

# Stephen W. Meader: His Contributions to American Children's Literature



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## Abstract

Stephen W. Meader published forty-four books of adventure for children from 1920 through 1969. His books successfully captured important aspects of American life and values, and were very popular across these very different decades of American history. This dissertation examines each of Meader's books at least briefly while paying special attention to questions of values and formula in key and representative works. Meader wrote both historical tales and stories with contemporary settings, set in many regions and most historical eras of the United States; his heroes mature in some way during the course of his books. Meader emphasized important American values: self-reliance, honesty, community, courage, loyalty, friendship, and clear thinking. He used formulas, especially the ordeal, in which the protagonist is separated from responsible adult leadership, faces a challenge, and successfully meets that challenge. This approach allowed him to test his protagonists to see if they would stay true to their values. Meader's heroes usually had sidekicks and often had mentors as well. They often tangled with memorable villains, received rewards, and sometimes found romance. Meader had an interest in entrepreneurial themes which he expressed most memorably in four contemporary novels in which the young hero starts a business. Along with the fictional story, Meader provides information to the reader in both general approach and specific costs, on how to start certain business ventures: trucking (T-Model Tommy 1938), fruit cultivation and production (Blueberry Mountain 1941), earthmoving (Bulldozer 1951), and ski resort management (Snow on Blueberry Mountain 1961). The protagonists of most of Meader's books are good at making do with what they have and at thinking on their feet. Two illustrative examples of his many historical novels are *Boy With a Pack* (1939), whose protagonist is a Yankee peddler and for which he won a Newbery honor award, and *Red Horse Hill* (1930) based on his New Hampshire boyhood. Meader wrote many historical stories of the sea in various eras. He also wrote on environmental themes throughout his career. Meader's work during World War II stood out among American juvenile authors because he confronted the war directly as it was happening while most such writers avoided the war until after it was over. An example is *The Long Trains Roll* (1944).

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Stephen W. Meader (May 2, 1892 – July 18, 1977) was the author of over forty novels for young readers. His optimistic stories generally tended to either concern young men developing independent businesses in the face of adversity, or else young men caught up in adventures during different periods in American history. Meader graduated from Haverford College in Philadelphia in 1913, and initially worked in Newark, New Jersey as a cruelty officer with the Essex County Children's Aid Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and by 1915 was working for the Big Brother Movement. It is called "Surrealism for Children: Paradoxes and Possibilities" because the very notion of an avant-garde for children strikes the author as both paradoxical and not, and as both

possible and impossible. In making this claim, the author argues with – and revises – his own analysis in *The Avant-Garde* [Show full abstract] and *American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks* (2002), which took for granted that an avant-garde for children was both possible and critically viable. What he once accepted as a certainty, he now thinks of as an intriguing question. Stephen W. Meader: *His Contributions to American Children's Literature*. May 2005. Chesley Howard Looney. Of 15 children by his three wives—Abigail Phillips, Elizabeth (née Clark) Hubbard, and Lydia (née Lee) George—only two survived him. Cotton Mather's heritage from his two grandfathers, Richard Mather and John Cotton, was both fortunate and unfortunate. Like them, he had an active mind and the will to use it. Edwards' was the first major contribution to the long debate about human nature in American theology and helped set the terms of that debate. Edwards perceived the threat in Taylor's notion of man's innate goodness and autonomy; the whole Christian conception of supernatural redemption seemed to be at stake.