

ChLA Proposal 2019 (250 words)

Title: A Reclaiming of Lost Work: Edith Rickert's Modernist Picture Books

Edith Rickert is well-known as an influential medievalist scholar, especially for her work with John M. Manly on Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*. However, Rickert published some fictional works on her own including three little-known picture books. For my ChLA paper this year, I'd like to reclaim Rickert's children's books *The Bojabi Tree* (1923, illustrations by Anna Braune), *The Blacksmith and the Blackbirds*, and *The Greedy Goroo* (1929, illustrations by Elizabeth M. Fisher).

The two books I have access to so far (*The Blacksmith and the Blackbirds* was not available in the US; I have ordered a copy from the U.K.) were very hard to track down; *The Greedy Goroo* was only available to borrow from the Library of Congress. These texts both feature allegorical tales, with animal main characters transmitting didactic messages. *The Bojabi Tree* specifically notes on the title page that it is based on an "African Folk Tale." The animals embody the usual symbolism (as discussed frequently by picture book scholars, especially Nodelman in *Words about Pictures*) so the lion is the king and noble, which the tortoise is slow, etc. Both books are also longer picture books, broken up into chapters. The act of naming things (people and fruit) in both texts also plays an important role, as well as playing with font choices, sounds, and creative capitalization.

I will place these three picture books in conversation with the modernist texts popular for children, published especially during the 1920s. As part of the theme of the conference, this paper would be a feminist reclaiming of a scholar who was frequently overshadowed by her male collaborator and her fictional works mostly ignored.

Keywords: picture books, Edith Rickert, modernism, fable, feminist