

**CEREBRAL PLEASURES; CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND
PHILOSOPHY**

by

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Cerebral Pleasures brings together two fields concerned with the edification of children's minds: childhood studies as it occurs in the English department and a number of interdisciplinary programs; and a minor movement in academic philosophy whose proponents argue for the philosophical education of children. While childhood studies tends toward a bleak view of children's literature and culture, often implying that it has a potentially deadening effect on young people's powers of critical thinking, I contend that a category of children's book, which presents philosophical material and introduces its readers to cerebral pleasures, has neglected educative value. Hence, I argue against stock cynicism about juvenile literature, and examine a number of disciplinary premises that have led to a stalemate in the field, including: the polarization of essentialist and constructivist approaches to childhood, an oversimplified understanding of the way texts manifest ideology, and the injunction to restrict criticism to matters of representation. I explore the diverse responses to Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books to illustrate some of trends in, and difficulties of, literary interpretation, noting that a great range of contradictory readings of the *Alices* are often simultaneously accurate, but proceed from different interpretive assumptions. At the same time, I am concerned with another critical commonplace in childhood studies: that children's books are either instructive or entertaining, and that "pleasure" and "pedagogy" are opposites. To the contrary, philosophical children's literature demonstrates that these faculties can not only occur simultaneously, but that they can be intimates: such that it is

sometimes difficult (and invariably unnecessary) to differentiate learning and play. In my sampling of texts, I sacrifice breadth for depth, analyzing the *Alices*, L. Frank Baum's portion of the *Oz* series, and Gertrude Stein's *The World Is Round* for their philosophical content, and exploring the ways in which the books attempt to entice readers to participate in what Lewis Carroll called "mental recreation."

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INTRODUCTION

Children's literature should not be condescended to. One reason is this: some very good children's poems and stories – not all, or even most, but some – excite in young minds (and old ones, too) perplexities that can't be assuaged by merely passing on information, even information of a very sophisticated sort. These perplexities demand to be worried over, and worked through, and discussed, and reasoned out, and linked up with each other, and with life.

Gareth Matthews¹

While philosophers and educationists have been paying critical attention to philosophical material in children's books since at least the 1970s, literary scholars working in the field of juvenile literature have yet to remark upon the phenomenon. I proffer this study as an inaugural comment.

My central argument is that philosophical children's literature – of which my examples are Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, L. Frank Baum's portion of the *Oz* series, and Gertrude Stein's *The World is Round* – model the sorts of conceptual manipulations that are the usual province of professional philosophers, and in so doing, aspire to teach the cerebral pleasures of philosophical concept-play to their readers. My secondary aims are to bring English department childhood studies and the "Philosophy for Children" movement into greater proximity, to contribute to research in the latter field as much as the former, to demonstrate to my home discipline what philosophical readings of children's books unveil, and to explore the sometimes misunderstood relation between

¹ "Philosophy and children's Literature" (1976, 15-6).

“pleasure” and “pedagogy” in literature. In all these, I join a faction of literary scholars who protest the bleak vision of children’s books as inevitably repressive or conservative, whilst also discussing some misconceptions that I believe persist in the arguments of critics who advance the notion of a progressive literature for children. I have a final motive that is simple and pragmatic: to entice parents and teachers to provide young people with philosophical literature and cultivate the cerebral play that some small children do without any instruction.

The first riddle raised by this list of purposes is the perhaps unnecessarily vexed question of what sorts of concerns I am including under the legend “philosophy.” I would prefer to avoid this dispute, since it seems to me that the solution to what constitutes philosophy is simultaneously obvious and impossible: obvious because “philosophy” takes whatever it likes into its purview and because, like games as they are described in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theory of family resemblance, it seems the sort of thing that is recognizable if undefinable;² impossible because so many very different traditions lay claim to the field – or its contents, or its methods – and some ardently protect their territory. As it happens, all of the works of children’s literature that I examine here contain ideas that are familiar content from Anglo-American analytic philosophy. However, some of the books that I will recommend for philosophical analysis in my conclusion do not so obviously partake of this tradition – which is flexible in its subject matter, but consistent in certain important aspects of method and temperament. And since there is no good reason to be exclusive, and because many of

² Richard F. Kitchener makes this suggestion in his critique of the “Philosophy for Children” movement (henceforth, “P4C” – the abbreviation adopted by the Montclair Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children) (1990).

the concerns of analytic philosophy are shared with other fields, I shall attempt to sketch a concept of the sorts of issues with which the books that I describe as “philosophical” are concerned.

As I understand it, part of the trouble with “philosophy” involves disciplinary ownership: that is, the question of which academic field holds the rights to the ideas of a long line of scholars. Of course, the different fields can and do uncontroversially share the thought of a number of consequential historical figures. The conflict that I anticipate, then, attaches to the decision to call a particular pursuit “philosophy,” as opposed to something else – which could be anything from “critical thinking” to “cultural studies.” As an unproblematic, but representative example of disciplinary haziness, one may imagine a scholar using Immanuel Kant’s concept of the sublime as an organizing device for a discussion of a set of literary texts. She inhabits an English department and calls her project “literary,” although she examines and problematizes Kant’s concept just as a philosopher would. Similarly, there are philosophers who investigate literature (and they may keep Kant in their toolboxes), and in both cases disciplinary allegiance most likely has more to do with the scholar’s knowledge of conventionally bound methods and contents than what she happens to be pursuing at any one time. In the humanities, there is probably research going on that could legitimately be called “philosophy” behind many doors with different markers on them. Indeed, historically, philosophy included a variety of fields of study that “now happily housekeep for themselves” (Matthews 1976, 15) – but at least some of the time there are reasonable distinctions between what is material for philosophy and what is not.

The instances in which the sciences have acquired content formerly treated by philosophers are perhaps more informative than those where the reins have been taken by humanities subjects. While curricular change is partly the result of transformations in institutional structures and the evolution of conventions, the epistemological status of the subject-matter also has a significant role in the movement from “philosophy” to “science.” That is, as I understand it: the transition occurs when human beings attain the technological or methodological sophistication required to discover the answer to the relevant problem. In other words, when a theoretical question becomes empirical, it becomes the province of science – as, for instance, has the issue of what constitutes life, which was once a speculative question that can now be explained biochemically.³ Let us, then, call philosophy the branch of thinking concerned with questions for which we do not have the means (and in some cases, will not ever have the means) to find their answers. This is a necessary criterion, although it probably is not sufficient, since the manner by which philosophers conduct their inquiries is also important.

Out of ignorance, my discussion is restricted to Western philosophies, amongst which I shall include the analytic and continental traditions, and aspects of those taken on by disciplines that do not call themselves “philosophy,” per se.⁴ The third group is diverse, and penetrates various sub-branches of academe (among them, for instance, certain schools of psychology or approaches to literary study) or may, more broadly and

³ Of course, there are disputes about what can be achieved empirically, and different disciplines sometimes legitimately take possession of the same question, which they tackle using their characteristic methods. For example, neuroscience, artificial intelligence studies, and philosophy are all concerned with the constituents and nature of consciousness.

⁴ Here I exclude the sort of religious philosophical questioning that responds to unsolvable problems by positing an answer to be accepted on faith, rather than acknowledging that we simply don’t know, and attempting to achieve as much as possible using reason.

perhaps controversially, comprise a method or a set of mental capacities, such as “critical thinking skills.”

For the moment I shall call analytic philosophy – the set of practices and contents that take place in many university philosophy departments in the Anglo-American world, which draw on “various interlocking subtraditions ... held together by both their shared history” (including canonic figures such as Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hume, and more recently, say, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Searle) “and their methodological interconnections,” in particular, a dependence on logical reasoning (Beaney 2009) – the ‘limited concept of philosophy.’ In his assessment of the relationship between “critical thinking skills” and (implicitly, analytic) philosophy, Richard Kitchener lists possible criteria for a philosophical “way of life”:

Philosophy as a way of life includes much more than merely being able to think critically: it means, *inter alia*, thinking about a philosophical issue (e.g., free-will vs. determinism), it means raising philosophical questions and being puzzled by things ordinarily taken for granted, it means assimilating or appropriating the historical tradition of philosophy by reading the great philosophers, it means constructing arguments in support of certain kinds of conclusions, it means engaging in various kinds of conversations about philosophy, it means being bitten by the philosophy bug so that one cannot give up philosophizing, etc. (1990, 425).

The concept of “philosophy as a way of life” is Wittgenstein’s proposal for distinguishing a praxis from a skill-set, and in Kitchener’s interpretation, describes the usual activities of

university professionals and informed amateurs who partake of the same historic formation. Kitchener's argument that "thinking critically" is necessary but insufficient to characterize a pursuit as "philosophical" is convincing: he calls attention to the activities that can involve critical thinking, but are patently not "philosophy" (his examples are deciding which car to buy and evaluating the claims of the salesman) (423). However, the requirement for familiarity with a historical tradition seems to me unduly restrictive – for it is possible (and hardly difficult) to fulfill all the other listed criteria without this one and, still, to be doing philosophy. In other words, one may hit upon, or be introduced to, both the important questions and ways of asking without any acquaintance with the canon. I am also mildly troubled by the criterion that a philosopher asks "philosophical questions," if only because Kitchener's parenthetical example suggests that he means those consecrated questions that have been asked by the historic philosophers. It is the case that some sorts of questions are philosophical and others are not – evaluating the virtues of this Fiat over that Ford is not – but given that in both practice and theory philosophers are flexible and diverse in the questions they ask, we might be wary of hanging too much on canonic issues.

The proponents of P4C are fond of recalling the maxims of such luminaries as Aristotle and Bertrand Russell: that philosophy is born out of fascination; that it asks "questions which increase the interest of the world, and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life" (Russell in Matthews 1976, 15). Presumably many philosophers who share in the traditions of Aristotle and Russell would accept wonder as characteristic of the philosophical disposition, although they might hesitate to include it in a list of criteria for philosophy,

and would correctly regard it as a far from complete description. Still, I think the capacity for and the response of a type of wonderment – that is, relish in discovering that things are not as straightforward as they might seem – may help philosophers to identify philosophical material and attitudes.⁵ In chapter four, I consider the concerns with eating and cannibalism in L. Frank Baum’s *Oz* books in light of a subject that is not traditionally examined by analytic philosophers, but that has recently acquired a small following in the field: a branch described as the “philosophy of food.” This case is illustrative because it demonstrates how the hallmarks of philosophy as I am conceiving it – that it asks unresolvable questions, has a speculative spirit that marvels at phenomena that most take for granted, and employs a self-reflexive critical method – might appear in territories not conventionally trodden by scholars in university philosophy departments.

In a similar vein, while the books I have scrutinized in this study all contain material recognizable to anyone trained in analytic philosophy, some of the texts that I mention in conclusion include content that is amenable to the methods of this school, but more likely to be discussed at different venues. Arnold Lobel’s *Frog and Toad* books, for example, are unmistakably philosophical in their illustration of wonder, their interest in questions rather than answers, and their open-ended diagnostic method. However, their topics of friendship, bravery, and self-control seem more likely to be the province of psychology, continental philosophy or, retrospectively, ancient philosophy. Indeed, it

⁵ Here I don’t mean to pretend that all philosophically inclined people experience the same wonder in response to the same stimuli – or would necessarily agree on appropriate sources for wonder – and I do not think wonder as criterion for philosophy can be discussed in the categorical terms that some analytic philosophers favor. But at the same time, there is enough agreement about the importance of wonder that one ought to be able to generalize in some fashion: perhaps, that among philosophers, wonder is the affective response to unanswerable questions and hidden complexities. One of the dangers here, however, is assuming that specialists and students in other fields do not experience a similar sort of wonder.

is possible to consider ubiquitous matters such as these without identifying the questions or manner as distinctly “philosophical” at all – and this is often what occurs in literary studies, particularly those of juvenile literature, which often explicitly depicts psycho-social issues that are thought relevant to children. These issues can be examined from a “philosophical perspective,” but more often than not, they aren’t in children’s books: rather, bravery or friendship are taken as known items from which a narrative can be built, or about which a categorical lesson can be taught. One of the qualities of the *Frog and Toad* books that make them unique is that these issues are accorded a profundity that is surprising in a picture book. In other words, subjects that are easy to treat glibly are given philosophical weight, partly by the intangible methods of tone, and partly because the object of inquiry is never neatly explained: by the end of the books, we still cannot say, quite, what friendship, bravery, self-control *are*. Indeed, we have less of an idea than we did before we read the book. This is a clue to philosophy: that a concept believed to be straightforward is discovered to be complex and even inexplicable.⁶

What, then, of philosophical method, or “skills”?⁷ This is a matter hotly debated by philosophers who teach children, for a number of discussion-worthy reasons. The most important, perhaps, is that the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy (henceforth “IAPC”) for Children was founded by Matthew Lipman in response to a

⁶ Wittgenstein would argue against this property, instead maintaining that philosophers tend to complicate straightforward matters. This is probably the case in some instances, and all I can offer in philosophers’ defense is that the good ones know how to distinguish superficially straightforward matters from genuinely uncomplicated ones.

⁷ W. A. Hart argues “against the indiscriminate use of the word ‘skill’ in education because it confuses things which really are skills with things which aren’t” (1978, 206). In learning a “skill,” he argues, a student acquires the capacity to follow a set of rules (say, those that enable her to perform long division or create a spreadsheet). Meanwhile, the aptitude for some types of activity – Hart’s examples include “thinking, reading, loving” – requires that the student develop a new way of being (210).

perceived lack in the faculties attained through ordinary (non-philosophical) education: in particular, a deficiency in children's abilities to reason (Lipman [1976] 1993a, 373).

Lipman's primary purpose in embarking upon the project that was to become P4C was to teach children logic and, more broadly, independent thinking. In a polemic written in 1970, he vociferates against an educational system that fails "to instruct the child in the hygiene of thinking," to "teach him to think about thinking, ... to think for himself, to form independent judgments, to be proud of his personal insights, ... to be pleased with his prowess in reasoning" ([1976] 1993a, 374, 376). The first incarnation of P4C, then, was designed to instill logical thinking using a method more palatable than that conventionally employed in college logic classes, in the hope that children would learn "to distinguish among different types of situations" and acquire "a battery of methods so that [they] can adapt the appropriate method to the situation[s they] encounter ... and recognize..." ([1976] 1993, 377).⁸ Lipman's goals were laudatory, and the project successfully improved children's reasoning abilities as far as these are measurable (Lipman [1976] 1993, 383), but it hardly seems accurate to say that logic, or even "reasoning," are equivalent to "philosophy," rather than crucial parts of this field, and also others.

As the project developed, Lipman fleshed out the concept of "reasoning skills" to include a collection of methods and capacities, which he describes under different headings in his several accounts of the goals and contents of P4C. In *Thinking in Education* (1991), for instance, Lipman is concerned to delineate the cognitive effects of

⁸ In this vein, Lipman's first pedagogical children's novel (the primary tool in his P4C classrooms), *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (1974) is unambiguously (and sometimes tediously) focused upon teaching logic – and to a lesser degree, "thinking about thinking."

childhood education in philosophy – of which the most primary one is “higher order thinking.” The constituents of this capacity are of course controversial, but it is unnecessary here to outline and critique Lipman’s particular vision of them: the significant fact is that he is primarily concerned with philosophy as *manner* of thinking rather than type of content – and, importantly, it is the capacity for this sort of thinking that is intended to have a positive effect on other aspects of the philosophically educated child’s life, both mental and moral.⁹ In *Philosophy Goes to School* (1988), meanwhile, the projects and contents of P4C are more recognizably related to both scholarly (analytic) philosophy and the broader concept that I am sketching. In his preface, Lipman describes the impact of philosophy in terms of the field’s concern with “concepts, such as truth, that cut across all other disciplines, but are openly examined by none” (vii).¹⁰ Hence, in the earlier text, the content of philosophy is depicted as equally important as its procedures. Philosophy, in this view, is the field that unpacks the concepts that all other disciplines need to take for granted in order to proceed with their work. Lipman’s observation of the ubiquity of philosophical questions in the foundations of the other disciplines is another clue to the nature of philosophy: the field that is concerned to understand the most basic of premises.

Part of the significance of philosophical content for P4C is that numerous other projects have been launched by non-philosophers to induce children to think in a more sophisticated manner than that called for in ordinary education. “Critical thinking” is

⁹ See Chapter 4 of *Thinking in Education*, “Cognition, Rationality, and Creativity,” for a discussion of the elements of “higher order thinking” (1991, 68-97).

¹⁰ See also Johnson (1993), who writes of philosophy in the Socratic tradition as that transformative procedure which enables the student to understand the “structure of a discipline,” rather than learning merely to memorize and report facts or reproduce skills.

everybody's buzzword, at all strata of the educational pile. If the object of P4C is but an education in reasoning, critical thinking skills, or higher order thinking, as Kitchener suggests, it may be a very valuable project, but it is not, strictly speaking, philosophy. Alternately, Lipman's emphasis on method, ability, and outcome over philosophical content in some of his defenses of P4C may be a political move – since critical thinking and the like are more familiar and palatable to the educational establishment than the proposal that children learn an arcane discipline that most adults find incomprehensible. Obviously children need to think well; it may not be obvious that they “need” to think about mind, free will, truth, self-control, and so on. At any rate, contra-Kitchener, the circumstance in which improved reasoning ability is the crucial goal of a philosophical education for children need not invalidate the material encountered en route, or negate its philosophical character. Still, there is tension among philosophers who teach children about the status of “critical thinking,” “reasoning skills,” and other technique-oriented ends in relation to the “philosophy” that they teach. In some instances, philosophy for children is described *as* critical thinking or mastery in reasoning (e.g. Cannon and Weinstein 1993; Finocchiaro 1993; Lipman 1991), whereas in other places P4C is defended as in some ways comparable to contemporary movements designed to improve thinking, but ultimately superior – for philosophy provides content and context that the other projects lack (eg. Lipman 1993; Lindop 1993b; Daniel and Auriac 2011).

Lipman writes that the “competing approaches” to high-level thinking agree upon the virtues of the capacity, but lack any consistency about what mastery in reasoning involves, instead touting “those [reasoning skills] that count as [crucial] in their

own bailiwicks.”¹¹ The danger in specialized thinking, he maintains, is its insensitivity to context. Meanwhile, just as philosophical subject matter “cut[s] across disciplines,” “philosophical” methods, in Lipman’s view, are adaptable to any circumstances, and provide the tools to accommodate unfamiliar settings and ideas and, importantly, to self-correct (1993b, 684). The components of what philosophers for children understand as philosophical thinking, then, include a detailed set of faculties, such as: consciousness of fallibility and the use of self-correcting mechanisms; sensitivity to context; reflection upon and for practice; conscious use of criteria; rationality; judiciousness; intellectual responsibility; flexibility during the reasoning process; the abilities to clarify and examine concepts, criteria, and premises; and the capacity to construct models for understanding reality and experience (Lipman 1993b; Finocchiaro 1993; Cannon and Weinstein 1993, 602).¹² Catalogues of reasoning proficiencies are useful for understanding not only the pedagogical objectives of P4C, but also what it is that philosophers (ideally) do when they reason philosophically. In other words, in delineating the standards for children learning philosophy, P4C philosophers are articulating what it is that, as they understand it, the most able philosophers do when they think and write philosophically.

¹¹ Interestingly, Lipman includes philosophers amongst those who push the limited methods of their fields: he writes, “[t]hose in English count syntactical skills as thinking skills; those in philosophy nominate logical skills; those in social sciences nominate statistical and other research skills...” (1993b, 684).

¹² The capacities listed here are collected from all three sources, and are not intended to be exhaustive or to represent stated agreement; rather, I mean to indicate the sorts of abilities that philosophers for children tend to include under “critical thinking.” Cannon and Weinstein’s catalogue – of which I have reproduced only parts – is perhaps the most thorough and informative. They distinguish “philosophical reasoning” from “formal,” “informal,” and “interpersonal” reasoning – the latter three of which are presented as the more mechanical, less complex components of the former, which in addition, includes nuanced modes of distinguishing, defining, contextualizing, and so on.

The philosophers from whom I have drawn the above list are all analytically oriented, and their systematic delimitations of the preferred modes of reasoning might reflect this bias. Continental philosophy, meanwhile, is no less philosophy, although its temperament and some of its methods are distinctive. Ekkehard Martens describes the “business” of analytic philosophy as “a kind of logico-linguistic analysis,” or, “whatever can be said clearly,” in contrast to continental philosophy, which relies upon personal reflection and “stresses judgment, common sense, insight, personal experience and personal knowledge, imagination, understanding and wisdom” (1993, 404). Martens’ cynicism about analytic philosophy (a pardonable response to analytic prejudice against the continental tradition) leads him to caricature the field and set up his own as providing the human substance that the former, he thinks, lacks. Implicitly, Martens sees continental philosophy as able to accommodate those aspects of human experience that will not submit to logical exegesis and cannot be “said clearly.” Yet, I am not alone in treating as an essential aspect of philosophy (the general concept of philosophy, in contrast to the “narrow” one named above) that it takes on unknowns that are difficult to untangle and express – and a broad definition of the field should articulate what its different traditions share. In some ways, I am at a loss here, although it seems clear that when they are done well, both analytic and continental philosophy share certain methods, among them: self-reflexivity, openness to correction, examination of premises and definitions, the construction of conceptual models to represent and understand reality or experience, and so on. These are practices found in the writings of philosophers with very different subjects and styles: just as much in Foucault and Husserl as in Wittgenstein and Searle. Analytic philosophy is not lacking in judgment,

common sense, insight, and so on, just as rational analysis is no stranger to continental philosophy. Perhaps they are distinguished but by focus and the character of their prose.

While much of the preceding four pages might seem digressive, some impression of philosophical method in the broad sense – or, what it looks like when philosophy is in action – is helpful for identifying philosophical literature. That is: the books (or episodes in books) that I describe as philosophical all in some ways perform the sorts of activities that signal philosophical reasoning. In Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, the creatures Alice encounters often induce her to examine her definitions and assumptions; in L. Frank Baum's *Oz* books, numerous illustrative models explore the nature of life, personhood, and so on; while in *The World is Round*, the protagonist, Rose, continually reflects upon self and surroundings, and re-evaluates her earlier conclusions. But these cognitive practices, and others like them, are not in themselves what make the books “philosophical” – although they may signal that the novels are “critical.” A good scientist will also examine her assumptions, create models, reflect and re-evaluate – as, indeed, thoughtful people with no background or interest in philosophy should, and do. How, then, do we identify philosophy, and what is its importance? My summary of the preceding pages is brief: philosophy is that discipline which examines questions for which we are not able to find the answers conclusively; it considers the premises and concepts that underlie all other fields; it seeks the unusual in the everyday; and it employs methods of inquiry that open themselves to scrutiny and correction by self and other, involve imaginative conceptualizations of problems in thought experiments or through the invention of illustrative models, and it requires careful and dedicated thinking. The importance of philosophy should be apparent from my account of it, since its core

practice is inquiry, it comes from the understanding that human thinking is fallible, and its basic objectives are truth, wisdom, and judiciousness. Furthermore, philosophy is the practice that tries to penetrate beneath other fields and practices, allowing us to question premises that we need to assume in order to progress in other realms: hence, it is the foundation upon which other sorts of knowledge and research are built.

I hope it will also be clear by now that, and why, it might be important to introduce children to philosophy: not only that they become proficient thinkers and eager questioners, but also because philosophical questions are –or should be – unavoidable. P4C proponents often note that children ask these questions any way, without assistance from trained adult philosophers. Happily, this project does not require me to defend P4C or justify its inclusion in “philosophy,” but since my interest grew in part out of the discovery of the movement’s existence, and since P4C’s main tool is the philosophical children’s novel, some discussion of the philosophy that they teach to children is in order. As I have already mentioned, Matthew Lipman’s principal goal in forming P4C was to counteract the miserable effects of American school learning on children’s thinking abilities. While the initial, and still crucial, object is facility in thinking, the programs developed by Lipman and others introduce children to the traditional contents of (often analytic) philosophy, with the goal of exciting an interest just as much as improving intellectual hygiene.¹³ Philosophers for children are at great pains to defend the argument that, contra the Piagetian vision of children’s minds, even the very young

¹³ Some other “philosophers for children” whose work I have encountered include Gareth Matthews (1980, 1984), Michael Pritchard (1985), Thomas E. Wartenberg (2009), and Joanna Haynes and Karin Murrells (2012). The first three writers are primarily analytic in their focus, while Haynes and Murrells criticize Lipman’s method and, implicitly, his analytic bias. All use fiction to teach children philosophy. The movement has an international following, many of its branches following the program, and using the texts, developed by Lipman.

can do a form of philosophy. I am convinced by both their arguments and my own encounters with children, but prefer not to give over a great deal of space to this discussion – since much of the literature from P4C is devoted to presenting evidence for children’s abilities to think philosophically and accounts of children “doing philosophy.” Still, it should hardly surprise that the philosophy that pre-teenage children do is rather different from that which goes on in university philosophy departments. Indeed, Richard Kitchener challenges the philosophy for children movement on the grounds that what it teaches children to do is not “philosophy” in the proper (academic) sense, and the object of its pedagogy is not to advance children’s ability to “do philosophy,” but rather to improve their critical thinking capacities (1990). Kitchener has a point, but it is a rather narrow one – and disavows other legitimate philosophy besides P4C. The primary difference between academic and primary level philosophy is that children are not introduced to the historical greats or the specialized terminology and that, whereas writing and professionalization (which includes evaluation by testing at the undergraduate level) are usual practices in “adult” philosophy, they are largely absent from P4C classrooms.

There are also practices inscribed in P4C that are not in themselves philosophical: firstly, that philosophical ideas and practices are taught using fiction, and secondly that discussion-based investigation – or, a “community of inquiry” – is treated as a crucial component of the program. Lipman and his heirs also emphasize the performative nature of philosophy for children: philosophy is something that children in P4C classrooms *do*, rather than *learn about* – and teachers who facilitate philosophy sessions using Lipman’s method follow a prescribed set of procedures, as follows:

1) Reading of a novel that includes ambiguities and paradoxes; 2) Collecting pupils' questions concerning ambiguous or paradoxical situations that intrigue them and that they would like to discuss with their peers; 3) Holding a dialogue in the community of inquiry (CI) in order, as a group, to construct elements of response to their questions. (Daniel & Auriac 2011, 422)

Not only is the P4C community of inquiry designed to introduce children to philosophical material, stimulate their interest, and improve their reasoning, but it also aims to instill moral consciousness by “initiat[ing children] into the ethics of social life ... in which, by differentiating viewpoints and explicitly producing alternative solutions, it generates socio-cognitive conflicts in pupils' minds” (ibid).¹⁴

While the praxis and goals of Lipman's P4C are unique amongst modern philosophies (we should remember that Socratic philosophy was built upon dialogue and conceived as an activity, rather than a body of data or a skill-set, and directed towards improving communal life), many of the conversations that philosophy teachers record with, or between, children explore well-worn, and undeniably philosophical questions.¹⁵ Still, it is not clear whether the difference between elementary and university-level philosophy is one of kind or degree. Lipman defends his project by condemning the narrowness of Kitchener's vision of philosophy and pointing out that it is no contradiction that a subject matter be taught using special techniques and at a more basic level to children than it is to adults encountering a field for the first time (Lipman 1990).

¹⁴ See also *Philosophy goes to School* (Lipman 1988).

¹⁵ See for instance, *Dialogues with Children* (Matthews 1984), *Philosophical Adventures with Children* (Pritchard 1985), *Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom* (1995), and *Big Ideas For Little Kids* (Wartenberg 2009).

What is more pertinent to my discussion is the unanimous choice by philosophers who teach children to use fiction as their main pedagogical tool. Many use existing children's books, similar to or including those which are the subject of this dissertation. But Lipman's now-widespread method relies upon a series of novels written by him for the express purpose of teaching philosophy to children, and accompanied by teaching manuals to aid delivery. The novels all employ a formula: through a series of sometimes forced events, the protagonist (or protagonists) – a child character roughly the same age as that of the intended audience – discovers a peculiarity of his or her ordinary experience, and embarks upon a path of philosophical inquiry into, say, the reversibility of logical statements (*Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* 1974), or the nature of sensory perception and its relation to reality (*Kio and Gus* 1982), always bringing his or her peers into the discussion, and thus modeling a community of inquiry. There are undoubtedly virtues to this approach: in particular, it allows a writer with philosophical expertise to control the subject-matter and its delivery, and to present difficult concepts in an accessible manner.¹⁶ The effectiveness of Lipman's pedagogy is an empirical issue that I do not have the experience to comment upon (although the IAPC's accounts are compelling), and the books are not entirely without charm, but it seems to me a peculiar choice to produce a new set of relatively staid texts when there is already a body of

¹⁶ According to Haynes and Murris, "Lipman argues strongly against the use of [existing] children's literature because if the aim of education is to 'produce' thoughtful children, then educational material should model thoughtful children, and publishers and editors, he claims, 'deliberately exclude thoughtfulness from their depiction of fictional children'" because they implicitly believe that children are not thoughtful, and that the adults around them do all the necessary thinking (2012, 57). Here I would say Lipman is wrong, both about the diversity of children's books and (implicitly) what it means to convey thought in, or produce thinking using literature. There are logistical difficulties to realistically – and engagingly – depicting a great deal of thinking in narrative literature. Thought, then, may be hinted at by speech, action, or mood – but even when a protagonist does not seem at all thoughtful, or is not explicitly described as thinking, thought may be provoked in a reader through all manner of techniques.

imaginative philosophical children's literature, and some of its members are well-known. My skepticism about the IAPC's choice of text is one of the minor factors that motivates this dissertation. It seems to me that the organically philosophical children's books with which I am concerned not only introduce their readers to reasoning procedures and philosophical ideas, but also try and induce them to take pleasure in the cerebral activity that reading the books will ideally bring about. In other words: these books try to teach readers to enjoy using their minds in a manner that is playful and imaginative, and also perspicacious. Meanwhile, by adhering to a formula, and to predictable characters and characterization, and by overlooking some of the aesthetic and literary capacities of fiction, Lipman's novels neglect the object of teaching children to take pleasure in wide-ranging imaginative philosophical recreation.

On the other hand, some children's tastes may prefer the Lipman flavor. Still, I am not alone in my uncertainty about the pedagogical use of Lipman's novels. In *Picturebooks, Pedagogy and Philosophy* (2012), Joanna Haynes and Karin Murriss also raise doubts about *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* and its descendants, in their place applauding the selection of extant picture books that they have used to teach philosophy to children in England and South Africa. Haynes and Murriss also have a broader conception of philosophy than that implicitly favored by the IAPC: they refer to antecedents in the continental as well as the analytic tradition and prefer, even more than their American counterparts, to reduce the teacher's guiding role in the children's philosophy classroom. Indeed, Haynes and Murriss accuse the IAPC of an unsupportable inconsistency in their effort to teach independent thought using didactic methods. They write: "[i]t is difficult to conceptualize how the dialogical pedagogy of a community of enquiry and the

didactically constructed P4C curriculum can work in harmony” (58). While I share their concern about the Lipman novels, and also fear that “philosophy” “spoon-fed to the teacher,” with no experience in the field will be “drip-fed to the learner,” I don’t see this as a case in which the means should – or even can – mirror the ends (60). A dose of didacticism in youth need not inhibit the development of free-thinking autodidacticism later (or even sooner). Indeed, it is not impossible that the former help the growth of the latter. Haynes and Murriss also object to the teaching of predetermined content in Lipman’s P4C, and instead commend their own method, whereby a philosophical picture book read in class is treated as the stimulus for children to come up with their own philosophical questions. Hence, rather than going into the lesson with a syllabus and a set of questions for pupils to consider (as required by Lipman’s pedagogy), the Haynes/Murriss model conceives of the teacher as a facilitator for a discussion of whatever material interests the children who, if left to their own devices will, they believe, respond appropriately to thoughtful and ambiguous texts (61). While their pedagogy corresponds with my own interest in and beliefs about philosophical children’s books – and while I would maintain that space should be made in children’s classrooms to pursue interesting material that is not written into the syllabus – I question some of Haynes’ and Murriss’ devotion to young students’ autonomy. It seems to me no crime for a sympathetic expert to ascertain what a novice in her field should learn, and then teach it to him.

At any rate, my purpose here is not to adduce a syllabus or pedagogy for teaching the sorts of books discussed below – I mention some of the concerns of children’s philosophy classrooms as matters for which I have no answer, and perhaps only a dim

sense of the questions. I aspire, then, for philosophers and educationists to transform my literary observations into classroom practice. The main substance of this dissertation, which I present in chapters three to five –that is, the philosophical concerns and methods that appear in the *Alice* books, Baum’s *Oz* books, and *The World is Round* – is what I hope teachers will be able to absorb and convey to their students. In these chapters, I respond to the questions, “what are the philosophical themes and activities depicted in these texts?” and “how do the books communicate them?” or, “what are these texts trying to do to, or elicit from, their child readers?” The latter version of the second question is tricky, since I am in no position to say what real live readers actually take away from the books they read (this is an empirical question, but perhaps one for which it is difficult to design an experiment) – and in chapters one and two, I shall argue that readers’ experiences of texts are varied and unpredictable. Certainly, where the readers are literary critics, we seldom agree upon what a given work is “about”: what its shape is, what its politics and objectives are.¹⁷ Hence, I will be presenting what I believe readers *should* understand in and take away from my sample texts to engage with their philosophical material and participate in cerebral play.

Implicitly, I presuppose that we should all be invested in philosophical questioning and play, although I haven’t a developed justification for this premise, largely because it seems to me an obvious good to be able to manipulate concepts, inquire into the world around one, and occupy oneself using no other tools than one’s imagination. I

¹⁷ The case of academic criticism may not actually be all that informative here, since disagreement among critics is magnified by the institutional structure in which we work: literary research demands that we make new claims about texts, contradicting the old ones. I am assuming, however, that the interpretations which are fashionable among scholars at a given time filter down the educational ranks, and are reflected in recreational readers’ interpretations, if after a delay.

also assume that many people – adults and children – lack this faculty, for a variety of reasons, including among them lack of exposure, and also more insidious conditions, including the rationality of ends, pressure to conform, and traditionalist anxieties about critique. But I am also not sure that the varieties of practices that – with little attention to precision – I have called mental recreation, cerebral play, philosophizing, and so on, always or necessarily produce world- or even self-improving ends. In chapter three, I discuss theories of play, and in particular, scholars’ inability to prove that play is either adaptive or purely pleasurable. In a large part, their uncertainty appears to result from a misapprehension about the categories of use and pleasure, and the implicit assumption that pleasure is extraneous to function, or at best, an epiphenomenon. Rather (and again, with little justification), I am assuming that pleasure is sometimes a functional part of “use,” and vice versa, and that in the case of the sorts of gratifying intellectual activity with which I am concerned here, it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to try and disentangle momentary enjoyment from long-term cognitive or ideological benefit. At the same time, I want to let pleasure be a good on its own – and not require the defense that the source of the pleasure also produces functional dispositions.

My impulse to defend is in part a response to tendencies in the academic criticism of children’s literature, which include the ubiquitous neglect of philosophical themes in children’s books by critics trained in English, the inclination of some scholars to separate enjoyment from improvement, and routine cynicism about texts for children. My dissertation wants to say, “Look again at these books, for they do things that are enormously interesting, valuable, and pleasing.” Childhood studies scholars in English should pay closer attention to philosophers’ observations about children’s books, while

the case of the IAPC suggests that philosophers for children can benefit from literary insights into texts.

A caution is in order: because the field is broad, fluid, and difficult to define, it is possible to stick one's thumb into just about any text and pull out material that, with proper framing and tweaking, can be called "philosophy." (This, I fear, occurs too often in the popular "Philosophy in ..." series.) And here too, I do not have explanation or firm criteria for "philosophical children's books," although I hope that the above discussion of philosophy and P4C is instructive. The books I examine below are all manifestly philosophical; there are a few other similar texts in the canon of children's literature, and several more that are philosophical at moments. Time-slip fantasies contain a device that is necessarily philosophical, since questions about time are among the most baffling, unanswerable, and ever-present, but different texts may focus more or less on the theoretical questions surrounding time travel: those which create scenarios that bring the peculiarities of time to the fore, such as Diana Wynne-Jones' *A Tale of Time City* (1987), are more philosophical; whereas, a novel in which time travel does little more than provide the framework for an exciting plot might not be called "philosophical" at all. We should, in short, be judicious in our use of this qualifier.

While remaining cautious, I also want to allow that philosophy appears in more places than we might expect. One of the insights that I draw from P4C is the notion that our first instincts when young are to ask difficult metaphysical questions. Philosophers such as Gareth Matthews argue that the authors of philosophical children's books recognize and try to encourage this predisposition. Matthews identified "philosophical whimsy" as an important "style" of which a significant strand of juvenile

literature partakes as early as 1976, and *Cerebral Pleasures* is in some ways a development of and response to his work. Matthews writes that “our elementary and secondary schools reinforce only such wonder as will lead to the child’s learning what we consider useful knowledge – reading, mathematics, some science, and eventually what is called ‘social studies,’” thus leaving out a discipline that provides more questions than answers. He suggests that the inscrutable questions of philosophy threaten the epistemic complacency of adults who would rather suppress than participate in their children’s inquiry – and this is in part why the “philosophical whimsy” expressed by children and the books written for them is often denigrated or ignored (Matthews 1976).

My first chapter, “Mapping the Forest,” surveys the history of, and current trends in, English Department Childhood Studies, arguing against stock cynicism about juvenile literature, and examining a number of disciplinary premises that have led to a stalemate in the field. These include the polarization of essentialist and constructivist approaches to childhood, an oversimplified understanding of the way texts manifest ideology, and the injunction to restrict criticism to matters of representation. The “representational” mandate is ubiquitous in contemporary English studies and is not entirely ill founded, but rather limited, for it disqualifies or ignores the other material that texts have to offer: children’s books, I maintain, do far more than merely represent development to adulthood. My concerns about childhood studies are by no means rare, for several scholars have already protested against a model of children’s literature and culture as necessarily oppressive, and also against the state of inertia produced by a critical framework that prohibits the discussion of actual children. The more original elements of my argument in this chapter go against the grain of much current literary scholarship:

in addition to questioning the emphasis on matters of “representation,” I hold out against the idea that the morphological features of texts reflect or contain ideology.

Chapter two continues my critique by considering a diverse selection of interpretations of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books. Here I note that a great range of contradictory readings are often simultaneously accurate, but proceed from different hermeneutic assumptions. While I pay some attention here to critical assessments of ideology in *Alice*, I am more interested in the vastly different readings of the books that are made by the “scientific” community of philosophers, mathematicians, and linguists; and literary specialists, respectively. I then enact two different strategies for analyzing the *Alice* books, both of which explore the concerns with identity that the stories portray. The first focuses on the developmental teleology of the stories, and produces a paradigm “literary” reading in which Alice’s questions about identity are seen as a psychosocial matter that is resolved by maturation; while the second examines the texts as a series of teasing episodes, thus attending to fleeting play with language and ideas. The latter method brings out the books’ philosophical content – in particular, Alice’s metaphysical questions about identity – while the former leads to a concentration on plot and character.

In chapter three, “Mental Recreation in Wonderland,” I provide my own consideration of the *Alices*, applying the method that I use in subsequent chapters to examine other philosophical children’s books. Here I argue that Carroll’s play with ideas constitutes an effort to teach the cerebral pleasures of philosophizing; pleasures that the author himself obtained from and created through the numerous logical games and instructional texts that he produced years after the *Alice* books. In this chapter I dispute

the commonplace generalization mentioned above: that children's books fall to one or the other side of an "instruction/entertainment" divide. I propose, on the contrary, that "pleasure" and "pedagogy" are not opposites, but intimates; and that this is abundantly clear in the mental recreations that take place in Wonderland. In my analysis of the relationship between instruction and amusement, I draw upon Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997): a study of the different discourses, or "rhetorics" concerned with mammals' perplexing impulse to play. While in *Ambiguity* Sutton-Smith is more interested in what is said about play than the nature of the phenomenon itself, he repeatedly considers investigations of play that figure the faculty as either adaptive (that is, instructional, improving) or purposeless (in other words, "fun"). He notes and endorses a growing tendency not to separate the two functions, and I adopt this approach in my discussion of "mental recreation." I mean not to contend that we should see *Alice* as designed primarily to teach (whether mathematics, morals, or metaphysics), or to amuse, or even to do both at different moments, but rather that our impulse to categorize and define these different purposes is itself flawed, since, as in the case of play, we have little to gain from attempting to separate out what texts or aspects of texts give pleasure, and which produce new knowledge. I also catalogue some of the devices through which Carroll strives to quicken cerebral pleasures in the *Alices*: including distortions of familiar material, unsolvable riddles or logic jokes, absurd-seeming conversations, and play with sound and language, and argue that Carroll sets up his tomfoolery with words and concepts to model the sort of verbal or mental behavior that might be emulated by an enthused reader.

My exploration of L. Frank Baum's *Oz* books in chapter four elucidates several issues in the philosophy of mind, wisdom, and personhood which appear repeatedly in his part of the series. Unlike Lewis Carroll, Baum was unschooled in the practices and concerns of academic philosophy – but his unsophisticated treatment of the relevant material serves not to mishandle the topics, and instead to retain their accessibility. Along with the Philosophy for Children movement, I contend that metaphysical inquiry is a natural – and playful – everyday practice, and this is amply demonstrated in Baum's adventures in *Oz*.

Gertrude Stein's *The World is Round* (1939) is perhaps an anomalous entry in my catalogue of philosophical children's books, since this novel is far from well known, and does not employ the fantasy structure that is frequently employed by the strand. However, like Baum, Stein makes philosophizing seem a commonplace, unavoidable facet of human being. This is achieved through her depiction of the internal monologue of the central character: a nine-year-old named Rose, who meditates compulsively on the nature of human and animal minds, the matter of her own identity, the nature of personhood, and the difficulties of perceptual experience. Rose is deeply worried about the roundness of the world: a feature that bewilders and upsets her, although Stein, characteristically, fails to explain just why this is the case. Whilst critics have attempted to reconcile Rose's difficulty with roundness to any number of interpretations (the most popular of which have to do with sex, gender, or other psychosocial attributes), I contend that this is a mystery that should be maintained in the reader's – and the critic's – mind. This is because one of Stein's chief purposes in *World is Round* is to expose the ordinary mysteries that we encounter just by living. In chapter five, "A Case of

Introspection,” I argue that Stein’s prolix style, which has dubious success in her adult works, legitimates the sort of philosophizing that some children do on their own, encourages it in those who don’t, and portrays metaphysical concerns as everyday irrepressible matters.

My study sacrifices breadth for depth, and thus I have failed both to catalogue the range of philosophical children’s books and to devise a model for the type. Along the way, however, I occasionally gesture towards explanations for the “philosophically whimsical” variety of juvenile text. I suggest, for instance, that the centrality of the *Alice* books to children’s literature (and the many references, explicit and concealed, unintentional and calculated, to Carroll’s books in subsequent texts) sets it up as convivial towards philosophical themes. I wonder whether the characteristic playfulness of the type and its amenability to nonsense invites this sort of material. Finally, I have thought that there may be something about the regular procedures of specific genres of juvenile text – in particular, the fantasy genre – that make philosophical play a natural if not inevitable, result. I am not yet ready to abandon any of these ideas, but at the same time, none of them are fully fleshed enough to make a theory; hence, what follows is unavoidably incomplete, and I present it to provoke more comprehensive discussion.

I. MAPPING THE FOREST¹⁸

One cannot rely on a cultural product to be, in itself, subversive or liberatory. Too much occurs during the process of interpretation for a cultural product alone, outside a tradition of critical conversation, to carry such weight. That critical tradition – be it located in a classroom, a newspaper column, a circle of friends, or a parent’s whisper into a child’s ear – critically affects what people see and hear in any cultural product.

Lori Kenschaft¹⁹

Of all the fatiguing, futile, empty trades, the worst, I suppose, is writing about writing.

Hilaire Belloc²⁰

A large part of the purpose of this dissertation is to react against recent trends in the study of children’s literature and childhood as they occur in university English departments. Here I am concerned primarily with what Marah Gubar has referred to as the “climate of cynicism” surrounding texts produced for juveniles (2009, 28) – but I shall also discuss a number of comorbid tendencies in my field specifically, and in English more broadly, including among them: the polarization of “essentialist” and “constructivist” approaches (and the taboo against the former); a simplistic or biased

¹⁸ In his wonderful offensive-posing-as-review, “Fruits of the Academic Forest: Exploring Books about Children’s Books” (2006), Peter Hunt reflects sardonically on the growth of the academic field of childhood studies thus: “Once upon a time, under some prelapsarian tree,” he writes, “there was a storyteller and a child. But this is the twenty-first century, and the tree has grown to a scarcely penetrable forest of words.” Hunt proposes that “one way of exploring, even mapping, the forest, might be to take a sample of its recent fruits” (126) – the books written about children’s books. In the end, none of said “fruits” are found sweet.

¹⁹ 1999, 242.

²⁰ Quoted in Hunt 2006, 126.

understanding of the way ideology manifests in texts; adherence to a developmental imperative in the interpretation of children's literature; and the injunction to restrict the object of criticism to matters of "representation." While the latter two currents may not necessarily be problematic in themselves (although I shall have more to say about representational criticism below), I object to them on the grounds that in practice they too often disqualify or ignore the other material that texts have on offer: in short, that the representation of development is by no means all there is to children's literature. Meanwhile, I propose that the terms "essential" and "constructed" have become more harmful than handy to the vocabulary of childhood studies, not because they are meaningless or irrelevant to the field, but because the dichotomy – or the use of the terms as indicative of a dichotomy (in a spirit, moreover, that debars critics from identifying with one of its poles) – is more often abused than used. Katherine Jones refers to this state of affairs more politely when she protests that "it is important not to set up an age role versus age difference, society versus biology binary" in the case of childhood: meaning, as I understand it, that solely essentialist or constructivist understandings of the category are both obviously flawed – that is, that children have (generalizable) innate, and also socially manufactured characteristics (Jones 2006, 297).

Although critics such as Jones and others share my position, the difficulties surrounding the language of essentialism and constructivism can still be seen in Karen Sánchez-Eppler's entry on "Childhood" in Philip Nel and Lissa Paul's 2011 *Keywords for Children's Literature*. In her opening paragraphs, Sánchez-Eppler appears to affirm the now standard "constructivist" model, bemoaning the fact that "despite ... constructionist scholarship, the sense of childhood as a ubiquitous and fundamental

category of human life has proved remarkably resilient” (35). However, in the next paragraph, she affirms that “the essentialism of childhood has proved ... resilient and convincing because it rests, at least in part, upon biological fact” (36). As I see it, the move that occurs between these two statements has more to do with the critic’s squeamishness about identifying herself as someone who is prepared to essentialize aspects of childhood than her interest in discovering the factual conditions thereof. (After all, “biological fact” means that childhood is in significant ways an essential state – or, a “ubiquitous and fundamental category of human life.”) A similar move takes place in Jones’s complaint, above, and it is a common one amongst the critics with whom I ally myself, but one that I wish to avoid. As I see it, Jones, Sánchez-Eppler, and their kin are sensitive enough to the material world that they can accommodate the “biological” realities of childhood. The near-ubiquitous insistence on pluralism, however, has rendered any project that admits to essentialism taboo (and “essentialism” is invariably defined as a straw-man concept to which no sane person would subscribe); hence, the reality-sensitive critic may not call herself what she is, but must instead partake of the linguistic maneuvers that let her describe herself as a constructivist while practicing – as she should, in this case – as an essentialist.

This chapter comprises a brief history and critique of the literary study of children’s books, and it should be noted from the start that my complaints about the field are by no means rare. In different respects, I am in the company of Mary Galbraith (2001), Jackie Stallcup (2002), Jones (2006), Peter Hunt (2006), John Morgenstern (2009), Marah Gubar (2009, 2011), and others: all of whom object to what Gubar has termed the “colonization paradigm” in childhood studies, and the state of inertia produced by a

critical model that prohibits the discussion of actual children (Gubar 2009, 32). Hence, what follows comprises more review than original thinking, and I shall present the substance of my own thought in chapter two, where I consider some interpretive problems revealed by the critical treatment of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books – which are my “pleasant example” of a text that is both central to children's literature studies and also raises a number of problems for textual analysis.

As I understand it, the paradigm of childhood that reigns in the English department is largely the consequence of Jacqueline Rose's too-famous *The Case of Peter Pan or: The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* ([1984] 1992).²¹ While at the time of publication, *The Case of Peter Pan* produced controversy and suspicion,²² it has come to be treated as the foremost work of criticism in the field,²³ and at the same time has installed

²¹ Here I do not mean to pretend that Rose was the only architect of the current paradigm: *The Case of Peter Pan* was but one text in a trend towards ideological criticism questioning the model of power depicted in children's literature. (Jack Zipes' *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* [1983], for instance, preceded Rose.) I assign Rose a leading role in the development of current critical practice because *The Case of Peter Pan* appears to be the most oft quoted, discussed, and prescribed theoretical text in childhood studies by far.

²² In their introduction to the fall 2010 issue of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, David Rudd and Anthony Pavlik reflect upon the aftermath of *The Case of Peter Pan*, describing four categories of (contemporary and continued) response: those which “ignore [Rose] entirely;” “engage with her work, but from very different theoretical roots,” conceding that she does well to rattle too-simple assumptions about children's literature, but arguing that her project leads only to a deadlock; those which invoke her maxims merely as “a source of provocative quotation;” and those in which “there is ... open engagement” with Rose's work (224-5).

²³ A curious about-turn can be seen between Perry Nodelman's 1985 and 2010 responses to Rose – which I view as symptomatic of the movement of fashion in the field of childhood studies. In his 1985 review of *The Case of Peter Pan*, Nodelman trashes Rose's prolix style and finds her “seriously wrong in her assessment of children's literature” (98); however, in the issue of *ChLAQ* mentioned in the previous footnote, “Former Editor's Comments: Or, The Possibility of Growing Wiser,” Nodelman recants his earlier critique and asserts Rose's pre-eminence. While it may be generous to grant that twenty-five years on, he may indeed be “wiser,” Nodelman's main defence of his earlier ‘error’ is that, since 1985, Rose's words have been “quoted many times,” that she has had a resounding influence on subsequent criticism (including his own), and in short, “has more than stood the test of time” as “probably one of the most quoted books in children's literature criticism” (Nodelman 2010, 231, 237-8; the latter quotation reproduced from Rudd and Pavlik). What Nodelman's self-correction amounts to, then, is surely one of the oldest errors in the book: asserting

Philippe Ariès's dubious *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) as the go-to history for literary scholars interested in childhood.²⁴ Rose's central argument is that, far from being the simple beneficiaries of texts generously and uncomplicatedly produced by adults for children, because the category childhood is inherently problematic – and, indeed, constructed by those very texts written “for children” – those texts do not satisfy tell us, not about children, but about “our” fantasies of them, and hence, about the adults nurturing those fantasies. *The Case of Peter Pan* is the source of the colonization paradigm mentioned above, for it is here that Rose adapts the methods of post-colonial studies to the case of childhood when she incidentally compares the relationship between the adults producing and the children subjected to children's literature to that between European colonialists and their subjects.

In 1992, Perry Nodelman consecrated the model of juvenile texts as vehicles of colonization via reference to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). In “The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature” (1992), Nodelman substitutes the terms “child psychology and children's literature” and “childhood” for “Orientalism” and “the Orient” respectively in a paragraph reproduced from Said, to show the correspondence between what he regards as two similarly repressed states and the means of their repression (Nodelman 1992, 29). Although Nodelman's strategy overlooks the many ways in which adult-child relations in the West are unmistakably different from

that, because a text is popular and oft-quoted, it is on the right track, and we should pay attention to it.

²⁴ Like *The Case of Peter Pan*, *Centuries of Childhood* produced much controversy upon publication, and although historians have by-and-large discredited both Ariès' methodology and his findings, “scholars in other disciplines have held tenaciously to the idea that medieval society had no concept of childhood” (Heywood 2010, 344), for it both serves the constructivist interest and reduces the burden of research.

those between Western colonialists and Oriental subjects, the trend in English studies towards power-focused criticism (and with it, implicitly, the idea that oppressed or “othered” categories are aided by our discovery of textual repression) helps to kindle enthusiasm for ill-conceived appropriations of models from other fields to that of childhood studies.

Feminist theory is also often thought to contain insights useful for understanding the treatment of childhood and children, since (for example) “children, like women, are lumped together as helpless and dependent” in conventional cultural representations (Paul 1987, 187). The trouble is, while there may be similarities between children’s and erstwhile women’s literature (and while the two groups are often depicted together), there are obvious differences between the essential conditions of children and women respectively. While it is reactionary to portray, or worse, to treat adult women who have the same capacity for autonomy as adult men as “helpless and dependent,” children are in fact dependent, and relatively helpless, and it is an undeniable characteristic of the group that for a period its members require the care of older people. In other words, when we “lump” children “together as helpless and dependent,” we do them no wrong: rather, we tell of things as they are.²⁵ As I see it, the misappropriation of theoretical tools from other scenarios to the case of childhood results from confusion about constructivism, which includes the erroneous assumption that ‘everything is constructed.’ As Stanley Fish points out in a different context, the notion of constructivism is useful “only if it is limited; only if it is a thesis about some things,” for then it “enable[s] a

²⁵ For purposes of this discussion I have glossed a number of subtleties: in particular, I do not specify an age at which children cease dependence (this is in part culturally constructed). The significant thing is that there is a period in the youth of all creatures where dependence and helplessness are unavoidable – and it is only foolish to protest this state of affairs.

distinction between that which is socially constructed and that which is not” (1995, viii-ix). Traditional generalizations about gender, race, and class, are social constructions;²⁶ these stand in contrast to the case of childhood – a biological phase that therefore has at least some essential (and, furthermore, discoverable) characteristics.

Even when the correspondence between childhood and other states is understood to be rough and metaphorical – as Nodelman proposes with regard to the Orientalist model in a later argument, *The Hidden Adult* (2008, 163-4) – I maintain that the differences between the situations of colonized peoples or women and children respectively are significant enough that recourse to Said or to feminist theory does more to obscure than to clarify our understanding of childhood. Although he accommodates the fact that children are genuinely in a position to require some degree of protection and guidance from their parental and societal “colonizers,” Nodelman’s inattention to history and context allows him to overlook important facts about children in the west. One might say that what is at stake is not “oppression,” but rather the *reproduction* of an unjust society via the socialization that occurs through a number of different mechanisms, books among them. Critics such as Jack Zipes (1983, 2001) and John Stephens (1992) accommodate the view that juvenile culture is recuperative rather than repressive,²⁷ but there are still problems with this approach. To begin with, it seems peculiar to focus one’s diagnostic energies on literature when other spheres (that is, school, family,

²⁶ In the cases of gender (or rather, sex) and race, I am somewhat inclined to write “mostly” constructed – and to think that we needn’t be shy of exploring the biological (hence, essential) characteristics of the relevant categories. The trouble is, of course, that the long history of oppression of racial groups and women, justified on the basis of their imagined or invented natural traits, makes this hardly a neutral activity.

²⁷ More accurately, children’s culture *attempts* to reproduce, rather than to repress, since its success is dependent upon the state of the audience, rather than that of the texts.

advertising, other children) have a far more obvious role in socialization. Indeed, the marginality of children's literature might give the medium some freedom to resist tradition, since mainstream ideologues are hardly likely to pay the category much attention.²⁸ Secondly, while there are numerous instances in which works of children's fiction are clearly designed to perpetuate some aspect of the status quo (and not always a harmful aspect), I dispute the notion that juvenile literature is all, or necessarily, or straightforwardly, formulated to teach orthodoxy. Nevertheless, some or other version of the bleak vision of the species prevails in a major strand of scholarship by literary critics of childhood.

Rose, in launching the template for later criticism, described children's fiction as inherently ideologically conservative, since its uncomplicated language implies that reality is "knowable and controllable" ([1984] 1992, 124), while its sanitizing of troubling or "adult" concepts, its realism, narrative closure, and its veiled or obvious instruction in social and linguistic norms, all point to a reactionary ethos. This is perhaps the most significant concept to be seized upon in subsequent research, including dissenting scholarship, and conceived as orthodoxy: the notion that children's literature exhibits a circumscribed set of traits, and that these features signal a parochial genre.²⁹ Juvenile

²⁸ Along these lines, Julia Mickenberg argues in *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (2006) that in McCarthy era America, children's literature was a rare form in which progressives and radicals were able to express themselves safely. However, a radical writer does not necessarily translate into a radical text – and the blurring of aesthetic with political radicalism is an error that is ubiquitous in English studies today. Many (although not all) of the texts Mickenberg discusses are formally conservative – although their content may attempt to convey left-wing ideology.

²⁹ Nodelman is determined that the range of children's literature is restricted enough in its devices and themes that it qualifies as genre, rather than some broader classification (Nodelman and Reimer 2003, 186-90). I prefer Peter Hunt's term, "species," since it allows that children's literature "parallels the rest of 'literature' from at least the mid-eighteenth century, and ... encompasses virtually all genres..." (Hunt, ed. 1990, 1). "Genre" requires that we create or detect textual and

texts are understood to be simple, action-oriented, conveyed via the consciousness of an innocent protagonist, optimistic, didactic, and repetitious in form and content (Nikolajeva 1998, 221).³⁰ Childhood studies critics argue that the net effect of these features is to resist the complexity, ambiguity, and even incoherence of modernist, post-modernist, and/or ‘high literary’ texts; and so to position the implied readers as ignorant, incapable, and unsubtle; hence embracing and perpetuating dominant societal norms by falsely representing language and society as straightforward. Here I précis a range of scholars’ sometimes only implicit worries about the ostensive conservatism of juvenile literature – worries which in turn have roots in academic anxiety about popular culture, which may or may not have a Marxist bent.

Zipes’ *Sticks and Stones: The Troubling Success of Children’s Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (2001) is perhaps the best example of a critical text that assumes that the cultural commodities of capitalist production cannot possibly contain liberatory material. The whole species of children’s literature is written off, then, because a form designed for mass consumption by a susceptible group must unfailingly support the interests of those in power.³¹ The trouble with this assumption is, capitalism is flexible: able to both

contextual limitations, whereas “species” allows for historic change and structural and thematic variety, describing the category “children’s literature” in terms of the “family resemblances” of its components rather than a rigid set of rules (see Gubar 2011).

³⁰ I excerpt this list from Maria Nikolajeva’s “Exit Children’s Literature?” (1998), a short essay in which the author accepts the conventional characterization of historic children’s literature, but argues that late-twentieth-century developments in the field lead it increasingly to defy its norms. Nodelman and Reimer refer to a blueprint “no-name story,” which exhibits a stereotypical “home-away-home” structure with a child, or childlike protagonist, who travels in search of adventure, but ultimately prefers the security of home (2003, 188-91).

³¹ Anxieties about popular culture, of course, have a long and varied history. Whilst the New Critics may have deemed commercial art aesthetically impoverished, Marxists both historic and contemporary, have been more concerned about its ideological content. Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (1970/1971) (upon which Zipes draws), for example, has been crucial in rousing suspicion of the “Apparatuses” by which ideology is supposedly transmitted, of

produce, and absorb the response to, artifacts that can be seen as subversive. The capitalist economy also brings with it many beneficial developments – significantly, a broadening of the range of technological and aesthetic possibilities. In short, it is no contradiction that texts manufactured by the “culture industry” (presumably all texts) should at times be seen to resist or ignore the power-structure from which they come. More importantly, as I shall stress repeatedly below, it is all too easy to find the ideologies that one seeks in texts, for neither texts nor ideology are straightforward phenomena.

Still, the commonplace critical generalizations about the structural aspects of juvenile literature are reasonably accurate for many texts that fall into the category.³² But I am far from convinced that all of these features signal social conservatism – especially attributes such as linguistic straightforwardness, realism, and ‘closure.’ Nevertheless, the notion that a text’s morphological traits convey its politics exists through-out English studies (indeed, the attempt to ascertain the ideological implications of the formal features of texts is a major project of the field in its as it current state) and can be seen, for instance, in the familiar generalizations about modernist texts – in which open-endedness, difficulty, fragmentation, nonlinearity, and so on, are said to signify political

which culture is one; while Frederic Jameson continues the projects of the Frankfurt school theorists in his critique of the “culture industry.” In some ways I sympathize with the argument that much mass culture is designed to sustain capitalism and its inequalities. However, scrutiny of the actual texts said to perform this operation almost inevitably reveals that, notwithstanding the conditions of their production, mass culture is far from inflexible and seldom single-minded.

³² The understanding that all children’s books follow a single template overlooks difficulties in generalizing about the type, since the features of texts said to fall into the category “children’s literature” are constantly changing, and should not, as Gubar points out, be defined, but rather observed (2011). Nevertheless, it is meaningful to say that *many* children’s books exhibit the above simplifications (some of which are designed to accommodate newly literate readers), without claiming that the relevant features are necessary characteristics of the class of text.

radicalism.³³ Sometimes, however, these structural traits are seen as symptomatic of just the opposite, since the complexity of high modernist literature means that only a privileged few can gain access to its consciousness-broadening effects. Arguments about the ideological implications of the structural features of texts are always built upon confirmation bias because those features, as we shall see below and in the chapter following, are not, as Frederick Jameson's generalization has it, imbued with ideology.

In addition to its effects on the content of later criticism, *The Case of Peter Pan* has influenced the language of childhood studies discourse. Rose's introduction is a fount of pithy, indecipherable statements – such as the claim that children's literature is “impossible,” as is the “relation between adult and child”; that “desire,” as Rose uses the word, “refer[s] to a form of investment by the adult in the child, and to the demand made by the adult on the child as the effect of that investment, a demand which fixes the child and then holds it in place”; that “children's fiction sets up the child as the pure point of origin in relation to language, sexuality and the state” ([1984] 1992, 1, 3-4, 8). Versions of these assertions are wheeled out routinely in subsequent research, and

³³ As I understand it, this argument comes from the modernists themselves: specifically, the avant-gardes, who insisted that aesthetic innovation would lead to radical political change. To me, the perpetuation of this idea tells of the ingenuousness of critics who take for granted the feasibility of artists' claims almost a century after they have been proven unusable. (Which is to say: the avant-gardes did not provoke revolution, because massive change in the social and political sphere cannot come from experimentation in the art-world). There is a question here about what powers art (both popular and 'high') can have, and my answer is usually 'not very much.' As we shall see below, proponents of a “radical children's literature” often tout the potential effects of their subject texts as evidence of their ideological provocativeness: a matter that is far easier to speculate upon than it is to prove. Part of the problem, as footnoted above, is that it is too easy to assume that radicalism in art translates to radicalism in politics. Still, it is legitimate to analyze a text for what it *seems* to demand from the reader (I shall do this in my interpretation of the *Alice* books in Chapter three) – although we are playing a complex game in which readers are unpredictable and texts are inconsistent.

because Rose is taken as an authoritative source, it is often seen as unnecessary to inquire into what, if anything, they mean.³⁴

Another dubious critical practice in part popularized by Rose can be seen in the rhetorical method of the quotations reproduced from her introduction: that is, the practice of referring to two puzzling entities called “the child” and “the adult.” This formulation is not only Rose’s fault, of course, since it can be seen in numerous sub-fields in the English Department and beyond – and no doubt derives in part from Rose’s Lacanian background. “The adult” and “the child” are not meant to refer to actual adults and children; as I understand it, they denote an idea about or image of adults and children respectively. To consider “*the child* as pure point of origin,” then, means something rather clunkier, like ‘our culture’s idea of what a child is, is the pure point of origin...’ (Rose [1984] 1992, 8, italics added; I shan’t attempt to decode “pure point of origin”). One of Rose’s main intentions, and that of subsequent criticism (including that with which I sympathize) is to inveigh against monolithic notions of what a “child” is or, to put it differently, against the homogenization of children; against the idea that children are all the same; against child as stereotype; against a stereotype of children. The trouble, however, with the “the child” rubric is that it is a red herring: Rose, and way too many of her descendants, including the dissenting ones, have directed their powers of critique towards attacking a stereotype – which, by definition, is an idea known to be false from the start.

³⁴ What, for instance, does it mean to “fix” “the child”? What does it mean to describe a “relationship” – or more properly, a category of relationships – as “impossible”?

On top of this, the conventional use of “the adult” and “the child” as seen in Rose and her critical lineage is inconsistent: Rose means to make a general claim about adults (that is, how adults envision or ‘make use of the image of’ “the child”), while at the same time rejecting the project of generalization. But as Gubar hints in “On Not Defining Children’s Literature” (2011), the rhetorical manoeuvre that takes place when “the adult” is set opposite “the child” stereotypes adults to avoid stereotyping children. Both groups, of course, are diverse, and most people know this. Surely it is insane to believe that (‘an image of’) “the adult” corresponds to realities of adults, while fulminating against the notion that (‘an image of’) “the child” represents something about real children?³⁵

Still, a generous reader might observe that in *The Case of Peter Pan*, Rose intended primarily to respond both to the critical paradigm that preceded her and popular discourse about children’s books – and that a degree of cynicism was wanted in a budding field still dominated by mawkish, or at least uncritical, celebrations of what might be regarded as ideologically suspect children’s books. In a large part, Rose and her descendants’ arguments come out of the accurate, if trivial, observation that in the case of children’s literature, the group responsible for textual production is necessarily distinct from the readership: in all but a few cases, adults write the books and children read them; or, as it is sometimes put, there is a “gap” between the producers (amongst whom are included authors, editors, publishers, librarians, parents, teachers) and the consumers of books for children. There are instances in which it is important to notice this gap. For

³⁵ To be clear, my use of “*an* image of...” as opposed to “*the* image of...” is meant to indicate that the traits attributed to “*the* child” and “*the* adult” in Rose and others are but possible visions of the respective categories among numerous options for thinking about adults and children. “*The*” has no small role in setting up the red herring mentioned above.

example, I have had students argue that the ‘imaginativeness’ of a work of children’s fiction tells of the ‘imaginativeness’ of children: a non sequitur that results from a commonplace confusion between writer and reader and a case of wishful thinking. But where the simple division between the powers of writers and those of readers is properly observed, I count the “gap” uninteresting for a number of reasons. To begin with, all adults have been children (as we have not all been black, female, or colonized), and most of us have the capacity to recall and observe the state of childhood. But even if somehow we were not all former children, I protest the notion that others’ experiences (including even the experiences of the many groups seen as “other”) are impervious to empathic comprehension.³⁶ Finally, and most importantly, the observation that there is an asymmetry between the producers and consumers of texts for children is inconsequential because, as Peter Hunt has pointed out, this state of affairs is hardly “‘unique to children’s literature,’ for ‘[e]very literary act ... contains this imbalance,’” which, furthermore, is not “‘necessarily malign’” (qtd in Rudd and Pavlik 2010, 224, original italics). “Gaps,” which are to be found everywhere, are not the same as conflicts. And obeisance to this particular “gap” requires that all of our memories of childhood be reconfigured as distortions and lies: a view that is totalizing, gloomy, and finally, unsustainable.

³⁶ This is not to say that it is easy to avoid making mistakes when we “imagine” beyond our own experience – or that terrible mistakes about “others’ experiences” have not been made historically. But “mistakes,” I would argue, most often occur when those doing the “imagining” are seeking to confirm their biases, rather than to empathize. And to those who would argue that empathy is ‘impossible’ and confirmation bias inevitable I can have no compelling response, save that we are left with an impasse in which the process of disillusionment leaves us not only without illusions, but without vision either. I am not prepared to foreclose on the possibility that empirical study can furnish us with useful knowledge about childhood: knowledge that might lead to constructive generalizations without homogenizing children.

Meanwhile, those who subscribe to the colonization paradigm might pay more heed to the fact that the children who have the luxury of books are usually socio-economically privileged enough that they are not the youth about whom those who purport to care about children should be most concerned. The model of childhood in which fortunate Western youth are seen to be oppressed by culture is not only built upon a logical fallacy, but is also ideologically spurious because it legitimates disregard for genuinely deprived children's real suffering: suffering that results from global discrepancies in wealth, rather than local discrepancies in age. The source of the colonization paradigm's popularity amongst childhood studies scholars is a moral injunction that reigns in the English Department as a whole: to consider texts in a supposedly more socially responsible way than had been the case at the height of formalist criticism. Paradoxically, the effort to sympathize with a subjugated group has given scholars of childhood an excuse to avoid considering the interests of groups who most need attention. The problem is not, however, that such critics fail to examine real children in their most impoverished conditions (if this were our passion, we made a foolish choice to study texts), but rather that they pretend that useful social engagement is possible for our field, given the limitations of both content and methodology (not to mention institutional setting).³⁷ Let us not claim to be aiding an oppressed category when the category is not oppressed, and we are not aiding them.

On a different note, although the sorts of texts against which *The Case of Peter Pan* reacted lack the confrontational spirit that Rose, writing from the perspective of

³⁷ This is a very abbreviated version of the argument that Stanley Fish makes in *Professional Correctness* (1995), and the reader should assume my broad agreement with Fish's position.

deconstructionist feminism, brought to the scene, they are not quite as misguided as her polemic might have us suppose.³⁸ The critical method inaugurated by Rose denies scholars two of the most important resources that we have for contemplating questions related to childhood: the insights of children and our own memories of being young. Rose's predecessors and opponents make use of these resources, and their recourse to children or memories is not in itself misguided. Rather, the problem is that they sometimes (even often) use this material uncritically, without taking account of the conditions and limits of their specimens. While in "The Precarious Life of Children's Literature Criticism" 2007, Perry Nodelman cautions critics to distinguish "real children" from "the" reified, essentialized "real child" – implicitly asserting that our interactions with living children and our memories of ourselves as children do not furnish us with generalizable information about childhood as a state – I would argue that if we are cautious and fastidious about the boundaries of our sample populations, we need not throw out these rich sources of knowledge (Nodelman 2007, 5).³⁹ Historian Paula Fass recommends that, in response to the vagaries of memory and the individuality of children, "we be careful, professional, and judicious," for the fact that "adult renditions of childhood are fallible" is "hardly a new discovery" (2010, 162).

³⁸ Some members of this type (which I might define loosely as critical texts on children's literature that, for better or worse, accommodate the existence and insights of children and adult memories of childhood) followed – and continue to follow – Rose. These include John Rowe Townsend's *Written For Children* (1965), Aidan Chambers' *Booktalk* (1985), *The Signal Approach to Children's Books* (ed. Nancy Chambers 1980), Jonathan Cott's *Pipers at the Gates of Dawn* (1985), and *The Cool Web* (ed. Margaret Meek, Aidan Waldow, and Griselda Barton, 1977).

³⁹ In "The Precarious Life," Nodelman is most concerned to respond to the deconstructionist Reading critics' (that is, Rose's main heirs) failure to distinguish "real children" from "the real child" in his work. Nodelman and I are both intent to "act as if we believe that children do exist outside discourse" (a peculiar formulation, which only implies that we might not believe this because Rose and the Reading critics appear not to) (Nodelman 2007, 7), but I am inclined to dispute the notion that anyone, save its opponents, actually buys into the notion of "the real child."

To sum up: *The Case of Peter Pan* installed or popularized a number of assumptions about juvenile texts and methods for evaluating child-lore that are now taken for granted by many literary scholars of childhood. The current orthodoxies in English Department childhood studies include: (1) a taboo against essentialism; (2) the discounting of memory as a resource for understanding childhood on the grounds that (all?) adults “view [childhood] in the same idyllic terms, in the golden glow of retrospective nostalgia [sic]” (Nodelman 2008, 46); (3) the notion that texts for children are by and large ideologically repressive or reproductive, and attempt to dominate, control, or “colonize” their audience (an idea that involves certain mistaken assumptions about how ideology manifests in texts); and (4) a straw man understanding of “the” cultural vision of children (and ‘the critic’s’ vision of adults) and a failure to evaluate the nature of representations and their relation to reality. Before I consider an important ideology-focused reaction to Rose, I shall make a brief digression on the “representational” mandate in English and cultural studies.

In the preface to *Literary Criticism: An Autopsy* (1997), Mark Bauerlein meditates upon “what [he] thought” in the early nineties “was an inscrutable conception, namely, that the English department and its members should represent the world and that this goal was not so much an institutional definition as an ethical obligation” (x). The shift to “representation” as the principal subject matter of English studies is the consequence of the broadening of the field from the narrow and elitist sphere of “literature” to “culture at large,” so, it is thought, pursuing the moral principle of inclusivity, returning texts to the world from which they come, and allowing the scholar to transcend disciplinary

boundaries and descend from his ivory tower to the streets below (Bauerlein 1997, 1).⁴⁰ The directive to seek out what a text (or group of texts) “represents,” and so to make a claim about the text’s or the genre’s influence on and by social reality is one to which the whole field of English and cultural studies is subject. In the case of children’s literature studies, the pre-eminence of the representational mandate can be seen in the ubiquitous object of scrutiny: that is, “the representation of the child.” Notwithstanding the protests of the very same scholars who pursue this topic with abandon, I can only suppose that the field thinks juvenile texts so facile and one-dimensional that this is all there is to the entire category. (It may be that some children’s books, indeed, have little more to them than their “representation” of children, but those, I would say, without compunction, are hardly worth our critical attention.) On top of this, it is always implied and never explained or rigorously investigated just what the connection between the children represented in books and those that exist in reality actually involves: just how they influence one another, and what the significance of the representations is.

Poststructuralist scholars such as Jacqueline Rose and Karin Lesnik-Oberstein may consider material “reality” irrelevant to the equation, but I can’t see how the matter is worth exploring at all if not to make a claim about causation. I treat Lesnik-Oberstein (e.g. 2000, 2004) and the other Reading critics as Rose’s main heirs, largely for their refusal to consider openly the relationship between discursive and material realms. Lesnik-Oberstein is known for baiting scholars who make the mistake of referring to children as real live persons: an intolerable solecism, in her view. She not only objects to the use of memory and observation as resources for the investigation of childhood, but

⁴⁰ Again, see also Fish 1995.

also scorns scientists' and social scientists' efforts to illuminate the stage (2000, 223, 224). Although Lesnik-Oberstein's criticism is relatively marginal to the field, her grammar is representative, and exhibits the nebulous logic that characterizes Rose and her more moderate heirs. While she lays claim to originality, it seems to me that when Lesnik-Oberstein contemplates "childhood," her aim is rather similar to that of the rest of the field; that is, she means to explore "what is the child [sic] seen to be and why" (2000, 222). I have already discussed the implications of "the child" formulation. To this I add the observation that the crafty use of the passive voice allows critics to avoid identifying just *who* sees children as *what*. To be fair, Lesnik-Oberstein points out that children are "seen as" a range of often contradictory things, and the notion that discourse is "unstable" is a critical premise in her argument that accommodates fluidity and variety in 'ways of seeing' (e.g., 2004, 18). (This is the great insight of post structuralism – and its downfall, as I see it, is the failure to recognize that fluidity in meaning is compatible with straightforward attempts to determine meanings and, more significantly, with the use of 'transparent' language to discuss those findings, while accommodating their difficulties.) However, if critics refuse to pin down just whom they are talking about (while properly allowing for a variety of perspectives), I don't see how we can hope to establish "why" children are "seen" to be anything at all. In any event, the formulation, "children are seen as X," in place of the more informative, "Y sees children as X," allows the scholar of childhood to pretend that "adults'" vision of children is uniform and intelligible.

English studies more generally assumes that the way an object of interest is depicted in a text (or, more prudently, a set of texts) gives us important information about how that object was or is imagined by the groups responsible for producing and

consuming the text. Often, the content of the relevant representation is said to reveal something important about the workings of the culture from which it comes. These are ambitious projects, and while texts obviously tell of contexts (if they didn't, all of history would be lost to us), English scholars lack a systematic, tested method for ascertaining what is being told by images that, if they are found rich and interesting enough to be worthy of study, are almost always ambiguous. Furthermore, the limits of the information furnished by representations are unknown – although if we examine our own responses to popular representations, we might realize that people seldom straightforwardly believe what is depicted in the imagery of their culture. Even ordinary people, untrained in literary studies, tend to understand that representation is a far cry from reality. What, then, are we discovering when we unpack cultural and literary representations? This remains unclear to me, although I suspect that the case of childhood as described above is illuminating: that is, I surmise that the project of representational criticism is the critique of stereotypes.

I return, however, to the issue of ideology-critique in childhood studies. As we have seen, much of the critical interpretation of children's books is premised upon the assumption that 'the book' is out to get 'the child' – via the depiction of child characters (or animals said to stand in for children) as incapable, simple, powerless, precocious, intimate with nature, untarnished, innocent, tied to rigid developmental schema, unencumbered, and so on. Indeed, just about any depiction of a child (animal or human) can be recruited to a power-focused ideological argument siding with a slighted character or reader. Hence, 'the' childhood studies scholar has a formula ready at her fingertips, and because many texts are neither structurally nor ideologically straightforward, it is

usually possible to manoeuvre the evidence such that it supports the relevant orthodoxy.

There is, of course, a backlash: critics who argue, against Rose, Lesnik-Oberstein, Nodelman, Zipes, and many others, that children's books side with a child-figure, at least some of the time, and have the power to urge rebellion instead of conformity: that they can be liberating and enlivening just as they can be "oppressive" or ideologically conservative. This is the group for a "radical" children's literature, and includes scholars such as Alison Lurie (1998), Eliza Dresang (1998),⁴¹ Philip Nel (2002), Kimberley Reynolds (2007), and (in places) Nikolajeva (1996, 1998).⁴² This strand of criticism argues that formal innovations in certain works of juvenile fiction, often from the modernist period onwards, reflect ideological disruptions, and tell us that the species is not wholly or necessarily reactionary: that it may strive to engender questioning and change.

Reynolds' *Radical Children's Literature* is perhaps the most prominent contribution, and explicitly sets up its project as a response to *The Case of Peter Pan*. Reynolds' critique of Rose is in some ways similar to mine: in particular, she points out that both images and conceptions of children are diverse (across both persons and time-periods); that the

⁴¹ Lurie and Dresang are both relatively uncritical (and not explicitly political) in their analyses of children's literature. Lurie is concerned with historical works, and appears to argue that the species is inherently subversive for its invitation to child-readers to rebel against the adult world; while Dresang is concerned with the children's books of the "digital age." Both are more difficult to take seriously than, say, Nel and Reynolds, because it is obvious that they idealize both children and children's literature – that is, they make the mistake that Rose and others properly caution against.

⁴² Interestingly, Nikolajeva's work of the late '90s argues against the model of children's literature as necessarily conservative or oppressive, by considering texts published in the twentieth-century that break a set of rules defining the species as realistic, restricted, and traditionalist. However, in *Power, Voice, and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (2010), she appears to make an about-turn, by examining a range of juvenile fiction for the methods by which it "others the child." (Note that the grammar of the final axiom clouds the issue of whether it is "the child" *character* who is being "othered" or "the child" *reader*.)

dim view of children's literature accounts for neither all children's books nor all adults' estimations of children; that the species is not, in fact, "becalmed as an art form" (Reynolds 2007, 15). Reynolds's main intention, however, is to note that the language of some varieties of children's books – particularly the "large and impressive body of nonsense writing" – serve to "destabilise... meaning" rather than to falsely portray language and reality as straightforward. She zeros in on an instance in the conclusion of *The Case of Peter Pan* in which Rose remarks that juvenile literature eschews modernist experimentation. Reynolds responds that, on the contrary, certain children's books exhibit features of modernism and other traits that signal aesthetic innovation and generic flexibility, and thus should be seen as progressive or subversive, rather than traditionalist (Rose [1984] 1992, 142; Reynolds 2007, 7). Nel's argument in *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity* (2002) is similar, but he means also to trace a chain of influence from modernist (largely visual) artists to a selection of children's picture books that refer to, and employ the methods of their predecessors.

Proponents of both models of children's literature – that it is necessarily conservative or that it allows for, or even invites, subversion – provide reasonably accurate descriptions of the texts that they examine. (Even, as we shall see in the next chapter, when they are concerned with the very same text – from which they extract different material.) There are books that are playful, ambiguous, and formally experimental (and, with Reynolds and Nel, I prefer those books), and there are books that are simple, clear-cut, and conventional. I have already articulated my stance about the latter type – that it is a mistake to conflate a sedate aesthetic with right-wing ideology – and this holds for the rival case as well: that is, we should not be too quick to assume

that ambiguity, play, and innovation correspond to a liberatory ethos. Indeed, the problems related to attempts to translate aesthetics to politics are revealed by the vagueness of both Nel's and Reynolds' speculations about the ideological consequences of their subject texts. Nel argues that ambiguous texts (such as the paintings of Magritte or some of Dr Seuss' stories) serve social justice and critical inquiry by "provok[ing] the audience": by demanding that the reader or viewer tolerate textual ambiguity and think for herself (2002, 49). Reynolds, meanwhile, suggests that recent developments in children's books "are preparing readers to advance thinking about self and society in aesthetically exciting ways" (2007, 38). However, the relationship between art and society is far from straightforward, just as individual readers' responses are various and unpredictable; and while these arguments sound vaguely convincing, they are never supported by empirical evidence. Indeed, the evidence from the modernist period suggests just the opposite, or nothing at all: that is, that if unorthodox modernist texts had any effect on (political) consciousness, they did so by preaching to the converted, those who already considered themselves progressive, and believed that art had something to do with it (or had a vested interest in the relation).

I am somewhat inclined, when dealing with texts, to replace the term "conservatism" with "conventionalism" or "traditionalism," but in addition to connotations that I'd rather do without, these substitutes are problematic because they mean little more than that the text being described as "conventional" or "traditional" follows a formula provided by previous works of the same type. This doesn't tell us much because children's literature (like the novel) is a relatively recent and continuously mutating category. At the time of publication, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was far

from “conventional.” Something similar might be said of *Little Women*. Very often “traditional” or “conventional” means little more than “historical”: in other words, that the type under consideration – which was once new, innovative, “unconventional” – is now part of a repertoire. The converse – radical, unconventional, or innovative literature – refers to texts that do something new; something that appears not to have been done before. And we should not be too hasty to assume that “newness” has ideological implications, or if it does, what these might be. It seems peculiar that a type thought to have liberatory capacities during its period as ‘something new’ should lose these when it becomes one of a category of texts following the same mode.

In the debate over the relative conservatism or subversiveness of children’s books, then, textual interpretations are invariably tainted with the confirmation bias of the side from which they come. Given a reasonably interesting and complex work of children’s (or, for that matter, adults’, or popular, or folk) literature, it is possible to find structural and contentual elements – sometimes, indeed, the very same elements – that appear to reflect, or can easily be recruited to, different ideological projects. Texts, as James Kincaid pointed out in his 1977 effort to arbitrate a then-current debate between deconstructionist and formalist interpretive strategies, are “incoherent”: they contain contradictory, or even incompatible impulses (Kincaid 1977). I begin the following chapter by exploring Kincaid’s argument and its consequences, before considering the numerous different sorts of readings that literary critics, philosophers, linguists, and lay-people have made of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* stories.

II. A PLEASANT EXAMPLE⁴³

Critics in nineteenth-century England had a special term for fiction like Lewis Carroll's Alice books that did not fit into the customary formal definitions of the novel. They were "sports" – that is, oddities, or hybrids of accepted generic formulas... Carroll's Alice books ... have been impossible to integrate into the development of the novel, and thus we have had to place them in separate categories: fantasy, or children's literature. Yet they do not sit easily in those genres either, for they contain a great deal of overt social criticism of social manners, of Victorian morality, of Darwinism, and of ideas about time, language, and logic that one normally does not find in such literature.

Roger B. Henkle⁴⁴

Signs, however various, come in patterns all the same; readers could not read without recognizing them and agreeing to use them. While it is true that our agreements are almost never honored by texts and that we return time and again only to be duped anew, we always find and adopt the old patterns. That's all there are. They may and do cohabit very strangely indeed, but critics must not be satisfied with looking the other way, pretending that a busy whorehouse is a monastic cell.

James Kincaid⁴⁵

It is a commonplace that interpretations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* stories, critical and popular, literary and scientific, are so diverse that it may be difficult to imagine that the same mid-Victorian children's fantasies are the common subject of discussion. In what follows, I shall propose that, while certain interpretive conclusions reveal a good deal more about the interpreter than the text (these I call "wrong"), *Alice* is a paradigm of

⁴³ Kincaid 1977, 798.

⁴⁴ Henkle 1982, 89.

⁴⁵ Kincaid 1977, 802.

textual multiplicity: what James Kincaid, responding to Sheldon Sacks' insistence on literary "coherence," calls "incoherence" (Sacks 1964, Kincaid 1977). In other words, the formalist premise that texts are consistent, "well-wrought" (an assumption that critics unwittingly still make, despite having been liberated from the mandate for textual harmony) has more to do with readers' inclinations or investments than with the great majority of texts that come under the critical gaze, and the *Alices* are a particularly clear-cut example of this heterogeneity.⁴⁶ As we shall see, Carroll's novels are often fit to opposing ideological schema: scholars who subscribe to the cynical vision of children's literature discussed in the previous chapter tend to argue that they are basically conservative, having a recuperative end in mind, in which Victorian girls reading the books would be urged to reconcile themselves to conventional womanhood and domesticity. Others, meanwhile, contend that the *Alices* encourage rebellion in the form of a questioning, liberatory attitude. Both camps have strong evidence for their arguments, because the books contain suggestive material on both sides. My intention here, then, is to flesh out a claim made in the previous chapter, using *Alice* as an example: that is, that texts (at least, the interesting ones) are seldom ideologically clear-cut.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "[A]ll works," Kincaid writes, that are "of any interest to us are incoherent" (1977, 785): meaning, as I understand it, that the texts that excite the interests of literary scholars (it is an open question here, what the ordinary folk desire from their books – but one that we might ask where children's books are at stake) are those that confuse us, and lead us to argue with one another – although it may not always (indeed, often) be clear what the source of the confusion is. Stephen Booth hints at something similar in *Precious Nonsense* (1998) when he suggests that the primary appeal of "highly valued works" of literature "is that they are in one way or another nonsensical" (3): that they simultaneously inform and baffle us. Booth is not concerned with genre or overall structure, as is Kincaid, so much as linguistic and pragmatic nonsensicality, but it seems to me that the dichotomy (structural) coherence/incoherence must have some relation to sense/nonsense.

⁴⁷ In "Just a Spoonful of Sugar?" (1999) (cited in the epigraph of Chapter One), Lori Kenschaft makes a similar argument, with the film version of *Mary Poppins* as her subject text. Kenschaft first reproduces a formulaic power-focused reading of the sort that is familiar to every childhood studies critic, in which a number of features of the film (often, in contrast to P.L. Travers' book) come down

Kincaid does not explicitly consider the ideological implications of “incoherence,” and these have been discussed in the previous chapter, but I raise the matter again with Sacks’ and Kincaid’s arguments in mind. Sacks’ project is to “formulate a constant and necessary relationship between the ethical beliefs of novelists ... and novels” (1964, 27). If this purpose seems quaint from the perspective of twenty-first century criticism, it is still useful to consider the implications of its contrary. Supposing we infer that a text’s coherent structure reveals a coherent ethics – which for these purposes, I’ll update to ‘ideology’ – presumably if its organizing pattern is “incoherent,” multiple and perhaps contradictory, so too would be its ideological implications.⁴⁸ This is an insight that critics of children’s literature in particular appear to have failed to accommodate; meanwhile, one of my central claims in this dissertation is that, in addition to being structurally diverse, most texts are to some degree ideologically contradictory – and in many cases it makes little sense to map ideology onto text.

Kincaid’s discussion of multivocality comes in the context of an effort to mediate a debate of the 1970s between formalist and deconstructionist criticism. In “Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts” (1977), he proposes “a middle ground” between these factions, “satisfactory to neither ... but incorporating some freedom and some solidity”:

on the side of middle class docile patriarchy. She then produces an alternative interpretation, which takes note of elements of defiance, play, and opposition to the status quo. The method by which she obtains her opposing evidence is rather similar to that which I use in the second part of this chapter, “Alice and the Problems of Identity,” whereby an analysis that pays attention to trajectory and development brings to the surface ostensibly recuperative features of the text, while one in which textual elements are detected ‘ateleologically’ results in a ‘liberatory’ reading. Kencshaft’s focus, in conclusion, is on what readers ‘do’ with texts – since the artifacts themselves are heterogeneous – meanwhile, I would like to do more to emphasize the problems of common critical practice.

⁴⁸ And if we care to consider “the ethical beliefs of novelists,” I would say that even more than in the case of texts, we err to regard human beings as ideologically “coherent” – even while we may perceive, or at least desire, some sort of “coherence” in ourselves.

that, while readers pursue univocality, or “proceed with the assumption that there must be a single dominant organizing principle” in a given work, “most texts” are “demonstrably incoherent, presenting us not only with multiple organizing patterns but with patterns that are competing, logically inconsistent” (1977, 783). Kincaid reproduces the Wittgensteinian “duck-rabbit” as evidence for what he sees as a cognitive incapacity to perceive multiple types simultaneously: “one sees either a duck or a rabbit but not both at once,” he says and, citing Ralph Rader, “our perceptive apparatus will not accept the ambiguity” (Kincaid 1977, 785).

While Kincaid’s intervention is compelling (and will be elevated to a pair of principles, below), his choice of sample texts is somewhat sneaky. In addition to the *Alice* books, he considers *Wuthering Heights*: both works Roger B. Henkle assigns the antiquated term “sport” because they are, and in their time were perceived as, “oddities, or hybrids of accepted generic formulas” (Henkle 1982, 89).⁴⁹ Neither, then, is a neutral example, since both are demonstrably more multiple and contradictory than most Victorian novels, and both were – and remain – difficult to accommodate within familiar organizational patterns. (In the case of the *Alices*, Lewis Carroll’s celebration of “originality” in the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno* – his injunction to eschew “tale[s] of bricks,” which would be “utterly commonplace,” and “contain no new ideas whatever”

⁴⁹ To be fair, Kincaid hints at this sneakiness – at least, in the case of *Wuthering Heights* – when he notes that it “may be more ostentatiously incoherent than most novels.” His defense of this choice, then, is that *Wuthering Heights* is nevertheless “formally and fundamentally representative” and “in some ways not too complex but too simple,” for “[i]t never confuses us about what, in the largest sense, it is...” (797-8). On a different note, *Wuthering Heights* and the *Alices*, while both good examples of structural incoherence, are rather different sorts of books – Henkle only puts them in the same category because they don’t fit any other. Since I am most interested in the conceptual play – or, the cerebral pleasures – in the *Alice* books, I prefer to emphasize their differences from the *Wuthering Heights*.

– suggests that this is quite deliberate [Carroll 1889/1988, 256-7].) Hence, I call the *Alices* paradigmatic of generic incoherence because they are an extreme example of the multiplicity that occurs to a similar or lesser degree in the range of literary texts – including children’s books, where the frequent episodic structure and the injunction to playfulness may increase structural disorder even though the commonplace has it that they are “simpler” than adults’ books.⁵⁰ Probably the only subject text that I consider which is capable of producing a degree of interpretive confusion like that generated by the *Alices* is Gertrude Stein’s *The World is Round* (1939/1972), but I shall take it as given that all of the texts I discuss contain structural (and thematic, and ideological) inconsistencies. This is a premise that probably need not be justified, but in my defense, I might mention the (sometimes vastly) discrepant – yet often simultaneously accurate – critical readings that have been made of all of them.⁵¹ For the purposes of my subsequent exploration, then, I present the following strategies: (a) I shall attempt not to assume that any text is consistent, and (b) I will examine my subject criticism for its accommodation of multiple organizing structures – that is, I shall ask whether a given critic treats the relevant primary text as “coherent” and, if so, what generic or structural assumptions about the text are taken as given.

In his discussion of *Alice*, Kincaid broaches incoherence by conceptualizing the books, in turn, within each of Sheldon Sacks’ three mutually incompatible types of prose fiction: apologue; satire; and “actions,” or novels (Kincaid 1977, 798-800; Sacks 1964, 1-

⁵⁰ This claim is a little sneaky of *me*, since I mean, not strictly *all* children’s books, but children’s fantasy literature post-*Alice*: those texts which exhibit the traits likely to foster “incoherence.”

⁵¹ Kincaid writes of literary works generally: “why are the determinations made by readers so wildly diverse, often contradictory?” (1977, 782).

31).⁵² To Sacks, the different types of fiction – or, “variant principles of organization of coherent prose fictions” – place different limits on the expression contained therein (7).⁵³ “An apologue,” in Sacks’ conception, “is a work organized as a fictional example of the truth of a formulable statement or a series of such statements” – a defense, in other words, of how things are. “[A] satire,” meanwhile, “ridicules objects external to the fictional world created in it”: it attacks (some aspect of) a culture. The novel fits a different sort of formulation, as it “introduces characters, about whose fates we are made to care, in unstable relationships which are then further complicated until the complication is finally resolved by the removal of the represented instability” (26). Kincaid fits the *Alice* books to these respective structures – which I assume he uses for the strikingly neat way in which the stories lend themselves to all three types of organization – parsing them as follows:

1. [Apologue:] The Alice books ... are most fruitfully investigated in reference to their themes. Here is one convincing possibility:

Alice’s final, overt rejection of Wonderland, her flight from the frightful anarchy of the world beneath the grounds of common consciousness, is a symbolic rejection of mad sanity in favor of the sane madness of ordinary existence...⁵⁴

⁵² Significantly, Sacks accepts that his choice of classes is arbitrary – “obviously others equally ‘correct’ are possible” (27).

⁵³ It is important – and Kincaid acknowledges – that Sacks does not require that *all* works of fiction be “coherent.” However, it is “coherent fictions” (and more particularly, novels, or “represented actions”) in which Sacks is interested, and which he sees as yielding the desired ethical produce.

⁵⁴ Here Kincaid quotes from Donald Rackin’s “Alice’s Journey to the End of the Night” (1966) – an essay concerned with giving an accessible reading of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, avoiding the technicalities of “specialized modes” that “fail to view *Alice* as a complete and organic work of art” (313). I discuss this article further below.

2. [Satire:] The Alice books ... can best be approached as a masterful subversion of adult behavior. The attacks on lessons, adult presumption, even on Gladstone and Disraeli ... work to support a child's point of view...
 3. [Novel:] The Alice books trace the progress of Alice through a series of events that test her capacity to endure, her innocence, and her imagination...
- (Kincaid 1977, 798-9)

All “three possibilities,” Kincaid writes, “represent the basic assumptions of *all* criticism of the Alice books” – and *all*, he proposes, are “appropriate, but falsely restricted” (799, italics added).

I am not quite convinced that these approaches are either incompatible or exhaustive; in particular, some features of Kincaid's account (via Donald Rackin) of Alice-as-apologue trouble me. Rackin (with the approval of Kincaid) contextualizes his interpretation in relation to the appeal that the books have for mathematicians and philosophers, who presumably would see them as *making an argument* about logic and language in the real world via the misunderstandings and play that occur in the fantasy world. This argument – at least, as Rackin constructs it – conceives of *Wonderland* as a vindication of normative language and behavior that, although constructed (and their constructedness is a sort of tragic revelation, in Rackin's account), are in fact supportive. The trouble is, the sorts of understandings furnished (and misunderstandings celebrated) by mathematical and philosophical readings of the *Alices* – call them “scientific” interpretations – can be garnered towards almost as many ends (both ethical and structural) as the literary ones. They might just as well serve the interests of satire (in this case the revelation that apparently constitutive elements of language and behavior are

actually constructed is not tragic, but comic)⁵⁵ – although it is difficult to see them serving the interests of the novel, as Sacks describes it, unless we treat them as only ornamental. Or perhaps a focus on the scientific material produces a different sort of analysis altogether: one seldom seen, and perhaps poorly accommodated by literary studies. This might constitute a reading of *Alice* as comedy – a distinctive and arcane sort of comedy – but if we retain Sacks’ types, comedy comes not as its own genre, but as a sub-division (or perhaps a “super-division”) of the novel (and also, of course, satire). The previous four sentences intend partly to confuse – and by confusing, to show up some of the difficulties in Kincaid’s suggestion that although only ideal, Sacks’ classes are still useful; still describe possible pathways through a text. I also mean to propose that a concentration on the philosophical material in the *Alice* books produces a particular sort of understanding that, if understood primarily as playful – as directed, not so much towards making a claim about reality, but rather as manipulating its concepts for play’s sake – doesn’t seem to fit neatly with an understanding of *Alice* as apologue *or* satire *or* novel (or, in Kincaid’s terms, that apologue *and* satire *and* novel are not “*all*” there is to it). But what is the term for this additional type? Children’s literature? Fantasy? Sport? A mode that captures the peculiarly conceptual content of its sportiveness...? My goal in what follows is not, after all, to name a type, but rather, by highlighting the fact that *Alice* can be read in different ways, as different sorts of thing, to consider the nature and consequences of our interpretive choices – and to note that we sometimes make them unconsciously.

⁵⁵ Nothing in “Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts” suggests that Kincaid would oppose this analysis, but it is peculiar to me that he doesn’t make it – that he fits “scientific” understandings specifically to a reading of apologue.

I proceed, then, with a selective overview of twentieth- and twenty-first-century analyses of *Alice*, including a number of different approaches and disciplinary perspectives.⁵⁶ I have grouped critical approaches to the *Alices* not according to the generic model that the books are seen to fit, but rather based on the main interest of the critic (that is, thematically, rather than structurally) – which often, but not always, is a consequence of the disciplinary perspective from which the books are approached. It should be clear that the different types I consider are seldom mutually exclusive – and only at times contradictory. The goal of this dissertation is to explore the occurrence of philosophical topics (as described in my introduction) in children’s literature, and my underlying motive, as noted above, is to advance readings – both critical and lay, and with the hope that the latter may emerge in the practices of co-readers with the real children – that focus on philosophical questioning and play. Thus I will propose, shamelessly, that although a great number of readings of *Alice* are defensible, some are superior: that is, more productive of what Lewis Carroll called “mental recreation,” more provocative and disturbing, more apt to invite questioning, participation, and pleasure. In the second section of this chapter, “Alice and the Problems of Identity,” I return to a consideration of structure – or rather, the critical interpretation of structure – by contemplating the sorts of understandings of identity that result when each *Alice* book is read as a series of episodes rather than as teleologically continuous.

⁵⁶ While an examination of contemporary responses to the *Alice* books would provide intriguing material for study, and perhaps bring us closer to their historical significance, I justify my consideration of later criticism on the grounds that, (a) by the twentieth century, Carroll’s novels were well established as “classics” – and as such, invited numerous and diverse interpretations – and (b) although some of the texts that I consider in this dissertation are historical, it is my fantasy that the exegeses I propose reach twenty-first century readers.

A. THE VAGARIES OF *ALICE*

A professional philosopher concentrates on the logical fallacies and principles illustrated in Alice and points to Dodgson's concern with philosophical concepts of time, justice, and personal identity. The student of semantics has long enjoyed his own Alice in Wonderland, though he finds Through the Looking-Glass, especially Humpty Dumpty's remarks, a richer text than the first book. One reader maintains that Alice and its companion book are allegories of the intellectual struggles of mid-Victorian Oxford... Another reader uses Alice and Dodgson's other writings to psychoanalyze the author...

Elsie Leach⁵⁷

Carroll's fairy tales realize in most original and unexpected forms both literary and scientific types of perception. And this is why philosophers, logicians, mathematicians, psychologists, folklorists, as well as literary critics and armchair readers, all find material for thought and interpretation in the Alices.

Nina Demurova⁵⁸

As Elsie Leach observes, the philosophical readings of *Alice* are rather different from those made by literary scholars: whereas the former tend to read *Alice* for its illustrations of metaphysical and logical concepts, the latter focus upon characterization, development, and the relationship between text and context. Roger Holmes' "The Philosopher's *Alice in Wonderland*" (1958) and Peter Heath's annotations in *The Philosopher's Alice* (1974), for instance, elucidate some of the references that Carroll makes to problems now considered under the banner of analytic philosophy, while Richard Brian Davis (2010) has collected a series of frolicsome essays considering a range of matters in moral philosophy, logic, metaphysics and epistemology, and the problems of identity, as they appear in, or emerge from, the *Alice* books. In a similar vein, Bernard M. Patten's *The Logic of Alice: Clear Thinking in Wonderland* (2009) is an amateur consideration

⁵⁷ Leach 1964, 89.

⁵⁸ Demurova 1982, 86.

of *Wonderland* as a philosophical treatise on clear thinking, intended also to discredit psychoanalytic imaginings and to trim the book to univocal coherence. While some concentrations on the philosophical material in the *Alices* have the books themselves as subject matter, the stories have also provided a popular starting point or example for a number of subsequent philosophers – in particular, those concerned with the nature and problems of language, such as Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. In these studies, Humpty Dumpty is often presented as an exemplary figure through which conventions and definitions in verbal communication are discussed; one philosopher has even coined the phrase “the Humpty Dumpty effect” to refer to the restrictions that “convention imposes on verbal meaning” (Hirsch qtd in Hancher 1981, 54).

Scholars such as George Pitcher (1965), Jean-Jacques Lecercle (1994), Christopher Berry Gray (1995), and Leila S. May (2007), meanwhile, see the linguistic material in the *Alice* books as anticipating the insights of twentieth-century philosophers of language, especially Wittgenstein. (Clearly, Carroll *influenced*, or provided source material for Wittgenstein, but in this context “anticipation” suggests that the former partook of the insights that the latter developed – a somewhat different sort of claim.) May, however, is more concerned to demonstrate the use of Wittgenstein’s ideas for unpacking the *Alices* – and hence to argue that Wittgenstein provides tools underused by literary critics for the elucidation of other texts as well. Robin Tolmach Lakoff, writing from the perspective of linguistic pragmatics, implicitly makes a similar argument, although instead of framing the *Alice* books in the context of specific subsequent philosophy, she proposes that Carroll was pre-eminently ahead of his time: a “subversive pragmatist,” whose insights into the social functioning of language remain “daring and

controversial ... threatening to our human sense of uniqueness, rationality, and importance...” (Lakoff 1993, 384).

The *Alices* are also sometimes seen as avant-garde from the perspective of literary history: Juliet Dusinberre (1987), for instance, argues that *Alice* and some other examples of contemporary children’s literature not only anticipated, but helped to shape the insights of literary modernism via their impact on the well-known modernists who read them as children. Roger B. Henkle, too, suggests that “a case can be made ... for *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* as forerunners of the modernist novel” because they “organize and change themselves through psychic tensions rather than through the [then] customary means of social behavior” (1982, 90). And still other critics have suggested that Carroll’s works (more often the *Sylvie and Bruno* books than the *Alice* stories) anticipate postmodernism.⁵⁹

Carrollian language-play is a frequent focus of discussion: for instance, in texts such as Robert D. Sutherland’s *Language and Lewis Carroll* (1970) and Kathleen Blake’s *Play, Games, and Sport* (1974). While Sutherland’s project is to extract from Carroll’s literary and personal writings a linguistic argument (and thus to consider Carroll himself a sort of dilettante language philosopher),⁶⁰ Blake considers language and logic as vehicles for play – and play as an important phenomenon for critical examination in the *Alice*

⁵⁹ Kathleen Blake describes “three literary-historical” renderings of Carroll: those that regard him as quintessentially romantic, modernist, and post-modern respectively (1982, 136-8). I shan’t pay much attention to these accounts here, save to suggest that they give the lie to many routine schematizations of literary-historical eras, and the truth to the *Alices*’ “incoherence.”

⁶⁰ In an essay in *The Carrollian*, Fernando J. Soto also considers the *Alice* books as evidence of a developed – and innovative – philosophy of language. Soto believes that previous scholars writing on Carroll from the perspectives of language, nonsense, and philosophy have seen Carroll/Dodgson as stumbling across groundbreaking linguistic material by chance and intuition. While this is Sutherland’s premise, I am not convinced that this is a claim generally made, especially by logicians and mathematicians, who would have been well aware of Carroll’s background and capacities.

books. Mathematicians also, justifiably, lay claim to Carroll's literary works, interpreting what are elsewhere considered within the province of language, logic, and/or play as exercises in "recreational mathematics" (Gardner 1996, ix), or scrutinizing apparently innocuous numerical infelicities for their underlying logic.⁶¹

The different disciplinary approaches do not, however, negate one another; still, it is surprising from the perspective of a literary scholar with an interest in linguistics and philosophy (and a forgotten interest in mathematics), to encounter familiar material dealt with from what might seem an unexpected perspective – and this signals a need for improved communication between disciplines. It is curious but enlightening that, for instance, mathematics writer and Carroll scholar Martin Gardner parenthetically describes "linguistic play" as "a branch of [the mathematical field of] combinatorics" (1996, 3-4). We may easily forget that the conventional subject-matter of our home sphere is shared by other domains, and receptive to unfamiliar methods.

Together with Edward Lear's illustrated writings, the *Alice* books are also often regarded as the paradigmatic Victorian source of a new genre: that of literary nonsense.⁶² Treating *Alice* as nonsense, as do Elizabeth Sewell (1952), Gilles Deleuze (1969/1990), Susan Stewart (1978/1979), and Wim Tigges (1988), is often intended to provide a

⁶¹ For example, Kenneth S. Salins unpacks Alice's attempt to practice her multiplication tables in Chapter 2 of *Wonderland*, concluding that her nonsensical sequence ($4 \times 5 = 12$; $4 \times 6 = 13$; $4 \times 7 \dots$), terminating in the exclamation "I shall never get to twenty at that rate!" (Carroll 1865, 2009, 19), in fact has a logic of its own when certain contextual and mathematical factors are taken into account (that is: school multiplication tables usually end with 12×12 ; Alice is working in bases other than the usual 10 – see Salins 2000, 52-3).

⁶² While there is an argument to be made for nonsense as a genre, I am more inclined to treat it as device or mode (see Tigges 1988, 47-51): partly because vanishingly few works of literature can qualify as generic nonsense (and *Alice*, I would say, is disqualified by its sensical fantasy structure, even although some of the poems recited therein pass as strict nonsense); but more because allowing that nonsense devices or the mode of nonsense penetrate other types of work allows us to translate explanatory methods between fields – to trace the workings of nonsense between texts.

method for exploring the workings of sense and nonsense in other texts and in the extra-textual world. Critics that approach Carroll's writing with nonsensicality as their foremost interest invariably coalesce upon the same material as philosophers, linguists, and those concerned with play, but their objective is slightly different: to evaluate nonsense as a phenomenon in itself, rather than a means of describing uses and misuses in language. Furthermore, different terms are sometimes used for the same or related phenomena. To take an example from outside the *Alice* books, the term "nonsense" is surely related to what J.L. Austin calls "infelicity" in describing statements that cannot be categorized under a "true/false" dichotomy, but nevertheless "fail" in some way, or "don't work."⁶³ (Austin's *How to do Things with Words* [1962] surely has implications for the interpretation of language-play in the *Alices*, but I have only encountered discussions of the books in Austinian terms occasionally and schematically – for instance in Lecercle and Lakoff.) One of the most common generalizations amongst scholars that view *Alice* through the lens of nonsense is that, as nonsense, the books are "non-referential": that is, they refer to themselves, or to language itself, rather than to external material.⁶⁴ One of the effects of "non-referentiality" (to which I am sympathetic, although I'm inclined to say it should be treated as a likely or fleeting feature, rather than a rule of thumb, in

⁶³ It may be, in fact, that "infelicity" is a more precise description of what goes on in at least some instances of "nonsense" (or instances that previous philosophers would have set inside true-false or sense-nonsense dichotomies). Sadly, this matter is beyond the scope of this dissertation – but I would say that any thorough exploration of nonsense as phenomenon or device needs to take Austin into account.

⁶⁴ For example, Sewall writes: "we must be careful not to imagine that this world of Nonsense is a world of things" and "one need not discuss the so-called unreality or reality of the Nonsense world" (1952, 18). Stewart, too, argues that "nonsense most often results from what may be seen to be a radical shift ... away from a contiguous relationship to the context of everyday life and towards the context of 'nothing'" (33). Tigges, meanwhile, proposes that the essence of nonsense involves a balance or tension between multiplicity and the absence of meaning, such that there is the suggestion of "reference," but it is always undercut by ambiguity (47).

the *Alices*) is to disavow readings that see the *Alices* as code, or containing code: that is, as allegories for Oxford politics, representations of Charles Dodgson's psyche, portrayals of childhood norms, and so on.

From the opposite perspective, then, come those commentators who prefer to see the *Alices* in (sometimes inappropriate) social contexts – and often as allegorical or metaphoric. Ferdinand Soto argues against “nonsense theorists” by pointing out the many philosophical and etymological issues “referred to” by Carroll’s “nonsense” (1998, 30-1). Soto is correct that what we call ‘nonsense’ is ‘about’ these things, but he misunderstands the claim made when scholars describe literary nonsense as “non-referential”: the point is not that language and logic are not considered where nonsense appears (if it weren’t, we would not be able to ‘make’ anything whatsoever of nonsense – and hence, there would be neither pleasure nor purpose in it), but that strict nonsense is not a sort of metaphor or allegory, referring to real-world matters. The *Alice* books are interpreted as “referential” in readings such as Mary Liston’s “The Rule of Law through the Looking Glass” (2009), which explores the books’ concern with justice and issues of moral philosophy. The latter issues are also considered in Mark D. White’s “Jam Yesterday, Jam Tomorrow, but Never Jam Today” (2010) and Dennis Knepp’s “‘You’re Nothing but a Pack of Cards!’” (2010). Meanwhile, the *Alice* books have also been seen as political or religious allegory – or as containing allegorical elements and/or caricatures of individuals from Carroll’s historical milieu. In his well-known interpretation, which includes a hefty dose of psychoanalysis, William Empson mentions references to Darwinism, technological progress, and contemporary politics (1935, 346-7). Meanwhile, Shane Leslie sees the *Alices* as an allegory for “contemporary ecclesiastical history,”

representing the controversies of the Oxford Movement (1933). Even more bizarre is Abraham Ettelson's rabbinical reading of *Through the Looking-Glass* as a cryptogram for the Talmud, which Lecercle discusses, in a meta-interpretive gesture, in his introduction to *Philosophy of Nonsense* (1994, 6-20). From a rather different perspective, Elizabeth Throesch (2009) proposes that the literalization of metaphor upon which the language jokes of the *Alices* often hinge hypostatizes, and so caricatures, the activities of the Victorian hyperspace philosophers, who in proposing the four dimensionality of space, reified mathematical formulae.

This leaves the large body of readings more familiar to literary scholars because they partake of the methods and ideas conventionally encompassed by English studies: those that focus on the characterization of Alice as protagonist; upon affect and conflict in Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land; on the implications of the books for Victorian childhood or womanhood; on the ideological force of the books; their coherence or contradictoriness; and their psychoanalytic implications. Kathleen Blake's synopsis of selected criticism from 1976 to 1982 is useful here, as she classes interpretations according to their analysis of Alice's character and her interactions with the fantasyland creatures (1982, 131-8). The "three Alices" that Blake observes in her subject texts are "Angst Alice," "Malice Alice," and "Heiter Alice":⁶⁵ respectively, Alice is perceived as an innocent and solicitous victim of the Wonderland and Looking-Glass Land creatures' insanity and aggression; as herself the aggressor against an innocent world; and as neither perpetrator nor subject of conflict, but a blithe collaborator in imaginative play. What is interesting to me about these divisions is that they all focus on Alice's temperament— a

⁶⁵ Trans.: "bright" Alice.

critical choice that might seem strange when we consider both the fact that Alice as person is rather under-characterized, with affect depicted only shallowly, and also that there is so much other more intriguing material upon which to focus one's attention. In the context of his discussion of the *Alices* as "sport" and as precursor to literary modernism, Henkle notes that "they do not provide enough social density, or enough analysis of human motivation and psychology ... to fit the normal criteria of the nineteenth-century English novel ... [they] seem to be neither social fictions nor psychological fictions" (1982, 89). Elsie Leach also notes the lack of character development: "Alice's 'progress' cannot be described in meaningful, social, spatial, temporal, or moral terms," and "the character of Alice herself is a bit puzzling ... [she] is neither naughty nor overly nice..." (1964, 90). (One of my students suggests that Alice is more accurately viewed as a vehicle for ideas and interactions, rather than as a fully fleshed person.) This will be discussed further via my consideration of identity below, but for the moment I shall note that, while it is clear by now where my sympathies lie, the inevitable discussions of Alice's character are not entirely misplaced (if for no other reason than that most of us are trained from a young age to consider the personality of a novel's protagonist), even if, I maintain, they are somewhat odd.

I turn, then, to a chronological survey of what might be seen as exemplary "literary" readings of the *Alices*, including a discussion of a selection of oft-reproduced essays. My first case is Empson's 1935 "*Alice in Wonderland: the Child as Swain*," a broadly psychoanalytic interpretation, and one of the most frequently reprinted studies of *Alice*. Like perhaps every Freudian reading of the *Alices*, Empson's commentary both relies upon and reinforces a myth about Lewis Carroll as preternaturally innocent and a

sort of repressed pedophile, who failed to navigate the complex emotional terrain of Victorian adulthood.⁶⁶ Empson writes: “a desire to include all sexuality in the girl-child, the least obviously sexed of human creatures, the one that keeps sex in the safest place, was an important part of their [sic] fascination for [Carroll]” (1935, 358).⁶⁷ This quotation is worthy of consideration because it illustrates the imagination required to sustain a psychoanalytic interpretation. If we do not take it as given that the author is in some way pathological (even if our observation of pathology relies upon an anachronistic understanding of psychological norms), our analysis becomes meaningless.

Psychoanalysis has some value in diagnosing the cultural tendencies of an epoch, but these should not be confused with the author’s psychological state.⁶⁸ As an example of what the different types of “diagnosis” (not a pejorative term, here) might involve, we might consider the many laborious discussions of Carroll’s photographs of children.

⁶⁶ See Karoline Leach’s revisionary biography, *In the Shadow of the Dreamchild* (1999, 2009). It is not my concern here to regurgitate the endlessly inconclusive discussions of Carroll’s psychopathology, so I shall take Leach’s very convincing argument as an adequate exegesis of the routine, yet unsubstantiated, claims about Carroll upon which much psycho-biographical criticism depends.

⁶⁷ Carroll’s supposed deviant fascination with little girls is an aspect of the Carroll myth that is customarily drawn upon to substantiate claims about the characterization of Alice. It is common for critics to refer to Carroll’s well-known statement about “liking children – except boys” (qtd in Leach, K. 2009, 14) in defense of the myth. What these critics overlook, however, in their earnest pursuit of aberrance, is that the exclusion of boys is not so much a statement of Carroll’s attitudes, but rather a logic joke about categorization – like the numerous jokes of this sort that, we shall see, populate the *Alice* books. Carroll would have been conscious that this statement is logical nonsense: the category “boys” is a sub-group of the category “children”; hence, literally, it is not possible to “like children” without “liking boys.” Whether or not Carroll liked boys (and whether or not Carroll’s “liking” for children of different genders is evidence of pathology – and Leach provides evidence both that he “liked boys” and that preferring girls was endorsed by Victorian culture), this is an important example in which the quest for psychological depth distracts from the humorous logical surface.

⁶⁸ I would argue, with Theodor Adorno, that the problem with psychoanalytic readings of literature, across the board, is one of misapplication: a method that has explanatory and therapeutic value for the experiences of living humans does not necessarily work for those no longer around to participate in their “treatment,” and whose surviving texts contain all sorts of material that is far more interesting in its own right than as questionable evidence of the author’s psyche. Adorno writes: “[Psychoanalysis] is more productive psychologically than aesthetically... [It] considers artworks to be essentially unconscious projections of those who have produced them and, preoccupied with the hermeneutics of thematic material, it forgets the categories of form and, so to speak, transfers the pedantry of sensitive doctors to the most inappropriate objects” (2004, 9).

Karoline Leach points out that, far from revealing deviance on Carroll's part, admiration for little girls – and the photographing of their naked bodies – was a normal Victorian phenomenon. She writes: “undeniably Charles Dodgson worshipped the girl image almost as intensely as the Carroll myth suggests,” but he was not “simply expressing sexual and emotional deviancy; he was being a man and an artist of his time” (2009, 144). This does not, of course, provide us a psychological method for understanding Victorian norms, but it does point out that, if there is something to be understood, it is historical and not personal.

This serves partly as my defense for ignoring a hefty body of Carroll criticism. But there are other elements from Empson's critique that reappear in later interpretations not specifically psychoanalytic in their focus. For example, above I mention the suggestion that, if they are understood to be nonsensical works, the *Alice* stories should be taken non-referentially – as “about” themselves, or for their own sake, rather than concerned with events in the world, or Carroll's psyche, say. It goes without saying that Empson rejects the interpretive consequences of a nonsense reading, and in places he is right to do so. But there are certain instances in which the pursuit of underlying or allegorical meaning not only calls upon a suspicious amount of critical inventiveness, but in pursuing psychological recesses, disregards the complexities and humor of the surface. This occurs with striking frequency in the earnest readings of literary criticism following Empson, and is one of the practices against which this dissertation contends. In the case of “The Child as Swain,” one example of this method occurs in Empson's response to “Jabberwocky.” He mentions the poem in the context of adult-child relations as “a code language ... with which grownups hide things from

children or children from grownups” (Empson 1935, 355) – rather than as play with the heraldic form, with lexis, and with meaning. A more typically Freudian example occurs when a pun that occurs in the process of Alice’s Wonderland conversation with the duchess, “flamingoes and mustard both bite,” is parsed as having something to do with “the desires of the two sexes” – and implicitly, with Carroll’s own supposed sexual difficulties (Carroll 2009, 80; Empson 1935, 361). This is not to say that I regard analyses that pursue metaphorical meanings as necessarily inaccurate (or as incompatible with the reading that focuses upon language and logic that I shall advance below), but rather to point out that in the solemn pursuit of symbols, they seem to overlook humor and play – and, significantly, that this practice continues forcibly into at least some of the succeeding literary criticism.

Perhaps Empson’s most important connection to subsequent critique – in particular that which is currently fashionable among childhood studies scholars housed in English departments – comes via his discussion of the *Alice* books as representations of adult-child relations, premised on a conventional understanding of what development involves; as “about growing up” but also “in part a revolt against grown-up behavior” (1935, 345, 357). The frequent size changes in *Wonderland* and the quest for the queen’s crown in *Through the Looking-Glass* may make the *Alices* seem unmistakably “about growing up,” but Empson’s phrasing erroneously suggests that this is the central problem of two stories that have plenty to say besides, and I shall argue below that the philosophical dimensions of growth and change should not be dislodged by a focus on the cultural ones – and, furthermore, that juvenile literature has plenty to say in addition to its interminably discussed commentary on adult-child relations. Empson and his

successors, in other words, defer to what I have referred to in the previous chapter as the developmental imperative: they assume that because a text features a child or children, it is centrally concerned with depicting the process of maturation, which is understood to include a standard series of events that the text may either support or reject. As I have argued above, this sort of reading is not exactly defective; rather, it is restrictive – and it has become monotonous – since children’s books convey much besides developmental models. Indeed, the paradigms of growth found in juvenile texts probably serve more often as convenient backdrops to or vehicles through which other concerns are delivered than as the foci of the books.

Like Empson, Elsie Leach (1964) is centrally concerned with the relationship between adulthood and childhood in the *Alice* books, about which she argues that “*Alice* states the plight of a little girl in an adult world” and, more pointedly, that “the underlying message ... is a rejection of adult authority, a vindication of the rights of the child, even the right of the child to self-assertion” (92). As my epigraph indicates, Leach accommodates a degree of plurality in her interpretation of the books, but her effort to nail down a central organizing device – in the form of an anti-didactic pro-child ideology – well illustrates Kincaid’s assertion that readers tend to seek “coherence” in the face of multiplicity. It is also curious that in later criticism, the elements that Leach mentions in defense of child-liberation (primarily, the play with language and social interaction that reveals and can be seen to sympathize with Alice’s bewilderment and powerlessness) are often cited to support the argument that the *Alices* come down on the side of adulthood – that they are anti-child, and implicitly argue either in favor of growth to quiescent adulthood, or that Alice is already a representative of the adult world (see, for instance,

my discussion of Turner and Nikolajeva, below). Indeed, even in an essay that appeared soon after Leach's, Jan B. Gordon argues from the perspective of literary history that the *Alice* stories are not children's literature at all, but rather "decadent adult literature" (1971, 94) – a somewhat different sort of claim, but one that might be considered in response to the many analyses that have childhood at their cores. Still, the notion that the *Alices* are in essence anti-didactic is by now a critical commonplace that does well to position them in the context of Victorian fantasy literature for children, but I shall argue in the following chapter that the familiar dichotomy of pleasure against pedagogy is basically flawed, and that Carroll's texts, via their injunction to "mental recreation," are perhaps the most important example of children's books that demonstrate not merely that "pleasure" and "pedagogy" can be simultaneous, but that they are interdependent, and generate one another.

The essay from which Kincaid obtains his example of a reading of *Wonderland* as apologue, Rackin's "Alice's Journey to the End of Night" (1966) is a canonic work in *Alice* criticism that focuses not so much on age-relations as on the characterization of the protagonist and her state of conflict with the Wonderland creatures.⁶⁹ "Alice's Journey" is perhaps the foremost example of what Blake categorizes as "Angst Alice" criticism, for Rackin conceives of the protagonist as the ultimately triumphant victim of Wonderland insanity, and *Wonderland* as "above all else ... embod[y]ing a comic horror-vision of the chaotic land beneath the groundwork of Western thought and convention" (1966, 313). Alice's "journey," in other words, is seen as a sort of Hadean descent; a dark night of the

⁶⁹ Like Empson's "Child as Swain," this is an essay that is frequently anthologized – along with others by Rackin on *Alice* – a trend that I suspect has more to do with the eminence of the critics than the quality of the criticism.

soul, the net effect of which is to defend the artificial, but ultimately supportive rationality of the “real world”; the world of the reader. Kincaid’s own “Alice’s Invasion of Wonderland” (1973) appears soon after Rackin’s “Journey,” also in *PMLA*, but from the starkly opposite perspective in which Alice is seen as aggressor: “Malice Alice,” in Blake’s terms. This is an avowedly novelistic reading, for which Kincaid facetiously apologizes in “Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts” (1977).⁷⁰ From a meta-critical perspective, the net effect of these two works of criticism, following so closely upon one another, is to show up the peculiarity of much respectable interpretation, and also, again, to expose the *Alices*’ heteroglossia.

Nina Auerbach’s 1973 “Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child” shares in Kincaid’s detection of malice in the protagonist. Like Empson, Auerbach relies upon the Carroll myth – when, for instance, we are reminded “that an important technique in learning to read Carroll is our ability to interpret his private system of symbols and signs and to appreciate the many meanings of silence.” Presumably if Carroll’s “system” is truly private, it is hidden to us too, but Auerbach’s special access to the author’s psyche qualifies her to aver that Alice’s conversation with the serpent in *Wonderland* (a scene that philosophers understand as building a joke upon our – public – systems of classification and enquiring into the components of personal identity) is a portrayal of “the golden child herself becom[ing] the serpent in childhood’s Eden,” for “the eggs she eats suggest the woman she will become, the unconscious cannibalism involved in the very fact of

⁷⁰ He writes in the latter: “The most attractive [interpretive] possibility – that the [*Alice* books] are coherent represented actions or novels – is the easiest to refute,” and in the accompanying footnote, “[u]nhappily, since I once contributed to this approach myself: ‘Alice’s Invasion of Wonderland’...” (Kincaid 1977, 800). Part of the force of Kincaid’s tone, as I understand it, is to highlight the degree of invention and confirmation bias that accompanies critical interpretation; and to hint that, while it may be infelicitous, the analysis in “Alice’s Invasion” is also supportable.

eating and desire to eat, and finally, the charmed circle of childhood itself” (Auerbach 1973, 41).⁷¹ Auerbach’s psycho-biographical reading is interested in *Alice* as evidence for the nature of “the Victorian mind” (31), but she also sees Alice as an “anomaly ... who explodes out of Wonderland hungry and unregenerate” (46). Thus Carroll is seen as a sort of psychological avant-garde for his uncannily insightful tracing of “the chaos of a little girl’s psyche” (47) – another perhaps peculiar analysis, granted how little we are in fact given of Alice’s psyche.⁷²

Terry Otten’s 1982 “After Innocence: Alice in the Garden” contains elements similar to Empson’s, Elsie Leach’s, and later Jennifer Geer’s (2003) discussions of the *Alice* stories, for he partakes of the developmental imperative in his central concern with Carroll’s portrayal of childhood, adulthood, and the development between. Otten fits Alice, anachronistically, to a standard psychoanalytic model of maturation, locating her “somewhere between the two most profound early stages of consciousness, the oedipal period and puberty” and noting that, although at times she appears precocious, “she betrays the myopic vision of seven to ten year olds” (Otten 1982, 50). It is indeed important that Alice is a child (even forgetting about the contextual and literary reasons for this), for her combination of “innocence and experience” allows her to be both brunt

⁷¹ Alice’s eating, and talk of food, is frequently discussed in literary criticism (see, for instance, Armstrong 1990), especially that which has a psychoanalytic bent. While Patten’s dismissal of the appearance of food and eating in the *Alices* as little more than a motif to appeal to child readers (2009, 12) may be somewhat terse, I am troubled by treatments of the books that implicitly regard food and drink as a core concern rather than, say, a convenient means of accomplishing the size changes that disrupt Alice’s perception of personal identity in Wonderland, a matter that enters the books via their interest in social exchange, and a vehicle for logic-play.

⁷² Auerbach’s understanding of Alice as “anomaly” might be used in the service of a feminist interpretation of the books – like that which Megan S. Lloyd makes in “Unruly Alice” (2010). I don’t intend to consider analyses of gender in *Alice* in any depth here, but would like to note that the books are just as wont to be read as advancing the interests of feminism as opposing it. For examples of the latter, see Nancy Armstrong (1990) and Amy Billone (2004).

and perpetrator of some language games that she understands, and others that she doesn't (hence, Otten perceives in Alice with both angst and malice, if more of the latter) (51), but the focus on emotion and on a sort of play between virtue and vice might seem out of place if we grant Elsie Leach's observation that "Alice is neither naughty nor overly nice..." (Leach 1964, 90). And again, the myth of Carroll, a writer who biographers believe "found the line between childhood and adulthood, innocence and puberty, difficult to acknowledge," is both required and reinforced by the focus on character (Otten 1982, 58).

I now consider a slightly different type of literary reading, one that informs my own discussion of multiplicity: that which considers the apparent contradiction between the real-world frames and the fantasy narratives in both *Alice* books. My two examples are William Madden's "Framing the Alices" (1986) and Jennifer Geer's "'All Sorts of Pitfalls and Surprises'" (2003), both of which attempt to account for the contrast in tenor between the sentimental frames and the bold fantasies by considering what effect the inconsistency might have on Alice's growth and readers' perceptions of her character. Madden proposes that the framing episodes serve as guides for interpreting the "dream visions" as productive – rather than traumatic, or merely confusing – descents into imagination; as arguing for fantasy as an important component of maturation (1986, 370-1).⁷³ Geer, meanwhile, suggests that the frames should be seen as just as fantastical as the "dreams" – and furthermore, that the object of both episodes of fantasy is to construct competing "idealized visions of Alice" as female child (2003, 1). Both, then,

⁷³ Madden divides the frames into the "lyric verse" of the introductory and, where relevant, concluding poems, and the "realistic prose" of the real-world settings (1985, 365). Two layers of "framing," then, help to separate fantasy from reality.

see the frames as narrative guides that “encourage readers to interpret Alice’s adventures as fairy tales,” which “often exert a recognizable domestic influence on their readers or listeners” (Geer 2003, 1-2). While I have been inclined to view the framing episodes largely as cultural tokens to soften the blow and suppress some of the confusion of the fantasies – and as not worth paying much attention to – Madden’s and Geer’s readings propose that, more than “soften” and “suppress,” they alter, or reformulate, and hence are important components of the stories.

Geer’s addition to Maddens’ analysis includes (a) the suggestion that the “encouragement” furnished by the frames is related specifically to the understanding of femininity that they celebrate, and (b) that *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* respectively depict alternate versions of the development from childhood to womanhood. Via the frames, she writes, “*Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* ... characterize the values inscribed in idealized childhood and its tales as domestic and feminine,” but whereas “[t]he *Wonderland* frames suggest that Alice’s dream fosters the happy, loving childhood that will enable her development into a good woman and mother, ... the *Looking-Glass* frames anticipate that the tale will create a domestic space powerful enough to keep the stormy world at bay.” Geer provides a compelling argument that the books portray, and satisfy a desire for “power as well as comfort,” but again, it troubles me that she may position adult-child conflict as more central to the books than the range of their other interests (Geer 2003, 2).⁷⁴ Both scholars, in other words, focus perspicaciously

⁷⁴ Studying Geer’s essay with an undergraduate class, one of my students was concerned about the reception and effects of this binary by and on child readers. While more sophisticated critics of children’s literature might dismiss this concern as “missing the point” of thematic study (or, in the case of the Reading critics, making the mistake of suggesting that ‘the real child’ actually exists), I find my student’s question instructive. For one thing, I think it not insignificant that developmental

upon discord between different aspects of the texts, but (as should become clear from my discussion of “episodic” and “teleological” readings below) their readings are limited by their fidelity to the developmental imperative.

In conclusion, I turn to a current essay that exhibits the formulaic ideological arguments discussed in the previous chapter. In “‘Which is to be master?’: Language as Power in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*” (2010), Beatrice Turner reproduces the fashionable terms language, power, and ideology in support of Jacqueline Rose’s argument that children’s literature and culture serves primarily “to ‘secure’ and fix the ‘real’ child” (243). Turner proposes that the *Alice* books raise to the surface a dynamic that is more often concealed in children’s fiction, by “enact[ing] the relationships between subject and object, fiction and reality, through language,” for “to wield language in these texts ... is to have the power to define, to create, and to destroy” (2010, 244). Humpty Dumpty’s well-known (and, I might add, ironic) statement about “mastery,” for example, is interpreted, not as mocking insight into the fact that for meaning is consensual rather than essential, but from the anachronistic perspective of the twenty-first century English department, in which “power” is routinely analyzed within the vogue ideological formula – and, importantly, the colonization paradigm. Turner exhibits the earnestness that I noted in previous critics, and also, like her antecedents, reads *Alice* primarily for its commentary on adult-child relations, rather than the gamut of playful conceptual material that children’s literature also has as its subject matter. (A similar argument appears in Maria Nikolajeva’s *Power, Voice, and Subjectivity in*

themes and conflicts in the *Alices* are probably unlikely to be detected by child-readers – not because they aren’t there, but there is so much else that is going on, inviting all of play, confusion, delight, distress.

Literature for Young Readers [2010], whereby the linguistic confusion seen earlier by Elsie Leach to manifest sympathy with childhood, now serves the interests of oppression, as “the reader feels humiliated” by her incomprehension of language “alongside the protagonist” [33].)

Compared to my account of “scientific” readings of the *Alice* books, I have gone into some detail concerning a few examples of “literary” responses. Yet my sample and discussion is still rather schematic – and I am well conscious that it will be found ungenerous by some. My selection is intended partly to represent some of the studies that I assume, from the frequency of their reproduction, to constitute authorized writings on the *Alices*. But in addition, I aimed to flesh out some trends well-established in *Alice* studies in English departments – in particular, the earnest pursuit of symbols at the expense of humor and play, the positioning of the books as “about” adult-child relations and Alice’s maturation, and the reliance upon myths about Carroll (all of these, save the last, valid discussions, but not, I propose, the most productive ones) – against which this dissertation stands. The *Alice* books are much beloved by philosophers and mathematicians, but it is queer that the interests of this group and those of literary scholars seldom speak to each other. Philosophical readings tend to discredit literary interpretations,⁷⁵ while the latter seem by-and-large to ignore the insights of analytic philosophy. Thus, one of my important purposes here is to bring the “scientific” and “literary” criticism of these books into greater proximity: in particular, to set the insights of philosophers and linguists alongside those of literary critics; to unveil the sources of

⁷⁵ See Heath 1974, 7; Patten 2009, 9-12.

their very different interpretations; and to discover whether, and how, they might brought into commerce.

B. ALICE AND THE PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY

*...it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.*⁷⁶

I turn, then, to a discussion of two opposing methods for reading the *Alice* books, each based on a different instinct about how the parts of the stories relate to one another chronologically: one that sees them as developmentally continuous (this I call a “teleological reading”), and one that treats them as a series of discrete incidents (an “episodic reading”). My discussion here should shed further light on extant analyses – partly by unpacking contrasting assumptions about how the texts are put together (or rather, assumptions about how the texts *can be read*, since they contain directions to both “teleological” and “episodic” understandings) – although I shall be focusing on a single matter that is frequently mentioned, if not scrutinized, in *Alice* studies: that of Alice’s identity. This choice in trope is partly for convenience, as it offers a clear-cut way of understanding the different material that “teleological” and “episodic” readings – which, as it turns out, correspond at least roughly to “literary” and “philosophical” readings – bring to the surface of the *Alices*. Briefly, a teleological reading focuses on the development of Alice’s psychological sense of herself, with the desirable end-point (in *Wonderland*, at any rate), the attainment of confident self-assertion in relation to the

⁷⁶ Alice to the Gryphon and Mock Turtle (Carroll 2009, 92).

creatures around her: this I shall call a *concern with social identity*, which is often discussed in terms of “identity formation.” (In *Through the Looking Glass*, meanwhile, Alice’s development is figured in concrete terms via her quest for queenhood, which – reading the book teleologically – symbolizes her passage to adulthood.) An episodic reading, on the other hand, brings out the *philosophical problem of personal identity*, in which the issues confronted are those metaphysical and epistemological profundities related to the nature and conditions of persons. Identity is a significant theme in itself, not only in Carroll’s books, but for considerations of philosophical play and in children’s literature – and I hope that my approach will serve as a corrective to mainstream literary understandings of identity as purely a psychological matter, as “formation,” rather than the philosophical treatment of identity as conundrum.

I am inclined to suggest, further, that teleological and episodic readings are likely to produce different understandings of the credo (or, to use an Austinian term, “force”) of the *Alice* stories. In a teleological reading, the books’ domestic frames, Alice’s social and psychological development, and the antagonism between the protagonist and the fantasy environment, are often seen to set up the books as reinforcing and preserving norms of Victorian womanhood.⁷⁷ In an episodic analysis, meanwhile, the numerous parodies of contemporary poems, the caricatures of polite conversation that expose its irrational basis, the open question with which *Through the Looking Glass* ends, and some of the insistent philosophical concerns, might be seen to point to a text that encourages

⁷⁷ This is not quite the case in teleological readings that see Alice as anomaly (eg. Auerbach 1973), or as malicious (eg. Kincaid 1973), but part of the point I would like to make is that a concentration on the “teleological” features of the books (which are similar, if not identical, to those Kincaid would call “novelistic”) can only bring out issues of character and development, rather than the unanswerable philosophical questions that I want to cultivate.

questioning and play. I have already explored a discrepant selection of interpretations of the *Alices*, including a few insightful critics who note that the books appear to contain important, and perhaps irreconcilable, contradictions (even a contemporary reviewer of *Wonderland* worried about the “strange and heterogeneous combinations” of this “stiff, overwrought story” [Phillips, ed. 1971, 84])⁷⁸ – which, further, are sometimes expressed in terms of their relative subversiveness or conservatism.⁷⁹ But although it is extremely tempting to schematize the *Alices* according to their apparent ideological force – to suggest, for instance, that the depiction of Alice in the framing sections as an obedient, if wily, Victorian girl-child who will grow into a paragon of domesticity, is a “conservative” element; while the insistent mocking of linguistic convention in the fantasies is “subversive” – I wish to avoid this framework for reasons that should by now be clear.

My main problem with ideological readings, as discussed above, is that they are open to so much interpretation and confirmation bias. The critic who wishes to fit the *Alices* to, say, Nodelman and Reimer’s “no-name story” model can easily find her evidence (2003, 188-91) – perhaps in the form of the books’ standard “home-away-home” structure, the naïveté of the protagonist, the appearance of a development to greater age and wisdom, and so on. Another scholar, who hopes to prove that the books are anomalous and challenging, and incite defiance, might point out the aberrant elements of Alice’s personality, the unusual and teasing character of the social exchanges,

⁷⁸ Edward Salmon, meanwhile, sees Carroll as writing in a tradition in which “rollicking humor” and “an undercurrent of satire” are significant, while noting Carroll’s “simple” style and “extravagant” ideas (Salmon 1887, 87).

⁷⁹ A critical text I have not yet mentioned is “The Balance of Child and Adult” (1983), in which U. C. Knoepfelmacher argues that “conflicting impulses” result from the books’ simultaneous address to both adult and child readers. In another, Hélène Cixous observes a tension between subversive and conventional impulses in the *Alice* books, which she explains in sometimes fantastic psycho-biographical terms (Cixous 1982, 234).

the ambiguous aspects of heroine's development. Both sets of observations would be correct, and I can only conclude that the books in themselves are neither "subversive" nor "conservative."

Still, I champion the sort of reading of the *Alice* books that I have described as "episodic" – or any interpretation that brings out the philosophically playful aspects of the texts – and my argument has a force that is political as well as intellectual. In part, I am simply encouraging that we make responsible choices in what we "do with" texts that, on their own, enact a contradictory range of perspectives; and that we select material that helps to construct the relevant text as mind-broadening and productive of cerebral pleasures, rather than the opposite. But also, many of the matters that I wish to draw out and discuss were carefully and consciously placed in the *Alices* by Lewis Carroll for the purposes of what he later called "mental recreation" – and I contend that it befits us to heed authorial intentions that advance projects that have the potential to promote the conjoined virtues of pedagogy and play, and that hope to nurture a questioning state of mind.⁸⁰

The first intimation of a philosophical concern with identity occurs on the second page of *Wonderland*, via the first of several death jokes. Alice, while floating down the rabbit hole congratulates herself on her bravery, remarking that "[she] 'wouldn't say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house.'" The narrator interjects

⁸⁰ Carroll's social conservatism deserves to be mentioned here, although I am inclined to think that too much should not be made of it – partly because it is in the nature of human beings to be ideologically as well as psychologically complex and contradictory. (And, to be clear, I do not mean to imply that Carroll was in any way "radical" – although his works of mental recreation can be put towards fostering exploratory open-mindedness.) It might further be argued that the concept play or "mental recreation" that goes on in Carroll's literary and some of his pedagogical works belies (or has the potential to stand against) the conservatism he exhibited when not at play.

parenthetically, to note that this “was very likely true” (2009, 10): Alice would have nothing to say because *she* would be no longer. A teleological reading might collect instances in which death is mentioned or conflicts of self occur, to characterize a state of struggle between Alice and her environment, looking not at the implications of individual episodes (for instance, in this case, is it accurate to describe Alice, being dead, as “she”? – or, at what point does personal identity cease?), but rather at the possible affective consequences of an accumulation of antagonistic material. Alice, however, is neither injured nor distressed; the joke is forgotten almost as soon as it is made – in this instance, inviting a reader to see the narrative as more episodic than continuous. A similar quip occurs but a few pages on, when Alice, discovering that only her head can fit through the door to the beautiful garden, notes that “it would be of very little use without my shoulders” (2009, 13); and again, when she finds herself shrinking for the first time and wonders at the prospect of “going out altogether, like a candle.” The narrator’s addition is significant here, for it makes the philosophical character of Alice’s rumination explicit: “she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out” (2009, 14). We are also informed, early on, that “this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people” (2009, 15): a trait that, from a normative psychological perspective might suggest psychic fragmentation or pathology, or be seen to tell us something of Victorian (or, if we care to be precise, Lewis Carroll’s) conceptions of childhood, but from a philosophical standpoint sets up a consideration of the nature of and distinctions between persons.

Indeed, the next chapter begins by reflecting upon the relation between parts and whole in the constitution of persons as Alice, having eaten her cake, “open[s] out like

the largest telescope that ever was,” leaving her feet “so far off” that she imagines that they have an independent existence as other persons to whom she “must be kind” and send gifts (2009, 16).⁸¹ Alice’s first conscious contemplation of her identity, then, occurs after the first series of size-changes, when she wonders whether she “was ... the same when [she] got up [that] morning” (Carroll 2009, 18, original italics). Confusion of self is a recognizable social trope: “who in the world am I?” is the sort of question that the *bildungsroman* answers via its protagonist’s discovery of his tendencies, desires, and relationships with other persons in his environment.⁸² Indeed, *Wonderland* has been read as “a miniature *bildungsroman* in nonsensical form,” in which Alice’s adventures “test her sense of identity to the full” (Haughton 2002, 193-4). When the novel is read teleologically, as it is in Hugh Haughton’s interpretation, the “fall down the rabbit-hole” is seen to activate an “identity crisis” (193-4): here a psychological, rather than a metaphysical trope. Alice’s subsequent perplexity, then, is seen to be significant inasmuch as it constitutes the first in a sequence of questions about self – or, it represents an initial predicament caused by the trauma of descent and bodily upheaval, which prompts self-doubt and ignites a cognitive process that will eventually lead to superior confidence and selfhood.

⁸¹ Interestingly, this sequence of identity jokes occurs verbatim in the first chapter of the version of *Alice* written for the Liddell sisters, *Alice’s Adventures Underground* ([1863] 1964). We will never know whether they made a similar appearance in the extemporaneous version that Carroll narrated to his friends, but I take their appearance in *Underground* as evidence of a lasting interest that Carroll shared (and perhaps even developed) with his first audience – an interest that, importantly, occurs primarily for its humor.

⁸² I understand the *bildungsroman* as a sub-category within the novel – into which the *Alice* books can be seen to fall when we consider the way that the frames (and Alice’s oddly sentimental session with the White Knight in *Through the Looking Glass*) position the fantasies in relation to the rest of Alice’s (and perhaps the implied child-reader’s) life: at the close of *Wonderland*, for instance, Alice’s sister “picture[s] to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman” (Carroll 2009, 111).

But from a metaphysical perspective, “who am I?” is not a question that can be resolved with time or with the psychic discovery of self – and philosophers debate the epistemological question “how do I know who I am?”⁸³ From the latter perspective, when Alice wonders whether she could be Ada or Mabel, she performs a comedic philosophical enquiry. Ada is defined by her physical self, “for her hair ... goes in ringlets,” while Mabel is identified with her mental capacities, for “she knows such a very little” (Carroll 2009, 19). Thus, Alice contemplates first a materialist and then an idealist account of identity (Holmes 1951, 140). And while the idealist hypothesis appears to be more compelling (Alice, attempting to recount familiar schoolbook material in the form of a poem, discovers that she “do[es] not know,” and hence “must be Mabel after all”), the object of this sort of reading is not to come to a conclusion, but rather to ask a question – which is abruptly dropped when Alice finds herself shrinking again. To be clear, the comic effects of this inquiry are probably more important than the content of the questioning: a child reader is likely (or, perhaps more accurately, if unfashionably, “supposed”) to recognize the absurdity of the proposition that “*I*” am someone else, and hence simultaneously both “*I*” and “not-*I*.”⁸⁴ (The joke here, in other words, is both logical and metaphysical.) Alice does not explicitly ask “what makes Alice, Alice?” but

⁸³ It is extremely curious to me that Phoebe North, who encourages the use of *Through the Looking-Glass* as a teaching text to introduce children to the projects of analytic philosophy, rejects the possibility that similar use might be made of *Wonderland*. “Carroll’s intention” in *Wonderland*, she thinks, is “obvious: [it] is apparently a coming-of-age story whose fantastic voyage is primarily metaphorical” (North 2006, 16). Apparently even though she is attuned to philosophical content, North overlooks this dimension of the identity motif in *Wonderland* – perhaps because she is too intent upon structural coherence.

⁸⁴ Twentieth century philosophers have suggested that, since “self-knowledge is that which would characteristically be expressed in sentences containing the word ‘I,’” any enquiry into the identity of “*I*” is necessarily tautological: it is simply nonsense, or a sort of non-question to ask whether “*I*” might be Ada, Mabel, or Jones (Perry 2002, 122-3). This episode in *Wonderland*, then, can be seen as one of many instances in which Carroll seems to anticipate via play the insights of later philosophy.

the reference to other children's names and the association of the name with the person ("Who am I, then?" says Alice to herself, "Tell me first, and then if I like being that person, I'll come up..." [Carroll 2009, 19]) both refer to the metaphysical and logical difficulties of personal identity (see Patten 2009, 120-2), and hint at the peculiar nature of what John Perry calls "agent-relative roles" (2002, 215).⁸⁵

This scene might reference John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) – as does Alice's later conversation with the Caterpillar – a work influential to several spheres of Victorian thought. Locke argues that continuity is the necessary criterion for human identity, which "consists ... in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized body."⁸⁶ According to Locke's model, the idea of a "soul" as constituent of identity is inadequate, for if this were the case it would be possible for "Seth, Ismael, Socrates, Pilate, St. Austin, and Caesar Borgia, to be the same man." While "those men, living in distant ages, and of different tempers" might be the same "person" under a view that permits psychic transmigration, it is curious that Alice contemplates her possible identity with persons who are her contemporaries: a condition even more implausible than that which Locke dismisses. In addition to his representation of an endlessly engaging question, then, in an episodic reading Carroll

⁸⁵ Perry uses the term "agent-relative" as roughly equivalent to "subjective," but "somewhat less encumbered with alternative and not quite on-target meanings" (2002, 215). The point of the discussion of "agent-relativism" – which is well-captured by Alice's incongruous suspicion that she is "someone else" (yet still refers to herself as "I") – is to explicate the distinctive quality of "being me" (or, to put it differently, "to say that the world as we perceive it does not include ourselves, but has ourselves as a sort of point of origin" [Perry 2002, 208]).

⁸⁶ All references in Locke to Chapter 27 (Locke 1690).

might be seen to jokingly revise – or more accurately, *toy with* – an already suspect position to the point of absurdity.

Perhaps the most important episode with respect to Alice's identity in *Wonderland* (regarded from either a teleological or an episodic perspective) occurs during her exchange with the Caterpillar, whose "Socratic interrogation" can be read (teleologically) as pushing Alice to confidently assert her social identity or (episodically) as tacitly instructing her in methods of enquiry (Shores 2009, 197). When *Wonderland* is read teleologically, this episode is seen as the turning point in a development from uncertainty about self in the early chapters to self-possession in the final scenes: when Alice defensively asks the Cheshire Cat, "How do you know I'm mad?" (Carroll 2009, 58) and, at the trial, famously, asserts, "Who cares for *you*?' ... 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'" (109). But if this scene is considered as a free-standing interlude (and one that is meant to amuse or to excite an interest in an ideal reader, rather than to depict a change in the character), we might see the Caterpillar as stimulating Alice to perform a philosophical investigation of what it means to be a person. As Tyler Shores puts it in his episodic interpretation, "Alice's conversation with the caterpillar shows us how sometimes even the most complicated and important philosophical questions can lie beneath a seemingly straight-forward exchange" for "the ordinary question 'Who are you?' leads Alice to consider one of the fundamental philosophical questions: 'Who am I?'" (Shores 2010, 198).

Alice departs the Caterpillar by following his advice and consuming, first, the 'shrinking,' and then, when she panics as her "chin ... [strikes] her foot," the 'growth'

side of the mushroom (Carroll 2009, 46),⁸⁷ and the subsequent episode also has identity as its focus. When Alice's head shoots above the tree-tops on her elongated neck, the pigeon that flies into her face accuses her of being a serpent – and here another joke hinges upon a logical confusion about evidence for personal identity. The pigeon defines a serpent as (a) an egg-eating and (b) a long, thin creature: both of which Alice, at this stage, appears to be. The protagonist, in other words fulfills the necessary and sufficient conditions for serpent-hood, according to the pigeon's definition, but not her own, or (probably) our own. Thus, the question that might be raised implicitly, when this scene is considered in isolation, concerns which traits are important in defining a person: or, which elements are sufficient to distinguish *me* from others with whom I share features. We have already seen, meanwhile, one alternative for understanding the serpent episode – in my discussion of Nina Auerbach's "A Curious Child" (1973). Like Auerbach, William Empson also reads this scene as metaphor, but fits it explicitly to a developmental narrative of the sort that teleological readings invite: the experience of being mistaken for "the paridisal serpent of the knowledge of good and evil" brings out Alice's "object[ions] to growing up" (Empson 1935, 356). While I find the possibility of biblical allegory rather difficult to swallow (not because the serpent isn't a resounding cultural trope but because nothing else in the text supports such a reading), it is plausible,

⁸⁷ In the interests of absurdity, Carroll carefully avoids making explicit the distortion Alice's body undergoes, although it is apparent in the collisions and extensions that accompany size-change, and constitutes a sort of suppressed joke that it may take a relatively alert reader to discern. This manipulation of proportion in the shrinking and growth scenes is seldom considered in literary/teleological interpretations (or is regarded – anachronistically – as a reference to the bodily disruptions of adolescence) that see physical changes as a metaphor for growth to maturity, rather than a vehicle for conceptual play. Tenniel's illustrations often hint at distortion, but are inconsistent in their depiction of Alice's dimensions. The play with proportion is more visually apparent in *Underground* than in *Wonderland*.

considering the trajectory of Alice's development – including physical alterations that hint at “growing up” – that this exchange constitutes one of the crises of Alice's *bildung*.

Perhaps the most significant question about identity in *Wonderland* revealed by an episodic reading concerns persistence: or, the issue of “what is necessary and sufficient for a past or future being to be you” (Olson 2008). Locke considers consciousness “extended backwards” – in his analysis, memory – the criterion that fulfills the requirement for continuity of persons. Memory and consciousness are frequent subjects of inquiry in the *Alice* books: they are depicted, for instance, in Alice's frequent attempts to recite poetry, and, in *Looking Glass*, in the wood “where things have no names” (Shores 2010; Carroll 2009, 155-7). Alice's dramatic size-changes lead her to question whether she is “the same person” that she was before her fall down the rabbit hole, when her body appeared to be consistent through time – and, ultimately, to conclude that she is not, for when she recounts her adventures to the Gryphon and Mock Turtle, she says, “it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then” (Carroll 2009, 92).

Alice's conversation with the Gryphon and Mock Turtle invites a teleological reading, both because it explicitly reflects upon previous events in the text (“Alice began telling them her adventures from the time when she first saw the white rabbit...”) and because affect is comparatively heightened (Alice speaks “timidly”; feels “a little nervous” about telling her story), thus drawing attention to character as a developing feature (Carroll 2009, 92). When Alice's statement, “I was a different person [yesterday]” is understood teleologically, it can be seen as an evaluation of her psychological sense of her self: that she was not a “different *person* yesterday,” but merely *different*. But one of

the most persistent drives in the *Alice* books is to point out and make light of the infelicities of everyday language. It is conventional to describe qualitative changes to self as if they are quantitative: to say, for instance, “I am a new person,” when I mean, “I have had a new experience.” If Alice’s claim to be “new” is read straightforwardly, but not literally (that is, we assume that she means “I have had a new experience,” and ignore the carelessness of her language), this scene appears as a moment of self-exploration and significant discovery in her process of psychological growth. If, on the other hand, the logical inaccuracy in Alice’s claim is seen to be significant, we might suppose that she has made the mistake of confusing her qualitative identity (that is, physical and mental characteristics that are naturally changeable) with her numerical identity (Olson 2008). But her memory has also been altered, as we see when she fails to recite familiar poetry – and if the “memory criterion” is necessary for persistent identity, as Locke contends, it may indeed be that she is “not the same person.”⁸⁸ We might even argue that, by depicting Alice’s identity in this way, Carroll performs a sort of jocular philosophical thought experiment, which shows that the memory criterion is not sufficient for persistent identity (this, as we shall see, is taken up again in *Through the Looking Glass*).⁸⁹

The use of a child-figure both to explore these philosophical problems and to represent a social concern with identity is hardly surprising. In the former case, growth and development from childhood provide an example for contemplating change in the qualities of personhood concurrent with persistence in and evidence for identity. And in the case of social identity, it is normatively assumed that there are conflicts and

⁸⁸ See Olson 2008 and Shores 2010.

⁸⁹ Alternately, the failures of Alice’s memory are rather superficial: she gets the content of her school-learning wrong, but she is still conscious, via memory, of having experienced ordinary above-ground life.

transitions that occur in relation to one's sense of self between childhood and adulthood. Some of my students, reading teleologically, have seen the frequent changes in size that Alice undergoes in *Wonderland* as the reified portrayal of a child's imagined anxiety about growing up. In this approach, Alice's progressive attainment of control over her size – in which the Caterpillar plays a fundamental role, first, by inducing her to talk about her self and size, and then by providing her with the means to control the latter – is seen as an analogy for capitulation to the changes that occur during the process of “growing up” and also an instruction to the child-reader not to resist change.

The treatment of identity in *Through the Looking Glass* is somewhat different to that in *Wonderland*. A teleological focus on the literary effects of the forward-motion of the plot is likely to see Alice's “steady progress towards the goal of queenhood” metaphorically, in which case it may be argued that “her crowning comes to signify the adult powers she has already tried to adopt in her handling of the black kitten” during the framing section (Knoepfmacher 1983, 511). An episodic interpretation that concentrates on the philosophical material, meanwhile, might see the progress to coronation as but a structuring device providing a framework for the various conundrums that occur along the way and a challenge to assimilate a chess game into a literary text. But even following a teleological method, it is more difficult to fit *Looking Glass* to the conventional model of the *bildung* than it is *Wonderland*, for if Alice's “queening” is read as symbolic of her “com[ing] into possession of the powers associated with mature womanhood,” then “the crown of adult power [is] a questionable emblem” (Knoepfmacher 1986, 512).

The real-world frame of *Through the Looking Glass* might then serve to neutralize the dubious impact of the adventure by gesturing against adult stentorinousness. The romantic prefatory poem claims that the author and his kind “are but older children,” while the opening scene shows Alice playing at adulthood when she “disciplines” Dinah’s kittens (Carroll 2009, 123-7). If we assume that the Looking Glass Land crown is symbolic of adulthood, the net effect of Alice’s disappointing achievement might be to tell her that the pretense with the cats is a foolish one: that in fact what she imitates is the worst of adulthood, and that she might learn, rather, that the young are similar in important ways to grown-ups, who are only “older children.” Indeed, when she “awakens” from Looking Glass Land, Alice’s rapport with the kittens is more respectful and thoughtful than it had been before she crossed through the glass (this is strategically accomplished by having the kittens fill the physical space formerly occupied by the dreamland royalty). The attitude of preservation towards childhood that this interpretation furnishes is different from the teleological reading of *Wonderland* that my students offered, but it fits very well with the Victorian strain of child-loving reflected in texts like the preface to *Holiday House* (1839), in which Catherine Sinclair explains that in the tales of the volume she “has endeavored to paint that species of noisy, frolicsome, mischievous children ... wishing to preserve a sort of fabulous remembrance of days long past” (Sinclair 1839, iv-v).

In addition to the structure furnished by an inferior chess-game, the chief organizing device of *Looking Glass* is reversal, and our detection of the relevant inversions “depends on Alice’s retention of her point of view” – in other words, the “direction” or tendencies of her original identity – “after she passes through the looking glass”

(Reichertz 1992, 24).⁹⁰ The investigation of identity that takes place behind the looking-glass, then, is less explicit but perhaps more persistent, than that which takes place in *Wonderland*. The inversion of the White Queen’s memory, for one – an “effect of living backwards” (Carroll 2009, 176) – is of particular interest to Lockean and subsequent arguments for memory as constitutive of personal identity. By having the Queen (and presumably the other creatures that are native to and equipped for Looking Glass Land) remember both past and future, Carroll may refer to Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid’s criticisms of Locke’s “memory theory.”⁹¹ Butler pointed out that the memory theory does not account for self-concern with one’s own prospects: it “render[s] the inquiry concerning a future life of no consequence” (Butler qtd in Perry 2002, 145). Reid, meanwhile, argued that “we do not recall previous experiences ... rather, we recall *events*, experienced previously”: in other words, Locke “confounds consciousness with memory,” ignoring the fact that the latter requires external episodes prior to mental contents (Copenhagen 2009, original italics). By permitting memory of the future, *Looking Glass* focuses attention both on the contextual nature of memory – the queen recalls the *incidents* that will be constituted by Hatta’s trial and crime and her own injury – and also the fact that self-interest has the future as well as the past in its view. I am wary of assuming that Carroll’s purpose is to defend a hypothesis about the sufficient conditions for personal identity, since we will see below that his primary focus is humor and play: that is, Carroll is more interested in making a joke than an argument. But part

⁹⁰ Ronald Reichartz is chiefly interested in locating *Through the Looking Glass* in response to a tradition of didactic looking glass literature, which Carroll “reverses” just as he inverts the physics of Looking Glass Land (Reichertz 1992).

⁹¹ According to Charlie Lovett’s *Lewis Carroll Among His Books*, Dodgson’s personal library contained Locke’s *Philosophical Works* (1843) and Butler’s *Works* (1844). Reid is not mentioned.

of my point is that these supposedly arcane and complex issues can be – are – rendered accessible and comic and, as Phoebe North points out, that attention to these conceptual problems can have great pedagogical (and, I would like to add, *recreational*) use (North 2006, 19).

The above analysis is the sort that comes out of an episodic attention to the physics and metaphysics of Looking Glass Land; in a teleological interpretation, such perhaps abstruse concerns about self in time may be accounted for using a psychological model. Hélène Cixous, for instance, suggests that Jacques Lacan's mirror stage provides just such a paradigm: that one may "take the whole adventure for a figurative representation of the imaginary construction of the self ... through reflexive identification" (Cixous 1982, 238). In this reading, the reversals produced by the Looking Glass are seen as metaphorical, providing a structure for the social transformation – in this case, degeneration – of Alice's identity. Cixous describes *Through the Looking Glass* as a reverse *bildung*: "the tales and poems seem to point toward a sort of inverted birth, a ... regression toward the point of dismantling." It is difficult, however, to see what the consequences of this interpretation are, since Alice appears not to "be marked by the experience" as "one would expect" (Cixous 1982, 238).

Whereas in Wonderland, "who are you?" is a recurrent question that helps to structure the book whether we read it episodically or teleologically, in Looking Glass Land, one of the central philosophical concerns involves an inquiry into the relationship between words and things, underlain by the Berkeleyan question of "who is dreaming

whom.”⁹² Alice’s passage through “the wood ... where things have no names” is especially significant for what she learns during her wandering of the relationship between language and self (Carroll 2009, 155). After finding that she cannot name the tree under which she stands, Alice questions her own identity:

She stood silent for a minute, thinking; then she suddenly began again.

“Then it really has happened, after all! And now, who am I? I *will* remember, if I can! I’m determined to do it!” But being determined didn’t help her much...
(Carroll 2009, 156)

Peter Heath points out that “the nameless wood is not ... a place where things have no names; it is a place where visitors forget the names *they* customarily give to things” (Heath 1974, 158, original italics). However, if we bear in mind Humpty Dumpty’s subsequent linguistic insights, it becomes apparent that names, by definition, *are* the words that persons assign to objects. Alice, however, seems to connect her name intimately with the thing to which it is “given” (the matter of language is turned over to an issue of personal identity): her grammar equates the loss of her name with the loss of her identity – and memory is appealed to yet again as an important element of personhood (even if Alice overlooks the fact “still can remember[s] that [she is] forgetting something,” and therefore is “not totally forgetting” [Shores 2010, 204]).

Memory can, at the same time, be seen as a psychological just as much as a philosophical issue: Lionel Morton, for instance, describes it as “something essentially unpleasant – vaguely disturbing and baffling for Alice and an elusive, even painful

⁹² See Heath 1974, 170-1; Holmes 1951, 143-4.

enigma for the other characters” in the *Alice* books (Morton 1978, 296). Morton’s explanation for the difficulties of memory is psycho-biographical: he claims that it arises out of Carroll’s loss of his child-friend Alice Liddell, and his nostalgia for the boating trip when the character Alice was first created. The teleological interpretation, then, focuses on the affect associated with the relevant issue, while an episodic reading ignores affect and concentrates on ideas.

Alice’s encounter with Humpty Dumpty in Looking Glass Land is parallel in both novelistic significance and philosophical pithiness to her conversation with the Caterpillar in *Wonderland*. Like the Caterpillar, Humpty Dumpty’s conversational technique is rude to the point of insult; his discursive manner bewilderingly not “at all like conversation” (Carroll 2009, 185). But he socratically guides Alice to new philosophical insights, as she grasps and then imitates his method of linguistic mastery, and is “surprised at her own ingenuity” when she invents a definition for the neologism “wabe” (Carroll 2009, 190, 193). From a teleological perspective, Alice’s conversation with Humpty can be seen as the critical point at which she gleans the principles that govern Looking Glass Land (and perhaps, implicitly, the real world) – a discovery that is similar to that acquired through her exchange with the Caterpillar in *Wonderland*, when she learns to control her size. Yet, unlike in *Wonderland*, Alice does not appear to develop because of her new knowledge: she is “unshakeable, powerful, full of authority” throughout *Through the Looking Glass* (Cixous 1982, 237). Nevertheless, her awakening from Looking Glass Land is “superimposable” with that in *Wonderland*: “Alice stands up to the queen and destroys her immediately after having acquired her real stature” (Cixous

1982, 245). Reading for teleology, there is development and overcoming (the characteristics, Sacks would say, of novels) in both stories.

Humpty's chief intervention into Alice's identity is to question her on the properties that distinguish her from other persons: "you're so exactly like other people," he says, and "your face is the same as everybody has – the two eyes ... nose in the middle, mouth under. It's always the same" (Carroll 2009, 196). From a psychological perspective, Humpty's observation is a violation of Alice's individuality; she might take offense at his extraordinarily "unsatisfactory" social manner (197) – a manner that is characteristic of both Wonderland and Looking Glass Land exchanges, against which Alice, as heroine, is obliged to triumph. But as an inquiry into her personal identity, Humpty's observation is not colored by affect. Rather, he asks that Alice (or an implied reader) consider, given that human beings share significant traits, what property, or properties, differentiate one from the other (and as an egg who employs a particular, rather than a common language, Humpty represents a type of person significantly different enough from human persons that it makes sense for him to ask the question).⁹³

Finally, the question with which the novel ends – "which dreamed it?" – fulfills a similar role in the two different types of interpretation with which I am concerned. Psychologically, it is an affront upon Alice's person when the Tweedle twins first claim that she is merely "a sort of thing in [the red king's] dream": Alice is indignant that if "the King was to wake" she would *not* "go out – bang! – just like a candle!" (Carroll 2009, 168). And, teleologically, *Through the Looking Glass* can be seen as a protracted psychological trial, in which Alice (who is prepared for the challenge through similar

⁹³ See Olson 2008 and Shores 2010, 202-3.

assaults in Wonderland) must strive to defend herself against numerous chaotic attacks upon her person. But as a philosophical text, the question of dreaming alludes to George Berkeley's idea that we are all some "sort of thing[s]" in god's dream.⁹⁴ "The central problem of philosophy, the problem of the nature of reality" is connected to the problem of personal identity via humans' roles as the perceivers of reality (Holmes 1951, 144). Read episodically, the scenes in which the Red King's dream is mentioned might serve to actuate thinking about the nature of things, and the thinker's nature in relation to the world around her.

I suspect that it is far easier for readers who are familiar with novels and unfamiliar with analytic philosophy to detect and articulate a developmental concern with identity in the *Alice* books than to notice philosophical play with the constituents and continuity of self. Depictions of maturation are the central concern of *bildungsromans* and many novels, and hence it is unsurprising that scholars trained to notice elements related to growth, personality, and so on, fail to detect the material that my episodic reading brings out. The mandate to attend to the former set of features, then, is passed on to the educational sphere, and from there to schoolchildren who are instructed in novelistic reading by teachers, librarians, and parents. At the risk of jumping to conclusions about the experiences of child readers, however, I suspect that younger children, those yet unschooled in the conventional objects of literary reading, would be equally unreceptive to both types of material. Although the generalizing impulse is unfashionable among some twenty-first-century scholars of childhood, I think Walter Benjamin was wise to observe that, "in their reading [children] absorb" (Benjamin 1929, 256). Presumably,

⁹⁴ See Heath 1974, 170-1; Holmes 1951, 143-4; Alexander 2002, 224.

young children would be equally likely to assimilate developmental material as they would playful conceptual content, understanding little, but playing along. Still, the tale of identity development appears frequently enough in children's fiction that scholars have good reason to follow the developmental imperative. The trouble is, it too often blinds them to the concerns of texts that are not centrally 'about' growing up – especially those in which 'growth' provides a structural backdrop against which more interesting things happen.

Furthermore, the two different understandings of identity that the *Alices* furnish can be seen to have different consequences in terms of what they demand from readers. The discussion of the problem of personal identity speaks of an ethos that encourages questioning and play rather than earnest quiescence or endless repetition of conventional schema of growth. Put somewhat differently, the novel of development (or, the *Alice* books read as novels of development) has as its desirable conclusion a state in which a former child no longer wonders about her identity, while the metaphysical questions of identity are not resolvable, and could be used to encourage irresolution and prolong the sort of questioning that naturally occurs in childhood. When a text asks these questions, it is not looking for an answer, but rather for the process of questioning and play to be replicated and continued. Thus, the texts that perform this activity – or the reader who notices the features of a text that invite inquiry – might be read in light of a vision of childhood that values both intellect and pleasure. Meanwhile, by ignoring an invitation to inquiry in favor of an exploration of the perhaps more familiar elements of psychology and development, we discover in the text an attitude of passivity. It goes without saying, then, that the former type of interpretation is the one that should be

propagated amongst both literary critics and adult co-readers, for by repeatedly succumbing to the directive to talk about maturation, we do both texts and children a disservice. In the next chapter, then, I ignore all concerns with maturation in the *Alice* books, and instead, after developing a perspective in which the instructional and entertaining impulses in texts are seen as intimates rather than opposites, propose a reading based upon the premise that the books model, and so strive to teach play with philosophical concepts.

III. MENTAL RECREATION IN WONDERLAND

Our observations of animals, because of our detachment from them, may indeed be less biased than cultural attitudes toward our own human “play,” but they are probably just as inaccurate about distinctions between learning and play among the very young. These distinctions are often difficult to discern in the long, undifferentiated sequences of behavior that are typical of all immature organisms, not just human young.

Brian Sutton-Smith⁹⁵

The curtailing of play that is the result of the spread of literacy resulted in a compensatory valuing of play that is the foundation for the construction of childhood innocence. Specifically, the children’s novel was invented in an attempt to translate the phantasmagoric play of pre-literate children into the literary form of the novel, a translation that most clearly takes place in the Alice books. Lewis Carroll, because he knew how to play like a child, was able to invent the children’s novel and in doing so provided the rhetorical model for all subsequent children’s novelists, a rhetoric based upon a tension between the idyllic and the didactic.

John Morgenstern⁹⁶

One of the popular generalizations made about children’s literature as a species of text is that its members fall on one or other side of an instruction–entertainment divide – or, somewhat more subtly, that there is a spectrum of interaction, or a tension, between the two faculties. This is sometimes described in terms of a historic development, whereby children’s books before Newbery or Carroll (as the critic prefers) are seen as primarily instructional, whereas after the chosen turning point, amusement becomes permissible – if qualified by veiled direction in social norms (see, for instance, Hunt 2011, 45). Here,

⁹⁵ From *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997, 28).

⁹⁶ From *Playing with Books: A Study of the Reader as Child* (2009, 65).

however, I am concerned with the appearance of, or play between, pleasure and pedagogy as they are sometimes said to occur in juvenile literature as a type, distinguishing it from other categories of text. Historic development is of course relevant – as is a consideration of what, if anything, differentiates the pleasures and education furnished by texts directed to adults from those of children’s books – but will be sidelined in the interests of teasing apart what it might mean to detach what delights from what teaches.

Perry Nodelman is perhaps the most notable commentator on the opposition between pleasure and pedagogy in children’s books – and these, he has argued repeatedly, are the features that set them apart as “a distinct kind of writing, a genre” (Nodelman 2000a, 1). I am not concerned here to speculate on the nature of children’s literature (and Marah Gubar has presented an excellent argument that such categorizing in fact benefits us little),⁹⁷ but I shall consider elements from a debate that occurred in the 2000 issue of the journal *Children’s Literature* as the starting point for my own speculation on amusement and instruction in the *Alice* books and my other subject texts.

In the article that sets off the discussion, Nodelman writes that the children’s books that delight him – that “resonate ... magically” – do so “because they are trying to be optimistic and didactic at once,” which is “inherently self-contradictory” and “leads to ambivalence, subtlety – resonance.” Other, inferior, juvenile texts, he supposes, are “either more purely didactic or more purely optimistic,” and “represent two opposite ways in which adults like to address children, based ... on different ways of thinking about how children differ from adults.” The first “implies that children are ... in need of

⁹⁷ See “On Not Defining Children’s Literature” (2011).

instruction in how to be better people,” while the second “implies that children are not only just fine as they already are but that what they wish for in their childlike, egocentric way is exactly what they need...” (2). Nodelman’s commentary on didactic forces in children’s books makes it clear that what he refers to is specifically *moral* didacticism – “instruction in how to be...” – whereas if we regard the logical and linguistic content of the *Alices* as material that the books strive to teach, it is less easy to fit Carrollian “didacticism” to the usual ideological model. Still, the matters “learnt” would presumably make the child learner different than she was before her encounter with the book. And the injunction to “mental recreation” – both for its own sake, and for the virtues that it confers – can have some sort of a moral force, for the activity cultivates both play and attention to the intellect as virtues.

Nodelman’s discussion of adults’ efforts to influence children through literature, however, leads us to an important point implicit in his writing and that of many other contemporary critics against which I stand: that is, that any sort of didacticism, and especially moral didacticism, directed towards children in books, is seen as somehow a bad thing – or at least suspect, because it constitutes an attempt to alter children to our flawed adult model of being. There are, of course, cases in which this cynicism is well-placed, although I think they occur more often in children’s popular culture (and particularly, toys) than in books – but we are in error to presume that the field is inevitably pernicious, or that adults’ prerogatives to influence children are necessarily damaging. Nodelman does observe that “optimistic” children’s literature, which he describes as expressing a “wish-fulfillment stance” toward childhood is actually “just as didactic” as instructional children’s literature, since it endeavors to teach children to

conform to adults' ostensive vision of them. And this well-meaning point might tell, firstly, that "optimism" and "didacticism," or "pleasure" and "pedagogy," are actually far from separable. After all the opposite of "pleasure" is not "pedagogy," but "pain," and while too many schools systematically teach children that learning is unpleasant, books, I think, have a special capacity to do the opposite. But more importantly, wanting to help children change and grow does not necessarily reflect a "pessimistic" attitude about how they are. Instead it acknowledges that growing up is an unavoidable process, and that it can be done well or poorly. Furthermore, since didacticism in some form appears to be inevitable, instead of bemoaning this fact, we may as well use texts that have didactic elements – that is, *all* texts, interpreted in certain ways – responsibly. As we shall see below, in his response to "Pleasure and Genre," Roderick McGillis makes this very point. To be fair, Nodelman does identify one pair of unambiguous opposites: the literature that he describes as "didactic" instructs children to change, whereas that which he terms "optimistic" calls upon them to remain as they are. It is indeed a logical contradiction both to change and not to change, although Nodelman retracts the contradiction by implying that children are not, in fact, what "optimistic" or "wish-fulfilling" literature imagines them to be; hence, both "optimistic" and "didactic" literature wish children to change (and very few children, I am guessing, heed their calls...).

It is the contention of this dissertation (and a contention so obviously valuable that it shouldn't require articulation) that there are matters – ideological and otherwise – that books can and should endeavor to teach children; to ask them to change, as they mature. To Nodelman, pedagogy is permissible accompanied by or combined with

pleasure – the texts that achieve this balance, he thinks, linger in our consciousnesses – and I would support some version of this dictum while abandoning the suspicion of instruction and the taboo against attempting to alter children. Texts that are *received as* purely didactic are probably not much fun to read, if they are read at all, and their messages are probably unlikely to be digested. At the same time, Nodelman fails to accommodate the multifarious sources of pleasure. I propose, then, that (a) we examine supposedly pedagogical texts for their pleasurable drives, and recreational or frivolous texts for their instructional material, and (b) when it comes down to it, it makes little sense to separate the two faculties. The latter is McGillis’s claim in his response to “Pleasure and Genre,” where he distinguishes, not didacticism and optimism, but two kinds of pleasure: “elemental pleasure,” an “immediate sensation” that “may result when we assume that reading has no other purpose than to keep us perennially playing the same game” and “alert pleasure,” which is a “cerebral exercise” that “results from the consciousness that the game pits self against an other ... impl[ying] a plurality of readers and a text that speaks with many voices” (McGillis 2000, 16). It is these cerebral pleasures – in this case, jokes and play with philosophical material in children’s books – that are the main subject of inquiry in this dissertation, hence its title.

McGillis’s main goal, however, is to take Nodelman to task for his “desire to homogenize reading” – a desire that the former sees latent in Nodelman’s suspicion that ““readers of most ages mirror [his] own wonderfully ambivalent response”” to texts that integrate optimism and didacticism (McGillis 2000, 16). I think McGillis misconstrues the intention behind Nodelman’s remark, which is not to recruit “readers of most ages” to his model of reading, but rather to suggest that readers of all ages have access to the

same subtle pleasures in which the critic delights: McGillis, in other words, mistakes an egalitarian impulse for insistence on conformism.⁹⁸ Still, the observation that a critic all too often risks appealing to a normative model of reading that is in fact constructed and context-dependent is important to our understanding of learning and pleasure in and from texts. Perhaps the main danger in analyzing juvenile literature is not the urge to standardize reading at the present, but rather an anachronistic failure to accommodate diverse sources of pleasure – that is, the tendency to imagine that what gratifies many of us in the twenty-first century English-speaking West is immutable. As John Morgenstern puts it, the suggestion that “before the eighteenth century children’s literature was a desert of didacticism and only after Newbery (or Perrault) were children allowed to take pleasure in their literature” constitutes “a lack of historical imagination and a failure to understand the nature of the pleasure that children once took in works that are no longer to our taste” (Morgenstern 2009, 9). The same principle might be extended such that works that I am considering – which might teach, baffle, even attack – and can also be understood for their pleasures, not in spite of, but because they teach, baffle, attack.

McGillis makes another important point in his response to Nodelman: that certain pleasures, those he describes as “cerebral” or “alert,” are *learnt* – and implicitly, that we should endeavor to teach them. Some of these sorts of pleasures as they appear in the *Alices* require previous learning (for instance, some of the jokes benefit from a

⁹⁸ In his last word in the 2000 debate, “The Urge to Sameness,” Nodelman defends himself by arguing “not that actual readers ... share [his] reading strategies but that texts of children’s fiction tend to set up conditions that invite readers to make sense of them in the way [he] describe[s]” (2000b, 39). This is an instance in which I think Nodelman might have done more in his own defense, and I suspect that his failure to credit what I describe as egalitarianism reflects an intellectual climate in which many are so resistant to homogeneity that they fail to see what human beings share. I argue that we would do well to lose some of the individualism of identity politics and return to a humanistic model in which commonalities may be celebrated just as much as differences.

certain sensitivity to language or familiarity with the material that is distorted), while others induce it (those jokes, perhaps, which stimulate thinking or intimacy with language). In fact, it is probably difficult and unnecessary to distinguish “requiring previous knowing” from “inducing learning,” since what is half-gleaned before the experience with the book may be three-quarters articulated after. At any rate, what is perhaps most central to my argument is the notion that books can *teach pleasure* (and, by turns, that pleasure can induce understanding): and that the pleasures taught are valuable both in-themselves, for pleasure’s sake, and for the insights startled alongside them.

None of the above says anything of what it is that child-readers (or *any* readers) take from the books they read – and it is all too easy to confuse what texts have to offer with what readers get from them. However, it is difficult to challenge the idea that most of us choose to read primarily for enjoyment (and those who read because the master is bearing over them with a big stick – literal or metaphoric – are probably not reading at all; or at least, extracting as little improvement as enjoyment from the activity): and our pleasures include those of absorption, or “elemental” delights; and those resulting from knowledge obtained, material understood (or intriguingly misunderstood), pleasures in self-improvement (of whatever variety), or “cerebral” diversion. In my epigraph to this section I reproduced Morgenstern’s claim that children’s fiction endeavors to reproduce the fantasy play of early childhood, which was newly esteemed when the spread of schooling cut short this period of freedom. Notwithstanding some confusion between what children experience, and what their books contain, it seems irrefutable that play is an important driving force behind much juvenile literature after *Alice* – and,

notwithstanding Gubar's fine case against definition, that children's literature studies stand to benefit from the exploration of play as an organizing principle.⁹⁹

In Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play*, discourses on play as a human and animal activity are examined for what they reveal of the different disciplinary stances from which they come. Whereas scientists invested in the virtues of play have been inclined to treat the activity as adaptive – as preparing the young of the species for adulthood by modeling grown-up activities in their games – Sutton-Smith notes (and appears to endorse) a growing tendency to see play, not as conferring any advantage on the growing creature, but as ludic; as fun. More significantly to my argument, he notes (citing “developmental theorist Heinz Werner”) that “the behavior of the young is often undifferentiated, labile, rigid, and syncretic” while “our adult categories and definitions . . . imply much more differentiation, stability, flexibility, and discreteness in our observations” and “can easily be misleading about such inchoate forms” (Sutton-Smith 1997, 28).¹⁰⁰ In other words, Sutton-Smith supports the view that it is impossible to tell which of children's and young animal's activities are adaptive, or constitute “learning” and which, capricious and superfluous, count as “fun.” At the risk of falling into the confusion described above, I propose that we regard some “idyllic” juvenile texts as

⁹⁹ Not to neglect my recommendation above that the critic of children's literature ask himself whether the features he sees as unique to juvenile texts are not, in fact, found in equal measure in books directed to adults, we might ask how play in the two species of literature is differently manifested (for we err to deny either that adults play, or that at least some books addressed to adults are playful). Perhaps the difference is in tenor or sophistication – or, simply, the age of the character who is victim or perpetrator of concept play. Or perhaps we do best to heed Gubar's advice – in the spirit of which I frame “play,” not in terms of species definition (as does Morgenstern), but rather, simply, as a frequently observed device in juvenile literature and the current object of inquiry.

¹⁰⁰ Lest the opposition set up between “labile, rigid” and “stable, flexible” confuses, Sutton-Smith's meaning becomes clearer in later chapters of *The Ambiguity of Play*. Children's play-actions are rigid and repetitive (or, ritualistic), following strict conventions and limited to certain acts, but the category of what constitutes play is subject to constant change (see pp. 151-72).

similarly undifferentiated in their purposes. While critics such as Nodelman resist the argument that certain writers of children's books have genuine insight into childhood, I am willing to hazard, with Morgenstern, that some indeed retain access to "undifferentiated" behavior, and this is manifested in the superior texts that may appear to marry "optimism" and "didacticism."

I turn to Lewis Carroll, then, via the penultimate contribution to the 2000 debate: Margaret Higonnet's "A Pride of Pleasures." Higonnet observes that the pleasures Nodelman claims are idiosyncratic to the realm of juvenile literature "seem ... equally prevalent in adult culture" (30-1). She implies that there is a confusion in discussions of aesthetic pleasure when she notes an equation set up between pleasure, the aesthetic, and purposelessness, in discussions of historical children's books: "the evident importance of didacticism of children's literature of the [Romantic] period ... made it suspect, subject to debate: children's literature had a purpose and therefore could not be considered aesthetic" (30). This part of Higonnet's argument is not developed, so I would like to make more explicit its similarity to Sutton-Smith's depiction of animal play. First, it seems by-and-large unproductive (and, in a way, anachronistic) to try and disentangle delight and discovery – and, more importantly, that we do well to allow that both are perplexing in their intentions ("purpose," indeed, might be a term better left out of the equation, in part because the illocutionary goals of language are seldom the same as its perlocutionary accomplishments). But Higonnet's most important contribution, for my purposes, is to note "the multiplicity of pleasures that children's literature affords," in contrast to Nodelman's singular concern with the pleasures of narrative (34). The pleasures with which she is concerned include "[d]elightful acts of aggression against

conventional language and fairy tales,” hints at children’s knowledge of sex, “density of allusion,” and “imitation and repetition” (34-5). She further suggests, consonant with my argument in the previous chapter, that different sorts of pleasures can be seen along “linear” and “spatial” axes: respectively, those which result from the trajectory of a plot, and the immediate (or “episodic”) pleasures that occur along the way.¹⁰¹ In my discussion of identity in the previous chapter, I analyzed *Alice* for the insights that can be gleaned from a teleological (or “linear”) reading and an episodic (or “spatial”) reading respectively, rather than the pleasures that these furnish. And I take it as telling that in this case (and no doubt many others) “insight” and “pleasure” may as well be interchangeable.

Indeed, that these phenomena are not “inherently contradictory” at all – not opposites, but intimates – is suggested by the title of Carroll’s 1884 lecture, “Feeding the Mind.” Here Kathleen Blake’s discussion is instructive. She describes the project of the lecture as “to articulate an analogy between feeding the body with food and the mind with ideas” (1974, 22). More importantly, “qualifications and regulations and warnings aside” (Carroll urges against excess in realms both gustatory and intellectual), “Carroll advocates eating,” for “[w]hat’s good about eating is that something chewed, swallowed, digested is *yours*. Assimilation equals gratification...” and “Carroll’s lecture is not really concerned with usefulness in the ordinary sense. It is concerned with pleasure. When you feed the mind as you might the body, for the fun of feeding, you are moving toward play” (1974, 23). The sense of Carroll’s title, then, is that just as eating nourishes in the

¹⁰¹ Higonnet borrows terms for these “axes” from linguistics: “whereas narrative and argument move along a ‘syntagmatic axis’ ... character, vocabulary, color, and so forth organize their pleasures along a ‘paradigmatic axis’” (35).

long-term and pleases at the moment of incorporation, cerebral activity both nourishes and delights (although we should be wary of raiment, he proposes, that provides immediate gratification and later distress). Blake is perhaps a little too generous towards Carroll who, while he endorses pleasure in mental “feeding,” also warns “us how indigestible some of our favorite lines of reading are,” for they are followed by the “usual train of low spirits, unwillingness to work, weariness of existence” (Carroll 2007, 19). There is, then, an ascetic strain in Carroll, even while the injunction to “digest” – to process what one has read – between bouts of mental feeding suggests that he stands against intellectual straining. Alternately, the concern with digestive felicity suggests that in “Feeding the Mind,” Carroll is as just as intent upon sustaining nutrition as avoiding the future pain that might result from poor choice of refreshment: in other words, there is still a primary concern with and pursuit of pleasure.

Carroll’s interest in cerebral pleasures is made even clearer by the many games that he invented and a number of publications to which he turned in his retirement. In particular, *The Game of Logic* ([1886] 1958) and *Symbolic Logic* ([1896] 1958) constitute efforts “to *popularise* [the] fascinating subject [of logic]” such that it may “be of *real* service to the young, and to be taken up ... as a valuable addition to their stock of healthful mental recreations” (Carroll 1958, xiv, original italics).¹⁰² (If the epithet “healthful” smells a little too keenly of Victorian moralism, we might consider the

¹⁰² Sutherland points out that in his fictional works, Carroll often italicizes words as a signal that they are meant to be taken as puns (1970, 173). While this may not be his intention in the recreational works, I think it plausible that “popularize” is italicized to imply both “to make broadly understandable” and “to make widely agreeable, or fashionable.” “Real,” meanwhile, might suggest that “the subject of logic” is to be taken as objectively existing material (as opposed to an arcane game that logicians play), that the “service” it provides is built on truths, and that its virtues are genuine rather than apparent.

contexts of Carroll’s “mental recreations” – including a purchasing public that would likely have been enthused by salubrious play – before imagining that there is something foul to be kept at bay.) In these works, the character of Carroll’s writing deserves to be considered as well as his goals. *Symbolic Logic* includes almost one hundred pages elucidating the terms and methods of formal logic (including his own alternative to Venn diagrams), culminating with a series of problems for the reader to solve, and a section for teachers of logic reconsidering matters taken as axiomatic in his address to less advanced readers. It is perhaps not unusual for a logician, but the absurd quality of Carroll’s examples clearly reveals the delight that went into their construction – and presumably a sensitive reader should take them as a nod in the direction of play. Alternately, it may be that the form of logic problems, which demand artificial premises, invite nonsense – for instance, the following:

- (1) Puppies, that will not lie still, are always grateful for the loan of a skipping rope;
- (2) A lame puppy would not say “thank you” if you offered to lend it a skipping rope.
- (3) None but lame puppies ever care to do worsted work.¹⁰³

Logical problems that contain jokes, such as this, may produce their humor by creating a valid logical argument of which the premises are infelicitous or false, since the terms of the argument are irrelevant to its form – and form is the concern of logic. There are similarities, here, with Carroll’s nonsense poetry and prose fiction: in the former case, the

¹⁰³ Problem number 18 (Carroll [1896] 1958, 114). Solution: “Puppies, that will not lie still, never care to do worsted work.”

poems contained in the *Alice* books are always syntactically (that is, formally) correct (and in the case of the parodies, follow an existing – hence, conventional – form), but the “argument,” or content, tends not to be understandable, felicitous, or true. Elements of Carroll’s prose may provide even more interesting examples of formally valid statements, the content of which is infelicitous, since in *Alice*, normal conversational idiom is often spotlighted to show up its nonsensicality. In his syllogisms, meanwhile, Carroll appears to relish hinting at impossibility or idiocy: puppies can skip, speak, do worsted work; ducks might waltz; coronet-wearing M.P.’s may consider donkey-races, and so on.

This is an example of play that occurs en route to an explicitly pedagogical goal. But the chief purpose in learning and practicing logic is still its pleasures (even while concomitant improvement in one’s reasoning ability – which amounts to immunity against deception – should not be neglected). This may be seen even more explicitly in the preface to Carroll’s earlier *The Game of Logic*, which both contains and celebrates logical play:

This game requires nine counters... [and] it also requires one player, *at least*. I am not aware of any game that can be played with less than this number: while there are several that require *more*: take cricket, for instance, which requires twenty-two. How much easier it is, when you want to play a game, to find *one* Player than twenty-two. At the same time, though one Player is enough, a good deal more amusement may be got by two working at it together, and correcting each other’s mistakes.

A second advantage, possessed by this Game, is that, besides being an endless source of amusement ... it will give the Players a little instruction as well. But is there any great harm in *that*, so long as you get plenty of amusement? (Carroll 1886/1958, iv)

It might be argued that “amusement” here constitutes little more than an underhanded way of smuggling “instruction” into the game – or, contrariwise (if we can transcend our anachronistic impulses), that “instruction” serves as a cover for play. But the sportive tone of the preface, combined with Carroll’s veiled inquiry into the social nature of games suggests, again, that we blunder to separate “amusement” from “instruction.”

There are several other examples of later works by Carroll in which pleasure and learning are explicitly combined – and both pleasures of learning, and the learning of pleasure cultivated.¹⁰⁴ But the question remains what these have to do with the earlier *Alice* books or, more pointedly, how “cerebral pleasures” are manifested in Carroll’s fiction. And here I propose that the later interest in “mental recreation” be seen as a development of a concern that occurs more intuitively and less systematically in the *Alice* books. This position is somewhat similar to that which Robert Sutherland expresses about Lewis Carroll’s linguistic interests as a whole: that they are seen clearly from the works of his juvenilia to those of his decrepitude, but never arranged into formal systems of principles, like those of the twentieth century language philosophers who drew upon Carroll. Although it is not the main project of his monograph, Sutherland repeatedly comments on the status of Carroll’s linguistic insights with respect to learning and play,

¹⁰⁴ See Martin Gardner’s *The Universe in a Handkerchief: Lewis Carroll’s Mathematical Recreations, Games, Puzzles, and Word Plays* (1996) for an exhaustive discussion of these works, and also Kathleen Blake’s *Play, Games, and Sport* (1974).

and his final word is that “if there is any educational aim in Carroll’s treatment of language, it is subordinated to his desire to amuse and entertain” (Sutherland 1970, 228).

I hold broadly by Sutherland’s view, but propose that there is more to be said on the matter. (For one, the fact that the *Alices* were not conceived as pedagogical tools does not mean that they cannot be used this way.) And here I have two main points: firstly, it is interesting that the “desire to amuse and entertain” is so fertile a source of understanding. This needn’t surprise us, and philosophers of language are well-acquainted with the use of humor and play to expose truths and problems (while, simultaneously, delighting). Perhaps this is a phenomenon best treated by psychologists or scholars of humor, but aestheticians, teachers, and literary scholars do well to bear it in mind. Secondly, as I have hinted above, one of the primary faculties that texts such as the *Alices* aspire to teach (or perhaps, using reception terminology, call upon an ideal reader to learn) is pleasure in language and concepts: the capacity to delight in verbal infelicities and the aesthetic features of words and sentences. The latter issue is the subject of the second half of this chapter.

A. LEARNING PLEASURES: CONVERSATION-PLAY IN *ALICE*

Does it seem paradoxical, or even perverse, to assert that philosophy and humour – especially nonsense humour – are intimately related?

George Pitcher¹⁰⁵

The Alices are famous for being playful and moral-less; they are without explicit ulterior motive or benefit. But although the books are nondidactic (relative to the heavy-handed moralism of most children's literature of the time), they do bear a relation to reality and say something about life.

Kathleen Blake¹⁰⁶

In many ways, Blake's *Play, Games, and Sport* insists on the same fusion of idyll and didacticism that I have emphasized above – and, more importantly, on its centrality to the *oeuvre* of Lewis Carroll. However, there are two difficulties with her argument, which I intend for this section to correct en route to my discussion of the method by which cerebral pleasures are encouraged in the *Alices*. The first is her narrow conception of play based on a rhetoric of competition and mastery and the second involves her discussion of the *Alice* stories themselves, which she considers (legitimately, but restrictively) in terms of the many games that occur therein, rather than the briefer episodes of verbal and concept play, with which I will be concerned here. The focus on games rather than play (a knotty distinction, which I make a perfunctory effort to tease out below) serves the understanding of play-as-mastery (which Sutton-Smith describes in terms of “rhetorics of power”), but neglects the many instances in which play might be

¹⁰⁵ From “Wittgenstein, Nonsense, and Lewis Carroll” (1965, 593).

¹⁰⁶ From *Play, Games, and Sport* (1974, 35).

seen as an invitation to something more celebratory – or at least, amorphous. But before I consider *Alice* I return to Sutton-Smith’s exploration.

The net effect of *The Ambiguity of Play* is to expose the fact that, notwithstanding the many efforts from disparate fields to explain the phenomenon of play, it remains something about which little can be said with certainty. Sutton-Smith concludes that “variability is the key to play, and that structurally it is characterized by quirkiness, redundancy, and flexibility” (229) – all of which tells us a little of what play looks like but not what, if anything, it is “for.” Play might be adaptive, frivolous; individualistic, communitarian; ritualistic, chaotic, an activity of adult artists or hooligan children; focused on ends or on means; and so on, and so forth – as far as one’s imagination (or play-faculty, if we adopt the broad definition of the romantics) can take it. Sutton-Smith is only concerned in passing to comment on the accuracy or utility of the different interpretations; his goal is not so much to explain play as to unpack theories of play. It occurs to me, however, that what might be elucidated by the latter about the former may be more clearly elaborated with reference to another scholar (one not considered explicitly by Sutton-Smith), writing not about play, but about games: Ludwig Wittgenstein.¹⁰⁷

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein analogizes games and language. His interest is primarily in language, but for the purposes of this discussion I shall consider the insight revealed into games – and more broadly, play. Having in preceding sections

¹⁰⁷ Sutton-Smith does not make any explicit references to Wittgenstein, but he includes a line from *Philosophical Investigations* in the epigraph to the penultimate chapter (“Don’t be afraid of talking nonsense, but you must pay attention to your nonsense.”). This may be a calculated omission, since *Ambiguity* is surely Wittgensteinian in its interests, and the most obvious conclusion – which I draw below – is that “play,” like Wittgenstein’s “games” is usefully undefinable.

described language *as* game, in §66, Wittgenstein considers the many “proceedings that we call ‘games’”: for example, “board games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on.” He notes that “if you look at [all the different sorts of ‘games’] you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.” It is significant that Wittgenstein calls not upon our powers of interpretation for the exegesis of games, but rather those of observation: “don’t think, but look!” he cheers ([1953] 1997, §66).

Look, for example at board games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. – Are they all “amusing”? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.

And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. ([1953] 1997, §66)

The solution to the failure of definition is Wittgenstein's important notion of family resemblances – an alternative to the usual practice of definition, and one that might have a myriad uses in different fields (as Gubar has demonstrated via her application of the idea to children's literature). Games, like the concepts of number and language-use "form a family": "something continuous runs through the whole thread – namely the continuous overlapping of [many] fibres" (§67). It is possible to circumscribe the concept 'game,' but Wittgenstein argues that this reduces the term's utility for all but the most specialized purposes (§69). The point – as indicated by the injunction not to "think," but to "look!" – is that games are recognizable even although we can't quite explain what it is that they are. And more, that hazarding an explanation doesn't in fact help us: "What does it mean to know what a game is?" Wittgenstein asks rhetorically, and "What does it mean, to know it and not be able to say it?" (§75).

What then, to connect Wittgenstein, Sutton-Smith, Kathleen Blake, and Lewis Carroll, is the relationship between games and play? One might argue that examples from Wittgenstein such as a child throwing his ball against a wall or ring-a-ring-a-roses are not in fact games, but play. This would assume that structural formality and an interest in winning are important to games, which form a sub-group of a broader category, "play." But to delimit a boundary thus removes the benefits of a broad and intuitive *impression* of games, returning us from family resemblance to definition. Perhaps "play" and "game" are best treated simply as different parts of speech: play, a verb, is the activity, whereas game, a noun, is the thing acted upon. This at best may be a tendency rather than a rule, and since I think we do well to follow the dictum of ordinary language philosophy to consider language in its customary usage rather than to imagine that it has

an ideal form, I wouldn't want to hang myself on a parts of speech distinction. "Game" and "play" are *sometimes* used interchangeably, as noun and as verb. At any rate, a conception of the phenomena that is based in family resemblances would surely not only allow, but *require*, that we not set up a partition between the concepts.

In this spirit, I propose that we consider play – or circumstances of play, or activities that might be regarded as play – not as a phenomenon with a unifying characteristic (such as competition, mastery, childhood, fun, ritual, chaos, etcetera, etcetera), but as a group of variable phenomena related to one another by family resemblance. That is to say, some instances of play might have mastery or superiority as an end-goal, and some may inhere in the pleasure of the process, and others do other things entirely – and in most cases it is probably very difficult to say, following Sutton-Smith, quite what the most significant feature of the activity might be.

What, then, of cerebral play in Lewis Carroll's novels? I have already hinted at my suspicion of Kathleen Blake's argument that the *games* contained in the *Alices* are directed towards mastery and incorporation. (And my differentiation between "games" and "play" here gainsays my suggestion that we not separate concepts. Alternately, Blake's vision of games is circumscribed in the way that Wittgenstein's is not. She treats games as rigid, social, competitive, rule-bound events, whereas the latter would regard these as but one sub-species of game.) The instances of verbal and conceptual play that I shall examine below are not explicitly competitive – although it has been argued that they constitute instances of power play, of which Alice, and sometimes the child reader, is victim. I have proposed to discuss these instances as moments of pleasure: and more, moments at which a certain type of cerebral pleasure is stimulated or taught. In this

reading, these moments of play are seen as co-operative rather than antagonistic (just as a shared joke bonds joker and listener), and furthermore, as frivolous, transformative, and child-directed. (Sutton-Smith remarks that children's own story-telling includes "repetitive episodic plots, ... preferences for rhyme and alliteration, ... nonsense, ... obscenity, ... crazy titles, morals, and characters."¹⁰⁸) This is not to say that the critic who seeks hostility in the conversations of the *Alices* will not find plenty of it. (And nor would I presuppose that the books are any worse off because it is possible to find malice in them – or because some children have reported being menaced by them.¹⁰⁹) Thus, what follows is in part instructive: I mean demonstrate *how* to find and learn cerebral pleasures in the *Alice* books such that the scholars and co-readers considering them may make more enlivening interpretive choices.

To begin with, we can consider one of the differences between the cerebral play of the *Alices* (likewise, *The Hunting of the Snark* and *Sylvie and Bruno*) and the later works of

¹⁰⁸ This from the chapter "Child Phantasmagoria," in which Sutton-Smith considers the sort of violent and obscene child-play that some adults ignore or repress. It is interesting to me that some of the elements of stories commonly told *by* children (which Sutton-Smith calls "story disasters") are shared with Carroll's *Alices*: that is, episodic plots, word-play, nonsense, and craziness (1997, 161).

¹⁰⁹ Lest this seem a brisk remark to toss off parenthetically, one of its important implications concerns the content of the many language jokes in the *Alice* books. It is frequently noted that these serve to expose the infelicities of everyday speech and behavior – and the discovery that our usual assumptions are not what they seem may be disruptive indeed (and while *I* experience this disruption as liberating, I am also happy to acknowledge that others do not). Pleasant or otherwise, I would argue that a child who is so fortunate as to recognize these solecisms for what they are (and since one of the main burdens or joys of childhood is the discovery of the uses and misuses of language, I suspect that many children would be receptive to this insight) has experienced a beneficial and potentially empowering disruption. But language play might also be experienced as making fun of a child's (that is, Alice's, or a child-reader – or, for that matter, an adult reader's) ignorance. This is not a complaint to which I have an answer, although it doesn't trouble me much. Presumably the reader who feels victimized or insulted is unlikely to persevere with the book; or perhaps she is the little girl who, not knowing the identity of her interlocutor, told Carroll she thought *Wonderland* "the stupidest book [she] ever read!" – an anecdote the author, apparently, delighted in retelling (Hatch 1932, 10). Of course, there are many other sorts of pains that the *Alices* can produce – no doubt almost as many as the children and adults reading them – and the broader purpose of my parenthesis is to make the obvious point that no text should be dismissed because it is found to contain menace.

mental recreation discussed in the previous section. *The Game of Logic* has been considered “an attempt ‘to disguise a didactic dose with helpings of jam’” (Hudson in Kirk 1962, 19): a dud resulting from the fact that Carroll failed to see that “symbolic logic is not for children” (Kirk 1962, 23). It goes without saying that I protest the latter point: there is nothing that is “not for children,” and we do children an injustice to deny them access to material supposed to be boring, difficult, arcane (or, extremely useful for distinguishing information from what Harry Frankfurt calls bullshit). *The Game of Logic* and its sister texts, meanwhile, are indeed didactic (and at the time that they were produced, Carroll taught logic classes at girls’ schools), but I have no doubt that Carroll found the practice – or play – of logic advanced by these texts pleasurable in itself. The “jam,” in other words, is no disguise, but the dish itself, even if some may not find it sweet. The “game” is of the same family as brainteasers, crossword puzzles, scrabble, and chess: all games enjoyed by certain adults and children.

The *Alice* books, however, work somewhat differently: play with logic and language is less formalized and goal directed (we are not explicitly given a “problem” to “solve”), more intuitive, ambiguous, and depending on one’s tastes, fun. I suspect that the stories do a far better job of engaging a whimsy-minded reader than do the syllogisms, although it is unclear just what is being engaged; the works of mental recreation, meanwhile, do plenty to explain the logical and linguistic humor of the *Alices*, but to most of us are probably less gratifying reads than the novels. (I think, here, about Stephen Booth’s suggestion that what engages us in literature is what we don’t quite understand – what baffles us.) In the remainder of this chapter, finally, I will explore of

some of the cerebral pleasures of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and attempt to explain how the texts strive to awaken them.

I begin with an episode from *Through the Looking-Glass* in which Alice, delighted to discover the existence of the Unicorn, is informed that from his perspective, she is a “fabulous monster” (Carroll 2009, 205). Attention to this episode is instructive because it constitutes perhaps the most direct invitation to child readers to participate in the upheavals of reality that organize Carrollian concept play. The joke here (like many others of those in *Looking-Glass*) hinges upon the reversal of circumstances in fantasyland from those in Alice’s usual reality. In real life, children are ordinary and unicorns fabulous; in Looking-Glass Land, the situation is inverted. Haigha presents Alice to the Unicorn as a curiosity: ““This is a child!”” he says, ““We only found it to-day. It’s large as life, and twice as natural!”” (2009, 205).¹¹⁰ The Unicorn responds to Alice just as Alice is inclined to respond to the Unicorn: by exclaiming that children are an imaginary category; by wondering whether Alice is indeed live. This episode might call upon a reader who is herself a child (or has been one) to consider her own strangeness and contingency – or at least, to imagine a situation in which being a child is inexplicable. (The desired effect of the unicorn’s comment might be described as a sort of distancing: an invitation to lively self-reflection.) In the context of the question running through *Looking-Glass* concerning the nature of reality in comparison to dreams, the issue of Alice’s unfamiliarity has added metaphysical weight, since the Tweedle brothers have

¹¹⁰ The remark “It’s large as life and twice as natural” is worthy of further comment: here Carroll uses a device that appears frequently in the *Alices*: he reproduces normal idiom that we are all able to ‘make sense of,’ but that on closer examination is actually nonsensical. A careful reader, who is open to bafflement, might pause to enquire how “large” life is, and how “naturalness” is measured.

already implied that she has a status similar to that of “fabulous monsters,” both being products of minds.

But Carroll has another joke to make; another pleasure to induct. This occurs when the Unicorn and Alice make a deal: “if you believe in me, I’ll believe in you” (205). This remark should strike us as odd; as faintly absurd – for belief is not the sort of action that can be elicited thus, and because Alice and the Unicorn’s “belief” in one another in no way alters their respective realities. Earlier the White Queen boasted to Alice that she could believe “as many as six impossible things before breakfast!” (Alice, sensibly, had already pointed out that “one *ca’n’t* believe impossible things”); she also urged Alice to “consider” instead of “cry,” since “nobody can do two things at once” (177). Where the above-mentioned role-reversal is relatively straightforward, the peculiar references to belief are more arcane: easy to notice, difficult to explain. This sort of conundrum, however, is one of the primary methods by which the *Alice* books endeavor to teach cerebral play. That is: a conversational exchange occurs (it almost always has the character that led Wittgenstein to describe language as a species of game), which seems unusual, absurd, unsatisfactory, or “not at all like conversation,” and the reader is never given more than a partial explanation of what has transpired. Alice’s conversations with the Caterpillar, the guests at the Mad Tea Party, Humpty Dumpty, and the White Knight, are excellent examples discussed at length by philosophers and linguists – and I shan’t rehash their technicalities here. Most will notice that something is awry in these conversations; pragmaticians can explain what it is. But – and this is what is so important if we wish to see the connection between the insights of George Pitcher, Roger Holmes, Robin Lakoff, and Peter Heath and the pleasures of recreational readers,

child and adult – the explanation, with its specialized terminology, is not necessary for appreciation or play. The philosophical exchanges that appear in the *Alices* (some of which – to add a layer of strangeness – include the narrator) constitute a sort of half-concealed riddle. But the object of the riddle is not to find a solution, as is the case with a logical syllogism (for very often the “riddles” in *Alice* have no solutions), but rather to contemplate the problem: to mull over just what is odd about it; to be confused; to intuit that there is an application to “real life” or readers’ own worlds. The riddles can be passed over, ignored, misconstrued, but I would like to argue that attention to conundrums and confusion enriches reading by persons critical and lay, adult and child.

Here I want to avoid some of the explanatory impulses of Pitcher, Holmes, Heath, and the like: not because I think them flawed in any way, but because so much good work has already been done that there is little for me to add. It will be instructive, however, to consider the Wittgenstenian exegesis that Pitcher develops for remarks like those concerned with belief, as above. These are cases in which a communicative error occurs when one “wrongly [treats] a word or phrase as having exactly the same kind of function as another word or phrase, solely on the basis of the fact that they exhibit superficial grammatical similarities” (Pitcher 1965, 607).¹¹¹ In the *Alices* this occurs most often when verbs describing mental acts are used in a context in which a description of a physical act is expected. For instance, there is nothing contradictory about *saying* impossible things – although it is difficult to come up with a parallel action that might

¹¹¹ To be clear – Carroll’s and Wittgenstein’s purposes are rather different. Carroll’s, I would say, is primarily to make a joke that hinges upon the peculiarity of mental “action in comparison to physical action. Wittgenstein, meanwhile, lambasts philosophers for their failure to carefully scrutinize their own language-use: for their oversight in assuming that analogous grammar translates to analogous sense. These instances of humor and censure, respectively, have a similar insight at their respective cores.

replace the Unicorn's use of "believe." Part of the difficulty is not only that "belief" is mental, but that it constitutes a particular sort of mental activity, with a special kind of intentionality (it is possible, by contrast, to *imagine* six impossible things before breakfast), and thus I submit that one of Carroll's important concerns is to make light of peculiar differences between mentality and materiality. Indeed, one possible effect of the *Alices* may be the realization that it is rather strange indeed that human beings *have* mental lives. (This, as we shall see in chapter 5, is also one of the central conundrums of Stein's *The World is Round*.) The frequent jokes that hinge upon a comparison of mentality and physicality,¹¹² combined with Alice's penchant for pretend-play and the unclear status of the fantasylands with respect to normal reality could (or perhaps, should) evoke thinking about and play with these issues.

One of the most frequent modes by which play is conducted occurs when familiar language, behavior, or states of affairs are distorted or inverted, as occurs when the unicorn describes Alice as a "fabulous monster." (Twenty-first-century children have dwindling access to some of the material that is altered in *Alive*, since what was familiar to the upper-middle-class Victorian youth that constituted Carroll's implied audience is not necessarily still recognized. This is especially the case with regard to many of the poems that Carroll parodies and some verbal commonplaces that are now out of use. It is less often the case with regard to seemingly immutable tropes such as unicorns and

¹¹² Such jokes are less frequent in *Wonderland* than in *Looking-Glass*, and it may take more perspicacity to detect them in the former. For instance, when Alice asks of the Gryphon what the Mock Turtle sorrows over, the former answers, "It's all his fancy ... he hasn't got no sorrow" (84). Here we might note that since sorrow, by definition, *is* a mental phenomenon, the Mock Turtle's sorrow *is* his "fancy," and also exists. The double negative in the second clause, then, gives the statement unexpected sense. Perhaps few adults would notice this line, but I fancy at least some children would.

other articles of folklore; and never where physical, geographical, and logical axioms are at stake.) I imagine that the distortions and inversions that characterize the *Alices* are what Carroll refers to in Secunda's line in the prefatory poem to *Wonderland*, when he records her hope that "There will be nonsense in [the story]" (2009, 3).¹¹³ Whereas distortions of language and behavior have been discussed at length in previous criticism, I want to suggest in addition that one of the primary means by which the *Alice* books attempt to enthrall readers is through transformations in the physical, metaphysical, and geographical realms. In *Wonderland*, Carroll toys repeatedly with the human physics of growth and proportion. Alice not only changes size in response to her environment; her dimensions are also altered; and in the first chapters, Carroll repeatedly compares her changes in height to a telescope "opening out" and "shutting up" (Carroll 2009, 13, 15). This peculiar image serves the considerations of growth and change that enter into an exploration of identity, but I want to suggest that it also comprises a sort of eccentric thought experiment – one that should amuse in part because the bizarre mixing of categories that occurs when a human body is analogized to an optical device.

Confusions of size and category are one of the primary modes by which *Wonderland* attempts to entertain its reader and quicken her penchant for mental play. This occurs in such cases as Alice's interaction with the "dear little puppy," several times her size, which she encounters after fleeing the White Rabbit's abode, where she herself

¹¹³ While some might find it idealistic or misguided to suppose that Carroll's first audience to the earliest version of *Alice* would have comprehended – and appreciated – its distortions of reality, I find this line telling. Assuming that Carroll records something of the initial chronicle here (and I see no reason why we should suppose that he doesn't), what this suggests is that the interest in "nonsense" comes in part from – or at least constitutes a bond with – the children who delighted in the tale. I shall generalize unfashionably by positing that many children enjoy and benefit from "nonsense," which often involves "cerebral play."

filled a room (33, 39). It also occurs in the transformations between and conglomerations of different sorts of creature: the baby that becomes a pig; the fish- and frog-footmen. This is a trope that continues in *Through the Looking-Glass*, first with Alice's inability to distinguish bee from elephant, and later in both Humpty Dumpty's bizarre specification of "tove" and Alice's own confusion over the nature of his garment, which could be either belt or cravat. Whereas the earlier instances of category-confusion are primarily amusing, the latter discussion with the Egg brings out the real philosophical and linguistic issues that underlie the joke. Alice cannot tell belt from cravat because she cannot tell neck from waist: her understanding of form relies upon a definition of standard human form, which Humpty defies (Carroll 2009, 188-9). It may become clear, in the context of the Egg's famous discussion of words and meaning, that these distinctions are ("merely") consensual. *Through the Looking-Glass* contains many more physical and metaphysical distortions than does *Wonderland*, primarily because of the reversal theme. Here, the inversions of time and space are intended to be both entertaining and provocative: a receptive reader should be delightedly bamboozled at the prospect of time, speed, etcetera "running backwards," and also continue to toy with these notions and their implications.

So far I have proposed two devices through which cerebral pleasure is inducted in *Alice*: distortions of familiar material, and a sort of unsolvable riddle. The latter frequently involves logic jokes – which it is possible, but not necessary, to represent syllogistically. Alice's conversation with the Pigeon in *Wonderland* is one such example that I have discussed above. But there are plenty others, for instance, in her discussion with the Cheshire Cat about "which way [she] ought to go" or in *Looking-Glass*, in the

White Queen's baffling "comparisons" (57, 143). Logic, or "hyper-logic," as Leila May puts it, is also often used (as has been noted by several critics from different fields) to expose the irrationalities of conventional speech and behavior – usually by interpreting normative language that we may forget is metaphorical, literally (2007, 83). For instance, in the shop scene in "Wool and Water," Alice wishes "to look around [herself]" before she makes a purchase. The Sheep/White Queen, however, tells her she "ca'n't look *all* round [herself]" if she hasn't "got eyes at the back of [her] head" (2009, 178).

Examples like this are myriad, but the fantasy creatures are also capable of metaphor and Alice of literalism: for example, when rowing, the queen demands Alice "Feather!" (180) – a figurative use with which the latter is unfamiliar. Standard speech and social norms also provide familiar material for other sorts of humorous distortion. In the Queen/Sheep's shop, for example, two eggs are cheaper than one (183). It is possible to view the many instances of distortion as purely playful – as existing for the perverse pleasure of disfigured ideas. But the disfigurements also, again, come with meanings: usually in the form of exposure. May describes *Wonderland* as "a kind of catalogue of the sorts of things that can go wrong in language" (2007, 82).

It has been observed repeatedly that the *Alice* books contain several references to school learning: an important category of "familiar material" that is distinctively child-directed (and in many cases, still accessible to twenty-first-century children schooled on a British or American model). Alice has a habit of regurgitating her school learning, and is gently chided for her knowledge of words and ignorance of concepts ("latitude," "longitude," and "antipathies," for instance). But school is also mocked, and formal education exposed as insignificant; as but a performance of empty words. Maryn Brown

hypothesizes that the *Alice* books (together with Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* [1961]) sympathize with children's "experiences and struggles with tedium, educational methods, language, mathematics, manners, justice, and their own process of individuation" (Brown 2005). Brown is onto something, but I suspect that children who enjoy and understand the mathematical and linguistic humor of the *Alices* would have greater access to their insights than those who suffer the most from educational tedium. (The delight adult philosophers and mathematicians take in the books bears this out.)

Some of Carroll's representation of schooling – in particular, the scene in which the Gryphon and Mock Turtle recount their educational experiences using the delicious malapropisms, "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision" (Carroll 2009, 86) – might be seen as a sort of seduction of a child-reader via a shared joke at the expense of what had recently become a universal childhood activity. But I think there is more at stake – and more that is both gratifying and educative. Many of the things that can be learned from *Alice* are things not taught or practiced in schools: play with logic, language, and concepts; the raising of questions without the promise of answers. When these things are noted, the distortions of the familiar material that occur in the references to school become more than an inside-joke between author and reader and an expression of sympathy with children's plight: they unveil the fact that, like the normative uses of language and "manners" (which, bizarrely, Alice notes, are not "taught") that can appear constitutive, but are in fact conventional, the usual contents of school learning are sometimes poorly selected, and may not be not the most useful ones for understanding the world around us.

There are two final means by which the *Alice* books attempt to teach concept-play – both of which overlap with what I have described as half-concealed unsolvable “riddles” and distortions of familiar material. The first is through modeling: that is, the riddles and distortions exemplify the sort of verbal or mental behavior that might be fruitfully emulated by a reader. This is especially the case where exposures of language, social interaction, and school learning are at stake: readers who are enthused or amused by Carroll’s unpacking of conventional activities may continue independently to observe, unveil, and delight in, the oddities of the speech and action in their own environments. So too, the distortions, inversions, and nonsense that take place in fantasy can be replicated during verbal play in reality – indeed perhaps need not be replicated, but rather encouraged, since they already occur in the tall stories and wild imaginings that young children sometimes enact.¹¹⁴ Sometimes the narrative intrusions contribute to this modeling, for instance, when the narrator comments on the exchanges between the creatures and Alice. Alice, for example, demands that the Caterpillar identify himself before she undertakes the difficult task of “telling who she is.” When the latter asks ““Why?”” the narrator interjects to make clear that this is “another puzzling question” – implicitly, one that a reader might continue to puzzle over (Carroll 2009, 41). There are also moments at which the narrator appears to be a participant in the story; hints that Alice has overheard her own tale – most obviously at the *Wonderland* trial where the “suppression” of a guinea-pig is parenthetically explained, and Alice recalls her previous real-world encounter with the term (Carroll 2009, 100-1). Episodes like this, I think, are best interpreted as intended to entertain and confuse: the concealed exchange between

¹¹⁴ See Sutton-Smith on “Child Phantasmagoria” (151-72) for a discussion of children’s own stories – and the methodological difficulties of collecting them.

narrator and character is decidedly unusual, and undermines the standard methods of story-telling. Yet this is not a problem to solve, but rather an enigma to laugh at, and remain puzzled by (and perhaps, if anything, to consider one's own states of knowledge).

The final pleasure that I think Carroll means to rouse via his performance, especially in the poems of the *Alice* stories, is simply that of language. The books are liberally sprinkled with puns – which often result in confusion, and while this may make conversation seem a dangerous territory, it is also a delightful and expansive one. Carroll's neologisms and malapropisms, meanwhile, celebrate the sounds of language (and, by removing “sense,” direct attention to music), and the “grand words” that Alice recites during her descent into Wonderland might be seen as similarly laudatory, even while the protagonist is the butt of an affront against linguistic pretension (2009, 11). The “Jabberwocky” is, of course, the most famous episode in which “sound” is privileged over “sense,” but the parodies of *Wonderland*, the poems of *Looking-Glass*, and Alice's own mumblings (““Do cats eat bats? ... Do bats eat cats?”” she wonders, half asleep, manipulating sounds and ignoring meaning [11]) serve to point to the sonic properties of language, and to suggest that words constitute as much a medium for play as Tea Parties, nursery rhymes, and ideas.

In conclusion, I would like to cite two passages from “The Philosopher's *Alice in Wonderland*,” in which Roger Holmes intends to demonstrate the pleasures and the intuitions that Carroll's stories have for professional philosophers. He writes: “Wonderland and Looking-Glass country ... are crowded with the problems and paraphernalia of logic and metaphysics and theory of knowledge and ethics. Here are superbly imaginative treatments of logical principles, the uses and meanings of words,

the functions of names, the perplexities connected with time and space, the problem of personal identity, the status of substance in relation to its qualities, the mind-body problem” (Holmes 1959, 160). I have discussed only elements of the “problems and paraphernalia” that Holmes mentions, and reproduce his remark, not to prove that they exist in *Alice*, but as evidence of the cerebral delight taken in Carroll’s “superbly imaginative treatments” of these issues. This chapter proposes that child readers can take the same delight as the professionals, and that if they don’t do so of their own accord, we do better to instruct them to attend to episodes of conceptual play than to the development of Alice’s character. Holmes also suggests that “Carroll uses the absurd hilarity of Wonderland to bring difficult concepts into sharp focus” (161). What is most interesting to me about this observation is that it takes for granted that pleasures – “absurdity” and “hilarity” – have the ability to generate insight. While L. Frank Baum’s *Oz* stories are less humorous than the *Alices*, and seldom treat language as an opportunity for play, their depictions of philosophical concerns with mind and personhood are no less entertaining or insightful. These pleasures are the subject of the next chapter.

IV. THINKING, EATING, AND LIVING IN OZ

Next they meet Princess Langwidere. She is deeply narcissistic, a trait not much admired by Baum ... Instead of changing clothes, hair, makeup, the Princess changes heads from her collection. I found the changing of heads fascinating. And puzzling: since the brains in each head varied, would Langwidere still be herself when she put on a new head or would she be someone else? Thus Baum made logicians of his readers.

Gore Vidal¹¹⁵

Gareth Matthews begins his brief discussion of the “philosophical adventures” that take place in L. Frank Baum’s *Oz* series with reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* stories, which he describes as “adventures in philosophical perplexity.”¹¹⁶ Whereas Carroll, in Matthews’ evaluation, was the first English writer of “philosophical fantasy for children,” Baum, he proposes, is the earliest American equivalent (Matthews 2009, 37) – although the form of the latter’s philosophizing is rather different from Carroll’s, since the *Oz* books lack the “clever repartee” that characterizes *Alice* (38). For the most part, Baum is less interested in the problems of language and logic (notwithstanding Gore Vidal’s use of the word “logician”) that preoccupy Carroll than in a collection of questions that professional philosophers traditionally consider within the realm of philosophy of mind,

¹¹⁵ 1977, 83

¹¹⁶ Curiously, this is one of the few references to the *Alices* by a scholar interested in philosophy for children.

and some subsidiary issues that might be considered under the banner of moral philosophy.¹¹⁷

In what follows, I shall first introduce a selection of philosophical and literary issues raised by Baum's part of the *Oz* series, including his much-criticized style and organization. Here I argue that the deficiencies of Baum's prose, perhaps paradoxically, aid the portrayal of his philosophical concerns, for his inconsistencies mean that a topic is examined from multiple and sometimes contradictory angles. I then consider Baum's intermittent interest in perception as it is conveyed through Wonderful Wizard's illusions in the first book, and the Woggle-Bug later in the series. In the second section of this chapter, "Of Mind and Manikins," I explore Baum's ongoing ruminations on the various faculties of mind that comprise consciousness. While he inquires into the nature and components of mind, Baum tends simultaneously to moralize the virtues of certain uses of "knowledge," a term, I suggest, that he employs to refer to the earliest subject-matter of Western philosophy, wisdom. His view on wisdom is unsettled, and his considerations of the matter are remarkably similar to those examined more frequently by ancient than modern philosophers for its connection with human flourishing. Thus, while in the main this dissertation shies away from moral questions for reasons mentioned in my introduction, in section three of this chapter, I shall explore the depiction of the ethics of knowledge, intellect, and wisdom in *Oz*, arguing that, whether he intended it or not, the contradictions in Baum's evaluation of intellect may call upon

¹¹⁷ Matthews describes the "[p]rominent [philosophical] themes in ... *Oz*" as "(1) the difference between living things and nonliving things; (2) criteria of personal identity, especially identity through time; and (3) the nature and extent of consciousness" (2009, 39). This selection of interests is roughly equivalent to that which I shall consider in this chapter, but I will treat "living" and personal identity together as questions related to personhood, along with Baum's depictions of food and eating.

an amenable reader to make up her own mind or, better yet, continue the inquiry into what wisdom is and how it should be used. My fourth section, meanwhile, will consider the many permutations that Baum's imaginings about personhood take via the conglomerate and divisible, human and alien characters that he invents and what, or whom, they consume. In closing, I shall make some passing remarks upon the possible purposes and effects of Baum's musing on the metaphysics and virtues of mind in fantasy stories written for children.

Baum's prose has been much criticized. The more appreciative critiques have wondered why it is that *Oz* is so enduringly popular when it "appears to have no underlying theme – no unity of conception[;]" when "[i]ts characterizations seem shallow[;] Dorothy has no inner problems, doesn't develop, doesn't grow[;] ... the plot rambles[; and] ... [t]he style [is] ... straightforward but undistinguished, lacking in sparkle and in witty, surprising turns of phrase" (Hollister 1971/1983, 193). Meanwhile, for several decades after their publication, librarians and critics neglected or even suppressed fantasy by Baum – it is sometimes suggested, because of its literary failings (see Rahm 1998, 12-19).¹¹⁸ But among the most interesting features of Baum's contribution to the *Oz* series are their inconsistencies: in style just as much as in theme and didactic content. The most insightful description of the books that I have encountered appears in the essay "On Rereading the Oz Books" ([1977] 1983), in which Gore Vidal notices the

¹¹⁸ Alternately (and more compellingly), Michael Patrick Hearn proposes that "one of the major objections to the stories over the years has been to [the] socialist aspect of *Oz*," since "[t]he greatest opposition to the books was after the Red Scare of World War I and during the McCarthy Era" (Deluca and Natov 1987, 57). My suspicion is that the attention given to the stylistic poverty of *Oz* in the mid-twentieth-century served largely as cover for more inchoate worries about the books' social and political content – for there are plenty of poorly-written children's books that have *not* been suppressed.

“unevenness of style not only from book to book but, sometimes, from page to page” (256). Vidal writes that as a child reader he “used to spend a good deal of time worrying about the numerous inconsistencies in the sacred texts,” noting that “[f]rom time to time, Baum himself would try to rationalize errors but he was far too quick and careless a writer ever to create the absolutely logical mad worlds that Lewis Carroll or E. Nesbitt did” (257).

Notwithstanding Baum’s usual inattentiveness,¹¹⁹ there are passages that seem almost Carrollian for their shrewd nonsense. In *The Marvelous Land of Oz* ([1904] 2005), for instance, two of the many live manikins that populate Oz, the Scarecrow and Jack Pumpkinhead, consider their mutual incomprehension upon meeting for the first time:

The [Scarecrow] was the first to speak. After regarding Jack for some minutes he said, in a tone of wonder:

“Where on earth did you come from, and how do you happen to be alive?”

“I beg your Majesty’s pardon,” returned the Pumpkinhead; “but I do not understand you.”

“What don’t you understand?” asked the Scarecrow.

“Why, I don’t understand your language. You see, I came from the country of the Gillikins, so that I am a foreigner.”

¹¹⁹ Martin Gardner suggests that one of the reasons for the inconsistencies in style and plot, and for the failings of his prose, is that “Baum’s books received little editing” ([1962] 1983, 190).

“Ah, to be sure!” exclaimed the Scarecrow. “I myself speak the language of the Munchkins, which is also the language of the Emerald City. But you, I suppose, speak the language of the Pumpkinheads?”

“Exactly so, your majesty” replied the other, bowing; “so it will be impossible for us to understand each other.”

“That is unfortunate, certainly,” said the Scarecrow, thoughtfully. “We must have an interpreter.”

“What is an Interpreter?” asked Jack.

“A person who understands both my language and your own. When I say anything, the interpreter can tell you what I mean; and when you say anything, the interpreter can tell me what you mean...” ([1904] 2005, 50)

The girl-translator appointed to decode the speech of the two characters, Jellia Jamb, amplifies the confusion by making fun of Jack (who is the only member of his kind and thus claims, nonsensically, to “share” a private language) and the Scarecrow, misrepresenting as insults the innocuous utterances that they both comprehend passably. If there is a linguistic insight to be gleaned from the wacky exchange it is that language is a fundamentally social faculty and “understanding” is a term with multiple layers: Jack Pumpkinhead may not “understand” the Scarecrow’s question (and it is indeed an odd one: “how do you happen to be alive?”), yet they share a language – and both, presumably, are able to “understand” its grammar and vocabulary. How, one might ask, do sounds uttered by one become information assimilated by another? Alternately,

keeping with the injunction of ordinary language philosophy, what is intended or performed when we ordinarily speak of “understanding”?

Whereas such questions about language constitute a central interest in the *Alice* books, they are only an occasional concern in *Oz*. I suspect that the topics related to language that sometimes arise in Baum’s books are partly derivative of Carroll, who Baum regarded as a crucial figure in the history of “modern fairy tale.”¹²⁰ (At the same time, Baum has been described as an incorrigible punster – a trait that is irritatingly apparent in *Marvelous Land* – and betrays some at least sort of linguistic interest of his own.¹²¹) There are instances in which Baum might be seen to mimic the language games of *Alice*, such as occurs in *The Emerald City of Oz* ([1910] 2005), when Dorothy and her companions make the mistake of passing through Rigmale Town – a settlement where the inhabitants’ verbosity recalls the Duchess’s rigmale in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*:

“Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.” (Carroll 1863/2009, 81)

¹²⁰ This from Baum’s 1909 essay, “Modern Fairy Tales.” Interestingly, the feature that Baum values most highly in *Alice* is what he sees as the accessible characterization of the protagonist: “The secret of Alice’s success,” he writes, “lay in the fact that she was a real child, and any normal child could sympathize with her all through her adventures” (138). Baum offers only a paragraph on *Alice*, so we need not be distressed that he fails to consider its philosophical material (unless this is what he refers to as “bewilder[ing]” and “strange and marvelous”). Still, Baum’s praise for Alice as character (and her obvious influence on Dorothy) does not mean he didn’t absorb, replicate, and occasionally even develop, the other, more cerebral, pleasures of Carroll’s texts.

¹²¹ See Katharine M. Rogers’ 2002 biography for Baum’s love of puns (84, 118).

“It is the easiest thing in the world for a person to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ when a question that is asked for the purpose of gaining information or satisfying the curiosity of the one who has given expression to the inquiry has attracted the attention of an individual who may be competent either from personal experience or the experience of others to answer it with more or less correctness or at least an attempt to satisfy the desire for information on the part of one who has made the inquiry...” (Baum [1910] 2005, 243)

It is interesting that, in addition to the fact that in both cases “many words [a]re used but little [i]s said” (ibid), the content of both statements concerns linguistic etiquette. Lewis Carroll’s Duchess is in some ways clumsily resurrected in the woman we meet in Rigmarole Town, although Baum’s purpose in this episode is more clear-cut and satirical than Carroll’s in the Duchess’s utterance. This becomes clear as the party of travelers leaves Rigmarole Town, and the Shaggy Man (a homeless American picked up by Dorothy en route to Oz, who recalls the cynic philosophers) remarks that:

“Some of the college lecturers and ministers are certainly related to these people ... and it seems to me the Land of Oz is a little ahead of the United States in some of its laws. For here, if one can’t talk clearly, and straight to the point, they send him to Rigmarole Town; while Uncle Sam lets him roam around wild and free, to torture innocent people.” (243)

Carroll is less inclined to moralize than Baum: less wont to make it clear to the reader that there is a lesson to be abstracted from an episode – or, at least, less clear on what his

lessons might be. Meanwhile Baum, as we shall see below, has a moral interest in the uses and displays of knowledge.

My attention to the connections between *Alice* and *Oz* serves a purpose in addition to that of comparing themes and methods, for I mean to observe a trend in children's fantasy after Carroll. That is: a number of well-known works in this genre (including Baum's *Oz* series, P.L. Travers' *Mary Poppins* books, and some of the writings of E. Nesbit), all of which have Carroll's landmark texts in the center of their background – and often refer explicitly to *Alice* – replicate or continue Carroll's philosophical interests at least at moments, and at most as ongoing concerns.¹²² Unlike Carroll, these authors were not trained in logic, and often appear to be unfamiliar with the ideas from the history of philosophy to which Carroll sometimes alludes. Their handling of the relevant material may be unsophisticated – and thus, seldom is the philosophical density of Carroll's works attained – but an important effect of this crudeness is not to manhandle the topics but, on the contrary, to retain their accessibility. Whereas later juvenile fantasy is sometimes clumsy in its reproductions of Carrollian concept play, the point remains that philosophizing is a salient component of a small class of children's books, both because of their ancestry in Carroll and because the procedures of narrative play invite metaphysical, linguistic, and logical material. My narrow focus in this chapter on the *Oz* books, as opposed to, say, a broad survey of turn- of-the-century children's fantasies with philosophical content, will leave this hypothesis in the realm of conjecture that I hope

¹²² For a couple of minor examples of textual reference, Nesbit has the child-protagonists of her "Psammead" series use Carroll's portmanteau, "frumious" and contemplate a fall through the center of the earth to the "antipathy" of their location, as does Alice during her fall down the rabbit-hole. Meanwhile, Travers' famous "unbirthday party" refers to a concept first introduced by Humpty- Dumpty (Carroll [1872] 2009, 189; Nesbitt 2006; Travers 1937).

future research will take up. In concentrating on Baum, meanwhile, I aim for depth at the expense of breadth, and also to work towards remedying something Matthews deems “almost universally ignored in the scholarly literature on Baum – ... his preoccupation with philosophical issues” (2009, 38).¹²³

Compared to Carroll, Baum was uneducated – and in *Oz* he frequently mocks intellectual pretension, not only in his depiction of Rigmarole Town, but also, for example, in his characterization of the “Thoroughly Educated” Woggle-Bug, whose sagacity is acquired by eavesdropping on an elementary school classroom, where he envelopes himself in the “everflowing font of limpid knowledge before [him]” (Baum 1904/2005, 61). Baum’s suspicion of the intelligentsia might seem an unexpected accompaniment to his philosophical interests, but one of the purposes of exploring philosophy in *Oz* is very similar to a principle underlying the practices of the Philosophy for Children movement: to notice that philosophizing is not always arcane or dense, but rather a natural effect of playing with concepts that does not require any special education and, furthermore, a pleasure. In addition, Baum commends thinking and cleverness, and appears to argue for a democratic view of smarts, in which talents of mind are available to whoever cares to make the effort of developing them, and do not require special education or an elite position.

In addition to their disapproval of his style and politics, Baum’s critics also attack the serial nature of the *Oz* books. Historically, seriality both caused practical irritation

¹²³ It is not strictly speaking the case that philosophical material is ignored in Baum: rather, the tendency among the literary scholars, historians and economists who consider Baum is to regard his interests in personhood and consciousness for what they reveal of other matters. Matthews and I, meanwhile, are proposing that these issues should be considered in themselves, not only for what they might suggest, for example, about the books’ socio-economic implications.

among librarians and brought the literary quality of the works into doubt (see Rahm 1998, 18-20 and Gardner [1962] 1983, 189-91); more recently, the tendency is to query the drive to commodification that is revealed when sequels become the order of the day.¹²⁴ Richard Flynn writes that Baum “unwittingly inspired a kind of brand loyalty” producing so substantial a change in the landscape of children’s book publishing that not only were post-mortem sequels demanded of the original *Oz* author, but serialization and commodification became *de rigueur* for juvenile texts (1996, 124). While it may be the case that “the purveyors of child-culture” under commodity capitalism have learnt, in part from Baum, “to condition the marginalized desire for repetition (rereading) into the more acceptable desire for serial commodities (the sequel)” (Flynn 1996, 125), I propose that serialization has a number of virtues independent of its commercial purposes – some of which can be seen when we examine the whole of Baum’s part of the *Oz* series for its philosophical material.¹²⁵

At the same time, there is a further limiting tendency in *Oz* criticism, especially that which follows in the footsteps of Henry Littlefield’s influential paper, “The Wizard of Oz: A Parable on Populism” (1964): that is, to analyze only *The Wonderful Wizard*, sometimes in conjunction with the 1939 MGM film. While there are justifications for

¹²⁴ See, for instance, Nodelman and Reimer’s chapter on “Children’s Literature in the market Place” (2003, 108-127) for a representative discussion of critical concerns about the serialization and commercialization of children’s literature.

¹²⁵ While I am willing to believe there is some truth in Flynn’s idea, which he develops from Roland Barthes’ *S/Z* (1974), it ignores too many subtleties in the experiences of reading, childhood, and commodity capitalism. I am disinclined to regard sequels as in themselves a problem – or even a marker – of capitalism, since they provide values and pleasures beyond both the fetishization of consumer desire and the economic gain of their producers (it should be noted that if any aspect of *Oz* has been “fetishized,” it is the ideas, characters, and landscapes the fantasies, which cannot themselves be purchased, although objects representing them can be commodified – and they can also be made, represented and transmitted without commercial gain). Furthermore, it is important to consider the benefits that capitalism brings alongside its many ills, among them, developments in technology and art.

this approach (primarily, that these are by far the most widely known *Oz* texts, but also that Baum had not initially intended to produce sequels to what became the first of the series), it misses out on the fascinating way in which material is rearranged, adjusted, and sometimes brought into doubt, in the sequels. In other words, whilst serial production can be seen in some ways to work as a seduction of readers, we should also consider the opportunities it provides for the author and for the texts. Some of the ‘adjustments’ that appear in the later adventures in *Oz* – those inconsistencies that baffled Gore Vidal and no doubt many others as children – come out of Baum’s carelessness, but others are thoughtfully arranged, and reflect the author’s musings about the different permutations that a topic can take.

One of the things that seriality entails is that an author’s initial vision of a matter need not be settled: it can be modified, added to, complicated, and even mocked, in sequel texts. One of the most interesting instances in which this can be seen in *Oz* is the story of the Tin Woodman (who late in the series is given the name Nick Chopper), a character with whom we are all familiar from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. While aspects of the Tin Man’s history are contrived in the first book (in particular, that he has been progressively altered from a “meat” person to a tin person in a manner reminiscent of the philosophical conundrum of Theseus’ ship), these are only developed in the twelfth, *The Tin Woodman of Oz* ([1918] 2005), where a number of additional surprising questions about the nature and persistence of personal identity are introduced via a series of characters from the Woodman’s past. Importantly, Nick Chopper’s history is altered in the later book, in which we learn that his fleshy parts have been preserved by the tinsmith responsible for his new body – and from this amendment, a catalogue of questions about

personhood are developed. The additive method introduced by seriality probably has just as much of an effect on Baum's representation of his political and economic concerns as it does on the philosophical material that is my focus – and Littlefield and his successors are in error when they consider only *Wonderful Wizard*. Where Baum's philosophical dabbling are concerned, the recurrence of episodes in which “thought,” “brains,” identities, eating, knowing, and living are the subject of inquiry allows Baum to produce a compendium of different possibilities – a catalogue of thought experiments – for the workings of the relevant topic.

The *Oz* books also include a small number of thought experiments in which perception is the object of enquiry: as occurs most famously in the portrayal of the Emerald City and the visual trickery deployed by the humbug Wizard of Oz. These deceptions might be relatively uninteresting philosophically if it weren't for the fact that both the Wonderful Wizard and the delusory “Emerald” City are honored and retained even after they are exposed as illusions. Perhaps Baum is hinting that by their nature, sense data constitute a sort of illusion – or, at least, that the status of our perceptual experiences is a matter worth inquiring into. In the philosophy of mind, this issue concerns the relationship between our perceptions and “the world that exists apart from our perceptions, what philosophers like to call, misleadingly, the ‘external world’” (Searle 2004, 259).¹²⁶

While the important historical figures have all argued that “representation” or “impression” is all that we, so to speak, ‘have’ – that because what we receive via

¹²⁶ Searle disputes the term “external world” because he notes that minds and perceptual experiences are just as much a part of that “world” as the objects with which they are concerned.

perception is “sense data” rather than ‘the thing itself’ (this he calls the “sense datum theory” of perception) – Searle argues for naïve realism: a common sense position that the perceiver, object perceived, and the experience of perception are all causally related, and exist (259-61). Searle rejects the sense-datum theory primarily because “it makes it impossible to give a true account of how human beings and other animals relate to the real world” (269). One of the important arguments for the sense datum theory relies upon an analogy:¹²⁷ an experience known to be illusory (the greenness of the Emerald City, perhaps, or the dagger Macbeth sees suspended before him) is compared to our ordinary, everyday sensory experiences. Since we cannot distinguish illusion from not-illusion in cases that we know to be illusory, it is argued, we have no evidence that our ordinary perceptual experiences are reliable. To Searle, the Emerald City would fail as a demonstration of the sense datum theory because what Dorothy and her comrades “see” is not the “Emerald” City, but a white or variegated city obscured by green spectacles. In other words, it is language that deceives, not perception, for “The Emerald City” is only a partial description of the circumstance being observed (271-3).¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Searle describes two arguments in favor of sense-datum theory: the argument from illusion that I describe here, and the “argument from science,” in which perception is “account[ed] for” via a series of neurological events such that it becomes clear that perceptions consist of “experience[s] *in the brain*” (261, italics added).

¹²⁸ Baum’s use of color-symbolism may also be of interest to his considerations of perception – although I am inclined to downplay its possible significance, partly because way too much has already been made of color in allegorical readings of *Oz*, but also because it seems to me that the use of color is one of the books’ clumsier aspects, and may be designed to do little more than appeal to a child reader in the way that brightly colored toys are thought to attract toddlers. Nevertheless, I mention color because philosophers often use it as an example of an experience that, for all we know, may be irrevocably subjective: that is, while we can measure the spectral qualities of, say, green light, we cannot scientifically capture the phenomenal quality of “greenness,” and it is possible that persons experience the sensation idiosyncratically (see, for instance, Kim 2011, 293). If Baum has such an idea in mind it may be that he means to hint that the relative “greenness” of the Emerald city is, in fact, irrelevant, since it is possible that observers’ experiences of it are incommensurable anyway. Other explanations for Baum’s use of color include the suggestion that it has financial and political symbolism, the Emerald City

An even more interesting depiction of an illusion occurs in the person of the Woggle-Bug. Although it is never explicitly mentioned, the Woggle-Bug in some baffling sense consists of an illusion: the personality introduced in *The Marvelous Land of Oz* achieves his unique size when the Professor in whose classroom the Bug (initially of the usual insect dimensions) has been hiding out “throw[s] the insect upon a screen in a highly-magnified condition” ([1904] 2005, 61). The Woggle-Bug escapes in that “condition,” and it is a puzzle that is neither named nor solved how the enlarged image of the creature comes to be identical with the bug itself.¹²⁹ An inattentive reader might not notice the tremendous peculiarity of the Woggle-Bug, but for an alert one he offers up a complex and flavorful cerebral treat in the form of an unanswerable question: which is representation and which is reality? As is the case with the conceptual games in the *Alice* books, this is not a conundrum that wants a solution, but rather an impossibility to delight and enliven and that, as in the case of the Emerald City, might stimulate a reader to contemplate the relationship between her own perceptions and the world to which they relate.

representing greenbacks, and Dorothy’s silver shoes the silver standard that the turn-of-the-century Populist movement hoped to reinstate, and so on (see, for instance, Littlefield 1964, Culver, 1988, and Ritter 1997); the proposal that it signifies veiled racial stereotypes (Karp 1988, Ritter 1997); and the more plausible argument that the colors of the four countries and capital city are meant mimic the layout of a map or a flower garden (Hearn [1973] 2000).

¹²⁹ Alternately (or perhaps, simultaneously) this is a case of verbal trickery containing the insight that we often speak of a representation as if it is the thing itself: just as the city of Oz is referred to as the “Emerald City,” rather than “the capital, seen through green lenses.” On a different note, the illusion of the Woggle-Bug’s size is also used to echo his own illusions about his intellect, for both features have been ‘blown up.’

A. OF MIND AND MANIKINS: THOUGHTS ON THINKING IN OZ

[T]houghts accompany the brain's workings, and those thoughts are cognitive of realities. The whole relation is one which we can only write down empirically, confessing that no glimmer of explanation of it is yet in sight. That brains should give rise to a knowing consciousness at all, this is the one mystery which returns, no matter of what sort the consciousness and of what sort the knowledge may be.

William James¹³⁰

Perhaps Baum's most sustained philosophical interest in the *Oz* series is in the nature of "brains" and "thoughts": he ruminates on mind and its contents via the many discussions of mental activities and qualities that take place between his characters. Like Lewis Carroll, Baum knows that thoughts and thinking are strange indeed, and although he lacks a professional vocabulary and does not differentiate types of mental phenomena, his concern with mind is broad and persistent.

Professional philosophers distinguish different varieties or features of mental phenomena. For example, David Chalmers catalogues sensory experiences; experiences of temperature, pain, and other bodily sensations; mental imagery; contentual thought; emotions; and a sense of the unity of self – a list that is not meant to be exhaustive (for instance, it omits unconscious phenomena and the experience of the body in space), but rather to provide an impression of the richness of mental experience (1996, 6-11). Searle, meanwhile, delineates consciousness in terms of its features: qualitateness, subjectivity, unity, intentionality (that is, "aboutness," or reference to things outside oneself), mood, focus (or, "the distinction between the center and the periphery" – that is, the capacity to

¹³⁰ From *The Principles of Psychology*, volume 1(1890/1918, 687).

shift one's attention or the object of one's intentionality), degree of pleasurableness (which is "[r]elated to, but not identical with, mood"), situatedness (that is, a sense of location in time and space), degree of volition, organization, and a feeling of one's subjective self (2004, 134-45). Philosophers agree that the most important, and baffling features of consciousness is its first person, subjective, qualitative nature – or, its phenomenal aspect – the experience of 'what it is like to be X' (Nagel 1974, 435-7; Chalmers 1996, 11; Searle 2004, 116-7; Kim 2011, 281-3). Baum is suitably vague about the features and varieties of what he calls "thoughts" and "brains" – and unlike Carroll, he never hints at the tremendous peculiarity of being an 'T' – but I have taken it that he is referring to a nonspecific range of mental phenomena – which, in turn, are what I mean when I mention "mental contents" or "consciousness" below.

Baum's interest in mind is just as relevant to the Wonderful Wizard's famous defense of his humbuggery as is the more common interpretation that Oz's conferral of the counterfeit heart, brains, and courage constitutes a polemic "dramatization of an inescapable desire for an object that is manifestly a substitute, that is nothing but an image," a desire that manifests itself in the context of turn-of-the-century consumerism (Culver 1988, 99). In a famous passage in the first book, Oz, "think[ing] of his success in giving the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman and the Lion exactly what they thought they wanted" wonders:

"How can I help being a humbug ... when all these people make me do things that everybody knows can't be done? It was easy to make the Scarecrow and the Lion and the Woodman happy, because they imagined I could do anything." ([1900] 2005, 32)

As noted above, one of the trends in *Oz* criticism has been to examine only the first book, and this primarily for its political and economic commentary: which, in Henry Littlefield's essay, is seen to emerge via an allegory for turn-of-the-century America, where Baum supposedly defends the interests of the Populist party of the 1890s, a movement supporting the struggling farmers of the Midwest.¹³¹ Stuart Culver's oft-cited 1988 article builds on Littlefield by conceiving of *Oz* specifically in relation not to Populism, but to "the vagaries of consumer desire" in early twentieth century America, and Baum's own reflection on "commodity fetishism" as revealed in his *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows* (1900), a handbook "for would-be window dressers that culminated [Baum's] brief career as the editor of *The Shop Window*, the official journal of the National Association of Window Dressers" (Culver 1988, 97). In Culver's interpretation, the metaphysical tenor of *Oz*'s observation that hearts, brains, and courage are not things that can be given (and furthermore, that "everyone knows" this) is suppressed, as Culver equates these 'things' to the products of the "culture industry," such that the "consumers" (in this case, the Tin Woodman, Scarecrow, and Lion) "feel compelled to buy and use products even though they see through them."¹³² The parallel that Culver notices between the 'impossible' desires and their chimerical fulfillments in *The Wonderful Wizard* and those of consumers is striking, but limited, for in reigning in Baum's insight to a comment on the strange behavior of the purchasing public, Culver

¹³¹ While Littlefield's interpretation reigned for several years of *Oz* criticism, according to David Parker, it has been largely discredited (and Littlefield himself has recanted his earlier claims), as there is little evidence that Baum exhibited the political leanings that the former sought in his "parable" (1994).

¹³² Culver cites Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1944] 1972) in his discussion of Baum's insight into the logic of commodity fetishism. It may be naïve of me, but it baffles me that Culver consistently treats all *objects* in *Oz* as purchases; whereas, in this case at least, they are gifts.

ignores his broader and more complex comment on the strange nature of human experience, mental traits, and knowledge.

David Westbrook is also concerned with the limitations of Culver's approach, of which he writes that while it is "excellent," as a new historicist contribution, it "does not offer the only or the best solution for bridging the gap between the disciplines of history and literary studies" (Westbrook 1996, 111). While I am not concerned here with this particular disciplinary link (and nor do I share Westbrook's interest in Baum's exploration of "the business of producing and reproducing texts" [112]), many of the criticisms that he makes of Culver are pertinent to my investigation. For instance, Westbrook writes that:

Baum ... devotes special energy to imagining the strange ways in which immaterial things such as ideas, texts, identities, and cultural currents can become commodities. He repeatedly portrays the circulation of such ambiguously embodied goods... The scene in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* in which the Wizard gives the heroes physical objects that represent the qualities of intelligence, heart, and courage, dramatizes this strange combination of immateriality and materiality that poses such conceptual difficulties for both Baum and Culver.¹³³ (111)

¹³³ It might also be pertinent to consider here what relation the 'other' abstracts that Westbrook names – "texts" and "cultural currents" – bear to mind or mental contents (which are more closely related to what Westbrook terms "ideas" and "identities"). This question may be a dissertation in itself (and one I am not equipped to write), but for these purposes I suggest that while there is a relation between these different types of 'immaterial object,' Westbrook may be too quick to set faculties of mind alongside cultural processes. Part of the problem is that "text" and "cultural currents" can clearly be reduced to information – and they are not 'contained' in an experiencing 'I' – while it is less apparent that courage and love (if not "brains") comprise data, and they are tied to individual, experiencing persons.

These “conceptual difficulties,” Westbrook and I are suggesting, should be examined in their own light, not merely as mysteries attendant upon the inner workings of consumer desire, but, I would add, as adumbrations of what philosophers call the “mind-body problem.”

In the Scarecrow, Woodman, and Lion, three mental faculties, commonly deemed crucial to human flourishing – especially in the fairytale tradition – are hypostatized.¹³⁴ It is significant that Baum explicitly frames *Wonderful Wizard* as a development of “old time fairy tale” (Baum, Introduction [1900] 2005, 4), and more than any other *Oz* book, that the first of the series carefully employs tropes and methods that obviously belong to the genre of the fairytale.¹³⁵ It might indeed be that part of Baum’s purpose in *Oz*’s observation that the important symbolic objects, heart, brains, and courage, are intangible and non-transferable is to reflect upon an absurdity that he sees as the trademark of previous fairytales by bringing out a metaphysical peculiarity: what are love, intelligence, bravery, anyway? Where are they located, and what do they do? What sense does it make

¹³⁴ For the characteristics of fairy tale, see for instance, both the stories and critical commentary in Maria Tatar’s *The Classic Fairy Tales* (1999).

¹³⁵ Baum writes: “...the old time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as ‘historical’ in the children’s library; for the time has come for a series of newer ‘wonder tales’ in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incidents devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale. Modern education includes morality; therefore the modern child seeks only entertainment in its wonder tales and gladly dispenses with all disagreeable incident” ([1904] 2005, 5). These sentences have been discussed at such length (see, in particular, Karp 1998 and Pugh 2008) that it would be redundant to point out that *Wonderful Wizard* lacks neither “blood-curdling incidents” nor the occasional “moral.” My purposes are (a) to reiterate the fact that Baum explicitly positions the book as a development of the earlier type, and (b) that, as such, in order to be recognizable as type, the novel requires conflict (or, “blood-curdling incident”) and at least, the appearance of a “moral.” What might it mean for a text to appear to contain a lesson, without necessarily doing so? One possibility is that Baum is simply more intent upon amusement than edification; that his lessons are epiphenomenal, rather than a central purpose of the text; another is that his “morals,” such as they are, are not to be taken quite seriously. (Alternately, of course, it may be that we are not to take Baum quite seriously in his representation of his work)

to speak of these components of mind as if they are material objects? Having received his new brains, the Scarecrow tells his companions that “there thoughts in his head; but he would not say what they were because he knew nobody could understand them but himself” ([1900] 2005, 32). When the Scarecrow’s thoughts are revealed to be not only unobservable, but also incomprehensible, we might suspect that in the real world the substance of consciousness is also enigmatic.

In the seventh *Oz* story, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* ([1913] 2005), the Scarecrow’s female counterpart, the Patchwork Girl, is brought to life, and again, mental contents are figured as material objects. “Scraps” is the invention of a renegade magician, Dr Pipt, and his wife Margolotte, who have constructed her to be a domestic servant for the latter. Before she is sprinkled with “the powder of life” (the same type of powder that earlier in the series animated Jack Pumpkinhead), Pipt selects the Patchwork Girl’s faculties of mind from a shelf marked “Brain Furniture,” which contains a row of bottles containing “‘Obedience,’ ‘Cleverness,’ ‘Judgment,’ ‘Courage,’ ‘Ingenuity,’ ‘Amiability,’ ‘Learning,’ ‘Truth,’ ‘Poesy,’ and ‘Self Reliance’” (Baum [1913] 2005, 258). It would be closer to the interests of academic philosophers of mind if the “furniture” included more basic mental phenomena – say, “sensation,” “perception,” “emotion,” and so on – rather than a set of (agreeable) character dispositions. Characteristically, Baum merely hints at the underlying, and perhaps more conceptually difficult ‘ingredients of mind’; alternately, he is more interested in the ingredients for an exciting plot and an accessible narrative. However, while the chief significance of this episode lies in its roles in the trajectory of the story and the characterization of the Patchwork Girl (another new character, Ojo the Unlucky, defies Dr Pipt’s intention to conceive an obedient worker, and adds generous

quantities of all available varieties of “Brain Furniture” to Scraps’ person),¹³⁶ it also ties in thematically with the reified mind-contents that appear in the first book.¹³⁷ Baum does not dwell on the peculiar composition of Scraps’ brain, but the reference to “furniture” – as if mental traits are solid objects arranged in a vessel, the mind – hints again at a puzzle with a venerable history in the philosophy of mind, that is, the mind-body problem. It is further curious that Margolotte subsequently remarks on the trait “cleverness,” which, she reports, “‘is the Doctor’s substitute for “intelligence” – a quality he has not yet learned how to manufacture”’ (259). The distinction between the synonymous terms is explained neither in this scene nor in the subsequent characterization of Scraps, but it

¹³⁶ Baum’s depiction of class in this episode is somewhat uncomfortable, as it is unclear whether he satirizes or endorses class essentialism. Before Scraps is brought to life, Dr Pipt imagines that he “‘must be careful not to give her too much brains, and those she has must be as are fitted to the station she is to occupy in life. In other words, her brains mustn’t be very good.”’ Ojo, meanwhile, argues “‘that unless your servant has good brains she won’t know how to obey you properly, nor do the good things you ask her to do,”’ perhaps hinting at the conundrum that any individual who is adequately equipped to serve must also have the capacities that make a life of servitude repugnant. Margolotte, however, offers a middle ground: “‘...a servant with too much brains is sure to become independent and high-and-mighty and feel above her work ... I must take care to give the girl just the right quantity of the right sort of brains. I want her to know just enough, but not too much”’ (Baum [1913] 2005, 258). In the end, Scraps is preserved from servility through Ojo’s trickery – to the benefit of all – and if there is a class attitude to be extracted from this moment in *Oz*, it remains ambiguous. My suspicion is that Baum’s rendition of class stereotype is awkward here because he is more concerned with the metaphysics of mind and the characterization of the Patchwork Girl than with commenting, or avoiding commenting, on the ethics of servitude: he reproduces a view of servants that would now be considered reactionary because it contrasts with the person Scraps turns out to be and allows him to play with an idea about the composition of ‘brains.’ The Scraps that is created by the joint efforts of the Pipts and Ojo is the antithesis of servile: Rogers describes her (reasonably accurately) as “the most emancipated character of the whole *Oz* series ... free of inhibitions, of self-doubt, and of concern for what other people think” (2002, 195). Rogers seems to imply that Scraps’ trajectory argues against the Pipts’ essentialist view of class, but the matter is far from clear (not least because Scraps’ character and position is ‘biologically’ – that is, in this case, magically – determined), and it would be characteristic of Baum not to think the matter through (if he even noticed its presence).

¹³⁷ As intimated in the previous footnote, the construction of Scraps’ mental contents also raises questions related to free will – although Baum doesn’t fixate on this issue (which is also evoked through the portrayal of the mechanical man, Tiktok). In any event, we are probably meant to see Scraps’ “brain furniture” as constituting dispositions or tendencies, rather than determining factors.

may be that Baum means to allude to an imagined distinction between organic and artificial consciousness, and hence ‘live’ and ‘manufactured’ persons, or, that he intends to distinguish knowledge (“cleverness”) from wisdom (“intelligence”).

The mind-body problem, meanwhile, is one of the most important metaphysical questions that philosophers (and, more recently, neuroscientists and artificial intelligence specialists) consider. The primary questions concern “the relations between the mental and the physical, and how ... there [can] be causal relations between them.” Alternately, philosophers ask, “[h]ow is [consciousness] possible at all? How *could* the brain cause consciousness?”, while as I see it, the issue underlying Baum’s depictions of “brains” is the question of what, indeed, consciousness *is* (Searle 2004, 17, original italics). The famous Cartesian solution is to posit two separate and inalienable “substances”: mind and body, a view that Searle supposes “most people in the Western world” still accept in some form or other, while experts in philosophy and the sciences tend to adopt a materialistic view in which “mind” is identical with, or an illusion or epiphenomenon of, brain processes (12). Both the materialist trend and the technological and scientific discoveries (and ideological developments) responsible for it, however, post-date Baum, and it is instructive to consider the contemporary philosophical climate and also the ways in which Baum might be seen as ahead of his time.

Baum’s most important philosophical contemporary was William James and, while I have not encountered any evidence that Baum had read, or was even aware of the work of James, the latter’s thinking on consciousness may help to contextualize the somewhat cruder imaginings of the former. In my epigraph from *The Principles of Psychology* ([1890] 1918), James articulates the contemporary state of knowledge with

regard to minds, brains, and thought: he takes for granted that “thoughts accompany the brain’s workings” – or, to put it in more current philosophical terms, that there is a relation, probably causal, between the mechanical and electrical activity in the brain and our experience of consciousness – but, importantly, that for all our knowledge of brains, the natures both of consciousness and of that causal relation remain impenetrable.¹³⁸

Baum’s depictions of mental “furniture” in the scarecrow’s ‘brans’ and Scraps’ pharmaceutical dispositions are knowingly inadequate because, like James, he means to sustain the mystery and further, to beguile himself and his readers with various imaginings of its solution. The description of the “brain furniture” added to Scraps is additionally interesting for the way in which the “blue glass bottles” might recall, not only the compounds of a chemistry laboratory, but also a pharmacist’s or perfumer’s tinctures. These might allude presciently to what is now popularly known as “brain chemistry,” which current science believes shapes mood and temperament, just as Ojo’s elixirs shape Scraps’ personality. One of the most tantalizing ways in which Baum’s representations of mind are ahead of his time, then, is that he is intuitively able to link metaphysical issues to scientific issues: almost as if he foresees the later twentieth century disciplinary transitions, in which a range of topics traditionally considered by philosophy came, via developments in technology and knowledge, to be treated by the sciences.

¹³⁸ Whilst James offers to leave “metaphysics ... outside the province of [his] book,” at moments such as that from which I have taken my epigraph he skims the surface (beneath which none, as I understand it, have managed to plunge) of the metaphysical questions – which he defines as “attempts to *explain* our phenomenally given thoughts as products of deeper-lying entities” ([1890] 1918, vi, original italics). As in the case of contemporary neuroscience, James takes for granted the basis of thoughts in brain-states, and pretends not to trouble over the connection between them.

Baum's partiality for theosophy means he is almost certain to have held the popular, dualistic view of mind and body, in which these are deemed distinctively different sorts of substance (DeLuca and Natov 1987, 52-4; Rogers 2002, 225): this may be seen in the way consciousnesses appear to move between bodies or parts of bodies, as if in *Oz*, the physical world constitutes little more than clothing for some immaterial self (Baum sometimes describes bodies, and even heads, as things that characters "wear"...). But Baum's invocation of "brains" as the important seat of mental activity evokes a physicalist perspective. The fact that Baum never mentions "mind" or some cognate might, alternately, be seen in the light of his other efforts to accommodate an unskilled child reader: "brains" is the more familiar term, while the popular idiomatic usage in which "having brains" stands in metaphorically for 'being smart' or 'possessing desirable capacities of mind' is referenced both when Baum contemplates the virtues of intellect and when he considers the nature of consciousness. Still, the fact that this vocabulary suggests that children and recent popular discourse ostensibly both want a materialist understanding of mind is curious (perhaps especially so in light of Searle's reasonable assertion that the commonplace Western view tends to dualism). Perhaps this tells us that, while materialism seems inadequate, it is in some respects the easier view: the one we have the equipment to discuss and research.¹³⁹ (Thinking back to Wittgenstein, it may be an inadequacy of language that forces us to describe mind in *either* dualistic *or* materialistic terms because there simply isn't a grammar to account for the distinctive features of mind. This surely is the case even more in laymen's considerations of

¹³⁹ Chalmers writes that "the easiest way to develop a 'theory' of consciousness is to deny its existence, or to redefine the phenomenon in need of explanation as something it is not" – implicitly, a purely 'material' phenomenon, or an "illusion" (1996, xii).

consciousness than in those of the experts.¹⁴⁰) But while Baum's spiritualist perspective no doubt contributes to his interest in the metaphysical questions of mind and body,¹⁴¹ he knows that he lacks an answer to just what "mind" consists of, and this failing is one of the series' successes, for it means that the books contain a set of absorbing questions that are some of the ingredients of philosophical inquiry.

While Baum jocularly treats mental traits and thoughts as physical constituents in the ragdoll characters, Scraps and the Scarecrow, he considers consciousness more pointedly through the depiction of the mechanical man, Tiktok, who "Thinks, Speaks, Acts, and Does Everything but Live" ([1907] 2005, 89). Tiktok, then, might be seen as another configuration of the mystery of consciousness. The mechanical man first appears in *Ozma of Oz*, where Dorothy and the talking hen, Billina,¹⁴² find him, in his inanimate state, in a cavern en route to the land of Ev. Tiktok's three mechanisms are separately wound: in this instance, thinking first – upon which Billina remarks that "[h]e doesn't seem any different" (ibid).¹⁴³ If "thought [is] a possessible substance," as the

¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, Searle might dispute this notion (or aspects of it) by analogy with other bodily processes, such as digestion – which does not present a problem for our vocabulary. Still, the "irreducible private, subjective, qualitative component" of conscious experience is what requires a distinctive sort of explanation not required by digestion, circulation, and the rest (2004, 104).

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, Rogers notes that "[a] surprising number of distinguished American intellectuals shared the Gage-Baum interest in spiritualist psychic phenomena." In particular, "William James tirelessly attended séances, 'investigating claims by various mediums that they could communicate with the dead'" (2002, 260; quotation from Mark Edmunson, reviewing Linda Simon's, *Genuine Reality: A Life of William James* [Washington Post, 1 February, 1998]).

¹⁴² Billina – or "Bill," as she calls herself – is stock from the boat that is shipwrecked en route to Australia: a diversion that lands her and Dorothy in fairyland. The magic of *Oz* and its surrounds gives animals the power of speech and furnishes Baum with material for his thinking on appetite and personhood.

¹⁴³ Not to dismiss Culver too hastily, it is also significant that Tiktok is a patented device – and the shrewd Billina suspects that the promises on his label are "all humbug, like so many other patented articles" (Baum [1907] 2005, 89). It might be worth treating Baum's critique of consumerism, like many other elements in the *Oz* books, as intermittent rather than consistent,

depiction of the Scarecrow might lead one to imagine (Westbrook 1996, 114), we would expect to see a difference between the thinking and unthinking Tiktok, and while the pragmatic Dorothy is content with a common sense view of thought (“he is *only* thinking now,” she responds to Billina), the hen is more perspicuous (Baum [1907] 2005, 89, italics added). When, in *The Road to Oz*, Tiktok’s thinking mechanism is exhausted before his speech, Billina observes that the resulting gibberish is a consequence of the fact that “[w]hen he can’t think, he can’t talk properly, any more than you can.” Thinking, mysterious and intangible as it is, plays a crucial role in the existences of persons, for sentience is the trait that, in the real world, separates man from beast.

In their efforts to refute materialism, contemporary philosophers sometimes propose that it is possible to imagine the world exactly as it is, but without the phenomena of consciousness. The inhabitants of such a world (for which the technical term is “zombies”) would have all the same physiological processes as persons in the real world, but without their experiential – that is, qualitative and subjective – aspect. Such an argument is supposed to demonstrate that mind is importantly separable from body; a distinct sort of ‘substance,’ for if zombies are conceivable, and we are not zombies, consciousness must constitute a significant addition to our existence (Kim 2011, 309; Searle 2004, 92-3). While I am suspicious of the materialist position, I am inclined to think, with Searle, that zombies are not in fact all that conceivable: that consciousness may well be an inevitable consequence of physical processes – or, in more technical language, that consciousness is supervenient on brain processes (Chalmers 1996, 32-52;

such that we see the characterization of Tiktok not as primarily designed to comment on patenting (or on the peculiar nature of thinking, or living, or personhood), but as one aspect of his portrayal that may not be consistent with others.

Searle 2004, 148-9). However, I am compelled by another argument from Searle: that the traditional – that is, Cartesian – vocabulary with which the mind-body problem is usually articulated has resulted in a misleading dichotomy, that is material vs. immaterial. His alternative is “biological naturalism,” which avoids the historical language, emphasizing both the reality and the biological character and causation of “conscious states” (Searle 2004, 111-5).

It is curious, meanwhile, that the construction of Tiktok in some ways prefigures the notion of the “zombie.” Later in *Ozma of Oz*, he claims not to experience emotion, but rather that he “can only do what [he] is wound up to do” (Baum [1907] 2005, 93). However, the fact that Tiktok is given “thoughts,” if not “life” might make him an implausible zombie. Indeed, in his account of Baum’s “philosophical adventures,” Gareth Matthews comments on the constitution of Tiktok, noting that “in a way” the mechanical man appears to be a rendition of a zombie. At the same time, Matthews affirms that Tiktok fails as a zombie because the zombies that philosophers usually imagine “would say they felt sorrow and joy just the way you and I do. But there would be nothing it is like for [them] actually to feel sorrow or joy, any more than there would be anything it is like for a rock to feel the blow of a hammer or the soft touch of a hand” (2009, 42-3). In other words, zombies as philosophers conceive of them should be indistinguishable from persons who are not zombies: they should claim or “seem” to have conscious experiences (as we understand those claims and appearances), whilst not actually having them. I suspect that this points to a problem with zombie-theory, since it does not seem all that plausible that a creature would (indeed, could) claim the experience of such inherently subjective things as pain and mood if it lacked subjectivity. Matthews

fails to note, then, that zombiedom makes for a representational problem, since the Oz books are narrated in the third person – and, by definition, a zombie does not have the subjectivity that is narratable in the first person. With this in mind, it is only possible (in the absence of an omniscient and very involved narrator) to hint that a character may be a zombie.

It might be more plausible – and, from a twenty-first-century perspective, more obvious – to treat Tiktok as an automaton, in the context of issues that became pertinent in philosophy and the sciences only after Baum’s lifetime. This is an instance in which Baum’s thinking about mind and technology is uncannily farsighted, for he anticipates not only advances in robotics, but the peculiar questions that the anticipation of further advances have led philosophers and scientists dealing with artificial intelligence to ask: in particular, is it possible to manufacture consciousness, and what would this look like? Matthews seems to be suggesting that Tiktok might make a more credible robot than a zombie, for while his failure to “live” is suggestive, his inadequate ‘appearance of living’ disqualifies him from convincing zombiedom. To this I would add that, although Baum has Tiktok make automaton-like claims about himself, he doesn’t really mean to depict the mechanical man as any more mechanical than the Tin Woodman – presumably we are to imagine that he has a qualitative experience of his “thinking” – and further, that although he denies it, Tiktok appears to have a personality, with allegiances and distinguishing characteristics. Thus, the mechanical man’s claims to “lifelessness” – and incidentally, to his lack of free will (when he insists that he only acts as he is “wound” to) – are not meant to be taken quite seriously, for they are contradicted by the human-like behavior that he exhibits through-out the rest of the series. Still, the question is raised

intriguingly, and never answered: what exactly is going on ‘inside’ Tiktok? What exactly goes on inside you and me?

Tiktok confirms Billina’s hypothesis about the connection between thinking and speech, saying that “words are formed on-ly by thought,” and thus hinting that consciousness is to be seen as analogous to the gears of a machine. This is a theory known to philosophers as the “identity thesis,” because it postulates that what we count as thoughts simply *are* (i.e. “are identical with”) our brain mechanisms (Kim 2011, 313-5; Searle 2004, 55). While I have remarked above that Baum’s theosophy would dispute this notion, his repeated manipulation of models of consciousness in *Oz* suggests either that the matter was far from settled for him or, more interestingly, that he found different accounts of knowledge and intellect an appealing topic with which to play. In this scene, the ever-curious Button-Bright (another American visitor who seems better equipped for fairyland than the ordinary world) “want[s] the clockwork man to open himself, so that he might see the wheels go round.” But this “could not” be done – implicitly, because thoughts, intriguingly, are invisible or unobservable ([1909] 2005, 187). By refusing to open the mechanical man, Baum confirms a suspicion that we may – or ought – to have had, on first meeting Tiktok: that the description on his placard is no straightforward representation of his person, or its thinking.

There is one final mystery of mind with contemporary significance to Baum upon which he touches: that of the unconsciousness. In *Marvelous Land*, Jack Pumpkinhead, an endearing dolt, carves the Sawhorse’s wooden ears, thus enabling him to hear, upon which Tip (the boy-servant who is to become Ozma of Oz) asks him “[h]ow [he] happen[ed] to think of it?” To this Jack replies that he “didn’t *think* of it ... he didn’t

need to, for it [was] the simplest and easiest thing to *do*” ([1904] 2005, 46, italics added).

There is a didactic component to this exchange, but from the perspective of philosophy of mind, it also offers a further peculiarity of thinking: that thoughts sometimes pass unnoticed by the thinker. Alternately, we sometimes appear to ourselves to act without them, even while they might seem from the outside to be necessary. In other words, not all ‘conscious experience’ is strictly “conscious,” in the ordinary usage of the word.

Philosophers treat “the unconscious” as a group of more or less related phenomena, including not only the repressed content that psychoanalysis has popularized (which Freud termed the “dynamic unconscious”), but also a range of experiences that are so quotidian as to seem unproblematic at first glance. These include, firstly, the “preconscious,” or those mental contents that exist as potentialities not present to our immediate consciousness – in other words, the ordinary beliefs and faculties that we presumably still ‘contain’ while asleep, or when our focus is elsewhere.¹⁴⁴ They also include the “deep unconscious,” or the set of rules that we ‘unconsciously’ follow and may be unable to ‘consciously’ articulate when we perform a basic activity such as using language; and finally, the “nonconscious” “neurobiological phenomen[a]” that “function crucially in controlling our mental lives” via the execution of all the important bodily processes “but that are not cases of mental phenomena at all” (Searle 2004, 239-42).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Searle’s example is “an obvious sort of case”: that “it can truly be said of me, even when I am sound asleep, that I believe that George Washington was the first president of the United States.” In addition, “we can even say of a person who is wide awake, and who happens to be thinking about something else entirely, that he believes that George Washington was the first president of the United States” (2004, 239).

¹⁴⁵ As an example, I do not have a qualitative experience of my brain producing serotonin (this is “nonconscious”), even while I have the qualitative experience of changes in mood (which is conscious).

Jack's 'acting without thinking' fits somewhere on the spectrum of unconscious mental activity, and although it is not immediately clear which category this episode might represent, it expresses another enigmatic problem for the philosophy of mind: "[h]ow can ... unconscious states, when unconscious, succeed in causing actual human behavior?" (ibid, 243). How is it that Jack Pumpkinhead can respond as if to thought, while not being aware of thinking? (And why is it that he sees thinking as redundant in this case?) While one possibility is that Jack constitutes another possibility for zombiedom (that we might, in other words, suspect that he has no "thoughts"), it is more likely that this episode is meant to portray the rather more familiar idea that "thought" need not be "conscious" via an individual who has been set up as having a rudimentary understanding of his own mental activity.

Searle maintains that material from the "dynamic unconscious" can be understood using the same model as for the case of the less problematic preconscious," and similarly, that "deep unconscious" and "nonconscious" material have the same basic structure, both consisting of brain activities that do not have a subjective component (even although they may correlate with mood, bodily sensations, and action) (245-6). If Searle is to be taken seriously here, what this means for the Pumpkinhead is that our options for explaining his 'unthinking' behavior are reduced from four to two: either he acts on phenomena present in his conscious mind but not his awareness, or his action is the result of physiological processes that *could not* have a phenomenal (that is, a qualitative) expression. While there may be reasons to question Searle's reduction, it leads to a useful rephrasing of the question concerning Jack Pumpkinhead: is he acting mechanically when he makes the Sawhorse's ears (as his claim that it is "easy" might

suggest), or is his cognition of his own mental processes lacking (as might be consistent with the way he is characterized)? Whether or not we care to try and answer this (and I think it highly unlikely that Baum considered the full ramifications of the issue raised, even while he seems clearly to be expressing a question about mental causation and awareness), the point is that our attention is brought to a mundane, yet remarkable, experience.

B. THE BEST AND SAFEST TREASURE

He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing.

Plato's *Apology*

While the characterization of Tiktok and the manikin characters affirms Baum's interest in mind as an issue that generates more questions than answers, it also has conventional didactic purposes, and it may be somewhat unclear how these relate to the more surprising, less resolved, metaphysical ones. In the case of the *Alice* books I argued that Lewis Carroll means for his audience to emulate the conceptual play that the stories model; this is less obviously the case in Baum – and the latter's tendency to moralize, especially where intellect is at stake, might suggest that he wishes to settle certain aspects of the issue of thinking, even while at moments he opens it up for investigation. The depiction of Tiktok is not the only instance in which Baum urges his reader to 'think before speaking,' and there might seem little more to his characterization if it weren't for the mystery of the machine man's insides. While I have argued that we should not shun a

text for its (inevitable) didactic content, there is good reason to see texts that manage to inform and inspire thinking – as opposed to merely sermonizing – as superior. With this in mind, I still see little objectionable about the precept “think first” (or the moments at which Baum encourages modesty in one’s attitudes towards knowledge and intellect), whilst also noticing a further inconsistency in Baum’s *Oz* – whereby in the treatment of a single topic he fluctuates between resolution and wandering inquiry. This needn’t be a mystifying contradiction, since what it really amounts to is that Baum is convinced that thinking is a virtuous activity, even while he is far from certain what thought is.

Baum sometimes argues for a position by using caricature – which is by definition a didactic method, although one seldom frowned upon in the way that lessons conveyed without art or humor are sometimes.¹⁴⁶ In particular, the *Oz* books use caricature to show up the shortcomings of intellectual pretension – in addition to the inhabitants of Rigmarole Town, the Woggle-bug and a character named the Frogman, who appears in *The Lost Princess of Oz* ([1917] 2005), all burlesque intellectuals beautifully. But Baum also employs dialogue between characters to model attitudes towards knowledge. A striking example occurs at the beginning of *The Scarecrow of Oz* ([1915] 2005), where a new pair of

¹⁴⁶ Scholars of children’s literature might pay more attention to the forms didacticism takes in the works that they critique before assuming that the fact of a text’s endeavor to teach is itself faulty. This is an addendum to my argument in the previous chapter, since what it amounts to is an observation that some forms of learning are more pleasurable than others. (My grammar in the above sentence, furthermore, helps to point out something else that might be said in favor of caricature and satire over other forms of didacticism: that the former *argue for* an idea, rather than simply presenting it as inalienable truth.) One of the difficulties frequently considered in the context of juvenile literature, however, is that the intended audience of inexperienced readers may not receive a “message” conveyed through the subtle means of irony, caricature, and related forms. While it should be noted that adults also often fail to apprehend arguments that are expressed indirectly, I don’t have much of a solution to this problem (if, indeed, it is a problem). Perhaps a starting point would be an empirical study of child-readers’ comprehension of irony and similar methods in texts.

heroes – the sailor, Cap’n Bill and his girl side-kick, Trot – consider insights familiar to an experienced reader from Plato’s *Apology*.¹⁴⁷

“Seems to me,” said Cap’n Bill, as he sat beside Trot under the big acacia tree, looking out over the blue ocean, “seems to me, Trot, as how the more we know, the more we find we don’t know.”

“I can’t quite make that out, Cap’n Bill,” answered the little girl in a serious voice, after a moment’s thought, during which her eyes followed those of the old sailor-man across the surface of the sea. “Seems to me that all we learn is jus’ so much gained.”

“I know; it looks that way at first sight,” said the sailor, nodding his head; “but those as knows the least have a habit of thinkin’ they know all there is to know, while them as knows the most admits what a turr’ble big world this is. It’s the knowing ones that realize one lifetime ain’t long enough to git more’n a few dips o’ the oars of knowledge.” (368)

As is characteristic of Baum, this opening dialogue has little to do with the plot of *The Scarecrow* (perhaps it constitutes a peculiar tribute to the elite men’s’ group, “The Uplifters,” to which the book is dedicated),¹⁴⁸ and nor has the book any sort of thematic

¹⁴⁷ Cap’n Bill and Trot are the protagonists of another Baum fantasy, *Sky Island* (1912). Baum tried repeatedly to end the *Oz* series, to which his child readers and publishers insisted that he continue to add. His compromise involved entering characters from other books into *Oz*, and creating *Oz* stories in which large parts of the plot took place outside the motherland (DeLuca and Natov 1987, 56-8).

¹⁴⁸ This is pure speculation on my part, and perhaps a vain attempt to rationalize the peculiar appearance of a dialogue in the spirit of Socrates at the beginning of this novel. Rogers writes that “Baum was an enthusiastic charter member of the Lofty and Exalted Order of the Uplifters, an inner group of the Athletic Club members organized in 1909... Meeting every Saturday over lunch, the Uplifters enjoyed songs and lively conversation, followed by a talk on current affairs”

concern with the ethics of knowing. Although their conversation may serve to individualize Bill and Trot, characterize their relationship, and allude to the book in which they first appear, its disconnection from the plot and themes (if not the tone) of the remainder of the narrative, makes it seem incomplete.

However, at other points in the series (both before and after *The Scarecrow*), the injunction to be cautious in one's claims to knowledge emerges more naturally from other elements in the books. In particular, conglomerate characters recently brought to life provide a means both to question what knowledge is and where our mental capacities come from, and to urge that those who are inexperienced should be cautious in exercising them. Soon after he is 'born' in *Marvelous Land*, Jack Pumpkinhead is asked by the witch Mombi what he knows. He responds: "that is hard to tell ... although I feel that I know a tremendous lot, I am not yet aware how much there is in the world to find out about. It will take me a little time to discover whether I am very wise or very foolish" ([1904] 2005, 42). Jack both anticipates Cap'n Bill's insight that one's quantity of knowledge is relative to others' and to the unending stock of information in the world, and points out that our sensations of knowing are not necessarily commensurate with our experience. In other words, *feeling* that one has knowledge is another peculiarity of human experience exposed via a joke about the Pumpkinhead's lack of self-knowledge.

As might be seen from his explanation of the carving of the Sawhorse's ears, above, Jack's uncomplicated approach to knowledge contrasts with that of characters

(2002, 182). While there is little to suggest an interest in ancient philosophy among the Uplifters or in Baum, it is not impossible that a "lively conversation" involved or referred to Socratic ideas about the ethics of knowledge and the virtues of what philosophers call "epistemic humility" (see Ryan 1999, 119).

such as the Scarecrow, Tiktok, the Woggle-Bug and the Frogman, all of whom fixate upon intellect, sometimes to their disadvantage (the Frogman, unlike the other characters, reforms when he falls in the pond of truth, and is thereafter forced to admit that his intellectual superiority is a front). In other words, we might take the discussion of the ear-carving as lauding effectual action uninhibited by intellectualization: as holding up the Pumpkinhead as a different sort of model from those offered by Tiktok and the Scarecrow. It is significant, however, that the author does not decide between the methods represented by Jack and his foils, instead portraying persons who minister to their minds both appreciatively (as in the case of Tiktok and the Scarecrow) and critically (as with the Woggle-Bug), and those who willfully neglect intellect as simultaneously virtuous and flawed. What is more, a fixation upon “brains” is sometimes seen to be both admirable and suspect within a single personality. In the case of the Scarecrow, it is often unclear whether he is being derided or praised. Meanwhile, the Woggle-Bug is both mocked for his self-importance and honored for his superior knowledge. By the fifth book, he has become established as a respectable (if still at times foolish) character, and afforded the privilege of opening a school, the “Royal Athletic College of Oz.”¹⁴⁹

One critical response available for making sense of these ambiguities would be to propose that Baum means for his child-reader to weigh up both possibilities and resolve the issue herself, perhaps via an amicable middle-ground in which intellect is nurtured,

¹⁴⁹ The college is “Athletic” because the Wonderful Wizard (who by now has recovered from his humbuggery to practice real magic) has invented “School Pills,” such that knowledge can be “swallowed” by the students, liberating their time for the more enjoyable pursuit of games ([1910] 2005, 216-7). I would say that this portrayal is meant simultaneously to please an unscholarly child-reader who would prefer such an education, and also to satirize the sort of learning that involves mindless absorption and results in a false sense of intellectual prowess – like that which the Woggle-Bug has himself experienced

but not paraded; in which one fosters the abilities to both extemporize and rehearse. I would be prepared to support both this reading and its didactic content, but I also think that Baum, like the ancient philosophers, is asking just what wisdom involves, and how it relates to action and human flourishing. Button-Bright is the character that most makes the virtues of intellect seem ambiguous. When he first appears in the fifth book of the series, *The Road to Oz* ([1909] 2005), he is depicted as oddly primitive, and might even seem vacant if not for his ebullience. Dorothy, Toto, and the Shaggy Man meet Button-Bright, “a little boy dressed in sailor clothes ... digging a hole in the earth with a bit of wood” en route to Oz, and when Dorothy enquires into the boy’s origins, he answers every one of her questions with the phrase “[d]on’t know.” In part, their dialogue is meant to amuse – and perhaps to portray Button-Bright as a familiar type of infuriating yet delightful child – but when Dorothy insists that he “MUST know SOMETHING,” in particular, “[w]hat’s going to become of [him],” it becomes apparent that human beings cannot but lack important sorts of knowledge. Indeed, the sage Shaggy Man corrects Dorothy by pointing out that “[n]o one knows everything” (Baum [1909] 2005, 166). Button-Bright’s approach to wisdom is similar to that of the Pumpkinhead and contrasts with that of the ‘intellectual’ characters, and it is unclear whether his naïveté is being praised or criticized.

The king of the foxes, who the travelers meet soon after Button-Bright joins the party (and who, unsurprisingly, embodies the traits of “foxiness”), thinks that the boy is clever indeed. And, while his judgment is not quite trustworthy, he can justify his

claim.¹⁵⁰ As is the case during his conversation with Dorothy, Button-Bright responds to the Fox-King's questions by saying that he "don't know." When King Dox discusses his own "official name ... King Renard the Fourth" with the boy, they conclude that the name "Ren" is "nothing at all" in itself: alluding, I think, to one of the linguistic insights that also appears in the *Alice* books – that proper names do not "mean" anything; that words in themselves are "nothing at all."¹⁵¹ Dox proclaims that the child has "a brilliant mind," and asks further whether he knows "why two and two make four?" Button-bright, of course, does not know – and, importantly, does not pretend to know – and Dox commends him, rightly, because "[n]obody knows why; we only know it's so, and can't tell why it's so" (169). The two characters are gesturing towards the peculiarity of the mathematical axioms with which any child would be familiar, and along the way pointing to the virtues of what philosophers, perhaps inaccurately, call epistemic humility: that is, the Socratic idea that the wisest individuals are those who are conscious of the limits of their knowledge.

While recent philosophers dispute the notion that modesty about one's own insight is a criterion for wisdom,¹⁵² I think that they may be incorrect to describe the landmark position of Plato's Socrates as "epistemic humility." Although the conclusion of *The Apology* has Socrates make the famous claim that I have reproduced in my epigraph

¹⁵⁰ The king of the foxes is named Dox, which suggests "doxa": the Greek word for "belief" or "opinion." This is most likely coincidental, since nothing suggests that Baum knew any Greek (alternately, it is possible that he has English words etymologically related to "doxa" in mind).

¹⁵¹ Reynard the Fox is a character from European folklore: a "French animal figure of great cunning and guile" (Seal 2001, 220). In an 1844 translation of William Caxton's 1481 version of *The History of Reynard the Fox*, William J. Thomas writes that "the world-renowned history of Reynard the Fox ... succeeded in winning golden opinions from all classes of society; its homely wit and quaint humour proving as delightful to the 'lewd people,' as its truthful pictures of everyday life, and its masterly impersonation of worldly wisdom, have rendered it to the scholar and the philosopher" (1844, v).

¹⁵² See, for instance, Sharon Ryan 1999.

– that the wisdom of human beings amounts to “nothing” – in the body of his argument, Socrates makes the more compelling point, not that “knowledge” is “nothing,” but that the Athenians he has consulted are unwise because they do not recognize the limitations of what they know. In other words, I would say that the more famous statement is a rhetorical gesture (and as such, one of the instances in which Socrates’ undermines his own claim to reject rhetoric). I don’t wish to become too much embroiled in the details of the current philosophical debate about the conditions for wisdom, although it seems to me that a correct understanding of limitations is probably more likely a candidate criterion for wisdom than humility.¹⁵³ At any rate, Dox honors Button-Bright’s ‘cleverness’ by changing his head into that of a fox, thus suggesting that the boy shares the supposed shrewdness of the king’s species – but no more is given in this scene to tell us whether or not ‘foxy’ wisdom is the desirable model. There is one point later in the series, however – again in book nine, *The Scarecrow* – in which Button-Bright’s position appears to be praise-worthy. Here Cap’n Bill and Trot, now accompanied by Button-Bright, have just alighted in Oz, but not yet encountered any of its inhabitants. Trot, impressed with the geography, speculates that “[n]o one could live in such a country without being happy and good,” but when she asks Button-Bright what he thinks, he responds:

“I’m not thinking, just now ... It tires me to think, and I never seem to gain anything by it. When we see the people who live here we will know what

¹⁵³ At the same time, it also seems to me that there is something peculiar – and perhaps unwise – about philosophers’ attempts to grasp so elusive and ideologically laden a concept as wisdom (see Kekes 1983 and Ryan 1999) via their conventional analytic methods. It may be that this is a topic better dealt with by persons who have had access to the greatest possible range of human suffering and flourishing

they are like, and no 'mount of thinking will make them any different.” (Baum [1915] 2005, 385)

The wisdom of the ‘unthinking’ characters is that they refuse to speculate: to go outside the bounds of what is given, and thus it may be that they are more receptive to how things are because, as per the Socratic dictum, they are mindful of the limits of their insight.

Indeed, one of the characters who is most respected for his wisdom in Oz, the Scarecrow, is appreciative of “[t]houghtless people,” if for the dubious reason that they are “more fortunate than those who have useless or wicked thoughts and do not try to curb them.” Thinking, he is proposing, comes with dangers, and thus “[t]houghts should be restrained ... and applied when necessary, and for a good purpose,” for “[i]f used carefully, thoughts are good things to have.” This sentiment seems, in some ways, to reflect Baum’s thinking about knowledge as it develops through the course of the series, and also to fit in with the Socratic mandate: knowledge is a good when tempered with caution and awareness.¹⁵⁴ However, even the Scarecrow is not to be taken entirely seriously when he describes his theory of wisdom, for another astute character, the rainbow’s daughter, Polychrome, “laugh[s] at him, for [she knows] more about thoughts than the Scarecrow” (Baum [1918] 2005, 525-6). Polychrome’s laughter probably does more to hint at the metaphysical issues related to mind than the ethical ones connected with the practices of knowledge – since she is a fairy and ethereal as, implicitly,

¹⁵⁴ Earlier in the same book, the Scarecrow and Nick Chopper have also agreed upon the virtues of asking and answering questions, thus implying that people do well to acknowledge gaps in their wisdom, rather than to feign knowledge, as do Socrates’ Athenians (Baum [1918] 2005, 496).

“thoughts” are in Baum’s vision – but the Scarecrow’s insight is also brought into doubt, and thus the question of ‘how to think’ remains to some degree open.

In conclusion to this section, I take note of a couple of instances in which wisdom is described unambiguously as a good: and the greatest one. The first occurs near the beginning of *The Patchwork Girl*, when we have first been introduced to Ojo the Unlucky. Ojo has spent his life up to this point living with his taciturn uncle, Unc Nunkie. Because Unc Nunkie seldom speaks, ““there was no one to tell [Ojo] anything,”” and that, suggests Margolotte, is ““one reason [he is] Ojo the Unlucky,”” for ““[t]he more one knows, the luckier he is, for knowledge is the greatest gift in life”” (257). My title for this section, meanwhile, comes from *The Lost Princess of Oz* ([1917] 2005), in which the greatest magician of Oz, the witch Glinda the Good, meditates upon the disappearance of several crucial objects, including the leader Ozma and her own magical instruments. In this instance, an edifying voice comes not from a character, but from the narrator, reflecting upon Glinda’s thought process. We are told that, “although [Glinda’s] instruments and chemicals were gone, her KNOWLEDGE of magic had not been stolen, by any means, since no thief, however skillful, can rob one of knowledge, and that is why knowledge is the best and safest treasure to acquire” (455). There is nothing equivocal about this injunction, even although it isn’t entirely consistent with the characterization of Jack and Button-Bright and the Scarecrow’s remarks, and although the moralistic tenor of the remark might taste hokey, I see it as making an important ethical claim regarding the flourishing of persons.

C. THE METAPHYSICS OF MEAT

*“Surely it is unkind to accuse a luncheon of being a murder”*¹⁵⁵

My focus in this, final, section relates both to Baum’s metaphysical interests in mind and to his ethical interests in human flourishing: here I consider the extended investigation of personhood, or what it means to be a sentient self and wherein the self lies, that takes place in *Oz*. Baum’s questions about selfhood involve both metaphysical and moral issues – he asks ‘what is a person?’ and also ‘what is good for persons; what do persons need?’ – but since the author does not distinguish description from evaluation, for the most part, I shan’t go out of my way to differentiate the types of concern.¹⁵⁶ The investigation of personhood that takes place in the *Oz* books occurs primarily through Baum’s invention of an assemblage of different types of individual, each of which I see as a thought experiment designed to measure the limits of the concept personhood and thus contemplate its important or common criteria and evaluate its conditions. Many of the topics that I consider within the rubric of personhood have already been explored by

¹⁵⁵ The Tin Woodman, in defense of the kitten Eureka, who has been accused of consuming a tiny piglet, in *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* (1908/2005, 160).

¹⁵⁶ S. F. Sapontzis critiques the concept of personhood for conflating moral and metaphysical issues. Metaphysical personhood, in his analysis, *describes* a certain type of thing (unproblematically, a human being, he argues), whereas moral personhood *evaluates* – that is, assesses the rights and virtues of beings we call “persons.” Sapontzis’ main claim is that “evaluations cannot be derived from descriptions”; that this leads to “a philistine conception of morality,” which grants some humans undeserved rights and denies some non-humans deserved rights (1981, 616, 618). Sapontzis’ critique responds specifically to late twentieth century trends in ethical philosophy, and therefore is of only tangential interest to my discussion of personhood. However, I mention his distinction between moral and metaphysical concepts of personhood because (a) I have already remarked on similar differences in questions related to mind and thinking, above, and (b) as noted, I will *not* be making an effort to distinguish moral from metaphysical questions of personhood in my discussion below, not only because Baum does not separate the issues, but also because it is not always so easy to do so, and I am not convinced that “description” does not (or should not) lead to “evaluation.”

Andrew Karp (1998) and Tison Pugh (2008), and hence I shall trim my discussion in places. What I hope to add to Karp's and Pugh's interpretations is attention to the manifestly philosophical nature of Baum's questions about personhood: that is, I intend to consider his interest in self as a cohesive topic on its own, rather than as a precedent for the representation of an ambiguously utopian society, as Pugh and Karp describe it.

While questions about personhood in *Oz* are often broached via the depiction of non-biological characters (those, in Baum's idiom, not made from "meat"), they also emerge through a theme that is uniquely treated in Baum's writing and only a recent topic of interest amongst professional philosophers: that of food and eating. A newly categorized sub-field in philosophy, the philosophy of food, aims to "do more than treat food as a branch of ethical theory," and "also [to] examine how it relates to the fundamental areas of philosophical inquiry: metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, political theory, and of course, ethics," and so "to tackle the most basic questions about food: What is it exactly? How do we know it is safe? What should we eat? How should food be distributed? What is good food?"¹⁵⁷ I consider the issues that Baum raises

¹⁵⁷ Food, eating, and taste, have of course been considered since the earliest philosophers, but until recently these have been treated under more traditional banners, most commonly ethics or aesthetics, rather than in a field of their own. Curtin and Heldke (1992) argue that food, "one of the most common and pervasive sources of value in human experience," has been "persistently ignored" or at least "marginalized" because food production is a traditionally lower class, and/or female, domestic activity, and because western philosophy "has tended to privilege questions about the rational, the unchanging and eternal, and the abstract and mental; and to denigrate questions about embodied, concrete, practical experience" (xiii, xiv). Carolyn Korsmeyer (1999), meanwhile, notes that "taste is frequently catalogued as one of the lower functions of sense perception ... associated with appetite, a basic drive..." and hence "philosophers have assumed that this sense affords little theoretical interest" (1). Furthermore, because "philosophers have interpreted taste preferences as idiosyncratic, private, and resistant to standards," they have found the subject yields poorly to philosophical probing. I see the discussions of food and eating in the *Oz* books as an instance in which Baum's untutored philosophical intuitions happened upon a topic that was only to begin to emerge as a potentially legitimate sub-field within academic philosophy at the end of the twentieth century. The quotation is from "What is Philosophy of

about food and eating in this light, suggesting not so much that Baum is canny in his discovery of a topic that would interest a minority of philosophers almost a century after his death, but rather that those philosophers (and other readers of Baum) have much to glean from his investigations about how food relates to personhood.

Eating is a basic requirement for animal life, and hence the question of who eats and who doesn't – and what they eat, and why – allows Baum to problematize the difference between living and non-living things. Interestingly, manners of eating are also related to “higher” functions, as one of the features that distinguishes intelligent life from what I'll call “animal” life (animals, in Baum, have intelligence, so this is a difference from the real world, not fairyland) is the consciousness of taste preferences, the urge to make moral and/or political decisions about what is eaten and what is not, and the need to prepare food before consuming it. Characters in *Oz* are typified in part by their eating habits, while the recurrent reference to “meat people” rouses the perhaps discomfiting revelation that we are all, like it or not, edible. The *Oz* books make apparent that what constitutes food is far from clear, while what it does – that is, whether eating is a recreational or a utilitarian activity – becomes similarly baffling.

As mentioned previously, it is one of the virtues of seriality that it enabled Baum to append and alter his populations of remarkable individuals, thus allowing him to revise and develop issues that only begin to emerge in *The Wonderful Wizard* in later books. In

Food?” at “The Philosophy of Food Project” (<http://food.unt.edu/philfood/#a>), which cites David Kaplan's *The Philosophy of Food* (2012). Contrary to Korsmeyer and Curtin and Heldke, Kaplan suggests that “the real reason why relatively few philosophers analyze food is because it's too difficult. Food is vexing. It is not even clear what it is. It belongs simultaneously to the worlds of economics, ecology, and culture” (ibid). I'm not convinced by this explanation, since philosophers tend not to shy away from issues that are “too difficult”; perhaps, rather, it is the combination of difficulty and banality that has made the subject resistant to philosophication.

what follows, I shall explore the means by which Baum raises the question “what does it mean to be a person?” by considering the range of different types of person that appear in the *Oz* books, whilst also identifying a number of traits that he appears to consider important signs of personhood and/or features of flourishing persons. In focusing on the metaphysical issues of personhood, I shall investigate some matters related to the persistence (and divisibility) of personal identity that are similar to those referred to by Lewis Carroll in the *Alices*. Along the way, I attend to references to food, and discuss how Baum’s remarks on eating, taste, and cannibalism are used to broach difficult questions about the nature and interests of life and persons.

The different types of characters that appear in the *Oz* books may be divided into six categories, each of which raise different (but overlapping) sets of questions about persons: (1) “meat people” (who are often, but not always, Americans) such as Dorothy, Oz, Tip/Ozma, and the Shaggy Man; (2) “meat” animals, of which the Hungry Tiger, Billina the hen, Eureka the Kitten, and the nine tiny Piglets are important to my discussion; (3) societies of organically occurring people and animals, sometimes composed of “meat,” but in many cases of familiar (in some cases, edible; and in others, conglomerate) objects or substances; (4) manikins and other manufactured persons, whom we have already met (and amongst whom I include Tiktok, although he is in some ways an anomaly); (5) those who have features of both meat and manikin people, that is, Nick Chopper and his ‘kin’; and finally (6) unclassifiable oddities such as the Woggle-Bug, Polychrome, the Woozy, and (for these purposes) Princess Langwidere.¹⁵⁸ The

¹⁵⁸ Strictly speaking, Princess Langwidere is made from “meat,” but her ability to change heads sets her aside from the rest of her species.

“meat people” constitute a familiar basis for comparison, from which the other types of characters differ in terms of their composition; whether or not, and what, they consume; their desires (in particular, desires for different varieties of sustenance) and urges, or what Baum calls their “natures”; the physical locations of their selves, identities, or minds in relation to their bodies; and whether or not they can be said to “live.” Baum implies that *all* these creatures “live,” and that all are persons, although as we have seen that there is a question about this hanging over Tiktok – and at one point the Scarecrow also wonders about his own status as a “living” thing.

I shall mention “meat people” inasmuch as they contrast with the other types of person that we meet in *Oz*, and hence I begin with “meat animals.” These are used to raise questions about how civilization, “nature” (by which I take Baum to mean both disposition and instinct), and taste, distinguish persons both from one another and also show them up as special creatures with confounding faculties. Baum is not concerned with perhaps the most obvious criterion that a consideration of animal life usually brings to the discussion of personhood – that of sentience, or (self-) consciousness – since it is taken for granted in *Oz* that animals have the same sorts of intelligent minds as human beings (as is the case in many children’s books). Hence, Baum’s animals are not comparable to animals in the real world, but rather to human beings, for they are used to ask: ‘given that we can imagine animals sharing our mental lives, but still differing from us in their tastes, dispositions, and “civilization,” how important are these faculties to our definition of persons?’ Alternately, ‘given that human beings are ourselves animals, what are the benefits and woes of “civilization”?’

Remarks on nature and civilization are scattered through-out the *Oz* books, often in defense of animal behavior that would seem unacceptable to most human beings. One of the most important, and amusing, examples is provided by the Hungry Tiger, a character introduced in *Ozma of Oz* ([1907] 2005), who eventually becomes the companion of the better known Cowardly Lion. These two beasts are set alongside each other because both appear to be anomalies among their respective species: the Lion believes that he lacks courage, supposedly a necessary criterion for lionhood; whereas the Tiger, who is perpetually ravenous, yet constrained by his “conscience” denies himself the “fat babies” that, because he is a tiger, he is obliged to crave. It is in the “nature” of both beasts to be fearsome – and often it seems that, in the *Oz* books, “nature” is an explanation or excuse for bad behavior or evil desires. However, I want to argue to the contrary, that Baum means to inquire into the relationship between the animal, instinctual, or in-built aspects of personhood and the social, acquired, or extrinsic elements. The desire to consume babies – which, we want to forget, are actually a kind of meat – might be said to represent the former aspect, while “conscience” is a manifestation of the latter.¹⁵⁹ And, while “nature” seems unavoidable, the constitution, source, and degree to which the extrinsic elements bind us are carefully unanswered.

¹⁵⁹ One of the complications that the sequels introduce involves questioning the Hungry Tiger’s purported craving for babies – which is stated as a straightforward fact about him in *Ozma of Oz* ([1907] 2005, 99) and several other places, but contradicted at later moments, only to be subsequently reaffirmed. For instance, when Dorothy introduces the Tiger to Polychrome, she tells that latter that “[h]e says he longs to eat fat babies; but the truth is he is never hungry at all, ’cause he gets plenty to eat; and I don’t s’pose he’d hurt anybody even if he WAS hungry.” In response, the Tiger silences Dorothy, warning her that she’ll “ruin [his] reputation if [she is] not more discreet” ([1909] 2005, 190). On a somewhat different note, one can also read the characterization of the Hungry Tiger as having a refreshing didactic purpose: as noting, contrary to the Scarecrow’s creed, that it is no sin to have evil desires if one does not act upon them.

“Nature” is also often appealed to where creatures from my third category are the subject of discussion: for example, in *Rinkitink in Oz* ([1916] 2005), once a society of evil nomes (who appear in several of the books) has been forced by Ozma to reform, their King Kaliko complains that “being goody-goody ... is contrary to their natures” (448). Similarly, there is a community of foxes, which I have already mentioned, and also a society of rabbits that appear briefly in *The Emerald City of Oz* ([1910] 2005), both of which are satirized for their efforts to acquire “civilization” contrary to their “natures” ([1909] 2005, 171; [1910] 2005, 239). Whereas “civilization” appears to benefit the Tiger (or at least, the babies he encounters), at other moments it is a source of suffering, if not evil. Karp writes that because of its “limitations and possible contradictions,” civilization “is not all it is cracked up to be,” while Pugh points out that in Oz and surrounds, “[n]ature provides a guide for all creatures to follow, yet the tension between nature and civilization demonstrates just how challenging it is to maintain any civilization” (Karp 1998, 113; Pugh 2008, 339).¹⁶⁰ Significantly, the depiction of a conflict between “nature” and “civilization” raises questions about what it means to be a self, and to cohabit with other selves, or, as Karp asks, whether it is “natural for human beings to live together in an elaborate society with restrictions of their freedom or ... to live totally free as hunter gatherers in the wilds, mere ‘unaccommodated man’? What if one’s proper nature is to be mean and take delight in others’ unhappiness?” (1998, 113).

As we see in the case of the Hungry Tiger, these questions are often asked via a discussion about food. It is in the Tiger’s nature to hunger after human babies, but while

¹⁶⁰ In this vein, Dorothy’s own allegiance to “civilization” is shown up as arbitrary and limiting in a discussion with the hen Billina about the relative merits of live and dead; cooked and raw food ([1907] 2005, 107; see Pugh 2008, 331-3).

many describe their young as delectable, the revelation that they are food is usually considered repugnant. There are other instances in which the portrayal of “meat animals” is used to inquire into the ethics of personhood and the constraints of the societies that organize persons. A number of conversations between Dorothy and the hen, Billina, are pertinent here, but these are admirably treated by Pugh (2008, 328, 331-3); instead I shall briefly consider similar issues raised by an episode involving the trial of Dorothy’s kitten, Eureka, from which the epigraph to this section comes. In *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* ([1908] 2005), Eureka is charged with the suspected murder and consumption of a tiny piglet, a pet given by the Wizard of Oz to Ozma. The Tin Woodman speaks eloquently in defense of Eureka (herself, it should be remembered, a pet), again appealing to “nature.” When the Woodman contends that “it is unkind to accuse a luncheon of being a murder,” he points to issues both moral and metaphysical. It might be said that, whilst killing persons is an ethical issue, eating is not: hence, Ozma makes a logical error when she interprets a meal as murder; besides, meat is the natural food of cats, and meat, unavoidably, comes from previously living things. For those who need meat to live, Baum notes repeatedly, we have a dilemma: for it is impossible to both sustain self and not harm other flesh animals.

The dimension to the problem that Eureka raises which I have called “metaphysical” arises when we consider the above scene in light of numerous instances in which humans are described as “meat people” and, as we shall see shortly, in relation to the communities of persons in *Oz* that are composed of other types of food. One of the features of persons in the real world, which we are forced to recognize by the individuals that appear in *Oz*, is that we (or, our bodies, if we subscribe to dualism) are

made from edible substance – and our substance must assimilate similar sorts of substance if it is to continue to exist. (There are a couple of creatures in Baum’s *Oz* series that gloomily report having eaten only once or twice in centuries. These, I would say, are jokes premised on impossibilities, and contain the insight that, not only do we need to destroy in order to eat and live, but that it is necessary to do so frequently.) Ethical matters may supervene on this description, but in itself it is curious that persons (at the current stage of technological development) must assimilate substances like that of which they are composed to continue as persons – and further, that we can also be assimilated by others.

Turning, then, to category three, the peculiarity of being ‘made of meat’ is also brought to the fore when Baum imagines different societies of person composed of other edible substances, such as the people of Bunbury ([1910] 2005, 233) and the vegetable people, the Mangaboos (Jack Pumpkinhead can also be considered under this rubric, since he is painfully aware that his head is an important ingredient for pie). The Wizard of Oz, Dorothy, and an American visitor named Zeb encounter the Mangaboos during their travels underground in *Dorothy and the Wizard* ([1908] 2005, 128-36). I read the vegetable society as a thought experiment that must have become inevitable once Baum had repeatedly referred to human beings as “meat people”: the Mangaboos raise the question, ‘if persons as we know them are made from meat, what would it look like if they had evolved from the other primary living substance and comestible, vegetable?’ And it turns out that sentient creatures comprised of vegetable matter have, of necessity, some rather different experiences than those made of meat. For one thing, they have to be planted; to grow on cultivated bushes (and, curiously, they ‘farm’ one another); they

do not eat, for they “are quite solid inside [their] bodies”; and their life-spans are very much shorter than those of meat creatures (Baum [1908] 2005, 130). Because their growth period – which parallels childhood, rather than gestation in utero – is spent adjoined to the ‘parent’ bushes (which are not sentient), they only achieve full personhood once “ripe,” when they have reached adulthood and are ‘born,’ or “picked.” The prince of the Mangaboos explains to Dorothy and her companions that his people:

“... do not acquire their real life until they leave their bushes ... when they are quite ripe they are easily separated from the stems and at once attain the powers of motion and speech. So while they grow they cannot be said to live, and they must be picked before they can become good citizens.” (130)

Thus the questions, ‘what is life?’ and ‘when does it begin?’ are raised. Baum’s conception of vegetable consciousness alerts us to some distinctive and important features of ‘being meat’ that might otherwise pass unnoticed: we have parenthood and childhood, are sentient before maturity, and incorporate other substances into our bodies. More interestingly, the Mangaboo Prince refers to “the powers of motion and speech” as defining features of “life”; he also implies that “citizen[ship]” – which I take, here, to mean social life – is an important feature of personhood. Thus Baum gives us some possible criteria for “living,” even while at other points (for instance, in the depiction of Tiktok) he suggests that far more is necessary than movement, speaking, and interaction.

In addition to vegetable people and persons made of bread, Baum invents populations made of wood, paper, china, kitchen tools, and also conglomerate objects -

in the populations of Wheelers, Scoodlers, and Whimsies. He also imagines groups that more closely resemble humans or familiar animals, such as the Winged Monkeys and the Flatheads. The net effect of all these different groups of creatures for Baum's ruminations on the nature of intelligent life is to consider the significance of substance and make-up to selves, and to take note of the surprising ways that the composition of the body affects basic facts of our existence – to imagine what it would be like if we were made from something other than “meat.”

We have already met the important manikins in my previous discussion, and I have hinted at their significance for the question of what constitutes life, and where it is physically located – or, whether a body part can be considered the seat of one's identity. Mind appears to be an important component of personhood in Baum – perhaps the most important one – but here I shall consider what it is that the manufactured persons reveal (or ask) about body. The manikin characters (and also Nick Chopper and his “relations,” with whom I shall deal with separately) provide the material for a series of revealing jokes about the peculiarity of personal identity – and again, Baum's addition of sequels is in part what allows for the accumulation and modification of these quips and the intuitions they contain. Individuals such as the Scarecrow, Jack Pumpkinhead, the wooden Sawhorse, and the Gump, serve not only to bring into question the significance of the body and its parts to personhood, but also to ask about the burdens and pleasures of having a body.

The fragmentation and reconstitution that the Scarecrow and Jack Pumpkinhead undergo at different points in the series provide excellent examples of jokes about the location of the self in divisible bodies. In *The Wonderful Wizard*, the Scarecrow is

willingly dismembered for the benefit of his friends, and when his clothing is finally rescued from the tree where the Winged Monkeys have tossed it, and restuffed with new straw, it becomes apparent that the Scarecrow consists of his clothes: here, identity and personhood appear to be found on the surface of the ‘body’ ([1900] 2005, 26). In the twelfth book of the series, it is hinted that the Scarecrow’s parts are frequently replaced as a matter of maintenance. Before setting out on a journey with his companion, Nick Chopper, who is by now the Emperor of the Winkies, the Scarecrow is emptied and refilled by his friend’s servants, for his “body was only a suit of clothes filled with straw” ([1918] 2005, 489). (The emphasis on “body” here might hint at Baum’s belief that “mind” – whatever that is – is more significant to being.) Meanwhile, when Jack is introduced in *Marvelous Land*, it is clear that he and the Scarecrow have some similarities: both are “flimsy, awkward, and unsubstantial” and “hastily made,” while the Scarecrow tells the Pumpkinhead that “whereas [he] will bend, but not break, [the latter] will break, but not bend” ([1904] 2005, 50). Both appear ill-equipped for “living,” as is clear both from the ease with which the Scarecrow is disassembled and from Jack’s ongoing anxiety that his pumpkin-head will rot. As it transpires, Jack’s heads do rot. By *The Road to Oz*, he has become established as a familiar character and acquired a home that consists of an enormous pumpkin, which a visitor can reach by traversing the Pumpkinhead’s personal graveyard ([1913] 2005, 189). Jack’s decayed heads are buried beneath tombstones marked “Here Lies the Mortal Part of JACK PUMPKINHEAD / Which Spoiled [date]” (188). Clearly, Jack’s identity is not located in any individual head (although the quality of their seeds affects his mental powers); as he tells Dorothy, since “[his] body is by far the largest part of [him], [he] is still Jack Pumpkinhead, no matter how often [he] change[s]

[his] upper end.” Here size, rather than significance of purpose, is a sign of the location of personal identity. By this stage in *Oz*, death has been removed from fairyland and thus, as “mortal parts,” the Pumpkin-heads are merely replaceable pieces (which, additionally, furnish Baum with several jokes about cannibalism and pie).

There is another manikin character assembled from a disparate collection of parts that have an unusual relation to their whole. Also in *Marvelous Land*, the Gump is hurriedly constructed as a live flying machine so that Tip and his companions can execute an escape. The Gump (a yak’s head, two sofas, and other assorted objects) is animated using “the powder of life,” but since there is a limited quantity of this elixir, his legs are left inert. As in the case of the Mangaboos, it seems that “life” in this case is the capacity for movement (if not sensation – which the manikins appear not to have). “Life,” furthermore, is the mysterious source of vitality that is often mentioned but never explained in the *Oz* books. When Tiktok is said not to live, I argue, it is a jocular paradox for the reader, at the heart of which lies the insight that perhaps we don’t really know what qualities are essential for “life.” Baum may mean to hint that movement, speech, and thought seem somehow inadequate to explain the difference between live and non-live things. (In contemporary philosophical terms, it might be said that we have no way, from the outside, of telling zombies from persons.) Indeed, late in the series he has the Scarecrow speculate about whether he truly lives – here, Baum seems to be asking whether “life” is something that can be manufactured.

In *The Scarecrow of Oz* ([1915]2005), a grasshopper lands on the Scarecrow’s nose and, realizing that his perch can talk, asks ““Oh! Are you alive?”” (397). The Scarecrow responds:

“That is a question I have never been able to decide ... When my body is properly stuffed I have animation and can move around as well as any live person. The brains in the head you are now occupying as a throne are of very superior quality and do a lot of clever thinking. But whether that is being alive, or not, I cannot prove to you; for one who lives is liable to death, while I am only liable to destruction.” (ibid)

It is not clear what the difference between “death” and “destruction” is in this context, especially since the former is possible, but not natural, in Oz. Perhaps the implication is that an object that has been “destroyed” can be reassembled (as the Scarecrow is, on several occasions), whereas the “death” of a live thing is final.¹⁶¹ Returning to the Gump, whose head remembers its former life as a wild animal: this creature opts for dismemberment after his use is expired, for he is “greatly ashamed of [his] conglomerate personality” ([1904] 2005, 81). However, it is not quite “the end of the Gump,” for the head still retains his identity and his capacity for thought and speech, even in its new role as a mantelpiece ornament.

In addition to raising unanswerable questions about the nature of “life,” Baum’s manufactured creatures are also used to discuss important, if seemingly banal, features of human and animal experience. As early as *The Wonderful Wizard*, the Scarecrow remarks that “it must be inconvenient to be made of flesh ... for you must sleep, and eat and drink” (10). We have already seen from the case of the Hungry Tiger that appetite can be a moral encumbrance. And there are repeated conversations about the burdens of

¹⁶¹ We might also read the Scarecrow’s statement as containing a linguistic insight: that we refer to the end of a living thing as “death,” whereas inanimate objects are “destroyed.”

“meat”: for instance, the wooden Saw-Horse tells his flesh counterpart that he needs neither food nor air, and is never troubled by flies. In response, his interlocutor points out that the manikin horse “miss[es] many pleasures” ([1908] 2005, 155). The Patchwork Girl, however, pities “people who have to be born in order to live,” for her manufactured brains (like the Scarecrow’s) make her intellect superior ([1917] 2005, 466); and the Tin Woodman (admittedly, an unusual case, since he was previously flesh) remarks that he and the Scarecrow:

“...are more easily cared for than those clumsy meat people, who spend half their time dressing in fine clothes and must live in splendid dwellings in order to be contented and happy. We do not eat, and so ... are spared the dreadful bother of getting three meals a day. Nor do we waste half our lives in sleep, a condition that causes meat people to lose all consciousness and become as thoughtless and helpless as logs of wood.” ([1917] 2005, 494)

In spite of these compelling arguments for the inferiority of fleshly life, there is only one “meat” character who responds to the constraints of the body as a burden: the stoic Shaggy Man. Shaggy “care[s] little about dress,” and when the injudicious Woggle-Bug invents a “square meal” tablet, he is the only character to appreciate the trouble it saves him, and moralizes in his defense, saying “[o]ne should only eat to sustain life” ([1909] 2005, 188; [1913] 2005, 276). The students for whom the tablet is devised, meanwhile, rebel against the prospect of swallowing nutriment even although they are delighted to absorb knowledge in pill-form. Clearly, they regard eating as a sort of play, and whilst the utilitarian attitude towards food is lauded by Shaggy and the manikins who do not eat, the contrary argument – that food equals pleasure, and provides a sort of enrichment that

is less definable than mere sustenance – is given equal support. In reply to the Shaggy Man, the Woozy (an anomalous creature, made all of cubes, who has not eaten in several years) grumbles that “[c]hewing isn’t tiresome; it’s fun,” and furthermore, that “this eating business [is] a matter of taste, and I like to realize what’s going into [him]” ([1913] 2005, 276).¹⁶²

The Tin Woodman also participates in discussions of food and eating – and has the benefit of having experienced both fleshly and fabricated existence – but I shall concentrate here on the issues that his story raises with regard to the persistence of personal identity. Matthews has already noted that the gradual change the Woodman undergoes from a “meat person” to a tin person is reminiscent of the conundrum of the Ship of Theseus: a vessel progressively rebuilt such that “at the end of [the] process of complete piece-by-piece replacement,” the philosopher asks whether the same ship “still exists,” and if so, “what makes her [the original ship], rather than some new ship...?” (Matthews 2009, 39). This is very interesting, but the story of Nick Chopper only really gets rich and baffling in the twelfth book, *The Tin Woodman of Oz* ([1918] 2005), when Baum adds several layers of paradox to his contemplation of identity. In this book, the Woodman goes in search of the young lady, his old flame, for whom he was dismembered and reconstituted in the first. En route to her old home, Chopper finds

¹⁶² There is plenty that might be said about this line, which, sadly, I shall abbreviate for the sake of space. For one, we can see that Baum puns on the word “taste” (and unlike some of his other puns, this one is rather skillful) – a word that recurs in the *Oz* series in reference both to eating and to other matters of disposition. I am also interested in his use of the word “realize,” which seems to me a peculiar, but also insightful choice for broaching what is pleasurable about the experience of eating, as opposed to merely acquiring nourishment. It is possible to be sustained (say, via a drip or a tube) without the qualitative experience of what is going in to one’s body; the Woozy, meanwhile, hints at what is irreplaceable but also non-utilitarian about the experience of eating, while to the Shaggy Man, food is but medicinal.

he has a double, a soldier who also fell for the charms of Nimmie Amee, who was also progressively amputated by her vindictive former employer, and also rebuilt by the tinsmith responsible for the Woodman's new body. Since both Tin Men have loved Nimmie Amee, they go together in pursuit of her, imagining that she will pick the better man. First they go to the workshop of the tinsmith, Ku-Klip, and finding its owner absent, Chopper looks into one of the cupboards. Here, to his great perplexity, he finds his old head, which tells him, "I used to be Nick Chopper, when I was a woodman, and cut down trees for a living." Chopper responds, "If you are Nick Chopper's Head, then you are Me – or I'm You – or – or – What relation are we any how?" Whilst Nick asserts that "[y]ou and I are one," the head is cantankerous: "[w]e've been parted," it says, "[p]lease close the door and leave me alone" (523). The situation is only confounded when Ku-Klip appears and confirms that he preserved the former parts of both Nick Chopper and the soldier, Captain Fyter. Ku-Klip tells his visitors that, needing an assistant, he constructed a new individual using the "odds and ends" of Chopper and Fyter, and finished with a tin arm (524). Like many of the conglomerate persons of Oz, the new man, Chopfyt, is both physically and temperamentally maladjusted, and when Ku-Klip finds the insatiability of Chopfyt's appetite a hardship (recalling the burdens of flesh), the latter leaves to seek his fortune. Chopfyt's head came from the former body of the Tin Soldier, but when the latter protests that "It was mine!" Ku-Klip tells him that "it was [his] ... for [he] had given [Fyter] another in exchange for it" (525). Bodies – or body parts – in this scene appear to be configured as possessions, and the question here is thus, not 'which body *am* I?' but 'which do "I" *own*?'

Chopper and Fyter eventually find Nimmie Amee, who tells them that “[e]ven sweethearts are forgotten after a time.” Predictably, she has set up house with the irascible Chopfyt. The Tin Men are furious with the interloper, who not only has stolen their beloved, but “is wearing” Fyter’s head and Chopper’s right arm. Chopfyt contends that “it is absurd for you tin creatures, or for anyone else, to claim my head, or arm, or any part of me, for they are my personal property,” but both Tin Men reject the view of body as possession. “You? You’re a nobody!” shouts Fyter, while Chopper declares Chopfyt “a mix-up!” (532). There is never any answer given to the nature, location, or persistence of the men’s identities – or what their “relation” to one another is – and although the net effect of this portrayal supports a dualistic view of body as possession of an inimitable “I,” the fact that there is continuity between all three persons – and that their existences are rooted in their bodies – suggests that some of the enigma is to be maintained. This is a familiar sort of paradox to philosophers, who often in imagining the conditions and limits of personal identity invent thought experiments in which identity is divided or moved between bodies (see Perry 2002, 34-63; Searle 2004, 279-300). But the foremost purpose of these scenes in *Tin Woodman* is play: the unusual physics of fairyland allow Baum to toy with the limits of self, and he means to amuse and confound just as much as to enliven his readers’ imagination through “day dreams ... with [one’s] eyes wide open and [one’s] brain- machinery whizzing” – which “lead to the betterment of the world.”¹⁶³

¹⁶³ These words appear in the author’s introduction to *The Lost Princess of Oz* ([1917] 2005, 453). It is interesting that Baum refers to the mental activity of his readers in terms of “brain-machinery whizzing,” suggesting the physicalist perspective that at other moments he resists.

My final example of a question about personhood in *Oz* comes from an individual that I have placed in my sixth category: Princess Langwidere. Both Gore Vidal and Matthews have noted the questions raised by Langwidere, so I shall consider her chiefly in the context of Baum's ongoing interest in the relationship between heads and personhood. Langwidere flatters herself by changing heads, rather than clothing, whilst retaining her identity – although some of her traits are subject to change (head no.17, we are told, is accompanied by a furious temper “which was hidden somewhere under the glossy black hair” [(1907) 2005, 95]).¹⁶⁴ Jack's pumpkin-head is also replaceable; identity appears to move or alter itself between the heads of Nick Chopper and his kin; a community of Scoodlers use their heads as weapons, replacing them on their bodies after flinging them at their enemies ([1909] 2005, 179); a population of Whimsies conceal their miniscule heads out of embarrassment at their inadequate brains ([1910] 2005, 211); and finally, the Flatheads, having no room for their “brains” beneath their level skulls, instead keep them in tins ([1920] 2005, 580). In *Oz*, heads are significant to identity and intellect, and in tampering with his characters' heads, Baum alludes to our sense that our selves are located in our heads (or, more specifically, our “brains”). When he makes heads (or their contents) removable, replaceable, or suspect, Baum forces a receptive reader to ask where the seat of one's person lies. He is inconsistent, however – and this allows his thought experiments to take on different forms and consider different issues. Whereas heads appear insignificant to some persons, to others they are the criterion for continuous selfhood. The Gump, for instance, appears to be comprised of his head;

¹⁶⁴ Looking back to my discussion of mind, above, it is another mystery – one that goes together with the Woodman, Scarecrow, and Lion's hypostatized love, intelligence, and courage – that “temper” is given a material location.

although the Scarecrow seems ‘made of clothes,’ he regards his head, which contains his “brains,” as the important part; Nick Chopper, as we have seen, is very invested in his head(s).

What of Baum’s “preoccupation” with philosophical issues in his *Oz* books? How are we to take his contemplation of metaphysical and moral issues surrounding thinking and personhood in these uneven, often clumsy, yet well-loved texts? I think the answer to this is revealed largely in Baum’s preface to *Lost Princess*, which I quoted above. My sense is that Baum was by-and-large ignorant of the long history of philosophical writing about the themes that I have discussed in this chapter, but that he would see them (as I do) as exercises in imaginative play for the benefit and amusement of both author and reader. As I argued in the case of the *Alice* books, his emphasis on the imaginations of his readers suggests that, at least in some moments, he expects them to imitate the sort of thought experiments that he performs when he configures and reconfigures notions about what persons and minds involve. At the same time, the repeated episodes of moralizing in Baum might make it seem that the author is more invested in delivering a conclusive message than in retaining an enlivening state of ambiguity. This is another inconsistency in the *Oz* books, and one that only sometimes requires defense, for at least some of his “messages” are worth being preached.

Baum’s erratic moralizing produces a couple of thought-provoking – if probably unplanned – effects. Firstly, whereas he insists that thinking is a virtuous activity, Baum also asserts the Socratic position that wisdom entails alertness to the limits of one’s knowledge. Simultaneously, the philosophical questions that he takes on at different points in the series involve cases in which human beings’ knowledge is (and perhaps

cannot but be) limited: we do not know what comprises a 'person,' what the relationship between our sensations of thinking and our physical brains are, what civilization has to do with human being, and so on. In short, one of the net effects of the series is to play out a number of instances of epistemic failure, thus demonstrating not only a common need for consciousness of our deficiencies, but also that the things we do not know often provide the most interesting and engaging concepts with which to play. Not knowing, then, may be a flaw, but it is also a pleasure. Secondly, Baum never berates the Woggle-Bug's students for their failure to take pleasure in intellect, and their preference for the physical delights of eating and sport, and he seems to honor the unthinking simplicity of Jack and Button-Bright. Yet at the same time, he repeatedly illustrates the joys of cerebral recreation, thus demonstrating the recreational virtues of 'using one's mind.' His play with concepts may be less skillful than Carroll's, but he models just the same sort of cerebral entertainment as his antecedent.

V. A CASE OF INTROSPECTION

If I am I then my little dog knows me.

Gertrude Stein¹⁶⁵

Here we have a case of introspection, not unlike that from which William James got the idea that “self” consisted mainly of “peculiar motions in the head and between the head and the throat”. And James’ introspection shewed, not the meaning of the word ‘self’ (so far as it means something like ‘person’, ‘human being’, ‘he himself’, ‘I myself’), nor any analysis of such a thing, but the state of a philosopher’s attention when he says the word ‘self’ to himself and tries to analyse its meaning.

Ludwig Wittgenstein¹⁶⁶

It is very interesting to have it be inside one that never as you know yourself you know yourself without looking and feeling and looking and feeling make it be that you are some one you have seen. If you have seen any one you know as you see them whether it is yourself or any other one and so the identity consists in recognition and in recognizing you lose the identity because after all nobody looks as they look like, they do not look like that we all know that of ourselves of any one.

Gertrude Stein¹⁶⁷

While Lewis Carroll and L. Frank Baum are both widely read figures crucial to the history of children’s literature, Gertrude Stein might seem out of place in a critical work that aspires to make a general claim about the significance of philosophical themes in juvenile fiction. Yet, although Stein’s reputation always exceeded her readership, and her children’s books in particular have never been widely known, the manifestly

¹⁶⁵ Stein 1936b, 403.

¹⁶⁶ Wittgenstein (1953) 1997, §413.

¹⁶⁷ Stein 1936a, 362-3.

philosophical nature of the most successful of these, *The World Is Round* (1939), calls out for discussion within the rubric of this dissertation – and one of the more important arguments that I make below is that this is a book which *should* be read by children interested in philosophy, and by philosophers interested in teaching children.

While Stein is occasionally set alongside Lewis Carroll as a writer of “nonsense,” her prose has little in common with that of *Alice* or of *Oz*, and her avoidance of the genre of fantasy literature – a type of fiction that may invite philosophical material – also distinguishes *The World Is Round* in a way that is important to my discussion. Part of my intention in what follows is to show how a work that renders familiar mental realities still manages to engage ideas that many would see as dense, arcane, or at the very least, removed from everyday considerations: ideas that other children’s books tend only to take on during the flights from reality furnished by a fantasy structure. The claim that her children’s novel is ‘realistic’ might seem a surprising one to make of so elusive and solipsistic a writer as Stein¹⁶⁸ – not to mention of a text that has children acquiring wild animals as pets, climbing mountains alone, and inexplicably changing inalienable features of their relations – but I propose that the ‘experimental’ method which has dubious success in many of Stein’s adult works is unexpectedly naturalistic in *The World Is Round*. While fantasy texts remove both characters and thematic content from the familiar life-

¹⁶⁸ There is a debate among critics of Stein about whether her writing succeeds in representing the immediate mental reality of first person perception, in which case, the successful works might be described as examples of ‘modernist realism.’ It is usually the more “difficult” earlier texts, such as *Tender Buttons* and the “Portraits” that are supposed to capture this reality (unsuccessfully, in my view; see Robert Chodat’s “Sense, Science, and the Interpretations of Gertrude Stein” for a compelling argument about the failure of Stein’s “experiments”). However, I consider the more accessible style that Stein uses in *The World Is Round* as a somewhat different sort of effort to ‘get at’ the experience of personhood and humans’ sources of knowledge – and, importantly, to legitimate or encourage “thinking” as an activity for human beings who inhabit a round world.

world, by setting her tale in the regular, round, world (a world we are told is round, but that to our senses appears flat), Stein represents philosophizing as the stuff of everyday existence. As Donald Sutherland puts it, “the story takes the real as the marvelous ... and assumes that the world is strange enough just in being round” (1951, 170). In this chapter, then, my central claim is that *The World Is Round* legitimates and encourages children’s philosophical thinking. Critics have neglected this aspect of the novel because, as is the case with literary interpretations of Carroll’s *Alice* books, they tend to treat the matters of personhood, identity, and mind that appear in *The World Is Round* as psychosocial rather than metaphysical problems. Stein’s philosophical concerns can be seen clearly in two adult works that preceded the children’s novel, “What Are Masterpieces and Why Are There So Few of Them” (1936a) and *The Geographical History of America* (1936b).¹⁶⁹ After a brief consideration of critical tendencies in the analysis of Stein’s writing, I examine these two works for what they reveal of her thinking in *The World Is Round*. In the final part of this chapter, I shall read Stein’s children’s novel for its philosophical content: in particular, its meditations on the differences between human and animal minds, its questions about self and identity, attention to sources of knowledge and the difficulties in evaluating our experiences, and the depiction of artistic genius as the capacity to achieve a heightened state of metaphysical consciousness. I argue that perhaps the most significant effect of *World Is Round* is to portray

¹⁶⁹ “Master-pieces” was first delivered as a lecture during Stein’s 1934-5 American tour, after the writing of *Geographical History*. Because the two texts are closely related, and the former often refers to the latter, in what follows I treat them as if they are consistent and even continuous with one another. Richard Bridgman cautions against such a move since although “ideas about identity which [Stein] murkily advanced in [*Geographical History*] became clarified in ‘What Are Masterpieces’ ... the tentativeness of her original articulation of those ideas” remains significant (1970, 265). Notwithstanding this proviso, I shall advance, since I wish to come up with at the least a flawed impression of what Stein means when she writes of identity, mind, and so forth.

philosophical enquiry as an inescapable human activity – implicitly, as something to be nurtured in growing persons, rather than repressed.

Stein is a controversial figure, and since her earliest (self-) publications, readers have argued about her projects and interests. The recurring interpretations of Stein include a miscellany of very different types of claim: it has been suggested that she was little more than a celebrity hound and devotee of incomprehensibility; that she emulated the activities of the modernist painters – in particular, the cubists – using language; that (in this vein) she failed to acknowledge the particular conditions and limitations attendant upon the medium of words. In more recent criticism, she is set alongside other modernist writers, and her work elucidated more or less usefully in line with the conventional generalizations about texts from the period.¹⁷⁰ It has been argued that her earlier, “unintelligible” works constitute exercises in automatism or insanity, or – slightly more subtly – that in them Stein attempts to represent the immediate experience of consciousness, as her brief period of study under William James had led her to

¹⁷⁰ Recent research in modernism departs from “conventional generalizations,” which include the properties of massive formal innovation, difficulty or “being hard to sell to large numbers of people,” and some sort of relationship (either resistant or recuperative, depending on the critic) with mass culture and/or capitalism (Mao and Walkowitz 2008, 744). Classifying by temperament, type, or even period in so fluid a field as art cannot but be a strained and artificial procedure, and I am suspicious both of forced period generalizations about modernism and the more recent departures from older characterizations. (If the type “modernism” fails to collect a group of like documents or practices because its features are so broad that just about any praxis or text fits the type, then the term lacks utility.) Still, the critical text that I have found most subtle in its delineation of the features and problems of modernism is Richard Sheppard’s *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* (2000) – although I am not convinced of the central role attributed to Dada in Sheppard’s scheme. While I shall avoid focusing on questions that relate to Stein as a modernist writer – as they are only tangentially relevant to *The World is Round* – Barbara Will’s *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of “Genius”* (2000) and Christopher J. Knight’s *The Patient Particulars* (1995) both read Stein in the light of (American) modernism in a way that elucidates her philosophical background.

understand the phenomenon.¹⁷¹ The notion that Stein's 'unintelligible' writing was produced automatically was, famously, advanced by B. F. Skinner, in "Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?" (1934), and almost immediately discredited.

Another well-known early critique of Stein that deserves to be mentioned is Michael Gold's "Gertrude Stein: A Literary Idiot" (1934). Gold reproduces the contemporary view that Stein's writing was either a work of genius or a ruse, before presenting his own argument that it "represents ... an example of the most extreme subjectivism of the contemporary bourgeois artist," since it is accessible only to the solipsistic author (209). While I am inclined to think that Gold's Marxist template is slavishly applied to Stein, there are scholars who might turn a more critical eye upon her self-absorption, especially those who read Stein as an insurgent against "phallogocentric" discourse. Since language rules are established by convention and usage, writing that defies those rules so radically that it loses its recognizability can only fail, not only to communicate, but also to rebel. I mention Gold's reading, and hint at its virtues, because I contend that *The World Is Round* succeeds where other works by Stein fail: it manages to represent a number of concerns about identity, language and consciousness in a manner that is considerably more intelligible than the 'adult' works from the same period in which Stein considers similar subjects.

In many interpretations, Stein's passing collaboration with James is seen as formative, and her own work read in the light of the latter's ideas about spiritualism,

¹⁷¹ These, and many of the responses to Stein mentioned below, can be seen in the contemporary readings collected by Kirk Curnutt in *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein* (2000).

habit, pragmatism, or perception and consciousness.¹⁷² In others, her style is seen an instance of *féminine écriture*, her central intention to defy patriarchal or heterosexual language by refusing masculine conceptions of sense. Somewhat inconsistently, in works such as *Tender Buttons* (1914) and *How to Write* (1931), the impenetrable method read in light of gender and sexuality is sometimes simultaneously reconciled to a sort of code for lesbian intimacies.¹⁷³ In still other cases, Stein is seen as a scientist, experimenting with great exactitude in the possibilities for language-use.¹⁷⁴ In this vein, her prattle is sometimes seen as a sign of genius; but her claims to genius have also been taken for outrageous prattle. Analyses that focus on Stein's defiance of linguistic convention sometimes also implicitly see her as a sort of language philosopher, inquiring into our conventional – and often mistaken – understandings of the way words work by privileging sound over sense.

Aspects of these interpretations of Stein – especially those that attend to her interests in consciousness and language without trying too hard to reconcile them to an

¹⁷² The most frequent (and plausible) theoretical link made between Stein and James concerns their common interest in perception and consciousness. Meanwhile, Stephanie Hawkins (2005) reads Stein in the context of James's interest in religious experience; Liesl Olson (2003) sees Stein as a proponent of Jamesian dedication to habit; both Olson (2003) and Ann Hoff (2010) see her as a follower of pragmatism.

¹⁷³ Marianne DeKoven (1983) and Lisa Ruddick (1990) both read Stein's style as anti-patriarchal, whilst Pamela Hadas (1978), assuming a similar paradigm, 'decodes' *Tender Buttons* as a series of lesbian intimacies celebrating Stein's relationship with Toklas at the time of publication.

¹⁷⁴ See, for instance, Hawkins (2005) and Hoff (2010). Again, Chodat makes a convincing case that Stein manifestly fails in any attempt at "science," largely because her "experiments" are neither repeatable, nor leave us with any constructive information about the workings of language and discourse. This need not be a criticism of Stein since, as Chodat points out, it is difficult to see how writing in itself could be a vehicle for "scientific experimentalism." The analyses produced by Hawkins, Hoff, and many others are flawed because they take Stein's outrageous claims – about the "scientific" nature of her work, about her own "genius," and so on – at face value. As a notoriously elusive writer, one of the first principles for reading Stein is that her words should not be taken to mean what they superficially seem to mean (in the favored cases, that is, where they "seem to mean" at all).

ideological project – influence my reading of *The World Is Round*.¹⁷⁵ But it is important to be mindful of the fact that, because her writing is usually somewhere in between equivocal and unintelligible, critics of Stein are at special risk for confirmation bias.¹⁷⁶ Too much of the little that has been written about *The World Is Round* wishes to square the novel to the sorts of feminist readings often made of *Tender Buttons*. But I am skeptical about the many feminist readings of Stein – largely because neither her words nor her deeds reflect a particular interest in the emancipation of women (see, for instance, Brinnin 1959), but also because they tend to ignore the metaphysical nature of Stein’s enquiries by forcing her writing into an ideological model. For instance, the round world of Stein’s refrain is much discussed with regard to sex, gender, and normativity: and yet, it is entirely unclear from the novel itself just what, if anything, roundness might be said to symbolize. The protagonist, nine year-old Rose, is characterized in part by her aversion to round objects, the concept of roundness, and circular motion: her “teachers [have] taught her” that earth, sun, moon, and stars, are all round, and all perpetually “going around and around” – and this is information that never fails to make Rose weep (21). Because Rose cries when she confronts roundness, Laura Hoffeld supposes “Stein uses roundness to signify evil, evil of a particularly sexual nature” (1978, 51). Linda Watts, meanwhile, sees the roundness of the world as the consequence of a “social problem” rather than an epistemological or conceptual one, as I

¹⁷⁵ Because the evidence about Stein’s political leanings is contradictory and confused (see Brinnin 1959) – and her own statements suggest that she considered herself apolitical – I am extremely suspicious of readings that see Stein in the light of an explicit ideological goal.

¹⁷⁶ Chodat wryly provides an example of confirmation bias when he discusses Marjorie Perloff’s interpretation of *Tender Buttons*: “why,” he asks, “should the acoustics of ‘Roast potatoes for’ evoke ‘the simplicity of roast potatoes, which is everybody’s food,’” as Perloff claims in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981), “rather than anything else – say, the unhealthiness of a starch-heavy diet or the monotony of eighteenth-century Irish peasant life?” (2003, 600).

shall argue below (1993, n.p.); and Barbara Will considers Rose's "entrapment in 'roundness'" as symbolic of her embroilment in the "master narrative of heterosexual pairing and normative family life" (Will 2007, 342).

The purpose of my summary representation of these representative critical claims about roundness in *The World Is Round* is both (paradoxically) to make an assertion about Stein's intentions when she represents roundness, and – against the critical fashion for interpretations that involve sex and/or deviance – to make clear from the start that the problem with round world is never actually articulated. We are never told why roundness makes Rose cry, except by non sequitur: because it is "so sad." (It might be noted, also, that Rose's tears are not necessarily signs of torment; both the absence of explanation for Rose's distress and Stein's echolalic method make it difficult to sympathize with Rose.) This, indeed, is Stein's practice: she provides limited information, partly for the sake of humor – that is, to tease her reader – but also, I shall argue, because when she writes of the roundness of the world, she means literally the metaphysical conditions of that "round world," and the epistemological problems of accessing it.

Meanwhile, in nailing Rose's thinking about self and world to a psychological and/or ideological 'crisis,' critics slide over Rose's (and Stein's) epistemological and metaphysical concerns, which are patent in the contemporaneous texts, "Master-pieces" and *Geographical History*. Not only do these contain much of the material from which the children's book is wrought, but *The World Is Round* also illustrates the argument of the earlier works by having Rose, Stein's "genius" figure, undertake a quest, not to gain or "settle" her identity, but temporarily to lose awareness of it (and awareness, to Stein,

constitutes identity) during a climactic moment of artistic creation. In my discussion of the former texts, I pay attention to ideas that Stein recycles from the history of philosophy, observing a background that precedes William James and also a habit of thinking which might seem rather fustier than that which proponents of Stein as an “Avant garde” thinker might prefer to suppose.

In “Master-pieces,” Stein defends her understanding of artistic genius as the special capacity to transcend consciousness of self during acts of creation: “one has no identity,” she writes, “when one is in the act of doing anything” (1936a, 355). Stein joins William James and his antecedents in defining identity as little more than “recognition”:

Identity is recognition, you know who you are because you and others remember anything about yourself but essentially you are not that when you are doing anything. I am I because my little dog knows me but, creatively speaking the little dog knowing that you are you and your recognizing that he knows ... destroys creation. (ibid)¹⁷⁷

Recognition of self here comes from both without and within: from one’s own and others’ memories of oneself, and from the identification of past with present selves. James describes identity thus: “resemblance among the parts of a continuum of feelings ... constitutes the real and verifiable ‘personal identity’ which we feel” (James 1890, vol. 1, 336-9). Personal identity, in Stein, constitutes of a kind of illusion: a functional illusion for most of us, but an intrusive one to the artistic genius.

¹⁷⁷ The next sentence reads, sardonically, “That is what makes school.” “School” also appears briefly in *The World Is Round*, where it seems to have a creatively dampening effect on Rose’s thinking.

Stein's view that personal identity is but a sensation or means of accounting for recognition also puts her in the company of Ludwig Wittgenstein, for both pay specific attention to the transience and contingency of the state in which identity is 'recognized'. In the passage from *Philosophical Investigations* reproduced above, Wittgenstein considers the experience of identity a "case of introspection" and a "state of ... attention" (1953/1997, §413). Neither Stein nor Wittgenstein, then, treats personal identity as an ontological condition – although it is important to heed the fact that they have very different projects attached to this approach.¹⁷⁸ Wittgenstein's is to critique philosophers' insularity by accusing William James of generalizing a scholarly experience of "identity": those without the same intellectual baggage, he contends, probably exhibit a rather different "state of attention" when they contemplate self – one that does not produce unneeded tomes. This is not a claim that appears anywhere in Stein, who, whilst she sometimes condemns philosophers, is inclined to generalize her own eccentric experiences.

Stein, furthermore, is specifically concerned with artistic practice: she asserts that creative production occurs in the rare moments, to which only "genius" has access, in which attention to identity is suspended. (Implicitly, "genius" is a quality that is both exceptional and innate. Stein writes of those she regards as geniuses – for instance, Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, and herself – as born into the capacity, such that one cannot 'acquire' genius.) In other words, she proposes that the creation of a "master-piece"

¹⁷⁸ Stein and Wittgenstein are sometimes set alongside one another as dissenting modernists focused on language-use, but I am not convinced that this is an appropriate connection. Stein's tone and intentions are very different from Wittgenstein's; and more significantly, her insights into language are expressed in a way that makes them difficult to apply to other situations, while her thoughts about consciousness are often derivative. Wittgenstein's writing, meanwhile, is both original and applicable to many different cases.

requires a particular psychological state, which the artist achieves when she loses the sense of herself as a past and future person, and of herself as a self. (Richard Bridgman suggests that “masterpieces were less important [to Stein] than their creator” for they arise out of “an unverifiable state of being,” and it is this “state” that interests her [1970, 266].) Another insight Stein shares with Wittgenstein, then, is that identity is a sensation that occurs *when one pays attention to it* – but unlike the latter, Stein fails to recognize the impact of discursive conventions on *how* we ‘pay attention.’ She also sees the absence of attention as an anomalous rather than a quotidian condition of mind, and the reason “why there are so few master-pieces.”

It is not only the artist’s state, but also the nature of her creation that distinguishes a “master-piece” from its plebeian (but still, in Stein’s view, valuable) cousins: and here it is unclear whether it is the form or the content of the creation – or perhaps, the nature of the insight it contains – that gives the master-piece its special quality. Still, originality and essence appear to be the most important features of a work or person of genius. Stein writes that “any woman in any village or men either if you like or even children know as much of human psychology as any writer that ever lived,” and things that “everyone knows” are not the proper concern of master-pieces (although they may, confusingly, provide a putative subject; a pretext for creativity) (1936a, 356-7). The concern of a master-piece, meanwhile, is the “thing in itself,” which Stein considers in the realm of “the human mind and entity” as opposed to “human nature or ... identity” (358).¹⁷⁹ Stein’s debt to the idealist philosophers is apparent here – and it is an

¹⁷⁹ While on balance he is singularly ungenerous towards Stein, in some respects I support B. L. Reid’s criticism of her definitions of “genius” and “master-piece,” and the assumptions that lie behind them. Reid notes that “Stein denounces most of what we are accustomed to consider the

allegiance that she shares with other American modernists, who, in their common concern with “things-in-themselves” saw their artistic projects as “attending and giving voice to ‘something which is actually present’” (Knight 2000, 74).¹⁸⁰ These artists, according to Christopher Knight, “recognize[d] the falsity in ordinary perception and expression” and sought, through their idiosyncratic styles, to capture the essences of things abstracted from prior concepts (ibid 73).

What, then, does Stein mean by the polarity mind/entity versus nature/identity – and how is it that “masterpieces” are artifacts of the former, and not the latter? I turn to *The Geographical History of America*, subtitled *The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind*, in which Stein further lays out her metaphysic. Here she describes “human nature” as that which connects us with our past experiences and those of the species: she writes,

When you climb on the land high human nature knows because[,] by remembering it has been a dangerous thing to go higher and higher on the land[,] which is where human nature was[,] but now in an aeroplane human nature is nothing remembering ... it is not anything that is a memory... (1936b, 374)

Meanwhile, in the human mind, “there is no remembering and no forgetting”: Stein’s “human mind” refers to consciousness in its fundamental, *a priori* state (what *that*

‘proper’ matter and manner of art” and condemns her “sweeping dismissals [of] the whole vast area of the ‘imagination,’” which she has “allocated to ‘minor’ or ‘precious’ writers...” ([1958] 2000, 296-7). I am not so intent as Reid to cling to tradition, but I would argue that, as with the case of all language-use, the concepts “genius” and “master-piece” are established by consensus (and, as Wittgenstein would argue, should not be defined, but rather observed). Stein may give us a narrow, eccentric, and occasionally convincing explication of these terms, but if they ignore common usage, they are useful only to herself.

¹⁸⁰ Quotation in Knight from William Carlos Williams’ *Imaginations* (1970, 81).

involves is another question). “Human nature,” meanwhile, is connected to instinct – to our ‘lower’ faculties – as becomes clear through Stein’s frequent discussion of dogs as both foils and cousins of humans. This choice reflects her domestic scenario, but also, by considering an animal privileged by humans as a sort of ‘honorary person,’ allows her to imagine just what it is that makes human consciousness unique. Stein takes for granted that dogs, like persons, have and express, mental contents: a dog “can have tears in his eyes when he has been disillusioned” – that is, dogs manifest distress – and, just as “any man[,] that is[,] women and children[,] can talk all day[,] or of a piece any day, dogs do too in the same way [–] not quite in the same way.” In other words, dogs communicate in some manner – and they communicate with humans – “You can say to a dog look ... and he does” (1936b, 375). Dogs will appear again when I discuss *The World Is Round*, but their significance here is that Stein uses them to characterize “mind” as that mental quality which is unique to human beings. Animal nature, she thinks, is on a level with “human nature,” and thus the capacities that humans share with animals (and for Stein’s purposes, canines are our closest kin) – tears; speech; recognition – cannot be those that distinguish “mind.”

“Human nature,” then, refers to our trivial selves that apprehend what is present in our experience: what “everyone knows,” even animals. “Mind” has access to something else – something that transcends both experience and memory. The respective objects of “human nature” and “the human mind,” then, seem very like the Kantian notions of phenomena and noumena. Whereas the noumenal world “is that reality as it is in itself,” the phenomenal world consists of “reality as it is represented in our experience”: and these two “realities” (or, more properly, reality and the impression

of reality) are “radically different.” According to Kant, “humans structure the objects of their experience in basic ways that do not reflect the intrinsic nature of objects as they are in themselves,” for our minds are only equipped to process phenomena (Martin and Barresi 2006, 172-3). The phenomenal world (or the experienced self in the sensate world), then, includes that which is familiar: what “everyone knows,” what our senses render in our consciousnesses. Meanwhile, the noumenal world – which consists of things-in-themselves – contains the material we fail to know because sense data only provide us with images.

Another crucial figure in the history of philosophy deserves to be mentioned here: Kant’s contemporary, David Hume. Hume uses the phrase “human nature” to refer to his own object of study: a “science” of human psychology in the phenomenal world that rejects the metaphysical interests of his predecessors and stands against those that appear in Kant’s philosophy (Morris 2009). Just as Stein’s references to the “thing in itself” signal her Kantian legacy, I take it that the phrase “human nature” is used in part to single out Hume’s ideas – and to express disinterest in what she deems a quotidian object of study. One of the repeated claims in *Geographical History* is that “mind” is “interesting” whereas “nature” is not. It should be taken into account, firstly, that this is an equivocal dichotomy: to call a concept “(un)interesting” tells us more about the namer than the object being named – specifically, it tells us that she wishes to be evasive. Setting aside Stein’s authorial games, if we assume that she is following (or perhaps, reinventing) Kant’s model, and spurning Hume’s and those of subsequent empiricists, defining “human nature” as “uninteresting” amounts to calling it so familiar

as not to be worth the effort of theoretical or artistic explication: which indeed, she has done, when she observes that “human nature” is what “everyone knows.”

One of the baffling refrains that run through *Geographical History* is the statement “the human mind has no relation to human nature at all” (e.g. 376). Assuming that Stein’s project is in part Kantian can help us make some sense of the proposed ‘lack of relation’ between “mind” and “nature” and their contents, noumena and phenomena. A significant difference between Stein’s theory and Kant’s is that for the latter, the “thing-in-itself,” or the “noumenon,” is but a “boundary concept”: since the idea “of pure, merely intelligible objects is entirely devoid of all principles of its application,” it “only serves, like an empty space, to limit the empirical principles” (Kant 1781/1998, 350, 353). To Kant it would not make sense to speak of ‘knowledge of noumena’ because phenomena are the only experiential resource that human beings have. Stein, meanwhile, proposes that “things-in-themselves” genuinely, as it were, exist – and hence that we can have knowledge of them. The mutual exclusivity of “the human mind” and “human nature” in Stein, then, suggests that she takes on Kant’s assertion that noumena and phenomena are fundamentally discrete categories, while still insisting that the former is within our reach. She treats ‘noumenal knowledge’ as a real aspect of mentality: that which is unconnected from the things we remember, and which identifies objects without using images obtained from the memory of other objects. This concept is central to Stein’s model of genius because “memory” – by which Stein also means the consciousness of one’s past selves and awareness of the present “I” as continuous through time – makes artwork “dull.” “The minute your memory functions while you are doing anything,” she writes, “it may be very popular[,] but actually it is dull.” (Hence,

Stein's outlandish efforts to capture the "continuous present" in her portraits and *Tender Buttons*.) Mental state is inextricably tied up in the object of production; "master-pieces" do not exist apart from the internal conditions of their inventors, and the manifestation of genius is a work's originality. Presumably in vindication of her own writing, Stein adds: "that is what a master-piece is not, it may be unwelcome[,] but it is never dull" (1936a, 359).

Stein's comments here seem very like those of a successor of Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer – one of the few modern philosophers to embrace the noumena/phenomena distinction, and who, according to Barbara Will, was read by Stein (Martin and Barresi 2006, 176; Will 2000, 73n). Schopenhauer explicitly sets human access to phenomena and noumena – or knowledge of "immanent" and "transcendent" ideas – in relation to works of artistic genius. Unlike Kant, and like Stein, he proposes that noumena exist as knowable entities, rather than imaginary extremes. I take Schopenhauer's use of "immanent" and "transcendent" from his "Immortality: A Dialogue" (1892), in which the philosopher's spokesman, Philalethes explains:

Transcendental knowledge is knowledge which passes beyond the bounds of possible experience, and strives to determine the nature of things as they are in themselves. Immanent knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge which confines itself entirely within those bounds; so that it cannot apply to anything but actual phenomena. (Schopenhauer 1892, 405; Barresi and Martin 2006, 191)

In Schopenhauer's essay "The Metaphysics of Fine Art" (1892), he explains his view of the relation between the two types of knowledge and artistic master-pieces.

Schopenhauer contends that an artistic genius has the unique capacity “to be freed from [him]self,” which is “what is meant by becoming a pure intelligence,” and further: “[genius] consists in forgetfulness of one’s own aims and complete absorption in the object of contemplation; so that all we are conscious of is this one object” (280). Stein too writes that the loss of self is crucial to artistic production, but she may disagree with Schopenhauer on the source of artistic transcendence. In the latter, it is contemplation that allows the artist to access transcendental knowledge, whereas in Stein, it is in action, or the moment of artistic creation – “when you are doing anything” – that you forget that “you are you” (Stein 1936a, 355).¹⁸¹ Both, however, are concerned with the paucity of master-pieces; in “Metaphysics,” Schopenhauer speculates about “why there are so few of them,” and his conjectures are in some ways similar to Stein’s. In the former, only “a knowing subject free from will” can achieve transcendental knowledge: “a pure intelligence without purpose or ends in view” (Schopenhauer 1892, 280). While nothing in Stein’s writing correlates to Schopenhauer’s concept of “will,” she shares his belief in the supremacy of “pure intellect,” a “condition of mind necessary in artistic creation” and yet “so rare,” because the plebeian mass is anchored in the concerns of memory and self (Schopenhauer 1892, 281). Stein does not moralize like her predecessor, but her insistence upon a transcendental basis for “master-pieces” reveals her intellectual roots, constitutes an apology for her theory and practice, and exposes her preoccupation with matters of identity and knowledge.

¹⁸¹ In addition to Will, Allegra Stewart is one of the few critics to set Stein alongside Schopenhauer, although she does not speculate about Stein’s sources, or about the differences between the two thinkers’ ideas about art, writing simply that, “like Schopenhauer, [Stein] saw in the Idea the abiding and the essential, and in art, the embodiment of reality. Though [Stein’s] emphasis is different, it seems ... that she must have agreed with nearly everything Schopenhauer says about the work of art” (Stewart 1986, 78).

One of the many curiosities of Stein's writing is that while she wittingly takes on the material that is the conventional object of western philosophy, she disdains the field as a whole, especially for its treatment of identity: "Philosophy tries to replace in the human mind what is not there," she writes, "that is time and beginning," and "[t]here are consequently practically no master-pieces in philosophy"; "Philosophy ... says human nature is interesting" but "it is not" (1936b, 457). I maintain that it is important to see Stein in relation to her philosophical forebears, in part because the orthodoxy of her ideas is sometimes neglected in criticism, but also because I shall be treating *The World Is Round* as a text in which the foremost concern is philosophical. What, then, does Stein intend when she rejects philosophical insight into consciousness, and how does it square with the claims I shall be making about the children's book?

In one of the autobiographical fragments of *Geographical History*, Stein recalls: "when I was at college I studied philosophy," which "was it they did not know what they saw[,] because they said they saw what they knew, and if they saw it[,] they no longer knew it because then they were two." After an even more impenetrable pair of sentences, she follows: "The minute you are two it is not philosophy that is through[,] it is you. / But when you are one you are through with philosophy, because philosophy has to talk to itself about it, anything but a master-piece does that[,] and if it does[,] then it is not one[,] but two" (1936b, 452). Presumably "they" in the first quotation refers to philosophers, and while it might illuminate matters if Stein were to share just who she has in mind, instead she hints that there is a flaw in philosophical – or perhaps, epistemological – practices as a whole: in the way philosophers conventionally "look at" their objects of study, which leads to redundancy and self-deception. The inversion of

the phrase ‘knew what they saw’ humorously suggests that Stein thinks “philosophers” only capable of making observations that match their expectations. Hence, because Stein believes that philosophers are trapped by their partial empirical method – which is reliant upon memory to identify phenomena “in relation” to images of known objects – she concludes that they deny themselves the possibility of noumenal knowledge. When she writes of “becoming two,” Stein seems to refer to some sort of divided experience in the acts of simultaneously ‘seeing’ whilst also ‘knowing what one sees,’ such that in the act of philosophical investigation one earns distance from, rather than proximity to, the “thing in itself.” To merely ‘see,’ without ‘knowing’ or ‘remembering’ what one perceives, then, is what makes an experience truly “artistic.” Because the conditions of creation give the artist access to recognizable things rendered unfamiliar by the suspension of self, Stein thinks, “master-pieces” are inimitable. Thus, she regards art, and specifically works by “geniuses” as the only suitable vehicle for getting at transcendental truths. This is a notion that she shares with Schopenhauer who, in the happy tradition of philosophers, also disdains philosophy, regarding it as incapable of “soar[ing] to supramundane things” (1892, 277).¹⁸² In the end, Stein belies her disdain, for she remains engrossed by questions of identity and in *The World Is Round* articulates a number of traditional philosophical concerns.

While in “Master-pieces” Stein is intent to dismiss any concern with identity as trivial, the repetitions and obsessions of *Geographical History* (like those of *The World Is Round*) are at odds with her professed lack of interest. Kirk Curnutt describes the central

¹⁸² This from “The Failure of Philosophy: A Brief Dialogue” (1892, 277-9), in which “A” holds that philosophers and other non-geniuses should concern themselves with phenomena, convincing “B” that “genius” both has access to transcendental knowledge, and suffers for it.

problem of *Geographical History* as “how we know who we are,” an issue that, while ostensibly “not interesting” to Stein, remains engrossing: “Unavoidable, a ‘nuisance’ that we tolerate” (Curnutt 2000, 291, 292). In particular, the reiteration of the phrases “I am I because my little dog knows me” and “what is the use of being a boy if you are going to grow up to be a man” suggest that Stein found questions about personal identity unavoidable (e.g. Stein 1936a. 355, 360). While the question of continuity between younger and older selves shows Stein referring to and rebuffing a long line of philosophers who touted the common-sense relational view of identity, her periphrasis around the issue of recognition allows her to broach an ineluctable difference between first and third person (or “inside” and “outside”) access to self.

In “Part IV” of *Geographical History*, Stein inserts “A Play,” “The Question of Identity,” into her essay, and it is in the subsequent pages that the relation between “I” and “my dog” are most obsessively repeated (1936b, 401).¹⁸³ Stein’s method for contemplating identity is cumulative – within *Geographical History*, she successively modifies a series of similar statements concerning knowledge of self. The nature of personal identity – as seen, also, in *Alice* and *Oz* – is a well-worn story that philosophers continue to wrangle over, and one of the purposes of Stein’s repetitions and permutations is to capture subtly different aspects of the issue. Like Rose, Stein is more intent to ask questions than to have them answered. One of her iterations of the topic

¹⁸³ Stein names and numbers the sections of *Geographical History* in no discernable fashion; for instance, there is no point in the text at which the “Play” clearly comes to an end. For these purposes, I don’t care to speculate about why Stein disturbs formal convention thus – if, indeed, there is any rationale other than play. Here, then I am concerned here with approximately five pages in which she speculates ‘dramatically’ about the relationship between self-knowledge and other-knowledge, as encapsulated in the issue of how “my dog’s” recognition of “me” relates to “my” own self-identification.

appears thus: “I am I because my little dog knows me, but perhaps he does not[,] and if he did I would not be I. Oh no oh no” (402). Here “oh no oh no” registers that, for good or ill, beings (elsewhere, Stein makes clear that non-human animals are included) are invested in a consistent sense of personal identity. It also might suggest that hinging one’s identity on another’s recognition is not a comforting way to retain knowledge of self. Alternately, Stein points to a difficulty in being identified ‘from the outside’ by others, despite ordinary changes to one’s person – which is intrinsically different from one’s own internal detection of selfness. Stein’s dog “knows” its master by connecting her with past selves, and hence she, in the present, is not ‘the same she’ that the dog conceives.

Brie Gertler writes that “[i]n philosophy, ‘self-knowledge’” can have different meanings: it can refer “to knowledge of one’s particular mental states,” but also, as I use the term here, it can mean “knowledge about a persisting self – its ontological nature, identity conditions, or character traits” (Gertler 2008, n.p.). One of the starting premises of philosophical discussions of both types of “self-knowledge” is that it appears to be qualitatively different from knowledge of others or of the outside world. For instance, my claim that I have a pain has a special status and authority in comparison to my claim that you have a pain or that the object in front of me is my husband. Philosophers argue at length about what is special about first person self-knowledge (some maintaining that it only appears to be special). In my epigraph to this chapter, I have cited a less well-known formulation of the recognition that takes place between “my little dog” and “I”: “If I am I then my little dog knows me.” Here Stein inverts the logical formula of the original statement, thus making clear that the problem with the claim “I am I because my

little dog knows me” is that, as she points out several lines on, “that does not prove anything about you it only proves something about the dog” (1936b, 403). In this way she articulates the basic rift between knowledge of self ‘from the outside’ and self-identification ‘from the inside’: or, that the first person experience of self “is irreducible to any third person ontology” (Searle 2004, 98). Part of the problem with identity, in Stein’s view, is that “recognition” of self can only be understood using the terms normally reserved for third person recognition, even though there is a distinctive and difficult-to-articulate sensation of ‘being I.’ This is what I understand by my third epigraph, when Stein writes: “It is very interesting to have it be inside one that never as you know yourself you know yourself without looking and feeling and looking and feeling make it be that you are some one you have seen” (1936b, 362).

While Stein’s meditations on the difference between “inside” and “outside” have been considered in previous criticism, the metaphysical implications of the problem are often set aside in favor of psychological questions. For instance, in his essay “Inside and Outside: Gertrude Stein on Identity, Celebrity, and Authenticity” (2000), Kirk Curnutt observes Stein’s “philosophical stance” in her considerations of identity, and inner and outer selves, but treats only the psychological aspects of these concerns as they relate to her supposed ambivalent feelings about her celebrity status (292). While I am to some degree sympathetic to Curnutt’s interpretation, what I want to focus on here is the way Stein gestures towards the epistemological problem that I also considered in my second chapter: that knowing self ‘from the inside’ is a specially ungraspable kind of experience. I contend that the strangeness and difficulty of first person ontology is one of the main concerns in a number of texts by Stein from the late thirties to the early forties (that is,

those discussed here, and also *Ida: A Novel* [1941]). In *Geographical History*, this can be seen in the obsessiveness with which she repeats formulations of the phrase “I am I,” for instance:

I am I yes sir I am I

I am I yes Madame am I I

When I am I am I I

Any little dog is not the same thing as I am I

Chorus. Or is it.

With tears in my eyes oh is it.

And there we have the whole thing.

Am I I.

And if I am I because my little dog knows me am I I.

Yes sir am I I.

Yes madame or am I I.

The dog answers without asking because the dog is the answer to anything that is the dog. But not I. Without tears not I. (1936b, 405)

Here Stein appears to take the problems of personal identity – the questions of “am I I[?]” and how being ‘inside’ oneself differs from perceiving others – to be a matter of great consequence: “the whole thing.” Not to forget my caution about interpreting Stein, it is also possible she means that within the context of the “Play” she communicates the “whole” problem of identity in the question, “[is] any little dog ... the same thing as I am I[?]” – which I take to refer to the distinct experiences of self as opposed to “any little dog.” The dog, then, could stand in for other persons (in other

words, for third person experience ‘from the outside’) or, more specifically, for animal consciousness as Stein uses it to represent her concept of (human) “nature” – in which case “I” exemplifies “mind.” When, below, she describes “the dog” as “the answer to anything that is the dog,” it is unclear whether the complement – “I” – refers to the speaker’s experience of the dog (an inside/outside distinction), or her experience of self in comparison to the dog’s experience of self (a mind/nature distinction).

These are both issues presented in *The World Is Round*, often via interactions between dogs and the protagonist, Rose. I shall treat the novel as composed of two sections: in the first, a series of vignettes that are at times both trivial and fantastical are used to characterize Rose, her foil Willie, and the round world upon which they live. In the second, Rose climbs a mountain, presumably to see from “up there” whether “the world” really is as round as she has been told. The animal interludes occur in the first part; in chapter one, “Rose is a Rose,” Rose has an altercation with a dog named P  p   who “was not hers but she said it was”: P  p   and Rose have different ideas about the ownership of P  p  , who “belonged to a neighbor and ... never did like Rose” (8-9). In addition to having a concept of self-ownership and the capacity to dislike, the dog P  p   is revealed to have a complex, yet plausible, mental life. Rose has instructed P  p   to perform an unnamed act; P  p   resents the instruction and abhors the act, and refuses to perform; Rose, in retaliation, shuts P  p   in a room for so long that he wets the floor, a deed “he had been taught never to do in a room”; when he is released, P  p   bites Rose in retribution, and refuses to interact with her ever again (9-10). This vignette represents familiar dog behavior in such a way that makes it difficult to question the existence of dogs’ rich mental contents, or something like minds: P  p   is able to communicate,

understand, learn, resent, have a sense of correct behavior, and most importantly, know – and his capacity to know is emphasized at the close of the anecdote when we are told that “Rose knew” why P  p   is shy of her, “and P  p   knew[,] oh yes[,] they both knew” (10). The dog seems almost a person. But in the nomenclature of *Geographical History*, all of these abilities would fall under the category “nature,” rather than “mind,” and Stein makes clear through the representation of a second dog that, notwithstanding the impressive faculties of “nature,” “the human mind” differs in special ways from animal brains.

Rose has a dog of her own, named Love, and girl and dog share in the activity of song – the vehicle through which Rose performs her main activity, thinking. Rose sings about the mystery of her identity:

Why am I a little girl

Where am I a little girl

When am I a little girl

Which little girl am I. (11)

When Rose sings, she cries: perhaps because she does not know the answers to her questions, or because the questions are inherently unanswerable, or because they are an engrossing, inescapable burden to her. (We might also recall the many moments at which the speaker in *Geographical History* considers difficult questions “with tears in [her] eyes.”) This is one of the many bewildering features of *The World Is Round* because it is never explained precisely why the matters that she contemplates in song are so distressing to Rose, and her weeping might not seem quite justified by the events of the

events of the plot. Critics have been inclined to read Rose's crying as evidence that she is "disturbed" or that *The World Is Round* is a story "about emotions" (Bridgman in Watts 1993, 56; Hoffeld 1978, 48). The interpretive issue that is at stake here concerns the analysis of affect: does the child-protagonist's recurrent weeping tell of a psychological or social trauma – a neurosis, as Richard Bridgman imagines, or a conflict between self and other – or are Rose's tears a signal derived from the repertoire of common child-behaviors to tell the imagined reader that the issues "considered" are critical? Do they show, then, that Stein sympathizes with the children who cry because their basic experience of self and world is perplexing? It should be clear that I think the latter – but crying is also important because it is an activity shared by dogs and humans, and Stein points this out in an effort to flesh out their differences and similarities. When Rose cries, Love cries too, but the dog's tears appear to be a manifestation of his communion with his mistress, for the canine activity that is contrasted with Rose's singing and thinking is drinking. Dogs perform necessary and instinctual activities, while human beings ask incomprehensible questions, experience perplexing feelings, and produce art.

Love is also set alongside undomesticated animals: first, in a brief sketch in which Rose's father sets the dog to "*help [a] rabbit*" that has been dazed by the headlights of their family car "*to run away*," and later, when Willie's lion is discussed (19). In the former instance, Love does not recognize the rabbit as prey – although the rabbit recognizes the dog as an attacker – because Love (unlike Pépé) is amicable: "that is the way Love was, he always went up and said how do you do[:] he said it to a dog or a man or a child or a cook or a cake or anything" (19). Animals, then, have what we call personality traits – and the capacity to be "disappointed," as Love is "because the little rabbit had not said

how do you do, back again” (20). Meanwhile, the rabbit’s response to Love is used to illustrate a difference between the sorts of knowledge possessed by wild and domestic animals.

Just as Rose thinks and sings about her own knowledge of self and world, she also contemplates the sources of Love’s knowledge – and this meditation is generated by the appearance of Willie’s lion. The most ‘fantastical’ of the ‘trivial’ vignettes in *The World Is Round* is a sequence in which Willie (who is introduced as Rose’s cousin, but in the coda undergoes an inexplicable change in identity, turns out not to be her relation, and becomes her husband) acquires a pet lion. This is perhaps the most unaccountable scene in a book that is for the most part naturalistic. Sutherland treats the lion scene as figurative: he writes that, “with the exception of the charming symbolical scene where people get human natures in the form of wild animals in boats ... the story takes the real as marvelous” (1951, 169-70). Meanwhile, Peter Schwenger considers the procurement of the lion “an act of fantasy,” and the imagined beast “a guardian for Willie’s identity” (1994, 118). Whilst both of these explanations are appealing, for they make sense of an puzzling aspect of the narrative, I am not yet convinced that we do well to nail the ‘lion scene’ to symbolism or fantasy. It is possible that Stein means for us to take her literally, or to be confused – since her comparison between wild, domestic, and human animals is an important part of her exploration of mind. Assuming Stein is more interested in philosophy than continuity, the status of the lion episode is beside the point.

At any rate, Willie soon gives his lion to Rose because it causes him inexplicable distress, and the narrator recalls a past encounter between Love and another lion. Love, we are told, barked his first bark, having never “spoken” before, when a truckload of

caged wild animals passed Rose and her family on the road. “Love just could not stand it,” we are told, “and he barked,” and Rose began to sing:

How does Love know how wild they are

Wild and wild and wild they are

How does Love know who they are

When he never ever had seen them before. (35)

Rose’s song raises two epistemological questions: one about the nature of animal knowledge, and the other about sources of knowledge. The latter is a baffling question that runs through *The World Is Round*: how is it that knowledge can come from sources other than experience? Why, furthermore, should Rose believe that “the world is round” when she has experienced only flatness in the parts of it with which she is familiar?

When Rose observes Love’s recognition that the caged animals are wild – that is, very different sorts of creatures from himself – she is led, further, to enquire into the distinction between wild and domestic animals, a question that, again, seems to lack an answer. She sings:

I wish ... I wish

I knew why wild animals are wild.

Why are they wild why why,

Why are they wild oh why

And once more Rose began to cry. (36-7)

Stein briefly asks similar questions about wild animals in *Geographical History*, although in the earlier text she is more explicit about the peculiar characteristics that humans use to

identify ‘wildness’: “If wild animals live as if they are wild,” she asks, “but they are kept healthy and not killed[,] are they wild[?]” She considers two additional criteria for wildness: “If they run away when they are seeing they are seen[,] are they wild[?]” and if “anybody who knows where they are knows they are there[,] are they wild[?]” (1936b, 416). The measures of wildness that Stein lists here constitute features of the observing, defining human, rather than the animal observed. In Stein’s idiom, we could say ‘this does not prove anything about the wild animal it only proves something about you.’ In *The World Is Round*, meanwhile, “something” is “proved” about Love when he barks at the caged beasts: presumably, that he has the capacity to recognize type, and experience himself as a different category of thing from the type recognized. In this excerpt we see, too, that Rose’s characteristic activities involve singing about difficult questions and weeping. Perhaps, then, part of Stein’s purpose is to sympathize with the children who ask engrossing, unanswerable questions (Matthews 1980, 39).

Rose’s counterpart, Willie, does not “romance”; his mode of being represents an alternative, less fraught, attitude to his identity. Willie is as convinced that ‘he is he’ as Rose is dubious that “Rose is Rose” – he recognizes himself, and his recognition amounts to identity. Willie sings:

My name is Willie I am not like Rose

I would be Willie whatever arose,

I would be Willie if Henry was my name

I would be Willie always Willie all the same. (15)

Rose, meanwhile, wonders at what ordinary language uses as a connection between name and self. The first question she asks in *The World is Round* is, “would she have been Rose if her name had not been Rose[?]” and this is an issue that continues to plague her (8). Willie’s quixotic assertion that he “would be Willie if Henry was [his] name,” meanwhile, helps to point out how inadequate a name is as a designator of self: a personal name is but the signal we use to identify (or “recognize”) a person, who presumably has a number of more significant distinguishing or identifying characteristics, some of them intractable. While Willie always returns to a state of confidence about his identity (and Rose to a state of doubt), his blitheness is interrupted at a moment in which he sees himself “from the outside,” thus illustrating Stein’s view, as it is expressed in *Geographical History*, that questions of self are largely an encumbrance. During what seems to be a sort of holiday in the chapter entitled “Willie and His Singing,” in which Willie sings rapturously about his new surroundings, it suddenly dawns upon him to wonder at the roundness of the world and his knowledge of self within the round world. He notices a lizard falling off the side of a house, asks whether, “if the earth is all round ... a lizard [can] fall off it,” and several lines on, encounters the distressing questions about self:

... *When I know yes when I know*

Then I am Willie and Willie oh

Oh Willie needs Willie to tell them so. (26)

Willie’s identity, in this moment, is hinged on “telling them”: as if identity needs to be articulated to be believed. The crisis ends almost immediately, when Willie sings, “*Once upon a time I met myself and ran,*” suggesting that in the moment of distress he experiences himself simultaneously from first and third person perspectives, and instead of

producing certainty, the feeling of self as “two” produces only doubt. The doubt is too uncomfortable to bear, so Willie swiftly returns to his usual state, in which, he sings, “*I do as I please ... I Willie*” (26).

Willie, for the most part, is the more tranquil character than Rose, and the attitude that Stein expresses towards the questions (or questioning) of identity in “Master-pieces” and *Geographical History* might suggest that his should be the favored temperament in *The World Is Round*. But Willie is uninteresting – he suppresses, rather than transcends, the question of his knowledge of self – and Rose, by contrast, constitutes a genius figure as it is described in “Master-pieces.” In the quest episode that makes up the second part of the novel, Rose undertakes to climb a mountain: an effort that allows Stein to depict the protagonist’s encounters with a number of different sources of knowledge: experience, received knowledge, superstition and, briefly, transcendent or a priori knowledge. For the moment I want to concentrate on the climactic scene, and its relation to the argument of “Master-pieces.” As we have seen, Rose is an inveterate thinker, and her mode of thinking is song. During her climb, however, she elects not to sing because “singing[,] or even talking[,] well[,] hearing anything even if it is all your own[,] like your own voice is[,] and you are all alone and you hear your own voice[,] then it is frightening” (74). Willie has had a single experience of ‘hearing his own voice’ and recognizing himself from the inside and outside simultaneously; Rose is more experienced, and knows to expect the terrors of recognition. Thus, in the next chapter, “Rose Does Something” (which immediately follows the above quotation), we are told that “Rose did not sing[,] but she had to do something” (75). “Doing something” is the phrase Stein uses in “Master-pieces” to refer

to the act of artistic creation, in which consciousness of self is obliterated. Hence Rose, in a state of abstraction, carves Stein's famous aphorism "*Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose*" around the trunk of a "lovely tree," and the details provided about the act of carving are minute (75-6):

It is not easy to carve a name on a tree particularly oh yes particularly if the letters are round like R and O and S and E, it is not easy.

And Rose forgot the dawn forgot the rosy dawn forgot the sun forgot she was only one and all alone there she had to carve and carve with care the corners of the Os and Rs and Ss and Es in *Rose is a Rose is a Rose is a Rose*. (76-7)

Rose, then, expunges awareness of self and world – and although her identity, "Rose is Rose" is the subject of her artwork, the loss of self-recognition that she experiences while producing it tells us that this, in Stein's model, is one of the rare and fleeting moments at which a "genius" creates a "master-piece."

My diagnosis of Rose as Stein's model of a genius is less important to the general argument of this dissertation than my claims about the educative potential of *The World Is Round*. I imagine that few non-specialist readers would benefit from the supplementary information provided by Stein's antecedent texts – although Rose's 'forgetfulness' during the act of carving is emphasized enough to make clear that this is a crucial feature of the episode. Here, then, I wish to reiterate what is surprising and delightful about the depiction of Rose and her "thinking" in *The World Is Round*. That is: Rose thinks obsessively, open-endedly about self and world. Thus far, I have not said much about "world," but I propose that in her representation of Rose's thinking about self, Stein

portrays and legitimates what some children do spontaneously – they ask unending, unanswerable philosophical questions about what it means to be a person – and she invites the children (and adults) that don’t already do so to take up the habit of inquiry. With this in mind, it is significant that in the opening sequence of *The World Is Round*, Stein identifies living creatures as having a basic interest in self: “everywhere there were men[,] women[,] children[,] dogs[,] cows[,] wild pigs[,] little rabbits[,] cats[,] lizards[,] and animals,” she writes, “and everybody[:] dogs[,] cats[,] sheep[,] rabbits and lizards and children all wanted to tell everybody about it[,] and they wanted to tell all about themselves” (7-8). “Telling about self,” in this sentence, is the elemental impulse to assert one’s existence or identity. By removing the adult human components, “men” and “women,” from the second list, Stein implies that the urge to “tell all about [oneself]” is a rudimentary (perhaps, in the language of *Geographical History*, a “natural”) drive. And the story that follows tells us that, whether or not Stein believed it herself, this is a drive towards which it is worth paying attention.

There is a second term in Stein’s model of the crucial aspects of living; I have already considered “self,” and the other object of interest is “world.” Alternately, one might say, the subject is “self” and the object is “world” – or that we have two basic sets of experience, of our “inside” subjectivity and the world “outside.” Stein, then, begins her children’s novel with a metaphysical statement of ‘how things are’: there is a world, and there are selves, and “That is the way it was” (8). (If Rose and the round world can be said to symbolize anything, I would say it is these two aspects of experience, respectively: the sensation of I, and the phenomena that are not-I.) The conventional opening line, “Once upon a time” – which is repeated, curiously, in the titles of two later

chapters that are significant for their banality – is a signal to genre, suggesting folk or fairy tale.¹⁸⁴ But the ensuing phrases are anti-climactic, obvious, trivial, or absurd: as long as there has been a “world,” presumably, it has been “round” – and one could travel “around” on it.¹⁸⁵ This is, in part, a nonsense device, in which “stating the obvious gets the text nowhere” by defying our expectation that the generic phrase “once upon a time” will introduce material that is new and interesting.¹⁸⁶ In addition to the subverting textual convention, however, the purpose of the formulation as it is used in *The World Is Round* is to direct a reader’s attention to ordinary reality in such a way that it appears incongruous, and hence worthy of inquiry: a fitting start to a text concerned with philosophical questions of personal identity and our knowledge of reality – matters which, for practical purposes we take for granted, but on closer examination are far from straightforward.

As I have noted, “roundness” is an idea, a quality, a type of movement that appears repeatedly and bafflingly in *The World Is Round*, often as the qualifier for things that are not-I, although both Rose and Willie experience distress when they discover roundness in their selves. In addition to “the world,” we are told that several other things are round: a lake in which Willie almost drowns; the moon, sun, and stars; Rose’s

¹⁸⁴ The twelfth and 29th chapters are also titled, and begin with the phrase, “Once upon a time” (44, 81). The former is concerned with Willie’s “being there” (“there,” of course, “was where Willie was”) and the return of his lion, which is now named Billie. In the latter, Stein reminds us that “Once upon a time way back there were always meadows with grass on them on top of every mountain,” before discoursing upon the elegance of grass and the difficulty of carrying a blue chair up a mountain.

¹⁸⁵ Watts implies that *The World is Round* has what I see as a parodic component, when she refers to it as “an innovative response to the formulas of spiritual narrative and the shape of what folklorists call the European magic tale”, and that it “decodifies master narratives of male quest, spiritual expression and authoritative speech” (1993, 53).

¹⁸⁶ See Stewart’s *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* ([1978] 1979, 47, 57, 63-6).

open, singing mouth; yellow peaches; a drum, and the wheels of the drummer's bicycle; Rose herself, whilst thinking; numbers; the letters of Rose's name, and the tree trunk around which she carves them; the word "Oh"; and finally, the motion of Willie's flashlight when he eventually finds Rose upon her true blue mountaintop (13, 21, 32, 42, 48, 52, 76, 80, 92). The diversity of objects and ideas in which roundness can be found tells us that this is an important notion – a motif, if not a symbol – but without revealing just what is significant about it. I have already suggested that this is a sort of trick that Stein likes to play on her few brave readers – and as such, that we might do just as well to undergo, enjoy, or tolerate "roundness" as to try and attribute meaning to it.¹⁸⁷ But the fact that roundness is a quality that many different sorts of things can have (including some things which are not "things") suggests that Stein means to point to some important metaphysical and/or phenomenological condition when she refers to the quality: notice this attribute which a number of widely different sorts of objects and experiences can share, she seems to say; isn't it odd? Indeed, Rose's observations of the more esoteric 'things that can be round' – numbers, persons, sounds – might tell us that the significance of "roundness" is that it is a term that gives us a way of accounting for or describing things we encounter. "Round" is a piece of information that we can provide to characterize something, implicitly by setting it alongside other things that we know to be "round," or by comparing it to the idea of roundness.

¹⁸⁷ Criticism of *The World Is Round* frequently sets the motif of "roundness" alongside the "circular" character of Stein's writing, often suggesting that Rose's difficulty is not so much that of locating self in "world," but rather in language (see, for instance, Rust 1996 and Schwenger 1994). The tendency in interpretations of Stein is to focus on form at the expense of content: an approach that is understandable, given that her style is so very peculiar and the content of her writing difficult to determine. In this analysis, however, it should be clear that my interest is primarily the content of *The World Is Round*, and since form has already been adequately dealt with, I mention the "shape" of the novel only inasmuch as it affects – that is, clarifies or mystifies – the concerns of the novel.

Martha Rust implicitly bases her understanding of the significance of roundness on a similar observation when she suggests that Rose is distressed by the quality because, since so many different things are round, roundness “devours individuality.”¹⁸⁸ This reading is compelling, but the interpretive step that describes a metaphysical or epistemological concern as a psychological one troubles me. Part of the problem is that, while Rose clearly has a worry about identity, she doesn’t seem remotely concerned with “individuality” as the term is usually employed. As I understand it, the desire for “individuality” is a psycho-social goal: the wish to see oneself as qualitatively different and special in comparison to others. But Rose is not after specialness, or self-definition, and she doesn’t seem to experience any conflict in her relationships with others – and while it is troubling that “self” and “world” share characteristics, there is no doubt where one ends and the other begins. Rose never mistakes herself for Willie. Rather, Rose’s interests, and her terrors, are philosophical: she wants to know what a self is, what the world is, and how we can know these things.

Viewed in this light, the trouble with roundness in *The World Is Round* is probably that, at least in the primary case of “the world,” experience received via perception does not match up with one of the first basic facts about reality that children learn. Towards the end of the first part of the novel, the Rose instructs herself to “look down at the ground”:

And what do you see

You see that the world is not round.

¹⁸⁸ Rust builds her interpretation on that of Bridgman, who writes that, in the presence of pervasive roundness, which “is the given from which everything proceeds,” and which “means perpetual continuation,” the “individual self loses meaning” (Bridgman 1970, 300).

That is what Rose said... (39)

Rose has in common with Carroll's Alice that both have been failed in predictable ways by normal education and common knowledge. Alice repeatedly appeals to schoolbook learning and common sense in order to ground herself epistemologically in Wonderland and Looking Glass Land, and repeatedly finds them inadequate to this task. Rose, meanwhile, knows from the start that her schooling has failed her, and her distress about the world's "roundness" arises out of the fact that nothing she has experienced proves this condition:

The teachers taught her
That the world was round
That the sun was round
That the moon was round
And that they were all going around and around
Not a sound
It was so sad that it almost made her cry
But she did not believe it
Because mountains were so high (21)

Rose's appeal to "mountains" might be a non sequitur – height isn't really incompatible with roundness, although one can imagine a naïve thinker making this error – but the disparity between what she has been "told" and what she experiences still adequately explains Rose's distress at the fact that "the world is round." She suffers, here, from epistemological incoherence – the testimony of the authorities from whom she is

supposed to learn does not match up with her perceptual experiences – and, combined with her unanswerable questions about self, the ordinary facts of reality give Rose plenty of reason to be upset. But what of the other instances of roundness? Rust suggests that cyclical and repetition are what torment Rose, and again, the evidence is suggestive but equivocal. My own, tentative suggestion is that the “other” instances of troubling roundness are meant to echo and emphasize the main problem, with “the world,” and the conflict between knowing and seeing that it represents. Because this problem is so unavoidable and baffling, Rose develops an obsession with roundness, which, when she looks for it, she finds everywhere.

Rose, indeed, is compulsively interested in the qualities of her experience, and this is why trivial events can be used to create a rich and stimulating investigation. During the quest sequence in the second part of the novel, an encounter with a mysterious creature leads Rose to contemplate life as the opposite of nonexistence, and nonexistence as a possible condition of being: “I wish I was not dead said Rose but if I am I will have torn my clothes” (56). With the coming of dusk, she considers the relationship between circumstances and meanings, including the possibility that her sensory experiences, as Bishop Berkeley suggested, are “a dream”:

It grew rosy they call it an alpine glow...

And then she knew yes she had heard it too,

Red at night is a sailor's delight

Red in the morning is a sailor's warning

And said she is it rose or red

And said she is it morning or evening

And said she am I awake or am I in bed

The appeals to aphorism, like that which Rose makes when she meditates on the word “red,” occur repeatedly during her climb. She seems to refer to common sense proverbialism as a source of knowledge to explain self and surroundings – since both testimony and perception seem to have been proved fallible – but sometimes the axioms that she remembers have no connection to her environment, and seem only to illustrate the arbitrary dictates of adults: “then she remembered about if you put shoes on a table it makes awful trouble” (61). One of the important inquiries that Rose makes during her climb is epistemological, when she invents her own colorful aphorisms, for instance: “if you see the new moon through a window with glass not any trouble will ever pass” and “if you see a girl or a woman dwarf it is more awful than any cough it is just awful awful all awful” (62). Rose’s invention of proverbs serves at least two functions here: one is to mock the didacticism of previous juvenile literature of the fairy tale form to which the structure of *The World Is Round* alludes, and the other is to refer to the difficulties of knowledge; of usefully explaining self and environment. Rose spots a figure on the mountain-side that she imagines is either a little boy or a male dwarf – the latter of which she interprets as a positive “sign.” But the narrator intrudes to warn, “it is so easy to believe whatever they say when you are all alone and so far away” (65), thus positioning Rose’s magical thinking in the context of adages or popular knowledge that come from external sources rather than from one’s own careful evaluation.

Finally, although Rose appears to achieve some sort of equilibrium from her long climb up the mountain and the two climactic scenes when she carves her name around a tree, and when she reaches the summit, sits “all alone on top of everything,” and “[is] so

pleased with sitting she just [sits]” (77, 87), resolution is only temporary. For when Rose “stop[s] to think” (her human vocation) she returns to her cycle of singing and weeping (88). One of the problems may be, indeed, that she thinks, but the most obviously distressing concern that occurs to her on the mountain-top is that of place:

And I am here

And here is there

Oh where oh where is there

Oh where.

And Rose began to cry *oh where where where is there. I am there oh yes I am there oh where is there.* (90)

Since location can only be usefully described relative to other locations, Rose cannot say where, essentially, she is, just as she cannot specify who she is. All of Rose’s questions are similarly intractable, and in posing them, Stein (re-) introduces her readers to the subject-matter of philosophy.

The World Is Round fits the rubric of “cerebral pleasures” a little less comfortably than do the *Alice* or *Oz* books, since its abstruseness makes its intellectual pleasures more difficult to extract than those of the earlier texts. However, Stein’s mode of delivery – the repetitive, song-like voice that mimics the verbal play of young children – calls upon readers to delight in the sounds of the story, independent of its meanings. And as in the case of the other works, no reader is promised that she will receive the ‘meanings’ proposed above. Still, one who is seduced by the melody may feel compelled to reflect upon why ‘she is she,’ how animal consciousness compares to human ‘thinking,’ how she

acquires knowledge, or how (or whether) to account for the differences between received and experienced information. Most importantly, in *The World Is Round*, the heroine is depicted as an irrepressible thinker, and inquiry as the natural pursuit of small children. Thus, Stein authorizes a manner and mode of pondering reality – that is, aloud, critical, lyrical – that many adults may be inclined to suppress or ignore when they encounter it in children. The promotion of what, in the end, is a style of philosophizing – of wondering at seemingly ordinary things – locates *The World Is Round* in a corpus of children's books that engage in and teach mental recreation, and thus it deserves the sort of critical and pedagogical attention that releases it from the constraints of developmental interpretations.

CONCLUSION

When I embarked upon this project I had hoped to be able to generalize about the appearance of philosophical material in children's literature: to come up with a theory of a type that would explain and anticipate the existence of similar content in a sub-field of juvenile fiction. I imagined (and still might tentatively maintain) that children's fantasy provides a uniquely hospitable home for philosophical themes – perhaps because of the genre's lineage in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, or as a consequence of the style of play that it tends to invite, or because the complete liberty to imagine all manner of unworkable scenarios in fantasy engenders thought experiments and investigation into the unresolvable issues like those I have contemplated above. The trouble is, very few works of children's fantasy, if any, are as persistently philosophical as the *Alice* books or *The World Is Round* (Baum's *Oz* books, I would say, contain ample material to qualify as “philosophical fiction,” but, as we have seen, they are inconsistent). Perhaps only Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* (1961) qualifies as genuine Carroll-type philosophical fantasy – and it is probably a very good thing that the form (if two samples make a “form”) does not have imitators.

Still, there are works of fantasy that intermittently ask or, more accurately, toy with, the concepts and methods of philosophy. I have noted that P. L. Travers' *Mary Poppins* series, as well as some of E. Nesbit's fantasies, engage in philosophical play at moments. There may also be the shadow of a philosophical interest early in J. M.

Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), when the Darling children's "minds" are conceived as physical containers, through which their mother "rummage[s]" (8).¹⁸⁹ Arguably, *The Water Babies* (Kingsley [1863] 1910) is partly philosophical: many of its comments hinge upon insights that have a philosophical character (for example, "no one has a right to say that no water babies exist till they have seen no water babies existing, which is quite a different thing, mind, from not seeing water babies" [57]) – although Kingsley's didactic intentions may override the novel's exploratory inclinations. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he attempts to use a type of argumentation that seems philosophical to support religious and political ideas. Meanwhile, Gareth Matthews has commented on philosophical content in A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books, among others (Matthews 1976, 11).

I have wondered whether children's literature as a type sanctions a sort of conceptual and verbal play that might seem frivolous, but is actually thoughtful, imaginative, and philosophical. It has also occurred to me that there is often something nonsensical about the books or episodes in which the sort of content with which I am concerned occurs. Certainly, this is the case in the *Alice* books, even though they fit the genre of fantasy better than that of literary nonsense. "Nonsensical fantasy," perhaps, is their mode – and maybe this is the category that I seek to elucidate philosophical children's books. Wim Tigges describes nonsense as "a genre of narrative literature which balances a multiplicity of meaning with a simultaneous absence of meaning" – hence, this is a type of writing that would seem to invite questions related to language, meaning, and sense – and questions, furthermore, that we cannot answer (1988, 47).

¹⁸⁹ Not to give too much weight to the philosophical aspects of this image, Barrie probably means to illustrate some children's sense or fear that their mothers can 'read their minds.' Still, it is difficult to avoid asking, in response to this passage in *Peter Pan*, what exactly a mind is.

Still, there are works of nonsense that are so intractable (for example, Edward Gorey's picture stories) that it is difficult to extract anything from them besides baffled hilarity.

On a different note, I have speculated about whether there are historical tendencies in philosophical fantasy for children. It seems to me that fantasy from the late-twentieth century onwards is qualitatively different from that written during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. More recent fantasy sometimes contains philosophy, but its explorations of character and emotion, and its literary qualities tend to be richer and deeper than those of the earlier books. Fantasies by Russell Hoban and Diana Wynne-Jones, for instance, contemplate philosophical ideas (how does time work? What is it to be a person?), and they are also dense and probing in their explorations of character and relationships – and it would be inaccurate to say that their concern is largely or characteristically philosophical, even though philosophy makes a plain appearance.

Finally, there are also a number of picture books that are clearly philosophical, including both well-known texts like Margaret Wise Brown's *The Important Book* (1990) and obscure artifacts from the short-lived Harlin Quist publishing house, in particular Eugene Ionesco's *Stor[ies] Number[s] 1 to 4*. I have also mentioned Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad* books above. Meanwhile, Haynes and Murris, and others who teach children philosophy, discuss additional examples that they have used in their classrooms. No doubt philosophical picture books work differently from novels that take on similar sorts of content: because the books are shorter, a single topic can be sustained for the length of a story, while their illustrations allow concepts to be imagined visually, and the frequent contradictions between word and image add a layer of doubt.

I conclude, then, with reference to John Morgenstern's *Playing with Books* – which, similar to my study, has as its central concern the idea that play is crucial to juvenile literature. I have focused here on the particular type of play that children's books can produce: that is, not play as a physical, and perhaps communal activity, but rather as something that can take place in one's mind. Furthermore, I have been concerned with the few texts whose play is distinctly philosophical: those that are concerned with unpacking and manipulating basic concepts and language; and that do not seek answers to the questions they implicitly ask, but rather to manipulate and expand the issues with which they are concerned. Morgenstern explains that his subtitle, *A study of the Reader as Child* is devised "to evoke the sense of how the children's novel can rekindle in [adults] the pure pleasure of the play of the text, a pleasure that can all too easily be lost in a rage for interpretation" (2009, 209). His purpose is in a large part to defy the pessimistic trends in children's literature criticism that I discussed in chapter one. Meanwhile, my intention is to direct attention towards a type of activity that might be called "interpretation" whilst retaining – or rather, deepening – its playfulness.

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