

## Recovering “Lost Classics” and Variants: A Case for Textual Scholarship and the Children’s Literature Archive

Edward Prime-Stevenson is best known for his 1906 novel *Imre*, which some critics describe as the first explicitly gay American novel. Fifteen years earlier, he authored a boys’ adventure novel titled *Left to Themselves*, which he publicly called a homosexual work for juveniles. *Left to Themselves* was published in New York in 1891 and London in 1893—the last published edition before the one I edited for Valancourt Books was released in 2016. Scholars of gay literature, who have recognized Stevenson’s importance, have paid scant attention to his children’s books, which have remained little known among children’s literature scholars. Nonetheless, *Left to Themselves* represents a tremendously important milestone in the history of children’s and gay literature. I use my experience editing Stevenson’s novel to consider the role of textual scholarship and the archive in children’s literature studies. Before 2016, only eight library copies of *Left to Themselves* were cataloged worldwide, making the archive essential to the recovery of Stevenson’s obscure but important book. David Greetham explains that “all involved in...textual transmission and preservation are textual critics, and this category therefore includes archivists, librarians, rare-book dealers, and even literary critics” (“Textual Scholarship” 113). I argue that the archive provides an essential starting point for the textual criticism of children’s literature, especially the recovery of “lost classics” that can alter or enhance our understanding of the history of writing for youth. Moreover, while scholars of adult literature have long acknowledged the need to note differences among editions and identify the edition under discussion, children’s literature scholarship less commonly attends to the identity or status of texts and variants. Drawing from the holdings of the de Grummond Children’s Literature Collection, I observe in my presentation how the archival collection and preservation of editions point to the possibilities of, and necessity for, textual scholarship in children’s literature studies.