Juvenilia

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1: compositions produced in the author's youth
2: literary compositions suited to the young

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary

This is based on the talk given at G4G12 on the various efforts Martin Gardner made while young and those made for the young reader. We begin with a brief mention of his earliest influences.

Two periodicals he read avidly as a child were John Martin’s Magazine and Science and Invention. His interest was so abiding that 70 years later he acquired complete runs of them, in hopes of passing on the appreciation to a new generation. The first was suited for younger readers and contained the puzzles of George Carlsson. The second was published by Hugo Gernsback and was full of science, recreations, and debunking of pseudo-science. He was also a young fan of Sam Loyd.

Gardner wrote a lot of poetry at Central High School in Tulsa. Science-fiction was an early influence, hence the poem “An Ethraldrian Gazes at the Earth” and the like. In February 1930 Ripley’s “Believe It or Not” published a submission of his. In April 1930 Science and Invention published a question Gardner sent to “The Oracle”. And in May 1930 The Sphinx, a prominent magic journal, published a trick of his. The editors encouraged him and by June his name had moved to the title “The Best Pocket Tricks of Martin Gardner.” He continued to contribute often. In May 1932 he had letter published in The Cryptogram encouraging more difficulty and in-depth articles. In September 1934 his article “A Puzzling Collection” appeared in Hobbies, which detailed his extensive collection of mechanical puzzles. At this point his public writing became associated with his studies at the Univ. of Chicago.
His first publication for children was an outgrowth of the pamphlets he was writing for magicians. In the 1930s he had begun in earnest to accumulate and sort his growing knowledge on several subjects including magic. Drawing on his files he wrote two pamphlets for a publisher of science textbooks in 1941: *Magic for the Elementary Science Class*, and *Magic for the Science Class*. His profession was listed as “magician.”

After the war he contributed to *Uncle Ray’s Magazine*. His column contained stunts, science tricks and math puzzles.
After moving from Chicago in 1948 to New York he came to the notice for publishers. In particular, he began contributing regularly to Parents Institute, which was keen to expand their magazine line.

- *Children’s Digest* (Sept. 1951)
- *Parents Magazine* (“Family Fun,” Jan. 1952)
- *Humpty Dumpty* (Oct. 1952)
- *Polly Pigtails* (Spring 1953)
- *Piggly Wiggly / Piggity* (Winter 1953)
- *Children’s Playcraft* (Jan. 1954)

He contributed to the titles above irregularly, except for *Humpty Dumpty*, which edited from the first issue. He told his mother he was the “contributing editor in charge of gimmicks.” He provided filler material, games, stunts, puzzles and the occasional article. But for *Humpty Dumpty* he also contributed a short story about the titular character and he also contributed a cautionary verse about good behavior. (Some of the latter were collected in *Never Make Fun of a Turtle, My Son* which he joked could have been called “Poems of Sage Fatherly Advice to Undisciplined Children in this Democratic Age of Moral Rot”.) The short stories have never been republished despite his concerted efforts.

He considered his years with Parents Institute to be a good and rewarding experience. He always spoke of it with pride. However he left by 1961, when they were just reprinting his contributions and in general treating him miserly.

As he was winding down at Parents Institute and ramping up at *Scientific American*, he took on the task of writing a column “On the Light Side” for *Science World*, a high school science magazine. This lasted 5 semesters mostly under the alias of “George Groth”. The material was largely collected in the books *Mathematical Puzzles* and *Science Puzzlers* (since reprinted with different titles).
He became very busy and in demand after this. However he regularly found time to write for the youth market.

- *Codes, Ciphers and Secret Writing*, 1972.

In addition to these books he contributed the Oz literature in many ways. He edited reprints of his youthful hero George Carlson, in two “Peter Puzzlemaker” volumes. However his most recognized contribution to the education of young readers was the creation of two boxed sets of filmstrips—*The Aha Box* and *The Paradox Box*. These became the books *Aha!* and *Aha. Gotcha!*.