

As Told By the Cabin Boy: Memoirs of Adventure by Child Authors

In this talk, I discuss how children of the 1920s and 30s both embraced and transgressed the protective measures put in place for their wellbeing. More specifically, I will argue that the adult society that felt increasingly responsible for children's welfare equally longed for reassurance that worldly enterprise and childhood innocence could co-exist in young lives—whether that enterprise brought children into contact with the danger-ridden high seas or the noxious consumerism of the publishing industry. To demonstrate how children, too, supported the mythology that a benign form of independence and risk-taking was possible, I will contrast the organizations and rhetoric concerned with children's protection in the 1920s-30s with the contents and reception of contemporary juvenile adventure logs: David Binney Putnam's *David Goes to Greenland* (1926), Kennett Longley Rawson's *A Boy's-Eye View of the Arctic* (1926), Barbara Newhall Follett's *The Voyage of the "Norman D" as Told By the Cabin-Boy* (1928), and Lis Andersen's *Lis Sails the Atlantic* (1936). The ocean setting of these non-fictional juvenilia reflects the fluidity with which adults met these tales: while the contents of these juvenilia clearly marked the children as extraordinary adventurers, privileged (and at-risk) beyond their peers in their journeys to far-away destinations and their access to publication, adult reviewers persistently repackaged these memoirists as envoys of childhood normalcy.

The fact that these juvenilia engendered several sequels makes it apparent that readers found in these narratives the welcome suggestion that restrictions placed upon childhood were a means of freeing it from danger, without over-restricting the child's circumference. As the promotional material for Rawson's text states, "They sailed 6,000 miles, crossed the Arctic Circle twice, fought through the dreaded reaches of Melville Bay, launched their planes over the unknown Arctic *and returned safe and sound*" (my emphasis). The non-harrowing conclusion of Rawson's adventure resonated, I argue, with a society increasingly ambivalent about its own moves to circumscribe children's actions and with a generation of children set upon breaking these bounds both on the high seas and in print.