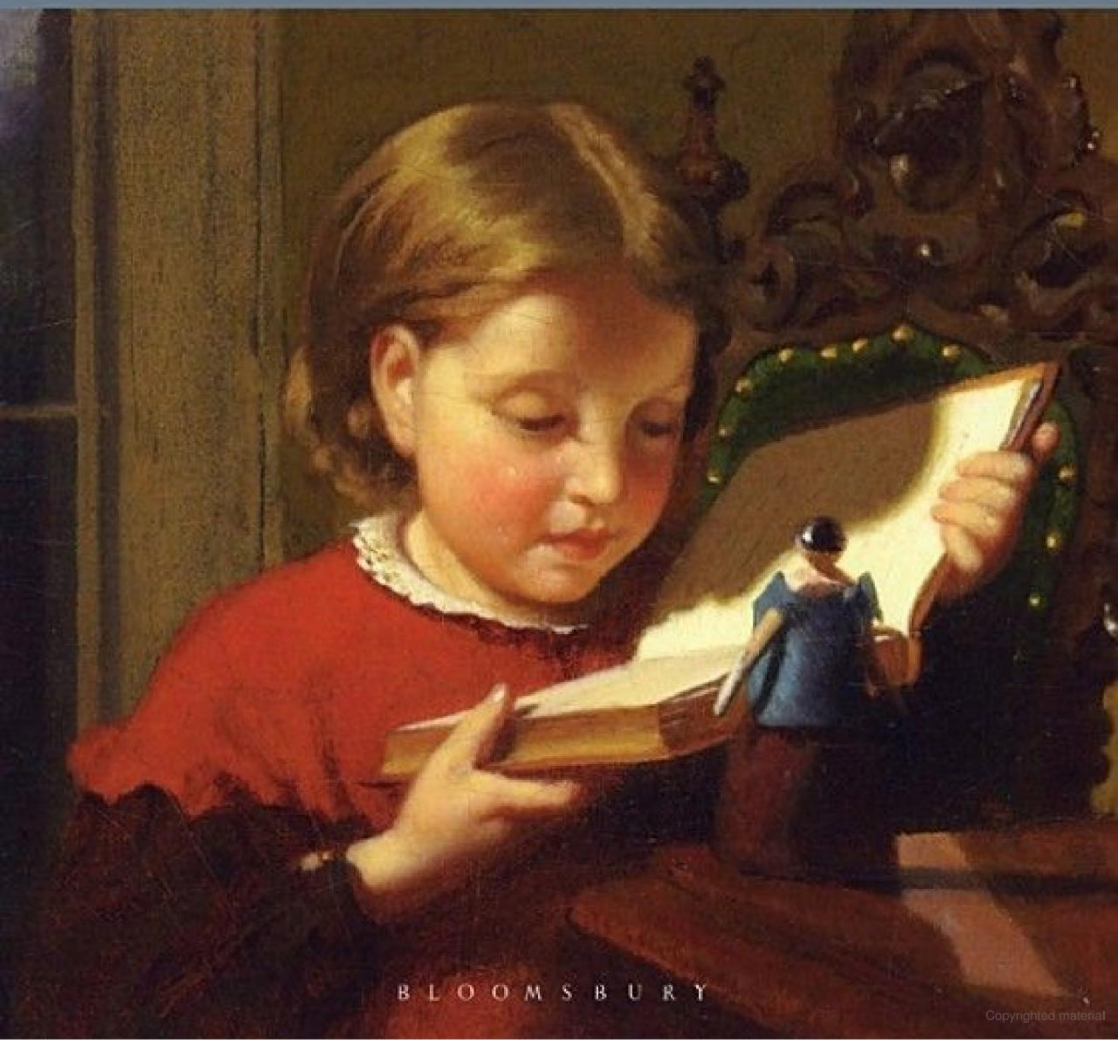
PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Literature's Children

The Critical Child and the Art of Idealization

Louise Joy



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Introduction

As Matthew Lipman has observed, ‘children are not easily prevented from thinking’ (Lipman, 2003, p. 1). The existence of children’s literature testifies to the child’s need to imagine and to wonder, to question and to doubt. The very diversity of such literature evidences children’s eagerness to reach beyond the same familiar mental horizons. And yet literary scholarship which concerns itself with the child reader (invariably envisaged as a monolithic category) is repeatedly drawn back to an idea that the child reader is inert: at one extreme, a passive receptacle for the adult to fill, and at the other, an impossibility. The discursive conceit of the *tabula rasa* – the child as that which the adult desires it to be – continues to loom large in children’s literature scholarship, even though the empirical validity of the idea has long been disproven. As Clémentine Beauvais has recently observed, its continued dominance is expressed most vividly in the readiness with which critics invoke Jacqueline Rose’s totemic thesis, even as they purportedly seek to distance themselves from it (Beauvais, 2015). The idea that the literary text manipulates the child reader to serve adult ends remains firmly entrenched, whether those ends are seen to be dictated by the desires of the author (Jackie Wullschlager), the agenda of the narrator (Barbara Wall), the aesthetic demands of the text (Perry Nodelman) or the ideologies embedded in discourse (Stephens) – be they patriarchal (Lissa Paul), heteronormative (Kenneth Kidd) or occidental (Roderick McGillis). This hermeneutics of suspicion

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reaches its acme in oft-cited works by Jacqueline Rose and James Kincaid which identify the power dynamics at operation in children's literature as mechanisms for the subjugation of the child, but it is also present in more dilute form in a notion such as Peter Hunt's, that 'the realisation of a text, and especially of a text for children, is closely involved with questions of control, and of the techniques through which power is exercised over, or shared with, the reader' (Hunt 1988, p. 163), and discernible too in notions such as Jack Zipes's Marxist conviction that '[a]t the same time as the child reads and views signs, he or she is being configured by the material conditions of a particular social class, ethnic group, region, and genetic background within a particular field of children's literature production' (Zipes, 2009, p. 6).

A number of critics have recently begun to challenge this metanarrative which has held such sway over children's literature criticism since the 1980s, and to attempt to shift the terms of the debate. For example, David Rudd's 2013 book, *Reading the Child in Children's Literature*, concludes with the wish that 'instead of claiming that we can only *text*, or *page*, or, indeed, simply *read* the child in a self-indulgent, nostalgic way, there is now the opportunity . . . to take cognizance of the child who might text back' (Rudd, p. 191). This acknowledgement of the child's resistance to being positioned by the text is central to Clémentine Beauvais's 2015 study, *The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature*, which complicates the nature of the power structures at work in children's literature, seeking to move debates away from the belief that the adult is always an 'omnipotent, manipulative, authoritarian, repressive, oppressive entity', and instead proposing that at the heart of 'the didactic

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discourse of contemporary children's literature, even at its most didactic, lies a tension of powers – of time-bound powers – between the authoritative adult and its desired addressee, the mighty child' (p. 3). Beauvais's category of the 'mighty child' – who is 'not just a subject but also a project' (p. 205) – provides us with a much-needed way of identifying the audience of children's literature as one defined more by its *potential* – emphasizing the implicit unpredictability of the process of didacticism at work in the exchanges which take place in and through literature, exchanges which play out what she characterizes as 'the paradoxical adult desire to *ask the child didactically for an unpredictable future*' (p. 4) – than by its impotence. However, each of these counterarguments which have sought to provide a non-suspicious account of the unique dynamics at work in children's literature has stayed faithful to the idea, even as this idea is problematized, which critics including Jacqueline Rose and Peter Hunt placed firmly at the heart of the debate in the 1980s: that what is centrally at stake is *power*. So firmly established is the belief that children's literature is fundamentally concerned with *power* that it has even been identified as that which provides its quintessential definition. Maria Nikolajeva, for example, has argued that 'the particular characteristic of children's literature is its focus on child/adult power hierarchy, just as the specifics of feminist literature is the gender-related power structures, and the specifics of postcolonial literature the ethnic-related power structures' (2010, p. 8).[1]

Literature's Children proposes that one of the reasons why, despite repeated attempts to do so, we have found it so difficult to kick into the long grass this unsavoury conviction that the child reader is necessarily a victim of

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adult machination is that it is intertwined with another totemic belief which cuts through children's literature criticism, and which we have not yet been prepared to relinquish: the belief that what children's literature texts essentially do is to *idealize* the worlds they represent. As Peter Hunt has put it, literary texts for children, '[p]erhaps more than any other texts . . . reflect society as it wishes to be, as it wishes to be seen, and as it unconsciously reveals itself to be' (p. 2). This is a belief which is played out again and again in critical discussion of literary works for children, and it is a belief which has taken various different forms. One of its manifestations is the observation made by critics including James Holt McGavran (1999) and Anne Higonnet (1998) that much children's literature since the middle of the nineteenth century channels or redirects versions of the *romantic* child. These accounts tend to place an emphasis on the importance of the concept of 'innocence' (Natov, 2003; Thacker and Webb, 2002, p. 4) in their efforts to determine the status of works of children's literature as such. Given the pre-eminence in Western thought of the belief so forcefully articulated by Michel Foucault not merely that knowledge is a form of, but moreover that knowledge *is*, power, the concept of innocence, etymologically intertwined with ideas of ignorance, immediately introduces – or takes us back to – questions of domination and subordination, and the presumed affiliation of these with knowledge, on the one hand, and absence of knowledge on the other. Continual recourse to the concept of the romantic child as a means of accounting for the idealizing tendencies in children's literature thus tethers the idea of idealization to a discussion of the power play between experience and inexperience, the fallen and the

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unfallen. A different variant of a similar theme is the critical argument that children's works (especially those of the second half of the nineteenth century) manifest a 'cult of the child', taking up the phrase coined in 1889 by Ernest Dowson, in which authors for children represent worlds in which the child is protected from routine pain and hardship. Such accounts, for example, those by James Kincaid and U. C. Knoepflmacher, have emphasized the importance of 'delight', both that of the protagonists' carefree existence evoked *in* the text and that of the audience's aesthetic pleasure evoked *by* it. As discussions of aesthetic pleasure have transmuted inexorably into discussions of idealized 'erotic bliss', the matrices involved in the act of reading have become configured as interchangeable with the matrices involved in the act of desiring, once again bringing to the fore issues of domination (gazing, wanting, appropriating, consuming). A further manifestation of the same critical tendency can be seen in the application of the label 'golden age' to certain works of, or indeed whole eras of, children's literature. As its name documents, to ascribe this label is in part to identify such works by way of their perceived pastoralism.[2] But moreover it is to confer on them a kind of canonical, *idealized* status – to imply that in such texts we see an epitomized realization of those values which we aspire to see upheld in children's literature. The insistence of critics including Humphrey Carpenter, Fred Inglis and Jerry Griswold that works written in the decades succeeding the publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are a manifestation of a 'golden age' tethers the discussion of children's literature to questions of a different kind of power, the power of literary value: the notion that certain works, especially those produced along

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certain discernible lines (lines which invariably reach back to *Alice*), have an enduring cultural potency not seen in works which are merely popular. The very notion of what children's literature is, at its best – what it *ideally* is – rests on a set of ideas about cultural capital in which prestige derives from, and is therefore allied to, the power to influence the terms of the debate.

Such critical labels – 'romantic', 'cult of the child', 'golden age' – serve a useful practical function in that they enable us to group together alike works and to perceive connections between the literary texts produced at given historical moments and the wider cultural movements in which they might be seen to participate. However, too often these critical labels have been taken up in uncritical ways. For example, general introductions to children's literature routinely use such terms as descriptors to demarcate (and hence reduce) whole periods of children's literature history. In the relative infancy of the scholarly field of children's literature studies, such introductory overviews have been a mainstay.[3] But as the field has become more established, and as scholars, taking up the gauntlet thrown down by Kimberley Reynolds, begin to specialize in more localized subsets of the field, we need to reconsider the usefulness of labels that derive from an impulse towards generalization and summarization, and which threaten to simplify and falsify.[4] One regrettable consequence of our continued reliance on a label such as 'golden age' is that those works which best reflect the particular attributes of the critical category in question are treated as emblematic or typical of the age itself. This in turn creates a distorted sense that children's literature which does not readily fit into the category, which in practice comprises much children's literature from prior to

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the late nineteenth century, is homogeneous, readily knowable and of interest to us only in as much as it enables us to formulate with greater confidence our sense of what children's literature since the golden age, by contrast, *is*. As a result of their treatment in this way, certain children's literature texts which have come to be seen as exemplars of the literary categories that are used to characterize them have acquired a kind of normative status against which other (both later and earlier) kinds of children's literature are seen as departures. This has led to the oft-asserted claim, made, for example, by Patricia Demers, that the 'legacy of the best Golden Age books is still evident in outstanding literature for children today' (1983, p. xiv). Where Demers's teleological narrative rests on suppositions about qualities intrinsic to the texts themselves, the same narrative has been plotted in relation to the conditions in which works for children have been produced. Shelia Egoff, for example, has documented the ways in which, unlike that of adult literature, 'the history of children's literature is still very much a part of the present-day character of publishing for children' (McGillis, 2003, p. 4). In part, of course, a certain degree of linear, direct influence is inevitable, particularly since, as Jane Tompkins has shown, a literary work succeeds or fails in terms of its reception in the immediate context 'on the degree to which it provokes the desired response' (Tompkins, 1985, p. xviii). That is to say that a text becomes established – canonized – not on account of its peculiarities, but on account of the ways in which it upholds values which are already accepted. And, as Perry Nodelman has demonstrated, certain works become 'touchstones' when they encourage imitators, providing new benchmarks in relation to which subsequent works of

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children's literature are judged.[5] By the same token, when we use a critical term such as 'urchin verse'[6] , which has been used to characterize some contemporary British children's poetry, we do so to encapsulate the ways in which such poetry spurns convention, thereby reaffirming the status of those values which have been rejected as exemplary or ideal. And yet, intriguingly, this kind of linear narrativizing does not merely consist of a nostalgic reaching back. It also takes the form of a kind of Whiggist march forwards which has led critics to hasten past children's works from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries until we emerge in the safe territory of the 'golden age', where we can saunter leisurely among the riches. As Mitzi Myers, in her robust critique of Geoffrey Summerfield's *Fantasy and Reason*, observed, there is an unpalatable presentism involved in the denouncement of children's writers, especially female writers, of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who espoused what Summerfield dismisses as 'grown-up values associated with mature reflection' instead of those values associated with the imagination – values which, as Myers rightly points out, only came to be seen as conventionally (and therefore ideally) childish in a subsequent age (Myers, 1987, p. 109).

On the surface, it may appear that the two critical premises which I have briefly outlined above – first, that the child reader is a powerless victim, and second, that children's literature presents idealized versions of the world – do not obviously have much connection with one another. However, in this book I propose that they do. Specifically, I seek to highlight the ways in which both are predicated on a mutual supposition: the supposition that

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children's literature is inherently, but regrettably, didactic. That is to say, both premises rest on a belief that children's literature aspires, whether consciously or not, overtly or not, successfully or not, to instruct the reader; and furthermore, they rest on a belief that to aspire to instruct the reader is necessarily objectionable. Since at least the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), in which Lewis Carroll famously and mercilessly parodied a particular mode of moralistic writing most notably associated with Isaac Watts, the idea that children's literature might assume a didactic function has often been viewed with disdain. The critical label *didactic* has sometimes been used not merely to characterize, but moreover to denigrate, the works to which it is attached. It has become a means of casting outside our sphere of interest types of writing which are not seen to be predicated on an aestheticist valuation of art for art's sake. Consequently, swathes of children's literature from prior to the late nineteenth century, which often call attention to their educational pretexts, remain largely unread, certainly rarely *closely* read, by children's literature scholars. By the same token, works which apparently *do* foreground the child's delight by purportedly offering idealized versions of the world for the child's delectation, particularly those works which are perceived to be wrought in the mould of *Alice*, have often been prized largely on account of their apparent reluctance to instruct. While the term 'wonderland' has entered our collective vocabulary as a term to denote the surreal,[7] we seem sometimes to have accepted as real the mischievous presentation of children's literary history which is spun in Carroll's fictional realm.

The primary objective of this book is not to probe the

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critical accuracy of Carroll's portrayal of children's works in the Wattsian tradition, though a reassessment of such works is indeed long overdue.[8] My aim here is to consider what is at stake at a theoretical level in the crafting of a teleological narrative wherein a move towards aestheticism entails a rejection of didacticism. This is the narrative which critics such as Ulrich Knoepflmacher have entrenched when they claim that the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 'completed the erosion of a didactic and empirical tradition of children's literature' (p. xi). Such a teleology, epitomized by the title of Patricia Demers's anthology, *From Instruction to Delight*, casts didacticism and aestheticism as oppositional in character. It places the pedagogical function of children's literature in tension with the aesthetic demand for entertainment, envisaging the two as mutually exclusive aims. Hence, the extent to which a work fulfils the former is presumed to compromise its capacity to fulfil the latter, and vice versa. The oppositional character of these two positions is enshrined in the interrogative subtitle of Torben Weinreich's 2000 book, *Children's Literature: Art or Pedagogy?* Peter Hunt reifies the same binary when, echoing the famous inscription to John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (based on the Horatian premise which was a foundational principle of Western literary aesthetics long before John Newbery perceived its peculiar aptness for the children's text), he asks: 'Should children's books be for instruction or delight?' (Hunt in Maybin and Watson, 2009, p. 13). It is not a rhetorical question; the answer which critics in our own age have resolutely reached is that children's books should be for delight. In our eagerness to laugh with and not be laughed at by Carroll, we have inherited his contempt for the custom of using

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literature as a vehicle for instilling rote learning and the parroting of accepted truth, and nurtured full-blown embarrassment towards the notion that children's literature might be educational.

And yet, despite the fact that the notion of didacticism has sometimes provoked uneasiness, claims have repeatedly been made that children's literature has a unique association with it. It has variously been observed that children's literature has its roots in the didactic tradition (Seth Lerer); that all children's literature from prior to the mid-nineteenth century is didactic (Ulrich Knooepflmacher); that all children's literature is *used* didactically (Peter Hollindale); and even that children's literature is *necessarily* didactic – that it is 'inextricably tied to a *prescriptive* role' (Lesnik-Obserstein, 1994, p. 3). Debates about the nature of the education which children's literature offers – or, more particularly, debates about the nature of education which children's literature *should* offer – continue to determine the parameters, and shape the questions we ask, of the field. Just as Sarah Trimmer in the late eighteenth century expressed her nervousness that fairy tales would corrupt the young, so too do cultural commentators today regularly pose anxious questions such as Megan Creasey's 'Does Violence Have a Place in Children's Literature?' (2010), belying a fretting about what impressionable young readers will pick up from the potent reading matter put into their hands.

Didacticism

The incommensurability of this apparent contempt for didacticism with an inability to stop worrying about the corruptive potential of children's literature points towards

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something unresolved lying at the heart of children's literature studies. It points towards a discomfort which far exceeds the prevalent anti-Leavisite feeling which cuts through literary culture more generally. The view that reading good books might make us better people now firmly belongs to a quaint and receding past. Our peculiar discomfort with the business of didacticism, one which pervades literary studies more generally but which is even more acutely felt in the arena of children's literature studies, derives, I propose, from the lack of an adequate account of what it might mean for a literary text to be didactic. Specifically, it highlights that we need better to understand what it might mean for a literary text which is written by a knowledgeable party (usually an adult) to educate a reader who is comparatively less knowledgeable (often a child). It indicates that we need to do more further to probe the assumption, as recent scholars including Clémentine Beauvais and Lisa Sainsbury have done, that education entails a one-way, linear transaction – a form of transmission – wherein values which originally reside in the author are straightforwardly passed on to, even imposed on, the reader. Such a notion is tied to a concomitant belief that the delivery of knowledge is bound up with power: it entails an act of giving (or abuse) on behalf of the powerful (the knowledgeable) to the powerless (the ignorant).

But such a model of education is not the only one available to us. In fact, the belief that education comprises a process of indoctrination or inculcation wherein the older generation transmits to the younger generation a heritage the value of which the adult has preordained is now a decidedly outmoded one. It is one, indeed, which philosophers of education have come to distance

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themselves from to such an extent that it is invariably characterized as *traditional* in contradistinction to the supposedly more modern models that have been influential in the last century or so. Traditional education presupposes a formal, authoritarian educational context, wherein the teacher is conceived as a repository of knowledge which is passed on, intact, to the pupil. The pupil, it is imagined, passively ingests what is provided, complicit in (or forced to submit to) the belief that such knowledge is necessary for initiation into the adult world. With roots in ancient practices, traditional educational practices were popular among Medieval pedagogues, and remained effectively dominant in Europe until the twentieth century, when Anglo-American policymakers first began on a widespread scale to take seriously some of the claims made by proponents of so-called *progressive* education. Although progressive education has a long history, one in which ideas articulated by John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Richard and Maria Edgeworth, among many others, play a vital role, it was given coherent formulation in the work of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American philosopher, John Dewey. Consequently, Dewey is often regarded as its progenitor, although in the 1930s Dewey in fact denounced many of the educational experiments carried out in the name of progressive education, and sought to distance himself from the movement. In America and Britain in the first decades of the twentieth century, Dewey popularized a set of educational premises which have been characterized as *child-centred*. Dewey's theories of education, influenced by thinkers as diverse as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Charles Darwin, carry into the realm of the philosophy

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of education a nineteenth-century commitment to the belief that scientific enquiry, as opposed to deference to the classics, was necessary to secure intellectual, and hence political, freedom.[9] Dewey's writings on education emphasize the child as an active learner, a questioner – an experimenter who learns through doing things first-hand, often through play, and not merely through being told what to think. He envisages the teacher as a partner in or facilitator, and not the author, of the learning process. This process is thus one in which the teacher participates, but which he or she does not seek to, indeed recognizes that he or she cannot, dictate. Crucially, then, for Dewey, education originates in, and is driven on by, the activity of the child.[10]

Dewey's theories have been much debated in the century or so since their first articulation, and he is only one among many philosophers of education to propose a model of educational exchange which poses an alternative to those associated with more traditional modes of education.[11] Nonetheless, his influence looms large over contemporary discussions of education, not merely owing to his material importance – his ideas were taken up and tested both by fellow theorists and by practitioners such that he dramatically altered the educational landscape in both Britain and America, as well as in other parts of the world – but also his symbolic importance. By challenging in the mainstream the dominance of traditional ideas about education, he mobilized renewed commitment to the belief that how and what we educate our citizens is vitally important to the social contract. While theorists and practitioners since Dewey have contested, modified or repudiated many of his ideas, his legacy is felt in our continued questioning of educational traditions. And yet,

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curiously, often when literary scholars employ the term *didactic*, they appear not to take into account the many questions which one might ask of education, and indeed, the many questions which philosophers of education since Dewey habitually *do* ask of education, and often continue to operate on the largely unexamined basis that education entails formal, traditional instruction.[12]

In fact, for all that the term *didactic* has a familiar place in the repertoire of critical terms available to literary scholars, it is a term which has rarely been subject to sustained enquiry or theorization, whether specifically in relation to children's literature or whether in relation to literature more broadly conceived. Certainly, literary critics have rarely looked to the philosophy of education as a field which might have something to offer to such discussions.[13] Perhaps the business of education has seemed self-evident, or, like the literature which the label *didactic* has been used to describe, perhaps the study of literature's alliances with education is deemed embarrassingly retrograde, hence beneath critical notice. Perhaps scholars have been put off by a concern that to study didacticism is tantamount to signing up to the notion that literature *should* be didactic. Whatever the reasons that have caused scholars to skirt around the issue, the result is that there is a surprising dearth of scholarly enquiry into what we might mean or do when we identify a work as didactic. To be sure, a number of recent studies have probed the discursive intersections between theories and practices in the domain of literature and theories and practices within the domain of education. For example, Richard Barney's *Plots of Enlightenment* (1999) and Alan Richardson's *Literature, Education and Romanticism* (1994) consider interrelations between literary and

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educational thought in the eighteenth century and romantic period respectively. Dinah Birch's *Our Victorian Education* (2007) focusses on concerns that have been dominant since the nineteenth century, while Michael Bell's *Open Secrets* (2007) is a more trans-historical sweep from Rousseau to J. M. Coetzee. Such studies indicate that a scholarly interest in the relevance of ideas about education – particularly as they pertain in and to particular historical periods – is already well established. None of these studies, though, takes head on the question of what it might mean for a literary text to operate didactically. In the field of children's literature study, where it has long been familiar to apply the characterization 'didactic' to certain kinds of literary text, some recent scholars have started to provide revisionist accounts of what the didactic exchange inherent in children's literature might consist. Lisa Sainsbury, for example, in her examination of the ways in which contemporary children's literature fosters philosophical engagement, has argued that the 'didactic impulse' which is 'common to ethical discourse and moralizing' can be viewed as 'liberating' and not just as 'enslaving'. The kind of impulse which can be viewed as 'liberating' can be envisaged, she proposes, as a 'positive didactic drive' (Sainsbury, 2013, p. 7). Sainsbury's welcome re-evaluation of the ethics of didacticism fruitfully moves on the discussion from the centuries-old impulse to pronounce on the moral value of specific systems of thought promoted in and through children's literature, and to shift it instead towards an analysis of how literary works might facilitate moral enquiry. Sainsbury's nuanced account of the didacticism at work in children's literary texts nonetheless continues to adhere to a supposition that the child is invariably in *receipt* of that which the adult

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offers. As a consequence, she finds that what the child gains through moral enquiry is a form of *power* – or, in her own terminology, 'liberty': the freedom not to be overpowered.

My own study is motivated by a conviction that for as long as *power* dominates discussions about children's literature, then the idea that child readers are simply passive consumers of that which the adult provides for them will continue to rear its head. In this book, I therefore deliberately place questions of power to one side, not because I consider them to be unimportant (I do not) nor to deny that power dynamics are at play in the complex encounters that literary texts enable between multiple different human parties. I confess, though, that I frequently find myself losing a grip on any sense of what the term 'power' might mean when it is used in a literary theoretical context, and I observe that its signification is often taken for granted when it is not, in fact, always self-evident. Indeed, when reading about the power dynamics at work in literary texts, I often find myself wondering what, if anything, the term 'power' means when it is used in this context.[14] My desire to place questions of power to one side instead marks an attempt to explore whether the introduction of a different conceptual vocabulary, a vocabulary which places the emphasis on the reader as an active agent in the educational process, might enable us to identify aspects of the nature of didactic transactions which have become obscured by our readiness to read such exchanges as exercises in subjugation.

The account offered in this book explores the ways in which we might reanimate discussions of literary didacticism by considering the relevance for literature of non-traditional ideas about education, specifically those

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so-called 'progressive', child-centred ideas about education so comprehensively articulated by John Dewey at the turn of the twentieth century. If we turn to an account of education which emphasizes what the child *does*, and not what is done *to* the child, I contend, then we can arrive at a new and less discomfiting way of thinking about the educational character of children's literature. In providing an account of the child reader, following Dewey's account of the child as thinker, as an inquirer – as an active, not a passive, agent of interpretation – I probe the ways in which the child might resist the processes of idealization apparently at work in children's literary texts. In so doing, I add a further voice to the growing call that we need decisively to move away from the too-long-established view that the child reader is a passive, powerless victim of adult machination, as well as the equally outmoded notion that children's literature – any the more than any other kind of literature – ever *could* idealize the world it represents. By thinking our way outside of these positions which have for so long and in so many embedded ways dictated what we see and how we look at reading matter produced for children, we can arrive at a way of approaching children's literature, both at a theoretical level and in practice, which acknowledges the child's capacity to read against the grain: that is to say, an approach towards children's literature which acknowledges the child as *critic*.

The child as critic

In a prolific and astonishingly wide-ranging career, John Dewey played a seminal role in securing public and political interest in child-centred education, particularly

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through the influence of his major works of education philosophy, *School and Society* (1899), *Child and Curriculum* (1902), *How We Think* (1910), *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Art as Experience* (1934), *Experience and Education* (1938) and *Knowing and the Known* (1949). One of Dewey's most enduring contributions to the philosophy of education, and one of the ideas that has become most closely associated with his name, is his insistence that the primary aim of education ought to be the fostering of critical thinking.[15] Criticism, or critical thinking, for Dewey, is the exercise of 'discriminating judgment' and 'careful appraisal' in an effort to minimize our dependence on 'dispensations of fortune or providence' (LW 1:298). His 1910 study, *How We Think*, outlines in full his understanding of what critical activity entails and why it matters, and he further elaborates on its political role in his seminal work, *Democracy and Education* (1916). For Dewey, critical thinking provides a means of comprehending 'the causes of ideas – the conditions under which they are thought', which enables us, as Lipman puts it, 'to liberate ourselves from intellectual rigidity and to bestow upon ourselves that power of choosing among and acting upon alternatives that is the source of intellectual freedom.' This kind of thinking is *critical* because it is 'aware of its own assumptions and implications as well as being conscious of the reasons and evidence that support this or that conclusion' (Lipman, 2003, p. 35; p. 26). In this way, critical thinking involves interrogation of the very processes involved in thinking even as that thinking is being carried out. It is a form of watching oneself think – a form of consciously and deliberately managing the processes of discovery.

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A central proposition of *Literature's Children* is that Dewey's concept of critical thinking provides children's literature scholarship with a valuable means of accounting for the didactic nature of the exchange at work in the reading of children's literature without requiring us to cast the child in the position of a passive victim of adult oppression. The conceptual vocabulary which underpins Dewey's account of education provides us with a means of shifting the discussion about the educative character of children's literature away from discussions of power (predicated on a model of delivery and receipt), and instead towards discussions of *activity*, in which the education experienced by the child reader can be characterized by verbs such as enquire, choose, consider, deliberate, think, experiment, question, seek evidence for and try out. Such an account of the education entailed in the reading of literature enables us more satisfactorily to acknowledge and accept the implications for children's literature of the ways in which poststructuralist literary theory, in the wake of the work of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, among others, has destabilized any easy alignment between authorship with authority, and invited us to reconceive the reader as an active agent in the production of meaning. Theorists of children's literature, in their repeated insistence on the peculiar passivity of the child reader, have sometimes shown an apparent reluctance to assimilate into their critical practice poststructuralist ideas about the constitutive role played by the reader, even while mainstream literary critical culture has long ago absorbed this notion as one of its central tenets. Through consideration of John Dewey's account of critical thinking, then, *Literature's Children* seeks to move the discussion away from what literary texts *do* to children

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and, building on foundations laid most notably by Margaret Meek in *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* (1988) and Peter Hollindale in *Signs of Childness* (1997), shift the focus instead towards a reflection on what children might *do* to literary texts.

The central contention of *Literature's Children* is that the child reader can best be understood as a kind of *critic*. That is to say, child readers are active, curious, independent, questioning thinkers who operate in disciplined, inventive, risky ways to arrive at individual, potentially liberated, responsible judgements. By analyzing the sophisticated critical work which the child reader undertakes – that is to say, by acknowledging the questions which a child reader might ask and the inferences which they might draw as they attempt to make sense of the words in front of them – we can, I contend, arrive at a conceptualization of the child reader which shifts the emphasis away from power (bound up with ideology) and towards activity (bound up with *ideas*). We can reconceive the child reader as a mobile, proactive, inventive, experimental, sceptical, artful agent – a doer, a worker, a thinker, a discoverer – and not an inert *tabula rasa*, awaiting the imprint (whether benign or otherwise) of the adult. This is not merely to identify the child as a kind of naïve swain, in the way that William Empson has famously done; nor is it to recapitulate the Wordsworthian conceit that the child knows something of which grown-ups remain ignorant. In fact, it is precisely to avoid viewing the role of the child reader as defined via a binary opposition with the adult reader, an opposition which sets up a perverse trap wherein if we wish to deem that the child's insight is not lesser than the adult's, then we must deem it to be greater. My own, perhaps sceptical, premise – the

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idea which this book tests out – is that the activity which the child carries out when invited to read a literary text might surely, indeed, *must* surely, unless and until we can prove otherwise, be similar in kind to that carried out by the adult. That is to say that, just like the adult reader, the child reader too is interrogative, deliberate, suspicious, resistant – in short, *critical*.

To assert that the child reader is a kind of critic might appear to be a peculiarly audacious claim when one bears in mind how entrenched is the supposition that critics are not merely adults, but moreover, especially *wise* adults at that. Over the centuries, the critic has variously been conceived as a genius (William Wordsworth, 1974), a moral authority (Matthew Arnold, 1960-77), an aesthete (Oscar Wilde, 1909), a custodian of tradition (T. S. Eliot, 1951), an arbiter of cultural value (F. R. Leavis, 1962), and a virtuoso performer (Derek Attridge, 2015), to cite just a selective handful of theoretical positions. The tendency to view the critic as a figure of prestige in possession of exceptional skill runs hand in hand with, and no doubt derives from, that long-standing tendency to view the author (the point of origin) as possessed of a unique kind of knowledge – as having access to that which eludes the ordinary reader. This belief, which reaches back at least to Plato, can be traced through influential accounts of the function of criticism by poets and authors including Philip Sidney, John Dryden, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Oscar Wilde, and T. S. Eliot, and has continued well into the twenty-first century, seen alive and well, for example, in tributes made on the death of Seamus Heaney.[16]

Of course, plenty of alternative ways of understanding the relations between authorship and authority, maturity

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and wisdom, are available to us. Certain commentators, particularly those who have attended to the literary treatment of childhood in the wake of Rousseau, have turned the customary view on its head, and considered the ways in which it is during *childhood*, and not adulthood, that knowledge is privileged. This Rousseauvian – or in the British tradition, more often Wordsworthian – notion is present, as has been well documented, in autobiographical accounts of childhood from the early nineteenth century by Thomas de Quincey and Hartley Coleridge, and has been reframed, albeit to enable a sceptical view, in our own age by scholarship on romantic childhood by scholars including Judith Plotz (2001), Peter de Bolla (2003) and Sally Shuttleworth (2010).[17] Pursuing a rather different tack, Andrew Bennett (2009) has offered a beguiling counterposition to the customary alliance between authorship and authority which draws attention to the peculiar relationships which subsist between poetry, poets and ignorance. From another angle again, the particular fertility of childhood as the domain of play has been exploited as a means of identifying the kind of aesthetic anarchy witnessed in the works of writers such as Algernon Charles Swinburne and James Joyce, for example.[18] At a more theoretical level, the idea, attributed to Pablo Picasso, that every child is an artist, a reorientation of the Renaissance idea seen in the work of Francis Bacon, popularized anew in the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill, that every child is a scientist, has already accustomed us to the notion that the untrained child might be capable of excelling in skills which the drudgery of training serves to remove.[19] But the notion that the child might be a kind of *critic* – that the critical faculty might be commensurate with childishness, with that which

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> a multiplicity of allied experiences, tend to bring about those judgments which we then call intuitive; but they are true judgments because they are based on intelligent selection and estimation, with the solution of a problem as the controlling standard. Possession of this capacity makes the difference between the artist and the intellectual bungler. (*HWT*, p. 105)

Importantly, then, though it may masquerade as something which occurs instinctively or easily, critical thinking takes *time* and *effort*; it requires *proximity* to the available information; it requires undivided *attention*; and it requires personal *interest* in the matter under consideration. It is motivated by a desire to solve a *problem*. In its adherence to these principles, critical thinking, for Dewey, does not merely satisfy intellectual curiosity; it fulfils aesthetic standards of beauty, truth, and excellence. While it may follow scientific procedures, fundamentally it is an *artistic* virtue, demonstrating the pinnacle of human mental achievement, and, like a work of art, is itself to be subjected to critical scrutiny, wonder and judgement. The end point of critical thinking is not a definite answer; it is further critical thinking. The process, then, is *ongoing*, *self-perpetuating*, and *infinite* – a kind of Derridean process of endless deferral wherein the signified of a signifier turns out to yield yet another signifier, *ad infinitum*. For Dewey, through the perpetual dynamism of critical thinking, wherein what we thought we knew is questioned and found wanting, and, therefore, through further testing, is modified and developed, the human race renews itself.

The relevance for literary study of Dewey's ideas about critical thinking is immediately apparent in his insistence

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that the 'function by which one thing signifies or indicates another, and thereby leads us to consider how far one may be regarded as warrant for belief in the other, is . . . the central factor in all reflective or distinctively intellectual thinking' (*HWT*, p. 8). Like reading, then, thinking is a 'process of reaching the absent from the present' (*HWT*, p. 26) – or to put it another way, it involves extrapolating signifieds from signifiers. As is well known, the process of meaning-making is essentially one which entails the navigation of signs; this is an established tenet of literary criticism, certainly in the wake of structuralist and poststructuralist literary theory. The relevance of Dewey's ideas about signification for the reading of literary texts will be explored in greater detail below; what is interesting to observe at the outset, though, is the way in which Dewey envisages the processes of signification involved in critical thought as ones which are inherently literary – that is to say, linguistic processes which are contrived as opposed to natural, whose ends are beauty, truth and pleasure, and, moreover, which appeal to us on account of their suggestiveness: 'Civilized man deliberately *makes* such signs . . . All forms of artificial apparatus are intentionally designed modifications of natural things in order that they may serve better than in their natural estate to indicate the hidden, the absent, and the remote' (p. 16). Key here is the idea of design: signs are deliberately wrought to communicate efficiently and effectively, whereas that which they signify is not. That which they signify is given, and is therefore of lesser interest to us. Dewey's privileging of the sign is almost directly contrary to Rousseau's romantic prioritization of the natural over the artificial[23] : reappropriating markedly similar vocabulary, but inverting the logic, Dewey aligns the 'artificial' with

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connotations of artfulness and artistry to hint at the skilfulness required in the making of signs, and the achievement it reflects. To denote such achievement as 'civilized' invests it not merely with artistic, as well as scientific, technological and political sophistication, but it also implies that there is something peculiarly mature, even adult, about such achievement: that the sign-maker is already conversant with codes which the decoder has yet to learn, a paradigm peculiarly apposite for the scenario of children's literature, in which the initiated (adult) writes for the uninitiated (child). Since meaningfulness is not an inherent quality in signs themselves, and is generated by the quality of the thought which is brought to bear on them, those who are not yet familiar with the precedents for their use will be unable to extrapolate sense through mere guesswork: 'words are mere scratches, curious variations of light and shade, to one to whom they are not linguistic signs. To him for whom they are signs of other things, each has a definite individuality of its own, according to the meaning that it is used to convey' (*HWT*, pp. 16–17). Dewey here anticipates an idea which later becomes familiar to literary theorists through the influence of thinkers such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida: that meaning only comes into being through the constitutive presence of the reader, making it inherently 'individual', owing not merely to the distinctiveness of the sign but also to the distinctiveness of the reader, or, here, thinker.[24]

Just as literary criticism takes as its subject matter what Aristotle in *Poetics* characterizes as an *agon* (1970), Wordsworth calls 'the burthen of the mystery' ('Tintern Abbey', 1974, l. 39), and William Empson terms 'ambiguity' (1991), critical thinking arises in the wake of a

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problem. 'The origin of thinking,' writes Dewey, 'is some perplexity, confusion, or doubt' (*HWT*, p. 12). It emerges when something is not understood, irrespective of whether the particular mental obstacle poses difficulty at large; what is relevant is not whether the issue is generally understood, but whether the particular thinker – the thinking subject (although Dewey himself rejected the term 'subject' for use in this context in favour of the term 'enquirer' – has overcome his or her own difficulty in comprehension. The predicament of the enquirer – the subjective perspective which he or she brings to bear on the problem – is thus vital in determining the extent to which critical thinking can occur. Dewey characterizes this predicament as:

> a *forked-road* situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives . . . Difficulty or obstruction in the way of reaching a belief brings us, however, to a pause. In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another. (*HWT*, p. 11)

Dewey's recourse to the metaphors of a physical journey vividly portrays the difficulty as one which derives from a surfeit of options. In order to arrive at understanding, one particular route needs to be selected, but until it can be ascertained which one is optimal, no forward progress can occur. The 'pause' in the journey thus mirrors a type of mental stasis. However, this stasis is not an impasse – a cessation of movement; it involves a different kind of

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movement, here figuratively denoted as upwards movement (up a tree), such that the perspective is enhanced. The ultimate selection of the route, then, is not random but considered; the hesitation is not paralysis, but deliberation. Dewey's account stresses the effort entailed in critical thinking, and by extension, the stamina required to carry it out; it is prompted by something troubling, but is itself troublesome, since it 'involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance. Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiring; and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful' (*HWT*, p. 13). Critical thinking, then, does not come easily, even when this may appear to be the case; and the degree of curiosity and intensity of desire to overcome the given obstacle must be strong indeed if they are to outweigh the frustrations posed by the process.

There is of course an element of perversity in the wilful undertaking of that which is laborious and 'painful', a perversity which is also manifest in the practice of literary criticism, itself, at one level, so egregious and pedantic – somehow excessive to that which is required. This perversity, indeed, characterizes the very enterprise of deliberately attempting to impose order on that which presents itself as disorderly – or as Dewey puts it, introducing 'i) *definiteness* and *distinction* and ii) *consistency* or *stability* of meaning into what is otherwise vague and wavering' (*HWT*, p. 122). Indeed, the emphasis Dewey places on the need for 'systematic' methods (p. 13) indicates the extent to which the process strains against itself, and can be controlled only by resolute measures. In a very fundamental way, then, the meaning reached at the

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metaphors of sight; we speak of looking for textual evidence; of observation; of insight. This shift in the perceived location of authority, and the concomitant shift in emphasis in an account of experience which rests on that which is obtained through first-hand experimentation, rather than that which is obtained through the accumulation of knowledge, has particular consequences for the reading of children's literature, dependent as it is on a reading subject whose knowledge is limited. If we reduce the views of others – that is to say, any interpretations of a text proffered by those adults who seek to influence the child (e.g. parent, teacher or even implied author) – to mere *testimony*, to be weighed up alongside, but not to take the place of, other forms of evidence which the child collects first-hand, then it makes it unlikely that the child will wholesale inherit that view of a text which is anticipated or promoted by such adult figures. To accept that this might be the case necessarily has implications for how we consider that a literary text might function didactically, since it makes it impossible any longer to assume that testimony offered by the adult will be taken into account at all, should the child choose to ignore it.

So, having collected evidence through processes of careful observation, what kind of testing does Dewey have in mind to which to subject such evidence? What does Dewey mean when he declares that 'every inference shall be a tested inference' (*HWT*, p. 27)? The nature of the testing which Dewey has in mind is a twofold process which comprises of induction (the movement 'from fragmentary details (or particulars) to a connected view of a situation (universal)') and deduction ('which begins with the latter and works back again to particulars, connecting them and binding them together'). It is in 'so far as we

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conduct each of these processes in the light of the other,' he asserts, that 'we get valid discovery or verified critical thinking' (*HWT*, pp. 81–2). The process is thus a *dynamic* one, one which emphasizes continuous 'movement' back and forth between induction and deduction such that it is possible to draw an inference.[27] Importantly, though, the experiment which the critical thinker carries out is one that is directed and controlled: Dewey's verbs are active, emphasizing the ways in which 'we' are in charge of the process. The movement inherent in an active thought process, however, is supplied not by the evidence itself, which, naturally, is static; instead, it is supplied by the activity of the enquirer (the scientist or experimenter) who carries out the tasks; the mind which puts the various ingredients together decides upon the order in which to do so, and presses them into the shape of his or her own choosing. To be able to balance induction and deduction in order to arrive at a reasonable conclusion thus requires 'invention and initiative' (*Democracy and Education* (hereafter *DE*), pp. 75–8). In this way, the activity which the critical thinker carries out is practical in the colloquial sense that it entails being adaptable; it requires being capable of thinking on one's feet and being self-sufficient. But the critical thinker is also practical in the alternative sense of being capable of lateral and not merely rectilinear mental activity: a critical thinker must be capable of making believe, of using his or her imagination, of being creative – capable of plotting an unchartered course which is devised spontaneously, rather than adhering to preordained rules.

The instruments which the critical thinker uses to carry out these tests are *ideas*:

> We stop and think, we *de-fer* conclusion in order to

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> *in-fer* more thoroughly. In this process of being only conditionally accepted, accepted only for examination, *meanings become ideas. That is to say, an idea is a meaning that is tentatively entertained, formed, and used with reference to its fitness to decide a perplexing situation, – a meaning used as a tool of judgment.* (*HWT*, p. 108)

An idea, then, for Dewey, is a provisional judgement – one which is mobile rather than static, still under consideration rather than fixed. As Dewey puts it, a 'true conception is a *moving* idea' (*HWT*, p. 213). The concept of motion is thus inscribed in Dewey's understanding of what ideas are: 'tools in a reflective examination' (*HWT*, p. 109). As such, they are not the end in themselves, but a means of arriving at an end: an idea is a 'method of evading, circumventing, or surmounting through reflection obstacles that otherwise would have to be attacked by brute force' (p. 110). This means that ideas must be particular; they must derive from specific circumstances rather than vague, approximate generalities. ' "Glittering generalities" ', Dewey remarks, 'are inert because they are spurious' (*HWT*, p. 213). This is what Dewey seeks to emphasize in his repeated use of the term *practical* (the term also emphasized, for much the same reasons, by I. A. Richards): that critical thought handles the specific, localized, real details immediately in front of us (*ideas*), and not the abstract and insubstantial generalities which one might imagine, hope or dream to be the case (*ideals*).[28] Equally, the term 'practical' emphasizes that it is not 'the target but *hitting* the target' which is 'the end in view' (*DE*, p. 112). While Dewey repeatedly insists throughout his work that the overriding end of all intellectual inquiry is 'a delight in thinking for the sake of thinking' (*HWT*, p. 141), he also recognizes that

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the ‘need of thinking to accomplish something beyond thinking is more potent than thinking for its own sake’ (*HWT*, p. 40). That is to say, we are likely to be galvanized to set ourselves the task of getting to the bottom of a mystery by an immediate and perhaps utilitarian incentive, even though the gain in abstract terms may, ultimately, outweigh the localized gain which motivates the thought process in the first place. It is for this reason that Dewey proposes that if critical thought is to participate in progress, be its contribution to individual understanding or to the understanding of society at large (and central to Dewey’s political philosophy is the notion that it achieves the latter through the former), it must be harnessed and concertedly pressed into service. The critical thinker must be not merely active, but moreover, purposeful: ‘the ground or basis for a belief is deliberately sought and its adequacy to support the belief examined’ (*HWT*, pp. 1–2). The critical thinker is one who is in charge of the direction of his or her thoughts. That is to say, raw data is considered not in a haphazard fashion, but in an orderly manner which is dictated by a conscious end. ‘To foresee a terminus of an act is to have a basis upon which to observe, to select, and to order objects and our own capacities. To do these things means to have a mind – for mind is precisely intentional purposeful activity controlled by perception of facts and their relationships to one another’ (*DE*, p. 109). As well as being inventive, then, the critical thinker must be methodical: capable of shaping ideas not merely into a sequence, but into ‘a *con*sequence’ (*HWT*, p. 2).

Critical thinking is therefore not something which can just occur spontaneously and effortlessly. To acquire the capacity for mental orderliness which Dewey’s philosophy

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seeks to place at the heart of education, careful preparation is necessary: ‘only systematic regulation of the conditions under which observations are made and severe discipline of the habits of entertaining suggestions can secure a decision that one type of belief is vicious and the other sound’ (*HWT*, p. 21). This is not to say that ‘routine’ is required; in fact, routine ‘marks an arrest of growth’ (*DE*, p. 57). What is instead required is a kind of *training* which fosters stamina and perseverance, even in the face of difficulties. The key thing is not to give up, but to have the resolve to keep attempting alternative ways forward, aspiring for ever greater familiarity with the material at hand. In his essay ‘The School and the Life of the Child’, Dewey identifies the key behavioural traits which the critical thinker must acquire, through continual and deliberate practice, as: ‘ingenuity, patience, persistence [and] alertness’ (*School and the Life of the Child* (hereafter *SLC*), p. 37). There is thus an irony here; in order to secure the necessary conditions for the free play of ideas, concerted effort and controlled work is required. To ensure the liberation which critical thinking brings, the conditions under which that thinking is carried out must be carefully restricted. This brings out another important dimension of Dewey’s notion of the practical as that which is *practised*: as that which has been fine-tuned and developed through deliberate, repeated and accumulative exercise. In this far from haphazard way, the thinker makes him- or herself a skilled expert.

Critical thinking, then, has a temporal dimension. Not only does the honing of the practical skills requisite for critical thinking take time, but, since critical thinking itself is a *process*, it is an activity which takes place over time. Dewey repeatedly stresses the need for deceleration – for

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ideas on contemporary theories of mind.[30] Dewey does not elaborate on what he has in mind by that which he designates as ‘unconscious’, but, like Sigmund Freud, he recognizes the prevalence and significance of mental impulses which appear to originate outside of our sphere of direct influence. For Dewey, as for Freud, while such impulses, in their unpredictability, complicate the process of critical thinking, it is in their very inevitability that they are also valuable. Furthermore, Dewey suggests that the ideas which arrive in our conscious minds, seemingly from nowhere, may in fact already have been subject to unconscious testing, and that therefore we ought to allow time for such testing to take place. Prematurely to impose conscious order on a mental process which is being worked out unconsciously will result in contrived results. For Dewey, the optimum scenario is one in which first an idea is explored ‘by more unconscious and tentative methods’, and then it is more consciously reviewed and tested, such that it can be conceived in precise and definite terms (*HWT*, p. 113). The process of critical thinking is thus fundamentally *risky*, given that it involves temporarily being prepared to surrender control to unconscious and seemingly undirected impulses. However, the risks of attempting to solve the problem far outweigh the risks of not doing so. Indeed, such is Dewey’s contempt for persisting in erroneous beliefs – uncritical thinking – that he suggests that ignorance is preferable: ‘a being that cannot understand at all is at least protected from *mis*-understandings’ (*HWT*, p. 129). For Dewey, misunderstanding invariably derives from ‘vagueness’ (p. 129) and ‘ambiguity’ (p. 130), since ‘vague meanings are too gelatinous to offer matter for analysis, and too pulpy to afford support to other beliefs. They

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evade testing and responsibility.' Indeed, 'vagueness disguises the unconscious mixing together of different meanings, and facilitates the substitution of one meaning for another, and covers up the failure to have any precise meaning at all' (*HWT*, p. 130). It is important to note that the kind of 'ambiguity' which Dewey has in mind here is qualitatively different from the kind of uncertainty or doubt – problem – which gives rise to critical thinking, particularly if we seek to pursue the potential literary parallels which can be drawn out here. Both critical thinking and literary criticism are generated, as has been observed already, by a variety of curiosity which derives from uncertainty. Uncertainty as to how to interpret the patterns which emerge from the different signifiers in play is different, however, from uncertainty deriving from clumsy or inaccurate reading of the signifiers in the first place. Here, as in the practice of literary criticism, even where one might suggest, as Dewey does, that there is no end to the process of critical thinking, since critical thinking simply generates further critical thinking, it is still possible to *mis*read by failing to pay sufficient care to the available signifiers.

The riskiness of critical thinking is thrown into even greater relief when one appreciates that genuine critical thought is always *original*; that is to say, it involves creating, and not following precedent – exploring intellectual territory that is as yet unchartered by oneself, irrespective of whether others might have been there before. Dewey writes:

> All thinking whatsoever – so be it *is* thinking – contains a phase of originality. This originality does not imply that the student's conclusion varies from the conclusions of others, much less that it is a

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> radically novel conclusion. This originality is not incompatible with large use of materials and suggestions contributed by others. Originality means personal interest in the question, personal initiative in turning over the suggestions furnished by others, and sincerity in following them out to a tested conclusion. Literally, the phrase "Think for yourself" is tautological; any thinking is thinking for one's self. (*HWT*, p. 198)

The preoccupation here with 'personal interest' has a direct analogue in literary theories which foreground the reader's interest (often, following Richards, envisaged as an *emotional* interest) as a central driver in determining what he or she finds in the literary text. Similarly, literary criticism has, throughout the centuries, been highly concerned with debates about originality, and the question of whether a critical reading must be innovative, or whether it may, as Alexander Pope so memorably put it, convey 'what oft was thought but ne'r so well expressed' in *his* 'Essay on Criticism' (1711), has recurred throughout the history of literary theory. Specifically, however, Dewey implies that it is precisely 'personal interest' which makes critical thinking 'original', and this idea has a very particular resonance with the kind of practical criticism advocated by I. A. Richards, whose own evidence collected in his book of that name demonstrates the unique perspectives which different readers bring to bear on a text, and gives weight to the idea that a reading is inevitably original by virtue of its origination in a different reader. Since the judgement reached is arrived at independently, it entails *taking responsibility*, with all the political, moral and social implications which such a notion brings into play. Or, to give the same idea slightly different emphasis, since as

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