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Cambridge Elements

Elements in Publishing and Book Culture
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PICTURE-BOOK PROFESSORS

Academia and Children's Literature

Melissa M. Terras
University of Edinburgh

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108438452

DOI: 10.1017/9781108529501

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781108529501

First published 2018

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-43845-2 Paperback

ISSN 2514-8524 (online)

ISSN 2514-8516 (print)

The Element is also available, with additional material, as Open Access at
www.cambridge.org/Picture-Book-Professors

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First published online: October 2018

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ABSTRACT: How is academia portrayed in children's literature? This Element ambitiously surveys fictional professors in texts marketed towards children. Professors are overwhelmingly white and male, tending to be elderly scientists who fall into three stereotypes: the vehicle to explain scientific facts, the baffled genius, and the evil madman. By the late twentieth century, the stereotype of the male, mad, muddlehead, called Professor SomethingDumb, is formed in humorous yet pejorative fashion. This Element provides a publishing history of the role of academics in children's literature, questioning the book culture which promotes the enforcement of stereotypes regarding intellectual expertise in children's media.

The Element is also available, with additional material, as Open Access.

KEYWORDS: Children's Literature, Academia, English Literature, Gender Studies, Diversity, Representation

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ISBNs: 9781108438452 (PB), 9781108529501 (OC)
ISSNs: 2514-8524 (online), 2514-8516 (print)

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