COMING TO LIFE
Movable Books Delight Children for Centuries
BY SUZAN ALTERI
One of the gems of the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature is its large collection of old movable books and toys created to delight thousands of people, young and old alike. The fact that somehow these materials survived the tugging and tearing of children only makes their presence in the collection all the more awe-inspiring. Although volvelles — rotating paper disks sewed into a book — were present in adult books beginning in the fourteenth century, it was almost five centuries later that movable parts were added to books for children. While readers today are very familiar with the work of Robert Sabuda and Matthew Reinhart that is sold in bookstores all over the world, they might not be aware of the tradition that informs today’s pop-up books.

Beginning in the very late eighteenth century, a publisher in Great Britain developed the Harlequinade, an early version of today's lift-the-flap books. Suddenly readers were able to transform pictures and text into different scenes right before their eyes. These books, also called Metamorphoses, continued to be published well into the mid-nineteenth century, usually with religious overtones about good and evil, life and death. Around the mid-eighteenth century, elaborate paper creations termed “peepshows” or tunnel books gave the illusion of theatrical stage sets. Although these accordion style, layered scenes contained no text, they served as an

_left and right: Tip & Top and the Moon Rocket, V. Kubasta (1964)_
important step in the development of later movable and pop-up books.

One particularly unique, interactive movable, *The History of Little Fanny: Exemplified in a Series of Figures* was published by London printers S. and J. Fuller in 1810. This set contained a small 15-page book of scenes along with one paper doll and seven different outfits. Child readers were encouraged to dress Fanny for each scene along a journey from Fanny's disobedience, to begging on the street, to eventual restoration with her family after promising to be good. During this time, children's literature was not necessarily about entertainment, but more focused on educating the child and building moral character.

More intricate paper engineering occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, as printing technologies and literacy developed, to keep pace with the public demand for engaging reading material. Around 1850, Dean and Son — one of the premier publishers for movable and novelty children's books — began printing their long-running series of "Scenic Books." These marked the first real appearance of images that could be popped up by readers. Working from their own studio in Ludgate Hill, the publisher "animated" layered pop-up pictures using the techniques of peep shows and pull ribbons. The reader would open the page, pull the ribbon, and voila, a scene from classics such as Cinderella, or *The Little Glass Slipper* appeared before their eyes.

The renaissance of early movable books came from Germany through the works of Lothar Meggendorfer, Ernest Nister, and Raphael Tuck. Nister was the first to develop automatic pop-up books — pages that popped up without any
manual maneuvering — while Meggendorfer was the undisputed king of pull-tabs that controlled an elaborate series of mechanical movements. Tuck, who later immigrated to Great Britain, employed a variety of novel methods to his books, including embossing, die-cutting, and chromolithography to enchant readers. Although the Baldwin Library holds a few hundred of Nister and Tuck books, of particular interest is Meggendorfer’s *Always Jolly!* and *Princess Rose-Petal and her Adventures*. The moving parts in these books are so complex that even UF students are in awe of the engineering feats employed by this German author and illustrator. In *Princess Rose-Petal* a single pull-tab initiates a series of paper levers which animate multiple features on a page, with each lever attached by a tiny screw barely visible to the reader.

The World Wars disrupted relationships between Europe and Great Britain, allowing for movable book production to flourish in the US. Although E. P. Dutton Publishing had partnered with Ernest Nister to distribute his works in America, it wasn’t until the 1940s that the US could claim to be the center of movable book publication with a series of books by illustrator and artist Julian Wehr. Wehr created over 30 animated books during his career, each vibrantly illustrated, which utilized his patented, unique method of a pull-tab that could move in any direction to give characters multiple movements. One of Wehr’s more uncommon, but delightful books, *Animated Antics in Playland*, features various stuffed toys getting into trouble while their owners are away. Beginning in the 1950s, Central Europe re-entered the movable
book market
when Czech
architect and artist
Vojtech Kubasta
started creating and
publishing three-
dimensional pop-up
books. His works were
sold in 24 languages,
and their complexity
was reminiscent of
Meggendorfer. Kubasta’s
pop-ups, such as *Tip &
Top and the Moon Rocket,*
were enjoyed by millions of
children worldwide.

The collection of movable
books in the Baldwin Library of
Historical Children’s Literature
illustrate the long history of how
authors, illustrators, and
publishers engage with child readers. Each
book is a wonderful example of construction
and design, and every year students from UF’s
Materials Engineering program visit the collec-
tion to study these feats made from something
as simple as paper. Researchers from around
the world visit to see the influence of movable
books on child play, and graduate students at
UF work towards 4-D digital models of texts to
engage with people who are not able to come
to the University to see these marvels. The Baldwin
Library, for its part, continues to acquire rare and
popular movable works intended for children in
order to keep this rich history alive.