curiosity.

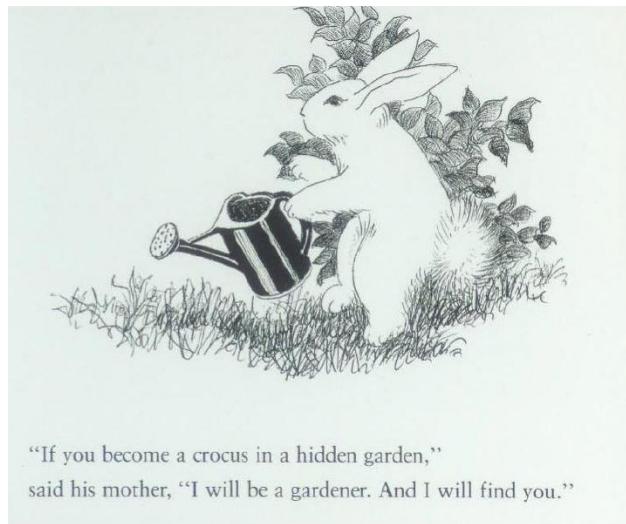
The illustrations with visual aids are to enhance the bunny’s quest for adventures. The detailed and vivid artwork done by Hurd complements the text and offers the young reader an exciting immersive experience. Each page in the picture book is decorated with a sketch in pencil placed on one page and followed by a set of colourful pictures of a similar setting next page. Interestingly, the text appears only on pages decorated with the sketches, whereas colourful illustrations do not have captions at all. *Pictures 1-4* are to clarify the point.



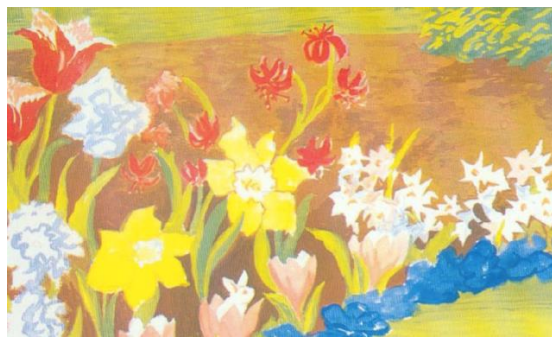
*Picture 1: The Runaway Bunny by Clement Hurd, 2005.*⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 33.

⁵⁹ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 12.



Picture 2: The Runaway Bunny by Clement Hurd, 2005.⁶⁰



Picture 3: The Runaway Bunny by Clement Hurd, 2005.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 13.

⁶¹ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 14.



Picture 4: *The Runaway Bunny* by Clement Hurd, 2005.⁶²

In this case, the pictures in colour play a special role in captivating the reader's attention. The absence of the verbal cues signals the reader to pause and explore the illustrations more attentively. Whereas, the pictures in black and white do not feature bright elements that capture the eye of a child. By means of vibrant colours Brown might have wanted to stress how exciting the life of the bunny becomes when he reunites with his mother, and how dull it turns if he attempts to run away.

The Runaway Bunny is meant for two to six-year-olds, since its idea remains relevant from the point of children's development. As it has been discussed prior, Brown highlighted through the image of the little bunny the desire of an infant to independently explore the world outside the house, and also confronted with several crucial issues such as the innate fear of loneliness and alienation from parents. J. Nicholson and Quinn M. Pearson explain that fear is a natural yet inevitable feeling all children experience over a period of growth.⁶³ An emphasis is put on the correlation between fears and the age of a person, as the children's development undergoes several stages so does the focus on fears change respectively. They also suggest that a fear of unknown people and separation from parents are prevailing fears at the early stage.

A particular emphasis could be deduced from Brown's childhood, as it was marked by challenges. Her father was a regularly absent figure in her family. In

⁶² Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 15.

⁶³ Janice I. Nicholson and Quinn M. Pearson. "Helping Children Cope with Fears: Using Children's Literature in Classroom Guidance," *Professional School Counseling* 7, no. 1 (2003): 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42732530>.

addition, she was apart from her parents, attending boarding schools abroad. Marcus suggests the book might also reflect the author's personal experience. He draws a parallel between the main character of the *The Runaway Bunny* with Brown who once carefully invented a runaway plan:

It's not clear how old she was at the time, but she seems not to have made it out of the neighborhood; the ever-resourceful Margaret must have been quite young. Perhaps, like the hero of *The Runaway Bunny*—like virtually all child runaways—Margaret did not so much wish to leave home as to know that someone there would notice her absence and care enough to find her.⁶⁴

One of the potential reasons why Brown ran away may have been the fact that she often felt abandoned and neglected by her family. Besides, her father was not a frequent figure in her upbringing due to his job in another country. As a matter of fact, middle children, as of Brown's case as well, tend to suffer from loneliness and call their parents' attention to themselves at the expense of their own safety and wellbeing. Although, deep in their minds, such children do not favor to cause any trouble and inconvenience for the household.

Clearly, the story does not feature the father of the little bunny. The central position is assigned to a protective mother figure who takes responsibility for her child's future and wellbeing – the exact pattern that was not often observed at the Browns. Indeed, for an infant as well as for an older child, the presence of the mother in his life is crucial. The story summarizes an imaginary yet healthy mother-child bond to reassure the young readers that they are protected and taken care of in the real world.

Nicholson also mentions that *The Runaway Bunny* has been approved as one of the picture books best employed for classroom counselling.⁶⁵ The book's concept operates according to the here-and-now standards, since the plot leads a child to intuitively identify itself with the main character, contemplate possible outcomes of a situation and consciously transfer behavioural patterns upon his experiences. Indeed, such preventive guidance is more likely to teach children coping strategies through facing a fearful situation from both sides.

⁶⁴ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 58.

⁶⁵ Nicholson and Pearson, "Helping Children Cope with Fears," 18.

7.2 Little Fur Family

In 1946 Harper agreed to advertise Brown's book called *Little Fur Family*. It soon appeared in book stores that same year, which was a year after the publication of *Little Lost Lamb*. Gary uncovers the fact that the piece had a size of a pocket-book and looked unique with a limited design of the book case:

Margaret made a petite, hand-sewn book she called Little Fur Family and wrapped it in real rabbit fur. Garth Williams illustrated the fur-covered book that was placed into a slipcover box with a round hole to showcase the fur.⁶⁶

Finally, the book offered the readership two variants of the cover: one was wrapped in faux fur and the other, which was a limited edition, was decorated with mink fur. Owing to Harper's successful marketing campaign, the demand for both versions was rapidly increasing.

The picture book consists of a page-turning story about an adventurous fur creature which wanders in the forest and explores the surroundings. It addresses relevant issues such as diversity and self-acceptance.

The story opens up with a fictional fur family which is busy with a morning routine. Colourful illustrations first depict two most important members of the household. The first to appear is a father who says goodbye to his family before he leaves for "his little fur world"⁶⁷ which might be interpreted as his work, for where else fathers might leave early in the morning. The other is portrayed as a caring mother who is bathing her little child which emphasizes her nurturing role. The focus then shifts to the main character – their furry baby. Interestingly, it is impossible to determine what kind of animal are the members of the fur family. *Pictures 5-6* may clarify the point. Moreover, the baby does not possess any explicit gender identity. Both Brown and the illustrator Garth Williams do not specify these details. Perhaps, the omission of this information may effectively challenge the perception of gender stereotypes by children.

⁶⁶ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 316.

⁶⁷ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 1974), 8.



Picture 5: The father in Little Fur Family by Garth Williams, 1974.⁶⁸



*Picture 6: The mother and the little fur child in Little Fur Family
by Garth Williams, 1974.⁶⁹*

The story unfolds in the little fur family's house. After the morning bath and breakfast, the little fur child is going to play in the forest on its own. By means of a repetition of a word 'wild' as in "It was a wild wild wood."⁷⁰, "wild flowers"⁷¹,

⁶⁸ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 8.

⁶⁹ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 9.

⁷⁰ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 13.

⁷¹ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 13.

“wild winds”⁷², “wild nut trees”⁷³ and “wild grass”⁷⁴, the narrator stresses that the area is unknown and might be unsafe for the child. Despite a potential threat, the little animal is cheerful and goes further to the deep forest.

Next location takes place where its grandfather resides. He is depicted as a prototypical person of age – hunchbacked, holding a walking stick in his hand and wearing warm sleepers (*Picture 7*). In order to present a realistic portrayal of this character and a true-to-life setting, Brown makes an extensive use of onomatopoeia. The term ‘onomatopoeia’ refers to a linguistic term where a particular word, or a group of words imitate the sound of an action or an object they are associated with.⁷⁵ For instance, onomatopoeic ‘thump’ in the line “And grandpa came walking *thump thump thump*”⁷⁶ evokes a sound of a shuffling gait which is characteristic of elderly people. When the child and the grandpa sneeze, they utter “Kerchoo!”⁷⁷ which is also onomatopoeic and resembles the sound of sneezing. In addition, this scene might teach the young how to express politeness and kindness in order to maintain positive social interactions with people of different backgrounds, age and beliefs. Using an illustrative example of the mindful and respective characters whose speech displays phrases ‘bless you’ and ‘thank you’, the child acquires valuable cultural norms and customs and becomes a part of the society.

⁷² Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 13.

⁷³ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 13.

⁷⁴ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 13.

⁷⁵ Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 199.

⁷⁶ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 16.

⁷⁷ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 16.



Picture 7: *The grandfather and the fur child in Little Fur Family*
by Garth Williams, 1946.⁷⁸

An unknown path through the wood leads the fur child to a river. There it sees fish for the first time. After a long observation it learns that the fish do not have fur and legs which make them weak and vulnerable. Intrigued by a new discovery, the fur child catches one to examine it closer but in a moment throws it to the water – “Kerplunk!”⁷⁹ This onomatopoeic word imitates a water splash as the fish plunges into the river. In a moment the main character catches a ladybug to study the way it looks like. In contrast to the fish, the insect has a pair of shiny wings which enable it to fly away immediately. “Ssip!”⁸⁰ and the bug is released into the sky. At the end of the adventure, the fur child catches a creature that looks alike. It has warm fur and a pink nose but is twice as small as him. The fur child is sentimental towards its small version and puts him back on the ground. As soon as the sun sets and the sky is getting darker, the main character returns home. Its parents are waiting for him to hug, gave it supper and read to bed.

Marcus adds that for Brown, the idea of *Little Fur Child* bore a deeper meaning:

⁷⁸ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 16.

⁷⁹ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 20.

⁸⁰ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 21.

As an author, Margaret often returned to the compelling (and at the time largely unexplored) theme of the power struggles implicit in growing up: young children's determination to make the world conform to their will and to acquire a sense of self-mastery.⁸¹

By the example of mindfulness with which the little fur child interacts with the fish, the insect and his 'little twin', the young reader perceives an image of a child who knows how to control their power and how to display an appropriate attitude towards those who surround them.

The language of the picture book is a great example of Brown's creativity. The onomatopoeic words she makes extensive use of are catchy and easy to read. Such words perform a significant role in introducing a child to the world of sounds that surround him. Pairing a sound with an object it associates with, the child broadens his sensory experience and improves listening skills.

In addition, *Little Fur Family* demonstrates a number of cases of amusing rhymes found in the text that teach children words and word-formation. Below, there is an example of a free rhyming verse which follows the ABBCDE rhyming pattern:

There was a little fur family
warm as toast
smaller than most
in little fur coats
and they lived in a warm
wooden tree.⁸²

An unusual simile 'warm as toast' found in the first line of the stanza above, allows the reader to spark his own imagination to decode the imagery and also contributes to a memorable reading experience. The following stanza with the ABCDBE draws the reader's attention to the little fur child's experience in the woods through the rhyming words *trees-sneeze*:

⁸¹ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 56.

⁸² Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 7.

Wild nuts fell from the wild
nut trees
and wild grass tickled the
fur child's nose,
tickled his nose and made him
sneeze.⁸³

While reading *Little Fur Family*, the young readers are immediately immersed in a usual morning routine, therefore they might parallel the setting presented in the picture book with cultivated habits and social roles set within their household. For example, the little fur creature as well as a vast majority of children takes a morning bath and spends free time in the fresh air. Its mother is nurturing and affectionate. As usual, the head of the family spends most of the day at work and returns home in evenings, but both parents equally partake in the upbringing and are willing to sing their child to sleep. The observations the little fur child has made helped him to acquire a valuable lesson about diversity. The living beings might not share the same qualities or features, but they possess their own peculiarities that make the world amusing. With a reference to this experience, children learn to respect and embrace the diverse world. The examples above are illustrative enough to prove the story resonates with the young, because they are unlikely to come across unfamiliar or vague behavioural patterns in the text.

7.3 Goodnight Moon

Published in 1947, *Goodnight Moon* has since become Brown's most famous and adored book. Despite positive reviews from *The New York Times* and other trustworthy media sources, it took the book long to gain recognition from New York Public Library. Gary reveals that the head librarian did not approve of

⁸³ Margaret Wise Brown and Garth Williams, *Little Fur Family*, 12.

the ideology of the here and now style and refused to stock the book.⁸⁴ This fact eventually halted the emergence of *Goodnight Moon* in libraries for nearly two decades.

Goodnight Moon is a bedtime book that tells children a story about a baby bunny and his routine before going to bed. The story is narrated in the third-person narrative. In this narrative, the omniscient perspective reveals fascinating insights into the character's world. The bedtime routine being the main motif of the picture book is viewed from a child's perspective which introduces the young reader to a realistic setting in a friendly and comforting manner.

The scene opens in a spacious bedroom referred to as "the great green room".⁸⁵ The narrator describes the setting of the bedroom in a chaotic manner:

In the great green room
There was a telephone
And a red balloon
And a picture of-
The cow jumping over the moon
And there were three little bears sitting on chairs
And two little kittens
And a pair of mittens
And a little toy house
And a young mouse
And a comb and a brush and a bowl full of mush
And a quiet old lady whispering "hush"⁸⁶

At first sight, the connection between the objects is either absent at all or seems vague. Pearson compares the lines mentioned above with "free association exercises used in psychotherapy, and "stream of consciousness" writing used by the modernists."⁸⁷ To be more precise, Pearson stresses that Brown's style of writing resembles Virginia Woolf's, a modernist essayist and writer who expressed her

⁸⁴ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 341.

⁸⁵ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *Goodnight Moon* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 1991), 4.

⁸⁶ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *Goodnight Moon*, 11.

⁸⁷ Claudia H. Pearson, *Have a Carrot: Oedipal Theory and Symbolism in Margaret Wise Brown's Runaway Bunny Trilogy* (Birmingham: Look Again Press, 2010), 34.

thoughts, feelings and experience through interior monologues. This phenomenon became her personal writing style and was widely known as the stream of consciousness. As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, Brown sought inspiration from modernists Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf when she was finding her way into creative writing. Speculating on that fact, I might assume that the structure of *Goodnight Moon* echoes Woolf's manner of writing.

The main character of *Goodnight Moon* is a personified genderless baby bunny who is getting ready to bed. There is another character shown – an older female bunny which is introduced to the reader as “the old lady”⁸⁸. It is worth noticing that the lady's relation towards the bunny remains uncertain. Nor the narrator or the little bunny addresses her as ‘mother’ or ‘grandma’. She does not feature in the story as a meaningful character either. From time to time the old lady marks her presence only with a soothing “hush” uttered several times. For this reason, the little bunny appears more foregrounded in the story and occupies more space than actually the objects surrounding it. The narrator's voice also seems to be speaking on its behalf. The reader's attention is still drawn to the various items in the bedroom that contribute to the wholeness of the setting. Before bed time, the bunny says goodbye to everyone and everything that surrounds him in the bedroom.

Goodnight Moon is written in a form of a rhyming verse. In particular, there is either a compact little text or few lines which are placed under each illustration. Verses do not adhere to any particular rhyme scheme; therefore, the lines own an original rhyming pattern. The stanza below mirrors the structure ABCDC:

In the great green room
There was a telephone
And a red balloon
And a picture of-
The cow jumping over the moon⁸⁹

Here, the rhyming words *balloon-moon* found at the end of the third and fifth lines respectively create an end masculine rhyme, since the words rhyme on

⁸⁸ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *Goodnight Moon*, 11.

⁸⁹ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *Goodnight Moon*, 6.

single syllables which are stressed. Such rhyme creates a natural pause between the third and fourth lines and enables a smooth transition to the following line.

Another free verse demonstrates the ABBCCD rhyming pattern:

And there were three little bears sitting on chairs
And two little kittens
And a pair of mittens
And a little toy house
And a young mouse
And a comb and a brush and a bowl full of mush⁹⁰

The rhymes *bears-chairs* and *brush-mush* at the beginning of the stanza above and at its end respectively consist of a single stressed syllable and are also masculine. Whereas, the rhyming words *kittens-mittens*, *house-mouse* serve as examples of end feminine rhymes, because the rhymes match initial stressed syllables of these words. This rhyming pattern is softer than the masculine rhyming pattern and resembles a lullaby which makes the flow of the text sound natural and attaches a soothing tone. In addition, the anaphoric repetition of the conjunction ‘and’ contributes to the continuity of the text and emphasizes its melodic pattern.

The language of *Goodnight Moon* deserves special mentioning. Brown is widely known as the children’s author whose writing style bore much resemblance to a child’s speech. For that reason, she would omit complex sentences in favour of short catchy lines, so that the wording would be both entertaining and accessible to any child. For example, the text of *Goodnight Moon* includes words that often constitute the lexical minimum of a three to four-year-old child, to which belong numerals, animals (e.g. *kitten, mouse, cow, etc.*), colours (*green, red, etc.*). Altogether, the choice of the ordinary words answers the main requirement of the here-and-now approach – to teach the young readers the basics through simple adapted vocabulary.

The illustrations observed in this picture book are characterized by their unsophisticated nature, which is common for children’s picture books. Each picture is accompanied either by few lines of the text or one word which develops the skill of reading the illustrations and extracting necessary information from them. However,

⁹⁰ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *Goodnight Moon*, 10.

the pages demonstrate depictions of both typical and uncommon details which in some way disagrees with the here-and-now principles. For instance, the interior of the bedroom features odd and rare colour combinations such as green walls and a red floor. A corded black telephone standing on the nightstand and the fireplace do not fit a traditional child's bedroom either. These items rather suggest the idea that the bunny is falling asleep in the old lady's room. Brown did not conceal the fact that she was driven by emotions and her childhood memories when she was working on the manuscript. Marcus adds that after long-lasting negotiations, Hurd agreed to include the following realistic depictions of Brown's household in the illustrations:

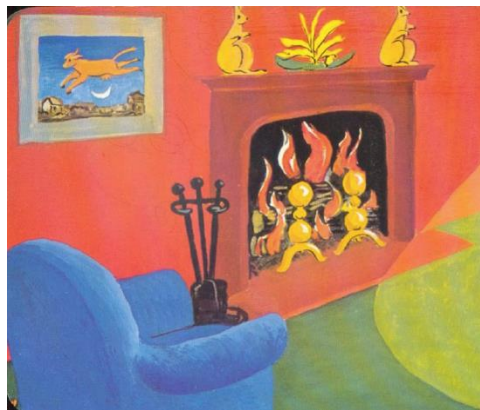
Clem's illustrations perfectly captured Margaret's dream and had used her own living-room-turned-bedroom as the story's setting. Her own green walls, accents of yellow, and her big bed with its bright red spread were perfectly captured in Clem's illustrations. So were her rocking chair, table, and black telephone. The great green room with the red balloon was her own bedroom and, like her, the little bunny in the story looked out at the moon and stars through the room's huge window. She also recognized the arched marble fireplace Clem used in his paintings.⁹¹

If compared with *The Runaway Bunny*, the illustrations in *Goodnight Moon* suggest an interesting issue worthy of discussion. As it has been mentioned in section 7.1, *Goodnight Moon* sequels *The Runaway Bunny*, with the little bunny as the protagonist. The connection between these two picture books is also strengthened by details observed on the pictures below. *Pictures 7-8* feature the setting of the bedroom in *The Runaway Bunny*. *Picture 7* illustrates the room with red walls, a green floor and a cosy fireplace. On the wall, there is a painting of a flying yellow cow. *Picture 8* centers the reader's attention at the mother bunny on a rocking chair holding the little bunny in striped pyjamas in her arms. *Pictures 9-11* belong to *Goodnight Moon*. First and foremost, the bedroom on *Picture 9* contains an identical colour palette, but the colour of the walls and floor is swapped on *Picture 7*. The little bunny on *Picture 9* is wearing the familiar striped pyjamas seen on *Picture 8* earlier. The bedroom in *Goodnight Moon* has the fireplace as well. Surprisingly,

⁹¹ Gary, *In the Great Green Room*, 341.

there is also a painting of “*The cow jumping over the moon*”⁹² hanging on the wall behind it. *Picture 10* depicts the old lady knitting in the old rocking chair resembling the bunny’s mother shown on *Picture 8*. Another striking feature is a black and white painting seen behind the old lady (*Picture 10*). The episode illustrates a white bunny fishing in the river and refers to a coloured scene from *The Runaway Bunny* (*Picture 11*).

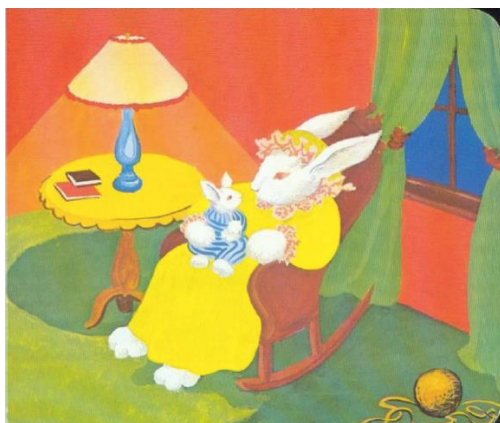
In summary, the small details mentioned above recur and emphasize the on-going elements that have symbolic significance for both *Goodnight Moon* and *The Runaway Bunny*.



*Picture 7: The interior of the room in The Runaway Bunny by Clement Hurd, 2005.*⁹³

⁹² Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2005), 6.

⁹³ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 30.



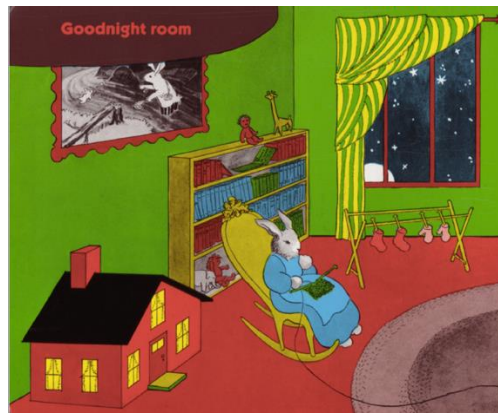
Picture 8: The mother bunny and the little bunny in Runaway Bunny by Clement Hurd, 2005.⁹⁴



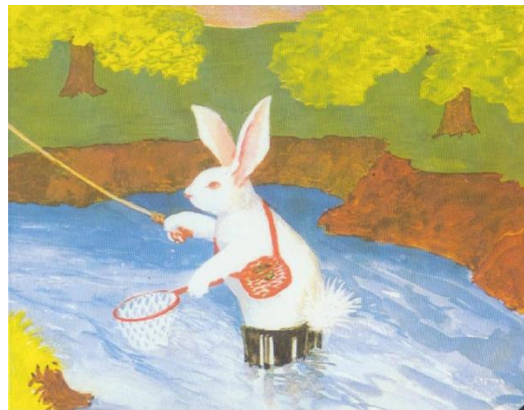
Picture 9: The bedroom in Goodnight Moon by Clement Hurd, 1991.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 31.

⁹⁵ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *Goodnight Moon*, 5.



Picture 10: The old lady in the great green room in Goodnight Moon by Clement Hurd, 1991.⁹⁶



Picture 11: The mother bunny fishing in The Runaway Bunny by Clement Hurd, 2005.⁹⁷

In the past, the portrayal of the bedtime ritual was not a common motif observed in children's books. Authors mainly used to feature fictional characters that were not tied to the real world, and in general, the children literature was to form a proper moral behaviour. Meanwhile, *Goodnight Moon* guides young readers to view and consider the night time routine from the perspective of the little bunny who personifies a child. This fact allows the conclusion that the shift of the angle from which the story is seen has acquired a more child-oriented mode. Brown seemed to have adopted some realms of the modernist writers' philosophy. She succeeded in pairing "The modernist aesthetic of recreating in art the immediacy of

⁹⁶ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *Goodnight Moon*, 12.

⁹⁷ Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd, *The Runaway Bunny*, 7.

sensory impressions”⁹⁸ with “young children’s natural reliance on their senses.”⁹⁹ In other words, *Goodnight Moon* does not load the young reader’s mind with instructions, but instead presents a pleasant story about a bunny kid based on a real-life occurrence which children face on a daily basis.

⁹⁸ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 237.

⁹⁹ Marcus, *Margaret Wise Brown*, 237.

7.4 Conclusion to the Chapter

Margaret Wise Brown dedicated a great deal of effort to exploring a child's nature to deepen her understanding of his thinking processes. Ironically, she lacked experience in motherhood but displayed a remarkable ability to establish a friendly contact with children. At first glance, the picture books I have analysed in this chapter may not seem to align with the principles of here-and-now approach. The presence of fictional elements such as personified animals do not distinguish Brown's picture books from fairy tales and fantasy stories of the past. On the other hand, what in fact makes her stories significant and revolutionary is a reference to an actual environment in which every child is growing up and real-life issues he might relate to. For instance, everyday routine, friendship, diversity, the nature and living beings that are around us. The appealing narratives and colourful illustrations contribute to the emotional development of a child and facilitate the comprehension of the idea of a picture book through reading images. In addition, amusing nursery rhymes and the lack of verbosity make the texts sound similar to a child's speech, as if a child shares with the reader what is on his mind. Each story embodies a relevant challenge narrated in a comfortable and familiar manner any young reader is able to comprehend and make his own conclusions drawn from an exclusive experience.

Conclusion

Margaret Wise Brown was one of the first authors whose picture books were written for children in a children's language. Brown was exceptional in children's literature that boosted her writing career fairly quickly and worked well towards establishing long-lasting partnerships with influential publishers, big names and illustrators. This paper is an attempt to introduce to the reader Brown's unique and revolutionary literary approach to writing children's literature through the elucidation of her biography which underlie the context of her writings. To provide a full background on Brown's works, her educational background at Bank Street and literary achievements were also observed.

The initial chapter helps to understand why the relocation to New York was a significant as well as a major step Brown took on the way to build a thriving writing career. Bank Street College was the proper ground that introduced Brown to the specifics of the children's sense perception and psychological development. Lucy Sprague Mitchell whom she met at the college in 1935, was a passionate educator and powerful leader who managed to make Brown and many other people, driven by enthusiasm and ambitions, close allies. Bound by the same realms, Bank Street members contributed to early learning and popularization of unconventional picture books that introduce the real world to a child through first-hand experiences. The here-and-now approach heavily promoted within the college became the major concept on which Margaret Wise Brown's most enjoyable picture books are based on.

It is worth mentioning that the catalytic role of Lucy Sprague Mitchell as well as the experience gained within Bank Street College had a great impact on the formation of Brown's writing style. By means of the careful observation of children's speech, Brown figures out that the simplicity of the language is the key to establishing contact with her target audience. The narrative of the stories tends to resonate more with the young readers, for the texts mirror their manner and style of speech. *The Runaway Bunny* is filled with playful and repetitive phrases that keep young readers engaged with the plot. Melodic nursery rhymes of *Goodnight Moon* serve as a lullaby and ensure a memorable reading experience.

At Bank Street, Brown acquired sufficient skills to manifest herself as a progressive writer of the children's literature. Chapter 3 observes how she continued

to advocate for the here-and-now approach that eventually inspired many writers and publishers to collaborate with her. Her great personal achievement was to co-author *The World Is Round* with a prominent writer and a role-model Gertrude Stein.

The chapter on the historical background discusses the beliefs and ideas that lied behind the American children's literature during the 17th-21st century. In retrospect, the early juvenile literature used to neglect the child as the main reader, its interests, and besides its mindset remained an obscure and the least explored notion. As the interest in the children's psychology grew, the structure and design of children's books underwent profound changes. Plots narrated in the books became more child-oriented and tailored towards the interests of its target readership. The technological progress availed the opportunity for colourful printing that erased boundaries in the book design. The second half of the 20th century put the children's literature on a par with books meant for adults emphasizing social issues and political agendas to raise children's awareness.

The major part of the paper intends to deepen the understanding of the here-and-now approach which Brown heavily relies on in her writings. The ideas and concepts she integrated in her picture books accounted for a major change on the children's book market of the 20th century. Those changes include the shift in perspective, the themes raised, the language of the stories, and the setting depicted.

The analysis of the selected children's books carried out in chapter 7 proves that Brown was the first writer who attempted to illustrate the world through a child's perspective. All the main characters of the picture books under analysis are small animals which remind us of curious toddlers. The little bunny in *The Runaway Bunny* believes it is mature enough to see the world on its own and wants to run away from the mother bunny. *Little Fur Family* reveals the story of a furry creature that enjoys his new experience with the inhabitants of the woods.

The realistic portrayals of childhood in each story suggest that Brown's writings are several steps ahead of the formal and didactic writings that were prevalent in children's literature at that time. She managed to modernize the ideas for her manuscripts to stress the shift from children's books on morals to its contemporary and exciting printed companions to the world. *Goodnight Moon* illustrates the bedtime routine every child could relate to. *The Runaway Bunny* depicts a caring and protective parent figure that will be with a child no matter where they go or what

they do. *Little Fur Family* raises such issues as diversity and the exploration of the world through the senses.

Books by Brown account for the revolution in the American children's literature that took place at the second half of the 20th century. The author expressed her concerns about a child's curious nature and intended to explain complex issues such as love, loss, or fear in a child's manner. In order to explore and convey what children might feel and think, Brown had to let her inner child take over in the writings and proceed in a funny and exciting writing style. Such an approach acknowledged her as an innovative children's writer on the literary stage and revolutionized the trend to treat children as equal members of the society who display a genuine interest in sounds, nature phenomena, and learn the world through their own feelings and first experiences.

Resumé

Americko-irská spisovatelka Margaret Wise Brownová je známá především pro svou velice plodnou kariéru psaní dětské literatury. Její nejznámější pohádky „The Runaway Bunny“ (1942) a „Goodnight Moon“ (1947) stanovily nové trendy pro ilustrované knížky, a v době Americké zlaté éry ilustrovaného vyprávění ukotvily její místo jakožto průkopníka v této oblasti.

Tato práce si dává za cíl představit experimentální přístup Margaret Wise Brownové k psaní dětské literatury, a to skrze shrnutí jejího života a vzdělání. Obsahově je rozřazená do sedmi kapitol, z nichž se každá zabývá jinými aspekty autorčina života a tvorby. Hlavní výzkumnou metodou je analýza, a to sice ve dvou formách. První je analýza Brownina literárního přístupu, která poslouží k hlubšímu pochopení metod a technik, které její tvorbu značně odlišuje od jiných knížek té doby. Druhou je kritická analýza vybraných povídek, které ilustrují, na jaká témata se autorka ve své tvorbě zaměřovala. Primárními zdroji pro kritickou analýzu budou povídky „Goodnight Moon“ (1991), „The Runaway Bunny“ (2005), a „The Little Fur Family“ (1974).

První kapitola slouží jako úvodní, představuje cíl práce a blíže stanovuje témata, která budou v následujících kapitolách probírána.

Druhá kapitola se skládá ze tří podkapitol, přičemž se každá samostatně zaměřuje na jinou ze tří klíčových etap autorčina života. Zkoumá, jak Brownino vzdělání a okolí ovlivnilo její rozhodnutí začít psát knížky pro děti. První podkapitola přibližuje období jejího sebepoznávání, a poukazuje na nelehké počátky její kariéry. Ty se nesly převážně ve snaze se finančně osamostatnit od rodičů, se kterými, v kombinaci se svou vzpurnou povahou, neměla ideální vztah.

Následující podkapitola se zabývá léty strávenými v New Yorku v době její časné až střední dospělosti. Rozmezí let 1936 až 1940 je klíčovým obdobím, kdy Brownová vyučovala na Bank Street College. Tato část také zmiňuje faktory, které Brownové pomohly zformovat myšlenku, kam dále ubírat svou spisovatelskou kariéru. Sekce 2.2.1 a 2.2.2 hovoří o cílech stanovených školou Bank Street College a uvádí krátký životopis její zakladatelky Lucy Sprague Mitchellová, která zároveň Margaret Wise Brownové blízce radila. Poslední podkapitola o životě Brownové obsahuje krátké shrnutí jejího osobního života.

Třetí kapitola se zabývá výhradně spoluprací Brownové s vydavateli, ilustrátory a dalšími spisovateli/spisovatelkami. Tato kapitola popisuje Brownin vzestup na vrchol a zaměřuje se na spolupráce s několika významnými literárními osobnostmi, konkrétně Gertude Steinovou, Esphyr Slobodkina a Clementem Hurdem a vydavatelstvími Harper and Brothers či Doubleday.

Kapitola čtvrtá se ohlíží nad autorčiným odkazem, co se stalo s jejími vydanou i nevydanou tvorbou po její smrti. Důležitá je také role, kterou hráli její kolegové a rodina ve snaze zachovat nesměrné množství materiálu, který po sobě zanechala.

Aby bylo možné Brownin přístup ke psaní dětské literatury analyzovat, je důležité se nejdříve poohlédnout za historickým pozadím celého žánru. Následující kapitola se konkrétně zaměřuje na vývoj dětské literatury v Americe s důrazem na období od 17. století po současnost. Retrospektivní pohled na toto téma pomáhá poukázat na kontrast mezi myšlenkami a problémy, které bývaly předkládány dětem v minulosti, oproti těm, které se s nimi řeší dnes. Současné poznatky s přihlédnutím na historii dětské literatury přináší shrnutí článků „The Origins and History of American Children’s Literature“ od Michaela O. Tunnella a Jamese S. Jacobse „Children’s Literature, Past and Present: Is There a Future?“ od C. Lynch-Brownové a C. M. Tomlinsona. Ty také zmiňují důležité události a specifická díla, která stála za ustanovením dětské literatury jakožto samostatného žánru a dokázala dostat tyto knihy do povědomí široké veřejnosti.

Chytrý způsob, jakým Brownová dokázala pracovat na Bank Street College s dětmi je podrobněji popsán v kapitole další. Důraz je zejména kladen na základní myšlenky experimentální „here-and-now“ metody, kterou Brownová ve svých knihách uplatňuje a se kterou přišla Mitchellová a další členové Bank Street. Analýza jejího přístupu k psaní poodkrývá způsoby, jakými se děti mohou přiučit novým věcem za pomoci vlastního myšlení.

Samotné kritické analýzy povídek „The Runaway Bunny“ (2005), „Goodnight Moon“ (1991), a „Little Fur Family“ (1974) se nachází v kapitole 6. Cílem tyto kapitoly poukazovat na problémy, na které se autorka v každém příběhu zaměřuje, a zkoumat jejich význam v rámci „here-and-now“ metodologie, kterou sama Brownová ve svých příbězích uplatňuje.

Závěr práce doplňuje o poznatky k jednotlivým argumentům a vyzdvihuje autorčin značný vliv na popularizaci způsobů v dětské literatuře, jakými děti poznávají skrze

vlastní zkušenosti svět kolem sebe. Shrnuje, že Margaret Wise Brownová se snažila co nejlépe pochopit dětské myšlení. Ačkoliv se paradoxně nikdy matkou nestala, věděla, jak děti přemýšlí, snadno proto dokázala se všemi bez problémů vycházet. Na jednu stranu nemusejí vybrané povídky nutně spadat do kategorizace pro „here-and-now“ metodu. Přítomnost smyšlených prvků jako například personifikovaná zvířata neodlišují díla Brownové od jiných pohádek nebo děl v rámci žánru fantasy. Co na druhou stranu její tvorbu odlišuje, je odkazování na skutečné prostředí, ve kterém děti vyrůstají, a reálné problémy, se kterými se každé dítě může potýkat. Přítomnost veselých říkanek a jednoduchost textů samotných skoro připomíná dětskou mluvu, jakoby dítě samo ke čtenáři promlouvalo, a sdělovalo mu, co si právě myslí. Každý příběh nabízí jedinečný zážitek, který je mladému čtenáři předán známou a snadno pochopitelnou formou.

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Annotation

Name: Yuliya Gabelko

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Abstract:

This master's thesis is an attempt to introduce to the reader Margaret Wise Brown's experimental approach to writing children's literature by means of an elucidation of her biography and educational background. The paper also demonstrates the relevance of this approach by means of analysis of the author's selected picture books. The works under analysis are Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon*, *The Runaway Bunny*, and *Little Fur Family*.

Anotace

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Klíčová slova: dětská literatura, Bank Street College, přístup „here-and-now“ k dětské literatuře, knihy s ilustracemi, rozvoj děti

Abstrakt:

Tato diplomová práce má za cíl představit experimentální přístup Margaret Wise Brownové k psaní dětské literatury, a to skrze shrnutí jejího života a vzdělání. Práce také stanovuje důležitost autorčina přístupu skrze literární analýzu jejích krátkých povídek. Těmito povídkami jsou „*Goodnight Moon*“, „*The Runaway Bunny*“, a „*The Little Fur Family*“.