

**“THE LONG-DEFENDED GATE”: JUVENILIA, THE REAL CHILD, AND THE
AESTHETICS OF INNOCENCE, 1858-1939**

by

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Scholars frequently protest against reference to the real child in relation to adult-authored children’s literature. My dissertation exposes the fundamental flaw in extending this injunction to the literary production of real children. By recovering the wildly popular, critically acclaimed and bestselling juvenilia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I contend that child-authored texts make manifest individual children’s absorption and manipulation of culture. Although critics such as Beverly Lyon Clark aptly note a growing bifurcation of children’s and adult’s literature at the turn of the century, I argue that adult and child authors alike participated in the construction of the “real child” as a trope of literary representation. In highlighting the centrality of the child’s individualistic voice to both juvenilia’s success and canonical literature’s innovations, however, I resist literary-historical narratives that characterize the era of the Cult of the Child as one straightforwardly invested in childhood innocence. Instead, I claim that authors such as Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mark Twain joined the contemporary critics of child writers such as Marjory Fleming and Opal Whiteley in promoting a highly paradoxical aesthetics of innocence integral to the pursuit of narrative authenticity. I illustrate how the co-existence of idealized notions and pragmatic concerns regarding children in this time rendered the “long-defended gate” of childhood a prized but flexible boundary between innocence and experience. In keeping with such developments as the play movement, child study, and child-centered education, adults not only perceived children’s precocious talents as directly dependent

upon their naiveté, but also went to great lengths to school children in this natural state. By reading juvenilia as children's literature, however, I offer an interpretative methodology that resists Romantic binaries positing adults' and children's knowledge as distinctive from one another. Far from supporting Jacqueline Rose's thesis that literature "colonizes" children, I assert that juvenilia marketed to young readers reveal the ways in which real children may actively engage with constructions of innocence and overcome the "impossible" power imbalance between children's literature and children.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	VIII
1.0 INTRODUCTION: “THE LONG-DEFENDED GATE”: REAL CHILDREN AND THE PARADOXES OF INNOCENCE	1
2.0 “AS FOR REGANING MY CHARACTER I DESPARE”: MARJORY FLEMING, <i>HUCKLEBERRY FINN</i> , AND THE AESTHETICS OF INNOCENCE	22
2.1 FLEMING AND HER ADMIRERS	28
2.2 HUCK AND THE CRITICS.....	46
3.0 “LIVE TO LEARN AND LEARN TO LIVE”: THE ST. NICHOLAS LEAGUE AND THE VOCATION OF CHILDHOOD	66
3.1 “ANOTHER KIND OF CHILDREN”: EARLY CHILD CONTRIBUTORS TO ST. NICHOLAS	71
3.2 “FOUR HUNDRED ANGLO-SAXON WORDS”: THE ST. NICHOLAS LEAGUE AS GREAT COMPARATIVE SCHOOL	77
4.0 READING INNOCENCE: JUVENILIA AND THE PROTO-MODERNIST VOICE... ..	98
4.1 DAISY ASHFORD, OPAL WHITELEY, AND THE INNOCENCE-KNOWLEDGE SPECTRUM.....	104

4.2	“HER VISION OF HIS VISION OF HER VISION”: ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AND HENRY JAMES’S CHILDREN	123
5.0	“GENUINE CHILD’S PLAY”: AUTHENTICATING THE FICTION OF THE INNOCENT PROFESSIONAL.....	143
5.1	“BY CHILDREN, ABOUT CHILDREN, FOR CHILDREN”: HULL AND WHITLOCK’S <i>OXUS</i> TRILOGY	153
5.2	“THREE CHILDREN COME ALONG AND COUGH AND OUT COMES A BESTSELLER”: THE ABBES’ TRAVEL MEMOIRS	176
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	196

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1.0 INTRODUCTION: “THE LONG-DEFENDED GATE”: REAL CHILDREN AND THE PARADOXES OF INNOCENCE

Between 1919 and the advent of World War II, an unprecedented vogue for child-authored texts peaked, with at least fifty-six juvenilia appearing in the 1920s and seventy-four in the 1930s.¹ These books were published by major houses such as Putnam, Macmillan, and Knopf and reviewed by critics in national newspapers like the *New York* and *London Times*. In this dissertation, I argue that these now mostly forgotten texts are not marginal ephemera, but rather key cultural artifacts that offer an alternate narrative about not only the relationship of real children to Anglo-American literature, but also the construction of innocence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through my analyses of juvenilia, I call into question the widespread notion that adults in this time period guarded the divide between their own experiences and those of children without ambivalence. Instead, contemporary responses to these texts reveal profoundly paradoxical definitions of innocence that blur such lines, allowing readers to credit the child author simultaneously for her knowledge of literary convention and her

¹ These figures are based upon Jane B. Wilson’s bibliography of published children’s writing and represent texts written by authors under eighteen and issued by major publishing companies in the United States or England. These numbers do not include anthologies or privately printed materials. My own research suggests that there are famous texts missing from Wilson’s 1982 compilation, such as Pamela Brown’s *The Swish of the Curtain* (1941). See Wilson, *Children’s Writings*.

transcendence of tired forms, her arduous work and her spontaneous play, her acumen and her naiveté. In the following chapters, I articulate a methodology for interpreting child-authored texts that highlights the reading practices common to not only juvenilia, but also adult-authored texts, practices that both invoke and complicate the binary between naiveté and maturity. Recognizing that the “innovations” of these texts frequently rest upon the presumption of such a binary provides the opportunity to reconsider literary-historical narratives that frame literature as exclusionary of real children.

Beginning with Daisy Ashford’s wildly popular satire of Victorian romance, *The Young Visitors* (1919), the juvenilia of this era enjoyed critical and commercial successes that speak to their cultural significance. Hugh Walpole, for instance, ventured that Ashford’s novella would join *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* as an immortal text of the English language (455). The serialization of Opal Whiteley’s childhood nature diaries in *The Atlantic Monthly*, and their subsequent publishing as *The Story of Opal* (1920) attests to the journals’ popularity. That the *Christian Science Monitor*’s reviewer joined other readers in perceiving Whiteley as “one of a company” with Wordsworth and other poet-naturalists, however, indicates that readers considered the young author’s records more than a passing source of amusement (“Amazing Tale” 3). In 1936, Patience, Richard, and Johnny Abbe’s travel memoir *Around the World in Eleven Years* topped the *New York Times* bestseller list with *Gone With the Wind*.² A few years later, May Lamberton Becker of the *New York Herald-Tribune* declared Katharine Hull and

² On August 2 and September 13, 1936, *Around the World in Eleven Years* was the number one bestselling non-fiction text according to the *New York Times*, while *Gone With the Wind* was the number one fictional work (“Best-Selling Books” BR12, BR18). Until 1942, the *New York Times*’s bestseller list was published roughly once a month; reports of top regional book sales appeared weekly. *Around the World in Eleven Years* first earned a spot on the national list on May 3, 1936; the book maintained a position of eighth or better until January 31, 1937, and was listed as the third bestselling non-fiction text of 1936 (“Best-Selling Books of 1936,” 102).

Pamela Whitlock, the young authors of *The Far-Distant Oxus* and its two sequels (1937-1939), “among our steady providers of children’s literature” (7). These varied markers of respect just begin to suggest the admiration and curiosity that child-authored texts incited (not to mention the controversies) as well as juvenilia’s subsequent ramifications for our understanding of literary criticism’s segregation of the child’s voice from the adult’s.

While the childhood writing of established authors such as Jane Austen or Charlotte Brontë have recently received more critical attention,³ juvenilia by children who did not pursue later careers in literature continue to be all but neglected by critics. A substantial if under-investigated body of literature, these once-famous and highly lucrative texts demonstrate that children participated in their era’s appropriation of childhood and the “real” child’s voice as a means to achieving literary authenticity. Beverly Lyon Clark convincingly argues that children’s and adult’s literature underwent an increasing bifurcation at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ While the literary intelligentsia may have marginalized children’s literature, however, cultural notions of the child and the childlike became increasingly central to the project of realism. Works such as Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew* (1897), which I discuss alongside juvenilia in Chapters Two and Four respectively, posit the child as a source of superior integrity and honesty. By foregrounding Huck and Maisie’s perspective, these authors in turn suggest that the child’s faulty comprehension of

³ Thirteen articles on Jane Austen’s juvenilia (the first collection of which was published in 1922) appear in the MLA International Bibliography, in addition to one full-length book collection, *Jane Austen’s Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, edited by David J. Grey. A similar search of the MLA database yields six articles on Charlotte Brontë’s juvenilia, as well as two on the juvenilia she collaborated upon with her siblings. In contrast, Daisy Ashford’s *The Young Visitors* (1919)—a bestselling book continuously in print since its initial publication and most recently adapted by the BBC into a film directed by David Yates (of *Harry Potter* fame) and starring Jim Broadbent and Hugh Laurie (2003)—has garnered only four scholarly articles.

⁴ See *Kiddie Lit*.

literary or social convention can lend authenticity to realist literature and what they increasingly felt were mechanical attempts at representation. Whereas previous scholarship has treated this formulation—no less constructed in its notions of reality than previous literary models—as a distinctly adult enterprise, my work with juvenilia illustrates that children, too, co-opted contemporary constructions of childhood in their writing. The young authors of the St. Nicholas League whom I discuss in Chapter Three, for instance, craft paeans to nature and childhood’s preciousness, skillfully and self-consciously responding to editors’ prescriptions to write “what they know” with the full knowledge that the individual’s experience should conform to pre-dictated parameters set largely in accordance with Romantic notions of innocence. Despite these Romantic overtones, the result of the magazine’s writing contests was not the fantasy literature typically associated with such ideals, but realistic prose emphasizing the child’s engagement with the material world. Indeed, the child’s perspective on the contemporary world was so highly valued that the most popular juvenilia for either adults or children—some of which I discuss in Chapter Five—were typically non-fiction texts lauded for their depictions of “ordinary” childhood, no matter how extraordinary the child authors’ experiences or writing abilities. This aspect of juvenilia supports scholars’ conceptualization of children’s literature as an increasingly realistic genre in the early to mid-twentieth century. These texts share with the era’s adult-authored children’s fiction a highly idealized notion of real children’s lives, which despite better enforced labor laws and compulsory schooling, included daily contact with financial and social woes that these texts represented as alien to or, at the very least, surmountable by their child characters.

Given the popularity, acclaim, and theoretical opportunities opened up by twentieth-century juvenilia, the scarcity of scholarship on these texts begs the question: why have critics all

but ignored this body of literature? Perhaps scholars have been reluctant to broach these materials because interpreting juvenilia in the same manner one would interpret other texts necessitates crediting young authors with the ability to navigate both literary conventions and the rhetoric surrounding childhood. A small but vocal coterie of children's literature critics have argued specifically against the real child's inclusion in literary studies, subsuming Jacqueline Rose's idea that there is an "impossible" relationship between adults and children that renders children outsiders to the process by which their literature is produced (1-2).⁵ By investigating the ways in which young authors absorb, repeat, but also sometimes revise dominant notions of childhood, my work implicitly questions Rose's assumption that the power imbalance between children and the adults who oversee literature's production stymies children's abilities to discern and respond to the culture surrounding them. The presence of contemporary constructions of childhood in juvenilia that I note above may suggest, as Perry Nodelman claims, that children "learn childlikeness from children's books" and other cultural artifacts (*Hidden Adult* 12-3). However, the child's ability to wield these conventions does not mean that she is incapable of perceiving or altering them. In Chapter Five, I consider at length Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's popular *Oxus* children's series, which relays the pastoral adventures of six youngsters on holiday in Exmoor. Here, I show that contemporary reviewers of the novels once again lauded the young authors' ability to replicate ideas of childhood common to the culture. However, I also claim that Hull and Whitlock's overtly "healthy" portrayal of children at play in nature belies their narrative's more idiosyncratic version of childhood. Empowered rather than constrained by

⁵ Karen Lesnik-Oberstein is one of the most vocal of these critics. While she is careful to stress that she's not arguing against the existence of actual children, she contends that the differing realities of and beliefs surrounding individual childhoods means that critics of children's literature may only legitimately work with constructions of childhood. See *Children's Literature* 3-36.

their relationship to and knowledge of culture, the young *Oxus* protagonists exemplify the ways in which authors of juvenilia revise notions of childhood competence.

Recognizing the way in which young authors negotiate concepts of childhood means moving away from the constrictive binary between innocence and experience that dictates that children are either wholly naïve of social constructs or wholly acculturated, and therefore unnaturally “adult.” When interpreting texts in which a child’s voice appears (whether written by an adult or a young author), scholars have tended to reinstate this binary. In their otherwise sophisticated criticism, such scholars thereby unwittingly replicate Romantic ideals, obscuring real children’s relationship to both culture and literature. Although Nodelman, for example, credits child authors with the skills to imitate or even challenge contemporary constructions of childhood, he presumes an implicit divide between adults’ and children’s ways of experiencing culture when he concludes that “a text genuinely expressive of childhood or childlike thinking as experienced by a child would lack a fundamental defining quality of children’s literature” (*Hidden Adult* 148). Discounting the possibility that children’s writing can be children’s literature, Nodelman supposes that children are by definition unconscious and uncritical of discourses of childhood. In a similar fashion, Alexandra Johnson notes “the eroding effects of socialization on talent and identity” in Marjory Fleming’s childhood diaries (first published in 1858) as the author ages, a perception dependent upon the notion that the child’s natural state is one of happy, inspired oblivion that exposure to society can only corrupt (97). Even contemporary readers who credited juvenilia’s authors with literary craftsmanship or other signs of conscious art seem unable to resist the equation of the author’s innovations with their age. For instance, Margery Williams Bianco, best known as the author of *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922), calls thirteen-year-old Barbara Newhall Follett’s second book, *The Voyage of the Norman D.*

(1928), “a fine, sustained, and vivid piece of writing that would do credit to a writer of any age.” While this comment suggests her recognition of the author’s skill independent from her status as a child, Bianco adds that she “very much doubt[s] whether an older mind would have got so much out of the experience or brought nearly so much to the writing of it” (943)—a conclusion that reinstates an implicit binary between the child’s and the adult’s existence, with the child privy to superior intuition and (ironically) therefore to superior artistic abilities as well. As Mitzi Myers aptly observes, such assessments of children’s writing are problematic because

as long as the only metanarrative we have is the tired Romantic tale of wise child philosophers interfered with and suppressed by adult culture, we can’t tell the story of the juvenile passage from *infans* (literally, the being before language) to forked tongue (the being who moves easily among multiple languages, *making* a self from what’s available, rather than uttering the intuitive). (66)

Expanding beyond these boundaries allows us to engage critically with constructs of the “real” child as well as with the historically underrepresented individuals to whom such notions refer. In their foundational collection on juvenilia, *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf*, Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster occasionally lapse into the binary thinking Meyers warns against by referencing the child’s separate, “authentic vision” of the world, or falsely conjecturing that the child author’s assumption of literary power is dependent upon her “appropriation of the adult world” (McMaster 66; Alexander 11). In this dissertation, I build upon their groundbreaking assertions elsewhere in their collection that admirably credit children with a “literary self-consciousness” that transcends age (Alexander and McMaster 5).

At the same time that reading juvenilia can offer examples of empowered children who actively respond to their time’s circulating ideas of childhood, reading contemporary responses

to juvenilia's publication offers a broader understanding of the era's notion of innocence itself. David Sadler characterizes the fad for child authors in the 1920s⁶ as reliant upon an adult investment in childhood purity, suggesting that any juvenilia whose authenticity came under suspicion elicited angry reactions: "those [works of child authors] about whose innocence there could be no doubt," he claims, "were the ones who captured the hearts of readers" (24). Sadler fails, however, to consider precisely what innocence signifies for juvenilia's early twentieth-century audience. Given the perpetuity of a child-adult binary in reviews, publisher's notes, and other relevant ephemera, scholars may readily perceive readers of juvenilia as representing the Romantic attitude toward childhood often noted in literary-historical accounts of the era. While the authors of such accounts certainly do not represent innocence as a static category, they fail to recognize the degree to which paradox characterizes the time period's definitions of the concept. Having inherited Romantic notions of the child's innate spontaneity, moral superiority, and transcendent kindredship with nature, parents, educators, and psychologists increasingly found themselves in the role of enacting measures to secure this state, rather than merely admire its natural existence at a remove. Throughout this dissertation, I term the co-existence of these idealized and pragmatic notions surrounding childhood "neo-Romantic." I use this term to suggest the early twentieth century's flexible notion of innocence, wherein traditional ideas of the child's purity were re-made to co-exist uneasily with modern issues of children's schooling, labor, and changing modes of recreation. In the following chapters, I argue that the increasing attention children's experiences received contributed to a cultural ethos in which innocence was both carefully circumscribed and joyously encroached upon by adult readers; both a wholly

⁶ Reviewers of juvenilia frequently commented on this trend; the *Boston Transcript*'s review of Follett's *The House Without Windows*, for instance, begins with the proclamation that this "evidently" is "the day of child-writers" (4).

natural component of childhood and an existence to be cultivated or striven after; both a prerequisite to healthy play and the means to the child's professionalization.

Far from being uniformly defined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, innocence was in fact an absurdly elastic state. The rhetoric surrounding the publication of Barbara Newhall Follett's *The House Without Windows* in 1927, the year the author turned twelve, epitomizes this flexibility. Follett's novel is the fantastic tale of a young girl named Eepersip who leaves her parents' home to live in the wild, evading capture until she finally is transformed into a wood fairy. Although reviewers lauded the text as a masterful piece of storytelling, they simultaneously perceived the novel as the "overflow from the clear reservoirs of a nine-year-old imagination" and evidence of the child's "escape from the tiresome world of grown-up mechanisms and compromises" (Lechlitner 3, Dodd 592). Critics writing in this vein espouse one of the paradoxes inherent to neo-Romantic conceptions of childhood innocence: the child's acuity—her ability both to write within and improve upon literary conventions—is directly dependent upon her naiveté. Henry Longan Stuart, reviewer for the *New York Times*, encapsulates this neo-Romantic stance when he asserts that despite Follett's "meticulous literacy," her novel is "the fruit of one of those impulses" which she would never be able to express "more truly and vividly" if she were to write until age ninety. He surmises further that "there can be few who have not at one time or another coveted the secret, innocent and wild at the same time, of a child's heart," rejoicing that "here is little Miss Barbara Follett, holding the long-defended gate wide open and letting us enter and roam at our will over enchanted ground" (5).

Such readers not only envision innocence as an inviolable component of childhood, but also perceive access to this enviable state as a means to refreshing both literary representation

and the adult's dissipated relationship with life and nature. Another contingent of Follett's critics recognized the paradoxical nature of this conception of innocence; these readers feared that the act of "roaming at will" through the young author's mind was one of trespass with potentially long-term damaging effects for the child herself. In other words, the very prose that revealed the child author's innocence to some readers signaled its end to others through the child's association with commercial or professional enterprise. Although children's librarian and noted critic Anne Carroll Moore has "only words of praise" for *The House Without Windows*, for instance, she queries "what price" Barbara Follett will "have to pay for her 'big days' at the typewriter" (348). Noting that the young author assiduously reconstructed at age nine the manuscript she lost to a fire at age eight, Moore concludes that Follett's "professional attitude toward writing [. . .] seems to me less a matter for congratulation than for keen regret over certain inalienable rights of childhood which she is bound to have forfeited by that same token" (349).⁷

As Moore's comments reveal, precocity was a chronic cause for concern among contemporary readers of juvenilia. Reviewers like Moore were made anxious by signs of the child's professionalism and her understanding of literary convention or worldly matters because these traits seemed to be indicators that the child's innocence was endangered. Critics like Stuart above, however, paradoxically interpreted the young authors' "inspired" prose or commentary upon adult issues as indicators of the child's *absolute* innocence. Perceptions of young authors' precocity were often thus closely linked with perceptions of their innocence: that is, the so-called

⁷ When twelve years later, at the age of twenty-five, Follett walked out the door of her Brookline apartment never to be seen again, it was as if she were fulfilling Moore's worried critique. Having suffered both emotionally and financially from her parents' divorce, by her early twenties Follett was working as stenographer, a more prosaic application for the typing skills she acquired when she was four years old.

proof of one trait was often also the proof of the other, showing just how unsettled the idea of innocence was in this time period. Answering the “charge” of precocity leveled at his daughter, for example, Wilson Follett argues that Barbara is “an example of the norm of childhood, undevastated by the average perversion” because she has been “let alone” (“Notes” 9). Although Follett makes mention of her early use of a typewriter, and her interest in Beethoven and Roman history, his emphasis is upon Barbara’s freedom from culture: “pains were taken with her upbringing—pains to stand out of her sunlight, to give her air, to let her go it” (11). Subsequently, his daughter is able to write with the “sunlight that would saturate *any* child’s consciousness if we could only make up our minds to give nature half a chance” (10, emphasis in original). Follett’s denial of his precocious daughter’s precocity recurs in the prefaces of many juvenilia, wherein adult editors, publishers, famed authors, or other parents repeatedly claim that the child’s extraordinary work directly corresponds to the ordinary, but wondrous, nature of unadulterated childhood.

Such contradictory methods of delimiting the child’s purity indicate that innocence was a less narrowly defined concept in the early twentieth century than scholars such as David Sadler have typically represented it. It is true that whether contemporary critics perceive Follett’s novel and other juvenilia as cause for celebration or concern—whether they fight to bolster neo-Romantic notions of the real child or to safeguard the lived experiences of actual children—they express an implicit investment in childhood innocence.⁸ However, the various definitions of innocence evidenced in contemporary responses to juvenilia—the young authors of which write

⁸ Naomi J. Wood notes an apparent gender divide in the reviews of Follett’s work, with female critics tending to treat Barbara as a subject, while men perceived her as a passive conduit (49). My research indicates, however, that despite the slightly less idealized nature of many women’s reviews, both male and female responses to juvenilia demonstrate inherent contradictions in their attitudes toward childhood and its productions.

both from within and around these competing constructs—highlight the paradox of childhood’s “long-defended gate”: namely, that its enclosures both quarantine childhood from the larger world *and* make possible adults’ entry into its sacrosanct sphere.

While I work, therefore, from the same premise as James Kincaid in that I see innocence as a shifting notion often appropriated to suit adult needs, the inclusion of juvenilia in my research allows me to move beyond his conclusion that society inflicts this “empty” category upon children and thereby sets limits on the type of power they may possess. In keeping with Kincaid’s conceptions, Carolyn Steedman presumes that while charming artlessness is something which children may learn, it is “not so much *performed*—for that suggests children’s intention and complicity in enacting something—as *recognised* by adults watching them” (147, 97, emphasis in original). In contrast to these critics, I allot children their share of credit (or blame) for their conscious revision and participation in the cultural constructs that scholars such as Perry Nodelman presume inescapably “colonize” or otherwise blindsides the young. Like Marah Gubar, who argues that authors of Golden Age children’s literature and other adult participants in the Cult of the Child express a self-conscious ambivalence concerning Romantic constructs of innocence, I claim that both detractors and proponents of juvenilia demonstrate an often-contradictory conceptualization of childhood. Much as Gubar recognizes the young character or reader’s agency to “renovate” literature and the version of reality it espouses (57), I also trace the child author’s engagement with notions of innocence, whether she plays to popular constructs or circumvents them in her prose.⁹

By reading both juvenilia and adult-authored texts that operate through either a central child narrator or perspective, I not only afford juvenilia the respect of locating them in one of

⁹ See Kincaid 4-7; Nodelman, “The Other,” 29-35; and Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 3-38.

several possible literary contexts, but also reveal these works' common investment in capturing the child's voice. In Chapter Two, I discuss two antecedents to juvenilia's peak in the 1920s and 1930s: child diarist Marjory Fleming's journals and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Fleming was only eight years old when she died in 1811, leaving behind copybooks filled with her poems, letters, and memoirs. Pairing Fleming's diaries, which appeared in numerous editions between 1858 and 1935 and continue to this day to be in print,¹⁰ with Mark Twain's novel demonstrates the degree to which adults turned to the child's voice as the means to a truer form of expression—whether that voice was fabricated by the adult author or “innocently” recorded by the child herself. Contemporary reviews and criticism of these works illustrate that readers equated the child's unconventional or flawed prose with his/her superior morality. Hence, the supposed innocence of the child translates into a more authentic or truthful representation of reality, free of the compromising constraints of both literary and social conventions. While the equation of ethics with “truthful” or authentic literature may seem particular to nineteenth-century literature and its criticism, in this chapter I argue that current methods of reading Fleming's juvenilia resemble those of early reviewers of *Huck Finn* who predicate their assessments of Twain's text upon their assessments of the title character's innocence. Presuming a divide between Fleming's naïvely singular voice and the acculturated adult's, recent critics perpetuate the binary between innocence and experience that my analysis of juvenilia seeks to unsettle.

¹⁰ In 1858 H. B. Farnie published the first edition of Fleming's work, *Pet Marjorie: A Story of Child Life Fifty Years Ago*, which blended biography with excerpts from the journals. At least one edition of these journals (compiled by different editors and with varying degrees of space committed to Fleming's actual prose) has been continuously in print since, with the first complete version of her work appearing as a collotype facsimile in 1934, edited by Arundell Esdaile. For more on the publication history of Fleming's diary, see Chapter Two.

In Chapter Three, I turn my focus to the young authors of the St. Nicholas League writing contests whose work reflects a shift in the perceived relationship between childhood and conventional competence. Here I argue that *St. Nicholas Magazine* editors Mary Mapes Dodge and Albert Bigelow Paine espoused the emerging cultural assumption that childhood itself was a form of vocation—a state achieved only through unrelenting perseverance and adult guidance. In urging their young contributing authors to be *more* “childlike” or “natural” in their conduct, the editors of *St. Nicholas* simultaneously influenced the content and style of children’s compositions. Emphasizing concrete, “Anglo-Saxon” prose and realistic accounts of forays into nature, these editors shepherded League authors away from the fantastic literature popularly associated with the Romantic child that the contest topics courted. The poems, stories, essays, and letters of this monthly feature illustrate, however, that far from being duped into such representations, League members self-consciously responded to the magazine’s prompts. Their entries show not only the skillful manipulation of conventions, but also a meta-discourse on the well-worn tropes of childhood innocence.

In my final chapters, I investigate the role of the reader in determining juvenilia’s successes. Whereas the competence of the young St. Nicholas League writers was made acceptable by their largely traditional depictions of childhood, the satiric worldliness of Daisy Ashford’s *The Young Visitors* and the questionable authenticity of Opal Whiteley’s published childhood diary¹¹ laid them open to the criticism that they capitalized on “cheap puerilities” (McFee 3), “infant adultism” (Lechlitner 3), or adults’ love of “conceiv[ing] of children as

¹¹ The public suspected the diary to be the work of the then-adult Whiteley. Aside from her improbable claims that she was the unacknowledged daughter of the French aristocrat, Henri d’Orleans, Whiteley lost readers’ trust by inserting French terms and historical dates into her diary that she would be unlikely to know as a six-year-old in an Oregonian logging camp.

characters in a detestably sophisticated ‘fairy play’” (“Notes and Comments,” *Athenaeum* 510). Although these texts’ tenuous balance between the child author’s innately superior knowledge of the world and unhealthy exposure to it subsequently divided readers into devout worshipers or virulent detractors, proponents of Ashford’s and Whiteley’s work share with the editors of *St. Nicholas* a common investment in the precocious child’s lack of precocity. In this chapter, I argue that this investment offers a window onto the reading practice evoked not only by juvenilia, but also by the proto-modernist works of Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James. The experience of reading Stevenson’s *A Child’s Garden of Voices* (1885) or James’s *What Maisie Knew*—like that of reading Ashford’s novella or Whiteley’s journal—involves the construction of a knowledgeable reader who serves as a contrast to the innocent voice—whether real or fabricated—of the child narrator. The guessing game invoked by the interplay between these two figures—what, exactly, does the child comprehend of what she says?—invites in turn the reader’s meta-awareness of representational forms and literary conventions, their inadequacies and oversimplifications. This process thereby circumnavigates proto-modernists’ concerns that realist representations be seen as innocent, one-to-one representations of reality, and ostensibly imparts authenticity to their texts.

In my concluding chapter, the reader’s impact on juvenilia’s success meets the era’s paradoxes of innocence once again as I contrast the divergent expectations of those juvenilia pitched to adults versus those pitched to other children. Here, I focus on two attention-garnering trilogies of the 1930s: Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock’s children’s novels, *The Far-Distant Oxus* (1937), *Escape to Persia* (1938), and *The Oxus in Summer* (1939); and siblings Patience, Richard, and Johnny Abbes’ travelogues, *Around the World in Eleven Years* (1936), *Of All Places!* (1937), and *No Place Like Home* (1940). As noted above, Hull and Whitlock revise

notions of the Romantic child in their fiction by meshing their characters' obsessive relationship to the pastoral with a beneficial, rather than stultifying immersion in culture. Despite the young authors' empowered version of childhood, however, critics repeatedly homed in upon the traditional, and thereby "healthy" or "genuine," aspects of their protagonists. In return for their portrayal of appropriately childlike characters, Hull and Whitlock received praise for their literary competence or professionalism without the usual accompanying anxiety about precocity. The absence of this anxiety signals the degree to which juvenilia-as-children's-literature incurred far less skepticism than those juvenilia marketed to adults (such as the Abbes' texts), because the former better satisfied traditional notions of children's experiences. The Abbes' memoirs of life in Hollywood and Europe on the eve of World War II were distinctly "childish" in comparison to the *Oxus* books in terms of standard literary conventions and their uninhibited pronouncements. However, the sibling's texts were equally "adult" in their subject matter (politics, social hypocrisies, and their parents' own unstable marriage). This disparity called the sanctity of their childhood into question, reducing what for some readers was innocently wise prose into calculated naiveté for others. The paradoxes of the era's notion of innocence become apparent again here as Hull and Whitlock's professionally produced fiction gains more credit for being authentically childlike than the Abbe children's actual memoirs.

Referenced in the company of Sir Walter Scott, Lewis Carroll, and Arthur Ransome, the juvenilia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries illuminate the significant presence of real children in the era's mainstream literary culture.¹² The reasons behind these once-famed

¹² Marjory Fleming's editors frequently portrayed the girl author as Sir Walter Scott's muse. See Chapter Two, 30. Reviewers classed both Daisy Ashford's novella and Mimpsy Rhys's *mr. hermit crab* (1929) with Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). See Walpole 455 and Evans 37. For comparisons between Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock, and

texts' neglect relate not to their cultural relevance, then, but rather to historically complex issues of literary scholarship. Just as children's literature as a field of study once suffered from hierarchical distinctions between the child and the adult—relegating texts written for the child into a category correspondent with middle-brow literary culture—so, too, has children's writing felt the impact of a child-adult binary. Scholars have found it difficult to interpret these texts without reinstating binaries the field has fought long to discard, but which reappear unprompted in the course of reading a young person's voice. The contemporary reviews I explore at great length in this dissertation reveal the way in which texts by the child author (like those featuring a child narrator) invite the reader to place himself in the role of the wise or jaded figure who better comprehends and therefore appreciates the child's naïve or unconscious state. As my discussion of contemporary criticism on Marjory Fleming reveals, the dichotomy between innocence and experience, the child's comprehension and the adult's, subsequently infuses attempts to make sense of the young author's prose.

Far from being an esoteric enterprise with idiosyncratic difficulties, however, the practice of reading juvenilia forces scholars to articulate the ways in which we commonly interpret texts. Despite scholars' general acquiescence to the notion that we cannot presume to assign authorial intention to texts, readers constantly credit authors with the humor, wisdom, and other insights their narratives offer.¹³ The immediately apparent complexity of doing so with child-authored

Ransome, see Strong 1023 and the *Springfield Daily Republican's* review of *The Far-Distant Oxus*, 7e.

¹³ In 1946, W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley first voiced their concern that the pursuit of authorial intention was not only unachievable, but also detrimental to the quality of literary criticism. See "Intentional Fallacy," 3-18. Twenty plus years later, Roland Barthes more radically declared the "death" of the author, arguing that "to give an Author to a text is to impose a limit on it, to furnish it with a final signified," when in fact its contents are "a tissue of quotations, drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (147, 146). Whereas Barthes's essay

texts, however, exposes the ways in which our enduring interpretive practices depend upon the assumption of a mature, self-aware, and above all, critically reflexive writer.

While scholars such as Karen Sánchez-Eppler have begun to discuss real children's writing, showing how children both play to and also playfully resist stereotypical notions of childhood, they have been reluctant to theorize about their interpretative methodology.¹⁴ In each of the following chapters, I strive to remedy this gap in scholarship on juvenilia by articulating the ways in which I am reading my chosen texts. An example from Daisy Ashford's *The Young Visitors*, which recounts a bachelor's and a debutante's overlapping attempts at social-climbing, will help to illustrate my own approach to the complexities of these seemingly simple narratives. In Ashford's opening chapter, Mr. Salteena, an "elderly man of 42 [who is] fond of asking people to stay with him"(17), responds to Lord Bernard Clark's invitation to stay with him—and to bring "one of [his] young ladies whichever is the prettiest in the face" (18)—thus:

Certainly I shall come and stay with you next Monday I will bring Ethel Monticue commonly called Miss M. She is very active and pretty. I do hope I shall enjoy myself with you. I am fond of digging in the garden and I am parshial to ladies if they are nice I suppose it is my nature. I am not quite a gentleman but you would hardly notice it but cant be helped anyhow. (19)

Ashford's misspellings and faulty grammar immediately signal the text's unconventional narration. Determining whether these idiosyncrasies and the innuendo of the passage are indicative of the author's unconscious production or the height of artifice, however,

celebrates the birth of the reader "as the site where this multiplicity is collected" (148), Michel Foucault considers the relationship between the "author-function" and authority one that perpetuates the exclusion of the reader from the creation of textual meaning. See Foucault 113-138.

¹⁴ See Chapters One and Four in particular of *Dependent States*.

circumscribes the text's signifying potential by positing that it is inextricable from the child's state of mind. Besides almost inevitably subjecting the literary text to simplified constructions of the child—who is thereby either entirely aware or entirely naïve of her statements' meaning—this approach hampers our ability to treat juvenile-authored texts as we would other literature.

Recognizing that one cannot arrive at a definitive understanding of the child author's level of consciousness in relationship to any given moment in the text releases one from a task that would never legitimately arise if it were an adult female author, for instance, under consideration. My goal in pursuing this research is not, after all, to recover a uniform notion of what children are *actually* like, but rather to acknowledge that they are (much like adults) variously mimics of *and* re-shapers of culture, and to read their texts with according flexibility. As Kenneth Kidd warns, it would be a misconception or “sheer fantasy” to think that studying real children would amount to uncovering the truth about children or the “wholeness of childhood” (150). Likewise, I agree with Peter Cumming's admonishment that to ‘assume that “the child” is directly and transparently accessible “inside children's writing” would be to fall straight into another trap’ (110).

To decide, subsequently, that the potential pitfalls of making claims about juvenilia are reason for not pursuing these texts, however, is to whitewash the very practices common to the interpretation of literature. As the reader absorbs Mr. Salteena's admission that he is very “parshial to ladies,” but “not quite a gentleman,” she must consider whether these statements are to be taken sincerely or as a tongue-in-cheek reworking of previous Victorian romances. Part of this determination involves assessing whether the texts' overall tone indicates the story will be one of dastardly deeds or humorous social missteps. The same process is implicit in the act of reading an adult-authored text: although in casual reading we make these interpretative moves so

automatically that we hardly pause to consider them, texts like P. G. Wodehouse's "Jeeves and Wooster" stories, for instance, ask that readers ascertain whether the harebrained schemes and dialogue of Bertie Wooster and his friends (nearly as ludicrous in their behavior as Ashford's protagonists) are to be taken as the author's misunderstanding of normative social behavior, the record of absolute madness, or simply lighthearted fare. Certainly, the ambiguity of what Daisy knows draws the reader into a more distinctly meta-consideration of the relationship between the author's state of mind and the text's characteristics. In the end, however, her novella is as much a comedy of romance and manners as Wodehouse's, because regardless of Ashford's intention, the process of querying just what kind of mischief an "active" girl such as Ethel might invite, renders the narrative humorous. As I consider individual juvenilia throughout this dissertation, then, I pay a significant amount of attention to the interplay between the reader and the text, and the impact of conceptions of childhood and innocence upon contemporary assessments of juvenilia. At the same time, however, I take it as a matter of course that the child author herself negotiates cultural ideals, granting her credit, as we would any other author, for her pithy social commentary and apt handling of her characters' actions, no matter how idiosyncratic.

Although juvenilia titillated, awed and sold their way into a starring role in Anglo-American culture, I am not the first to lament the waning interest in these celebrity texts and their authors as they aged. In May 1941, more than a year after the disappearance of his now-twenty-five-year-old daughter Barbara, Wilson Follett published an open letter to her in the *Atlantic Monthly* in which he marvels at the lack of effort to recover the lost author: "'Could Helen Hayes be lost for ten days without a trace? Could Thomas Mann? Could Churchill?' And now it is getting on toward forty times ten days, and the thing four thousand times as preposterous as ever after a twelvemonth" (564). In the same way that Follett found it incomprehensible that the loss

of his once-lauded daughter could go unnoted, it is inexplicable that the juvenilia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should go uninvestigated by literary and cultural studies scholars today, as these texts' successes reflected their time period's co-option of childhood as a marker of higher artistry or integrity, while garnering significant critical attention on their own merits. As Wilson Follett remarks:

What would it mean to the dweller in a mountain valley if a peak that he had contemplated steadily for a quarter of a century were suddenly blotted from the landscape? [. . .] This sky, in the sector where you should be, has now been misshapen for one whole round of the seasons [. . .]. (565)

Many of the juvenilia of Barbara Newhall Follett's day have been absent from our literary-critical landscape at least seventy rounds of seasons now. In this dissertation, I restore the shape of this terrain by reinstating real children's writing to its proper place in the era's literature and culture, offering a new-old perspective on children's centrality to conceptions of innocence, competence, and the authentic experience.

2.0 “AS FOR REGANING MY CHARACTER I DESPARE”: MARJORY FLEMING, *HUCKLEBERRY FINN*, AND THE AESTHETICS OF INNOCENCE

Although child diarist Marjory Fleming died in 1811, just shy of her ninth birthday, her status as a literary figure endured well into the twentieth century. Editions of her journals and poetry have appeared in varying forms (and with varying degrees of accuracy) from 1847 to the current day, prompting praise not only from her fawning editors, but also from authors such as Leslie Stephen, Robert Louis Stevenson and, at the greatest length, Mark Twain. The history of her diary’s publication and reception illustrates the way in which admirers of juvenilia sustain a common interest in young authors’ purity despite valuing these texts for divergent reasons over time. Mid-Victorians lauded Fleming’s compositions as a window onto child life, while editors and reviewers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries valorized the journals’ aesthetics for their lack of artifice. Indeed, between the final decades of the nineteenth century and the peak of child-authored texts’ publication in roughly the 1930s, the average adult reader increasingly hailed juvenilia—children’s “innocent” outpourings—as the means to a truer form of expression.¹⁵ Such readers perceived the idiosyncrasies of such texts as emblematic of the child’s remove from adult influence and convention—a view that simultaneously secured the author’s moral *and* literary superiority.

¹⁵ This was not, of course, a universal response to juvenilia. As I discuss in Chapter Three, outlets like *St. Nicholas Magazine*’s League of young authors encouraged children to cultivate their “innocent” prose, rendering it an equally contrived form of literary expression.

The ostensible turn towards the young author's literary aesthetics as the focal point of her accomplishments was thus still inexplicably caught up with the figure of the child herself. Fleming enthusiasts, for instance, consistently described the author's ability to subvert or revitalize language and form in terms of her unconscious freedom from convention; and "Pet Marjorie"—the diminutive and misspelled appellation Fleming's first editor,¹⁶ H. B. Farnie, conferred upon the young author—was a name that Fleming's admirers persisted in linking to her.¹⁷ Thus, even as a model of authenticity and individuality, Fleming's creative success paradoxically relied upon her normative position as an innocent child.

Given her diaries' long-spanning publication history, in this chapter I demonstrate how Marjory Fleming's juvenilia serves as a model for the ways in which child writers' misspellings, malapropisms, and irregular forms gradually became "proof" of the young's ability to proffer both moral and literary truths. Even as Fleming's early readers noted her pedantic sermonizing and worldly passions, they repeatedly linked an idealized image of the child with their interpretations of her texts, promoting the idea that young authors provided readers not only with an individualistic (and therefore superior) view of life, but also with a more authentic form of literary representation. Katherine L. Carlson argues that the scarcity of scholarship on Fleming is the result of critics' "post-structural disavowals of binaries and the marginalization they cause" (370). Because even modern readers, however, tend to conceptualize Fleming's diaries, verse, and letters as a blend of her "true" child voice and the voice of intervening adults, I explore how the critical inheritance of Romantic binaries—which juxtapose the innocent child with the

¹⁶ Alexandra Johnson suggests that Isabella Keith's supervision and critique of Fleming's writing render Isa the first editor of the famed journals. Johnson adds that under Isa's influence, Fleming swiftly began to self-edit her expressiveness. See *The Hidden Writer*, 35.

¹⁷ Sadly, the epithet appears to this day on Marjory's tombstone in Kirkcaldy, Scotland.

acculturated adult—continues to limit scholars’ capacity to treat juvenilia as an integral part of literary history, rather than as mere oddities. Such approaches to child-authored texts likewise ignore the degree to which juvenilia’s authors were both active participants in and re-shapers of Anglo-American culture. In this chapter, I argue that critics’ inability to separate the text from its child author not only erects unwarranted divisions between real children’s and real adults’ consciousness of literary and cultural discourses, but also reveals the degree to which modern literary criticism in general perpetuates statements about writers’ intentions, despite the field’s broad acknowledgement of the “death” of the author.¹⁸

Bestselling, theoretically provocative, or otherwise deserving of consideration in their own right, juvenilia also offer new ways of contextualizing narrative experimentation in literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While I reserve my discussion of juvenilia’s potential impact upon definitions of children’s literature for Chapters Three and Five, the latter portion of this chapter explores the way in which the appropriation of the child’s voice in adult literature sprung from a cultural belief in the idea that an “uncultivated” or otherwise innocent prose offered a superior literary truth or realism.

To illustrate this phenomenon, I take as an example a text widely understood in popular culture as having helped to democratize the voice of literature—namely, Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In this later segment of the chapter, my goal is to elucidate not how scholarship currently contends with Twain’s work and issues of realism or representation in late nineteenth-century literature, but rather how historical perspectives on this text resemble the way in which juvenilia continue to be read today. Despite healthy sales, Twain’s novel endured a varied critical reception for its first fifty years, before gradually

¹⁸ See note 13.

achieving canonical status. While critical debates about *Huckleberry Finn* in the latter half of the twentieth century up until the current day have centered largely upon the book's handling of racism, contemporary evaluations of the novel hinged almost exclusively upon the degree to which readers valued the narrator's innocence: those who censored the novel in the nineteenth century did so with the belief that both its content and language were vulgar; those who applauded the book did so believing that Huck's innocence of moral and literary conventions paradoxically rendered the text both highly ethical and more successfully realistic than previous adult prose.

That this latter viewpoint emerged increasingly as the twentieth century progressed, and during the time period in which juvenilia's publication reached its peak, speaks to the relationship between the valuing of the child's prose and the opening up of the literary field to alternate forms of representation. Twain's *Harper's Bazaar* essay on Fleming shows his intense personal interest in the young author; his continual return to childhood in his work—which culminates with the use of the child's "own" voice in *Huckleberry Finn*—likewise corresponds to the youth-revering culture that simultaneously contributed to the success of juvenilia such as Fleming's and the advent of narrative experimentation in adult realist literature. Despite these connections, the American satirist's "hypercanonized"¹⁹ novel and the Scottish child's private papers may seem an odd pairing, and reading the two in concert asks that scholars forestall the critical tendency to segregate "high" culture from what has hitherto been considered low culture. By reading the two texts as equals, I explicitly ask that we set aside the temptation to dismiss

¹⁹ A term I borrow from Jonathan Arac's apt exploration of the book's critical history in *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target*.

Fleming's work as insignificant ephemera or Twain's novel as an exaggerated masterpiece, as doing either means indulging in a hierarchical binary between the child and the adult that I seek to unsettle here.

In novels such as *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) or *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), and tales such as "The Story of the Bad Little Boy" (1865), Twain used child figures to satirize institutional or adult enterprises. In *Huckleberry Finn*, however, he sought to replicate the child's voice itself as a tool for such social commentary; in doing so, he mirrored the general trend in the reception of Fleming's work, which was to focus increasingly upon the child's language as a means of accessing her unconscious wisdom. Critics like Lionel Trilling, who helped secure the canonical status of Twain's novel, implicitly linked Huck's vernacular dialect or unconventional expressions to his superior morality. Never secure in his comprehension of the moral truisms of social convention or Sunday school literature, Huck's naïve brand of skepticism thus renders him capable of judging Jim's worth by his private standards rather than society's. That scholars largely see the final "Evasion" chapters—those in which Huck acquiesces to Tom Sawyer's clichéd literary models for rescuing Jim— as a failure signals the degree to which readers have linked the novel's success with its protagonist's innocent interpretation of cultural narratives and language.

It is important to note here that critics who laud Huck's famous resignation to "go to hell" as symptomatic of the boy's unconsciously superior ethics ignore Huck's conformity to racist ideologies elsewhere in the text, casting his cruelty to Jim in the final chapters as a blemish in the novel rather than a blemish in Huck's morality. Although Twain frequently waxed nostalgic upon his own youth in both private letters and his published work, he rejected the Romantic idea of childhood as a time apart from the imperfect adult world. Instead, his fiction portrayed

characters like Huck as “real” children—flawed by their association with society, if ultimately more virtuous than adults.

In my respective sections on *Huckleberry Finn* and Fleming’s diaries, I will consider how this particular representation of innocence—imperfect and therefore more realistically pure—has fueled readers’ fetishization of both Huck’s and Marjory’s authenticity. The “bad boy” texts of authors like Twain and his contemporaries Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Charles Dudley Warner, and William Dean Howells offered readers the illusion that their semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional narratives granted access to the child’s true nature.²⁰ Ironically, while such mischief-laden tales ostensibly allowed the real child a place in literature, the success of the depictions still relied upon a highly idealized image of childhood, in which the young’s proximity to the adult or the corrupt paradoxically reinforced their innocence. For those reviewers and scholars who praised *Huckleberry Finn* and Fleming’s journals, the more they witnessed Huck amongst gambling and thieving company or consumed the girl’s records of love affairs with young men, the more assured they were of the child’s purity. The unconscious nature of Huck’s moral resolve works, for example, with his obvious faults (he skips school, swears, and lies profusely) to suggest the ostensible authenticity of Twain’s depiction. Describing herself as “more like a little young Devil” than a pliable child, Fleming’s behavior mirrors Huck’s in that she is not impossibly good and pious but rather believably blemished and therefore, to many readers, more profound in her unconsciously wise utterances (40).²¹

²⁰ See Aldrich’s *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1869), Warner’s *Being a Boy* (1878), and Howells’s *Boy Town* (1890). For a discussion of these texts, see also Chapter Two of Kenneth B. Kidd’s *Making American Boys*.

²¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Fleming’s work are taken from the edition transcribed by Frank Sidgwick.

For many authors and readers at the turn of the twentieth century, the child's voice, whether real or fabricated by the adult, became a means of accessing a more authentic literary representation. Ernest Hemingway's declaration in 1935 that *Huckleberry Finn* was the source of all modern American literature (Hemingway 21), coincided with the heyday of the publication of juvenilia, as well as the production of the first unabridged version of Fleming's compositions. This overlap suggests that investment in the child's expressivity was an increasingly widespread phenomenon in British and American culture. This chapter seeks to elucidate the degree to which this voice was integral to the development of an "authentic" literary realism and to illustrate how the real child's centrality to this development has rendered juvenilia a valuable, but methodologically challenging resource today.

2.1 FLEMING AND HER ADMIRERS

Marjory Fleming was born in 1803 in Kirkcaldy, Scotland. The most influential event of her short life was undoubtedly her extended visit to her older cousin Isabella Keith in nearby Edinburgh. Fleming's absorption into the Keith household along with the more cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city afforded the then six-year-old girl resources and attention that she might otherwise have not received in her own small town, amidst numerous siblings and a new baby sister.²² With Isa (Marjory's nickname for her cousin) overseeing her education, Fleming

²² Fleming spent her sixth, seventh, and much of her eighth year in Edinburgh. After viewing the original manuscripts at the National Library of Scotland, I concur with Frank Sidgwick's dating of her journals: thus, Fleming was seven when she wrote her first two diaries, and eight years old when she completed her third. Throughout this chapter, when quoting the diaries, I refer to Fleming in accordance with the age she was when she wrote the selected passage.

undertook a record of her new life; her journals describe everything from sermons to Regency bonnets, from the crimes of the *Newgate Calendar* to what she perceived as her own impassioned love affairs.

Before turning to the contents of Fleming's journals—which prompted Leslie Stephen to include her in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1889—it is worthwhile to consider their publication history, as it reveals the gradual transition from nineteenth-century readers' primary interest in juvenilia as a window onto the real child's life, to early-twentieth-century readers' belief that access to the young author's innocent voice might increase the possibility of attaining literary authenticity. Lovingly preserved by her family for several decades as the memorabilia of a lost child, Fleming's diaries, poetry, and letters did not become public until local author and librettist H. B. Farnie published an article on "Pet Marjorie" in the *Fife Herald* in 1847. In 1858, Farnie turned this piece into a six-penny booklet entitled *Pet Marjorie: A Story of Child Life Fifty Years Ago*. It was not long thereafter that the much better known Dr. John Brown seized upon Fleming as a topic. The publication of his "Pet Marjorie: A Sketch" in *The North British Review* in 1863 sparked warring book-length editions from both himself and Farnie, as they vied for the position of expert in all things Fleming. In both cases, the texts were largely biographical, focusing upon the preciousness of Marjory as a child, rather than upon the distinctiveness of her prose. Farnie inserted fragments of Fleming's text into his story of the "angel in the house" with disregard for their original order and an inconsistent correction of the girl's spelling, while Brown added to Farnie's infantilizing depiction of Marjory as a "Pet," by claiming that Sir Walter Scott often looked to his "bonnie wee croodlin doo" to sit upon his lap and amuse him (Farnie 5, Brown 16). This sentimental scenario, based upon a thin suggestion in

one of Fleming's sister's letters, has stuck so obdurately to the young diarist's image, that even contemporary critics sometimes presume it to be fact.²³

Although the Victorians may have been among Fleming's most fervent admirers, editions of the journals continued to appear regularly well into the twentieth century that suggest a deepening investment in the young author's prose itself. In 1904, Fleming's third editor, Lachlan MacBean, issued his own first edition of *Pet Marjorie*, recovering some of the misprints and censored segments of Farnie's and Brown's versions.²⁴ Editions of MacBean's book appeared regularly thereafter, including one in 1920—a year in which Anglo-American culture was permeated with references to famed juvenile authors Daisy Ashford and Opal Whiteley (see Chapter Four). It was not until 1934, however, that any editors presented Fleming's words in a completely unaltered form: the manuscripts having recently become the property of the National Library of Scotland, Arundell Esdaile produced a collotype facsimile of the Scottish writer's juvenilia, a publication which was followed the next year by Frank Sidgwick's more affordable (and legible), transcribed edition. The belated nature of this publication shows how confused the line was between an appreciation of Fleming's writing and an appreciation of the girl author herself, allowing editors to laud the young girl's prose while offering only a fraction of it to her readers.

²³ See, for instance, Judith Plotz's otherwise adept article on Fleming's work, "The Pet of Letters: Marjorie Fleming's Juvenilia."

²⁴ Five years later, Kate Wiley, the lone female commentator on Fleming during this era, published *Pet Marjorie and Sir Walter Scott*. The text did not contribute any new material or unique commentary upon Fleming's work (quoting largely from Brown's edition) and was not re-issued in subsequent editions.

Although biographical sketches and reproductions of Fleming’s work continue to be published sporadically today,²⁵ the concentrated interest in her journals in the mid-nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries suggests the degree to which that period’s culture was increasingly invested in the contiguous notions of childhood innocence and literary experimentation. Sidgwick charts the progressive divulgence of Fleming’s compositions thus:

<i>Editor</i>	<i>Prose (words)</i>	<i>Verse (lines)</i>
Farnie (1 st edition)	1150	150
Brown	2380	100
MacBean	8900	560 (Sidgwick xxi)

This gradual disclosure of Fleming’s manuscripts indicates the reading public’s growing eagerness for the child’s actual words. While this phenomenon was clearly still caught up with an infantilizing admiration of the “cute” young author, the care with which later editors treated Fleming’s texts contrasts the approach taken by Farnie and his Victorian readers, who were intrigued less by Fleming’s prose than by the “Pet” herself. “The interest of the [author’s] little life-history,” Farnie asserted, “must in a great measure proceed from its truth. Were they fictitious, the incidents mentioned would not be very remarkable [...]” (preface, unnumbered). Concerning her writing, Farnie is ambivalent, positing that if “Pet therefore writes, as she certainly does, a good deal of common-place prose about the beauties of scenery surrounding her abode, let us fancy that the child had not yet fluency enough of diction to write her own thoughts” (33). Farnie’s comments suggest that mid-nineteenth-century admirers of Fleming valued Fleming for the way in which she offered a valuable entrée into childhood’s realities.

²⁵ Paperback editions of MacBean’s and Brown’s books appeared in 2006 and 2009 respectively. The most recent new edition that I have found is Barbara McLean’s illustrated *Marjory’s Book: The Complete Journals, Letters, and Poems of a Young Girl*, published in 1999.

Readers such as Farnie, however, did not presume that the truths revealed about the child translated to a more authentic prose; instead the editor presumes that Fleming merely parrots “common-place” representations of the world surrounding her.

Despite the growing investment in the originality or importance of Fleming’s prose, nearly fifty years later, Twain’s article on the author for *Harper’s Bazaar* registers the same fascination with Marjory’s small person. As part of its homage to the young author, Twain’s 1909 essay contains illustrations depicting moments from the diaries or the biographical narratives surrounding them: hence, readers see Fleming poring over the *Newgate Calendar* with her cat at her feet, or trotting alongside Sir Walter Scott. The featured picture, however, is a portrait of Marjory alone, placed in the center of the first page. Although the clasped hands and bow-bedecked visage bear little resemblance to the existing portraits of Fleming, Twain steals a caption from Brown’s earlier essay, asserting, “there she is, looking straight out of the picture” (1182). The article’s excitement over the possibility that Marjory communicates directly and openly with her readers mimics the link Fleming’s editors increasingly make between the child and her text. Referring to the paintings done of Fleming by Isabella Keith—miniatures now preserved at the National Library of Scotland—Brown’s text states “there she is, looking straight at us as she did at [Sir Walter Scott]—fearless and full of love, passionate, wild, wilful [*sic*], fancy’s child” (21). Later in his essay, Brown revisits this depiction of Fleming, exclaiming over the

picture the *animosa infans* gives us of herself, her vivacity, her passionateness, her precocious love-making, her passion for nature, for swine, for all living things, her reading, her turn for expression, her satire, her frankness, her little sins and rages, her

great repentances! We don't wonder Walter Scott carried her off in the neuk of his plaid, and played himself with her for hours. (53)

The exaggerated nature of Brown's descriptions—I would categorize, for instance, the portrait's expression as far more neutral—registers the intense focus upon the young's preciousness seen particularly in cases where a child died prematurely. Fleming's own mother expressed a fetishistic appreciation of her deceased child's body, writing Isabella Keith, "How often did I wish you had seen [Marjory's] cold remains. [...] Lovely in death the beauteous ruin lay...for never did I behold so beautiful an object. It resembled the finest wax work."²⁶ Like Fleming's mother, Brown transforms the child into an object to be "carried off" and played with, a passive entity for consumption rather than an active subject.

Although Brown's somewhat eroticized characterization of the "picture the *animosa infans* gives us of herself" may have resonated with a commonplace—if, to contemporary eyes, troubling—trope in nineteenth-century culture, his interpretation becomes truly problematic in that it carries over to his reading of Fleming's juvenilia itself.²⁷ Noting that "we have now before us the letters and journals of Pet Marjorie," Brown translates this boon into an instance of the child divulging her person to her readers: hence, "before us lies and gleams her rich brown hair, bright and sunny as if yesterday's [...]." Expounding further on his topic, Brown sentimentalizes "the faded old scraps of paper, hoarded still, over which her warm breath and her warm little heart had poured themselves" (20). Just as Fleming's warm signs of life seemingly

²⁶ Letter from Isabella Fleming to Isabella Keith, January 9, 1812. Sidgwick prints an excerpt of the letter, but does not include this segment; MacBean and Wiley include a portion of the quote, but do not give it in its entirety (MacBean 164, Wiley 81). To my knowledge, the full quote is available only in manuscript form at the National Library of Scotland.

²⁷ Alexandra Johnson notes that Brown's publication "tapped the very nerve of Victorian culture: the cult of the child" and "anticipated the Victorian's obsession with childhood and early death, which bordered on the erotic" (*Hidden Writer* 42, 43).

spill onto her manuscripts, Brown's fetishistic descriptions of the child overwhelm his interpretations of the author's compositions.

Ironically, the excitement over the possibility of accessing the real child also overwhelms any concerns about her innocence. Brown's description, while sentimental, focuses more upon Marjory's mischievous delectability than upon her purity. In Twain's gushing opening paragraph of his *Harper's* article, he enumerates Fleming's charms in like fashion:

how impulsive she was; how sudden; how tempestuous, how tender, how loving, how sweet, how loyal, how rebellious, how repentant, how wise, how unwise, how bursting with fun, how frank, how free, how honest, how innocently bad, how natively good, how charged with quaint philosophies, how winning, how precious, how adorable—and how perennially and indestructibly interesting! (1182)

Twain's admiration of Fleming's prose arises once again from an adulation of the girl herself. No sooner, for instance, does Twain compliment Fleming for the "stunning and worldly sincerities" she produces "every time her pen takes a fresh breath," then he feels compelled to exclaim, "the adorable child! she hasn't a discoverable blemish in her make-up anywhere" (1182). Twain's anthropomorphized representation of Fleming's pen reveals the connection he makes between the child's innate truthfulness and the vivification of literature. Even as interest in the young author's prose mounts, then, the sense that readers are accessing the real child through her writing continues to color their interpretations of her work.

The oppositional traits with which Twain credits the author—she is both "innocently bad" and "natively good"—also mimic the paradoxical way in which adult readers viewed children's innocence. Commenting upon the perceived symbiosis between the girl's naughtiness and purity, Judith Plotz characterizes Fleming as a "border being" able to "negotiate between

innocence and the world [...] to touch pitch, to write pitch and be undefiled” (7). Just as the innocence of Daisy Ashford’s novel *The Young Visitors* (1919) would be confirmed for most readers by the extent to which she attempted to discuss adult matters (see Chapter Four), Fleming’s readers typically read her forays into mature concerns as proof of her miscomprehension of them. Fleming’s most famous poem, for instance—which laments that “Three Turkeys fair their last have breathed”—condemns the young fowls’ mother for being “more than usual calm/[She] did not give a singel dam” (29). Of Marjory’s coarse choice of language, Brown assures his readers that “this last word is saved from all sin by its tender age, not to speak of the want of the *n*” (44).

In a similar vein, Fleming’s editors were seemingly incapable of attributing questionable ethics to the young author’s musings on love and beaux, with which she repeatedly interrupts her documentation of sermons and family visits:

I walked to that delightfull place with a delightfull young man beloved by all his friends and espacialy by me his loveress but I must not talk any longer about him for Isa said it is not proper for to speak of gentalm[an] but I will never forget him. (49)

Regardless of Fleming’s good intentions, her interest in romance resurfaces:

A sailor called here to say farewell, it must be dreadfull to leave his native country where he might get a wife or perhaps me, for I love him very much & with all my heart, but O I forgot Isabella forbid me to speak about love. (108)

When a few sentences later, the diarist notes (in a more philosophic mood) that “love is a papithatick thing as well as troubelsom & tiresome,” she quickly admits once again that “Isabella forbid me to speak about it” (109). While Isabella’s reprimands pervade these moments almost without fail, indicating her perception of her cousin’s impropriety, the author’s innocence never

seems in doubt for her adult editors. MacBean expresses the general editorial sentiment on Fleming's purity when he asserts, "of course the child is constantly getting beyond her depth, as in the naïve description of the female bigamist, but childish innocence is secure amid every peril" (45).

This seemingly unshakeable belief in Fleming's innocence rode a tenuous line, however, between acknowledging and shunning signs of the child's engagement with the world. As Marah Gubar argues, much of nineteenth-century literature "extoll[ed] the child's natural simplicity while simultaneously indulging a profound fascination with youthful sharpness and precocity" (9). In similar fashion, Fleming's editors generally paid equal tribute to the author's purity as to her fascination with criminals and lovers, without presuming one negated the other. Nevertheless, there was a limit to the flexibility of their perception of innocence. As I discuss later in this chapter with *Huckleberry Finn* and again in Chapter Four with Daisy Ashford and Opal Whiteley, for many readers, the child's authenticity and the value of her text hinges upon her ignorance of her statements' resonance. Indeed, any overwhelming suggestion that the child fully comprehends her subject ruins the titillating game of guesswork from which at least part of adult readers' pleasure in reading juvenilia surely originates. As is evident in their contemplation of her early demise, had Fleming's editors been capable of contemplating her naïveté being in jeopardy, the reception of her juvenilia might have been far less secure. Commenting on the pathos of her premature death, Clifford Smyth—who wrote the introduction to MacBean's *Pet Marjorie*—admits that "if she had grown up to be a woman, a wife, a mother, she would no longer be Marjorie Fleming for us, no matter what rare contributions to literature she might have made in the years of her maturity" (xxiv).

On the one hand, Smyth's unabashed pronouncement suggests the importance of Fleming's status as the "Eternal Child" to her positive valuation (xxiv). After all, had she not died so pitifully young, family members and literary figures may not have preserved and poured over her early writings as they have. On the other hand, his assertion elucidates the paradox of juvenilia's reception: the acceptability of young authors' delightful, searing, or surpassingly sincere prose relied upon a belief in the child's innocence. Hence, the same traits that ostensibly endear Fleming to readers are suspect in the definitively mature author—particularly if she is female.

Multiple editors of Fleming's work suggest that the impulsiveness for which readers admire the young girl would have proved problematic had she become an adult female author. Noting her "power of affection, this faculty of *beloving*, and wild hunger to be beloved, comes out more and more," Brown thus surmises that "she perilled [*sic*] her all upon it, and it may have been as well—we know indeed that it was far better—for her that this wealth of love was so soon withdrawn to its one only infinite Giver and Receiver" (26). MacBean expresses this same sentiment even more bluntly, remarking

it was perhaps well that hers was the fate of those whom the gods love. Those deep, passionate eyes, that proud, sensitive mouth, that impulsive temperament, contained all the possibilities of disaster. The world yields no adequate satisfaction for an ardent nature like Marjorie Fleming's. (13)

MacBean, like Brown and Smyth, predicates the enjoyment of Fleming's irreverent pronouncements upon the seeming disparity between what the child's prose signifies and what readers believe the child to understand. If Fleming were to write as a "woman, a wife, a mother," however, her editors would be hard pressed to reformulate her ardent nature as an indication of

her innocence, rather than as a sign of her mildly inappropriate or (by contemporary standards) even illicit knowledge (Smyth xxiv).

The enjoyable game of guesswork juvenilia encouraged readers to participate in concerning the author's knowledge was threatened, ironically, by her very act of writing. The ability to construct narrative involved the child in a process that was highly socialized and—for juvenile authors of the twentieth century—even potentially commercial. Above all, such activity threatened the child's moral and aesthetic individuality. H. B. Farnie's 1858 edition of Fleming's diary, for instance,—the first appearance of the journal in book form—cautioned that parents too often snub talent in young children by “weed[ing] away the little flowerets of the baby-mind” (21). Twain (with an ironically similar vocabulary) advised at least one boy writer to shun “fluff and flowers and verbosity creep[ing] in” to one's prose: “when you catch an adjective,” he concluded, “kill it” (qtd. in Tanner, *Reign* 151).²⁸ The adjectives and verbosity Twain refers to are seemingly the specious trappings of tutored writing, which stand in contrast to the “little flowerets” of childhood expression.

Such editorial remarks suggest that it is only when the child ineffectually approximates mature language or conventions that adult readers perceive her as being successful—a stance connected to what Myra Cohn Livingston calls the “myth of the child-poet” (92). In his introduction to MacBean's edition of Fleming's work, Smyth extolled the “biblical sincerity and downrightness about an intelligent, unspoiled child's utterance,” declaring, “we love it for its very uncultivation” (xviii-xix). Reacting specifically to Smyth's commentary, Livingston argues:

²⁸ Tanner notes that this letter was written to Wattie Bowser, on March 20, 1880, and that it was first published in the *Houston Post*, Sunday, February 7, 1960.

[Such readers] would ask of the child-poet that same sort of confusion of word and of incomplete thought, without polished metaphor or synthesis, that would allow adults to recall a time when reason did not invade the thinking. Here adults could give themselves up to the wild abandonment of fantasy one minute and realism the next, and they could chuckle over the confusion in language, the cuteness of childhood. (88)

As Livingston's complaint suggests, adult readers who persist in dividing the innocent child from the overly cultivated adult cannot divide the child author from her text, as it is the author's unconscious or naïve perceptions that sanction or idealize the individuality and authenticity of her pronouncements.

The critical response to Fleming in recent decades shows signs of a continued commitment to segregating the image of the child from adult influence—despite critics' awareness of this complication in juvenilia's assessment. As Katherine L. Carlson points out, addressing Fleming's work requires negotiating such previously accepted binaries as that between "artless children" and "artificial adults"—constructions she notes are passé in a postmodern critical ethos (370). A. O. J. Cockshut thus deems Fleming's output a "*mix* of schoolroom exercise and personal confession" (387-8, my emphasis), while Carlson herself notes the diaries' "*tensions* between socialized adult forms and freedom of expression" (370, my emphasis). Alexandra Johnson similarly remarks upon the juvenilia's "tension between confession and censorship," but goes one step beyond Carlson in claiming that this opposition "underlines the eroding effects of socialization on talent and identity" for women ("Drama" 97).

In this regard, these twentieth and twenty-first century critics (Johnson in particular) perpetuate the assumption that maturity breeds inhibition and stagnancy in literary representation. Tellingly, while contemporary scholars may, as Carlson claims, be more self-

conscious about entering into such discourse, it remains difficult to avoid the presumptions underlying the dichotomies they shun. The use of language that emphasizes the nuance of mixtures or tensions suggests critics' admirable attention to this dilemma; however, it still posits two separate entities and ways of experiencing the world that must either merge or stay at war with one another. Confident that Fleming's journals are both "shelter and straitjacket," Johnson submits to the idea that children only acquire knowledge of literary and cultural conventions as they age and conform—a stance that narrowly defines both childhood innocence and authentic expressivity ("Drama" 81).

The desire to mark a progressive socialization in Fleming's compositions occurs regardless of the order in which readers and critics presume the diaries proceed—a dynamic indicative of the degree to which deep-seated beliefs in distinctions between the child and the adult influence interpretations of juvenilia. MacBean, for instance, laments that while Fleming's "first" journal "fairly shimmered with the sunshine of happiness of books, new acquaintances, new knowledge of places and things," etc., in what he deems her second journal "there is not a scrap of poetry; very little about books, nothing of the beauties of nature; the landscape is ashen gray and the heavens are covered with a thick cloud" (82). A few pages later, quoting from what was ostensibly Fleming's third diary, MacBean joyfully asserts, "Marjorie is herself again" (113). In 1935, Frank Sidgwick established a plausible alternate order for the journals, based for the first time upon Fleming's own references to dates and events in the text. Despite this arguably definitive arrangement of the text, in 1997 Johnson mimics MacBean in her conclusions, arguing "caution and confession bred like germs late in Marjory's journal" (*Hidden Writer* 38).

Let me be quick here to acknowledge how difficult it is to create an alternative methodology for interpreting juvenilia. While analyzing such texts without reference to their authors may eliminate interpretations that unwarrantedly segregate the child's experience of the world from the adult's, doing so also ignores the fertile history surrounding juvenilia and their reception. The popularity of Fleming's diary, for instance, relied upon its readers' knowledge of the author's age and their subsequent presumptions about her nature. Her prose jumps incongruously and at lightning speed from one topic to another, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Climbing is a talent which the bear excels in and so does monkeys apes & baboons. I have been washing my dools cloths today & I like it very much people who have a good Concience is always happy but those who have a bad one is always unhappy and discontented. There is a dog that yels continually & I pity him to the bottom of my heart indeed I do. Tales of fashionable life are very good storys Isabella campels me to sit down & not rise till this page is done but it is very near finished only one line to write[.] (4)

Without any further information, readers can perceive the speaker's racing mind through this entry's madcap progression; determining how to categorize this composition, however, compels critics to make decisions about the author's state of mind—a process that most often goes unacknowledged in contemporary scholarship. Scholars might interpret Fleming's journal as a record of madness; or, they might just as readily read the diaries as a self-conscious attempt to recreate stream-of-consciousness not unlike Virginia Woolf's. The knowledge that the text's writer is a child has typically resulted in readers framing her narrative unconventionality as an unconscious success rather than as a self-reflexive project. For instance, although animals, play,

and the compulsion to compose a full page litter her meanderings, Fleming also resorts to moral platitudes that Twain deems “shop-made holinesses.” Implicitly espousing the presumption that there is a divergence between the child’s and the adult’s relationship to societal norms, Twain suggests that the girl’s piety is “perfunctory” and included only “under pressure of a pestering sense of duty” (“Wonder Child” 1182). His sense that these “lapses” into morality are the exception to Fleming’s true nature—which would rather contemplate baboons or tales of fashionable life—reveals the way in which readers frequently base their enjoyment of juvenilia upon the child’s ostensibly more visceral experience of life.

The same dynamic involved in Twain’s reading impacts the modern critic, despite the field’s widespread rejection of essentializing notions of childhood. Fleming’s blithe acknowledgement of her religious relativism, for example, admittedly resonates more when one factors in her age: “An annibabtist is a thing I am not a member of,” she writes. “I am a Pispalikan just now & a Prsbeteren at Kercaldy [...]” (99). While there is nothing in the text surrounding this pronouncement to indicate whether or not Fleming comprehends its humor, it is tempting to decide that she is innocent of her statement’s full meaning, because doing so offers the mature reader the added pleasure of supplying the knowledge Fleming presumably lacks.

The act of interpreting juvenilia highlights the practices in which scholars frequently engage when they make statements about *any* literature. In other words, as literary critics we constantly assign intention to texts (despite protests to the contrary) by deciding that the writer is parodying, jesting, sermonizing, etc. in a given moment. Assuming that young authors like Fleming fail to comprehend their pronouncements leads to the presumption that children may only engage with culture as consumers or passive mimics, rather than as active agents. Such a stance both ignores the potential for scholars to engage with children, like their adult

counterparts, as individuals with distinctive skills, and precludes the possibility that the child author deserves credit for her literary adeptness.

Imperfect, thus, as any interpretation may be, the most responsible way to approach juvenilia is to acknowledge the reading practices or presumptions involved in consuming such texts, while respecting young authors enough to also surmise that they navigate—sometimes more and sometimes less successfully—literary conventions as any writer does. Self-reflexivity is apparent, for instance, in Fleming’s commentary upon her own compositions. While a good bit of the journal records impressions, recalls sermons, or lists the books Marjory was reading, the young author also attempted verse, frequently turning to her beloved cousin Isa as a topic. In one such ode, she remarks that even in bed, Isa “corrects my faults improves my mi[nd]/And teels me of the faults she find.” Fleming concludes with the line: she “is soun[d] asleep sometimes/For that I have not got good rimes” (34). While an author’s intentions can only be surmised, whether the author is a child or an adult, such straightforward statements concerning the writing process reveal the restrictions conventions may place upon individual expression. Hence, when Fleming undertakes a sonnet on her aunt’s monkey, the “O lovely O most charming pug,” she finds her description reduced to what the form will allow. After detailing at length the pet’s white teeth, “devine” tail, and cheeks “like the roses blume,” she concludes, “his noses cast is of the roman / He is a very pretty weomen / I could not get a rhyme for roman / And was oblidge to call it weoman” (149). In calling attention to such textual frustrations—or perhaps jokes on Fleming’s part—my objective is not to vilify the conventions with which the child tussles, but rather to illustrate the complex negotiation between thought and word that all writers undertake.

While Isa conceived of the journals as a pedagogical tool for improving Marjory's penmanship and a means of documenting the girl's visit (with the intention that their pages would eventually be shared with her mother), Fleming also used her journals as a place to make impolitic pronouncements about the adults surrounding her. It is these uncouth moments that largely won the young author her later nineteenth-century adult male admirers, even as these editors censored and shaped the general reader's experience of her work.²⁹ Twain delighted, for instance, in Fleming's treatment of one Miss Potune—whom Marjory had previously declared in a letter home to be a “horid fat Simpliton” (160): “she pretends to be very learned she says she saw a stone that dropt from the skies, but she is a good christian” (98-9).

Twain and other readers' repeated conclusions that such moments reflect Fleming's “true” self, echo the recent criticism discussed above. The assumption that the child's form of expression is more genuine than the adult's reveals the Romantic inheritance scholars struggle to shake even today. As I shall discuss more in Chapter Four, the adult reader frequently brings a dual perspective to the consumption of child-authored texts that assumes an unbridgeable divide between children and their elders. Thus—just as with her statements concerning her religious changeability—when Fleming laments throwing away her talents or losing one of her “lovers,” the mature reader perceives her avowals both at face value and with the added knowledge presumably missing from the young author's comprehension. “My charecter is lost a-mong the Breahead people,” she mourns. “I hope I will be religious agoin but as for reganing my character I despare” (80). If this textual assertion could be read without the influence of biographical

²⁹ Brown, for instance, apparently catered to Victorian decorum when he transcribed the opening line of Marjory's first letter (written at age six) as “I now sit down to answer all your kind and beloved letters [...]” The original manuscript clearly reads, “I now sit down on my botom [...]”

information, most likely the reader would attribute a profoundly desolate tone to the passage. The knowledge, however, that the remorseful voice is that of a seven-year-old unfairly and perhaps unavoidably impacts one's interpretation, rendering the author's vantage point seemingly more sincere, but also less despairing—potentially even amusing.

The temptation to segregate the child's voice from the adult's resonates with the concomitant desire to cast children's innocence as a source of innovation, novelty, or wisdom unequalled by anything that stagnant, conventional maturity might produce. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the charge of precocity was anathema to the child writer's reception, as it suggested a distasteful relationship to the careworn and overly calculating adult world for most readers. Like the prefaces of nearly all juvenilia from the 1920's-1930's, the various introductions to Fleming's work continually emphasize the normalcy of the girl's behavior. Kate Wiley assures Fleming's audience that "bright and gifted as she was, Marjorie was no 'pale weakling,' as precocious children too often are, but a strong, healthy, laughing little girl" (14). MacBean defends the young author far more passionately, crying, "Let no one do our Marjorie the injustice of classing her as a pale, precocious child, for she had none of the pertness and preternatural smartness of that species. She was on the contrary a healthy, warm-blooded, happy, humorous, little girl" (52-3). Smyth surmises that if Marjory's key feature had been precocity—"a weariness from which all of us pray to be spared"—her works would not have endured "beyond the pages of some dry-as-dust chronicle of literary curiosities" (xii).

The contrast these commentators draw between the dry productions of pale weaklings and the joyful expressions of the warm-blooded author raises the specter of the child's body once again into textual interpretations. This focus upon the child's physical person and her behaviors outside of writing signals the degree to which readers wished the ingenious child to be "not a

child prodigy but rather a prodigious child: a genius at being a child” (Plotz 6). Although MacBean enthusiastically touted the fact that Fleming’s “artless writings have been classed with the wonders of the world,” he conceded that “indeed she was often but a merry, inconsequent babbler, as every *real* child must be” (1, my emphasis). In the following section, I will consider how this Romantic valuation of the ordinary child similarly affected critical readings of *Huckleberry Finn* well into the twentieth century, ending with a look at how acknowledging this shared interpretative framework might help scholars to re-think juvenilia’s value.

2.2 HUCK AND THE CRITICS

This section begins with a look at the way in which the reception of now-obscure juvenilia like Marjory Fleming’s journals ironically mirror the early critical history of Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—a text hailed by countless scholars in the latter part of the twentieth century as the quintessentially American novel. In recent decades literary critics have expanded the ways of looking at Twain’s “classic,” but in the novel’s contemporary reviews, Huck’s perceived state of innocence or depravity provoked either the highest encomium or the most vitriolic critique, respectively. The imperiled notion of family readership played a role in the negative responses: conservative readers expressed concern that Huck’s less-than-ideal behaviors would set a poor model for his child audience. At the same time, however, many reviewers lauded the novel’s realistic depictions, judging them as proof of the narrative’s supreme “truthfulness.” While such early critics fell short of crediting Huck himself with

superior virtue, their comments implicitly linked Huck's unconventional narration with the text's authenticity, suggesting once again readers' attention to innocence when evaluating literary merit.

As the twentieth century progressed, critics such as Lionel Trilling, T. S. Eliot, and Leo Marx increasingly equated the success of *Huckleberry Finn* with a complex blend of moral insight and narrative innovation.³⁰ In these critics' laudatory essays—which were largely responsible for the novel's canonization between the 1940s and 1950s—the positive value of Huck's social commentary relies upon the same problematic brand of criticism with which Fleming's juvenilia has been met, by positing that the sanctity or profundity of the child's statements relies upon the unconsciousness or innocence with which they are made. Thus, for Huck's decision to stick by Jim and “go to hell” to register as superior morality rather than didactic moralizing, readers must perceive the boy as having made his resolution in ignorance.

Throughout the early twentieth century there was also an increasing trend to view the child's form of expression as symptomatic of narrative or linguistic authenticity. Writing Helen Keller—a long-time friend—Twain himself argued that whereas the “grown person's memory tablet is a palimpsest, with hardly a bare space upon which to engrave a phrase,” the child's “memory tablet is not lumbered with impressions, and the natural language can have growing room there” (*Letters* 731). In contrasting the adult's rigid consciousness, upon which ideas and language can only be engraved, and the child's more fluid state of mind, which allows for organic growth, Twain suggests that children possess an intuitive relationship with the world that

³⁰ Indeed, in 1953, Marx—quibbling with Trilling's and Eliot's justifications for the book's ending—argued that the novel's moral insights could not be separated from its form, thereby rendering the concluding chapters a failure. See “Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*,” reprinted in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*.

circumvents disparities even between sign and signified. In Marx's influential scholarship on *Huckleberry Finn*, the narrator's meaningful representation of his landscape accordingly lies in what Marx deems the boy's "vernacular" language, which resolves the narrative disjunction in previous Twain novels between an aesthetic and a utilitarian appreciation of the river. Although Marx is careful to note that there is no intrinsic value to vernacular narration, his assertion that Huck's language is "native" to the river, because he "belongs" to it, takes its cues largely from the same Romantic ideal of childhood or naïveté expressed in Twain's letter to Keller. Marx may deny that Huck is an "innocent traveler," but he also perceives him as adopting a "primal mode of perception" in his "willingness to accept the world as he finds it, without anxiously forcing meanings upon it" ("Pilot" 30). In other words, whether critics focused upon the morals, linguistics, or narrative conventions of Twain's novel, innocence was always key to their evaluations.

Before turning to the early reviews from which canonizing essays like Trilling's and Marx's evolved, it is useful to explore how critics' emphasis upon the relationship between an unacculturated "naturalness" and authenticity shared Romantic overtones with the turn-of-the-century's flourishing youth-revering culture, in which Twain played an enthusiastic role. Despite Twain's oft-times satirical treatment of childhood in his fiction, the author's nostalgic interludes on boyhood in his letters, whimsical gifts and correspondence with child actress Elsie Leslie Lyde, and his girls-only Angelfish Club, all suggest a spirited fetishization of childhood.³¹ This latter enterprise was undertaken during the last decade of his life, when the author went so

³¹ Lyde played both Tom Canty and Prince Edward in Daniel Frohman's dramatization of *The Prince and the Pauper*. Around this time, Twain sent her a pair of slippers elaborately (if eccentrically) stitched by his hand. He described the slippers as "crimson with the best drops in that heart, and gladly shed for love of you, dear ("A Wonderful Pair" 312). Later, the novelist also gifted Lyde with an inscribed copy of *Huckleberry Finn* (Lillie 409).

far as to begin “collecting” adopted granddaughters, girls whom he met aboard ships, in the streets of New York, or on vacation in Bermuda.³² These dozen girls responded enthusiastically to his overtures, writing effusive letters (in answer to Twain’s own) and visiting the famed author during their summer breaks.³³

Interestingly, early on in his correspondence with the first such of these girls, Gertrude Natkin, Twain gave his young friend a copy of Fleming’s journals. Natkin responded to Twain’s description of the diarist as “that quaint & charming & affectionate & tempestuous & remorseful little child” by asking if she might be his “little ‘Marjorie’?” (Cooley 13).³⁴ Delighted, Twain always referred to Natkin thereafter by that name. Although Gertrude Natkin was never officially an “angelfish,” her relationship with Twain epitomized the dynamic her successors would share with the novelist. What Twain evidently sought in these relationships was a connection to the activities and perspective of youth, which he missed particularly in the final years of his life. In the same way that the wholesomeness of Fleming’s subversive pronouncements relied upon the surety of her innocence, however, the enjoyment of Twain’s interactions with his young correspondents hinged upon the indisputability of their naïveté. When Natkin celebrated her sixteenth birthday, Twain exclaimed, “*Sixteen!* Ah, what has become of my little girl? I am almost afraid to send a blot [a kiss], but I venture it. Bless your heart it comes within an ace of being improper! Now back you go to 14!—then there’s no

³² In his autobiographical dictations, Twain asserted that “we are all collectors,” adding that “as for me, I collect pets: young girls-girls from ten to sixteen years old; girls who are pretty and sweet and naive and innocent—dear young creatures to whom life is a perfect joy and to whom it has brought no wounds, no bitterness, and few tears.” Quoted in Cooley, xvii.

³³ For more on the Angelfish Club and for the complete extant correspondence between Twain and the girls, see Cooley.

³⁴ Letter from Twain to Natkin, February 14, 1906; letter from Natkin to Twain, February 17, 1906.

impropriety. Good night, sweet fourteen” (Cooley 25).³⁵ Twain’s sense that at sixteen, as opposed to fourteen, a kiss may be interpreted as a “blot” or a blemish upon the girl’s character rather than as a playful sign of affection, suggests the degree to which permissiveness could be sanctioned by innocence. Not long after this letter, Twain ceased communicating regularly with his “granddaughter”; Natkin must have sensed his waning interest, writing “Dear Grandpa, please dont [sic] love me any the less because I am sixteen. No matter how old I am in years, I shall always be your young little Marjorie as long as you wish it” (Cooley 29).³⁶ Just as the precariousness of Natkin’s innocence impacted the stability of her relationship with Twain, the moral nature of *Huckleberry Finn*’s boy narrator influenced the novel’s contemporary reception. When “little Marjorie’s” flirtatious talk of “blots” came from a child, they were safely cute; writing on the verge of womanhood, however, the same affectionate discourse had the potential to be uncomfortably suggestive.

A comparable dynamic occurred in readers’ judgments of Huck’s ethics, the varied perceptions of which elicited a widely disparate range of reviews when the book was first published. Although for many years scholars continued to accept Arthur Lawrence Vogelback’s perception that the overwhelming response to *Huckleberry Finn* in 1885³⁷ was censorious, Victor Fischer’s comprehensive article in 1983 clarified that the initial reception of the novel was in fact far more diverse than Vogelback had claimed.³⁸ Certainly some libraries followed suit when the Concord, Massachusetts Library Committee banned the book as a dangerous influence

³⁵ Letter from Twain to Natkin, April 8, 1906.

³⁶ Letter from Natkin to Twain, late May 1906.

³⁷ Although Twain’s novel was published in December 1884 in England, a mistake at the American printers’ meant that the book did not appear in America until February 1885.

³⁸ See Vogelback’s 1939 article, “The Publication and Reception of *Huckleberry Finn* in America.”

upon children, but the negativity of early reviews was far from universal. A quantity of newspapers like *The Springfield Republican* followed Concord's example, declaring the novel "trashy and vicious" and "no better in tone than the dime novels which flood the blood-and-thunder reading population" (Bowles 4), but a nearly equal amount of newspapers mocked the library committee's decision. The Augusta, GA *Chronicle and Constitutionalist*, for instance, remarked upon the committee's cultural isolation and their ignorance of what nine-tenths of the reading public would prefer, noting the "probability that [Twain's] exaggerated waggeries are not near so dangerous to faith and morals as are the agnostic speculations of New England pundits [...]" ("Philosophy and Buffoonery" 4).³⁹ The Boston *Daily Globe* took a more humorous approach, quipping, "when Mark writes another book he should think about the Concord School of Philosophy and put a little more whenceness of the hereafter among his nowness of the here" (2).

The controversy the library ban engendered frequently overwhelmed commentators' readings of *Huckleberry Finn* itself. Those articles that did spare some space for praise or condemnation of the novel, however, shared a common interest in the "truthfulness" of the text and its narrator. Detractors took this question of veracity fairly literally, repeatedly focusing upon instances of lying or other sins in the narrative that flouted genteel notions of literature—particularly literature that children might read. Calling Twain's novel a "Pitiable Exhibition of Irreverence and Vulgarity," the New York *World* criticized the text for telling the story of a "wretchedly low, vulgar, sneaking and lying Southern country boy" ("Mark Twain's Bad Boy" 7). In San Francisco, the *Examiner* demoted the book to a "potboiler" characterized by an "utter absence of truth" ("Book Notice" 3), while the *Bulletin* questioned "whether young people who

³⁹ Fischer conjectures that this article was probably written by James R. Randall (21, n. 46).

read this volume will be the better for it”: “the problem,” this reviewer concluded, “with ‘Tom Sawyer’ and ‘Huckleberry Finn’ is not that they are too good for this world; even as the world goes, they are not good enough” (“Current Literature” 1).

Such critics implicitly connected the book’s veracity with the kind of moral model Huck set with his behavior. Because the boy engages in a series of deceptions and masquerades, such critics failed to see any greater “truth” in the novel or its narrator’s larger decisions. In contrast, champions of *Huckleberry Finn* focused upon the narration’s authenticity, designating the book’s realistic depiction a virtue in and of itself. The Hartford *Courant* asserted that Twain represented life on the river more powerfully than any of his previous books, so that the experience became “startlingly real.” “The beauty of this,” the reviewer added, “is that it is apparently done without effort” and the characters “do not have the air of being invented, but of being found” (2). The notion that Twain’s novel was produced effortlessly was a trope, too, in commentary upon juvenilia of the twentieth century—the apparent ease of the enterprise reinforcing the naturalness of the literary representation.⁴⁰ In keeping with the notion that such authenticity or realism renders literature more beneficial to its readers, the Hartford *Daily Times* noted the “fidelity” with which Twain’s narrative unfolded, remarking that “it teaches, without seeming to do it, the virtue of honest simplicity, directness, truth” (4). This same language of “fidelity” and “truth” appeared in the Sacramento *Daily Record-Union*’s review, as well as two separate articles in the San Francisco *Chronicle*;⁴¹ Joel Chandler Harris took the metaphor one step further, declaring, “there is not in our fictive literature a more wholesome book than ‘Huckleberry Finn’” (253).

⁴⁰ Indeed, Twain credited Fleming with such ease in writing: “she doesn’t have to study, and puzzle, and search her head for something to say; no, she has only to connect the pen with the paper and turn on the current; the words spring forth at once, and go chasing after each other like leaves dancing down a stream” (“Wonder Child” 1182).

⁴¹ See “Mark Twain’s Readable New Story” and “Ruling Out Humor.”

That such a pronounced disparity existed between the positive and negative reviews—despite their use of a similar criteria and vocabulary of truthfulness and authenticity—speaks to the extent to which innocence was the unifying factor in critics’ assessments. For those readers for whom Huck’s virtuousness was in question, the novel came under harsh scrutiny; for those who saw a natural innocence or truth in the text for which the boy was responsible, the book was a revolutionary success. For instance, Brander Matthews, an early and staunch advocate of Twain’s novel, argues that “one of the most artistic things in *Huckleberry Finn* is the sober self-restraint with which Mr. Clemens lets Huck Finn set down, without any comment at all, scenes which would have afforded the ordinary writer matter for endless moral and political and sociological disquisition.” Just as Brown and Twain felt that Marjory Fleming communicated directly and transparently with her readers, “looking straight out of the picture” at them (Brown 21, Twain 1182), Matthews unquestioningly accepts that there is a real child’s perspective fuelling *Huckleberry Finn*’s authentic representations:

We see everything through his eyes—and they are his eyes and not a pair of Mark Twain’s spectacles. And the comments on what he sees are his comments—the comments of an ignorant, superstitious, sharp, healthy boy, brought up as Huck Finn had been brought up; they are not speeches put into his mouth by the author. (153).

In the 1920s, reviewers would similarly evaluate texts such as nine-year-old Daisy Ashford’s *The Young Visitors* and Opal Whiteley’s childhood diary based upon the degree of naïveté with which they made their wise or satiric statements. Such conjecturing about the author’s state of consciousness saturated readings of juvenilia, inextricably implicating the child in the interpretation of her text.

During juvenilia's heyday, Van Wyck Brooks provided perhaps the most famous reading of *Huckleberry Finn*. Although Brooks initially seems to denigrate youth's influence upon literature, the child (and the childlike) is also critical to his argument: Van Wyck Brooks's central thesis in *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920) is that Twain's failure to achieve his full artistic potential was a matter of "arrested development" and "immaturity" (25, 17). Consequently, scholars often cite Brooks as an influential figure in stalling the canonization of *Huckleberry Finn*, claiming that it was not until the 1930s and 1940s that writers and critics such as Ernest Hemingway and Lionel Trilling recovered the book from Brooks's condescending views.

On the contrary, Brooks is highly commendatory of *Huckleberry Finn*, deeming it Twain's "unique masterpiece" and the exception to the author's artistic failure (121). In puzzling out the discrepancy between Brooks's claims and subsequent scholars' extrapolations of those claims, it is important to note Brooks's inconsistent use of metaphor: despite accusing Twain of "being arrested in his moral and esthetic development," Brooks finds that "the books in which [Twain] really expressed himself and achieved a measure of greatness, were books of, and chiefly for, children, books in which his own *juvenility* freely registered itself" (198, 154, my emphasis). Brooks paradoxically suggests that the most highly evolved artistry draws from the least cultivated perspective. He asserts that *Huckleberry Finn* in particular freed the author's "whole unconscious life, the pent-up river of his own soul," leading to the "abandon, the beauty, the eternal freshness" of the novel.

Brooks's muddled perceptions of the juvenile are reminiscent of Andrew Lang's 1891 article on Twain's novel. Lang declares both *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and

Huckleberry Finn “masterpieces which a fallacious appearance has confounded with boys’ books.” At the same time, however, he suggests that Twain’s “tendency to extravagance and caricature is only to be checked by working on the profound and candid seriousness of boyhood” (222). Beverly Lyon Clark perceives both Brooks’s and Lang’s conflicting statements as evidence of the growing divide between children’s and adult’s literature at the end of the nineteenth century. Arguing that critics secured the canonization of *Huckleberry Finn* by redefining it as an adult text, she concludes that the “greatness” of Twain’s novel “had to be constructed [...] at the expense of a fundamental respect for childhood and children’s literature” (101).

While my own research on juvenilia’s publishing trajectory leads me to concur with Clark’s conclusions about the twentieth century’s marginalization of children’s literature (see Chapter Five), the popularity in this era of juvenilia and adult-authored texts that incorporated youthful voices suggests that the *idea* of childhood itself enjoyed a privileged literary status. The seeming contradictions in both Brooks’s and Lang’s criticism highlight the degree to which the culture increasingly (if inconsistently) segregated children’s reading materials from children’s innocent perceptions of the world. In other words, while literature designed for the child reader suffered critical disdain, the appropriation of the child’s way of thinking and writing indicates the era’s growing respect for this alternate perspective. Even Clark notes the sometimes-positive assessment of the childlike in Brooks’s text (92), which argued that by speaking through Huck, Twain was able to express himself more freely. Brooks comments that “anything that little vagabond said might be safely trusted to pass the censor, just because [...] as an irresponsible boy, he could not, in the eyes of the mighty ones of this world, know anything in any case about life, morals and civilization” (195).

Here—with a healthy dose of sarcasm—Brooks seems to disparage those readers who cannot perceive the child as a conscious, self-reflexive agent. Although Brooks himself later indulges in such an interpretative move when he refers to Huck as a “puppet on the lap of a ventriloquist,” his notion that the boy’s narration secures the text’s success presage those of Lionel Trilling, a key figure in the canonization of Twain’s novel (196). Trilling, too, notes the freedom from stagnant moral and literary convention that Huck’s narration apparently affords Twain: in 1948, echoing the positive reviews of *Huckleberry Finn* in 1885, the critic promoted Twain’s novel as a “great book,” arguing that the text’s primary power was that it tells the truth (105). Like T. S. Eliot—who would shortly thereafter cite “the Boy” and “the River” as the two key elements that ensure the novel’s success—Trilling makes the child central to this assertion (Eliot vii). Whereas Brooks considers the child’s perspective a mere device for sneaking uncomfortable or unpopular truth past censors, however, these later scholars presume that the young themselves possess an essential quality that renders their pronouncements more sincere: children, Trilling asserts, do not tell the “ultimate lie of adults”—namely, the lie to one’s self (105).

Building upon pervasive Romantic notions of childhood as a more authentic state of being, critics follow Trilling in presuming that a “childlike” way of communicating has the power to lend authenticity to prose. Trilling was the earliest to perceive Huck’s unconventional relationship with language as the foremost evidence of the narrative’s sincerity: the critic calls Twain the master of a colloquial style that “escapes the fixity of the printed page” and is the “very voice of unpretentious truth” (116-7). Leo Marx expands upon the claims of Trilling’s influential essay by defining the novel’s vernacular dialect as a “natural” language (“Pilot” 28).

For Marx, Huck's ostensible immersion in the pastoral suggests the boy's intuitive ability to represent his environment realistically and without the constricting mediation of conventional form. In his book-length study of Twain's child characters, Albert E. Stone similarly claims that "imitating faithfully Huck's idiosyncratic accents seems [. . .] to liberate Twain from some of the self-imposed or culturally derived inhibitions evident in both of his earlier novels about boys" (136), while Tony Tanner argues that the "naïve-vernacular character" offers a "new way of getting the living world into words, as a new possible strategy of intimacy and inclusion" (103). All of these critics elide Romantic cultural constructions of childhood with Twain's representation of his boy narrator: Huck's presumed innocence transfers to his language, which scholars in turn deem unquestioningly veracious. As Tanner circuitously concludes, "it is Huck's linguistic sincerity which convinces the reader of his complete truth" (Tanner 170).

In such readings, critics ironically figure Huck's misdemeanors and imperfections as symbols of his supreme childhood purity; contrasting the impossibly pious children of earlier moralizing fiction, the "bad boy" figure of late nineteenth-century literature offered readers the illusion that the author was accessing the "real" child's nature. Because Huck is the narrator of his own "autobiography," his idiosyncratic or slang-laden speech doubly conveys the message that his approximation of professional storytelling is genuine. Thus, critics like Trilling, Marx, Stone and Tanner equate what they perceive as Huck's unerring fidelity to self with an authentic representation of reality, which a more conventional narrative or vocabulary would distort.

Although Twain does not consistently idealize Huck's innocence, his novel offers critics the opportunity to read the boy's linguistic or narrative idiosyncrasies as evidence of a greater fictional veracity. Despite the fact that *Huckleberry Finn's* opening notice exposes Twain as the novel's actual author, when Huck asserts that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is "mostly a true

book, with some stretchers” put in by Mr. Mark Twain, he opens up the possibility that his own narration will provide an alternate level of genuineness (11). In contrast to *Tom Sawyer*, Huck’s book famously denies that its pages contain a plot, motive, or moral—in other words, the standard traits for which readers prized books in the late nineteenth century. Although Huck’s assertion does not specify the concessions *Tom Sawyer’s* author made in his storyline’s interest, Twain implies that fictional conventions trap one into making less sincere comments; just as formal rules limited Fleming’s ability to complete her “Pug” poem, *Huckleberry Finn* suggests that rhetorical conventions and language constrain one’s ability to write truthful or authentic prose.

Despite Twain’s possibly more nuanced statement about the vagaries of fictional truth, the informality of Huck’s vocabulary and his self-conscious relationship with expressivity resonated with an early twentieth-century audience that Tanner argues had a “growing tendency to equate inarticulateness with sincerity and to make sheer naivety the gauge of depth of feeling” (123). In other words, Huck’s frequent complaint of the difficulty in making language effectively convey his meaning, underscores the artistic integrity or authenticity of the boy’s representations. Rather than describing his experience of the night air in conventionally romantic terms, for instance, the narrator evocatively remarks, “it looked late, and *smelt* late. You know what I mean—I don’t know the words to put it in” (42). Huck’s inability to perceive the effectiveness of this description signals his position as an outsider figure in relation to language and literature. The book’s ending reinforces this position, when Huck pronounces that “there ain’t nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I’d ‘a’ knowed what a trouble it was to make a book, I wouldn’t ‘a’ tackled it, and ain’t going to no more” (283).

Twain’s novels repeatedly rail against the blind acceptance of societal or institutional

notions of morality, which his fiction suggests is corrupt or otherwise wrongfully dogmatic. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the author inextricably links conformity to such morals with an unquestioning submission to the narratives that both society and books tell. As the novel's key representative of such cultural compliance, Tom Sawyer repeatedly resorts to the written word to substantiate his claims. When the other boys question his prescriptive methods of conducting adventures, he complacently replies that he has "seen it in books; and so of course that's what we've got to do" (18). Pushed further, he adds, "Don't you reckon that the people that made the books knows what's the correct thing to do? Do you reckon *you* can learn 'em anything?" (19).

Although Huck is often passive (or even complicit) in the face of the Southern patriarchy's violence and hypocrisy, in contrast to Tom, he queries the logic of conventional linguistic wisdoms, be their source novelistic or Biblical. Under Miss Watson's tutelage, for instance, Huck attempts to understand what she has described as the beneficial aspects of praying for others: "I went out in the woods and turned it over in my mind a long time, but I couldn't see no advantage about it—except for the other people; so at last I reckoned I wouldn't worry about it any more, but just let it go" (20). Of course, Huck repeatedly helps others—deserving or not—throughout the narrative, but his literal-mindedness balks at the discrepancies between the rewards Miss Watson describes and what he perceptibly receives. Such moments fuel the novel's exploration of the "chasm between word and deed, language and reality" (Blakemore 21), which Twain suggests is a necessary aspect of the truly moral life. When Tom's "diamond raid" turns out to be nothing more than a schoolboy attack on a children's picnic, Huck equates Tom's dogged adherence to the tropes of romantic literature with the abstractions of the ethical tale: it "was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies," he remarks, and "it had all the marks of a Sunday School" (23).

Critics have long perceived Huck's decision to stand by Jim and "go to hell" as the ultimate intersection in the novel of individualistic language and deed. As Huck grapples with this decision—what *he* perceives as the ultimate betrayal of his conscience—he chastises himself for having not sought out a better moral education through the Sunday school he mocked, and falls to his knees to pray. "But," he explains,

the words wouldn't come [...] because I was playing double. [...] I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger's owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. (208-9)

Despite his revelation about the divergence of his sincere feelings and the "right thing," Huck still struggles to make the normative moral choice. That this compulsion leads him to the act of writing is telling in that it directly connects conventional morality to a conventional linguistic form: to alleviate his aching "conscience" he drafts a letter to Miss Watson notifying her of Jim's whereabouts. It is in tearing up this epistle—his written attempt to conform to his society's ethics—and making his ostensibly sacrilegious proclamation, that the novel suggests Huck secures an individualistic, and therefore superior, morality.

In keeping with the novel's interior logic, critics typically read Huck's decision to go to hell as a stance made in innocence—the import of which, ironically, the mature reader must supply. The duality of the mature reader's perspective operates here much as it does in interpretations of Fleming's work: by presuming Huck makes his pronouncement in ignorance—a reasonable assumption based upon his interior monologue in this scene—readers grant the statement a multivalent resonance it would not otherwise have.

At the same time, however, conjectures about Huck's innocence allow critics to exaggerate his isolation from the culture and its trappings by deeming his proclamation a symbolic resumption of his own language. Conversely, as Jonathan Arac notes, the seemingly momentous phrase "returns to the religious language that is alien to Huck's own human sympathy" (53). Like Arac, Laurence B. Holland points to the ways in which the passage reveals the cross-pollination of "Huck's" and "society's" language: "whether genuine and durable or not, Huck's moral commitments are made not in severance from his civilization but in an entanglement [...] with its very foundation, namely language" (Holland 76).

The dynamic Arac and Holland note—namely, critics' tendency to create an unwarranted binary between Huck's identity (linguistic or otherwise) and that of his society—arises also in critics' interpretation of the novel's ending. The perception that the final "Evasion" segment of Twain's novel represents the narrative's downfall, has its roots in one of the earliest commentaries upon *Huckleberry Finn*, Thomas Sergeant Perry's oft-quoted review in *The Century*. Perry penned largely commendatory remarks about Twain's effort, comparing it favorably to *Tom Sawyer* for its eschewal of the earlier book's "conventional literary models," whose "caricature of books of adventure leaves us cold" (171, 172). The review tellingly equates the successful aesthetics of *Huckleberry Finn* with "the evident truthfulness of the narrative," and where this truthfulness "is lacking and its place is taken by ingenious invention, the book suffers" (171).

The implication that Huck's moral individualism and the narrative's linguistic or structural idiosyncrasies mutually inform one another has suggested to many readers that Huck's decision to "go to hell" is the apex in the novel's linear development and the symbol of

childhood innocence having overcome faulty social convention. As Millicent Bell argues, however, the narrative more accurately represents Huck's struggle as continuous, exploring the navigation of society's fictional or literary structures in relationship to morality (133). Indeed, Huck's acquiescence to Tom's ludicrously complicated methods of freeing Jim—methods taken straight from the pages of boy adventure novels—replicates the dilemmas he has faced throughout his river journey, during which he must constantly decide to conform to or reject the accepted standards of his compatriots and surroundings. Schooled in the boy literature of noble, wrongly accused prisoners and other quixotic adventurers, Tom insists, "It don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the *right* way—and it's the regular way. And there ain't no *other* way, that ever *I* heard of, and I've read all the books that gives any information about these things" (237). In keeping with this stance, Tom believes that any departure from this model—such as the selection of a pragmatic over a more imaginative tool—just "ain't moral" (239). In response, Huck retorts, "picks is the thing, moral or no moral; and as for me, I don't care shucks for the morality of it, nohow" (240). Nevertheless, he succumbs to Tom's illogical plans, revealing Huck's own cultural complicity.

Although Twain's novel suggests the degree to which innocence or integrity is precarious and unsustainable, for the most part, critics of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century idealize the extent to which Huck's inclinations are individualistic, citing them as the reason for the novel's authenticity. A greater attention to the child's role in the construction of these dubious critical frameworks could further elucidate the assumptions upon which scholars base such claims. Similarly, critics need to address readings of juvenilia that essentialize childish vocabulary, syntax, and sentiments by positioning them in opposition to "shop-made holinesses." In both Twain's and Fleming's texts, doubt and compromise pervade Huck and Marjory's

individual moral narratives and linguistic choices. Midway through Fleming's journals, for instance, she repentantly declares, "I will never again trust in my own power. for I see that I cannot be good without Gods assistance" (82). The typical desire to read this statement as the loss of individuality and the onset of stagnant convention establishes the value of the real child based upon highly idealized expectations of childhood's isolation from the world. Moreover, it ignores the fact that moral platitudes and "adult" sentiments cycle endlessly through Fleming's compositions, signaling their place in even the most "innocent" child's rhetorical repertoire.

The long endurance of Marjory Fleming's texts combined with its author's varied connection to several famed adult writers suggests that juvenilia has the potential to re-animate scholarship concerning the state of literary representation and experimentation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Critics have long discussed novels such as *Huckleberry Finn* in terms of their vernacular language and democratic realism; the contemporary rhetoric surrounding real children's writing sheds light upon the way in which adult-authored novels like Twain's participated in a youth-revering culture that valued the child's voice for its "authentic" position outside of literary convention. At the same time, juvenilia itself deserves more book-length studies, as well as a reappraisal of the ways in which real children's voices may prove valuable to children's literature criticism. These texts offer a forum, for instance, in which critics may consider the role biography continues to occupy in scholarship that seeks to contend with the real child—bringing problematic critical vocabulary such as "intention" and "consciousness" back into play.

In the following chapters, I trace the paradoxical ways in which the child's "innocent" voice was negotiated in the publishing world. In the pages of *St. Nicholas Magazine* at the turn of the twentieth century, the League competition supervisor Albert Bigelow Paine urged young

contributors to adopt formulaic depictions of innocence that conformed to middle-class taste. League members' manipulation of childhood's tropes secured them unmitigated praise from Paine, who ironically cast the writers' skillful paeans to nature and childhood as signs of the precocious child's lack of precocity. Two decades later, readers remained similarly invested in the innocently wise pronouncements of Daisy Ashford's satiric romance *The Young Visitors* (1919) and Opal Whiteley's diary, published as *The Story of Opal: The Journal of an Understanding Heart* (1920). As I discuss in Chapter Four, however, overt signs of professionalism or knowledge disrupted the compelling game of guesswork common to the practice of reading these juvenilia and texts such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885) and Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) that featured a juvenile narrator or protagonist. This practice required that the child figure, whether real or fabricated, occupy a delicate position of knowing and not-knowing that would allow mature readers the pleasure of both questioning and supplying the conventional wisdom or bawdy details presumably hidden from the young. Thus, the same traits reviewers found charming, inventive, or inspiring about Ashford's and Whiteley's naive narration, were deemed calculated, overtly commercial, or tawdry when the child's innocence became too improbable.

In my final chapter, I explore how a surge in the marketing of juvenilia to a child audience once again invited paradoxical responses to children's writing. Juvenilia directed at the adult, such as Patience, Richard, and Johnny Abbe's travelogues, continued to suffer constrictive criteria: despite the childlike quality of their prose, such texts incurred controversy due to their authors' engagement with worldly issues. In contrast, critics freely recognized the competence and precocity of young authors of children's literature because they offered images of children at play that ostensibly affirmed cultural ideals of innocence. A closer examination of these books

reveals that these authors not only mimicked, but also revised common notions of childhood. Texts such as Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's *The Far-Distant Oxus* (1937), Mimpsey Rhys's *Mr. Hermit Crab: A Tale for Children by a Child* (1929), and series such as Putnam's "Boys' Books By Boys" beg that we reconsider our definitions of children's literature in a time period largely overlooked in the critical field, offering scholars new opportunities to value and make space for the real child's voice in our criticism.

3.0 “LIVE TO LEARN AND LEARN TO LIVE”: THE ST. NICHOLAS LEAGUE AND THE VOCATION OF CHILDHOOD⁴²

Papa says that I may write very good fairy-tales, but that I haven't imagination enough to be a realistic writer.

—from Alice Wellington Rollins's "Effie's Realistic Novel"

In Alice Wellington Rollins's story "Effie's Realistic Novel," published in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in 1887, the title character is a young girl trying her hand at the prose style of William Dean Howells.⁴³ Reading her story aloud to her family, Effie calls their attention to those details that she feels qualify her work as highly realistic: the little girl claims, among other things, that her heroine's middle initial "P," nominally unattractive features, and habit of walking on the left, rather than the right, side of the street all situate her firmly in the real. Despite Effie's claims, her descriptions and what little plot she accomplishes are in fact quite conventionally romantic, and after a series of mumbled derogatory asides at his daughter's expense, Effie's father admonishes her outright that "imagination is not *inventing* things; it is *seeing* things [...]. The realistic writer

⁴² Copyright © 2011 Hollins University. This chapter first appeared as an article in *Children's Literature* Volume 39, 2011, pages 58-84.

⁴³ I am indebted to Elizabeth C. Saler and Edwin H. Cady for calling attention to Rollins's story. See "The *St. Nicholas*."

must see, not new things, but new qualities in things; and to do that, he must have plenty of imagination” (261, emphasis in original).

Effie’s father’s comment resonates with the paradox central to conceptions of childhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—namely, that as childhood became a privileged, protected state, those traits generally considered “natural” to the child were no longer always perceived as being attainable without careful adult guidance. Simultaneously considered more powerful and visionary than the adult, while in need of grown-ups’ wisdom and protection, the era’s image of the Anglo-American child reflected the concurrent evolution of idealized imagery and practical concerns surrounding childhood. At the same time that a broad cultural belief in the child’s native perceptive or creative abilities persisted, the rise of compulsory schooling and social reform agencies in the latter half of the nineteenth century helped to shape theories of children’s need for specialized attention and careful molding. Imagination, playfulness, and receptivity to the natural world around one—all proclivities previously presumed inherent to childhood—were now characteristics to which each child need *aspire*.

In the pages of *St. Nicholas*, one of the most influential juvenile periodicals of the time (1873-1943), generations of young subscribers found a venue through which to actively compare themselves to such images of childhood. This chapter will consider the paradoxical position that child contributors to the magazine consequently inhabited—at once “natural” creatures engaged in the ostensibly liberating “pleasure-ground” of the periodical, and self-conscious, schooled representatives of that existence (Dodge, “Children’s Magazines” 353). Editor-in-chief Mary Mapes Dodge shied away from encouraging these young writers, fearful that engagement with the adult business of publication would mar their innocent existence. After charting Dodge’s tenuous responses to child contributors in the publication’s early years, I will contrast her

attitude with that of the St. Nicholas League, a monthly feature begun at the turn of the twentieth century in which subscribers could participate in prose, verse, drawing, photography, and puzzle competitions. The League's editor Albert Bigelow Paine unabashedly fed his youthful artists directives, seeing no discrepancy between the natural children he lauded and the tutored children he helped produce. By urging young contributors to either live more fully in the real world or to write more realistically, both editors bucked the historical association of the imaginative child with the fantastic or fantasy literature, while continuing to privilege the youth's visionary capacities.

Frequently emphasizing the bourgeois American ideals of resourcefulness, pluck, and patriotism, *St. Nicholas's* fictitious portrayal of children was far from wholly Romantic. Nevertheless, in Dodge's interactions with real children, she encouraged them to embody traits more traditionally associated with innocence, such as creativity. In the magazine's early years, the editor's hesitation to disturb this innocence often led her to dissuade children from writing at all, urging them instead to engage more fully with the perceived experiences of childhood. In later volumes of *St. Nicholas*, Dodge modified this stance, presuming that as long as the juvenile compositions substantiated the notion that their authors were frolicking in natural spaces, observing wild animals, or otherwise enjoying the "simple" pleasures of youth, the child writers' innocence remained intact.

Instituted by Paine in November 1899, the St. Nicholas League directly contended with the issue that Dodge had intermittently skirted for nearly three decades: namely, how to reconcile an idealized imagery of children's ingenuity with the reality of their artistic productions. On the one hand, the League's existence privileged the child's vision, intrinsically suggesting that children possessed sufficient native creativity to sustain the department's monthly allotment of

twelve pages. On the other hand, the graduated levels of prizes, adult editorial staff, and commentary upon the entries placed the child artist in a subordinate position from which the only way to rise was through the education offered by the League.

Specifically, the way for young writers to receive acknowledgment was to adhere to the largely realistic literary style of *St. Nicholas* and Paine's repeated admonishment to write "what they know"—a directive which simultaneously valorized children's lived experiences while dictating the parameters of those experiences. Scholars of *St. Nicholas* frequently note both the magazine's subtle coercion of children into its middle-class ideals of childhood, as well as the preponderance of realist or nonfiction material in the publication; what has not yet been considered, however, is the symbiotic relationship between these two phenomena in the League—a forum in which youthful writers could ostensibly author their own childhoods. In Suzanne Rahn's highly informative work on *St. Nicholas*, for instance, she emphasizes that the "stated aims of the League were concerned not primarily with aesthetic goals but with the conduct of life as a whole" ("In the Century's" 120). Although Paine's feature clearly influenced the activities in which its members engaged, scholars must take into consideration the degree to which the "normative" activities of child life promoted in the League mandated a realist aesthetic in the juvenile writers' work. In order to prove themselves fully living the lives of inquisitive, imaginative children, these young writers needed their entries to exhibit them engaged in such projected experiences of childhood as playing, experimenting, and communing with nature.⁴⁴ Counterintuitively, the cultivation of imagination necessitated these young authors' immersion in

⁴⁴ Unlike Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster's edited collection on juvenilia, which emphasizes the child author's appropriation of adult roles and experimentation with convention, this chapter explores how the young writers of the *St. Nicholas* League actively submitted to the perceived roles of childhood, becoming self-conscious agents of contemporary notions of youth. See *The Child Writer From Austen to Woolf*.

the material world, a practice that consequently shepherded them away from the fantastic literature popularly associated with such innocent vision.

When the paternal character in Rollins's story reproached his daughter for her lack of imagination in portraying the real world, his criticism foretold the level of earnest labor juveniles would need to undertake to fully occupy their roles both as children and authors in the *St. Nicholas League*. Entrants were held to detailed protocols and prosaic subject matter and when children diverged from these specifications or wrote romantic tales, Paine often chastised them publicly. Like his contemporaries in the fields of education and social reform, the League editor felt that children's concrete experiences and straightforward representations of those experiences bred the highest level of creativity. As John Dewey asserted, proponents of the imagination's cultivation "undo much of our own talk and work by a belief that the imagination is some special part of the child that finds its satisfaction in [...] that of the unreal and make-believe—of the myth and made-up story" (61). Instead, Dewey and Paine argued that the natural medium for the child's education was the world surrounding them, and the point of the imagination's play was "to enliven and illumine the ordinary, commonplace and homely" (Dewey 144). Thus, while Effie and her real counterparts might naturally write "very good fairy tales" or fantasy, representations of the real world call for a higher level of perceptivity that children may only achieve when adult guidance and dogged perseverance sustain their work.

Despite the educative attitude implicit in the League's judgment of children's writing, *St. Nicholas's* training of the child's visionary lens upon the real world resonates with the Romantic desire "conventional in children's literature: innocence, as adults wish children experienced it, sees the way things really are" (Nodelman 130). Although Paine himself was more exacting when it came to his authors meeting normative standards of spelling and grammar, his years as

the *St. Nicholas* League editor (1899-1908) may be seen as a precursor to the creative atmosphere of the 1920s and 1930s, an era which valorized “childlike” representations in art and witnessed the publication of a series of novels, poetry collections, diaries, and travel memoirs penned by children themselves.⁴⁵ Although the perceived charm of these later juvenilia often involved grammatical aberrations and unconventional syntax that the League would not have sanctioned, such texts join the *St. Nicholas* feature in assuming that it is the child’s experience of the real world that generates the keenest imagination and insight. The young writers of *St. Nicholas* accepted the vocation of childhood implicit in the League’s motto “live to learn and learn to live,” and—in diligently striving to both occupy the ideals longed for by adults and commit their experiences to paper—became adroit professionals of both life and art.

3.1 “ANOTHER KIND OF CHILDREN”: EARLY CHILD CONTRIBUTORS TO ST. NICHOLAS

When Paine’s first League editorial graced the pages of *St. Nicholas* at the turn of the twentieth century, he faced the same challenge that had shaped the magazine’s nearly three decades in print: namely, how to enlist children’s genuine interests while simultaneously dictating what should interest the “genuine” child. Dodge—the publication’s chief editor from 1873-1905—

⁴⁵ Based upon Jane B. Wilson’s bibliography of published children’s writing, I calculate that at least fifty-six juvenilia—written by authors under eighteen and issued by major publishing companies in the United States or England—were published in the 1920s; at least seventy-four such juvenilia were published in the 1930s. These figures do not include anthologies or privately printed materials. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century also witnessed an unprecedented interest in children’s visual art. Sue Malvern cites the 1880s-1914 as the most intense period of focus upon the child artist, noting exhibitions held in Hamburg, London, Moscow, Vienna and New York during this time period (627).

initially conceived of the magazine as a metaphoric space where young readers could come and go as they please, where they are not obliged to mind, or say ‘yes, ma’am’ and ‘yes sir,’—where, in short, they can live a brand-new, free life of their own for a little while, accepting acquaintances as they choose and turning their backs without ceremony upon what does not concern them. (“Children’s Magazines” 353)

In contrast to this emancipating vision of the magazine and its child reader, Dodge’s staff and advertisers sometimes openly declared the periodical’s function as an arbiter of taste and instructor of conduct. In an advertising supplement bound with *St. Nicholas* in January 1875, for instance, Charles Dudley Warner declares that the magazine “has been made level with the comprehensions of children, and yet it is a continual educator of their taste, and of their honor and courage. I do not see how it can be made any better, and if the children don’t like it, I think it is time to begin to change the kind of children in this country” (1). Referring back to Warner’s remark fifteen years later in an advertisement, Dodge’s staff asserts:

Well, the children do like it, but all the same *St. Nicholas* has changed the kind of children. It cannot be that multitudes of them should see such pictures and read such stories and poems without being better, more thoughtful, more refined, and in many ways another kind of children than those who have gone before them. (qtd. in Gannon, “Here’s to *Our Magazine*” 86)⁴⁶

While this unapologetically didactic approach appears at odds with Dodge’s project, it highlights the oftentimes-paradoxical nature of writing for children. True to her word, the editor generally perpetuated a casual, secular tone in her magazine, and the publication’s selected

⁴⁶ The source of Gannon’s quotation is *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 16 (Dec. 1890): 667-70.

fiction, nonfiction, and poetry signal attention to children's entertainment. But at the same time, the comments of Warner and Dodge's staff make it clear that if Dodge and her magazine catered to children, it was, nevertheless, in service to a very specific notion of childhood. In large part, that notion took its cues from middle-class culture, which increasingly placed the pragmatic lessons of duty, industry and thrift alongside more idealized notions of childhood as a protected time of play, innocence, and imagination.⁴⁷ *St. Nicholas*'s young readers were, therefore, "free" to take pleasure from the magazine's pages—but only in ways predetermined by the editors.

Michelle H. Phillips claims that this covertly didactic aspect of *St. Nicholas* masqueraded as "antididacticism"—catering, in other words, to conventional or Romantic ideas of children's relative freedom and creativity. In answer to an earnest young reader's query about the origins of "runcible spoons," for instance, Dodge tasks the girl to consult not encyclopedias, but the "great big, big volume called Imagination" (May 1874, 436). From this comment, Phillips deduces that for Dodge, "imagination is a requirement rather than an option for her ideal child reader"—despite the seeming tension this stance creates between Dodge's rhetoric and her magazine's overwhelmingly realist prose (95).

While Phillips offers an astute reading of the relationship between the editor and this young letter-writer, noting the degree to which most child correspondents were aware of performing childhood in their letters, her conclusion that Dodge chides her subscribers to read less seriously misses the unintentional contradiction in the editor's reply (Phillips 101-2, 95).

⁴⁷ R. Gordon Kelly suggests that in the periodical's early decades—a time of both social and financial instability for the nation—*St. Nicholas*, like other American magazines, sought to preserve the "gentry" values idealized by the middle class (see *Mother Was a Lady*, Chapter Three). Fred Erisman argues that the magazine's fiction promoted an idealized middle-class culture, while its nonfiction prepared children for the actualities of nineteenth-century American life ("*St. Nicholas*" 383).

Despite the somewhat fanciful nature and tongue-in-cheek tone of Dodge's remarks, her response indicates the earnest work that children must undertake in order to embody their own idealized image. Much as Perry Nodelman argues that children are expected to "learn childlikeness from children's books," Dodge's allusion to imagination as something specifically contained within a "volume" conceptualizes a so-called childlike vision as something existing beyond the experiences of actual children, in a text (like *St. Nicholas*) that they must reference (13).

This circumscribed conception of imagination mirrors the attitude with which Dodge greeted children's creative submissions to the magazine. Much like the overly academic letter-writer above, real children's compositions carried the potential to break with the image of childhood espoused by *St. Nicholas*. Despite the difficulties that subsequently arose with young subscribers' contributions, Dodge often solicited their input on new departments and serials, or even offered drawing, writing, and riddle competitions.⁴⁸ Letters from child readers suggest that they eagerly anticipated such opportunities to see their names in print, and Dodge's editorial comments reveal that children often responded in large numbers.⁴⁹

Throughout the periodical's first two decades, however, Dodge struggled with a meaningful way to incorporate these contributions. Initially, and with very few exceptions, Dodge limited children's offerings to the Letter-Box. When the mother of ten-year-old Elaine

⁴⁸ Mary June Roggenbuck notes that when Dodge experimented with eliminating serials in favor of complete stories for the entirety of volume 29, she solicited letters from readers voicing their opinion. Unfortunately, these letters were never printed, but Roggenbuck indicates that in subsequent volumes, Dodge reinstated serials, suggesting readers were unhappy with the new format (337-38). According to Roggenbuck, the solicitation of reader response was a "long-standing *St. Nicholas* tradition" (180).

⁴⁹ Roggenbuck notes that an 1889 contest in the Riddle-Box, for instance, elicited 6,072 entries (308).

submitted the girl's poem to this section, Dodge printed the first verse:

How enchanting 't is to ride
With my mother by my side,
 Underneath the evening skies of June,
Shining with a myriad stars, —
Silvery Saturn, glowing Mars, —
 And the gleaming, —golden gleaming of the moon,
How it puts my heart and voice in tune! (March 1874, 308)

Although the poem's publication signals some recognition of the child's creativity, the editor's accompanying response registers emphatic discouragement:

Dear little Elaine! don't write verses yet, cleverly as you do them for one of your age. There is time enough for that. Put your 'heart and voice in tune', dear, by frolicking in the open air; by enjoying your dolls and playmates, and by being a sweet, merry, good little girl,—and not by leaning over your desk writing verses. You'll be all the better poet for it by and by. (March 1874, 308)⁵⁰

Dodge suggests that the best way for the child to be a writer is, paradoxically, not to write at all. On the one hand, her stance prioritizes the girl's innocence—a state that the young author undercuts by attempting to produce sophisticated verse. At the same time, Dodge's instructions insinuate a relationship between the activities of an innocent childhood and the eventual assumption of creative endeavor. Without the experiences of a “normative” childhood from which to draw, young authors jeopardize the success of their future creative output.

⁵⁰ Dodge's remarks echo Wordsworth's poem “The Tables Turned,” which urges its reader to quit his books, as “One impulse from a vernal wood/May teach you more of man;/Of moral evil and of good,/Than all the sages can” (lines 21-24).

Despite the perceived dangers of precocity, Dodge continued to experiment with juvenile-authored texts, instituting a “Young Contributors’ Department” in *St. Nicholas* from 1876-1880. As Greta Little notes, however, the reasoning behind the selection and placement of these contributions remained unarticulated and irregular, with the young authors’ full names omitted in order to avoid feeding “the vanity of unfledged authors” (Dodge, “Jack-in-the-Pulpit” 130). When plagiarism reared its ugly head once too many times amongst these contributions, Dodge apparently used it as a justification for reducing the scope of the department. From 1880 forward, poems and stories from children continued to appear in print with their letters, but haphazardly and with little commentary (Little 20, 21).

Exceptional amongst these juvenilia is Margaret Frances Mauro’s poetry, which *St. Nicholas* afforded a total of four full pages in August-September 1896, illustrated by one of its premier artists, Reginald Birch.⁵¹ In a spirit quite different from that in which she addressed Elaine, Dodge praises Mauro in the Letter-Box for writing of “her favorite flowers and birds, and the everyday experiences of childhood” (August 1896, 876). Although Elaine expounds upon the moon’s healthful effects upon herself, Dodge seemingly believes that in Mauro’s poem the more “childlike” activity associated with the observation of flowers and birds counteracts the unnatural strain of leaning over one’s writing desk. This justification for Dodge’s altered view of juvenilia may also take its cue from emerging changes in perceptions of childhood. As the nineteenth century waned, and industrialism and urbanization threatened to eradicate the young’s “natural” pastoral setting, educators and social reformers increasingly saw the markers of childhood as

⁵¹ See Mauro, “Poems,” “Poems by a Child,” and “Ye Romaunce of Oldenne Tyme.” Although published far earlier than Mauro, child poets Elaine and Dora Read Goodale also are exceptional in that Dodge wrote an introduction to their 1877 publication, “Poems by Two Little American Girls.” As with Mauro, Dodge emphasized the girls’ relationship with nature and its positive influence upon their writing. For more on the Goodale sisters, see Satelmajer 117-19.

traits that could only be achieved through children's earnest pursuit and the intervention of institutions such as the Fresh Air Fund or Playground Movement. Because the young poet's verses reinforce her participation in "youth-appropriate" activities, Dodge may sanction Mauro's literary hobbies without anxiety.

After having praised the childlike connotations of Mauro's work, however, Dodge incongruously notes that many young readers may have " 'skipped' [...] the poems as perhaps too 'old' for them, or too like poems for grown folk" (August 1896, 876). Unwittingly, the editor reveals the extent to which the childish activities represented in Mauro's poems cater to *adult* ideas of childhood. The editor's comment mirrors the paradoxical stance that the St. Nicholas League department would blithely adopt just a few years later: the most successful child author composes verse and prose that is recognizably "childlike" in its content, but achieving a style appropriate to this content relies upon a self-conscious representation that belies the author's innocent nature. Thus, under Albert Bigelow Paine's helmsmanship the young League members' most fully realized compositions were those that mimicked *St. Nicholas's* adult prose in their realism, their appreciation of nature, and their glorification of childhood itself.

3.2 "FOUR HUNDRED ANGLO-SAXON WORDS": THE ST. NICHOLAS LEAGUE AS GREAT COMPARATIVE SCHOOL

Although less scholarship exists concerning the St. Nicholas League than other aspects of *St. Nicholas*, throughout the years that Albert Bigelow Paine oversaw the department (1899-1908), children repeatedly and enthusiastically wrote into the magazine to declare it their favorite

segment.⁵² The feature was generally around twelve pages long⁵³ and included prefatory comments by Paine; a list of the winners of the gold and silver badges; and publication of the winning entries in verse, prose, drawing, and photography.⁵⁴ Paine also variously included mention of noteworthy failures or near winners, eventually settling on a regularly featured Honor Roll. As the League membership quickly ballooned to more than 40,000, the editor found it necessary to parse this category even further: by late 1902, the Honor Roll consisted of two categories, one of which indicated those entries that would have been published had space permitted, and the other listing work worthy of encouragement. Beginning in 1908, the honor rolls were also accompanied by a Roll of the Reckless or Careless, namely, those children who failed to adhere to the dictated rules and formats of the contests.⁵⁵

Whereas Mary Mapes Dodge struggled to reconcile her endorsement of a “bourgeois adaptation of Romantic views of childhood” (Fowler and Gray 40) with the self-conscious juvenilia that threatened to disrupt these views, Albert Bigelow Paine saw no discrepancy between his League editorials’ simultaneous promotion of children’s natural creativity and assumption that their creative endeavors necessarily involved hard work. Throughout Paine’s career with *St. Nicholas*, what he lauded time and again was perseverance: “That is the way to win—to try, try again. It is the only way. [...] We cannot all have genius, but we can all have

⁵² It was a rare issue that did not contain at least one letter from a faithful member declaring their love and appreciation for the League. Dorothy Posegate’s correspondence even queries “who knows but that in time the League may become the magazine and *St. Nicholas* the preface?” (185).

⁵³ From 1899-1908 changes in the magazine’s overall length or editing occasionally affected the length of the League department, as in 1906, when a strike resulted in an eight-page April issue and no March issue.

⁵⁴ The League also listed winners of the puzzle section, but their entries were generally located in “The Riddle-Box” department.

⁵⁵ A “Roll of the Forgetful” made a brief appearance in January and February of 1905.

industry and perseverance, and in the long run the difference between these and genius is said to be hardly noticeable” (May 1900, 650).

Where Dodge paid lip service to her magazine being a child’s “pleasure-ground,” slipping in instruction under the guise of liberating fun, Paine forthrightly advertised the League as “a great comparative school” (“League Notes” 667). Certainly the League still saw itself as a child-centered endeavor—but for Paine there was little tension between the notions of natural versus tutored children. As part of contestants’ “comparative schooling,” Paine urged them to learn “by thoughtful study of the successful contributions the faults of our own and the reason of another’s success” (November 1905, 80). Like such exercises, the presence of League chapters in children’s lives—independently formed writing and social clubs—also substantiated their perception of belonging to a larger body of peers. Paine often referred to this body as a “mighty army of the most intelligent, the most talented children in the world” (November 1907, 83). Although Paine tolerated young contributors’ occasional transgressions from form, his general expectation was that his “troops” in the St. Nicholas League would act as a regiment, bending individuality to the feature’s communal taste and prescriptions in order to gain accolades.

Indeed, Paine appears to have entirely lacked anxiety over the fact that his editorship held sway not only over his protégés’ composition, but also the composition of their lives. His ease with tutoring juvenile authors to appear *untutored*, simple, or natural reflects a cultural environment in which teachers, social agencies, and other public entities saw innocence and its associated traits as a state of being that children could only fully realize under the supervision of adults. Early twentieth-century play reformers and theorists, in particular—faced with the reality of children’s limited ability to play in familiar ways due to increasingly urban environments—drew an analogy between children’s pursuit of recreation and education itself: “play is to the

boy” playground reformer Joseph Lee declared, “what work is to the man—the fullest attainable expression of what he is and the effective means of becoming more” (viii). Unsupervised, wild play, however, could be detrimental to the same extent that orchestrated play could be beneficial. Thus, Everett B. Mero, a contemporary of Lee, asserted that while play is an intrinsic component of every childhood, “there is play that grows like a weed and never gets beyond the weed state; and there is play that has careful cultivation so that it becomes a useful plant” (17).

The same irony inherent in training the child to be better at *being* a child runs throughout the League’s monthly competitions. For Paine, the child did not necessarily come trailing clouds of glory, pen in hand; education was a necessary component of artistic endeavor just as it was for productive play, no matter what level of inspiration initially graced his young authors. “Perseverance and the refusal to confess defeat are essential elements in the making of success,” Paine somberly preached. “The most superlative genius without them will flare and flicker and go out in a night of despondency and failure” (July 1906, 848).

In an effort to avoid such ill-fated nights and to facilitate instead its members’ resolve, the League offered young artists and writers a well-ordered environment in which to judge and improve upon their skills on a monthly basis. In addition to the League’s rigid, if basic, rules of submission, the topics of the competitions repeatedly encouraged (if they did not outright dictate) that winning entries be essays rather than stories, simple rather than baroque, realistic rather than fantastic.⁵⁶ Paine often declared that the most important opportunity the League offered was not

⁵⁶ Aside from particulars specific to the individual competitions each month, the rules declared that “every contribution of whatever kind *must* bear the name, age, and address of the sender and be indorsed as ‘original’ by parent, teacher, or guardian, *who must be convinced beyond doubt that the contribution is not copied*, but wholly the work of the sender” (emphasis in original). This information needed to appear on the entry itself, which could be written or drawn upon only

the winning of prizes, but the means to “develop to perfection the gifts of which nature bestows only the beginnings” (March 1901, 466). Hence, much as in “Effie’s Realistic Novel,” whatever degree of imagination might be native to the child, in the League there was always room for improvement or deepening of their perceptive abilities—particularly in the juvenile author’s discriminating depictions of their own everyday experiences.

Paine’s League editorials promoted, therefore, the child’s immersion in and representation of the real world—prose that mimicked the adult contributions to the periodical. Citing such magazine contributions as a pragmatic goal for artists, Paine noted that all “must learn to write or draw with fitness for the various publications”; the best way for young contributors to begin, he added, was “to adapt their offerings to the readers of The St. Nicholas League” (November 1905, 81).

Suzanne Rahn accordingly claims that Paine’s “ultimate goal in devising and judging competitions was not to encourage youthful imagination or self-expression, but to develop the talents of serious would-be professionals” (“In the Century’s” 129). Paine did frequently look forward in his editorials to the time when his talented contributors would gain their literary laurels in the adult world, and his standards were often exacting. However, many of the League editor’s directives and selected topics for composition also encouraged the child to be *more* childlike. In other words, *St. Nicholas*’s brand of professional writing—realist prose and informative essays about school or the natural world, and verse with simplistic, concrete imagery—dictated that young authors live up to their compositions’ ideals and more fully inhabit the material experiences of childhood. The form and nature of these experiences reflects what

one side of the paper. Members were allowed to enter only one contribution each month, choosing between the prose, verse, drawing, photography, or riddle competition.

Susan R. Gannon deems *St. Nicholas*'s dual allegiance to adult and child readers, a duality that produced a "carefully constructed image" of childhood alternately designed to please youth's desire for autonomy or reveal to parents the vulnerability of their children's innocence and dependency ("Fair Ideals" 48, 42). Consequently, the young *St. Nicholas* League author needed to simultaneously produce rule-bound, professional texts *and* show herself capable of exemplifying the constructions of "carefree" childhood so meticulously replicated in her prose.

In spite of the exacting nature of the League's standards, then, Paine periodically steered his young writers away from precocity, warning them that one should be wise and serious, "but not overwise nor over-serious; and certainly it is not well to begin these things too soon" (June 1905, 753). In these moments, Paine echoes the sensitivity to childhood's distinct and rarefied state expressed by Dodge in previous decades, counseling his readers to cherish the "faith, the memories, and the fancies of childhood" that *St. Nicholas* strove (rhetorically at least) to facilitate (June 1905, 753).

Of course—as elsewhere in the magazine—having made room for the joys of childhood, it is evident that the editors felt it their right to act as arbiters of the form and representation of those experiences. Paine consequently urges League members to not write in a manner "too 'grown up,'" and

instead of telling their story in short words, simply and directly, as they would talk, [...] adopt the style of some rather grandiloquent writer, and weaken with long words and flowery sentences the pretty thought that could be expressed so attractively in four hundred short Anglo-Saxon words, divided into brief, crisp sentences. (March 1900, 461)

Grandiloquent writing, Paine suggests, not only fails at achieving a legitimately adult voice, but also shatters all pretense of writing in the unconscious manner and style supposedly natural to

children. Such studied, if faulty, attempts at maturity threaten, moreover, to dissipate the child's healthy relationship with the concrete. It is better that children write, as Louisa May Alcott once advised readers in *St. Nicholas*, not only with “the strongest, simplest words,” but also—as they have not seen much of love or the world—only “of things they understand” (545).

Thus, while the more explicit aims of the League were patriotism, the preservation of animals, and the “protection of the oppressed,” the magazine feature's primary focus remained the relationship between its young readers' lives and these lives' articulation, transmuting an idealized concept of childhood into a formula for professionalization. It was only by directly experiencing the activities associated with the League's competition topics that its members could be both adequate children and capable writers. At the time of the magazine department's inauguration in 1899, it was becoming an educational commonplace that children learned best not through rote learning, but by being actively engaged in the subject at hand and by bringing their own knowledge to their studies.⁵⁷ In accordance with this pedagogical practice, the League encouraged its artists to do studies from life; photographers must copy images only from the world around them; and the most frequently rewarded prose writers were those who drew from family traditions, escapades in nature, or otherwise lived experiences. The fact that wholly fantastic stories appear infrequently suggests that children quickly learned that their efforts in this arena were not conducive to winning the editor's favor.

Paine campaigned for this experiential artistic education not only through the League editorials, but also through his own prose for *St. Nicholas*, such as “Marjorie's School of Fiction:

⁵⁷ Lucille M. Schultz discusses the relationship between this gradual ideological shift and composition pedagogy in nineteenth-century America, noting that “observation became a heuristic for writing, and that the knowledge that students brought with them to an educational setting from their own lives was valued. In a word, writing instruction was democratized” (5).

A Story for Young Authors.” The title character—drawn to writing first by natural proclivity and then by financial need when her father dies—dabbles in romantic, Sir-Walter-Scott-like prose in an attempt to support her family. Like Dewey’s educational treatises, Paine’s story insinuates that the rarefied atmosphere of most schools—where one dutifully leans over one’s desk, rather than actively engaging in meaningful activity—is counterproductive to the development of true imagination or vision. In Marjorie’s school, she is told that the “literary world was waiting for her” as she graduates “with a valedictory that shed glory throughout the institution” (438). But when Marjorie fails to sell her prose and becomes a salesclerk at a button counter, the young authoress realizes that she is now in a “*great* school”; the mathematically challenged girl “receive[s] her diploma from this institution” when the floor manager fires her for incompetence (440, my emphasis). The irony of this “graduation” brings to light the inadequacies of Marjorie’s previous schooling. With the increased spread of compulsory education, the vast majority of students in turn-of-the-century America were in training for future labor, and not for further schooling at the college level. Paine implies that an institution like Marjorie’s—with its seeming validation of both unrealistic prose and unrealistic expectations—does a disservice to its pupils. In contrast, upon successfully selling a collection of short stories about her button-counter exploits—a work that depicts the “wonderful march of real life”—Marjorie learns that the “greatest of all schools for every profession under the skies [is] the school of experience” (444).⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Many of Paine’s contributions to *St. Nicholas* outside the League work from the premise that simplicity and real-world experience breed true creativity. In his serialized “Boys’ Life of Mark Twain,” for instance, he draws direct parallels between Twain’s childhood pranks and adventures, and the novels *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), noting that the author’s youth supplied him with “plenty of real material” (147). Similarly, Paine’s story “The Shuttlecock of Fate,” witnesses the most down-to-earth poet of

Paine clearly thought that fanciful rendering of subjects got authors into trouble, and in his League editorials he repeatedly admonishes children to write only what they know—simultaneously valuing the child’s lived experience and denigrating the fantastic representation the Romantic-minded might have considered the child’s special preserve in previous generations. Having solicited camping stories one month and received an influx of bear-related adventures, for instance, Paine remarks that “bears constructed in the imagination [...] were usually too big and too fierce,” and the boys who shot them unrealistic. Unsurprisingly, the winning entries this month all take their narratives from true life. The losing entries, Paine suggests, may still find a market in the “Nickel Libraries,” the “only place where they have ever had any real good times and where they still properly belong” (October 1906, 1136, 1137).

Paine’s reference to the cheap literature of the “Nickel Libraries” reveals the attention to class underlying his writing school. Although he may have perceived of writing or drawing as a “trade” (September 1904, 1041), Paine was not willing to concede that all markets should be attractive to his own readership, for which the magazine perpetually supplied ““the old, old lessons”” in order to reinforce “the child’s sense of his place and role in a middle-class world” (Erisman, “Utopia” 71, 68). Despite the pragmatic nature of some of these lessons (such as duty and thrift), in this era middle-class childhood was increasingly perceived of as a sheltered, precious state, ostensibly filled with happiness and good cheer. Because such healthy, hardworking, fulfilled children regularly paraded through *St. Nicholas*’s pages, in the League, Paine repeatedly notes that “very sad, very tragic, very romantic, and very abstruse work cannot

three friends write the most successful verse for a competition they have all entered. Wandering in the woods and letting the “winds whisper [...] and the leaves gossip to her” she learns to write “simply, without straining after rhymes and phrases—without lameness or affectation” (678). Her straightforward language earns her not only the school prize, but also publication in a magazine.

often be used, no matter how good it may be from the literary point of view.” The editor adds that while he “does not advocate the sacrifice of artistic impulse to market suitability, he does advocate as a part of every literary education the study of the market’s needs” (March 1907, 464). Lurid, melodramatic work, Paine implies, represents the experiences of someone other than the young middle-class reader to whom *St. Nicholas* pitched its tone and content.

The League’s verse writers—whose contest prompts generally afforded them some slight latitude in subject matter—were also subject to this brand of critique. Deriding the near rhymes of some verse entries, Paine haughtily remarks, “such liberties are only permitted to popular song writers who do not hesitate to rhyme ‘wheelbarrow’ with ‘Fifth Avenue.’” League members, on the other hand, must content themselves with “tread[ing] the path of fame to the same old measures and the same old consonant rhymes that guided the feet of Tennyson and Longfellow and Whittier and Poe” (April 1908, 564).

Editorial comments such as these reveal the specific nature of Paine’s desire to professionalize the child. In order to draw, write, or photograph in the way Paine advocated, League members must simultaneously live their lives in accordance with middle-class ideals—fulfilling their obligation to their childhoods as much as to their art. In keeping with these ideals, the most frequently endorsed activity in the League was the exploration of nature. Like social reformers and other like-minded mentors of youth, Paine perceived the natural world as the child’s proper playground, and therefore the most effective site of education. In the League’s very first issue, the editor declared, “book-study alone is not followed by the best results. Direct friendship with the woods and fields and healthful play are necessary to the proper development of both mind and body” (November 1899, 80). A few months later, reminding his readers of the League’s motto “Live to learn and learn to live,” Paine equated the onset of spring with the

opportunity for individuals' growth:

There is so much to be learned on every hand—in the groves, in the meadows, and in our own hearts. We never quite know ourselves until the sap begins to stir and the arbutus to grow pink under the brown leaves. In winter, shut in with book and games [...] life goes on quietly or merrily [...], but with the first breath of young grass on the land and the smell of burning leaves there comes into the blood a joy that is of no other season, a glow of strong confidence that leads to higher achievement, and with, and for, a nobler purpose we may learn to live. (April 1900, 555)

If the winning selections in the League were almost invariably realistic in style, their most frequent subject was the appreciation of nature, and many young writers submitted essays about walks in the woods, observing animals in the wild, or examining fauna under microscopes.⁵⁹ The League promoted the natural world in every component of its contests. Wildlife photography was a featured competition each month, “encourag[ing] the pursuing of game with a camera instead of a gun.” Photos of deer, foxes, and various birds consequently peppered the League pages, while Paine’s verse prompts similarly called attention to the seasons, stars, or plants of one’s region. Prose entries like E. B. White’s “A Winter Walk” or Katharine Sergeant’s essay on spiders’ nests provided complementary material to such art and poetry, with pieces like Florence Loveland’s “How a Kodak Gained a Friend for the Birds” exemplifying the straightforward style and ecological message of the St. Nicholas League.⁶⁰ In Loveland’s piece,

⁵⁹ These stories and essays mimicked the adult-authored prose on natural history found elsewhere in *St. Nicholas*. For more on how these articles encouraged young readers’ direct observation of the world, see Kaye Adkins 34-37.

⁶⁰ Katharine Sergeant became the long-time fiction editor of *The New Yorker* in 1925. In 1929, she married E. B. White.

young John learns that it is better to aim a camera rather than a slingshot at the birds, so that they will “carol sweetly to you” rather than “run from you with a disgusted air” (1045).

While the existence of previous ecologically-minded organizations in *St. Nicholas* such as the Agassiz Association and Bird Defenders suggests that this aspect of the League was genuinely motivated by the desire to cultivate a regard for nature and wildlife in its readers, it also corresponds with the publication’s residual concern that little children “leaning over desks” will result in not only a deficient youth, but also deficient art. Paine’s editorial remarks in July 1903 mimic—if more casually—the sentiments expressed in Dodge’s letter to Elaine, reassuring readers that it is alright if for a time they neglect the League during their summer vacation, for “without knowing it, we shall learn from nature’s pleasant pages, and without intending to do so, perhaps, shall gather material for the poems and the stories and the pictures for another year to come” (848). In *St. Nicholas*, spending time in the natural world is critical to the development of creativity, because it amounts to full participation in childhood—an experience that in turn produces the fullest expression of life.

Even entries not specifically about the observation of wildlife often absorb the League’s equation of childhood and immersion in nature. Mignonette Lincoln’s “Receipt [*sic*] for Preserving Children,” for instance, makes the connection explicit:

1 extra large grassy field.

½ doz. children, assorted ages.

3 small dogs.

1 long, narrow strip of brook (pebbly, if possible).

Mix children with dogs, then empty them into field, stirring continually; sprinkle with field flowers, pour brook in gently over pebbles, and cover all with a deep blue sky;

bake in a very hot sun.

When children are well browned they may be removed. Will be found just
right. (760)

The author's sense that there is a formula for creating children who are "just right"—a formula, moreover, which involves animals and nature—coupled with her awareness of childhood as a time to be "preserved," suggests that League members adapted a rhetorical stance towards youth that belied their own association with it.

Paine's attempts to get kids to be simple and natural were often thus thwarted by his ritual promotion of "child-friendly" topics and his oft-repeated advice to compare one's work with that of others. His authors' consequent consideration of their entries' appropriateness for the publication engendered a number of self-conscious poems and stories catering to idyllic notions of childhood. In some cases, these pieces came from older members, whose status as children was therefore already suspect. As seventeen was the upper age limit for League submissions, for instance, newly eighteen-year-old members frequently wrote poems or letters chafing against being barred from further competitions and, by association, from childhood itself. "The gates are now closed upon me," writes Hilda Van Emster, "and I am left out in the cold, cold world; but may I not sometimes return,—may I not sometimes linger here outside the gates and look in upon the happy fields where I played in my childhood?" (665). Far younger writers, however, also lamented the passing of youth's hallowed state, such as ten-year-old Katharine R. Welles, who mourned, "Return to me, O happy years/Of childhood's merry day;/For now the years are flying fast,/And I'm too old to play" (1143). Such awareness of childhood's preciousness belies the child's own occupation of youth, signaling innocence's loss—or perhaps its initial exaggeration.

The same contrived sentimentality appears in essay contributions as well, arising in response to even the most prosaic prompts. Responding to a prose competition on “the story of a word,” for instance, thirteen-year-old Lucile Delight Woodling chooses “agoo,” a term she deems the “dearest little word in all the world.” Linking this baby talk to not only the “mystery of babyhood” but also a more “innocent” time culturally, Woodling mourns the fact that adult tenement dwellers need “jabber [in different languages] in vain [having] forgotten the language of innocence.” Suggesting that “this old world” would be a better place if everyone spoke the baby’s universal language, she concludes “what are all these side issues of learning, anyway, in comparison to the pure thought of a little child?” (1046).

Loveland, Lincoln, and Woodling—like many of their League compatriots—exhibit a meticulous attention to the style and sentiments favored by the department’s editor. Not all of *St. Nicholas*’s writers, however, absorbed these artistic protocols. While the majority of the juvenile authors worked to conform to the League’s standards, there were transgressors of taste and style, and occasionally Paine printed their entries in the League. The January 1902 issue witnessed most of the verse writers responding to the “Good-by, old year!” prompt with laments over the passing of the seasons, or observations of winter’s natural changes, but eleven-year-old Roy M. Sterne submitted the following irreverent poem:

Good-By, old year;
I’m glad you’re gone.
I’m tired of tomatoes,
Peas, and corn. (283)

Fifteen-year-old Leigh Sowers similarly resists May’s delights in her poem about toiling in her botany class, commenting simultaneously upon the uniformity of other members’ entries:

So while others are writing in elegant phrase
Of the beauties and pleasures of wonderful Mays,
This common decision *our* minds does harass:
'May's horrid.' Yours truly,

THE BOTANY CLASS. (660, emphasis in original)

Unconventional, but far from avant-garde, these submissions superficially break with the League's image of the child. Like the tractably naughty youth that intermittently appeared in the body of *St. Nicholas*, however, the willful voices of these League entries still function within the paradigm by which wholesome children may be identified. Angela Sorby argues that because Dodge strove to generate a sense of peer community amongst her readers, "transgressive behaviors were tolerated or even encouraged" in *St. Nicholas*'s stories, verses and even reader responses in the interest of marketability (71).⁶¹ In other words, in promoting the magazine as a child-centered pleasure ground, Dodge assumed that the occasional misdemeanor was a part of any liberated childhood. The clever, but ultimately tame way in which Sterne and Sowers subvert sentimentalized childhood, therefore, only reinforces their status as healthy children.

Nevertheless—although such unsentimental, un-earnest items received a place in the magazine from time to time, signaling some allowance for variations on what qualified as "youthful" expression—it was rare for unconventional entries to receive a League gold or silver badge. League members learned primarily through the comparative study Paine perpetually urged them to undertake between their own work and that of the winning entries. While the

⁶¹ Both Ellen Gruber Garvey and Catherine Van Horn suggest that the *St. Nicholas* Advertising League (1900-1917) was similarly conceived of as a way to establish peer identity, build upon the established rapport between the magazine and its readers, and turn its subscribers into good consumers. See Garvey, "The *St. Nicholas* Advertising Competition" and Van Horn, "Turning Child Readers into Consumers."

young competitors recognized publication as a step in the “long ladder to literary success,”⁶² the distinction between publication and winning gold was great (Simpson 185). Printing offbeat verse like Sterne’s and Sowers’s allowed readers a direct comparison between winning and non-winning entries, for while Paine’s perception of such entries was not always clear, their fate was: unconventional submissions did not fully meet the League’s tastes and ideals, and therefore did not win badges.

Children’s deviations from the norm were not restricted to verse. Young writers also attempted fantasy, which, though never expressly banned from the League, was never particularly encouraged by the competition prompts, which favored topics such as “My Favorite Character in History,” “A True Animal Hero,” or “One Day at School.”⁶³ When fantastic elements do arise in the children’s writing, however, they are almost invariably in service to everyday matters, as in “The Don’ts of a Book,” in which a talking book schools readers in its proper handling. Indeed, nine-year-old Ruth Linn’s tale concludes in a tone more didactic than most *St. Nicholas* prose: “I think it would be well if all boys and girls would try to remember what the book told Robert, don’t you?” (1037).

Similarly, Miriam Helen Tanberg disappoints expectations of the fantastic in her story “A Fairy Friend,” the ending of which actually goes so far as to privilege the League’s favored genre of realism. Tanberg’s designation as an “Honor Member” at age ten indicates her former success within the League: contributors were only given this title if they had previously won a gold medal and the magazine was printing their subsequent work. Despite the nod to the fantastic in her story’s fairy character, Tanberg’s narrative unfolds in a prosaic, educational manner. The

⁶² Helen Simpson was one of many letter writers who described the publication of their entries in this way.

⁶³ All of these topics were repeated at least once between 1899-1908.

fairy, equipped with golden book in hand, teaches the main character Marie—who has struggled but failed to write well herself—how best to compose stories. After reading from the fairy’s book, Marie learns that “the great stories she hoped to write were to be found all about her. That there was beauty in every common thing, and a romance in every life” (763). Thus, even an “unconventional” fantasy story absorbs the League’s touted practice of writing what one knows.

In keeping with the tenor of *St. Nicholas* as a whole, the League offered children a space to exhibit their natural inclinations and talents, while unabashedly dictating the direction those habits and interests should take. Suzanne Rahn characterizes *St. Nicholas* as a venue which encouraged children to see themselves not only as “self-reliant and resourceful,” but also as “lovable, not for any special talent or achievement, but for who they were” (“*St. Nicholas*” 108). This lovability, however, was unconsciously predicated upon a predetermined idea of childhood, and in the League especially, when “who they were” was children who failed to conform to the League’s standards, Paine was quick to point out their deviations. True, the editor often tempered his criticism with benevolent remarks about young creators’ efforts and congenial editorials on the typical childish pastimes of the given season. But just as (if not more) frequently his commentary abandoned any pretense that the League competitions were carefree endeavors. Of the four hundred prose entries the League received on “Jack’s Fourth of July” in 1902, for instance, Paine bluntly declares that “about three hundred and fifty were so hard for the editor to read that he wished before he was through that he had never heard of Fourth of July, or of Jack, or even of all the dogs and parrots and monkeys by that name that the young writers put into their stories.” He brusquely adds to this statement “just a word of advice. Don’t write a story just because you can put down on paper four hundred words of prose” (July 1902, 848).

While Paine's stern rigidity seems antithetical to popular notions of children's freedom and creativity, his serious approach to children's pastimes spoke to evolving notions of childhood's purpose at the turn of the century. Having legislated the child out of the workplace, the child was left to choose "not between work and play, but between play and idleness" (Curtis 4). Subsequently, play and childhood's other endeavors became a pseudo-profession for the child, an outlet for not only the physicality of work, but also its apprenticeship.

In asking its members to "live to learn and learn to live," the St. Nicholas League implicitly offered its members an opportunity to be professional practitioners of both life and art. At least some Leaguers seem to have intuitively understood the interconnectivity between their exercises for the feature and their own growth. Writing to thank the League for her newly-won gold badge, for instance, Freda M. Harrison modestly intimates that its worth is "far greater than the merit of *my verses*," adding that "the whole credit must rest with the League, for without its instruction and influence, I could never have become even *what I am*" (1147, my emphasis). Harrison's unconscious equation of her writing with her self indicates the symbiotic relationship promoted in the League between the child's activities and their expression.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, Rachel Carson, E. B. White, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Vita Sackville-West, Stephen Vincent Benet, Eudora Welty, and a host of stage designers, editors, and artists were all League contributors as children, suggesting that the absorption of the League's lessons may very well have been conducive to creative success.⁶⁴ That children respected and sought the League's good opinion of their work is obvious from the terms of letters published in the department; these letters reveal that children often faithfully

⁶⁴ For more on famous young contributors to the League, see Paul Rosta.

submitted entries for years before receiving an award or even honorable mention.⁶⁵ Indeed, in White's 1934 *New Yorker* article about the League, he notes that winning the Pulitzer Prize must have been "faint fun" for Edna St. Vincent Millay in comparison with winning her gold St. Nicholas badge (42).

What multitudes of less conventional renderings may have been lost to the League's confining tastes, however—or to the large wastepaper basket Paine boasted was in his possession—can never be fully known (August 1904, 945). In White's *New Yorker* essay, he admits that in order to claim his own gold badge, he doctored his entry to fit the profile of winning works, pandering to the magazine's prevailing sentiment of kindness toward animals. "This precocious anticipation of an editor's needs is a sad and revealing chapter in my life," he writes. "I was after results, apparently, and was not writing, or drawing, for Art's own sake. Still, the League motto was 'Live to learn and learn to live'" ("Onward" 46).⁶⁶ Looking back upon her gold-badge prose, novelist Anne Parrish also notes that it

was written, for my first and last time, to please the public. I had no use at all for Alice in Wonderland until I was grown. I am not sure who was 'My Favorite Character in Fiction' then; probably I was identifying myself with the heroine of *The Prisoner of Zenda*. But

⁶⁵ These letter writers are too numerous to name, but some include Robert E. Jones; Ellen Dunwoody; and Rena Kellner, who participated in the League contests from 1899-1908.

⁶⁶ White's adult work also shows Paine's influence, perhaps nowhere more so than in his contributions to William Strunk, Jr.'s *The Elements of Style*. White advises young authors to write with "plainness, simplicity, orderliness, [and] sincerity," avoiding fads, foreign terms, and "a twenty-dollar word when there is a ten-center handy" (69, 76-77). One cannot help but wonder if White consciously echoes the League editor when he adds, "Anglo-Saxon is a livelier tongue than Latin, so use Anglo-Saxon words" (77).

grown people liked even one as old as Juliet to like that Alice, and grown people gave the awards. (32)⁶⁷

In these reminiscences, White and Parrish reveal the extent to which the most successful League members cunningly played to *St. Nicholas's* tastes, self-consciously and effectively navigating literary conventions.

Despite the directive nature of the St. Nicholas League, Albert Bigelow Paine envisioned his feature as “a sort of garden that lies along the foothills of success,” an idyllic and free space for children’s artistic output (December 1906, 176). Like Mary Mapes Dodge, the League editor operated from the paradoxical stance that the child’s liberation was best expressed in predetermined, circumscribed ways—both in life and in art. Nevertheless, both he and Dodge appear to have genuinely wished for their subscribers’ full enjoyment of childhood, and near the end of his editorship, in particular, Paine’s instructive commentary often gave way to more sentimental address. In putting together an “album” of the League, the editor encouraged former members to write to him with stories of their artistic failures, as well as their successes:

The League editor who has seen you come and go, and who has watched—you do not know how proudly or how lovingly—your efforts during the days when each of your contributions must bear the sender’s age, cannot see you drift away into the unrecorded years without a hunger at the heart to know where and how your later lines are cast. Write, then, and tell all the story, and you may be sure of telling it to at least one sympathetic ear. (February 1908, 371)

⁶⁷ I am indebted to Mary June Roggenbuck for calling attention to Parrish’s article in her dissertation.

In the decades immediately following Paine's leadership of the St. Nicholas League, a number of published child authors did "tell all the story"—writing memoirs and exposés about the natural world, their generation's relationship to sex, or the precarious state of pre-war European countries (and their parents' own marriages). Readers and critics alternately considered these texts hilarious, impolitic pronouncements and prophetic commentary, hailing volumes like David Binney Putnam's *David Goes Voyaging* (1925), and Patience, Richard and Johnny Abbe's bestselling *Around the World in Eleven Years* (1936) for their "innocent" depictions of the real world. Artfully marketed as visionary to the extent that they were childlike, the published juvenilia of the 1920s and 1930s suggest that the simultaneously pragmatic and idealized notion of childhood in the St. Nicholas League had forecasted an environment in which the most imaginative, unfettered child was also the world's consummate professional.

4.0 READING INNOCENCE: JUVENILIA AND THE PROTO-MODERNIST VOICE

In the twentieth century's second decade, England and America shared two unprecedented literary sensations: Daisy Ashford's social satire *The Young Visitors* (1919), written when she was nine years old, and Opal Whiteley's childhood nature diary, serialized first in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and then collected under the title *The Story of Opal: The Journal of an Understanding Heart* (1920). Both Ashford and Whiteley's juvenile texts—discovered when their authors were already adults—were international bestsellers that instigated an outpouring of enthusiasm and controversy. With sales soaring on both sides of the Atlantic, several dozen newspapers and literary journals weighed in on the merits of the girls' work, with one critic declaring 1919 “the year of ‘The Young Visitors’” (Pure 451), and the chairman of Putnam personally announcing that he regarded Whiteley's diary as “a very remarkable work of genius, ranking with the great works of all time” (qtd. in Hoff 73).

Whereas the editors of *St. Nicholas* valued their young writers' seamless representations of a middle-class, neo-Romantic childhood, critics lauded Ashford and Whiteley for their lack of professionalism—in other words, for the very way in which their compositions' seams showed. Despite the texts being disparate in form and subject matter, they consistently received attention for what they related about their authors' innocence (or potential lack thereof)—a response

characteristic of the subsequent craze for child authors in the 1920s.⁶⁸ Critics repeatedly praised the ribald, yet “unconscious” humor of Ashford’s novella and the way in which the unconventional, poetic language of Whiteley’s diary connoted the author’s Romantic engagement with nature. In each case readers’ admiration hinged upon their insistence that the girl’s “childlike” prose was evidence of her remove from the world’s influence, and therefore, ironically, of her increased ability to comment upon that world. Discussing Ashford’s work alongside that of famed child artist Pamela Bianco, a writer for *Current Opinion* proclaimed both juveniles to be “true” artists, each with “a nature untrammelled by the impedimenta of intellectual knowledge, uncorrupted by useless, if inevitable, association, unhampered by concepts” (“Awakening” 189).

The regard this reviewer expressed for the young artists’ lack of hesitation and “direct expression of the sensibility of the mind” (189), echoed the sentiments expressed by countless others in response to *The Young Visitors* and *The Story of Opal*: the young authors’ innocence—not their precocity—was what ostensibly equipped them with visionary capabilities. Of the dozens of laudatory reviews written about each author, nearly all of them construe the child’s literary ingenuity as a result of her inexperience, not her talent or skill. In keeping with mainstream ideals of Romantic innocence, adults repeatedly presented the juvenile author in terms of what she was not—that is, “unhampered” and “uncorrupted” by stagnant depictions and worn linguistic conventions. Despite their sense that the girls’ work represented a superior form of art, readers were fascinated by the question of what Daisy and Opal knew—or rather, what they did *not* know, signaling a paradoxical investment in the precocious child’s lack of precocity.

⁶⁸ See note 45 for figures surrounding these publications. Cathryn Halverson and Carolyn Steedman both argue that this “craze” was oriented in particular towards girl authors. See Halverson, “Reading Little Girls’ Texts in the 1920s” and Steedman, *The Tidy House*, 62-3.

The irony of this stance is evident upon even a cursory close reading of *The Young Visitors* or *The Story of Opal*, both of which demonstrate their authors' various forms of knowledge. The characters of Ashford's novella are primarily concerned with achieving upward mobility in Victorian society and their attempts at social climbing underscore the author's keen understanding of class snobbery; while Whiteley laces her whimsical nature journal with a botanical vocabulary and references to obscure French historical dates uncannily erudite for a child of an Oregonian logging camp. Ostensibly eager to access the real child's thoughts and mode of expression, editors and reviewers perpetually strove to reinterpret these very signs of precocity as indicators that Ashford and Whiteley were *un*-precocious, in effect erecting a barrier between the "long-defended gate" of the real child's imagination and the reader.

Just as reviews of juvenilia construct notions of the child author's (un)consciousness, they also construct a reader wise or jaded enough to comprehend juvenilia's profound or humorous missteps. In this chapter I argue that such reading practices not only circumscribe the real child's capabilities, but also inform the narrative perspective—reliant upon a dual awareness of the text's conventional meaning and its young characters' miscomprehension—in proto-modernist works by Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James. In the decades preceding the publication of Ashford's and Whiteley's juvenilia, the advent of developmental psychology (or Child Study) shifted an enormous amount of attention to the way in which children process and acquire knowledge. As Holly Blackford argues, as the child's unfolding consciousness became an increasingly studied phenomenon, it also became an increasingly co-opted site for modernism's "authentic" modes of representation.⁶⁹ Frustrated with the perceived failure of

⁶⁹ Holly Blackford specifically links modernist transformations of the novel with the rise in Child Study, arguing that literature's growing focus on subjectivity corresponded with psychology's

realism, at the end of the nineteenth century Stevenson and James merged the child's "faulty" perception with her mature counterpart's, thereby drawing attention to literature's forms rather than seeking to conceal them. While these authors denied the innocence of form—that is, the idea that conventions might be used unquestioningly to represent reality—the position in which these texts place the reader sometimes causes the dilution of these works' dialectic between knowledge and naiveté to a simple indicator of the real child's innocence, thereby ironically promulgating a pure correspondence between sign and signified, the real and its representation.

Because of the highly constructed nature of most interpretations of child consciousness, while critics have well established the centrality of the child's perspective to adult modernist experimentation, few discuss the real child's role in this literary movement. Juliet Dusinberre partially redresses this oversight by questioning the presumed divide between children's literature and adult literature in this era, arguing that Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) valorized children's play and thereby provided a liberatory model of creativity for authors such as Stevenson and, later, Virginia Woolf. Dusinberre specifies that "*Alice in Wonderland* not only set children free from having to be serious about what they read; it also questioned the need for the writer to be quite so serious about what she wrote [...]" (66). She aptly notes the way in which a narrative "oscillation between adult and child consciousness" was representative of the "transitional movement between the writer as authority figure and the repudiation of that authority" (109).⁷⁰

scrutiny of mental cognition. See Blackford, "Apertures in the House of Fiction: Novel Methods and Child Study, 1887-1910."

⁷⁰ Blackford also claims that *Through the Looking-Glass* established the "oft-used metaphor of an inaccessible house to describe the inscrutable nature of child perception," a metaphor that helped define the perceived divide between child and adult consciousness (373).

Like the writers she cites, however, DusiBerre unquestioningly accepts that real children's play and creativity are authentically represented and thereby freed by adult-authored literature. In practice, the vacillation between the "free" child's voice and the fact-driven adult's frequently forces the child into the role of innocent instead of recognizing the movement between ignorance and understanding evidenced, for example, in children's own writing. Ostensibly the publication of juvenilia created a space for the real child's voice in the public domain. After all, the very publication of juvenilia suggests the public's appreciation for the precocious: on some level—conventional or otherwise—young authors such as Ashford or Whiteley demonstrated an unusual ability to write for their age. However, while the modernist adult author's repudiation of authority gained him credit for a more truthful depiction of reality, critics in this era predicated the child writer's authenticity upon her unconscious misinterpretation of either literary device or worldly matters.⁷¹

Indeed, when adults perceived juvenile authors as expertly wielding conventionalities or understanding their impolitic social commentary, their enthusiasm for these texts largely subsided. Daisy Ashford's use of such suggestive terms as "not quite the right side of the blanket" (*YV* 46), for instance, convinced some that the author's knowledge was "too nastily precocious for any child" (*Saturday Review* 250), and that her novella, therefore, was of little merit. Similarly, when new information concerning the discovery of Opal's diary lessened the probability of its being a six-year-old's work, the "genius" of her prose degenerated into "calculatedly naïve" statements (*J.W.N.S.* 372). For many of those readers for whom Daisy Ashford and Opal Whiteley failed to uphold the innocent end of the innocence-knowledge

⁷¹ As I discuss in Chapter Five, critics responded favorably to successful conventions in juvenile-authored children's literature as long as the content of these works corroborated idealized notions of childhood innocence.

spectrum, the authors' juvenilia constituted a betrayal of childhood, prompting outraged letters, harsh exposés, and—in the more extreme case of Whiteley's diary—the halted publication of a once lauded book.

Just as readers deemed Ashford and Whiteley's knowledge either closely circumscribed or shocking in its extent, Stevenson and James's work oscillates between a highly constructed representation of childhood purity (or ignorance) and a fluid boundary between innocence and comprehension. While neither author glorified real children's writing—and James, indeed, vocally sought to distance “high” literature from “childish” productions—their depictions of the child's voice or perspective credited the child with at least partial knowledge of the matters in which she was implicated. Famously declaring that “fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child” (“Gossip” 268), and depicting youthful methods of imagining as a model for the abstractions necessary in successful literary representation, Stevenson's work might seem to rely upon a notion of the child as innocent. However, his essays on realism and the child's imagination, along with his adoption of a childlike perspective in *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885), also invite readers to participate in the same meta-engagement with children's modes of comprehension inherent to the consumption of juvenilia. Although James's critical essays express a disdain for the immature reader's scope of knowledge, he also promotes the innocent's vantage point as a highly productive resource when filtered by an adult perspective. In *What Maisie Knew* (1897) James encourages the reader to juxtapose the presumable innocence of the title character with the corruption surrounding her. At the same time, his text perpetually frustrates a simple equation of Maisie with purity, engaging the reader instead in a perpetual guessing game as to the scope of the girl's knowledge.

The public's response to juvenilia in the 1920s highlights the confused line between real children and the practice of constructing the real child inherent in the reading of a youthful perspective—be it that of the child author or the appropriative adult. Although reviewers frequently cited the child author's innocence to establish juvenilia's authenticity, the innovations of these texts depended upon the same sexy proximity of the precious to the precocious depicted in Stevenson's poetry or James's novel. While scholars recognize the proto-modernist's manipulations of perspective—in this case, the merging of a "child" and an "adult" voice—some continue to judge Stevenson and James's work in accordance with its children's genuineness, at times even taking affront when knowledge threatens to encroach upon the central child's character or perception. Such criticism ignores the way in which pigeonholing the child as a source of authenticity may lead to inauthentic representations of the child, as well as inaccurate readings of the dialectic between knowing and *not* knowing at play in experimental forms of realism and juvenilia alike. In *What Maisie Knew*, James's title character "come[s] to like people's liking her to 'know'" (*Maisie* 125). As indicated by the author's ironic quotation marks around the word "know," it is the inaccurate, half-formed quality of Maisie's knowledge that drives readers' investment in the child's voice, which simultaneously offers a reprieve from realism's insufficiencies and calls the innocence of such a gesture into question.

4.1 DAISY ASHFORD, OPAL WHITELEY, AND THE INNOCENCE-KNOWLEDGE SPECTRUM

When Daisy Ashford and Opal Whiteley's childhood manuscripts came to light in 1919 and 1920, critics lauded the texts' innocent pronouncements as a fresh means of literary depiction.

The Young Visitors, considered a masterpiece of humor, supposedly was assured success not because of its skilled manipulation of situations and revamping of clichés, but because of the unconscious nature of its author's wit. Reviewers noted that Ashford's novella repeatedly falls short of its attempts at sophistication, asserting that the author's faulty comprehension of adult issues resulted in comically ingenious commentary on the social mores of Victorian England. Readers of Whiteley's journal similarly construed the girl's unconventional descriptions and misreading of situations as proof of an intuitive relationship with her surroundings that surpassed that which adults were able to achieve. At the same time that Whiteley's plant and animal friendships incited comparisons with William Wordsworth, her quaint grammatical constructions suggested to critics new poetic possibilities in prose.

Despite such exalted assessments of Ashford and Whiteley's work, no one credited the young authors with intentionally parodying or revising traditional literary forms. Readers alternately proclaimed the girls happily unconscious of their literary and social faux pas, or faulted their unhealthily precocious understanding of adult matters; in either case, however, the authors were never seen as being in command of their experimentations. Juvenilia could only provide unintentionally sage pronouncements upon worldly matters, because readers perceived Ashford and Whiteley's miscognition as their means of circumventing the adult's overly socialized, and therefore limited, vision of life. According to such logic, the child's sagacity was only effective if she was genuinely naïve of the unconventionality of her perceptions. As Cathryn Halverson asserts, "the child's text must amuse, but the child herself must not consciously attempt humor. The child's text must educate, but the child herself must appear innocent" ("Reading" 246).

Halverson insightfully argues that the 1920s vogue for juvenilia depended upon the child author's ability to "crystallize and support readers' conceptions of what children were like" ("Reading" 236). However, the insistence upon juvenile writers' innocence was not solely about preserving the era's dominant image of childhood; this insistence was also about preserving the reading experience that made these works new and compelling modes of literary representation. A meta-awareness of the limitations of both literary forms and conventional wisdoms was invoked equally by the child's incomplete understanding, as it was by a reader contrastingly "in the know." Indeed, it was the interplay between these two figures that created the form of expression deemed by countless readers as more authentic, genuine, or realistic—a phenomenon dependent upon it being the reader, and not the writer, who looks beyond the clumsiness of youth's perception to discover its insightfulness.

Because the value of these works was thus predicated upon the precocious child's lack of precocity, controversy surrounding their authorship has always vitalized conversations about these particular juvenilia.⁷² In proportion to the attention they received at the time of their publication, neither *The Young Visitors* nor *The Story of Opal* have garnered much critical consideration. Like contemporary reviewers of these texts, those few scholars of published juvenilia in the twentieth and twenty-first century inevitably cycle back to the role the authors' ages played in their books' reception. In both Ashford and Whiteley's cases, the intense interest in the girls' youth eventually translated into an equally intense scrutiny of their childhood manuscripts' authenticity. Given J. M. Barrie's involvement with the publication of *The Young Visitors*, for instance—he helped select the story from among Ashford's childhood writings and

⁷² While contemporary readers occasionally questioned the extent to which juvenile authors had composed their books without adult intervention, no other juvenilia received the degree of cross-examination that *The Young Visitors* and *The Story of Opal* did.

provided the preface for the novella—many readers assumed the whimsical playwright had a hand in the book’s composition. Contemporary articles frequently debated the probability of Barrie versus Ashford having written the text, focusing upon whether or not it was possible for a young girl to comment with such unconsciously ribald humor upon social convention. The fervor of such debates was even more pronounced in the case of Opal Whiteley, despite the very different nature of her topic. Having become an overnight sensation in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Whiteley gradually began revealing a sub-plot to her childhood diary’s records: raised in various Oregonian logging camps, the now-teenaged author declared herself the long-lost bastard daughter of a deceased French aristocrat, Henri d’Orleans. Aside from casting doubts upon Whiteley’s credibility, the author’s far-fetched claims called attention to those aspects of her journal which defied belief, such as the six-year-old’s use of French names to identify her bird and animal friends and her knowledge of obscure dates in French history.

Whether or not readers in 1919-20 believed that Ashford and Whiteley wrote their respective texts, the conversation surrounding them endlessly circled around the girls’ knowledge about their subject matter—a topic taken up yet again by scholars who wrote about *The Young Visitors* in subsequent decades.⁷³ While in recent years, critics such as Halverson and Deborah Garfield have discussed the controversy surrounding *The Story of Opal* as representative of its era’s neo-Romantic conception of childhood, the persistence of this topic in current scholarship suggests the difficulty in discussing real children’s works without addressing our culture’s continued investment in youth’s “innocent” creativity. This investment was promoted by both the tenets of Child Study and such literary images of children as those found in Stevenson and James’s work. But it was the publication of *The Young Visitors* that sparked an

⁷³ See Alan Friedman, Laura K. Ray, and Penelope Schott Starkey.

unprecedented enthusiasm for children's writing itself, prompting one reviewer to predict an impending flood of juvenile art ("Awakening" 189). Hugh Walpole ventured even further, foretelling that the young author's novella would join *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as an immortal text of the English language (qtd. in *Dial* 455).⁷⁴

The Young Visitors' continued popularity as an idiosyncratic cult classic may be attested to by the fact that it has never been out of print,⁷⁵ but in many ways, the novella proceeds in a highly conventional manner, satisfying expectations of the romance genre with its conclusion in love, marriage, and the happiness of all beautiful people.⁷⁶ Written in 1890, but not published until 1919, in many ways *The Young Visitors* reads as a Victorian romance novel and therefore follows a familiar trajectory: Ethel Monticue, a young pretty girl not adverse to social-climbing, must choose between two suitors—42-year old Alfred Salteena and his rich counterpart Bernard Clark. Ashford's descriptions of these characters are uniformly prosaic: she lists the color of their hair and eyes, the size of their purses, and (in the case of the men) how tall they are. Keenly attuned to the relationship between these details and their social standing, Ashford's characters constantly fret about appropriate apparel, protocols, and ancestors. Such issues are an especial worry for Alfred, and the book's subtitle, *Mr. Salteena's Plan*, refers to the lengths to which this semi-tragic figure goes to "grow more seemly" in his pursuit of Ethel's hand (37).

What sets *The Young Visitors* apart from the sentimental novel for most readers—turning the text into a witty parody—are those moments in which Ashford's apparent misapprehension

⁷⁴ The quote was part of an advertisement for *The Young Visitors* in *The Dial*.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that *The Young Visitors* was not available in the United States for roughly 35 years. However, it has remained continuously in print in England since its original publication.

⁷⁶ Comparing Ashford with the liberated women for whom Virginia Woolf lobbied in *A Room of One's Own*, Penelope Schott Starkey suggests that the young author's freedom from certain proprieties did not free her from the predetermined subject of matrimony.

of social protocols or advanced vocabulary serve as a reminder of the author's age. As critic Laura K. Ray notes, the faux pas that often mark Ashford's descriptions of adult scenarios allow for a "dialectic of perception and convention" similar to that at play in *What Maisie Knew* (89). Contributing to a long history of denying the child author intentionality, Ray argues further that far from being purposely avant-garde, Ashford values "convention for its own sake," mistaking it for "direct knowledge of the adult world" (91).

The disparity between *The Young Visitors's* "attempts" at conventionality and the adult reader's interpretation of the text's content becomes evident first in the childlike way in which its characters respond to the daily luxuries of upper-class adult life. Missteps occur, for instance, when Ethel and Mr. Salteena first embark upon their visit to the rich Lord Bernard Clark's. Ethel, "who did not really know at all how to go on at a visit," nervously inquires as to the etiquette of tipping Bernard's footman and driver, and Mr. Salteena finds himself "getting rather flustered with his forks" at dinner (24, 29). Similarly, the two take an exaggerated pleasure in adult liberties (some, indeed, far more libertine than the average Victorian would have been permitted), with Mr. Salteena "excitedly" telling his companion "I have had some tea in bed," and Ethel unabashedly sharing "in a somewhat showing off tone" that she is staying with Bernard at the "Gaierty" Hotel (35, 69).

Such incongruous behaviors in Ashford's adult characters point to her imperfect representations of the everyday, which are responsible both for *The Young Visitors's* gleeful eccentricity and its commentary upon the values of adult society. This dynamic is even more pronounced in the author's use of language. By approximating the way adults communicate, Ashford's text repeatedly transforms clichés into brilliant parody and revitalizes tired language. When the earl "disserppear[s] into the madding crowd," for instance, Mr. Salteena takes the

opportunity to propose to Ethel, who rejects him (69). Alfred's tortured response shows at once the markers of typical sentimental fiction and their revision: "this is agony cried Mr Salteena clutching hold of a table my life will be sour grapes and ashes without you" (71). In contrast, Bernard's successful proposal inspires mad capers with Ethel, and "taking the bull by both horns he kisse[s] her violently on her dainty face" (80).

As the examples above illustrate, the enjoyment of *The Young Visitors* arises largely from the mature reader's awareness of the child's "failed" knowledge. Indeed, in an era in which conventional literary representation was being recast as a naïve effort by modernist authors, it was the seemingly unconscious nature of the child author's errors upon which her text's success hinged. In his preface to the first edition of *The Young Visitors*, J. M. Barrie promotes the idea that the child's incisive commentary emerges naturally and innocently. The adult playwright describes the young authoress through whimsical, condescending images, suggesting that she "sucked her thumb for a moment (this is guesswork), and sat down to her amazing tale" (9). Conjecturing that she stole into family visitors' rooms, "examined everything and summed you up," Barrie asserts that "effort" is an absurd word to use in relation to the triumphant chronicler, as her text has "an air of careless power" (10, 7).

A belief in this "air of careless power" was critical to the reader's enjoyment of providing the evidently missing information in what some critics still call "the most innocent fiction" (Friedman 537). As a result, editors and publishers of juvenilia purposely emphasized the youth of their authors in their advertisements, prefaces, and other publicity. In the case of *The Young Visitors*, the most obvious of these stratagems was the preservation of Ashford's misspellings throughout the text itself. In fact, critic Christine Alexander notes that when the Juvenilia Press consulted the original manuscript for a re-issue of Ashford's work, the editorial team discovered

that the text contained far fewer spelling errors than the printed editions. While Ashford's first editor refrained from *inventing* spelling mistakes, he exaggerated the young author's errors by standardizing them: hence, if the word "idear" appeared once, the editor changed all other instances of "idea" to match the more childish spelling (Alexander 88).

This strategic marketing of Ashford's juvenility speaks directly to the traits that readers sought in the girl's work. Few Ashford enthusiasts lauded her publication for its skill, choosing instead to focus upon the child's "natural," but unknowing ability to summarize characters' insecurities and foibles. Summarizing the sentiments of many Ashford fans, the reviewer for the *Outlook* noted, "the fun is the unconscious naïveté of a child, not the conscious cleverness of the assured humorist" ("New Books" 191). Or, as another reviewer quipped, Ashford "achieves without intending it what so many writers intend but fail to achieve" (*Bookman* 147).

Despite publishers' and reviewers' emphasis upon Ashford's remove from adult experience, *The Young Visitors* is anything but a contemplation of the unworldly. Ashford's imagining of her characters' world relies upon a near obsessive engagement with the material. In consequence, her novella is replete with descriptions of food, bedding, and other sensual comforts. When Ethel and Mr. Salteena go for a visit to Bernard Clark's "costly" house, for instance, the Lord is keen to relate that "the bath room has got a tip up bason and a hose thing for washing your head" (27). Similarly, when Ethel and Bernard inevitably become engaged, Ashford lists their wedding gifts with a joyous attention to detail, culminating with the menu: "they had countless cakes besides also ices jelly merangs jam tarts with plenty of jam on each some cold tongue some ham with salid and a pig's head done up in a wondrous manner" (85). For many readers, these constant references to the material signs of pleasure and wealth contributed to what Oliver Herford praised as the "joyous virility and unflinching

vraisemblance” of her writing, suggesting that the girl’s realistic portrayals could incite jealousy in even Joseph Conrad (198).⁷⁷

Ironically, for the majority of readers, Ashford’s innocence was only further confirmed by the degree to which her narrative comments upon worldly pleasures and matters of sex. To some extent this was a logical response, as the further Ashford ventures into adult situations, the more childlike her depictions seem. The scenes of lovemaking between Ethel and Bernard particularly call attention to their own seams by exaggerating the superficiality of the forms they mimic. Having declared his love, Bernard exclaims, “I love you so intensely that if you say no I shall perforce dash my body to the brink of yon muddy river” (78). To this the ever-willing Ethel replies with a fervent sigh: “I certinly love you madly you are to me like a Heathen god she cried looking at his manly form and handsome flashing face [...]” (79).

The hilarity of such dialogue makes it tempting to see this as “the knowing form expos[ing] the naiveté of the content” (Ray 94), but such a reading fails to take into account the possibility that Ashford—like adult humorists—might consciously be portraying the foibles of the aristocracy. Ray aptly notes a common tone of irony to Ashford and P. G. Wodehouse’s prose, but she concludes that the breezy dialogue of their texts sounds like “sophistication” to Ashford and “pompous nonsense” to Wodehouse—a conclusion based once again upon assumptions about what Daisy knows (97).

Unfortunately, the small minority of Ashford’s fervent readership that did give the young author credit for her understanding of courtship and social protocols, typically felt her knowledge was “too nastily precocious for any child” (*Saturday Review* 250). The most vocal of these critics

⁷⁷ In contrast, Herford noted, Barrie would have made the same scenarios “delightfully unreal” (198).

was Edmund Gosse, whose collected essays in *Books on the Table* included a vitriolic chapter on the “imbecility” of Ashford’s admirers (251). Recasting the public’s investment in the child’s vision as “a new terror” and “an awful prospect” in which the “novelist’s fruitful activity would lie between the ages of nine and fourteen,” Gosse declared Ashford’s so-called innocent prose utterly vulgar or “common” (252, 255). In other words, Gosse objected fervently to the same commentary upon sex and social mores that most readers of *The Young Visitors* considered proof of the author’s naiveté.

Gosse’s chapter on Ashford—provocatively entitled “A Bubble Burst,” as if the young author’s purity were as vulnerable as the purity of her prose—focuses primarily upon scenes from *Her Book* (1920), the collection of juvenilia Ashford subsequently published after the success of *The Young Visitors*. While Gosse feels that the author’s description of Mr. Salteena as a man born “not quite the right side of the blanket” may warrant a smile, the unchaperoned night a young couple spends together in one of Ashford’s later tales convinces Gosse of the shocking impropriety of the girl’s mind. It is “difficult,” he declares, “to get further from all that makes a child’s mind attractive, from all that is fresh and genuine and simple” (255). Pronouncing vulgarities the exclusive provenance of adults, he declares that “to revel in an exhibition of a child’s mind as something no less squalid and mean, in its lower-middle-class snobbery and silliness, than those of the adults around it—this seems to me an offence against good manners” (255).

Gosse may have considered Ashford’s lack of innocence an affront, but few were willing to grant the young author the dignity of assuming she might actually comprehend the topics she addressed. The real children who wrote juvenilia were perpetually subjected to a constructed notion of the real child, their very incorporation of mature subject matter or dialogue willfully

reinterpreted by readers as markers of their innocence. If readers sought unconscious social parody in Daisy Ashford's work, they looked to Opal Whiteley's nature diary as a source of Romantic insight. Even more unconventional in its sentence structure and language than *The Young Visitors*, Whiteley's journal was also considered more innocent. Whereas the majority of reviewers consistently insisted upon Ashford's lack of knowledge, readers perceived Whiteley's innocence as a *form* of knowledge. Chronicling a six-year-old's friendships with the trees and animals of an Oregonian logging camp, *The Story of Opal* was seen by many as "the revelation of the imaginal life of a feminine Peter Pan of the Oregon wilderness—so innocent, so intimate, so haunting that I should not know where in all literature to look for a counterpart" (Thatcher 4).

Daisy Ashford's book was published through a series of incidental occurrences: having stumbled across her penciled manuscript as an adult, the author passed it onto a friend to amuse her during an illness. That friend in turn passed it on to editor Frank Swinnerton of Chatto and Windus, who quickly recognized its potential and put its publication in motion. In the case of Opal Whiteley, however, the twenty-one-year-old naturalist was actively seeking representation of her work when she walked into the *Atlantic Monthly* offices of Ellery Sedgwick. Handing the editor a self-printed edition of *The Fairyland Around Us*—a volume half informative botany, half insipid whimsy—Whiteley pitched the book for regular publication.⁷⁸ Unmotivated by the book's quaint descriptions and its magazine reproductions (pasted in by hand), Sedgwick was nevertheless captivated by the girl herself, whom he later described as "very young and eager

⁷⁸ *The Fairyland Around Us* was never published in a regular edition. Whiteley had raised enough money to start the self-publishing process, but lacking the final \$1,000 to complete the printing job, the printer destroyed the plates. Whiteley completed the one hundred extant copies by pasting in magazine images of the plants and animals she described, and hand captioning each one. Only about a dozen copies survive, and having compared the British Library's copy with David Caruso's online transcription of the book (www.efn.org/%7Ecaruso/fairyland/), I can assert that each volume was unique in its particulars.

and fluttering, like a bird in a thicket” (Sedgwick 254). Questioning her about her upbringing, the editor discovered that Whiteley had kept a diary of her childhood nature “explores” in Oregon—a volume torn up by a younger sister in a rage, but preserved by Whiteley in a series of hatboxes. Intrigued, Sedgwick had the young author send immediately to Los Angeles for these containers, and in the following months, his mother-in-law housed and fed Opal while she arduously reconstructed the puzzle pieces of her juvenilia.

As with Ashford, Sedgwick’s reminiscences reveal that from the very outset, a large part of the attraction to Whiteley’s work was Opal herself. Consistently described as petite and ethereal, “a human fairy almost,” the young naturalist’s demeanor encouraged representations of her as a Romantic child of nature (Bede 9). Choosing to publish the first two years of Whiteley’s diary alone—which were representative of the girl’s writing from ages six to seven—Sedgwick capitalized on the public’s desire to view the unsocialized child as a kind of natural prophet. As Carolyn Steedman asserts, many readers looked to Whiteley’s diary as “affirmation of a poetic consciousness that could be plucked directly from the garden of childhood,” noting that contiguous with this desire was a strong “impulse to find in little girlhood an area of experience and consciousness that [could] be used by adults” (*Tidy House* 66). E. S. Bradburne’s full-length biography of Whiteley corroborates this hypothesis by quoting several contemporary reviews of the diary, adding himself that the text reveals “something of the inner world of childhood whose doors so rarely open to outsiders” (68). The reviewer from *The Times Literary Supplement* similarly deemed the journal “the most complete picture of a child’s inner life that can be imagined” (qtd. in Bradburne 12), while children’s librarian Anne Carroll Moore praised the text as “the absolute record of a child’s emotion” (258).

This emphasis on the value of the child's inner life reflects the cultural investment in the "primordial sophisticate"⁷⁹ that Steedman argues was at the heart of early twentieth-century psychology and physiology, as "the idea of the child was used to both recall and to express the past that each individual life contained" (*Strange Dislocations* 11). Developmental psychologists, scientists, and artists alike esteemed the child's interiority as a mean of accessing that precious, unacculturated perception lost to the adult.

The pleasure in witnessing Whiteley's observations unfold arises from the same apparent disparity in Ashford's text between the child's comprehension and the adult's. In these instances, *The Story of Opal* reads with a similarly "unconscious humor" as that perceived by reviewers of *The Young Visitors*. Such presumably unintentional comedy occurs most pronouncedly in Whiteley's interactions with the people in her life, whom she seems to find far more puzzling than her animal and plant friends. For instance, the young author records that when she needs new colored pencils to "make more prints with," she writes a letter upon leaves for the fairies, who always swiftly honor her request. Opal excitedly shares the news with her lumber mill friend—invariably denoted in the text as "the man that wears gray neckties and is kind to mice"—who, Whiteley innocently reveals, is the only one that "has knowing" of the place where the girl deposits her missives to the fairies (118). Even when the author later discovers that the man's handwriting is strikingly similar to that of the fairies, she concludes it is because they taught him to write (290).

With the same marred "knowingness" that inflected Ashford's text, Whiteley also attempts to make sense of the most veiled aspect of adult life: sex. When the young author's

⁷⁹ A phrase used by Deborah Garfield to describe contemporary depictions of Opal Whiteley. Garfield argues that the "girl prodigy craze" of the 1920s was a paradoxical means of recovering modern femininity from degeneracy. See "The Heir Unapparent," 84-6.

neighbor Elsie welcomes a new baby into the household, the girl is convinced that her prayers to the angels have been answered. However, she is equally convinced that the child has been brought to the wrong house, as her prayers had been directed to the young couple who “have been married seven whole months, and haven’t got a baby yet” (166).

Such instances elicit the same bemusement on the part of the mature reader as that inspired by Ashford’s text, as the girls try to comment upon the behaviors of the adult world. At other times, Whiteley’s confusion springs more from a linguistic misapprehension, and the effect is to cause the reader to consider the worn constructions of language anew. Opal frequently reflects upon adults’ forms of communication, and the reader is consequently privy to a sense of the journal’s experimentation from which the six-year-old author’s nascent cognition seemingly bars her. In one episode, upon learning that her mother has “lost” ten minutes, Opal searches earnestly for the misplaced time under the cupboards, beds, and drawers of the house. Later, seeking to repair something with china-mending glue, the young girl almost knocks the bottle on the floor. Thankful for her near miss and accustomed to getting into scrapes, Whiteley reflects that breaking the bottle would have been a “cal lamb of tea” (200).

Such revised spellings and conceptualizations once again invite the reader to view himself as the knowledgeable partner in the text’s construction of meaning. However, Whiteley’s linguistic mistakes also represent a way in which the “innocent” author may revitalize conventions too readily accepted by the schooled adult. The *New York Times* lauded the “droll, fresh and poetic” constructions of Whiteley’s diary, citing them as proof that a child wrote it, for “no adult could put into language such innocent and spontaneous grace combined with such freshness of perception” (Wilkinson 14). Taking her pet pig to school with her one day, Whiteley demonstrates her tendency to make literal connections between the sign and the signified that

rejuvenate normative expressions when filtered through the adult reader's lens. Having excitedly regaled the class with her pig's life story, the young author finds herself the subject of a long, harsh gaze from her teacher. After several minutes of this treatment, Opal inquires as to its cause, to which the journal records her teacher replying, "I'm screwtineyesing you" (109). Enthralled with this new word, Whiteley notes that she will have uses for it: "now when I look long looks at a thing, I will print I did *screwtineyes* it" (109). True to her word, the young author incorporates her new vocabulary into later portions of her diary, constantly "screwing tin eyes" to the objects of her inquiry.

Whiteley's diary was renowned not only for revitalizing language, but also for conjuring Romantic conceptions of the child's greater connectivity with nature. In this regard, readers distinguished Whiteley even further from the adult world than her contemporary: as a special London cable to the *New York Times* declared, "Opal Whiteley is in no sense a second Daisy Ashford. Her work, produced in the vast silences and loneliness of lumber camps, is full of the wonder and beauty of the world as seen by child eyes and interpreted by a child heart" ("Child Writer" 9). The intensity with which the young girl related to the animals of her farm and the surrounding woods revealed a close correspondence between Whiteley's animation of language and her animation of nature. Like those who looked to the primitive or the child to reveal the evolution of human consciousness, the author habitually resorts to the cellular components of nature to articulate connections between her environment and her own emotional landscape. In the midst of bringing in kindling for "the mamma," for instance, Whiteley begins looking "long looks" at the wood and meditating about its personal history:

I did have thinks about the tree they all were, before they got chopped up. I did wonder how *I* would feel, if I was a very little piece of wood that got chopped out of a very big

tree. I did think that it would have hurt my feelings. I felt of the feelings of the wood.
They did have a very sad feel. (141-2)

The marked simplicity of such passages only increased reviewers' belief in Whiteley's "passionate sympathy with all nature" and an intuition superior to adults' ("Child of Seven" 694). This belief was further substantiated by the way in which Opal's animistic beliefs and Romantic-child behaviors repeatedly cast her at odds with her parents, who try to enforce a more pragmatic relationship with nature.

Perhaps the most poignant of such scenes occurs when Whiteley returns the barnyard to find her dearest pig friend, whom she named Peter Paul Rubens, slaughtered:

And I ran a quick run to save my dear Peter Paul Rubens—but already he was dying.
And he died with his head in my lap. I sat there feeling dead, too, until my knees were all wet with blood from the throat of my dear Peter Paul Rubens. [...] After I changed my clothes and put the bloody ones in the rain-barrel, I did go to the woods to look for the soul of Peter Paul Rubens. I did not find it. But I think when comes the spring, I will find it among the flowers—probably in the blossom of a *faon* lily or in the top of a fir tree. (156)

In such incidences, Whiteley's parents interfere with the girl's intuitive or sympathetic relationship with the natural world in favor of a functional one. Indeed, the author records that "when I cam back from the woods, they made me grind sausage. And every time I did turn the handle, I could hear that little pain squeal Peter Paul Rubens always gave when he did want me to come where he was at once" (156). Such repeated struggles between sentimentality and the farm's "relentless economy" underscore the diary's perception that adults are less capable of communing with the natural environment in meaningful ways (Halverson, "Explores" 202). This

underlying dynamic of the text also grants its more empathetic reader—who is able to “properly” comprehend the potency of Whiteley’s relationship with nature—a reason for self-congratulation.

Like *The Young Visitors*, Whiteley’s diary also reveals an engagement with the civilized world that runs counter to her Romantic child image. While for Ashford this contradiction to her innocence takes the form of an overt materialism, it is Whiteley’s constant naming and ordering of her animal playmates that complicates her ingenuousness. Calling Whiteley a “self-ordained child-priest,” Blake Allmendinger suggests that the young girl civilizes or domesticates her frontier surroundings through language (121-2). Whiteley repeatedly brought Catholic litanies and European history into her play in the woods, celebrating the “borning” days of notable historic figures and christening new-found animal friends with such names as “Brave Horatius” (her shepherd dog) or “Thomas Chatterton Jupiter Zeus” (her pet wood-rat).

Although such play might be construed as symptomatic of Whiteley’s socialization—no matter how mysterious in origin—these instances also emphasize the girl’s creative appropriation of language and history to her own purpose. In the case of child-authored texts, however, it continues to be difficult to read juvenilia without predicating their ingenuity upon their authors’ ingenuousness. Allmendinger’s recent article concludes that Whiteley’s diary “records her imagination triumphing over exterior, objective reality” in a manner atypical of pioneers’ journals: the text has a “magical logic of its own, an unchanging sameness that seems to exist outside time” (123). While his conclusion might be construed as giving Whiteley credit for her narrative innovations, it also continues to rely upon a notion of the child as outside time and reality—a “real” child, rather than an actual girl marked by familial and cultural influences. Like Ashford’s first editor, Sedgwick took pains to present the text in a manner that would emphasize

those aspects which confirmed readers' idealized notions of childhood, carefully editing Whiteley's diary so that she might appear as the sort of "everychild" upon which Allmendinger's argument relies. Letters from Sedgwick to Elbert Bede and others reveal that the *Atlantic Monthly* editor excised not only less credible passages, but also segments which revealed Whiteley's interactions with the industry and community of the logging camps (Halverson, "Explores" 208-9). In so doing, he crafted an image of Opal as a Romantic child at play in a natural idyll.

When Putnam published the British edition of Whiteley's journal, *Constant Huntington*, the company's English chairman, declared that the text was "not the matter of a season's interest. I regard the diary as a very remarkable work of genius, ranking with the great works of all time" (qtd. in Hoff 73). Although Huntington was not alone in making such proclamations, as Whiteley's claims became more widely known and more wildly improbable, the once enchanted public turned swiftly against her. Despite all the praise Whiteley's diary received for its immediacy, poetry, and understanding of nature, once the majority of its readership believed the text to be the fabrication of an addled adult, any regard for the book's prose disappeared virtually overnight. After having been a much-quoted and immensely popular feature in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the published version of *The Story of Opal* went to three editions, selling 15,000 copies. With the controversy over Opal's lineage casting doubts upon the diary's authenticity, however, Sedgwick decided to pull the remaining copies of the book less than a year after its initial publication. Incensed readers returned their volumes to the publisher or cancelled pre-ordered gift editions.

The indignant reaction of one-time fans underscores how integral the child writer's innocence was to her success. Moreover, it reveals the degree to which juvenilia construct a

certain kind of knowing reader—one who may appreciate the innovations or spirituality of juvenilia in a way neither their authors nor readers less invested in circumscribed notions of childhood consciousness can. The evidence readers used to verify a child writer's innocence was often therefore the same material others used to deem her overly precocious or in some way suspect. Fred Lockley's interview of one of Whiteley's Oregonian grandmothers, for instance, corroborated the opinions of both believers and skeptics of the diary. Describing her granddaughter as "queer" in her behavior, Opal's grandmother recalled that the girl "used to tell awful lies when she was little, about what the toads and birds and snakes said to her, just as if toads and bugs could talk" (140). In contrast to her sense of the girl's propensity for lying, most readers felt that the blurred lines between the imagined and the real in Whiteley's prose revealed a superior immersiveness in life, unmediated by stagnant narrative or linguistic forms masquerading as truth.

The attention Ashford's novella or Whiteley's journal calls to less conventional ways of both understanding and representing the world, invites readers to believe not only in the child's innocent relationship to her prose, but also in their own superior comprehension of the child's innate superiority. In encouraging this paternalistic style of reading, juvenilia benefit (or suffer) from the same dynamic at play in Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James's work, whereby the "real" child is at once the most authentic and most highly constructed figure, the most visionary and the least perceptive.

4.2 “HER VISION OF HIS VISION OF HER VISION”: ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AND HENRY JAMES’S CHILDREN

The state of children’s perception or knowledge was a matter of great concern to both Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James, despite their oftentimes-condescending attitude towards youth. Although their contemporaries and even later critics have sometimes based their assessments of these authors’ texts on a simplified notion of their child figures’ innocence, in both cases, the authors express interest in the half-informed nature of the child’s understanding and the effect that guessing about this knowledge’s extent has upon a viewer or reader. In *What Maisie Knew*, James comments overtly on this negotiation of information, comically noting that while Maisie and her father “sat together, there was an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision” (150).

In focalizing his novel upon Maisie’s fallible perceptive abilities, however, James never implies—as some critics have—that Maisie is free of cultural influence, believing instead that children’s natural tendencies to internalize or imitate their surroundings “would severely limit [their] capacity to transcend the limits of environmental conditioning” (Blackford, “Child Consciousness” 249). Indeed, far from being wholly pure, James’s character exhibits “an innocence so saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy” that she engages the reader in a perpetual guessing game as to the meaning or intent behind her pronunciations (*Maisie* 150).

Stevenson expresses the same contradictory stance towards youthful capability, at turns speaking with condescension and fetishistic awe towards the child’s alternate perception. His “Notes on the Movements of Young Children” (1874), which records his observation of several girls at play, encapsulates the way in which one end of the spectrum informs the other—in other

words, how the viewer's enjoyment of the child's ignorance or missteps renders her artistic efforts ultimately more powerful than her "accomplished" elders'. The first girl the essay describes, a dancer of two or three years old, fails to fully master the moves she attempts, bouncing from appropriate pantomime to disjointed maneuvers. Stevenson, however, admires her "verve and gusto" and pronounces the spectacle "not merely amusing," but "grace in the making" (94). Shortly thereafter, he witnesses several children skipping rope and registers a similar poignancy. Watching the youngest girl—with "a mottled complexion and a big, damaged nose"—test her proficiency with the rope, Stevenson remarks that she is "so droll and so pathetic" (95, 96). At the same time, the author finds that "the clumsiness of the child seem[s] to have a significance and a sort of beauty of its own, quite above the grace of the [older, more skilled children] in power to affect the heart" (96).

Presaging the pseudo-analytical observations of Child Study, Stevenson's essay appreciates the nascent talents the young dancer and "little broken-nose" exhibit not only as precursors to more refined dexterity, but also as inherently valuable traits due to their distinction from mature methods of expression. Despite the progressive linearity implied in staged education at the turn of the century—with adulthood seemingly functioning as the apex—the "neurotic intersection of extreme child worship and child scrutiny" in this time period rendered the child's failed cognition a productive site of study (Honeyman 33). Her fallible way of interpreting conventions also suggested a way to unsettle realism's modes of representation, with which authors such as Stevenson and James were increasingly frustrated. Anticipating later modernists' more radical experimentation with stream of consciousness and other narrative techniques, both authors encouraged an active readership through which the interplay between the child's and the mature reader's understanding of convention brought to light the inadequacies of both.

Stevenson and James further suggest that the merging of the two perspectives—with the child unavoidably standing in as the more innocent figure—offers a fresh way to represent life and literature’s complexities.

Thus, while Stevenson’s writing certainly indulges in nostalgic representations of childhood, his work more frequently registers the same contradictory perception of the child seen in late nineteenth-century reform and education movements, whereby youth is simultaneously a precious time of life and a state in need of adult intervention. In his essay “Child’s Play,” for instance, first published in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1878, while the overall tone of the text is sentimental, the author opens by declaring that regret for the loss of one’s childhood is not wholly justifiable. Citing several ways in which adults’ capabilities exceed those of children, Stevenson notes the loss of irrational childhood fears and elders’ freedom from chastisement; he sarcastically adds that “the capacity to enjoy Shakespeare may [also] balance a lost aptitude for playing at soldiers” (222). Most importantly, the adult distinguishes himself from the child through his more finely developed senses. “There is all the world between gaping wonderment at the jargon of birds and the emotion with which a man listens to articulate music,” Stevenson declares, apparently crediting the older individual with a superior responsiveness to his surroundings (225).

In “Child’s Play” and other essays, however, Stevenson also reluctantly admits that there is compensation for childhood’s “pleasing stupor,” as the young enjoy a kind of immersion in the world that adults can no longer hope to achieve (“Child’s Play” 227). The author warns if adults “wish to scale Mont Blanc or visit a thieves’ kitchen in the East End [...] we must be about it while we are still young. It will not do to delay until we are clogged with prudence and limping with rheumatism” (“Crabbed Age and Youth” (96). Questioning the value of the traditional

forms of knowledge that “clog” adults, Stevenson chides young students to prize their freedom and eschew the discipline involved in winning school awards, noting “most boys pay so dear for their medals that they never afterwards have shot in their locker, and begin the world bankrupt” (“Apology” 110). Truancy, he argues, will help them to develop the visceral enjoyment of life, for which books are a “mighty bloodless substitute” (“Apology” 110).

In keeping with the notion that the young enjoy a less watered down, but cruder experience of life, Stevenson notes that while the adult enjoys his stories intellectually, the child relies upon “lay figures and stage properties” in imagining adventures, bestriding chairs and climbing drawers when narratives call for urgent rides and towering cliffs (“Child’s Play” 229). On the one hand, Stevenson casts this need for material representation as a sign of children’s “pedestrian fancy,” as evidence of a “defect” in their imaginations (“Child’s Play” 231, 232). On the other hand, Stevenson suggests that the adult’s heightened sensibility lacks the immediacy of children’s play; although grown-ups possess a more refined vision, it is marred by the influx of “history, and gossip, and economic speculations” by which “all things are transformed and seen through theories and associations as through coloured windows” (“Child’s Play” 226). The young may willfully interpret their surroundings to suit their play, but so, too, do adults manipulate the sensual input they receive, fabricating a “medium in which we walk and through which we look abroad” (“Child’s Play” 226). Thus, the adult’s storehouse of facts, memories, and other signs of “sophistication” serve as a means of distancing him from the world, just as the child’s narrow focus and inexperience result in a one-dimensional engagement with it.

Just as the act of reading juvenilia constructs a dialectical exchange between knowledgeable reader and ignorant author, Stevenson’s texts continually suggest that the child’s limited, yet immersive interface with reality becomes a superior mode of comprehension when

filtered through the adult's lens. Prone to flights of fancy, the child he describes (much as readers would describe Opal Whitely) exhibits greater flexibility in distinguishing—or rather, *not* distinguishing—between the real and the imagined.⁸⁰ Indeed, at the conclusion of “Child’s Play,” Stevenson chastises parents to grant their young offspring leniency when it comes to lying, as children cannot be expected to submit to “any peddling exactitude about matters of fact” (241). This particular wording recurs in “A Note on Realism” (1883), his essay seeking to recover fiction from a misguidedly fact-bound brand of representation. Here, the author contends that the increased “admission of detail”—inaugurated by such romantic writers as Sir Walter Scott to offer “more ample contemplation of the conditions of man’s life”—has had the paradoxical effect of “degenerat[ing] into mere [...] literary tricking” (27, 28). The current vogue for “photographic exactitude” he warns, threatens to “immolate [...] readers under facts” (28, 31). Stevenson concludes that to more effectively capture life, the writer must “suppress much and omit more”—a formula recalling the child’s loose, impressionistic comprehension of the world (30).

Elsewhere, James joins Stevenson in objecting to modes of writing which fail, among other things, to register a deliberate awareness of form. In “The Art of Fiction” (1884), for instance, James notes that until recently the novel had been lacking a “theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself”—a state of affairs that rendered the form “*naïf*” and limited in

⁸⁰ Like Dewey, Stevenson promotes the idea that “the imagination is the medium in which the child lives. To him there is everywhere and in everything that occupies his mind and activity at all a surplusage of value and significance” (Dewey, *School* 60-1). In 1877 both M. Taine and Charles Darwin published observational reports on their infants’ development, studies—like Dewey’s work—that helped to suggest that the child’s inability to distinguish between the actual and the symbolic renders any engagement with the world an act of imagination as she constructs meaning from the objects and happenings before her. See Taine, “On the Acquisition of Language,” and Darwin, “A Biographical Sketch of an Infant.”

scope (376). He advises writers to avoid the sort of superficial composition that translates the occurrences of life into “conventional, traditional moulds”—a practice which “condemns the art to an eternal repetition of a few familiar *clichés*, cuts shorts its development, and leads us straight up to a dead wall” (397-8).

In the case of juvenile writers like Daisy Ashford, readers typically perceived the child attempting to do exactly what James counseled against, that is, to adopt conservative plot arcs and formulaic dialogue. Because, however, these young authors generally “failed” in their attempts to imitate familiar forms—no one bothered to question whether or not these were conscious experiments with convention—their efforts offered a meta-commentary on the literary devices or adult knowledge the text endeavored to mimic. Like enthusiastic reviewers of juvenilia, Stevenson’s and James’s essays suggest that the child’s half-articulated perceptions (although naïve themselves) may be the key to a more authentic portrayal of reality when processed by the mature reader, thereby ironically anticipating the praise young writers like Opal Whiteley would receive for possessing not only “evidence of a lively fancy, [but also] the quality of a genuine, unthinking revelation of a sharply sensitive self” (qtd. in Bradburne 12). Venturing that “the world was made before the English language, and seemingly upon a different design,” Stevenson complains of the difficulty of composition, which is “not to write, but to write what you mean” (“*Virginibus*” 74, 65). “To tell the truth,” he continues, “is not to state the true fact, but to convey a true impression; truth in spirit, not truth to letter, is the true veracity” (“*Virginibus*” 76).

The idea that one must abstract, simplify, or excise the “factual” to produce authentic prose resonates with what Stevenson saw as the child’s effective tendency to imagine and to manipulate meaning. In “A Humble Remonstrance” (1884), Stevenson’s response to James’s

essay “The Art of Fiction,” Stevenson notes that “man’s one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality” (283). Acknowledging the young’s aptitude in this regard, he remarks elsewhere that the child “can make abstraction of whatever does not fit into his fable; and he puts his eyes into his pocket, just as we hold our noses in an unsavoury lane” (“Child’s Play” 230). The child’s obstructed vision, then, serves as a model for the way in which the creator of life-like art must recognize and reject the so-called precision of traditional representation in favor of a more impressionistic, and thereby more truthful depiction.

At the same time that he glorifies the possibilities of the young’s perception, however, Stevenson shies away from fetishizing the child’s vantage point. Although he equitably declares that “if youth is not quite right in its opinions, there is a strong probability that age is not much more so,” he was no more prone to give the child credit for her innovations than reviewers of juvenilia (“Crabbed Age” 103). Stevenson’s work indicates his opinion that the child is less constrained by a nagging awareness of the division between sign and signified; however, much like critics of Ashford’s work, he still observes the child as rating the “reproduction more highly over the reality” (“Child’s Play” 233-4). In other words, Stevenson believes that children’s imaginative play reveals that they possess only an incomplete understanding of conventions and common wisdoms, which they in turn attempt to wield in earnest. While this state of affairs might make the child’s flawed pronouncements ultimately more astute than those of the fact-driven adult’s, they nevertheless require the adult’s translation in order to acquire significance.

In *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1885), Stevenson capitalizes on this dynamic, representing his young characters as figures that constantly misunderstand or abstract reality, mistaking everyday phenomenon for the inscrutable or willfully transforming furniture into

vehicles of pretend. Ostensibly, this behavior renders children further from comprehending the real world; however, Stevenson's conceptualization that the mature rely upon theories and associations to mediate authentic experience, has the effect of constituting the child's more direct engagement with the material world as a relative freedom from artifice. Thus, critic Ann C. Colley argues that the verses' nostalgia hinges upon Stevenson's perception that the adult—"separated by memory, 'intellect,' and conscience" from visceral reality—is "caught between the silence of a spectator and the voice of a participant," where he "finds no easy utterance" ("Towards Home" 315). In contrast, Colley argues, the child readily substitutes the everyday objects of his surroundings for the equipment of adventure, and thereby "easily experiences the intertextuality of the inside and the outside" ("Bodies" 50).

Colley presumes that Stevenson's child "lives in the community of his own mind and inside the frame of his own body," on the whole unaffected by the world surrounding him ("Bodies" 50). While this conclusion has some basis in Stevenson's verse, an examination of his other works complicates Colley's sense that the author straightforwardly envies the young their flexible experience of the world, which his essays indicate must be comprehended by the more knowledgeable reader or otherwise viewed from the outside to assume meaning. Her notion, moreover, that the child's voice in *A Garden of Verses* "needs no otherness, not even a third-person narrator, to explicate or qualify it," absorbs the idea that children possess an undivided consciousness that may be simplistically represented and consumed ("Towards Home" 316). From this perspective, the child's very presence in the verses simultaneously suggests the veracity of the poems *and* their depiction of childhood. Thus, scholars such as Joanne Lewis have been eager to validate the "honesty and clarity" of the poems and their representation of "genuine childhood emotions" (240). Likewise, the first person perspective, Michael Rosen

argues, permits the author to express “the experience of imaginative play without apology, without explicit reference to how adults might perceive it” (63).

What the critical statements above fail to recognize is the same exchange between knowing and not knowing that would color the public’s ways of reading juvenilia such as Daisy Ashford’s and Opal Whiteley’s. No less constructed than the convention-bound literature to which Stevenson objected, the “real child” of his verses stands as the innocent pole not only to the parents and other adult readers whom Stevenson surely anticipated reading his poems, but also to the child reader whose comprehension of the characters’ imaginative play constitutes an often-unacknowledged form of intelligence. “Pirate Story,” for instance, begins with the description of “three of us afloat in the meadow by the swing.” To make sense of the poem’s unmitigated declaration that “the wicket is the harbour and the garden is the shore,” the reader must distance himself from the speaker’s perspective, reinstating the similes and qualifiers (so that the wicket is *like* the harbour, the garden is *like* the shore) that signal the narrator’s initial interpretation of his surroundings (*Garden* 9). While Rosen is correct in stating that there is no explicit reference to this process, his work, like other scholars’, presumes a simplistic binary between child speaker and adult reader.

In contrast to those critics who perceive the child’s play as happily immersive, Jean Webb argues that the bewilderment and uncertainty the child registers in *A Child’s Garden of Verses* “characterises the Modernist sensibility,” making Stevenson a transitional figure between Romanticism and newer forms of representation (363). The child’s gaps in knowledge replicate the multivalent, open-ended frames of understanding that would become a hallmark of modernist experimentation. As part of this experimentation, Stevenson’s poems unseat the authority of the narrator, calling attention to the child’s inaccuracies and thereby drawing the reader into the

creation of meaning. The child “At the Sea-Side” confusedly continues to dig in the sand, while “In every hole the sea came up, / Till it could come no more” (6). The speaker in “Bed in Summer” wonders at the sun’s irregularity and the fact that in summer she must go to sleep in the daylight, while “In winter I get up at night” (5). In these cases, the knowing reader apprehends how seasons work or the seemingly unpredictable “way [a shadow] likes to grow,” phenomena that elude the child figures (“My Shadow” 15). Because this savvy reader enjoys the dual awareness of both “the child’s” vision and his own sense of reality, the author encourages the reader’s conscious contemplation of commonplace interpretations of the world and methods of representation.

In his essay on Stevenson in *Partial Portraits* (1888), Henry James focuses upon how this duality recovers the author’s work from the juvenility to which James virulently objected elsewhere. Both Felicity A. Hughes and Beverly Lyon Clark convincingly argue that James’s literary criticism played a significant role in the bifurcation of children’s texts from “high” literature at the turn of the twentieth century.⁸¹ As these scholars note, James repeatedly cast his criticism of other authors’ texts in terms suggesting the undesirability of the childlike or “juvenile.” “Heaven defend us from the puerile!” he exclaims in an early review, identifying the practice of incorporating child characters into narratives as “the bane of our novels,” a trait “fatal to the dignity of serious feeling and to the grandeur of strong passions” (*Notes and Reviews* 95).⁸² Although typically, then, the critic would have vilified fiction that offered a “direct rhapsody on the age of heterogeneous pockets,” in Stevenson’s case, James admires the author

⁸¹ See Felicity A. Hughes 544-48 and Beverly Lyon Clark 35-38.

⁸² The review was of Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney’s *The Gayworthys: A Story of Threads and Thrums*, and first appeared in *The North American Review* in October 1865. It was reprinted in *Notes and Reviews* in 1921.

because he “describes credulity with all the resources of experience, and represents a crude stage with infinite ripeness” (“Robert Louis Stevenson” 145). Hence, the adult writer stages a situation in which mature readers may observe the child’s perceived reality, while simultaneously contemplating their own experience. Such meta-commentary triggers the reader’s objectivity, which—as Hughes notes—was a key factor in James’s criteria for creating a successful sense of reality in the novel (545).

The discrepancy between James’s evaluation of “puerile” works and Stevenson’s adventure novels is reliant, moreover, upon the distinction the critic makes between writers who cater to the naïve and those that use the perceptions of the naïve to enliven literature. Indeed, even as he praises Stevenson’s youthful novels, James’s condescension towards the young remains intact through his suggestion that “there would have been a kind of perverse humility in [Stevenson] keeping up the fiction that a production so literary as *Kidnapped* is addressed to immature minds [...]” (“Robert Louis Stevenson” 171). While Stevenson offers the jaded reader the “romance of boyhood,” James conjectures that the child would be incapable of expressing the wonders of her own experience: “a child might have written [*A Child’s Garden of Verses*] if a child could see childhood from the outside [...]” (148, 146). Thus, Stevenson’s prose has worth to the adult only because it merges the events of childhood with a mature perspective. Accordingly, James asserts that the value of *Treasure Island*, for instance, is that readers may see in it “the young reader himself and his state of mind: we seem to read it over his shoulder, and with an arm around his neck” (168). The proprietary nature of this posture reveals the extent to which James viewed innocence as a state to implicate in the practice of reading, but not to revere in and of itself.

As his essay on Stevenson indicates, James blamed much of the novel's woeful state of affairs upon the inexperienced reader, whose innocence he felt overly influenced writers' output. In "The Future of the Novel" (1899), James expounds upon this source of fiction's increasing conventionality or vulgarization, primarily blaming the unwarranted amount of care authors take to court the "presence of the ladies and children—by whom I mean, in other words, the reader irreflective and uncritical" (51). James equates the indulgence of such readers with the adoption of "forms at once ready-made and sadly the worse for wear" (57). Instead, James argues, the images of the novel should be as "various and vivid" as possible, with experimentation a necessary component to the genre's revitalization (58, 54-5).

When authors censored their texts to make them wholesome for the child or the unwed female, James felt that the result was formulaic fiction, limited in scope and, therefore, in importance. At the same time that James rejected a large swathe of the reading public for its inexperience, however, he left the door open for a broader conception of what experiences qualified one to write. In contrast to the snobbery towards females and the young for which critics typically remember James, in "The Art of Fiction," the critic combats Walter Besant's hypothesis that one may only write of what one has experienced. Suggesting that a village girl might indeed write effectively of the military (a scenario Besant found unfeasible), James asserts, "a novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life" (384). James argues, therefore, that the most important skill in fiction is observation, the "power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it [...]" (389). Although fiction must give readers a sense of reality, the "measure of reality is very difficult to fix," and therefore open to interpretation (387).

Although James does not explicitly reference the child in this discussion, his description of the absorbing conjecture involved in observation recalls depictions of the child's flexible, half-formed knowledge in Stevenson's work, with which his friendship and literary criticism made him quite familiar. Moreover, with atypical generosity James concludes "The Future of the Novel" with the postulation that it might be precisely the naive female reader—for whom literature has cripplingly bent itself—who recovers the genre. If freed of rules and restrictions, the novel may shed its "superficiality" or "timidity," James surmises, predicting a "happy *coup* on the part of a great artist yet to come" (53). While James may not have been so open-minded to predict that the child author—young and typically female—would receive credit for being this artist, his essays, like Stevenson's, lay the groundwork for the incorporation of a narrative voice whose innocence unsettles tidy, and therefore ineffectual, literary representation.

Despite, then, once declaring himself "utterly weary of stories about precocious little girls," in *What Maisie Knew* James employs his young title character's perception to comment upon the drama and corruption evolving around her (*Notes and Reviews* 50).⁸³ By offering readers Maisie's fragmented understanding of the scenes surrounding her, James orchestrates the mature reader's multi-dimensional appreciation of that which ostensibly escapes the child. Like Stevenson's *Garden of Verses* or Ashford's *The Young Visitors*, the innovations of James's novel are commonly perceived as dependant upon the act of comprehending "the undercurrent of thought or meaning" behind the child's statements "with a relish proportioned to the

⁸³ The phrase comes from a review of Louisa May Alcott's *Moods* and originally appeared in *The North American Review* in July 1865. It was reprinted in *Notes and Reviews* in 1921.

completeness of its concealment from the younger reader”—or, many adults might add, the younger heroine or writer.⁸⁴

The key observer to her parents' and stepparents' divorces, fights, and illicit affairs, Maisie is a “little feathered shuttlecock,” a “receptacle,” and a “ready vessel for bitterness [...] in which biting acids could be mixed” (*Maisie* 42, 36). Although Maisie is thus ostensibly a passive character, a pawn in her various guardians' ploys, the questionable state (rather than the sanctity) of her innocence perpetually directs the action of James's novel. In his preface to the 1909 edition, the author claims that as the text's “ironic centre,” Maisie “lend[s] to poorer persons and things, by the mere fact of their being involved with her and by the special scale she creates for them, a precious element of dignity. They become, as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art” (29). James's assertion that Maisie's presence intensifies the scenes surrounding her springs from the sense that “the child's role [in literature] is to expose the essential imperfections of the world” (Pattison 110). Caught between warring parents and their new love interests, Maisie's misinterpretation of their behaviors condemns them far more virulently than if James had vilified them through an adult voice because it engages the reader in their condemnation. Indeed, without her naïve vantage, Robert Pattison argues, the story would devolve into “a series of angry fornications” (133). When the girl's governess schemes to spend more time with Maisie's father, for example, the young protagonist takes it as proof of Miss Overmore's affection for her charge: “what could have proved it better than the fact that before a week was out, in spite of their distressing separation and her mother's prohibition and Miss

⁸⁴ The comment comes from an anonymous review of Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. The reviewer argued that Stevenson only sometimes achieved this dynamic in the poems; more often, according to this critic, the child's voice appeared “too conscious of itself.” See *Saturday Review* (March 21, 1885): 394.

Overmore's scruples and Miss Overmore's promise, the beautiful friend had turned up at her father's?" (46). Because the mature reader is able to supply an answer for this innocent conjecture, his awareness of Maisie's faulty logic makes the self-interestedness of her guardians' behavior reverberate.

The novel's focalization through Maisie exposes the imperfections not only of contemporary morality, but also of linguistic representation. Like Stevenson, James's criticism perpetually expresses dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of mimesis; Susan Honeyman consequently argues that, "recognizing the obstacles that language and ideology create in bridging subjectivities, James found in child-figures a vehicle for representing the void between them" (49). Maisie's unintentional commentary upon the voids between sign and signified typically evolves from her confusion over figurative expressions or uses of language. When Miss Overmore supplies the girl with the information that "Mrs. Wix 'stood up' to her," for example, Maisie puzzles over the effrontery implied in the gesture: "in the absence of any suggestion of sitting down, it was scarcely more than natural that even poor Mrs. Wix should stand up" (61). In another instance, Maisie deliberates over the various ways in which adults use the term "youth," questioning her own identity as a young person if her mother and Mrs. Beale are also "young" according to Sir Claude: "such discoveries were disconcerting and even a trifle confounding: these persons, it appeared, were not of the age they ought to be" (84-5). Maisie's perpetual quandaries over such matters highlight the vagaries of language and normative communication.

Such dynamics in James's novella might seem to indicate the glorification of the child's unconscious wisdom. In keeping with such an interpretation, critic M. A. Williams argues that beyond gratifying the adult reader's sense of a superior knowledge, Maisie's perspective "dramatizes the transforming power of a free and wondering engagement with reality" (48). This

claim, however, both exaggerates the extent to which James represents Maisie as an innocent figure and implicitly works from the premise that the real child is necessarily free from cultural and linguistic clichés. James, in contrast, sees the literary child as a resource due to the way in which she half-comprehends. In his preface to the novel, James echoes Stevenson when he confidently declares that “small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, at all producible, vocabulary” (27). Maisie’s partial and covert acquisition of knowledge does not, therefore, negate the novel’s “demonstration of what Maisie knows, knew, and has known” all along (Klein 150); instead, it underscores the inadequacies of knowledge to which all humans are subject in its representation of the girl’s state of “being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass” (*Maisie* 101).

The “power” or “agency” of Maisie’s vision⁸⁵ thus relies upon the *possibility* that she operates from a position of exclusion. In other words, while the complexity of the novel’s observations rely upon “Maisie’s” formulation of them, the child herself must exude some measure of innocence—at once a “fantastic” construct and “essential to the novel” (Pattison 132)—to sustain the profound effect. The insightfulness of her naïve pronouncements arises once again from the mature reader’s experience of the text: the “simultaneous sense of intimacy and distance” created by the third person narration gives the “remarkable sensation of being the girl at the same time that we are watching her” (McCall 52). As James’s narrator notes, the “questions of the small are the peculiar diversion of the great” (*Maisie* 54), and like the adults

⁸⁵ Juliet McMaster argues that Maisie’s “enforced passivity” is offset by her literal ability to see or observe her guardians’ behaviors, a skill that grants her a degree of agency. See “What Daisy Knew,” 51-3.

who peer over the shoulder of Stevenson's child reader, James asserts "we simply take advantage of these things better than [Maisie] herself" ("Preface" 28).

As Maisie learns to conceal what precisely she does know about her environment, she comes to embody the innocence-knowledge duality of this narrative device. While some scholars see in the character's conduct an "unconscious ability to suggest both innocence and illicit knowledge" (Mendelssohn 82), James insinuates that Maisie fully comprehends adults' attraction to this duality, if not the topics forbidden to her. Like the innocent professionals of the St. Nicholas League, "she had come to like people's liking her to 'know,'" the narrator asserts, and "nothing was less new to Maisie than the art of not thinking singly" (125, 176). Nevertheless, James's inconclusive statements about the degree to which Maisie grasps adult matters keep the reader in a perpetual guessing game much like that which occurs between the novel's characters.

Given the extent to which Maisie's uncertain innocence is the driving narrative force in *What Maisie Knew*, it is unsurprising that many critics consider the child's consciousness central to their critiques. What is perhaps startling, however, is the degree to which the conversations about the novel's dual perspective translate into a protective or proprietary relationship to the young protagonist's innocence on the part of scholars. Despite the initial controversy reviewers expressed concerning Maisie's proximity to corruption in James's novel, in 1956, Harris W. Wilson called upon critics to remedy the lack of attention that had been paid to the text's "violation of innocence [and] in particular the corruption of a child" (279). More than forty years later Wilson's sentiment seems alive and well in Tessa Hadley's work, which interprets Mrs. Wix's instruction of Maisie as "a painful, an ugly intrusion into the child-consciousness" that imposes unsatisfactory conventions upon the girl's ingenuousness (220). Likewise, Dan McCall expresses "dismay" over Maisie's growing knowledge (52), while (with a touch of

personal outrage) John C. McCloskey concludes that when Maisie sheds childhood for adolescence at the novel's end, she "has achieved a self-awareness which is essentially selfishness and a hardness. What she knows, at the end, is what she wants" (512).

Although divergent in their conclusions, all of these critical essays are overly reliant upon limiting conceptions of childhood. Because the character in question is a child, readers seemingly feel entitled to judge the veracity of the portrayal in ways that would never be sanctioned if James's protagonist were an adult. Thus, Muriel G. Shine criticizes the verisimilitude of the novelist's depiction of Maisie, arguing that her lack of anger lacks "psychological authenticity": for "what compensation can there be for a child who is told by her father, 'you know your mother loathes you, loathes you simply' " (124). The presumption behind such readings is that the child is a knowable entity, whose innocence is her most valued resource.

In keeping with this presumption, Beverly Lyon Clark's otherwise astute reading of James's work discusses *What Maisie Knew* in terms of the violations or violence perpetrated upon the girl's innocence. Clark boldly declares that James's stripping away of the child's emotional response and exploitation of her naiveté constitutes an act of "literary child abuse" (42). Despite Clark's acute perception of stereotyping's effects upon the field of children's literature, her argument relies on the same narrow conceptualization of childhood that informed negative reactions to Daisy Ashford and Opal Whiteley's work in the 1920s. In contrast, Kevin Ohi's queer reading of the novel acknowledges how our cultural investment in innocence bears upon the real child by likening Maisie's status to that of juvenile victims of abuse and other sexually silenced figures. Ohi argues, in part, that the rhetoric of current-day molestation trials shares the dogmatic commitment to the child's innocence common to romantic cults of childhood (96). Thus, Maisie's

position in the novel—making possible various forms of exchange from which she is, simultaneously excluded—is analogous to the position of the child in erotic innocence insofar as innocence constructs the child as a point of blankness outside and constitutive of [...] exchanges underlying language, desire, and subjectivity. (94-5)

Ohi's argument points to the public's appropriation of the child's so-called purity as a site of naïve wisdom—a dynamic still at play in our contemporary notions of childhood and largely pervasive in the early twentieth century. This dynamic has been integral to critical readings of not only *What Maisie Knew*, but also the juvenilia that captivated the public in the 1920s. Just as readers who reached the conclusion of James's novel “still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew,” reviewers of Ashford and Whiteley's texts fueled their readings with queries about the young authors' state of knowledge (*Maisie* 266).

The inseparable line between interest in juvenilia and interest in juvenilia's authors reflects the way in which the reader's meaningful consumption of the child's perspective in literature relies upon the perceived health and sanctity of childhood itself. Elbert Bede's book-length exposé on Opal Whiteley encapsulates the delicate balance between appreciating innocence and condemning precocity evidenced in the reception not only of *The Story of Opal*, but also of Daisy Ashford's, Robert Louis Stevenson's, and Henry James's work. Bede—editor of the *Sentinel* in Cottage Grove, Oregon, where the author spent most of her youth—ostensibly builds a case against the authenticity of Whiteley's diary. The majority of his text, however, engages in personal attacks on the young author's character. Despite having earlier estimated the diary as “the beautiful, innocent, sincere unveiling of the heart of a precocious tot in composition childishly expressive” (qtd. in *Famous Opal* 42), Bede increasingly conflates the journal's value with the questionable naiveté of the author. Disdainfully asserting that Whiteley “submitted

herself to frequent photographing,” Bede accuses Whiteley of being an ungrateful and opportunistic publicity seeker (*Famous Opal* 11, 6). Further insinuating the cheapness of the young author’s character in exposing herself to the world, the skeptic entitles his chapter on the diarist’s initial meetings with editor Ellery Sedgwick “Opal Sells Herself to the *Atlantic*.”

The paradoxical insistence that the child author’s precocious statements serve to disassociate her from an unhealthily precocious understanding of the world, mirrored the tack often taken by readers of Stevenson’s and James’s work. To appreciate the wild inaccuracies and seemingly innocent slippages of Whiteley’s or Ashford’s prose, required the filtering of the experiences of childhood through a mature perspective—a reading practice both James and Stevenson perceived as healing the void between reality and its linguistic representation. Nevertheless, adults tended to esteem this conscious engagement with cliché or literary device only if it originated with the child’s passive or unconscious state. Commenting on later work he received from Whiteley, Ellery Sedgwick remarked that “the dew of morning had vanished” from her descriptions despite their continued whimsy: “the fairy kingdom was now the playground of other children. Its gates were closed, and Opal stood without” (*Happy Profession* 265-6). Like countless other readers of the early twentieth century, Sedgwick bought into the notion that childhood was an Edenic state of innocence enclosed by protective gates, a state not only untouched by politics, sex, or other adult matters, but also ironically conducive to commentary upon these subjects. While to stand outside the hallowed enclosure was the key to its appreciation, it was also a form of irreparable banishment, recoverable only in part through the voices of the young.

5.0 “GENUINE CHILD’S PLAY”: AUTHENTICATING THE FICTION OF THE INNOCENT PROFESSIONAL

The positive valuation of Marjory Fleming’s, Daisy Ashford’s, and Opal Whiteley’s juvenilia depended in large part upon an adult readership’s eagerness to clasp upon the child’s voice as the means to authentic representational forms and experiences. Such readers lauded the ways in which “pure” or “simple” juvenile compositions shed light upon the complexities of religion, nature, romantic love, or the like. In other words, adults applied the same vexed notion of innocence to children’s writing as they did to childhood itself—simultaneously paying lip service in public forums to its purity, while winking at its signs of precocity over the dinner table.⁸⁶ The remarkable authenticity of juvenilia, therefore, relied upon the juxtaposition of the writer’s naiveté with an evident knowledge of the world: the interplay between what the mature reader knew and what the young author *might* know made for a fascinating reading exercise. Maintaining the balance between these two states, however, was a tenuous achievement, and in the early 1920s, such titillating uncertainty both aided and injured the reception of Ashford’s and Whiteley’s work, with the texts garnering equal parts adulation and condemnation for their questionably ingenuous pronouncements. Those readers who emphasized the girls’ precocity

⁸⁶ Recent scholars have broken with the traditional literary-historical narrative that adults who participated in the late nineteenth-century Cult of the Child were invested wholly in children’s innocence; these critics note a more ambivalent portrayal of childhood in both art and literature at the onset of the twentieth century. See Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, 3-38; Reynolds 5; and Roth 158-60.

deemed their texts an open acknowledgment of the unhealthy understanding the authors had of sexuality, social climbing, the marketplace, or other adult issues.

Across many cultural fronts, including children's writing, the 1930s witnessed an attempt to rigidify the flexible binary between innocence and precocity. Changes in the era's cultural and economic climate lessened adults' tolerance for ambiguity surrounding the child's knowledge of worldly matters, causing (amongst other things) a stricter line to be drawn between juvenilia marketed to the child versus that marketed to the adult. Despite the perpetuation of revelry in the child's precocious moments or pronouncements, from the mid-1800s forward adults began progressively defining the young's experience in opposition to their own. In the early twentieth century, the practical repercussions of perceiving childhood as an idealized state included increasingly separate categories of "child" and "adult" literature, entertainment, and other activities. No longer banished to an upper-story nursery, the child had become increasingly central to the home; nevertheless, the creation of specialized equipment, furniture, and play spaces unique to the child officially reinforced the distinctions between young and old (Calvert 82-9).

This is not to say that the liminal space between innocence and experience—enjoyed by juvenilia as well many other cultural artifacts—disappeared. Rather, the border between adult and child, work and play, only *seemingly* became better policed as evidenced by regulations and specialty marketing, while fluctuation between these states continued to be the norm. The early twentieth century, for instance, also witnessed an overlapping of youthful and adult extracurricular activities, as the time and outlet for recreation became the perceived right of

every (middle-class) man, woman, and child.⁸⁷ In the case of juvenilia, it is clear from contemporary periodicals' book review sections that respected critics paid attention to these texts; from articles on juvenile authors in children's magazines, it is also clear that many children read their peers' prose, whether or not it was specifically marketed to youth.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, by the 1930s adults were more aggressively sorting texts, entertainment, and other activities or goods between those intended for adults and those intended for other children. Since the beginning of the century, play reformers such as Joseph Lee had warned against the destructive potential of passive recreation, but such warnings were embattled by the growing leisure market in subsequent decades: in the 1920s, Americans and British spent millions on sports events, movies, and radios for their homes. In contrast to these spectacles, play reformers and religious leaders continued to encourage active or creative play, overseeing the institution of city playgrounds and afterschool programs which reinstated the line between children's and adult's pursuits—or at the very least the venues in which they were enjoyed (Gleason 263-5). By the century's third decade, concerns over the exposure of children to inappropriate material had infiltrated even the passive leisure industry, leading to regulatory measures such as the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 (more popularly known as the

⁸⁷ See Melanie Dawson, William Gleason, and Kathryn Grover for more on the middle-class ideals of early twentieth-century recreation and its limited availability to the lower classes. See also Woody Register, who uses the case of amusement park creator Fred Thompson to illustrate the sacralization of middle-class childhood (boyhood in particular) in this era, and play's subsequent adoption by adult males as the marker of success.

⁸⁸ Young author David Binney Putnam, for instance, clearly wrote for his peers, and his work received notice not only in such major adult publications as the *New York Times* and *Nation*, but also in *The Youth's Companion*, which published segments of Putnam's diary as well as updates on his voyage throughout 1926. The intended readership of Patience, Richard, and Johnny Abbe's prose, which I discuss at length in this chapter, is far less clear. However—although publishers more typically marketed the Abbes' books to adults—evidence exists that children, too, enjoyed their texts. See note 104.

Hays Code for its overseer Will H. Hays). Its censorship of the widespread violence and sexual innuendo common to both children's and adult's entertainment opened the door for such forerunners of the children's film industry as Disney's *Snow White* (1937).

The economic upset of the Great Depression in America and the Great Slump in England was also a large contributing factor to adults' desire to draw a protective circumference around the child's experience.⁸⁹ With unemployment rates soaring and many parents unable to support their families, reminders of the child's relationship to pragmatic world affairs—such as often arose in juvenilia marketed to adults—could scarcely invite wholesale praise. All the same, children were both a vital part of the economy and the subject of protective labor reform. On the one hand, the deepening economic slough on both sides of the Atlantic meant that more children were unofficially entering the workforce in an effort to keep their families afloat financially.⁹⁰ On the other hand, social and political reforms of the era assumed an increasingly larger role in regulating children's experiences through stricter enforcement of both mandatory school attendance and labor regulations. The increased attention to these laws' enforcement implies that despite the ways in which children continued to be enmeshed in the practical aspects of the

⁸⁹ As Kriste Lindenmeyer notes, the “modern ideal of childhood as a separate, sheltered and protected stage of life had been around since at least the mid-nineteenth century, but it took the social and economic turmoil of the 1930s to stimulate the creation of a legal and cultural framework promoting the model as the normative experience for all Americans through age seventeen” (5).

⁹⁰ Because much of this work took the form of younger children assisting in a family's business, farm, or domestic chores, exact numbers are not readily available. Although 1938 saw the first lasting regulation of American child labor in the Fair Labor Standards Act, throughout the 1930s, financial hardship also led many high school students to leave school in search of jobs. The increase in the young workforce—brought on equally by individuals' need for income and businesses' need for cheap labor—pushed the federal government to enact stricter reforms. Thus, by 1940, government records show a higher school graduation rate and fewer children officially a part of the job force. For more on these figures, see Joseph M. Hawes, Kriste Lindenmeyer, and Elliott West.

economy, the strong undercurrent in Anglo-American society that persisted in viewing innocence as a hallowed state also decreed that the child's primary occupation remained childhood. The overt presence of paternalistic regulations frequently masked, however, the realities of many children's work hours, which were spent laboring either on the street or at agricultural chores that did not fall under the guidelines of government sanctions.

The conflict between rhetoric and reality described above indicates that precocity may have been an inevitable byproduct of economic hardship, but the persistent cultural investment in childhood innocence dictated that this precocity continue to take an acceptable form. The popularity of such precocious child stars as Shirley Temple suggests that adults were willing to overlook or even laud such traits when packaged in a convincingly childlike shape. Hence, while Temple's scandalously short dresses may have rendered her "completely totsy" to some viewers, for most they disguised her coy maturity as infancy's pure appeal (Greene).

In keeping with adults' ability to accept precocity when even thinly overlaid with childish traits, a host of new juvenilia appeared in this era—roughly fifty-six books in the 1920s and seventy-four in the 1930s⁹¹—that publishers increasingly marketed to other children, rather than to adults. Given that these texts were healthy sellers that captured the attention of reviewers in such major publications as the *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune Books*, and London's *Times Literary Supplement*, one might presume that they would instigate an amount of controversy equal to that of Ashford or Whiteley's texts; in fact, few received the quantity of press (or vitriol) aimed at their predecessors. By designating juvenilia as wholesome children's literature, publishers cleared the way for readers to both applaud the accomplishments of these texts and bypass any anxieties over the young authors' evident precocity.

⁹¹ See note 45.

Juvenilia aimed at the adult reader, however, continued to command divisive commentary, as their uncensored interpretations of contemporary issues simultaneously ensured their categorization as mature texts and made their authors the target of queries concerning the sanctity of their innocence. While critics perceived the defining characteristics of child-oriented juvenilia to be their simplicity and their naturalistic depiction of childhood, juvenilia pitched at the adult—ironically, often written in more “childish” prose—called their authors’ competence at being children into question.

In this chapter, I argue that the growing perception of childhood’s precariousness in the 1930s put pressure in turn upon children’s writing (as one of many cultural artifacts) to recuperate the notion that the child existed in a protected state. I argue further that the desire to substantiate the notion of childhood innocence paradoxically resulted in a celebration of children’s literary competence or professionalism—that is to say, child-authored texts that portrayed youth in appropriately “childlike” ways also received unmitigated critical praise for their literary prowess and realistic depictions. Instead of focusing primarily upon the young authors’ innocence or what they did *not* know, critics tended to evaluate (and generally commend) the children’s story construction, characterization, or descriptions, seeking evident rather than implied signs of the authors’ knowledge.

Reviewers’ notions of juvenilia’s competencies frequently encompassed more, however, than just effective or proper linguistics and style. As with the young apprentices of the St. Nicholas League, readers judged juvenilia such as David Binney Putnam’s travelogues (1925-1929), Mimpsy Rhys’s *mr. hermit crab* (1929), and Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock’s *Oxus* trilogy (1937-1939) based upon the degree to which they accurately represented a desirable childhood reality. Just as publishers marketed juvenilia on adult topics with claims that the texts

offered insight into the grown-up world, readers and critics promoted the idea that child-authored children's books provided an entrée into genuine youthful experience. These same readers, however, harbored highly constructed expectations of that experience, anticipating that as spokespersons of childhood, juvenile authors would reinforce the perceived correlation between children and nature, for instance, or the imagination. Despite, then, the praise such texts received for their conventional literary competence, adult readers attributed the greatest innocence—and thereby, the greatest authenticity—to children's texts when they reassured them that children continued to enjoy sheltered lives, unaffected by either the hardships of the time or the precocity evident in their prose. Thus, the children's literature critic for the *Saturday Review of Literature* deemed Rhys's book—subtitled “A Tale for Children By a Child”—the “realest kind of real book” (Woodbridge 424).

The enthusiasm over competent child writers does not mean that the controversy surrounding juvenilia's authorship entirely disappeared. Indeed, those texts that taxed readers' ability to believe in the child's idyll incurred negative press not unlike that directed at Ashford and Whiteley. Repeatedly, however, the overwhelming response to juvenile-authored children's literature—no matter how polished—was benign approval, while juvenile-authored adult's literature—no matter how childish—continued to feel the impact both of readers' glee over the child's titillating proximity to mature subject matter, and of their anxious disapproval of her misguided precocity.

To demonstrate both the similarities and the disparities between reviewers' evaluations of juvenilia pitched to the child versus that pitched to the adult, I discuss two juvenile-authored trilogies of the late 1930s. The first half of this chapter introduces one of the more successful series of juvenilia marketed to child readers in this era—Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's

The Far-Distant Oxus (1937), *Escape to Persia* (1938), and *Oxus in Summer* (1939).⁹² These novels—influenced by Arthur Ransome’s popular *Swallows and Amazons* (1930)—recount a group of children’s holidays in Exmoor, riding ponies, building huts, and living as much in the wild as they can contrive. The characters’ near obsessive relationship with the moors and disdain for the adult or the industrial incited reviewers to comment repeatedly on the “healthy” nature of these narratives. Praising Hull and Whitlock as “two unusually competent and businesslike authors” in one breath, in the next critics deemed their texts “the real thing, genuine children’s play” (“By and For Children” 832).

In contrast, in the second half of this chapter, I discuss the once-famous and highly lucrative trio of texts written by Patience, Richard, and Johnny Abbe: *Around the World in Eleven Years* (1936), *Of All Places!* (1937), and *No Place Like Home* (1940). The Abbes’ publishers promoted the siblings’ books—memoirs that divulged the details of their parents’ European exploits and the children’s own experiences in Hollywood—as the source of impolitic pronouncements exposing the world as it “really” was, through what their first book’s cover called the “naked eyes” of childhood. Whereas critics initially praised the Abbes for their naive prose, however, by their third publication—which documented the children’s treacherous, fact-finding journey throughout Germany and other European countries on the eve of World War II—these same critics ridiculed the authors’ artifice, what was now perceived as their disingenuous childishness.

Such “disillusioned” readers seemingly draw a connection between the pseudo-professionalism of the Abbes’ war correspondence and the unconventionalities of their

⁹² Hull and Whitlock wrote one other book together, *Crowns* (1947). The authors were 26 and 27 years old at its publication, however, and it followed a different set of characters than the Oxus series.

composition style. In other words, the childish, seemingly unconscious nature of the siblings' prose jars with the driving intentionality of their journalistic mission, suggesting in turn the children's knowing approach to selling books. Critics perceived *No Place Like Home* as not only demonstrating the Abbes' remove from the appropriate realm of children's play, but also as missing the mark on that titillating version of innocent composition wherein the child author engages in half-knowing observations that underscore her incomplete knowledge. Like Daisy Ashford's novella, the Abbes' texts lose favor with readers when the tenuous balance between innocence and professionalism seemingly weighs toward a relationship with the marketplace, implying that their innocent statements are in fact calculated naiveté.

It is arguable, of course, that the divergent responses to the *Oxus* series and the Abbes's texts stem from the juvenilia's distinguishing characteristics. Hull and Whitlock were teenagers (aged fifteen and sixteen) when their fictional stories were published; Patience, Richard, and Johnny were all under age eleven when the first installment of their memoirs appeared. The similar criteria, however, by which reviewers judged the two sets of juvenilia—wildly dissimilar in terms of style, genre, and authorship—suggests that what was really under scrutiny was childhood's sanctity. While the Abbes' childishly unconventional prose would seem at first glance to verify the children's innocence, in fact their subject matter's deviation from prescribed ways of being a child calls these stylistic idiosyncrasies into question. Under these circumstances, the fictional narrative authored by teenagers becomes the "real" children's text, because it coincides more snugly with middle-class notions of childhood experience. When the young characters in Hull and Whitlock's series take to the road on their own, for instance, it is to escape the confines of London for the pastoral idyll of the English countryside—a fantastic re-

imagining (for American readers in particular) of the increasing number of transient, homeless, or otherwise desperate youth of the 1930s.

Ironically, Hull and Whitlock's emphasis upon their child characters' disdain for the adult world revises the neo-Romantic sentiments for which critics praised the trilogy. These are not the half-wild, pagan spiritual figures of Wordsworthian poems, but rather solidly upper-middle class citizens, enjoying the finer things of that class's countryside. The Huntleys and their Exmoor friends may say that they yearn for the freedom of a primal, outdoor existence, but they are content to order their expedition supplies from the maid (*en français*), unthinkingly filch items from their summer guardians' farm, or otherwise deceive the people surrounding them—markers of their disregard for adult codes of behavior, yes, but also of their dependence upon the laborers surrounding them and their subsequent remove from the pastoral world they covet. When, in the series' final volume, Hull and Whitlock amplify their protagonists' entitled behaviors to the point that they—like the Abbes—no longer fulfill cultural expectations of childhood, at least one critic comments upon the “immaturity” of the authors' prose (Eaton “Two Young Authors” 10). This sudden sea change in perceptions of Hull and Whitlock's writing indicates that not even juvenilia-as-children's-literature was immune from the charge of faulty childishness.

Despite ambivalent reviews of Hull and Whitlock's final volume, the *Oxus* novels' overarching plots and melodramatic paeans to nature reassured readers that the young exist in a separate, sheltered state, leaving most reviewers happy to gloss over the less-than-innocent aspects of the teenagers' texts. In contrast, when the Abbes discuss their parents' financial instability or ploys to make money in Hollywood, numerous critics complain that the authors' real-life experience disrupts the “fiction” that the professional child author's work is merely play.

The Abbes (and their memoirs) suffer for their worldly portrayal of a child's existence, garnering disapproval for the overly pragmatic world they inhabit and for their subsequently incompetent brand of innocence.

5.1 "BY CHILDREN, ABOUT CHILDREN, FOR CHILDREN": HULL AND WHITLOCK'S *OXUS* TRILOGY

The earthbound and predictable pleasures of the characters in Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's *Oxus* books resonated with a children's literature market increasingly focused less upon fantasy, than upon a fantastic reality. While critics have sometimes overstated the 1920s-30s as the end of the Golden Age's high fantasy literature, a growing number of children's texts in this time did depict children in realistic—if idealized—scenarios. Books such as the *Dick and Jane* basal readers (first published in 1930) highlighted the era's focus upon incorporating the familiar into children's books: following the educational philosophies of John Dewey, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, and others, such texts worked from the premise that children both enjoyed and learned best by building upon what they ostensibly already knew of the world surrounding them. For instance, Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series, the first of which was also published in 1930, charted the outdoor play of his child characters on holiday in the Lake District; drawn from Ransome's childhood memories, the novels regaled readers with the protagonists' idyllic days of sailing, camping and pretending to be pirates. The author's association of youth with the outdoors mirrored another contemporary cultural ideal—that children thrived in the non-urban settings from which modern life increasingly excluded them. Authors such as Laura Ingalls Wilder and Carol Ryrie Brink also drew from their families'

experiences in nature in their novels *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932) and *Caddie Woodlawn* (1936) respectively; the real-life basis of these nineteenth-century pioneer narratives reflects the era's commitment to children's immersion in environments conducive to healthy play.

Although Wilder and Brink's narratives introduced readers to another era, the texts' focus upon the youthful characters' transformative skills—that is, their imaginative ability to transform privation or dull days not into fantasy, but into a more comfortable reality—were of timely concern for an America and England saddled with economic hardships. The attention to children's earthly enjoyments resonated with the theory—an educational commonplace by the early twentieth century—that children learned best by being actively engaged in the subject at hand and by bringing their own knowledge to their studies. Progressive educators applauded children's individual visions of the world, an approach epitomized by Lucy Sprague Mitchell's 1921 *Here and Now Storybook*, which emphasized realistic narratives that drew explicitly from children's own experiences. In Mitchell's introduction to her highly influential text, she vilifies adults who “kill” children's “play with words just as we kill their creative play with most things. We are utilitarian,” she exclaims, “we are executive, we are didactic, we are earth-tied, we are hopelessly adult!” (61). Despite Mitchell's focus upon creativity, however, she does not presume that children's stories or play must draw exclusively from the fantastic. Echoing John Dewey's disdain for the link adults typically made between children and fairy tales, Mitchell asserts, “it is only the blind eye of the adult that finds the familiar uninteresting” (15).⁹³

In seeming accord with this sentiment, the vast majority of juvenilia marketed to children in the later 1920s and 1930s were non-fiction. While these narratives stood in stark

⁹³ See Dewey 144.

contrast to the everyday experiences of most youth, their focus upon real life coincided with the more general trend away from children's fantasy literature. These privileged young authors wrote straightforward accounts of their exotic travels and adventures in books such as Judy Acheson's *Judy in Constantinople* (1930) or Betty Boyd Bell's *Circus: A Girl's Own Story of Life Under the "Big Top"* (1931). Publisher George P. Putnam went so far as to create a series entitled "Boys' Books by Boys"—a venture dedicated to regaling readers with the discoveries of teenaged writers (including his own son David) aboard ships bound for scientific missions, trapped in dangerous wildernesses, or on safari in Africa.⁹⁴

Marketed to the young authors' peers, such juvenilia both upheld the virtues of reality and offered escape from the more confining aspects of its readers' lives. On the one hand, such child writers' experiences were extraordinary, particularly in a time period in which most juvenile American readers were suffering from the straits of the Great Depression. On the other hand, these adventure-laden texts reinforced certain presumptions about children—namely, that they were more vivacious, simplistic, and captivated by the natural world than adults. As a seeming result, the trait that reviewers noted most frequently was the "genuineness" of children's memoirs. Critics joined famed children's librarian Anne Carroll Moore, for instance, in repeatedly praising David Binney Putnam for being a "real American boy"⁹⁵ who told the "tale

⁹⁴ The series included David Binney Putnam's own *David Goes Voyaging* (1925), *David Goes to Greenland* (1926), and *David Goes to Baffinland* (1927). The other titles alluded to are Clark Crichton, Jr.'s *Frozen-In! The Adventures of the "Nanuk's" Cabin Boy North of Siberia* (1930) and *Three Boy Scouts in Africa* (1928), by Robert Dick Douglas, Jr., David R. Martin, Jr., and Douglas L. Oliver. Douglas wrote more than one book for the series, as did Robert Carver North, Deric Nusbaum, and Bradford Washburn, Jr.

⁹⁵ The *New York Times* also referred to Putnam in these terms, as did Edwin L. Shuman, who deemed *David Goes Voyaging* (1925) the "genuine book of a natural boy" (726). See "David Makes Another Voyage," *New York Times* (Nov. 21, 1926): BR3; and Edwin L. Shuman, "How a

of the ordinary day” (“School to Skyline” 39, 40). Indeed, for Putnam as for young writers like Boyd or Acheson, the more simplistic the narrative, the more compelling many reviewers found it; unlike juvenilia marketed to adults—which presumably offered worldly wisdom through its unintentionally unconventional pronouncements—readers valued children’s non-fiction for the way in which it straightforwardly relayed the everyday sensations and thoughts of child life (no matter how out-of-the-ordinary the authors’ experiences were). Moore added to her praise of Putnam—who was in her words “neither a prodigy nor a prig”—by seconding his preference for the reality of his experiences over the authoring of them (“Children’s Books of 1925” 178, “School to Skyline” 41).

The same appreciation for representations of “natural” childhood arose in adults’ responses to child-authored fiction. In some ways, the dual recognition of innocence and competence in juvenilia intended for the child merely mimicked adult readers’ appreciation, for instance, of Daisy Ashford’s paradoxical blend of naiveté and knowingness. In both cases, the draw to these texts seemingly arose from a fascination with the close proximity and interaction of a “childlike” and an “adult” perspective. Like Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn or Henry James’s Maisie, young writers ostensibly offered readers a more authentic representation of life. In contrast to their elder counterparts, however—who wrote largely if not entirely for an adult readership—young authors of children’s literature received praise not for their seemingly childish (and therefore more genuine) prose or perspective, but rather for their conventionally “realistic” depictions of childhood.

Real Boy Found Adventure in Tropic Seas,” *Literary Digest International Book Review* (Oct. 1925): 726-7.

Many critics of this era valued juvenile literature, therefore, according to conservative criteria, focusing upon both traditional literary conventions *and* traditional depictions of childhood.⁹⁶ As critic Beverly Lyon Clark convincingly demonstrates in *Kiddie Lit*, the decades immediately preceding the juvenilia of the 1920s and 1930s saw an increasing schism between adults' and children's literature concomitant with the increasing reverence for realism as opposed to romance. Juvenilia aimed at children, however, offered not only a romantic, idealized version of reality, but also an innocent amanuensis, thereby suggesting a double authenticity to their contemporary adult readers without straying far from long-established stylistics and tropes of children's literature. Thus, readers judged Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's trilogy of pastoral adventures in terms of their competence at depicting neo-Romantic children, rather than upon an unwitting ability to produce funny or prophetic prose.

The fact that critics credited young authors with such traditional depictions does not mean that a close reading of these juvenilia necessarily supports this assessment. Certainly, Hull and Whitlock's novels are Romantic in their characters' affinity for wild ponies and boundless landscapes. These same characters, however, skirt such conventional paradigms of childhood innocence with their consciousness of social hierarchies and their propensity for lying—a dynamic glossed over by the publications' numerous book reviews. The children's disdain for adult standards of behavior and independence from direct adult assistance paradoxically works on two fronts, at once subverting the wholesome qualities for which it was touted and reassuring adults that children exist in a state segregated from corruption.

⁹⁶ This is not to say that children's literature of this era uniformly adhered to either conservative images of childhood or conservative narrative techniques. As Kimberley Reynolds demonstrates in *Radical Children's Literature*, modernist authors such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf wrote children's books, and numerous other children's books from the era "are fully engaged with modernist debates and experimentation" (7).

The border between the child author's innocence and her implication in adult endeavors was transmutable in many ways. Like many authors of juvenilia in the 1920s-30s, Hull and Whitlock had the support of a famous adult in publishing the first title in their series, *The Far-Distant Oxus* (1937). Having been inspired by Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* books, the fifteen- and sixteen-year-old collaborators bundled their manuscript off to their established literary counterpart, asking him his advice on submitting it to his own publisher. After confirming the text was not a hoax, Ransome responded enthusiastically, touting the narrative to Jonathan Cape publishing and writing a spirited introduction to the first edition himself.

While Ransome's support raises the specter of adults' unavoidable intervention in the publication of juvenilia, his introduction and reviewers' subsequent comments repeatedly emphasize Hull and Whitlock's independence during their composition of the novel. Having met over a summer holiday and decided to co-author a book, the girls proceeded in secrecy, affirming later that their parents and teachers knew nothing about the project until Jonathan Cape had already accepted it for publication. While comparisons to *Swallows and Amazons*—which similarly charts the adventures of a group of children on holiday in the country—were inevitable, adult readers felt that *The Far-Distant Oxus* was, as Ransome expressed it, an example of how children's books can “do without the grown-up author altogether” (12). Relaying that Hull and Whitlock's slogan was “by children, about children, for children,” Ransome added that despite the book's juvenile authorship, “readers will not find themselves laughing at quaint spellings, or making any kind of allowances on account of its authors' ages. Instead, they will find, with delight, that they are reading something different than any grown-up book” (15-6).

Critics followed Ransome's lead in coupling an appreciation of the authors' writing proficiency with the sense that Hull and Whitlock's first novel offered readers a child's unique

experience of the world. The difference readers registered between the girls' texts and those written by *adults* for children centered upon this latter trait, though few reviewers bothered either to define it clearly or contend with the irony of Hull and Whitlock being professionally adept at being young. Noting in one breath that the authors were "unusually competent and businesslike," the *Times Literary Supplement* declared in another that the book was "no 'Young Visitors' written in sham grown-up style with an eye on the grown-ups. It is the real thing, genuine children's play [...]" (832).

The competent stylistics of Hull and Whitlock's debut novel seemingly situated the young authors at least on par with their adult counterparts writing children's fiction. Indeed, the *New York Times* asserted that the book should serve as a model for other young writers, as a quality, attention-garnering product independent from its status as juvenilia (Eaton "Exmoor Holiday" 108). Ruth Hill echoed these sentiments in *Library Journal*, calling *The Far-Distant Oxus* "a story that is good in its own right, not because of unusual authorship" (821). The book is "no mere flash in the pan of youthful genius," renowned children's librarian Anne Carroll Moore remarked conclusively, "but a highly significant contribution to twentieth century literature for children" ("Three Owls' Notebook" 282).

The security with which critics pronounced the genuineness of *The Far-Distant Oxus* was repeatedly based upon the text's themes. The narrative's repetition of tropes typically associated with youth—a passionate sympathy with nature and animals in particular—signaled to readers that they were authentic representations of childhood. As I demonstrate in the latter portion of this chapter, the appeal of the Abbes' books was also the sense that the reader was gaining access to the child's experience of the world. However, one of the defining differences between their travelogues and the *Oxus* trilogy is the version of the world these two groups of authors present.

The expansive moors upon which Hull and Whitlock's characters realize their schemes offers a retrograde fantasy of childhood's landscape. In contrast, while the Abbes may offer adults fresh insights, these insights do not allow readers to forget the economic and geopolitical turmoil of the contemporary. Ironically, readers merited the fictional trilogy as more realistic than the non-fictional trilogy, because it was Hull and Whitlock's paradisiacal depiction of children at play that resonated most closely with the culture's neo-Romantic fantasies concerning childhood.

The idea that juvenilia like Hull and Whitlock's constitutes a text "different from any grown-up book" offers one provocative reason for children's literature studies' historical reluctance in tackling child-authored texts. While a number of critical articles do exist on the juvenile works of famed authors such as the Brontë sisters or Jane Austen,⁹⁷ juvenilia by now-obscure writers like Rhys or Putnam dictate that scholars contend with the texts as the productions of real children, as opposed to the apprentice efforts of adults. This kind of analysis necessarily engages with Jacqueline Rose's pronouncement—voiced more than twenty-five years ago, and still reiterated without qualification by many critics—that children's literature colonizes or otherwise constricts real children's identity. While many children's texts offer proscriptive notions of childhood, young readers and young authors may also replicate or play with these constructions in a self-conscious manner. That the real child—long underrepresented in children's literature studies—might engage with Romantic or Progressive or contemporary ideas of childhood, for instance, calls into question the assumption underlying Rose-ian scholars' work—namely, that children have little to no control over their consumption of cultural

⁹⁷ Thirteen articles on Jane Austen's juvenilia (the first collection of which was published in 1922) appear in the MLA International Bibliography, in addition to one full-length book collection, *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, edited by David J. Grey. A similar search of the MLA database yields six articles on Charlotte Brontë's juvenilia, as well as two on the juvenilia she collaborated upon with her siblings.

constructs. While some critics may balk at assigning intentionality to juvenilia, the practice of crediting authors with the humor, innovation, or other knowledge their texts display is in reality common practice. It is vital that in interpreting literature written by the child we grant her the same potential to understand the implications of her work as the adult author.⁹⁸

Hull and Whitlock's novels, for instance, may have satisfied many 1930's readers' neo-Romantic ideals of childhood; however, their young characters also exhibit characteristics distinguishing them from traditional notions of childhood. The first novel in the series, *The Far-Distant Oxus*, depicts the summer holidays of the Huntley children—Bridget, Frances, and Anthony—in Exmoor. The Huntleys make friends first with Maurice, the mysterious boy-of-nature who lives upon the moors by himself, and then siblings Jennifer and Peter Cleverton, thereafter reveling in a series of outdoor adventures involving untamed ponies, the construction of their own hut, and an expedition to the sea via raft. On the one hand, although Hull and Whitlock's contemporary reviewers emphasized the girls' divergence from grown-ups' children's literature, the teenaged authors' trilogy amplifies at least one typical construction of the child by accentuating—almost to the point of caricature—their characters' desire to live wild on the moors, free from adult supervision. On the other hand, the children's acerbic commentary upon adult-sanctioned books and activities, along with the aplomb with which they achieve their own self-directed missions, suggests that the novel's youths possess an agency generally not granted to child characters. Certainly, the children's solidly upper-class standing facilitates the

⁹⁸ As Marah Gubar notes, ignoring the potential of the child author also serves to limit our critical understanding of what constitutes children's literature ("On Not Defining Children's Literature," 212). Unlike scholars such as Rose or Perry Nodelman, my work strives to redress the notion that children's literature "as a field [. . .] is an adult activity," and that texts "genuinely expressive of childhood or childlike thinking as experienced by a child would lack a fundamental defining quality of children's literature" (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult*, 164, 148).

safety and success of their endeavors: unlike their real-life, Depression-era counterparts, the Huntleys, Clevertons, and Maurice all have the luxury to become “interested at the idea of a catastrophe” and to pronounce their raft voyage a “proper expedition” only when they have run out of food (*Far-Distant* 271, 292). Nevertheless, Hull and Whitlock ultimately offer readers an updated portrayal of childhood in which their young characters’ autonomous ability to navigate their world is rewarded, if safely circumscribed.

I will discuss shortly the ways in which the Oxus novels may be seen as revisions to restrictive ideologies of childhood. However, it is first important to address why adults most often haled these texts’ authors for their professional handling of traditional childhood tropes. Like David Binney Putnam, St. Nicholas League contestants, and other young writers of the early twentieth century, Hull and Whitlock received praise for their ability to embody the traits adults associated with childhood—readers presuming that the interests of the Exmoor gang mirrored those of the writers. Thus, Florence O’Gara remarked that *The Far-Distant Oxus* “shows unusual ability not only in its execution but in the way it breathes of the out-of-doors. Because the young authors have written about the places and things they love, the characters are natural and the background of Exmoor an integral part of a most delightful story” (753). Indeed, the child characters exalt in their relationship with nature, railing against any enforced time spent indoors. When the young protagonists travel down the river they re-name the Oxus, they express discontent over the “much more civilized country” they encounter; concluding that “industrialism in Devonshire left much to be desired,” they scorn the “villainous smoke” and filth of the iron furnaces and working men (*Far-Distant* 251-2).

The same disdain for intrusions upon nature and its enjoyment flavors Hull and Whitlock’s subsequent volumes. In *Escape to Persia*, the second book of the series, the

Huntleys dodge the London guardianship of their aunt in order to return to Exmoor. While plotting their scheme, Bridget becomes nearly frantic in her pursuit of Luddite freedom, but

happily she remember[s] that to-morrow night she would undress not by electric but by candle light [*sic*]. She would wash not in a tiled bathroom but in a tin basin. [...] To-morrow only the occasional crackle of straw, the clop of a pony's hoof, or the rustle of a martin in the thatch would disturb the stillness of the night. (38)

The other characters of Hull and Whitlock's novels share the nostalgia displayed in Bridget's reverie. Maurice—the trilogy's "young chief," a mysterious, Peter Pan-like figure—ridicules London's "beastly doors [. . .] all shutting in little circles of dull, comfortable people as self-satisfied as the doors themselves" (*Escape* 274, 43). Indeed, the children's disparagement of technology and the domestic extends beyond London, coloring even their appreciation of their beloved Exmoor. At play in their pastoral paradise and "deliriously content, they called out to each other, sympathizing with people indoors, with people without ponies, with people at work" (*Escape* 159). Simultaneously reflecting antiquated ideas of Romantic child autonomy and the contemporary onset of peer culture, when the gang comes upon the ruins of some simple dwellings, Bridget wishes that "they could rebuild these huts and start the tribe once again, wild and lonely in the middle of the moor" (*Escape* 200). The separateness from adult culture this desire implies is undercut, however, by the characters' consciousness of youth's ephemeral quality. The moor will never change, Maurice asserts; "it will all stay the same every year we come here, but we, all of us here, will change like anything" (174). The anxiety this realization produces among the children highlights the uneasy balance between their innocence and their absorption of youth-privileging ideology.

Despite the general trend towards Romanticism in the *Oxus* books, however, there are aspects of the text that indicate Hull and Whitlock's updates or resistance to the ideology. Critics frequently overlooked evidence of these revisions by linking the success of the text to the authors' immersion in a juvenile life sequestered from outside influences. In her review of *Escape to Persia* in the *New York Herald Tribune*, for instance, May Lamberton Becker calls the sequel a "healthy book," and declares that "if children are to write for publication [...] let us be grateful when they write as children, about their own world" (10). This assertion relies upon the idea that the child exists in a separate sphere from the adult, and ignores the relationship between her "own world" and that of culture at large. Hull and Whitlock's young characters, in contrast, are decidedly marked by class and privilege: they may consider the moors their personal landscape, but the renaming of its various farms and physical features with Persian monikers takes its cues from Matthew Arnold's "Sohrab and Rostum," indicating the education enjoyed by even the seemingly most rustic of the crew, Maurice. The children reveal the level of service to which they have become accustomed when they demand breakfast "now" and agree to being fetched via the Clevertons' Bentley, while simultaneously acting careless of their aunt's concern and protection—"oh, hang her," the Huntleys say (*Escape* 168). Spurred on by a sense of entitlement, the young protagonists not only directly disobey their elders, but also smoke cigarettes (albeit heather-filled), contemplate getting drunk, and arrange outlandish, but violent duels with those they consider their less enlightened peers (*Summer* 96, *Escape* 151, *Summer* 205-10). While these behaviors may serve to bolster the notion that the children enjoy lives sheltered from less serious vice or circumstance, they also trouble the idea that the Huntleys and their cohort are the innocent children upon whom reviewers predicated their judgments of the texts. The independence the characters enjoy may paradoxically be the result of adult facilitation,

but Hull and Whitlock still grant their Exmoor revelers a degree of proficiency in their endeavors and acuity in their opinions, where former texts by writers such as E. Nesbit had repeatedly highlighted children's fallibility.⁹⁹

Freed from the supervision of their parents (who are conveniently sequestered in Sumatra throughout the series) and hardly mindful of the farmer's care in which they reside, the adventures the Huntleys and their friends devise for the summer repeatedly circumnavigate direct adult support. The central action of the first novel centers around a voyage the children take alone along the River Oxus to the sea. Certain that the Huntleys will not be able to obtain permission for the week-long solo trek, the children orchestrate a series of deceptions in order to depart. As with many of their exploits throughout the book, the plan unfolds with little need for alteration. While logistics require that they tell the amiably lenient Mr. Cleverton of their scheme, the entirety of the expedition itself is accomplished without his aide.

The Huntleys, Clevertons, and Maurice repeatedly prove themselves proficient at any new task they undertake; for example, they are capable with a little plotting from Peter, the most engineer-minded, of constructing a hut in one day, and when it comes to navigating their raft (also built by their hands), "everyone had practised hard [...] and now all save Frances and Jennifer [the two youngest] were *expert*" (*Far-Distant* 198, my emphasis). Although Hull and Whitlock underscore the hard work the children undertake, the sum total of their arduous practice cannot have taken more than a handful of days given the short preparation time they left after the initial launch of their raft.

⁹⁹ E. Nesbit's *The Treasure Seekers* (1899) epitomizes this trend by providing numerous instances in which the reader comprehends the circumstances or vocabulary that confuse its "unknown" child narrator, Oswald Bastable. For more on this aspect of Nesbit's novel, see Julia Briggs, Mavis Reimer, and Erika Rothwell. For an alternate reading of Oswald's literary misapprehensions, see Chapter Four of Marah Gubar's *Artful Dodgers*.

The relative ease with which they accomplish such tasks mirrors the ease with which adults wished to credit child authors' composition. Aligning juvenilia's characters with their authors, adult reviewers frequently painted the "naturalness" of the protagonists' successes or activities as evidence of the spontaneity and authenticity of the writers' output. In contrast, the children in Hull and Whitlock's novels mock the perceived correspondence between child characters and a felicitous existence, noting in passing that they find the story of *Robinson Crusoe* unbearable with all its instances of good luck. Anthony declares further that "the Swiss Family Robinson makes me vomit," citing the narrative's propensity to take such fortuitous turns as providing a cotton plant just as the family has run out of cloth (*Far-Distant* 223).¹⁰⁰ In comparison, the Huntleys, Clevertons, and Maurice pride themselves on accomplishing self-directed tasks through practical skills, rather than divine—or even adult—intervention.

Indeed, the child characters are frequently disdainful of their elders, offhandedly referring to the Woman's Institute as a "collection of old hags" or mocking the "particularly revolting young ladies who strode about in beach pyjamas" (*Far-Distant* 121, 271). While women take particular abuse from the children, adults in general receive their scorn when it comes to their potential participation in the children's activities. When the crew of explorers discovers that their favorite wild Exmoor pony has been captured, they consider asking Mr. Fradd, the farmer with whom the Huntleys are staying, to release the wild pony, but "No," says Maurice, "if we want to rescue Ruksh we've got to do it ourselves, and now, this moment" (*Far-Distant* 143). As with nearly all the ventures they attempt, the five are successful in their rescue; moreover, they accomplish the rescue without regard for adult standards of conduct, tying up a village boy who

¹⁰⁰ Ironically, in the same scene, Anthony also references Hull and Whitlock's inspiration, *Swallows and Amazons*, noting that they cannot identify their raft expedition with Ransome's characters as northerners could never have suffered such a hot day (*Far-Distant* 223).

threatens to intervene and devising a deceitful scheme to make Mrs. Fradd believe that they have been in bed throughout the night. The children's lack of concern about the lies they tell in order to further their causes signals Hull and Whitlock's revision to previous depictions of wholesome children. It is often Bridget—who is simultaneously the most backward-looking and most modern character—who assures the group that it “doesn't matter if it isn't true” (*Far-Distant* 194). Her sense of moral relativity speaks to the protagonists' autonomy from prescriptive behavior and their ability to re-imagine their surroundings as they wish.

The empowered nature of Hull and Whitlock's children becomes that much more evident when compared to those in *Swallows and Amazons*, the plot of which the Oxus books superficially echo. Ransome's characters subserviently seek permission to embark on their far less dangerous journey across the lake to the island they have spotted from afar. When the four Walker children receive notice from their father—also abroad—that they may undertake this adventure, the text emphasizes their dependence upon this parental approval: “They were *to be allowed* to use the sailing boat by themselves. They were *to be allowed* to sail out from the little sheltered bay, and round the point, and down the lake to the island. They were *to be allowed* to land on the island, and to live there until it was time to pack up again and go home to town and school and lessons” (18-19, my emphasis). Despite this relative freedom, their mother accompanies them upon their first journey, advising them on sailing techniques, and helping them to fashion both tents and a flag.

In Ransome's narrative, adults are the gatekeepers to the children's adventures. Seven-year-old Roger's transition from pretending to be a sailing ship in the novel's opening to being a “real boy from a real ship,” relies upon the “telegram that had set them free for their adventure” (67). Throughout Hull and Whitlock's novels, in contrast, the children take especial pride in

eschewing adults' sanctions and interventions in their activities. Bridget in particular epitomizes this independent stance, repeatedly asserting that there is a "good deal of difference [...] between hearing about things and doing them herself" (*Far-Distant* 98). Set upon acquiring knowledge firsthand, she proclaims, "I don't want to be told, I like not knowing, I want to find out" (*Far-Distant* 39).

The resourcefulness and staunch independence of the *Oxus* characters in the first two novels may have helped ironically to substantiate the opinion that Hull and Whitlock's narrative was one of carefree, "genuine" children. Although the culture was clearly invested in policing the innocence of its children through regulations of both their work and play, in a world impacted widely by the Great Depression, there was an increasing tendency for individuals Hull and Whitlock's age to fend for themselves out of necessity. In America, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 prohibited most paid work for children under fourteen and limited the work hours of fifteen- to seventeen-year-olds. As historians note, however, many—if not more—kids continued to seek work in order to help their families survive, while nearly 250,000 adolescents and young twenty-somethings became transients in search of any means of survival (Lindenmeyer 51, 79). The triumph of the *Oxus* protagonists' endeavors tied in with the cultural wish that children continued to enjoy immunity from the larger—if less exotic—threats of an economically and politically unstable time, allowing readers to re-conceive the characters' sometimes-thorny independence as a form of innocence.

The rarity of Hull and Whitlock's third book, *The Oxus in Summer*, speaks to the changing balance not only between peril and idyll in the series' final volume but also between idealized and revised notions of childhood. Outwardly, the narrative remains similar to its predecessors, relaying the events of yet another holiday in Exmoor. The novel opens with the

trilogy's Romantic icon Maurice, whose

grey shorts and shirt and his sunburnt arms and legs fitted in with the granite boulders and the parched grass. A herd of wild ponies circled round him, plucking at the yellow blades only a few inches from his feet. When he stood to go they raised their heads and watched. The mares did not move when he tried in vain to comb out their knotted manes with his fingers; the yearlings were still more friendly and nudged at his arm with their sunwarmed foreheads. (11)

While this description promises more of the same brand of Romanticism that characterized the earlier volumes, melodrama intrudes upon the ostensibly peaceful, idyllic childhood enjoyed by the characters previously. Mrs. Fradd—the Huntley's summer guardian each year upon the farm—summarizes the text's tone aptly when she remarks that the children's decision to weather a storm indoors is the first time they have “behaved sensibly and not like lunatics” (*Summer* 269). The children race across rooftops, lock one another in cupboards, hire other children as “slaves,” and burn down (albeit accidentally) their hut, Peran-Wisa. Even when they engage in seemingly simple, rustic play upon the farm, their activity has an unsettling tenor:

They tore round and round madly, clutching at fork-fulls [*sic*] of hay, hurling them down, and scrambling over each other to get to the ladder once more. Bridget whooped spasmodically [...], Frances gurgled shouting words that no one could hear, Anthony and Maurice grunted and gasped for breath [...]. (*Summer* 66)

Such madcap responses to boredom characterize the book, which is rife with both exaggerated descriptions and behaviors that signify the protagonists' strained engagement with the natural world.

Reviewers responded to Hull and Whitlock's altered depiction of childhood in *The Oxus in Summer* with comments about the authors' childishness. Whereas critics castigated the Abbess' second and third books for the adult nature of their presumably calculated naiveté, Anne T. Eaton complains, for instance, that "youth and immaturity constantly intrude" upon the authors' final volume. Noting that the narrative lacks the "unpretentious sincerity" of Hull and Whitlock's earlier novels, she concludes that the book consists of sensational episodes rather than "serious make-believe" ("Two Young Authors" 10). Eaton's phrasing points to the oxymoronic quality of the traits adult readers sought in juvenilia. Expected to be both wholesomely childlike and briskly professional, Hull and Whitlock "fail" when their collaboration ostensibly reveals its amateur authorship without reinforcing a desirable childhood image. In their third volume, the child protagonists spend more of their time in the surrounding towns, disturbing the illusion of their pastoral remove. Although the Huntleys and Clevertons lie and steal in Hull and Whitlock's first two books, it is always in an effort to remain on the moors in the company of their pagan hero Maurice. In *The Oxus in Summer* the Huntleys and Clevertons continue to lie and steal, but now only in service of a seemingly pointless revenge upon Maurice, whom they feel has slighted them. In pursuit of this aim, the children devise elaborate and generally outlandish schemes, and consequently, there is "something faintly alarming to the adult in [the novel], though it will not strike the child for whom it is intended in this way" (Williams-Ellis viii).

The "faintly alarming" characteristics of the narrative arise in part from the narrative's violence and melodrama, traits common to the contemporary adult media from which the teenaged authors ostensibly offer a reprieve. The Huntleys' ireful response to Maurice's hired accomplice Jeremy Deptford—who foils the children's discovery of their former friend's hiding place—epitomizes the aggressive quality of their actions: "Bridget wanted to take [Jeremy's]

neck and squeeze it into pulp so that blood would spurt from each of his freckles, and his silly eyes bulge out of their sockets,” while “Francis smacked her lips and thought of the penalties she would inflict on him. First put him in the stocks and chuck eggs and tomatoes; then throw him on a hurdle and let Treacle drive it through Cabool [...]” (*Summer* 183,184).¹⁰¹ The ludicrous nature of the Huntleys’ behavior culminates in a duel fought between Bridget and Jeremy with whips. When she defeats the older boy and he still refuses to reveal Maurice’s whereabouts, Bridget becomes “possessed of the madness which conquers people when they fight.” Pushing Jeremy into the river, she towers over him, and “fiercely, with her hands on his shoulders, he went under, first his neck, then his chin, his frightened mouth, his nose, his eyes, and finally his hair” (*Summer* 212). The deliberate unfolding of this description underscores Bridget’s grim pleasure in the boy’s near-drowning and points to the novel’s violent undertones.

More importantly, however, the conflict between the Exmoor gang and Maurice overtly undermines the Romantic idyll for which critics lauded the first two *Oxus* novels. Throughout the series, the children hale Maurice as their leader, acquiescing to his intuitive knowledge of the moors and their native animals. Admiration for his pastoral existence transforms into obsession, however, when a convoluted misunderstanding between the children leaves the Huntleys believing that Maurice has been plotting to ditch their company. At this apparent revelation, Bridget “want[s] to throw herself on the ground and bite the earth, or claw at the trees in her fury and disappointment” (*Summer* 115). This intense reaction underscores the children’s newly antagonistic relationship with the natural world: Bridget’s inclination is to fight the earth and trees associated with Maurice. The children’s subsequent (and rather desperate) pursuit of

¹⁰¹ The spelling of Frances’s name is sometimes altered to “Francis” in the series.

Maurice's company effaces their own traditionally childish qualities by setting them up as seekers of the Romantic boy wonder, rather than as compatriots.

The narrative threatens even the sanctity of Maurice's position as this icon, however, by showing him equally desperate to conceal his true, apparently upper-middle-class background. While the boy spends the summers living in makeshift shelters along the moors without any sign of adult intervention, the one thing the children do know about him is that he formerly attended school with Peter—a fact the children generally tend to gloss over. Ironically, just as child authors' compositions might impinge upon adults' perceptions of their innocence, it is Maurice's diary that threatens his role as rustic chief: when Maurice believes that the Huntleys have read his journal in an attempt to unearth his jealously-guarded identity, he swears “by Ahura Mazda and all the fiery gods” to hinder any investigation of “his home, or his names and all the things he kept secret on purpose” (133). That eventually the friends resolve their conflicts and reunite does not negate the revelation of Maurice's tenuous hold upon his Romantic identity; nor does it erase the newly emphasized awareness the other children have of the distance between their idol's (presumed) existence and their own. “They chased him as he raced ahead, but they did not want to catch him, they wanted to be led by this wild boy wherever he desired to go” (220). While their characters' obsession with the pastoral could indicate that Hull and Whitlock fall prey to normative cultural constructs of healthy childhood, the violence with which the Huntleys pursue Maurice and the authors' choice to show Maurice as a self-conscious icon of Romantic childhood indicate a more stringent critique of these ideals. Whereas their earlier volumes offered a revised notion of the child's relationship with nature by suggesting this relationship might be facilitated by cultural knowledge and domestic resources, here Hull and Whitlock take a more extreme position.

Oxus in Summer did not receive all negative press: indeed, at its publication, May Lamberton Becker declared that Hull and Whitlock “have been accepted among our steady providers of children’s literature” (7). The novel garnered less press, however, than its predecessors, and its reviews paint a confusing picture of the book’s traits, given the idiosyncrasies discussed above. Overlooking the violence and intense anxiety of the text, critics chose to frame the narrative as unconsciously childish and riddled with missteps, ignoring the possibility that the authors intentionally comment upon the pressures put upon the young to embody traditional ideas of childhood pleasure. The rather condescending *New Yorker* blurb informed readers, “you may rest assured that the children of the stories have nice, literary imaginations and are very, very good sports” (82), while Anthony West of the *New Statesman and Nation* classed the book in a category not for “pleasant children,” but for “little prigs” (838). Rather than seeing the characters’ behavior as the sign of Hull and Whitlock’s deviance from traditional representations of childhood or criticism of adult culture, these critics join Anne Eaton in presuming that the book suffers from the authors’ immaturity. “How odd that this arid stuff should be considered healthier than the romantic sort of book which makes a child long for its maturity,” West surmises. “‘For children, about children...’ one might as well bind their feet in the Chinese fashion” (840).

West’s assessment of the teens’ final *Oxus* book is ironic in that it ignores the expansive quality of Hull and Whitlock’s portrayal of childhood. Certainly, the book suffers stylistically from melodrama—which readers might construe as a juvenile approach to realism—and the entitled attitude of the Huntleys in particular can be read not so much as priggish, as downright bratty. At the same time, however, the series—its quirky concluding novel in particular—depicts child characters who refuse to neatly fit the mold of typical children’s literature. In the trilogy’s

first two volumes, the Romantic child receives an update. The children may love nature and scorn the confines of home and city, but they also consider themselves entitled to domesticity's resources: when they ply their raft down the Oxus, they dine on jam and "Sainsbury's best Paris sausages" (*Far-Distant* 200, 225). Unlike the protagonists of Ransome's novels, the Exmoor crew does not need adult permission to strike out on their adventures and succeed at them; moreover, there is no humbling lesson or mandatory reform at their conclusion, as in *Caddie Woodlawn* or E. Nesbit's books. Setbacks are temporary, and Bridget and Jennifer never renounce their ambitions to do "something exciting" when they are grown women (*Far-Distant* 248). In *Oxus in Summer*, the children's deviations from previous conceptions of childhood are the most pronounced, as the Huntleys and Maurice display erratic behavior and oscillating moods that defy simplistic categorization as "good" or "bad" character traits. Their tenuous relationship to nature in this volume further undercuts any simplistic equation of childhood with a Romantic idyll. Far from binding, the trilogy's conclusion gives child readers an alternate, perhaps outright liberating, vision of youth through not only its fictional portrayal of its protagonists, but also through its suggestion that real children, such as the *Oxus* authors, may self-reflexively comment upon prevalent cultural notions.

The reviews of the third *Oxus* volume indicate the extent to which adults' retrograde fantasies of childhood impacted their interpretations of juvenilia. *Oxus in Summer* is far more "different than any grown-up book" than the first two volumes in the series (Ransome, Introduction 16), as the text's unwieldy plot development and descriptions make the mature reader cognizant of its unusual authorship. While the same dynamic—the reader's awareness of a precocious, yet innocent author—made texts like Daisy Ashford's popular, Hull and Whitlock's unflinching depiction of "alarming" or otherwise unwholesome children leads to the final

installment's relative failure. Moreover, the book does not provide the escape from the contemporary its predecessors did; instead it reminds readers of the violence brewing with the onset of world war. When Maurice first disappears, Anthony suggests that they "capture him [...] and torture him till he promises never to vanish again" (114). Such militaristic language and aggressive inclinations are not limited to their misunderstanding with Maurice, however; instead they color the entire narrative. Viewing two sparrows sparring Anthony declares, " 'I'd like to fight somebody,' [...] 'but to the kill, not a feeble sort of quarrel'" (37). An Exmoor in which R.A.F. planes fly overhead and even nature is at war reflects, no matter how obliquely, the world circumstances from which adults increasingly wished children to be shielded.

The initial success of the *Oxus* books depended upon the degree to which readers might interpret them as support for idealized notions of childhood. Early in the series, in awe of the view they encounter during a climb, the Huntleys and their friends engage in a philosophic discussion that epitomizes Romantic notions of children's intuitive relationship with nature:

"If we were artists," said Peter, "we'd all rush for oils and canvas and sit up here painting and painting till the sun went down and the mist rolled up."

"If we were poets," Jennifer continued, "we'd write some terrific ode or lyric or something, about the beauty of the moors."

"But as we aren't," concluded Bridget, "we look and see it all like an artist, and look and feel it all like a poet—and just do nothing except think about it."

(Far-Distant 187)

Bridget's sense that the children need only ruminate upon, and not capture, the surrounding beauty—ironic in a book written by young authors—reinforces the paradox key to juvenilia's success: the most competent, laudatory child-authored text portrays children who

prefer the experience of nature to its representation. Because their experiences suggest the young writer's own enjoyment of innocent activities, such "healthy" child characters sanction their authors' professionalism by masking the work of writing as a form of play. "Childish" prose, on the other hand, suffered the double shame of both appearing labored and failing to bolster the fiction that children could live in peaceful obliviousness to the threats of economic depression or impending world war. As with Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock, when Patience, Richard, and Johnny Abbe tread too heavily into such territory, reviewers claim that the children's innocent wisdoms devolve into incompetence or, worse yet, calculated cuteness, illustrating the rigid standards to which childhood freedom—and its authors—were often held.

5.2 "THREE CHILDREN COME ALONG AND COUGH AND OUT COMES A BESTSELLER": THE ABBES' TRAVEL MEMOIRS

Whatever the element of enjoyment in Marjory Fleming's, Daisy Ashford's and Opal Whiteley's works, when either lavish praise or condemnation erupted around them, commentators cited the concept of "innocence" liberally. In 1920, for instance, Clifford Smyth introduced Fleming's diary in the following way:

There is always a sort of biblical sincerity and downrightness about an intelligent, unspoiled child's utterance; a quaint gravity, a humor that knows not that it is humorous, a simplicity of expression that savors of some ancient saga. [...] we love [the child poet] for its very uncultivation, its wayward habit of straggling off into unexpected nooks and corners, above all for its reminiscent flavor of the primitive things of nature. (xix)

Clifford's emphasis upon the natural, spontaneous expressiveness of the child is key to his

appreciation of juvenilia. In contrast to perceptions of juvenilia aimed at a child readership in the 1930s, the “we” of Clifford’s introduction (who are, implicitly, adult or mature readers) interpret moments of cognitive or literary incompetence as the young author’s edge over tired, overly cultivated, prose. As early as 1899, however, Max Beerbohm lamented the vogue for child authors, which he predicted would hasten the end of their ostensible unconsciousness: “Jock and Millicent, encouraged in all their childishness, having but their own natures to think of, will very soon become self-conscious. [...] And soon every high-chair will hold its lisping Rousseau or Marie Bashkirtseff. And soon there will be no more simplicity to contemplate” (180).

A few decades later, children’s literature by young writers evaded concerns over the author’s simplicity by bolstering notions of childhood innocence in their plots and characterization, freeing reviewers to laud the writers’ stylistic competence. While the publication of these texts put the child in the position of a pseudo-professional, both their content and form demonstrated that she was buffered from the harsher realities of labor. In other words, these narratives simultaneously depicted children engaged in the carefree activities endorsed by a still Romantic-minded society, while also reassuring adult readers that the texts’ authors were children with the leisure and resources to play.

The history of Patience, Richard, and Johnny Abbe’s travel memoirs epitomizes the contrasting reception of juvenilia written for an adult audience: whereas their first book sparked either bemusement or reverence (depending upon the reviewer’s willingness to fetishize childish expression), the children’s latter publications received either a greatly reduced level of attention or indignant skepticism over the authors’ ingenuousness. In other words, the lapses in literary savvy and worldly comprehension that secured their initial memoir’s popularity, seem to devolve

into contrived naiveté as the Abbes age, and the topics they address—the turmoil of European politics on the eve of world war—increase in seriousness.

The Abbes' first book, published in 1936, was the runaway bestseller *Around the World in Eleven Years* (*AWEY*), which chronicles the American children's births and travels in Europe and Russia from 1925-1936 with their parents: photographer and journalist James E. Abbe and former Ziegfeld Folly Polly Platt. Along the journey, eleven-year-old Patience and her younger brothers document encounters with everyone from Anna Pavlova to Joseph Stalin, in an approach the book jacket proclaims is both "mercilessly funny" and an "apt critique of manners, morals, and reputations." The book was clearly a commercial success, selling 20,000 copies in its first twenty days alone; *AWEY* went to twenty-eight printings in total and was published in French, Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Braille. For six months—while *Gone with the Wind* headed the fiction category—the Abbes' memoir topped the *New York Times* bestseller list for non-fiction.¹⁰² For many, the children's debut work was also more than just commercially viable; in her review for the *New York Herald Tribune*, for instance, Isabel Paterson declared "there has been no such book since the journal and letters of the immortal Marjory Fleming" (3).

The range of people and experiences the Abbes encounter superficially suggests a world of privilege. In their first book alone, Georges Clemenceau visits their garden and calls Patience a "little cauliflower" (*AWEY* 12-3); Eugene Chen, the Foreign Minister of China, stays with the Abbes in Paris; Isadora Duncan's sister Elizabeth offers Patience a place in her dancing school; and Lillian Gish sends them a telegram welcoming them home to America. In the span of a few years, the children see Paris, Moscow, Berlin, London, and New York.

¹⁰² See note 2.

Despite this seemingly luxurious lifestyle, however, the children constantly report that the family is in financial straits. At times these references are oblique, as when Sergei Eisenstein, an early Russian filmmaker, arrives for a meal and notes, “how funny! When I was in your house in Paris you didn’t have any bread, and here in Russia you haven’t any tea” (*AWEY* 66). More often, however, the discussions of money concerns are overt: “Then Papa phoned from Moscow and he had photographed Stalin, but we didn’t get any money. Then our cars were in the hands of the Communists and Mamma and I walked two miles to the dancing school and Mamma had holes in her shoes” (*AWEY* 57). More than a minor setback, the Abbes begin selling their clothes; the fact that “nobody would buy Papa’s clothes because they were in rags,” indicates the systemic nature of the Abbes’ financial problems (*AWEY* 77).

It may initially seem hard to account for Depression-era readers’ attraction to a book rife with not only children’s commentary upon capitalism and Communism, but also moments in which “Papa and Mamma didn’t eat so much so we could have more” (*AWEY* 77). The familiarity of these issues would seem to drive away readers invested in childhood innocence’s preservation in the midst of economic upheaval. On the contrary, with the Abbes’ first volume at least, readers cast its tragic, impolitic, and innuendo-laden statements as signs of the children’s *absolute* innocence. At times, the wittiness of their anecdotes could arguably reveal their knowledge of adult affairs. When they move to the German countryside, for instance, Patience and her brothers note that “Papa said, ‘It is quiet here and I will write a book,’ and Mamma said, ‘I doubt it,’ And Mamma was right” (*AWEY* 42). Although the choice to include such stories might point to the Abbes’ precocity, the spareness of their prose—not to mention the widely publicized fact of their age—allowed readers to engage in the guessing game of authorial intention or consciousness that made children’s writing so compelling to the adult.

The proportion of un-vetted remarks in the Abbes' first book helped to color interpretations of their less-innocent connections to financial and political matters. The siblings' naiveté arises particularly in those instances in which they strive to be didactic, their faulty definitions and pronouncements littering *AWEY*:

Valiant means someone who loses all their money and doesn't whine about it. (49)

A capitalist is someone who has money and starves the poor people. We went in to see Lenin. He was dead six years but he didn't smell. (60)

Depression is something that depresses you, then you have no job, then you must take money from the President and that makes you bashful. (139)

On the one hand, moments like these confirm the fears of many adults in the 1930s: namely, that the young were increasingly privy to issues beyond the scope of an idyllic childhood. On the other hand, the obvious gaps in the Abbes' knowledge of these matters paradoxically reinforces their innocence—a dynamic that speaks to adults' complex conceptualization of that state as a mixture of precocity and ingenuousness.

To some extent, the appealing qualities of the Abbes' first memoir may be categorized as cuteness. Unlike Hull and Whitlock's novels—which not only portrayed independent, highly effective characters, but also elicited praise for their authors' literary competence—the success of the Abbes' text depended upon its fallible imitation of adult literature. Occupying a liminal space between the mature and the naïve, the young authors' inaccurate pronouncements epitomize for many readers what Lori Merish calls cuteness's "combination of precocity and powerlessness" (194). Repeatedly, advertisements and articles on *AWEY* cited the book as

“wholly delightful,” “irresistibly charming” or “hilarious good reading.”¹⁰³ The bemused tone of these assessments suggests that readers’ enjoyment of the texts arose from the superior stance they were able to take in relationship to its writers. The reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* ventured so far as to say, “children are unlikely to appreciate [AWEY], for its point is the funniness of the child’s point of view, naively expressed, about grown-up things” (751).¹⁰⁴

The *TLS* reviewer shares cultural critic Daniel Harris’s presumption that the aesthetics of cuteness arises from pitiableness and artificiality, and therefore renders its subject solely incompetent (179). The Abbes’ fallible attempts at maturity—no matter how amusing or otherwise cute—were seen, however by many reviewers as the mark of originality and profundity. Just as critics perceived Huck Finn’s “innocent” statements or the perspective of Henry James’s Maisie as the means to more authentic narrative representation, reviewers of *AWEY* frequently expressed the idea that the uncensored child author was capable of an incisive commentary to which adults had lost access. In the *Saturday Review*, for instance, Rosemary

¹⁰³ The first quotation is from *Booklist* (June 1936): 287. The latter two quotations come from an advertisement in the *New York Herald Tribune Books* that cites Isabel Paterson and Lewis Gannett respectively (18). The term “delightful” arose in numerous other reviews.

¹⁰⁴ The *TLS* reviewer was seemingly wrong in his speculation. The Abbes dedicated their second book, *Of All Places!* (1937), to all “the children and the people of America who have written letters to Patience, Richard and Johnny Abbe,” and Patience specifically remembers receiving many wonderful letters from children (see Abbe interview). An article in *Scholastic* indicates that students were even reading *AWEY* in school: the magazine published a letter the sixth grade class at David Stone School of Aurora Nebraska wrote to the Abbes’ publisher, Frederick A. Stokes, asking for further information about the book. In their correspondence, they list the following reasons for liking the memoir:

1. It is different from any other book we ever read.
2. It is in children’s dialect, making it simple and easy to understand.
3. It is humorous and interesting.
4. It is educational and helps us in our Geography lessons.
5. It is told in an entertaining way.
6. We liked their adventures, fights and many thrilling experiences. (“All About the Abbes” 25)

Carr Benet gleefully claims that the Abbés' first book is proof of one of her pet "theses—that children arrive at the truth more quickly than we do because they depend on observation and intuition only, both qualities more highly developed in the child than the adult, and they are unhampered by an accumulation of so-called facts" ("We Are Never Bored" 11). Like Lucy Sprague Mitchell and other Progressive educators, Benet credits the juvenile author with an increased receptivity to the profound underlying the everyday. Similarly, in the *Yale Review*, John Cournot asserts that

no grown-up can hope to interpret Europe for us with such refreshing piquancy. The phrase 'out of the mouth of babes, [*sic*]' reaffirms its meaning—the sort of meaning we often attribute to modern art. Sophistication has spoiled us, and children have something to teach their parents. (840)

Benet and Cournot join many readers of juvenilia in reinterpreting cognitive or linguistic failure as a superior form of invention, imagination, or honesty.

The *Oxus* novels celebrated childhood innocence through their nature-driven plots and ostensibly Romantic characters, while the authors were traditionally competent in their prose. In contrast, the Abbés' unconventional composition style—rife with non-sequiturs and unusual word pairings—serves as the proof of their ingenuousness, even in those moments where the siblings seemingly convey more than they realize. When they describe their visit with an insolvent, but proud noblewoman, for example, they note, "Mamma had her fur coat around her shoulders but Madame la Comtesse stayed in her evening gown" (*AWEY* 49). Later, in equally pithy terms, they observe of a Berlin friend that "his mother had a castle, but he was looking for work" (*AWEY* 107).

Again, the question of how much the Abbes comprehend the dynamics they comment upon inescapably engages the reader in a debate between the children's presumable understanding of a given topic and the multivalent impact of their assertions. When a fellow passenger on the ship to America informs them that they are returning to God's country, for instance, they remark, "we didn't know God had any special country until then" (*AWEY* 130). The practice of reading juvenilia reveals the extent to which readers constantly piece together textual and circumstantial evidence when interpreting literature. As a knowledgeable reader of *AWEY*—unavoidably aware, among other things, of the authors' ages—one may interpret their statement on God and state as proof of the children's ignorance. Their admission that "we didn't know," signals, after all, their lack of comprehension. Divorced of the context of juvenilia, however, the Abbes' remark might just as easily be read as pointed social commentary. For many readers, the idea that these statements are made ostensibly in innocence suggests that they are that much more authentic, heartfelt, or wise. The same effect occurs, for example, when the Abbes' much-loved grandmother Meme dies and they simply (?), sagely (?) advise the reader, "it was only her body that went in the box" (*AWEY* 31).

The tenuous ability to see the child author as both incisively accurate about the world and sheltered from its influence was elemental to juvenilia's success. The untutored quality of juvenile publications was thus also frequently met with skepticism, as readers tried to decide if these texts were an adult author's elaborate re-creations of a child's "free" expression. As a result of this skepticism, most juvenilia contained remarks by editors, respected authors, or the children's own parents reassuring readers that the extraordinary work was wholly that of the child, and that the young author was a "normal," totally *unextraordinary* child, who enjoyed playing outside as much as writing books. In keeping with this formula, when Katharine Woods

of the *New York Times* reviewed the Abbes' first book in April 1936, she chalked the book's achievements up to its "childishness rather than [...] its precocity," noting the text's "literalness, the unreasoning juxtapositions, the acceptance, of children" (BR10).

Because the genesis of these texts was often equally important to readers as the end product, stories of juvenilia's composition frequently appeared in the books' prefaces. None of the Abbes' memoirs contain such a narrative; however, in a personal interview I conducted with Patience Abbe, she described the writing of *AWEY* thus:

In front of our house [in Larksburg, Colorado] we had a beautiful cottonwood tree. And it was summer, and we were mostly up in the tree. And I would be sitting on a branch on that tree, probably holding one of my beloved cats. And mama would be sitting down below the tree with her pad and a pencil, and she would call up and say, "Patty, do you remember, blah, blah, blah." And then I would tell her all that I remembered, you know, about Paris, or France or whatever. And then my brothers would climb up in the trees carrying their little puppies, among the birds and the cotton, and she would ask them questions.

On the one hand, the Romantic overtones of the Abbes' composition "among the birds and the cotton" fulfills the cultural desire to see children at home in nature, and—by relation—their writing as an instinctive or spontaneous act. On the other hand, Mamma Abbe's questionably accurate dictation complicates the idyllic creative setting with its suggestion of adult interference. It was Patience who took the initiative to author her family's experiences abroad, and publishers were careful to note that little but punctuation and unrecognizable spellings had been changed in the memoir. Nevertheless, adult prompts unquestioningly guided her book's composition—a situation that highlights the paradox inherent in juvenilia's success:

despite the unavoidable adult collaboration in seeing these works published, it was only “authentically” childish attempts at adult literature that succeeded in being precociously sage. What served as proof of that authenticity was both intangible and inconstant, relying upon subjective guesswork as to the author’s state of mind.

The degree to which this guesswork was subject to change is evident in the critical response to the Abbes’ second book, *Of All Places! (OAP)*, published in 1937. Here, the sibling collaborators regaled readers with a seemingly endless string of anecdotes and appraisals of Hollywood life, offering a metacommentary upon their own experiences as juvenile celebrities. Despite the fact that this sequel to the Abbes’ European adventures perpetuates the general style and mode of discourse that contributed to the first book’s popularity, readers on the whole were disenchanted with this second Abbe effort, noting repeatedly that the prose had lost its spontaneity and that its naiveté now appeared “conscious and artful” (Benet, “What? Again!” 157). One such reviewer makes snide comments about the publishing industry’s peddling of “second-hand philosophy retailed by precocious children,” going so far as to suggest that the book’s unsophisticated prose is the result of a shrewd business decision (Thompson 25). Such remarks suggest that disappointment in the book stemmed from the opinion that what was previously an authentic lack of artifice had been now been brokered by adults into a moneymaking gimmick.

The Abbes seemingly anticipate (or know from experience) that they may meet with this assessment of their work; they repeatedly protest that they are not interested in selling themselves and express their revulsion at the unnatural childhoods of the young stars they meet.

This is a place where they buy and sell you, and when you get mixed up in it, unless you are very strong and do not become a slave, and really don’t care about what happens so

long as you are content [. . .] then it is safe to come out here and get mixed up in it. Otherwise it is much better to live on a ranch. (*OAP* 82-3)

Ironically, the Abbés mirror the attitude of social reformers who might protest the turn their young lives have taken: the children feel—in no uncertain terms—that the time they spent in the natural landscape of their Colorado ranch was “the best year of our whole lives” (*OAP* 41). Their astonishment over the contrasting artificiality of Hollywood is pronounced. They marvel over how difficult it is to distinguish what “is real out here and what is not” (*OAP* 56); and they are highly disdainful of most child actors, characterizing them as either “silly show-offs” who act like grown-ups, or “just plain freaks, wearing Russian boots, hair bleached, dresses up to their derrières, and always looking for work with their mothers who are very plain-looking.” Even the truly talented geniuses are only “all right,” in the Abbés’ eyes, “but not like real children, just the same” (*OAP* 125). Throughout their memoir, they strive to differentiate themselves from those children who have allowed themselves to be duped into caring about Hollywood’s hierarchies. “We do not think we are somebody or nobody,” they assert. “[...] We think we are three people trying to get along, and getting older every day and taller” (159). The Abbés are as suspicious of contrived youthfulness as their own critics, emphasizing the healthiness of aging and growth in contrast to child actors’ artificial measures to appear forever young.

Despite the apparent evidence that the Abbe children prefer the “healthy” brand of life promoted by Romantic-minded social reformers, the very fact of their book’s publication uncomfortably reminded many critics of the young authors’ relationship to the marketplace. Although her brothers staunchly proclaim that Patience is not the “kind to peddle herself around” (*OAP* 93), reviewers remarked that precisely “something of the sort seemed to happen” (Benet, “What? Again!” 41). As their sequel reveals, for some time after the publication of *Around the*

World in Eleven Years, the Abbes were mini-celebrities: aside from book-signings, they opened children's department stores, appeared with Admiral Byrd on a radio program, wrote an article on their favorite foods, and, yes, even auditioned for movie roles. The steady stream of photographs of the authors with not only such commercial successes as Charlie Chaplin, George Burns, Cary Grant, and Walt Disney, but also child actors Jackie Cooper, Jane Withers, Shirley Temple, and the stars of *Our Gang*, suggests that "in spite of the lack of peddling [. . .] they manage to get around a good bit [. . .]" (Thompson 26).

For all the book's philosophizing about the plight of Hollywood's youth, *Of All Places!* epitomizes the paradoxical correlation between childhood and commercialization. As Gary Cross explains, twentieth-century parents' intense focus upon both preserving and living through their children's innocence led to an increased reliance upon toys and other child-specific consumer goods to bolster the idea of "timeless" childhood wonder. Simultaneously, however, these goods defined the characteristics and impulses of that wonder. In other words, the very means intended to shelter children's innocence also threaten to ruin that state through exposure to a commodities-driven culture (Cross 15). In the same way—even as they decry this culture—the Abbes' too-close communion with the money-mad endeavors of Hollywood calls the sanctity of their naïveté—and by relation, the authenticity of their prose—into question. Contemporary critics contended that by offering their own product to the market, the Abbes—no matter how outwardly disdainful of hollow financial ploys—"[get] caught in the machinery" (McCormick 2).

The seeming commodification of the Abbes' childhood tainted their sequel's reception, because it brought them into contact with adult matters of finance, networking, and other forms of artifice. Ironically, the young authors' first book had discussed many of the same topics without eliciting murmurs of disapproval from its audience; at the time of *AWEY*'s publication,

however, the Abbes's status as three unknowns all under the age of twelve made it easier for readers to presume the children remained innocent, despite the signs of their precocity—a presumption nearly impossible to make when the writers contemplate their status as child stars in *OAP*.

When *No Place Like Home (NPLH)*, Patience, Richard, and Johnny's final book, was published in 1940, it suffered from a further decrease in press and sales: the book received only five reviews in major publications, and the rarity of this third volume (like Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's *Oxus in Summer*) speaks to its lack of popularity. Thematically, the Abbes return to the subject matter of their bestselling first effort: the trio's concluding memoir details their fact-finding mission to Eastern Europe in 1939, a perilous and complex undertaking that starkly contrasts the authors' unsophisticated prose. Although the childish qualities of both the Abbes and their literary style once ensured their success, in 1940 the reviews of both were mixed. Rosemary Carr Benet—scathing in her criticism of *Of All Places!*—celebrated the Abbes' final book as a return to their first memoir's "vigor and freshness" ("Abbe Odyssey" 15). Echoing Benet's sense that the authors offered a "lively and timely account" of the political situation abroad (15), the reviewer for the *Springfield Republican* asserts, "proverbially, if somewhat bafflingly, these young travelers see through humbug [. . .]" (May 12, 1940, 7E). Again, critics predicated their praise upon their belief in the authors' childish brand of authenticity. May Lamberton Becker, for instance, found the children's impressions of Europe "most lifelike when least important. As soon as the children grow sententious, or draw conclusions, an adult editorial smell gets into the air." In keeping with the sentiment (expressed in her review of Hull and Whitlock's *Escape to Persia*) that children should write "as children," she concludes, "when [the Abbes] stick to straight reporting in the jerky young style of their

books, they bring out of the turmoil of pre-war Europe a sense of national traits such as many a more serious book has been unable to convey” (“Abbes Are In Again” 10).

The qualified nature of Becker’s praise reveals the heightened skepticism incurred by the Abbes’ final memoir. Although overall a positive assessment, for example, the *Springfield Republican’s* write-up of *No Place Like Home* suggests the “children’s literary formula may not be as juvenile as it sounds and the reader may suspect that reported episodes represent a mingling of fiction and fact” (May 12, 1940, 7E). *The New York Times* was far more contemptuous, asserting that

where once [the Abbes] were precocious but apparently unaffected children, they are now self-consciously, determinedly, almost desperately childish adolescents. Never did fading beauty cling to youth more dauntlessly than [to] the Abbes, or with a more unescapable loss of youthful freshness and charm.

Lest readers assume that unconventional language was the true element of charm or vision in the Abbes’ earlier books, the *Times* reviewer adds, “nor can spontaneity be successfully counterfeited by confused sentence structure and bad grammar” (“The Abbe Children are Still at Large” 88).

The countless reviewers who refer to spontaneity when discussing the Abbes’ texts never bother to define the term, making it difficult to discern what in the text specifically signals that quality. Clearly, the irregularity of the children’s sentences and grammar points to the memoir’s unusual authorship, but whether or not their statements reveal spontaneity on the Abbes’ part depends upon readers’ assumptions concerning the children’s level of consciousness or intention. Despite the *Times’s* proclamation, then, it is not so much the Abbes’ prose that changes over time, as it is the complex relationship between the content of their work and the public’s

perception of their status as children. As the Abbes age physically, their writing becomes less and less popular, despite the fact that—as May Lamberton Becker remarks—“strangely enough their way of expressing themselves has not grown up with them” (“Abbes Are In Again” 10).¹⁰⁵ Although the children are more apt to quote adults directly in their final volume, *No Place Like Home* stylistically continues much in the same vein as its predecessors, jumping from topic to topic and making clumsily provocative proclamations, such as: Jesus “was different from other Jews [in] that he didn’t have any silverware for Hitler to steal” (16). The children also continue to provide definitions throughout their memoir, evidently of the topics that puzzle them the most, sharing with readers that “unscrupulous means people who suck your blood,” or that their mother told them incest is “a very rare disease and very few people had it, and you should be VERY careful not to get it” (*NPLH* 38, 30).

While the style of the Abbes’ prose changes little, both the circumstances under which the siblings write and the world in which they live does. For those inclined to judge the Abbes’ books as novel sources of amusement, the authors’ blunt assessments no longer read as unintentional—and therefore humorous—criticisms of the adult world, but rather as the somewhat outspoken commentary of a fifteen-, thirteen-, and twelve-year-old. Likewise, those readers set on finding meaning in the children’s malapropisms could hardly sustain the notion of the children’s innocence as they rushed headlong into the turbulent realities of pre-war Europe, commenting on everything from fashion to fascism along the way. Saturated with the overly real issues of money and geo-politics, *No Place Like Home* is not as entertaining or as edifying as their previous memoirs for those adults intent upon children remaining children despite mass

¹⁰⁵ The *Wisconsin Library Bulletin* directly correlated the authors’ aging to their loss of artlessness, writing, “they have grown older and the book has less of spontaneity than their first offering [. . .]” (157).

economic depression and international unrest. As children's author Wanda Gág remarked in her 1939 article "I Like Fairy Tales," modern children's lives are "already over-balanced on the side of steel and stone and machinery—and nowadays, one might well add, bombs, gas-masks and machine guns" (76).¹⁰⁶

The Abbes themselves provide ample fodder throughout *No Place Like Home* for the idea that unhealthiness results when the ostensibly separate spheres of childhood and adulthood collide. The sibling collaborators comment, for instance, upon a survey taken by New York City school children, which asked them to vote upon the most hated man in the world. (The result, unsurprisingly, was Hitler). "Before this, surely," the authors surmise, "children were not thinking whom they hated. Children don't have much time to hate—unless someone tells them to" (*NPLH* 11). Such contemporary concerns interfere with even the most Romantic passages of the text. Riding on a bus through Hungary, the children wax poetic on the quiet beauty of the landscape while "Mamma" Abbe quotes Thomas Gray. Just as the children's mother pretends her now-teenaged children "were little babies and she was rocking [them] to sleep," however, war interrupts the idyllic vision: "It was too bad to see then an antiaircraft gun pointing to the fine sunset and many children standing around it" (*NPLH* 145).

The Abbes' observations indirectly support readers' suspicions that adult intervention played a heavy role in the exposé's production.¹⁰⁷ Their claim, for instance, that "we are not so

¹⁰⁶ In the same article, Gág defends fairy tales as children's "rightful heritage," citing their particular importance in a time when children are over exposed to graphic scenes of murder, torture, or lurid stories in the media, unlike the "playful" representation of violence in traditional tales (76, 77).

¹⁰⁷ Textual indications aside, according to my recent interview with Patience, the Abbes' mother actively sought a third book assignment for the children. After Polly Abbe spent six or seven months meeting with publishers in New York, Julian Messner agreed to the project. These

interested in the political” makes little sense in relation to their mission—a determined venture akin to storm chasing—through areas widely understood to be under Hitler’s threat (*NPLH* 40). The children’s indifference to politics raises the possibility that their final volume is precisely the kind of moneymaking enterprise social reformers, critics of juvenilia, and others concerned with youth culture, feared might corrupt children. Indeed, never prone to mincing words, even when discussing their own private matters, the siblings reveal that “when our money was REALLY gone, we were going to sell ourselves to English papers from Spain and French papers too. We thought Mr. Paine, of the *Readers’ Digest*, would also buy us, and then we would get home” (*NPLH* 207). The Abbes’ glib admission that they are selling themselves and not their writing contributes to aging the children in the reader’s mind, disallowing the possibility that the children are still as innocent of pragmatic affairs as they are of grammar.

Although generally quite different from Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock’s novels, the Abbes’ last book is similar to *Oxus in Summer* in that it deprives readers of the notion that its young “characters” enjoy blissful innocence despite their precocity. The very title phrase of the Abbes’ final memoir encapsulates the plaintive tone of the volume, which was published mere months after *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) ensured the expression’s enduring status in twentieth-century pop culture. In *No Place Like Home*, the children repeatedly lament their absence from the American countryside, signaling their absorption of Romantic ideals: the young authors’ statements frequently point to the disjunction between their chosen research and their desire to live the sort of nature-driven childhoods portrayed in the *Oxus* novels and lauded by adults. The frontispiece is a photograph of “the Abbes at home,” all three astride their horses on their

circumstances contribute, perhaps, to Patience’s sense that “in the second book, you’re still getting a lot of *our* feelings. But in the third book you’ll get many more of Mamma’s feelings.”

Colorado ranch; the authors complement this illustration with their opening proclamation that “if there is war anywhere in the world, we think the United States of America is the SAFEST place to be. Especially where we live. This place is Colorado” (*NPLH* 9). Despite their evident preference for home, however, the topical matter of the Abbes’ project dictates that they exchange the ranch’s sanctity for the turmoil of Europe in 1939. In *Around the World in Eleven Years*, Richard wrote that he didn’t like wars “because you get killed and blind and your eyes out, and your brain gets crazy, and you lose your hands and arms and little children don’t get any milk and sometimes you kill your own brother” (81-2). The trio of authors reiterates this message in their last book, declaring, “this is no longer a brave world. It is a war world,” urging all children to cry out “WE DO NOT WANT WAR!” (236, 237). The children envision a utopian, pastoral setting where young people go “to live ALL by themselves in a place with pussy cats, dogs, horses, birds and animals”—a description that unsurprisingly conjures images of their beloved ranch and the site of their first composing days.

The success of *Around the World in Eleven Years*—the result of those early idyllic attempts at composing “among the birds and the cotton”—led at least one struggling adult author to bemoan the fact that all the three children had to do was “come along and cough and out comes a best seller!” (qtd. in *OAP* 66). Suggestive, certainly, of the quality of some juvenilia, her remark also highlights the cultural conception that creativity comes naturally to the child. For juvenilia to succeed, readers needed to perceive the texts as the result of spontaneous, wholesome play. While the Abbes’ later treatment by critics might arguably be justified—their prose, after all, was frequently clumsy or opaque—reviews of other child-authored adults’ books suggest that readers’ critiques arose from unease with the juvenile’s distancing of herself from the child’s world in favor of the adult’s. Reviewers lambasted, for instance, the prose attempts of

famed child poet Nathalia Crane, calling *The Sunken Garden* (1926) “hollowed, glossed and false,” and *An Alien From Heaven* (1929) “Another Young Visiter” [sic] (Taggard 5).¹⁰⁸ Such censure circulated around Nathalia’s failed attempts to be adult in both her style *and* subject matter¹⁰⁹: too sophisticated to be cute, and too unwieldy to be conventionally successful, Crane’s prose became “dangerously like the tedious magazine romances of her elders;” indeed the harshest criticism leveled at her first novel was that it was not at all a childish book with its “frequent traces of library research and hothouse imagination of a type not particularly healthy” (*Saturday Review* July 10, 1926: 924).

The signs of “genuine” play that readers sought in juvenilia serve as an indicator of the stringent standards to which adults frequently held childhood’s freedoms.¹¹⁰ With the effects of the Great Depression, World War II, and (perhaps just as dangerously to many) unwholesome consumer goods poised to drastically alter the course of children’s lives, Anglo-American parents, educators, and social reformers of the 1930s sought a more circumscribed experience for the young. Always a vexed, complicated notion, innocence’s relationship to precocity came under greater scrutiny in this era, despite the importance of the two states’ proximity to child

¹⁰⁸ The latter quotation is from the *New York Times* review of *An Alien From Heaven*, entitled “Another Young Visiter” (32).

¹⁰⁹ As David Sadler aptly notes, Crane “had the effrontery to write about sophisticated subjects using an adult vocabulary” (27).

¹¹⁰ As William Gleason notes, “recreation reformers ultimately backed organization over improvisation. They could (and did) cheer the self-in-the-making that play helped to nourish and could celebrate the freedom, power, and creativity that, in the modern world, only the play-made self was felt to achieve; but they could simultaneously insist that that self was best constructed through the organizational and supervisory ethos of the planned play programs that they themselves designed. [...] their commitment to a freedom tempered—always—by the needs of the social order” (15).

stars' popularity or the production of a freshly compelling, authentic literary perspective. The Abbes claim that "no matter where you are, if its springtime, you have the idea that everything is wonderful, whether it is or not" (*OAP* 231). Similarly, as long as readers could correlate the Abbes and other child authors with the purity or "springtime" of life, juvenilia maintained its privileged status as either amusingly precocious or enlighteningly immature. That this purity could be established through either the depiction of children at pastoral play, as in Katharine Hull and Pamela Whitlock's juvenile fiction, or through the stylistic incompetencies of *Patience*, *Richard*, and Johnny Abbe's memoirs, speaks to the uniformity of adults' criteria: child writers may be freed from the confines of the factory or labor force, but they must still work to substantiate the notion that children lead lives of leisure, communing with nature and writing spontaneously. Perhaps *The Spectator's* reviewer of *Around the World in Eleven Years* summarized the era's sentiments most aptly when he remarked, "if children do not think and write like this, they certainly ought to" (604).

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