

# The Embodied Child

Readings in Children's Literature  
and Culture



*Edited by*  
*Roxanne Harde and Lydia Kokkola*

Children's Literature and Culture



# The Embodied Child

*The Embodied Child: Readings in Children's Literature and Culture* is an innovative and timely collection of essays that offers rich analyses of children's bodies as they are constructed in literature and popular culture. In this ground-breaking work, editors Roxanne Harde and Lydia Kokkola have brought together some of the most renowned scholars in childhood studies who each delve into the complex ways children and their physical form are represented literature. Each chapter introduces readers to the subject through a distinctive lens, whether it be queer, racial, gendered, or those that are less often discussed, this book makes a long-needed contribution to discussions of the body and the child.

**Roxanne Harde** is Professor of English and Associate Dean (Research) at the Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta, Canada.

**Lydia Kokkola** is Head of English and Education at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden.

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To Bristol, the busiest little body a grandma could hope for.  
—Roxanne

In memory of my parents, Jean and David, whose bodies  
created my own.  
—Lydia

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# Acknowledgments

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# The Embodied Child

## An Introduction

*Lydia Kokkola*

The English word *body* stems from the Saxon word *bodig* meaning *vessel*: a carrier or container. Embedded within the etymology of the word are the ideas that the body is neutral and that what it contains—the soul, the spirit, mind, call it what you will—is both separate and of more value. This divide, so clearly articulated by Rene Descartes that it is often attributed to him, despite its older origins, informs many aspects of thought and behavior and is, consequently, deeply embedded in Indo-European languages. Academic studies of the body and embodiment typically begin by pointing out that the division is a fallacy: the body is *not* neutral, and it cannot be separated from the ways in which we think, perceive, and inhabit our environment. In their excellent *The Body: A Reader*, Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, for instance, note that this particular dualism is very Western and suggest that the reason Chinese medicine is more holistic is quite simply because the Chinese do not regard the body and the mind as a dualism. Instead they contrast the heart (the site, not of love, but of cognition and virtue) with the body (associated with emotion and turmoil), a dichotomy which, Fraser and Greco claim, “does not involve a general subordination of the body to the mind” (22). We also question the divide, even as we acknowledge its ubiquity, and with this collection we bring together a range of approaches to examine representations of a particular kind of body: the child’s body.

Maria Nikolajeva identified the “return to the body” and more generally “the material turn” as a recent trend in the scholarship on children’s literature, and posits that this trend has arisen partly in response to an extended focus on construction and representation (“Recent Trends”). The approach she espouses, cognitive criticism, was initiated by work in linguistics that revealed how the metaphors we use expose patterns of thought (Lakoff and Johnson). The language used to describe children also reveals an implicit set of ideas about this category of human: the word *child* is gender neutral—suggesting *it* would be the correct pronoun to use in reference—although the child is not an object. Or is “it”? Is the child merely an object (a vessel) until “it” is gendered, and thus filled with meaning? Finnish is one of the few languages that does



not have gendered pronouns, which would suggest that thinking outside gendered binaries would be easier, but in practice Finnish newborns are rapidly referred to using terms of endearment that reveal their biological sex, thereby ensuring that their bodies are easily understood and categorized by society. In short, gender is imposed even when the language does not directly support such classification.

Tensions surrounding the term *child* are also evident in the very name of our field. Where Anglophone scholars are generally comfortable with the use of *children's literature* to cover the entire range of books intended for readers from birth to adulthood, scholars from other language backgrounds need to add a specific marker for adolescents, for example, *Kinder und Jugend Litteratur* in German [Literature for Children and Youth]. Theorizations of different categories of non-adults have increased the use of such terminology in works published in English as well. A problem all scholars in our field share, however, is how to describe the other literature: the majority of literary works that are *not* intended to be read by a young person. Among ourselves, we often use the term *adult literature*, but the sexual connotations of that term tend to cause mirth when used in more general contexts. *Literature for adults* and, Nikolajeva's preferred term, *mainstream literature* provide less amusing alternatives, but even these are used only in contexts where one is endeavoring to contrast the two types of literature as though they were a dichotomy. Part of the thinking behind this collection was to examine the way in which the child's body belongs to what linguists would call a marked category—that is, a category that differs from the norm. In the same way that whiteness is deemed the norm in the context of racial terminology and heterosexuality is deemed the norm in the context of sexual desire, the adult body is the norm by which children's bodies are judged ... and found wanting.

If the child's body is a container, then it is a vessel that adults fill with their cultural values, with skills, thoughts, and emotions that will create a better future, as though the vessel was neutral or empty until filled in this way. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz criticizes the tradition of regarding "the human subject as a being made up of two dichotomously opposed characteristics: mind and body, thought and extension, reason and passion, psychology and biology" (3). She then provides a helpful overview of such practices from Plato to the end of the twentieth century which has informed our own summary below. For Grosz, this dualistic thinking is problematic because it links masculinity with the mind and femininity with the body. An analogous situation exists for children whose developing, unstable bodies are contrasted with the seemingly stable bodies of adults. From the lack of control over bodily fluids in infancy to the lack of control over responses to hormones in adolescence, the youthful body invites adult concern, and the desire to control and socialize young people into socially acceptable ways of taming bodily

desires. In this situation, adults are associated with the mind, reason, and control while the child's body is conjured as a site of uncontrolled desire, illogicality, and passion. As a result, "children's literature and culture has long been invested in constructions of and instructions about the body of the child," sometimes at the expense of the physical child who reads the literature (Hager 18). Nevertheless, no book-length study examining the representation of the child's body in literature, film, and other cultural expressions or the embodiedness of the reading process has yet appeared. This collection endeavors to fill these lacunae.

In thinking through the varied ways of conceiving the body, Fraser and Greco suggest three major positions: the body as object (something we *have*), the body as subject (something we *are*), and as performance (something we *become*) (4). Broadly speaking, these positions have arisen in that historical order. Descartes (1596–1650) radicalized the distinction between body and mind, but as Jack Zipes reminds us, the term "radical" indicates a return to the root (ix–x). Mind-Body dualism can be traced back to antiquity. In her discussion of Plato's *Cratylus*, Grosz points out that even he attributes the notion of the body as a vessel back to his own ancients, the Orphic priests (47). For Plato, man was a slave in the service of the body for "if we do obtain any leisure from the body's claims and turn to some line of inquiry, the body intrudes once more on our investigations, interrupting, disturbing, distracting, and preventing us from getting a glimpse of the truth" (Plato, *Phaedo*, in Lupton 2). Moreover, "Plato sees matter itself as a denigrated and imperfect version of the Idea. The body is a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason or mind. For Plato, it was evident that reason should rule over the body and over the irrational or appetitive functions of the soul," and this belief continues to dominate Western thinking even today (Grosz 5).

This separation of body and soul is frequently celebrated in Western religious practice, one of the most obvious examples being the celebration of Holy Communion within Christianity. The painful rupture as the church was split between Catholicism and Protestantism in the sixteenth century focused greatly on the quality of embodiment, as the church fathers debated the concept of transubstantiation. Leaders of the church questioned whether or not the bread and wine blessed during the service actually became the body and blood of Christ or whether it merely stood as a metaphor for His sacrificed body. In both services, however, the members of the congregation, to this day, refer to themselves as the collective *body* of the church as they share their spiritual practices. And in all sects within the Christian churches, the human body is designated as having less value than the spiritual. Bodily appetites, whether sexual or nutritional, are deemed base, while desires for abstract or spiritual goals are deemed to be of greater value. Many religious practices reflect this dichotomy by positing that subjecting the body to certain deprivations (such as abstinence, specific forms of clothing, or restricted foods) can

promote spiritual development. The underlying assumption is that the ability to control the body will lead to greater spiritual and/or intellectual development. The body is an object: something the mind *has*, and thus the mind can control the body. To return to Grosz, these practices pave the way for the body to become a commodity. The body “must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production or constitution ... it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product” (Grosz 23). Children’s bodies are no exception. As Jack Zipes explains,

It is one of the worst kept secrets in the world that, within the past fifty years or so, we have reconfigured our children to act and behave as commodities and agents of consumerism, and we continue to invent ways to incorporate them flawlessly into socio-economic systems that compromise their integrity and make them complicit in criminal behavior such as mutual economic exploitation.

(27)

If we accept Grosz’s claim that the body is the most significant cultural product, then the valorization of youth has resulted in children’s bodies becoming one of the most highly contested cultural products.

This separation of body and soul—for all its dominance and commodification—has constantly been subjected to critique. The notion of the body as a subject—something we *are*—is perhaps most clearly articulated in the classification systems that emerged in the eighteenth century. The Linnean system, developed by Carl Linnaeus, was an endeavor to produce a universal system that could transcend cultures and languages so as to enable people around the world to refer to their lived environment in the same way. The categories in the Linnaean system are generated primarily on the basis of visual identification. It is a hierarchical system that begins with three kingdoms (animal, mineral, vegetable) that are divided into genera (*genus* in the singular) and thence to species. Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* (1735) divided human beings into four species: *Europæus albus* (white European), *Americanus rubescens* (red American), *Asiaticus fuscus* (brown Asian), and *Africanus Niger* (black African), a classification that has been blown apart on ethnographic, ethical, and DNA grounds, although Linnaeus’s ground-breaking assertion that humans are animals and are members of the genus *mammal* species *primate* still holds today. In its day, the Linnaean system was valued not just for its seemingly clear classification of physical appearance, but also because it reflected the belief that behaviors are inherent. Linnaeus highlighted race primarily, making it unsurprising that critiques of the assumption that body and destiny are interwoven have come from scholars challenging institutionalized racism. The Linnaean system also made sex central to our understanding of the body: Linnaeus

institutionalized the use of *male* and *female* as metaphors to describe the reproduction of plants, based on the essentialist assumption that sex is a neutral fact, a defining feature of what a person or plant *is*.

This conviction that the body reflects an inner self—who we *are*—reveals itself in contexts as diverse as the valuing of white-collar work such as academia over the blue-collar work of farmers and builders who provide essentials such as food and shelter. It is also evident in the prestige given to evidence of a lack of physical labor such as high heels, manicured nails, and smooth hand skin. Sara Ahmed uses an anecdote about a time when she was stopped by the Australian police at the age of fourteen for no obvious reason (she was simply walking) to concretize her discussion of how skin tone—*chromotism*—is used to divide people into categories (58–60). At first the White policemen thought she was Aboriginal (Black like them) and when she refuted this, they concluded that she was suntanned (White like me). Ahmed's skin tone did not change during the discussion, but the way in which her body was read affected the way in which her supposed offence was perceived. Once her body was read as suntanned (that she had copious amounts of leisure time to spend in the sun rather than being engaged in outdoor labor), her behavior was deemed less significant than when her skin tone was (correctly) read as a physical marker of her racial heritage (albeit not the correct racial heritage).

This belief that “breeding will out,” implicit in the racist responses to Ahmed's body, is clearly visible in adoption stories (Singley; Nelson, *Little Strangers*). A consistent feature of these stories, from Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Princess* (1905) to picturebooks addressing contemporary issues such as cross-cultural adoption like Allen Say's *Al-lison* (1997), is the idea that heritage is carried through the body. This idea of heritage even spills over into areas such as the assumption that the children of heterosexual parents are simultaneously assumed to be asexual and becoming-heterosexuals. This bizarre combination, Stephen Bruhm and Natasha Hurley argue, “has some very queer effects. Childhood itself is afforded a modicum of queerness when the people worry more about how the child turns out than about how the child exists as a child” (xiv). The notion of sex as a determinant of behavior, like notions about race, remains endemic in both children's literature and the wider cultural context in which it appears.

Overt racism, sexism, and homophobia are certainly not the only ways in which our bodies can invite hostile reactions, although these aspects of the embodied self are often entwined with each other and with other prejudices such as fat prejudice. Beth Younger examines how young adult (YA) fiction reinforces cultural assumptions and social constraints, resulting in a policing of the young female body into conforming to patriarchal values. Large and obese bodies frequently invoke hostility, and so tend to be filtered out of advertising, unless

they are used for comic effect. Hager and Lindsey Averill also note the absence of fat bodies in children's literature and the negative biases in the few that exist (20). Studies show that negative bias against obese bodies is primarily drawn along moral lines, using public health discourse to justify increasingly questionable conclusions (Gilman). Since even health professionals adopt the rhetoric of moral panic over scientific discourse, reading the size of the body as a measure of subjectivity (who we *are*) can have grave implications such as access to appropriate health care (Teachman and Brownell) or the likelihood of bullying: fat children are more likely to be bullied than slim children (Weinstock and Krehbiel).

The ways in which bodies are adorned also invite specific types of reactions. Reactions toward Muslim women wearing (or failing to wear) veils in various different societies have attracted a great deal of attention in the news. Fashion magazines are also keen to help us value people who choose certain forms of adornment over others, and make-over reality TV shows draw large audiences. Body modifications in the form of plastic surgery, tattooing, piercing, and so on, have become increasingly mainstream. What all these diverse ways of reading bodies share is an assumption that the body is a reflection of the inner self: it is something we are. The problem with this approach, as Coupland and Gwyn astutely observe, is that "If I am to be judged exclusively on the evidence of my body, how do I reconcile this with the person my body denies me from being?" (5). This paradox lies at the heart of Cartesian dualism.

However, there are areas where the notion of the body as *the* determining factor in identity has been largely unpacked. The Victorian notion of the "criminal classes" is a point in case. For the Victorians, it was self-evident that some people were drawn to crime because of their biological inheritance rather than social factors such as poverty or discrimination (Beier). Attitudes toward these underdogs began to wane toward the end of the nineteenth century, partly spurred on by social mobility proffered by the "new" worlds, and more specifically by the success of the colonizing project in Australia. Nevertheless, when the French scholar, Michel Foucault, picked up the idea of recidivism in *Discipline and Punish*, he demonstrated how those punished by incarceration in prison continue to be *marked* or *branded*:

after purging the convicts by means of their sentence, [the penal system] continues to follow them by a whole series of 'brandings' (a surveillance that was once *de jure* and which is today *de facto*; the police record that has taken the place of the convict's passport) and which thus pursues as 'delinquent' someone who has acquitted himself of his punishment as an offender.

As a result, Foucault claims, former prisoners continue to be excluded from the workplace and thus channeled back into crime and thence prison. Throughout his discussion, Foucault clarifies the processes by which the penal system *fabricates* criminality (“delinquency” in his phrasing), thereby creating an “institutional product.” For our purposes, Foucault’s ideas heralded a series of critical tools that could be used to negotiate Fraser and Greco’s third category: the body as performance (something we *become*) (4).

Fraser and Greco’s terminology comes from feminism. When Simone de Beauvoir critiqued biological determinism in her influential statement that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” she highlighted the role of the social environment on gender and, thus, body politics (295). The body, in this view, is never neutral: it is socialized into being. Judith Butler’s contribution to the field in the 1990s with the notion of *performativity* highlighted the ways in which gendered behaviors are *learned* behaviors. In her preface to *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler describes the struggles she had staying “disciplined” on the task of considering materiality of the body: “I proved resistant to discipline. Inevitably I began to consider that perhaps this resistance to fixing the subject was essential to the matter at hand” (ix). Her choice of the term “discipline” is a knowing nod toward Foucault’s work on discipline and the body, and more specifically the way in which “state apparatuses such as medicine, schools, psychiatry and the law have been able to define and delimit individuals’ activities, punishing those who violate the established boundaries and maintaining the productivity and political usefulness of bodies” (Coupland and Gwyn 3). As Foucault’s work has also clarified, the role of state apparatuses is important in initiating forms of control, but they function most powerfully and efficiently once they have been internalized.

In concert with Foucault’s clarification of the socializing power of institutionalized discourse, critics like Butler celebrated the liberatory potential of escaping the prison house of the body. But in doing so, they reinstated the belief that the mind and body could be separated as a necessary precondition. The child’s body, which changes more obviously than the adult’s body, is perhaps even more subject to this kind of political combat than any other body at any other age. The child’s body, to an even greater extent than the adult body, is “an unfinished biological and sociological phenomenon which is changed by its participation in society” (Shilling 5). Histories of childhood along with studies of the poetics of childhood, highlight the movement from believing that the child’s soul is pure until it is corrupted by bodily wills to beliefs that by curbing bodily desires the child can be cleansed of original sin (Ariés; Natov, and others). Both positions assume that the mind and body are not one. As a result, children’s bodies are policed into conforming not only to gendered, ethnically defined, class-appropriate behaviors, they

are also being scolded for age-inappropriate behavior to a greater extent than any other age group (Kokkola 22).

In her discussion of the material turn in the study of children's literature, Nikolajeva emphasizes the embodied nature of knowing and remembering, and of affects, empathy, and perception ("Recent Trends"). The synapses in the brain, the chemicals released, and the physicality of the senses have been brought into the study of literature to counter-balance the mind-body separation that flourishes in studies of construction and representation. This return to the body does not undermine the significance of constructivist approaches, but it does demand that we consider the embodiedness of the reader and of the fictional child in the literature. This insistence on keeping the body in focus is captured by Martin Heidegger in his concept *Dasein*: the experience of being-in-the-world (59). If the mind and body are united, as they are within the notion of *Dasein*, neither can dominate. *Dasein* thus rejects both the notions of the body as object and as identity.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the key feature of Heidegger's *Dasein* is insistence that the body is an intentional part of the subject. The body contributes to the capacity to know: experience and knowledge combine to form the compound experience-knowledge. As he explains,

I never know things in their totality, but always from an embodied perspective. Because I am a body, I can only see things from a certain perspective, and yet, because I am a body, I can also experience the thing as being more than that partial perspective. The thing exists "in itself" because it resists my knowing it with total certainty. However, the thing exists "for me" because I always experience it in relation to my own body.

(153)

The examples Merleau-Ponty uses to illustrate this point are a table and chair: objects that each body will "know" in a different way as they physically interact. From this basis, he further reveals how this embodied knowledge forms part of our thinking. Common experiences of this include the automaticity of one's hands moving about a familiar keyboard as one types ideas: the hand, brain, and eye form a seemingly single unit of thought. Compare such flow with the awkwardness of working on an unfamiliar keyboard, especially one intended for a different language, when thoughts are interrupted by the mechanics of working one's hands. Another common experience is that of arriving in a room knowing that one intended to do something, but having to retrace one's steps in order to remember what it was. These everyday experiences prompted Merleau-Ponty to claim that whenever we reflect intellectually on experience, we have to go back to the lived world of our experience prior to that reflection (xxiv). He introduces the concept of the *body-subject* (which reflects

the embodiedness of thought) as an alternative to Descartes' *cogito* (which expresses a disembodied form of thought), thereby critiquing the possibility of objective thought. Rejecting Edmund Husserl's suggestion that "all consciousness is consciousness of something" (13), Merleau-Ponty argues that the world is not merely an extension of our own minds, but also the body can be viewed as simply an object or a material entity that exists independently of the perceiver.

The idea implicit in the notion of the body-subject, albeit not always attributed to Merleau-Ponty, has recently been brought to the fore in studies of readers. In many contexts, the bodies of reading children are largely ignored: little attention is paid to problems arising from the poor ergonomics of school chairs and desks, whereas the tests of abstract forms of knowledge, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, make front-page news. The increasing presence of digital tools in the classroom has attracted more attention to the reading body, and the physicality of the reading body has been brought to the fore. Anne Mangen and her colleagues at the University of Stavanger (Norway), for instance, suggest that differences in how readers respond to texts in digital form versus texts on screens can be attributed to the ways in which readers use their bodies (Mangen *Digitisation*, Mangen *Body*, and Mangen and Schilhab). Margaret Mackey has also examined narrative transportation in young adult readers' responses to paper novels, film, and video games (*Narrative Pleasure; Across Media*), and in this volume she returns to the topic to examine the role of the body in this process. Mackey also endeavors to capture the Dasein of reading experience through autobiography. She contrasts the frequency with which we consider the situatedness of the author's life when interpreting a work of fiction with the paucity of such considerations in relation to the situatedness of the reader. By using her own life as a reader as her starting point, Mackey illustrates how paying "attention to individual readers' social, cultural, and historical contexts" can contribute to our understanding of how children's investments in their own bodies affect their capacity to enter the fictional world ("Embedded Embodied" 289). Another way in which the reading body has been brought to the fore in the last decade has been through cognitive criticism. These approaches draw on recent advancements in functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology, which allow researchers noninvasive access to information about how the brain processes information. In her useful summary of the implications of this kind of approach to the study of children's literature, *Reading for Learning*, Maria Nikolajeva notes how these approaches allow us to understand differences between adult and child responses to texts. To sum up these varied approaches to the reading body, it seems fair to claim that reader response criticism in the twenty-first century primarily differs from 1980s' reader response criticism in its focus on the body-subject instead of the mind-text.



For all this celebration of the body-subject in research on readers, we find it telling that *none* of the literary works, films, or other material gathered from four continents and examined in this collection present the mind and body as inseparable. Only in the section on the reading body, where the authors' chapters discuss the way in which the reader's body forms part of the meaning-making process, do we find an inseparability of mind and body. Sometimes, it would seem, literature cannot imagine reality. Instead, fictional engagements with embodiment continue to be dominated by the three major positions (object, subject, and performance). In each case, the body is primarily regarded as something that is *seen* even though it is also the means by which we *see*. This tension is particularly emphasized in adult relationships with children's bodies, since adults must care for the child's body. This is most obvious during infancy but adults must also guide adolescents through puberty and the onset of sexual desire. Even when children are capable of dealing with their bodily functions independently, expectations about behavior are still gauged from observations of the body. For this reason, it seems reasonable to generalize that adults' responses to the child are, to a great extent, governed by their responses to the act of seeing.

*Scopophilia*—the pleasure of looking at the body—has, since John Berger's seminal *Ways of Seeing*, largely been used to describe the ways in which the male gaze affects female behavior, sexuality, and even the shape of the body. Using phrasing that echoes W. E. B. Du Bois' description of "double-consciousness," Berger explains,

To be born a woman has been to be born within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the expense of the woman's self being split in two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself.... From earliest childhood, she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.... One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relations of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

(47–48)

More recently, figures such as the metrosexual and awareness of the pressures of social media have indicated that men are not as oblivious to influences of gaze as Berger implies, yet gaze is consistently defined as being male. Even when women look at each other and appraise one

another's appearance, feminist critics such as Laura Mulvey would have us view such looking as masculine: women supposedly survey themselves through the male gaze. Although scholarly work is greatly indebted to scholars such as Berger and Mulvey for drawing our attention to the highly gendered nature of gaze, here, however, we draw attention to the primacy of the *adult* gaze and the impact it has on the formation of the child's understanding of themselves and their place in world.

The adult gaze is sanctioned in ways that the male gaze is not, and rightly so. The pleasure adults take in gazing at their newborn offspring is necessary to infant survival. The reward of the mutual gaze, a smile, or a laugh can compensate for many of the tedious aspects of caring for an infant's every bodily need:

However, at some unspecified point, adult gaze becomes unnecessary to the child's well-being, although the desire to gaze may linger on in the adult. When [the] gaze no longer serves the well-being of the child, the nature of the adult desire to gaze [should be] called into question.

(Kokkola 26)

The act of looking can cause change in the one who is perceived, potentially against his or her will.

Since the child's body is constantly subjected to the adult gaze, children learn to understand their bodies through this perspective. One of the aims of this collection will be to uncover images of the child's body that are primarily intended for the adult gaze, but which feed into the way children learn to understand themselves. Anne Higonnet's germinal study, *Pictures of Innocence*, alerted scholars to the way in which images of children intended for adult consumption evoked a particular notion of innocence. The children in the nineteenth-century paintings she discusses are lost in a world of play: their eye-gaze averted, they are painted as though they were caught unawares. Their games, however, reveal their own interest in the adult world as they play at becoming a bride or working the fields. The few children who do meet the viewers' gaze are dressed in oversized versions of adult clothing which stresses, literally as well as figuratively, that they are not quite ready to fill their parents' boots. Higonnet notes how the commercialization of these pictures of innocence impacted on expectations about appropriately innocent behavior. Children today learn to view their bodies within a consumerist environment, where their bodies are both commodities and consumers. The result, as Kelly Hager explains, is that "children's culture reveals an overwhelming interest in describing, depicting, and reproducing images of the body in order to educate, orient, and delight the child consumer" (17). Hager's observation addresses the culture that adults provide for

children, but this is intimately connected to the way in which children's bodies are consumed by adults.

Derrida distinguishes between "the seeing animal" and "the seen animal" (383) to suggest that the seeing animal not only has a point of view regarding the human, it also holds the point of view of the absolute other, as we will never know exactly what the animal thinks when it perceives the human. While avoiding connections between the child and the animal, the argument Derrida puts forth adumbrates some of the concerns this collection wishes to address. The "seen child" is the child presented for adult consumption, the image that encourages adults to buy products or take up causes. The "seeing child" watches the adult with judging eyes: no wonder Higonnet found so many of the children in the images she examined averted their gaze! The seeing child also watches the adult watching him or her: the child sees the images of childhood the adult desires.

The commercialization of the child's body in contexts as seemingly disparate as raising money for charitable endeavors to the selling of home insurance exposes the multifarious ways in which the child's body is *anything but* a neutral vessel. We situate our work within the larger cultural project of the return to the body. Although the theories that underpin this recent move can be traced back as far as the Renaissance, we identify this book as an expression of the increased urgency of understanding the limits and limitations of the body in the posthuman era. In *The Body and Society*, Brian Turner identifies the emergence of a "somatic" society—that is, "a society within which our major political and moral problems are expressed through the conduit of the human body" (6). Labor, leisure, and consumption are central features of the somatic society, and our value systems are heavily derived from making these visible through the body. Simple examples, such as the shift from valuing untanned skin in the nineteenth century (revealing that this is not a body engaged in outdoor labor) to valuing tanned skin in the twentieth century (revealing that this is a body that can afford the luxury of leisure), illustrate the veracity of Turner's claim and situate the birth of the somatic society in a much longer history.

Nevertheless, there appears to be a greater sense of urgency surrounding discussions of the body in the first part of the twenty-first century, and we connect this move to posthumanism. In her work on cyborgs, Donna Haraway asks us to reflect on the point at which alterations to the human body mean that we cease to be human. By using technology, such as writing, humans have extended their powers of memory and thought. People can communicate beyond the immediate environment through Skype, and can also kill animal and vegetable life at a great distance. Many of us require glasses or contact lenses to navigate our world, and we also live chemically enhanced lives. These latter extensions of human capacities beyond the natural limits of the body are typically deemed

irrelevant, as though they did not change anything about some poorly defined essence of what constitutes a human being. That said, medical technology appears to be developing faster than society's capacity to integrate the implications of these possibilities. Although few would consider their reading glasses to change their experience of being a human, many feel uneasy about the transfer of living tissues and organisms. The birth of Louise Brown, the first "test-tube" baby, in 1978, using techniques we consider commonplace today, was the tipping point that provoked the need to reconsider the limits of the body and the powers of humans to change those limits. The emergence of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in farming shortly afterward created anxiety about our relations to other species. Rosi Braidotti, for instance, argues that treating living matter, such as the blood used in transplants and plant extracts, as commercial products assumes that all organs are the same, a practice she considers perverse (55–104). Humans are trying to use science to resolve existential problems such as the fear of death, but the technology is developing faster than human's capacity to assimilate the implications. The posthuman body is a site of fear.

Within the study of literature, the turn to the body parallels scientific progress, or as Fraser and Greco would say: "the body has become a crucial site for rethinking the scope and the limits of the social scientific imagination" (2). Technological advancements are often imagined first in fantasy, especially dystopian fiction, and then become reality. The keyboard used by the eponymous chimp-human protagonist of Peter Dickinson's novel *Eva* (1988), enables Eva to communicate through language despite being "trapped" in a chimpanzee's body. It closely resembles the technology used by Stephen Hawking to communicate while "trapped" in his body by amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Note how the phrasing reflects Cartesian dualism: people are deemed to be "trapped" in their bodies, but bodies are never considered to be "trapped" in the mind. Once again, literature appears to be ahead of science: some of the works examined in this collection present the youthful body as being "trapped" by the mind.

In literature for young readers, fears about the limits of the body have traditionally been expressed through the seeming fluidity between the child and animal. In her article on "Beautiful Beasts," Marina Warner observes that "Within today's myths of human nature,... the child and beast don't stand at opposite ends, but are intertwined, continuous, inseparable. And yet they're in polar opposition to one another, too" (63). Warner's observation highlights the way in which seemingly incompatible beliefs in the mind-body split can coexist with notions of being and performativity. The child-animal blend celebrated in teddy bear hats and the extensive use of anthropomorphic animal characters in children's literature has largely lost the sense of fear of the animalistic body we see in early versions of fairy tales about, for instance, animal bridegrooms.

In recent years, the fear of the child's "animalism" is expressed through cyborg figures. Some of these, such as the best-selling *Animorph* series, continue to use animal imagery, but increasingly we see technology replacing the animal as a site of fear. Closely aligned with widespread beliefs that our children are "digital natives" who understand technology better than we adults do is a fear of technological cyborgs. Novels such as Neil Schusterman's *Unwind* series (2007–2014), Kevin Brook's *iBoy* (2010), and M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002) all express this technophobic response to the seamless integration of digital natives and their technology.

In short, posthumanism has placed new demands on the somatic society. As Coupland and Gwyn explain,

The body has new work to do, symbolic and social as well as physical. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the self seems above all a commodified self; the person is equated with their bodily form, and in control of their appearance via the body *project*.

(4)

The term "body project" is taken from Turner, and refers to constant work involved in maintaining a socially desirable appearance through grooming, exercise, fashion, and so on. In recent years, social media has increased these pressures as one is expected to display a body that reflects individual achievements within the body project. In other words, the posthuman era has not led to a decrease in concerns about the body as an object, subject, or performance, even as it ushers in concerns about the limits of the body. On the contrary, digital media have exacerbated existing concerns by proffering more options and demanding that we display ourselves to a larger audience than ever. It is noteworthy that anxiety about children navigating this environment is largely expressed as a fear of sexual predators: adults who wish to inveigle children into behaving in sexual (adult) ways. When adults use social media to invite children to expose their bodies, they are not only exploiting the power imbalance between adults and children, they are also exploiting the body project's imperative of displaying the body. Exposure is the new normal.

In the 1990s, critics drawing our attention to the imbalance of power at play in relation to the child's body often coupled their investigations with another, seemingly unrelated, celebration of the body: Mikael Bakhtin's notion of *carnival*. Carnival, with its celebration of bodily excess rather than the rationality of the mind, as well as queer theory's questioning of the status quo have been identified by Maria Nikolajeva as arising from the ability of these approaches to map the imbalance of power between children and adult (*Power*). Using the term *aetonormative* in an analogy to "heteronormative," Nikolajeva proposes that an overarching theory of children's literature would need to place this power disparity at its

center. In the discussion that ensues from this starting point, Nikolajeva does not raise the body to the fore. This collection, however, suggests that the imposition of adult mind over the child's body underscores not only the literature written for children, but also the ways in which real children's bodies are socialized. This highly politicized field has been most heavily theorized by those concerned with gender and/or ethnicity, and our collection reflects these biases, but we also strive to expose other areas in which body and identity politics intertwine. Given the centrality of the child's body to our field, we find it remarkable that a collection on the embodied child has not been produced earlier.

### **The Embodied Child: The Goals of This Collection**

In her discussion of the body in Philip Nel and Lissa Paul's *Keywords for Children's Literature*, Hager suggests "Perhaps the most explicit site of children's literature's engagement with the body and its physical vulnerability is the genre of young adult (YA) fiction, with its focus on sexual maturation, orientation, body size, and physical abuse" (18). While we would quibble with the description of YA as a genre (we regard YA as a collective term denoting a broad range of writing genres intended for an adolescent readership), Hager's observation that the body is more overtly problematized in fiction for teens is, to some extent, evident in the selection of primary materials examined in this collection. The vast majority of the articles examine reading materials and/or films for this age range, although we do include chapters on biographical writing, picturebooks for younger children, reality TV, and the real bodies of readers. We acknowledge that many of the issues we raise are also prevalent in books for the very young, where potties, diapers, and learning to dress oneself appear, but we have chosen to focus on bodies that have at least minimal autonomy. We have also chosen to exclude bodies that are wholly nonhuman, such as the animal body, even though animal bodies often function as representatives for human bodies, and are particularly common in depicting the supposed bestiality of the child's body. Indeed, eco-philosophy notes how easily animal bodies are read as humans and the difficulties readers have in perceiving animals as animals (Jacques 78).

The collection also challenges the idea that the mind and body are not one, as both literature and culture provide fora for debating the connection between the body and identity. The emergence of cognitive poetics as a form of literary analyses particularly suited for the study of children and their literature has fueled a return to the body that even feminist approaches to children's literature did not succeed (see Nikolajeva *Learning*; Trites). This collection intends to both break new ground in the study of children's literature and culture, and to consolidate the disparate streams of scholarship on children and their bodies.

As editors of the first collection to address the topic of the child's body in literature and culture, we have endeavored to provide a broad overview of the subject and so include the work of almost twenty academics. The essays offer compelling analyses of children's bodies as they read and are read, as they interact with literature and other cultural artifacts, and as they are constructed in literature and popular culture. The chapters examine the ideology behind the cultural constructions of the child's body and the impact they have on society, as well as how the child's body becomes a carrier of cultural ideology within the cultural imagination. The contributors bring perspectives from anthropology, communication, education, literary criticism, cultural studies, philosophy, physical education, and religious studies. With wide and astute coverage of disparate literary and cultural texts, and lively scholarly discussions in the introductions to the collection and to each section, this book makes a long-needed contribution to discussions of the body and the child. These essays consider an eclectic range of children's bodies in literature, film, ephemera, and pop culture, and apply an equally diverse range of theoretical approaches. We have included portrayals of children's bodies from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, and from a variety of cultures. We do not, however, suggest that this volume is fully comprehensive, and we doubt that any collection on this topic could be.

The chapters are arranged in four broadly thematic sections, which begin with their own introductions. These are intended to enable readers to situate the discussions of the child's body within broader considerations of the somatic society. These section introductions point out how the chapters contribute to ongoing debates as well as identify areas where further research is needed. We begin, however, with a chapter reflecting upon the history of how the body ever became separated from the mind, and connecting that history to the child's contested body. Using *Anne of Green Gables* to illustrate many of the points we have made above, Janet Wesselius's examination of embodiment and the Cartesian legacy takes the reader through the history of mind-body dualism.

The first section, *Politicizations*, highlights the ideological forces behind the cultural constructions of the child's body and the impact they have on society. The chapters focus on the politicization of race, gender, and class in relation to the body project. Each exposes the politics at play in fiction, at the same time keeping a clear eye on the embodied reader of the text. The *Corporealities* section resonates with the seeming dichotomies between healthy-versus-unhealthy bodies as well as able-bodied-versus-disabled bodies. Combined, these papers demonstrate that the unhealthy or disabled body is the marked category, and examine the ways in which this marked category is presented. Like the papers in the previous section, the child bodies that are examined are all fictional bodies that are proffered to an implicit, imagined child-reader. The third section, *Reading Bodies*, unpacks that generalized figure and examines

flesh-and-blood bodies that engage with literary texts and other media. The chapters in this section include studies of specific, real children as well as more general theorizations of how the bodies of these children form part of the larger project of meaning-making. Thomas Osborne's insistence that the body should be conceived "not just as an 'obstacle', but as a vehicle for thought and action" is taken seriously by the authors in this section (192). *Commodifications*, our final section, combines both the reading body and the body that is read in order to examine how the child's body becomes a carrier of cultural ideology within the cultural imagination. By examining very different types of material—nineteenth-century stories for girls, dancing bodies on film and in fiction, and sexualized toddlers—the chapters in this section expose the ways in which the child's body is packaged and presented for consumption.

This collection has also been packaged and presented for consumption: for your consumption.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous declared, "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (350). Without wishing to distract attention from the child's body that lies at the center of this volume, we ask you to think about how your own body contributes to your engagement with this research topic. As editors, we did not specifically ask the contributors to respond to this question, and it is worth noting that only one paper—by Michelle H. Martin and Rachelle D. Washington—chose autobiographical criticism as a starting point. They bring their own bodies into view as they reflect on how their own "hair stories" piqued their interest in, and desire to pay attention to, how hair stories for and about African American girls contribute to the politicizing of the African American body. The rest of us have hidden our bodies. Even Margaret Mackey who has published extensively on her own childhood reading has chosen not to bring her body to the fore in this publication. We, the editors, have not met all the contributors. We know a little about their careers as scholars and where they live, but we do not know their racial and/or ethnic backgrounds, their sexual orientation, whether they are fat, need glasses, or rely on medication to function. In short, we know very little about how their bodies inform their research, although we suspect that they have, not least because we know our own bodies informed the papers we have contributed here.

The insistence on separating the writing voice from the writing body that dominates scholarly endeavor is part of a larger cultural project. We do not suppose that this collection will change this separation. But we do ask you, the reader, to reflect on your own body as you read the chapters in the book. Where are you seated? Are you comfortable? How are you using your hands and eyes to navigate this text? Did you need to fetch your glasses first? Are you in pain? ... And most importantly, how does your body affect your cognitive and affective responses to this text? Read yourself. Your body must be heard.



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# 1 Anne's Body Has a Mind (and Soul) of Its Own

## Embodiment and the Cartesian Legacy in *Anne of Green Gables*

*Janet Wesselius*

Don't you just love poetry that gives you a crinkly feeling up and down  
your back?

—*Anne of Green Gables* (41)

According to the eleven-year-old Anne Shirley, some poetry can affect the reader's body. Evidently for Anne's creator, Lucy Maud Montgomery, reading is an embodied activity. Indeed, embodiment is an important theme in *Anne of Green Gables*; Irene Gammel writes: "by involving her senses and body in her exploration of nature's beauty, Anne blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, life and art, human and nature, physical and metaphysical" (229). In this list of boundaries, it is the last—the physical and the metaphysical—that invokes one of the deeply embedded dualisms in Western society: the mind/body. This dualism makes embodiment as a theme noticeable in a book like *Anne of Green Gables*.

Traditionally, it is understood the mind/body problem originated with René Descartes, although in fact it has a long history in the West, stretching back to the pre-Socratics. Or rather, we should say, the assumption that mind and body are separate has a long history, for the separateness of mind and body was not a problem until Descartes. I do not mean that people did not have problems with unruly bodies or with unruly minds: as Lydia Kokkola points out in the Introduction, Plato says in the *Phaedo* that the body impedes our pursuit of the truth while Patristics Evagrius of Pontus and John Cassian wrote in the third century about the difficulties in dealing with the "bad thoughts" of an undisciplined mind. Still it was taken as self-evident that minds and bodies interacted, however unsatisfactorily at times, even if they were separate. But Descartes' dualism is so radical that it seems impossible to see how mind and body could interact.

What has been given less attention is that the mind/body problem as articulated by Descartes implicates both childhood as a source of

that problem and the imagination, fueled by the senses and indulging in dreams, as another source of that problem. In the first part of this chapter, I analyze Descartes' formulation of the mind/body problem, particularly in relation to his experience of childhood and his use of his own imagination. I also contrast his view with the Scholastic and Greek view of the mind and body to which he was responding. My point in doing so is to show that the Cartesian mind/body problem is not an inevitable development, still less a neutral, "objective," understanding but has a contingent history of construction. I then turn to Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* as an example of subsequent ways of thinking about the mind and body, children, and the imagination that is influenced by the Cartesian formulation even in its rejection of it by reclaiming (or alluding to) pre-Cartesian ways of understanding the mind and body.

### The Father of Modern Philosophy and His Children

René Descartes gave us the most influential formulation of the mind and body for our time. He did not invent dualism—it was widely accepted in the West that the mind and body are separate—but his was the most radical form of dualism that led to the mind/body problem. According to the standard textbook accounts, Descartes is considered the father of modern philosophy because he inaugurated the epistemological turn: the turn from ontological issues to the problems of knowledge and a turning inward to the nature of our own minds and reason. The epistemological turn intensified a focus on mind and body or, more accurately, it made the question of mind and body an epistemic question. So, how was this new focus different from what went before? For the ancient Greeks, and for the medieval Scholastics who followed, mind and body were by no means identical—that is, they could be distinguished—but this was primarily an ontological concern, a concern over what exists (and not with how we know what exists).

What might have motivated Descartes to reject the view of the mind and body that he inherited? It is the same thing that motivated him to make the epistemological turn: in a time when the authorities (ecclesiastical, scholarly, scientific) seemed untrustworthy, Descartes resolved to trust only himself. He writes:

But as soon as I had completed the course of study at the end of which one is normally admitted to the ranks of the learned ... I found myself beset by so many doubts and errors that I came to think I had gained nothing from my attempts to become educated.... So, too, I reflected that we were all children before being men and had to be governed by for some time by our appetites [i.e. the body]

and our teachers, which were often opposed to each other and neither of which, perhaps, always gave us the best advice.

(I:113, 117)

In other words, given all the disagreements between so-called experts, it is foolish to put one's trust in their claims to knowledge. Children, of course, must be governed by their teachers, but as soon as they are old enough, they should seek knowledge in themselves. Here we see both the association of childhood with an immature reliance on (uncertain) authorities or the sway of the body and a rejection of those authorities in favor of relying on one's self as the mark of adult(man)hood.

And this is where the body comes in: the body, according to Descartes, also cannot be trusted, for senses sometimes deceive. He writes:

Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

(II:12)

So, the body (with its senses) is source of error and there are no sure signs by which I can distinguish truth from error. To avoid error, Descartes decides what to do:

I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that... all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment.... I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this mediation; and, even if it is not in my power to know any truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, that is, resolutely guard against assenting to any falsehoods, so that the deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, will be unable to impose on me in the slightest degree.

(II:15)

If there is a malicious demon—and how can I know there is not?—my body does not just deceive me sometimes; I might be completely deceived all the time. The only thing I can do is resolutely guard against accepting any falsehoods; I can withhold assent; I can doubt. But “am I not so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them?” (II:16).

No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning [the malicious

demon] who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I think, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived by my mind.

(II:17)

Maybe I do not have a body; but I think (even if most of the thinking I am doing is doubting since doubting is a form of thinking). “But what then am I? A thing that thinks” (II:19). I cannot know for certain that I have a body or that there is a reality external to me, but I do know for certain that as long as I am thinking (doubting), I exist. And by *I*, I mean “a thing that thinks” because “now I know for certain both that I exist and at the same time that all such images and, in general, everything relating to the nature of the body, could be mere dreams” (II:19).

So, here, we can see what was so earth-shattering about Descartes’s formulation: it was his reconceptualization of the mind as *res cogitans* (thinking substance, “a thing that thinks”) and the body as *res extensa* (extended substance). It was widely believed before Descartes that the mind and body were nonidentical; but by classifying mind and body as *substances*—and substances by definition are basic and have no dependent relations on anything else—he sundered the two completely. Philosophers before Descartes were for the most part dualists, but Descartes inaugurated a *radical* dualism, a dualism that cut to the root of what a human being is. It is important to note here that Descartes completely identifies himself with his mind (the *res cogitans*); he may or may not have a body, but as long as he is thinking (doubting), *he* exists. But now we can see the mind/body problem: the epistemological turn and the quest for certainty mean that the mind and body must be radically separate because only the mind is trustworthy. If mind and body are so radically distinct, how do they relate at all? And this is a problem that Descartes himself never successfully resolved.

So far, none of the story I have told is new for anyone who is familiar with the history of philosophy. However, what is a good deal less familiar is the role Descartes’ imagination and dreams played, as well as the influence his experience of childhood has on his theory. Susan Bordo writes about the dreams that impelled him to start on this philosophical project:

[O]n November 10, 1619, Descartes had a series of dreams—bizarre, richly image-laden sequences manifestly full of anxiety and dread. He interpreted these dreams—which most readers would surely regard as nightmares—as revealing to him that mathematics is the key

to understanding the universe. Descartes' resolute and disconcertingly positive interpretation has become a standard textbook anecdote... in terms of intellectual beginnings and fresh confidence, and a new belief in the ability of science—armed with the discourses of mathematics and the “new philosophy”—to decipher the language of nature.

(1)

The “official story of textbooks,” however, does not acknowledge some of the tensions in Descartes' project, beginning with the strangeness of interpreting dreams as a revelation that one must put all of one's faith in reason. In other words, the birth of rationalism is the result of imagination, the result of “image-laden” dreams. Nor is this the only time when imagination plays a role in his project: the imagination is indispensable for Descartes method of doubt which needs to imagine a malicious demon. My point here is that, not only does Descartes' project originate in a dream; the human propensity to dream drives the entire project. Moreover, Descartes' methodic doubt reaches its pinnacle in his imaginative invention of the malicious demon, who is so powerful that he can deceive Descartes about even the existence of his own body. And the malicious demon is certainly evidence of Descartes' imagination and his ability to entertain the most extreme form of doubt. The thinking he does is imagining and daydreaming; even his doubting, which is what brings him to the *cogito*, is brought to its strongest form by his imagined malicious demon; the most extreme form of doubt requires a powerful imagination.

Despite the importance of these dreams as an impetus for his entire project, Descartes was wary of dreams and the imagination in general, associating them with the state of childhood with its powerlessness and ignorance: we need to be continuously aware of “the falsehood or uncertainty to be found in all the judgments that depend on the senses and the imagination” (III:53). He explains:

From infancy I had made a variety of judgments about physical things in so far as they contributed to preserving the life which I was embarking on.... But at that age the mind employed the bodily organs less correctly than it now does... and perceived things only in a confused manner.... [I]t never exercised its intellect on anything without at the same time picturing something in the *imagination*.

(emphasis mine, II:297)

The weakness of the mind is that it is easily influenced by the body; moreover, this weakness is compounded by the fact that as children, we use imagination more than our intellect (that is, our reason), and we are prone to keep those childish imaginings instead of submitting them



to the judgment of adult reason. Here we see the vicious imbrication of childhood, the body, the senses, the imagination.

My point here is this: Descartes' mind/body dualism is also motivated by his desire to escape childhood, by his rejection of childhood as a state of the mistakes and helplessness. What is even more interesting here is that while imagining and daydreaming are often associated with childhood in general, Descartes repudiates his *own* childhood as the source of error and falsehood. It is widely accepted that Descartes' project began with his dreams, but in the *Meditations* his first paragraphs offer an additional reason for undertaking his project: "some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice I had subsequently based upon them" (II:12). Most readers of Descartes are familiar with what follows: he resolves to "demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations" (II:12). But after making this resolution he says that he had decided that he "wait until I should reach a *mature enough age*" (emphasis mine, II:12). As Bordo writes:

the Cartesian project of starting anew through the revocation of one's actual childhood (during which one was 'immersed' in body and nature) and the (re)creation of a world in which absolute separateness (both epistemological and ontological) from body and nature are keys to control rather than sources of anxiety can now be seen as a 'father of oneself' fantasy on a highly symbolic, but profound, plane.

(108)

In a "father of oneself" fantasy, one would never have to go through childhood. For Descartes, unfortunately:

we were all children before being men and had to be governed for some time by our appetites [body]... hence I thought it virtually impossible that our judgements should be as unclouded and firm as they would have been if we had had the full use of our reason from the moment of our birth, and if we had always been guided by it alone.

(I:117)

So, childhood is a necessary "evil" to be got through in order to become a man, with the consequence that our judgements will never be so perspicacious and certain as they would have had we never acquired the prejudices of childhood that are so hard to overcome.

Descartes' desire to "revoke" childhood is even more clearly revealed when he writes:

*The chief cause of error arises from the preconceived opinions of childhood.* It is here that the first and main cause of all our errors may be recognized. In our early childhood, the mind was so closely tied to the body that it had no leisure for any thoughts except those by means of which it had sensory awareness of what was happening to the body. (I:218)

As well, given the immaturity of children, they are particularly prone to being “swamped” by the senses (which are untrustworthy). As Descartes says, “Right from infancy our mind was swamped with a thousand such preconceived opinions; and in later childhood, forgetting that they were adopted without sufficient examination, it regarded them as known by the senses or implanted by nature, and accepted them as utterly true and evident” and our mind “was exclusively occupied with the objects of sense and imagination in its earliest years” (I:219–220). The implication is, of course, that the man of reason is not much occupied with objects of sense and imagination:

it is quite unworthy of a philosopher to accept anything as true if he has never established its truth by thorough scrutiny; and he should never rely on the senses, that is, on the ill-considered judgements of his childhood, in preference to his mature powers of reason. (I:222)

It is not a large step from this view of the worthy (and mature) philosopher to conclude that the ideal would be to have never been a child. But in fact, we have all been children; and moreover, we in the West are the intellectual children of Descartes, wittingly or unwittingly, given his enormous influence.

### **Lucy Maud Montgomery, the Mind/Body Problem, and the Reading Child**

It would be hard to imagine a book more opposite to Descartes' suspicions of childhood, imagination, and the sensual body than *Anne of Green Gables* in its celebration of all three things. And indeed, I use this novel, with its emphasis on an unmistakably embodied child as a foil to Descartes' revocation of childhood and its attendant associations. However, before doing so, it is interesting to note how Anne Shirley is a child without father or mother, who starts anew when she comes to Prince Edward Island and as an orphan, her early life certainly did not include much human companionship. But such a child is uncanny:

“For pity's sake hold your tongue,” said Marilla. “You talk entirely too much for a little girl.” Thereupon Anne held her tongue

so obediently and thoroughly that her continued silence made Marilla rather nervous, as if in the presence of something not exactly natural.... As [the meal] progressed Anne became more and more abstracted, eating mechanically, with her big eyes fixed unswervingly and unseeingly on the sky outside the window. This made Marilla more nervous than ever; she had an uncomfortable feeling that while this odd child's body might be there at the table her spirit was far away in some remote airy cloudland, borne aloft on the wings of imagination. Who would want such a child about the place?

(33)

Who indeed? But my point here is that Montgomery is also an heir to the Cartesian legacy, even as she revalues childhood, the bodily senses, and imagination. Marilla is made nervous when Anne behaves too much like a mechanical doll or when her spirit seems to be out of her body. Such language indicates a dualist understanding of human being.

Nevertheless, much of the literary criticism of *Anne of Green Gables* shows how embodiment is a pervasive theme in the novel. Many of the examples used to illustrate the theme of embodiment highlight the bodily reactions of Anne to intertwined emotional, social, and aesthetic experiences: during her first ride with Matthew down the Avenue,

its beauty seemed to strike the child dumb.... She came out of her reverie with a deep sigh and looked at him with the dreamy gaze of a soul that had been wandering afar, star-led... she put one hand on her breast—it made a queer funny ache and yet it was a pleasant ache. Did you ever have an ache like that, Mr. Cuthbert?'

(17–18)

Anne asks Marilla "Don't you just love poetry that gives you a crinkly feeling up and down your back?" (41); Anne's "sensitive little face suddenly flushed scarlet and embarrassment sat on her brow" (41); or "During Marilla's speech a sunrise had been dawning on Anne's face. First, the look of despair faded out; then came a faint flush of hope; her eyes grew deep and bright as morning stars" (46). And of course, even those who have not read the book know that the Anne of *Green Gables* has red hair. Gammel astutely argues that Anne's embodiment extends to her geography:

Mapping her body on the geography, then, Anne endows it with desire, giving birth to sensuous memory and nostalgia that would appeal to legions of readers.... In fact, the ritualistic repetition of the same somatic experience in performative scenes is crucial to establishing Anne's identity.... For example, while tomboyish, scrawny,

and freckled Anne makes the intuitive connection between the red roads of Prince Edward Island and the red of her glossy braids, she does so without intellectually comprehending the connection (more than encoding visuality, the color red evokes a somatic and material reality, the soil colored through its iron content, and Anne's hair grounded as it were by being referred to as "carrots," the very word that provokes intense emotional responses).

(235–236)

Here we can see that Gammel takes this analysis of embodiment further, seeing Anne's embodiment as co-extensive with her landscape, including the "intuitive" and "emotional." She goes on to argue that "it is the reader who is invited to practice the immersive nature reading modeled by Anne herself" (236), so the embodiment is not only Anne's, but also the reader's.

Passages such as these support Gammel's reading that since we "know that Montgomery was familiar with Emerson's notion of looking with both reason and understanding, thereby overcoming the division between the body and the soul," then we can see how "she turned Emerson's [transcendentalist] philosophy from the head to the heart and from the intellect to the body" (229). Gammel ultimately argues that the novel is

about the education of multiple senses, as Anne's selfhood is conceptualized as an *embodied* self... [through] the novel's sophisticated textual encoding of profoundly subversive somatic experiences for girls and women.... Ultimately, this approach allows us to see the ways in which Montgomery pushed the boundaries of representation in the children's genre, taking readers beyond the two-dimensional page into a vibrant kinesthetic space that refuses to be limited by the economy of the visual.

(231)

I agree that Gammel's perspicacious analysis makes *Anne of Green Gables* a paradigmatic example of embodiment in "children's literature." However, where I wish to push her argument is her contention that Montgomery "overcomes the division between the body and the soul" or more explicitly, her claim that the "appreciation of nature inscribed in the text... is a screen for covering more radical and covert subtexts that effectively breaks the Cartesian mind/body split" (243). Specifically, I argue that Montgomery is reclaiming an older understanding of human being that, while not Cartesian, is still dualist and as such, she does not overcome or break the mind/body split. Moreover, I argue that immersive reading is Montgomery's way of dealing with this version of the mind/body problem.

Gammel is by no means alone in thinking that Montgomery does not succumb to the Cartesian mind/body problem. For example, André Narbonne persuasively argues that Montgomery's view of personhood is shaped by the Platonic triad of truth, goodness, and beauty. When we first meet Anne, she asks Matthew "which would you rather be if you had the choice—divinely beautiful or dazzlingly clever or angelically good?" (17). Narbonne says this "might be considered the epic question of the novel" (435), and he shows how the answer changes as Anne develops. While Narbonne is right that this question "relates to the Platonic triad," it is a mistake to think that Montgomery has a Platonic view of personhood. While Plato has a tripartite notion of what it is to be a human, it applies only to the soul—that is, the Platonic soul (of the *Republic*) has three parts: the mind, the spirit, and the appetites; the appetitive part of the soul is most closely related to the body. Given the neoplatonism of the Patristics, for the first three centuries of the Church, humans were understood as consisting of body, soul, and spirit. However, due to the development of several heresies in these early centuries, Augustine considered the distinction between the spirit and the soul to be an "unprofitable distinction" (Heard 37). What was left after Augustine collapsed the distinction between spirit and soul was the Platonic hierarchy in which the mind is that part of the soul that should rule the whole soul (including the bodily appetites). And thus, we have a vitiated Platonism of body, mind, and soul. Gradually, *mind* and *soul* are seen as different terms for the same thing (hence, Descartes' tendency to use the two words interchangeably). So, Montgomery's view is in some respects a rejection of Cartesian *dualism* in favor of an older tripartite theological understanding of human being as body, mind, and soul. (Much of the literary criticism relating to the theme of embodiment in this novel tends to follow the Cartesian dualism—even as they criticize it—by using *mind* and *soul* interchangeably as if they are the same.) In her allusion to the Platonic triad of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, she seems to be invoking an old understanding of humans as composed of Body, Mind, and Soul. And Anne is clearly sensitive (taking in beauty through every sense); she has a rich intellectual life (being an inveterate reader and writer of stories); and she is spiritually responsive (feeling the "holiness" of quotidian places like Violet Vale). In Anne—a character whose body, mind, and soul are inextricably connected—we can see Montgomery's complex understanding of personhood.

Still, given Plato's exclusion of the body from the essence of humanness—the appetites, after all, are part of the Platonic soul—Montgomery's view of these three aspects of personhood is better understood in terms of Aristotle's hylomorphism which sees human beings as ensouled bodies. Although I am not suggesting that she was aware of Aristotle's theory, I am arguing that we can better understand her view of human beings as distinguishable parts—body, mind, and soul—that only exist

as ineluctably connected. It is generally accepted that Aristotle's hylo-morphism is a kind of dualism because although he did not see the soul and the body as different substances—as Descartes did—he did see the intellectual part of the soul (the mind, as it were) as something that went far beyond matter in its capacity for thought. As Crane and Patterson put it, “since the matter [of the body] needs the soul in order to be the thing it is... it would clearly be wrong to think of Aristotle as some kind of [materialist] ‘reductionist’” (3). In any case, whether Platonic or Aristotelian, Montgomery's view does not overcome dualism even if it rejects the Cartesian form of dualism. To make my point another way: although I agree with Gammel (and others) that embodiment is a pervasive and positive theme in her novel, I do not think this means that Montgomery has no “mind/body” problem. She does: it takes the form of the gap between the reality created by the imagination and the reality of the physical world, between Romantic ideals and prosaic facts of the matter. As Anne herself says, “it's all very well to read about sorrows and imagine yourself living through them heroically, but it's not so nice when you really come to have them, is it?” (32). However, this is where the reading—and writing—child comes in. As Laura Robinson argues, “Anne is first and foremost a reader, actively interpreting her world and experience through the literature she reads” (125). Moreover, early on, Anne tells Marilla that whenever she is “disappointed in anything” she tells herself “my life is a perfect graveyard of buried hopes”; she finds repeating this sentence comforting “because it sounds so nice and romantic, just as if I were a heroine in a book” (37). Robinson also points out that as “an extremely popular storybook heroine herself” (125), this reference is ironic. But I suggest we shift the focus slightly: *why* does Anne feel the need to imagine herself a storybook heroine? What is so comforting about imagining that she is the heroine of a book? I suggest it is because Anne's “real” life *is* so disappointing; as Marilla shrewdly surmises, “what a starved, unloved life she [Anne] had had—a life of drudgery and poverty and neglect” (41).

Making this connection between Anne's inveterate reading, which feeds her vivid imagination, and the deficiencies of her early life is not hard to do. Anne herself says that she does not mind things when she “can imagine them away” (16). We know that Montgomery too dealt with the exigencies of life by “imagining them away,” either through reading or through writing her own stories. Gammel points out that she both read and wrote as a coping mechanism. Clarence Karr points out that Montgomery was a compulsive reader—he says she represents “the reader as addict” (22)—and “as an author, Montgomery created heroines who shared her passion for, use of, and taste in books.... Anne... [is] addicted to books,... Diana Barry who, according to her mother, reads too much for her own good” (28). Of course, Montgomery could not have been familiar with Victor Nell's *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of*

*Reading for Pleasure* (since it was published in 1988), but it is fair to say that she knew well the pleasures of ludic reading in order to be “transported” into the world of the story.

Anne, like her creator, knows well how to transport herself, both by reading and by imagining: “Anne was curled up Turk-fashion on the hearth-rug.... She had been reading, but her book had slipped to the floor, and now she was dreaming, with a smile on her parted lips” (238). Even if I am right that Anne reads (and dreams) to make up for the deficiencies of her pre-Green Gables life, this is not the whole story, for she continues to read as well to imagine; indeed, she not only reads and dreams, she writes and sets up a Story Club so she and her friends can “cultivate” their imagination, even though she admits to Diana in that very conversation that “my besetting sin is imagining too much and forgetting my duties” (207). Why does Anne continue to do so when it is clear that after Mathew and Marilla decide to keep her, she rapidly transforms from the orphan-outsider to one who belongs?

It is instructive to look at the passage where Anne begins to belong:

“Now I’m going to imagine things into this room so that they’ll always stay imagined. The floor is covered a white velvet carpet with pink roses.... The walls are hung with gold and silver brocade tapestry. The furniture is mahogany.... I am tall and regal, clad in a gown and trailing white lac, with a pearl cross on my breast and pearls in my hair. My hair is of midnight darkness and my skin is a clear ivory pallor. My name is Lady Cordelia Fitzgerald. No, it isn’t—I can’t make *that* seem real.” She danced up to the little looking-glass and peered into it. Her pointed freckled face and solemn gray eyes peered back at her. “You’re only Anne of Green Gables,” she said earnestly, “and I see you, just as you are looking now, whenever I try to imagine I’m the Lady Cordelia. But it’s a million times nicer to be Anne of Green Gables than Anne of nowhere in particular, isn’t it?” (60)

This passage shows us one of the most significant tensions in the novel and how embodiment is implicated in that tension. Anne can imagine that her room is sumptuous and beautiful and not “the apartment of [such] rigidity... [that] sent a shiver to the very marrow of Anne’s bones” (27) but she “*cannot* imagine that red hair away” (16). This is the tension between the creative power of the imagination—reading, writing, playacting, daydreaming—and the constraints of physical reality. As Melissa Mullins puts it, Anne’s “imagination has literally managed to create a physical existence. This creative conjuring act of the imagination is reified by Matthew’s impression of Anne as ‘freckled witch’—a description used repeatedly throughout the first part of the narrative” (67). Imagination, in its widest sense encompassing reading, writing,

and dreaming, is both the “opposite” to the physical and a way to deal with the constraints of the physical. This is Montgomery’s mind/body problem: it is the gap between the ideals of the imagination and the cold hard facts of reality.

Although I am sympathetic to and largely agree with analyses that show how embodiment is a consistent theme in Anne’s relation to nature, what has been overlooked is how embodiment is expressed in Anne’s inveterate reading and writing. The way Anne deals with the gap between what we want and what is the case is to transport herself through imaginatively immersing herself in a story: recall that after Marilla tells her to “hold your tongue” Anne responds by going into her imagination (while her “body might be there at the table her spirit was far away in some remote airy cloudland, borne aloft on the wings of imagination” 33). Embodied reading (and writing) is Montgomery’s way of coping with this gap: reading to be transported into a story world is a way to deal with the gap between the ideals of the imagination and the constraints of physical reality. Given the unhappiness of Anne’s pre-Green Gables life, being transported, lost in a book, is an escape and a survival mechanism. In fact, the adults, like Marilla and Mrs. Barry, were made “uncomfortable” by Anne’s ability to be transported while her friends were frightened by her ability to transport them through storytelling:

Diana and I just imagined the wood was haunted. All the places around here are so—so—*commonplace*. We just got this up for our own amusement.... A haunted wood is so very romantic, Marilla.... Oh, we have imagined the most harrowing things.

(164)

But this time Anne frightens even herself and she resolves to “b-b-be cont-t-tented with c-c-commonplace places after this” (166).

But who cares about embodiment? It is because of our emphasis in the West on reason and rationality (on the mind) that we think we now need to focus on (or at least include) the body. For many child readers—or ludic readers—and certainly for Montgomery, the importance of embodiment is *affect*. And affect is important because it is a way to understand (and perhaps to deal with and cope with) and transform one’s own world. For child readers, I suggest, reading both makes a mind/body split concrete by pointing out and enacting the ontological difference between stories/play and the real worlds of bedtimes and chores but is also a way to deal with the mind/body split because reading can transport them and they realize that their make-believe world can be more real than the “real world” of bedtimes and vaccinations.

How is this “gap” related to the mind and body issue? I submit that for children (and perhaps adults), it is the relation between imagination and reality (between external reality and internal imaginings, but this



is an ill-advised description because as Anne shows us, the “inner life of the mind” is every bit as real as the “cold, hard facts of reality”). But when children read for themselves, they often read immersively (as does Anne), to transpose themselves (as does Anne). It is this relation that is the significant relation for children and for reading children. Montgomery herself said that: “I cast ‘moral’ and ‘Sunday School’ ideals to the wind and made my ‘Anne’ a real human girl” (*Selected Journals* 330–331) so Montgomery knows that the imagined world is just as real as the ‘external’ one. Despite the recognition that the imaginary life is real (and in fact is part of the “real” life), there is a tension between these two lives (just as there is a tension between mind and body). In *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne’s reading is part of learning to negotiate that tension between her imagination and the shared world of her body.

So what we have is a woman reading and writing about a girl who herself reads and writes and then in turn is read by children (many of whom also write). Despite the recognition that the life of the imagination is real (and in fact is part of “real life”), there is a tension between these two aspects of life just as there is a tension between mind and body: the mind can create imaginary worlds (which Descartes was both amazed by and worried about) and the body is part of that creation through the physical activities of reading and writing. But at the same time, the other world where, for example, Matthew dies and Anne has stubbornly red hair, is also real. Moreover, other people also have minds with the same powers and while this means that their imaginary worlds can be joined (Anne, for example, is an excellent storyteller), it also means that they can refuse to participate in our imaginings (Marilla refuses to imagine she is Anne’s aunt). These kinds of experiences are familiar and for children who depend on and are subject to adults they are familiar indeed. In *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne’s reading is part of learning to negotiate that tension between her imagination and the shared world of her body with its freckles and red hair.

### “Read Yourself. Your Body Must Be Heard”

Following Lydia Kokkola’s mandate that we must read ourselves: here are three stories. In 1948, an eight-year-old girl arrives in Canada from a Netherlands devastated by war. As she settles into a rural one-room schoolhouse near Portage La Prairie Manitoba, her young schoolteacher gives her *Anne of Green Gables* to read. It is the first chapter book she reads by herself in English and it remains linked to learning a new language, adapting to a radically different climate, landscape, and lifestyle even into her adulthood; it also remains intrinsically entwined with feelings of sanctuary, safety, and the satiety of having enough food to eat and enough books to read.

In 1974, another little girl—ten years old—is given *Anne of Green Gables* to read one summer when she complains to her mother that she is bored. Her mother has all the Montgomery books and over the next three years, she reads them all, although *Anne* remains the most significant for her. *Anne of Green Gables* in particular—read outdoors tucked up under the lilac hedge, read with her head resting on her napping pony's side, and read curled up on her parents' bed in a chilly farmhouse in the winter time—shape her imaginary life and talking about the book is often an occasion for her mum to tell her stories of her own childhood. As an adult, she remembers not only the books, but the multifaceted experiences of *reading* the books: where she was and what she felt and what else was happening in her life.

In 2009 a nine-year-old girl reads *Anne of Green Gables* and the rest of the series with her mother. They take turns reading the books aloud to each other during a time when they are temporarily displaced from their home. It is also an occasion for the mother to tell stories of her own childhood and that of her mother. Later on, when they are back in their own home, her mother comes across her reading the *Anne* book many times in various places. Several years later all three—grandmother, mother, and daughter—meet at Montgomery's birthplace in Cavendish, Prince Edward Island.

I have argued that *Anne of Green Gables* is a good example of how the Cartesian legacy of the mind and body relation is negotiated. I have, of course, also my own embodied reason for choosing it: I have told the story of my mother, myself, and my daughter; the reading of this book has played a significant role in my life and in the lives of some of the people closest to me. This is how my body informs my research. It has shaped my imagination as it has shaped the imagination of my mother and daughter, which in turn has influenced each other. Has it shaped my body? Indeed it has; it has no doubt shaped my brain in the ways described in Kokkola's chapter. But no less significantly it has shaped the way my mother treated me as an infant and child and the way I dealt with my daughter. What I wish to point out here are the far-reaching effects—both physical and mental—of reading this book. The neuropathways of reading a second language, not to mention feelings of safety, the physical and emotional ties of sharing a book, the transporting of the book to another world ... all these things are present.

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## Section I

# Politicizations

The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination.

—Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 25–26

Bodies are, as Foucault points out, political. They are necessary for the practice, administration, and support of the state, and their regulation—the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations—in turn constitutes the state’s most important undertaking. Children’s bodies are no less political in that they belong to, even though they are not uniformly concerned with, the workings of the state. Texts for children have long instructed their young readers about the appropriate conduct that will make them, in Foucault’s terms, useful forces in that they are both productive and subjected. Stories worked to teach them the dominant ideologies—the codes of religion, gender, class, and race—and turn them into useful and well-behaved subjects. Characters from Newbery’s *Goody Two-Shoes* (1765) to Stevenson’s *Jim Hawkins* (1883) model behaviors that affirm they will grow up to be ideal citizens and consumers; from Goody’s embracing of proper femininity, conjoined with religion, morality, and benevolence, to Jim’s turn toward a conservative masculinity, conjoined with his quest for upward mobility and disdain for the racial or ethnic other, textual representations of young bodies turn them into ideal subjects who know their place in the relations of power and domination. The chapters in this section analyze works from the 1960s to the present day to investigate how the politicization of the child’s body has continued in more recent times.

Racial, classed, and gendered identities are parts of the systems that help the state regulate its subjects. They work with and under the practices of biopower, as coined by Foucault, used by nation-states to control

their subjects' bodies, and so the "political body" presents itself in children's texts, and therefore in criticism of those texts, more often than it does not. In short, *all* children's literature is political literature. While the following three sections in this book cohere around well-defined themes: the somatic condition of the child's body, the reading child's body, and representations of children's bodies in popular culture, this section draws together seemingly disparate essays on the functions of power in diverse social structures. These chapters, however, highlight the ideological forces behind the cultural constructions of the child's body and their meanings to society, beginning with power structures as they relate to race.

*Discipline and Punishment* is, in addition to being an exposure of the forms of control exerted over citizens, also an account of how "state apparatuses such as medicine, schools, psychiatry and the law have been able to define and delimit individuals' activities, punishing those who violate the established boundaries and maintaining the productivity and political usefulness of bodies" (Coupland and Gwyn 3). Taking an historical perspective enables one to see how expectations of and about bodily functions have moved away from controlling the supply of much needed physical labor toward viewing the body as a reflection of self-discipline and engagement with consumer culture. As Coupland and Gwyn note, the

body has new work to do, symbolic and social as well as physical. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the self seems above all a commodified self; the person is equated with their bodily form, and in control of their appearance via the body *project*.

(4)

The term "body project," coined by Turner, refers to the constant work involved in maintaining a socially desirable outer appearance through grooming, exercise, fashion, and so on. And in recent years, social media has increased these pressures to display a body that reflects individual achievements within the body project. As Foucault's work also clarifies, the role of state apparatuses is important in initiating forms of control, but it is when they are internalized and the individual becomes self-policing that they function most powerfully and efficiently. The body project is a clear example of the internalization of a highly politicized consumer culture.

The final chapter in this section focuses on the political nature of the body project. In their discussion of African American hair, Michelle Martin and Rachele D. Washington make the highly personal fully political, as they untangle the context in which political beliefs about the body are internalized. Their chapter, "Kitchens and Edges: The Politics of Hair in African American Children's Picture Books," draws from

work by bell hooks, Neal Lester, Noliwe M. Rooks, and Jonda McNair on the politics of African American hair and the way that Black women and girls are brought under enormous pressure to conform to the White beauty standard. Instead of accepting their naturally textured hair, Martin and Washington point out, African American women and girls collectively spend millions of dollars annually to have it straightened, extended, and/or altered in other ways to make it straighter, longer, lighter, and more similar to Caucasian hair. Martin and Washington begin with their autobiographical hair tales before focusing on a select subset of children's picturebooks about Afro hair, including bell hooks and Chris Raschka's *Happy to be Nappy*, and Camille Yarrow and Carol Byard's *Cornrows*. Arguing that these picturebooks accomplish the work of making public, speakable, and positive discussions of African American hair that traditionally have been negative and marginal in mainstream American culture. Their chapter discusses how these texts offer a highly politicized resistance that allows the "kitchens and edges" of African hair to come to the center and become a source of strength and power.

This collection was produced during a particularly turbulent period in racial and sexual politics. In North America, the campaign "Black Bodies Matter" has drawn public attention to the ways in which Black citizens are subjected to greater degrees of policing and violence than White citizens. Images of police brutality alongside statistics that reveal the disproportionately high levels of Hispanics and African Americans incarcerated in American prisons are being circulated in both broadsheets and social media. The massacre in a gay nightclub in Orlando by a man who was "radicalized" via the internet placed the consequences of homophobia center stage in political debates. In Europe, the wave of refugees from nations such as Syria and Afghanistan, in concert with the orchestrated sexual attacks on White women in cities such as Cologne, Hamburg, and Helsinki on New Year's Eve (2016), has brought similar tensions to the fore. Against this highly inflamed political backdrop, the authors of the chapters in this section return to children's literature to see how such attitudes and beliefs are formed.

The Black Bodies Matter campaign gave rise to a counter-campaign: "all bodies matter." The latter purported that all citizens should be protected, and that "privileging" Black bodies was racist and inflammatory. Despite its seemingly liberal, even neutral, stance, the "all bodies matter" proponents deliberately overlooked the main point of the "Black Bodies Matter" campaign: namely that Black bodies should be as deserving of respect as White bodies already are. The "all bodies matter" campaign is a recent expression of a larger cultural practice that Robin Bernstein dubbed "racial innocence" in her book of the same name (2011). In her study of not only children's literature (more specifically Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), but also the dolls and other artifacts that

surround the story encourage specific forms of physical behavior. Ashtrays formed from clay reproductions of Black Sambo eating watermelon, and Raggedy Ann dolls normalized the violence expected in the treatment of the Black body as children watch their parents casually stubbing out cigarettes against the Black skin of a childhood figure and learn to treat the doll roughly. She also notes how the interchangeable Little Eva–Raggedy Ann dolls (joined at the waist, with the skirt position determining which face is shown) produced by slaves and the descendants of slaves functioned as a subversive commentary on the rape culture of slavery and the sexual violence performed on Black bodies.

The deceptively seamless connection between race and violence, captured in the literally seamless connection of Black and White child in the Little Eva–Raggedy Ann dolls and identified by Bernstein in *Racial Innocence* is addressed by Karen Sands-O'Connor in the opening chapter of this section. “Learning Not to Hate What We Are: Black Power, Literature, and the Black Child” examines political embodiment and violence in the Black Power movement. This form of militance grew out of a rally held in 1966 when Stokely Carmichael encouraged African Americans to demand “Black Power.” Unlike Martin Luther King Jr., who promoted Gandhian nonviolence and disobedience, advocates of Black Power promoted self-esteem and identity-building in Black communities, but also violence and social action. Sands-O'Connor examines biographies of Marcus Garvey from the United States, the West Indies, and the United Kingdom as she engages with this highly political and controversial movement, and traces the ways in which it worked to politicize (often in a highly militant manner) children of African descent (and their families), all the while enabling them to build self-esteem.

The need to build self-esteem stems, in no small part, from the invisibility of positive role models for young people. There is no lack of positive role models, like Shirley Chisholm, but many people have never heard of this African American woman who faced assassination attempts to run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972. Richard Dyer (1997, 2008), for his part, offers an alternative way in which invisibility interplays in the politicization of the body. Dyer drew attention to the insidious power that comes from treating Whiteness as an unmarked category:

As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced; we are just people. There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human.  
(*White* 10)

Dyer’s conclusions are painfully evident in the field of Western children’s literature and the scholarship that surrounds it. Unless a character is

specifically racially marked, they are generally assumed to be White. And, as the recent Twitter storm surrounding the filmic portrayal of Rue in Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy demonstrates, even when an author specifically incorporates details that indicate Blackness—Collins describes Rue's "bright, dark eyes and satiny brown skin" in the first book—readers may overlook this information. When the novel was turned into a film and the actress playing the role, Amandla Stenberg, was African American, many fans of the novel expressed their displeasure and when the passages indicating Rue's racial identity were highlighted, they claimed they felt Collins had cheated or tricked them. One of the reasons why these fans did not recognize Rue's skin-tone from the text is that, when the issues of race and-or ethnic background are raised, they tend to be problematized and become an issue that is part of the tension of the plot (for instance, in Marjorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses* series).

In Collins's trilogy, race is far less significant than the District to which the character belongs or their political beliefs. In her reading of *The Hunger Games* series, Roxanne Harde (in "[I]t's my skin that's paid most dearly': Katniss Everdeen and/as the Appalachian Body") connects the regional politics implicit in the notion of the Districts with the stability and profitability of the American state to interpret Katniss Everdeen and/as the Appalachian Body. Noting that Katniss's body is at the center of these texts, as both the robust body of the warrior in both Games and rebellion and as the beautiful body of the well-publicized "girl on fire," Harde points out how her body functions as the disciplined body used to drive various social economies, used to first enforce the subjugation of the Districts and then to overthrow the Capitol. Katniss's body functions in another, subtler, manner, as she embodies her home district, the Appalachian hills of the southeastern United States. Harde's chapter argues that in many ways, Katniss is Appalachia; her body synecdochically stands in for her homeland, an ecosystem repeatedly destroyed and rejuvenated. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theorizations of the body and power, this chapter reads Katniss's body and/as the Appalachian body, paying particular attention to the processes her body undergoes—preparatory processes, such as aesthetic interventions and training; medical processes to heal the trauma she suffers, such as bone fusion and skin grafts—alongside the exploitive processes visited upon the Appalachian hills where she lives, with its actual history of underground, strip, and mountain-top removal mining, and its fictional destruction at the hands of the Capitol.

Where Harde does not specifically engage with the femaleness of Katniss's warrior body, female identity and sexuality, alongside issues of power, are the crux of Heather Braun's chapter, "Invisibility and (Dis) Embodiment in Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours*." In its examination of Louise O'Neill's dystopian novel, in which girls are created to serve



boys who are born to rule, Braun's chapter focuses on its protagonist's best efforts to follow the rules, limiting her thoughts, feelings, food intake, and body size, this extreme self-discipline and self-denial lead her into a downward spiral. In its equation of ultra-thinness with sexual desirability, Braun argues, *Only Ever Yours* reveals the relentless pursuit of female beauty and sexual power as leading to powerlessness, loss of identity, and self-destruction. Drawing on Judith Butler's description of the body as an instrument of social control, this chapter examines the female body as a highly contested political site, as the stability and profitability of O'Neill's dystopian regime relies on the subordination and division of all females into the categories of reproductive companion, sexualized concubine, asexual chastity.

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## 2 Learning Not to Hate What We Are

### Black Power, Literature, and the Black Child

*Karen Sands-O'Connor*

The Black body has long raised fears in White people, from fear of the rape of White women by Black men, often invoked during the period of African slavery, to justification of police shootings through the argument that Black men are more likely to be dangerous. However, the idea that this threat might extend to Black children is much more recent. A 2016 study at the University of Iowa found that White college students had a tendency to link violence with pictures of Black people: “The researchers were surprised to find that images of harmless-looking five-year-olds could elicit threat-related associations that were on par with those elicited by images of adults” (“Faces of Black Children”). In light of this study and the increase in high-profile shootings of Black adults and children, it is useful to consider one previous response to similar concerns. Black Power, a worldwide movement for civil rights for people of African descent during the late 1960s and early 1970s, highlighted and showcased White fear and the Black response to it. One of these responses was from Black writers, artists, and publishers in producing children’s literature that embraced Black Power and its ideals.

In 1966, Stokely Carmichael encouraged a rally of African Americans to demand “Black Power”; by the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, Black Power had become a movement. Black Power was associated with self-esteem and identity-building in Black communities, but also with violence and militant action; many outside the movement, including liberal white groups and people associated with Martin Luther King Jr.’s ideas of nonviolence disavowed or avoided Black Power and its public anger. Although begun (and often referred to) as an American slogan and pressure group, Black Power affected people of African descent worldwide throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. Writers from the United States, United Kingdom, and the West Indies all produced literature designed for a (mostly Black) child reading audience, in the form of poetry and biography. These literary forms seemed particularly useful for communicating Black Power ideas and ideals of esteem-building and militant response to White indifference and suppression, because of their focus on language and on life construction.

Although the push for Black Power was not officially recorded before 1966, the sentiments behind it pre-dated the Stokely Carmichael rally. Malcolm X, for example, suggested in a lecture to the London School of Economics in 1965 that the need for Black people to protest against the dominant society's image of and attitudes toward Black people was a worldwide, and not merely an African American, concern. He told the LSE students that, "here and in America they have taught us to hate ourselves. To hate our skin, our hair, to hate our features, hate our blood, hate what we are" (181). The hatred that Malcolm X describes is physical, written on the body, and not confined to older people of African descent. Children with Black skin, in America and the United Kingdom, were indeed suffering from issues of self-esteem and identity because of the hatred Malcolm X described, and not only educationalists but writers and poets worked to counter the image of outsiders. The first children's literature to respond to Black Power, therefore, was a literature of image and identity.

Early examples of this Black Power image literature can be found in both the United Kingdom and the United States in the early 1970s. Poets and writers such as Nikki Giovanni and Bernard and Phyllis Coard produced books containing strong visual imagery of the Black child, and connected that imagery with text that embraces and celebrates the historical African roots of the child. Giovanni's *ego-tripping and other poems for young people* (1973) has a cover illustration by George Ford of two Black children dressed as Egyptian royalty. The Coards' *Getting to Know Ourselves* (1972) has a simpler cover image, drawn by Ricardo Wilkinson: two Black children, hands entwined, gazing at each other as if trying to memorize each other's features. These cover images emphasize the body of the Black child, suggesting through the royal dress (Giovanni) and the deliberate gaze (Coard) that the Black child body is worthy of careful consideration.

Giovanni's poems continue to emphasize the Black (child)'s physicality. The title poem of the collection, for example, makes the Black body beautiful, royal, and all-powerful, in the lines: "My oldest daughter is nefertiti/the tears from my birth pains/created the Nile" (3). In "Poem for Flora" Giovanni acknowledges that Black is not always beautiful, but the ugliness comes from trying to get rid of Blackness: Flora is described as "little/and colored and ugly with short/straightened hair" (9). The ugliness comes from the straightening—an external pressure to remove Black features—not from anything natural to the Black child's physicality. This idea is underscored by the poem's conclusion, where Flora decides she wants to be "Black and comely" (9) like the queen of Sheba. Contrasting the negative messages about Black identity received through the media, including those privileging whiteness and those entirely ignoring Black bodies, Giovanni's poetry celebrates the Black body and shows its beauty in its natural state. She also connects

the Black child repeatedly with Africa; in addition to comparing Black children with royalty and Masai warriors (7), she also suggests that little boys should play “Mau-Mau” (11) rather than cowboys, referring to the Kenyan anti-colonialists who pledged to rid Kenya of Britons and British rule, by murder if necessary. Giovanni’s comfort with violence allies her with militant wings of the Black Power movement; in a poem titled “Black Power,” Giovanni suggests that violence is a response to the criminalization of ordinary activity of Black people by Whites in authority. In the poem, a policeman calls Black women “whores” when they are merely chatting on the street corner; he is eaten by a panther (Black, of course). In another poem, she suggests Black boys ask for a “Rap Brown gun” for Christmas. By positing the panther as a fantasy or metaphor, and by linking Mau Mau with imaginary play and the Rap Brown gun with Christmas (and toys), Giovanni is able to highlight the violence endemic in the life of children, while subtly reminding (White) adult readers that we accept violent play from White children but fear it from Black children.

While Giovanni’s poems engage Black children with realities of a White-dominated world, the Coards’ *Getting to Know Ourselves* looks outward in a different way, using the Black child’s body to build a sense of global African community. The simple text introduces four young children, two from the West Indies (Jamaica and Trinidad) and two from Africa (Nigeria and Kenya). When the West Indians meet the Africans, they say, “They look like us, they must be West Indian” (10) and, likewise, the Africans exclaim, “They look just like us! They must be from Africa” (11). Pondering upon their similar physical appearance they confront one of the West Indian children’s mothers, who tells them, “We are all Brothers and Sisters, from Mother Africa” (20). Although the mother explains the journey that West Indians took from Africa, and how they “worked hard” (16) building roads, schools, and hospitals, and planting crops (including sugar cane), she does not mention White colonizers or conditions of slavery, but only “wicked men” (13) who “made them leave their homes” (14). However, the wicked men are not depicted in illustrations; the focus remains solely on Black people—a reverse of the many histories that exclude Black people—and their link to each other through skin color and through Africa. The Africans “work as slaves without pay” (15), but the Coards leave out further reference to physical violence. The use of simile is humanizing; the Africans are not slaves, they are Africans who work without pay. The Coards also turn the emotional, psychological violence of slavery into a positive by presenting the West Indians as creators of places of education (schools) and healing (hospitals). Both the Coards and Giovanni use the Black child’s physical appearance to embody Black Power ideals, but tensions raised by how much to connect Blackness with violence produce very different texts. Giovanni empowers the Black child by making Black violence

acceptable; the Coards empower the Black child by dissociating White violence from the Black body.

Neither the Coards' nor Giovanni's texts are historical, in the sense of providing dates or mentioning specific events, because their main focus is on the child's body and self-image. However, other writers felt that the specific history of people of African descent was too intimately connected with the Black body to ignore it. Chris Mullard, for example, wrote in 1973 that "For a racist society like Britain or the U.S.A., the concept of a black Briton or American is incomprehensible, for both societies perceive themselves as white" (*Black Britain* 145). For Mullard, one response was to create a "Black British Movement [which] should... concentrate on gaining power, power for blacks, power to change our environment" (170). Part of that encompasses, as Gus John and Derek Humphry put it in *Because They're Black*, "a search for black history, black heroes, black culture, black literature" (171). A focus on Black biography connected the history of Black people to Black (child) readers' experiences of their bodies in society. Kehinde Andrews writes that by focusing on Blackness, "The idea was to overcome negative ascriptions of the dominant society" (*Resisting Racism* 26), or in other words to rewrite Blackness to emphasize beauty, rather than violence, as the Black body's signifying characteristic. Although many biographical subjects could have been used to accomplish these goals, one specific figure was ideally suited to address them with children: Marcus Garvey.

Garvey was a significant figure for Black Power advocates; Tony Sewell writes that there was a "symbolic significance of Garvey during the 1960s Black Power upsurge, with many of the demands put forward by the Black Power movement having been articulated by Garvey years before" (*Garvey's Children* 66). On the one hand, Garvey advocated the beauty of the Black body in his speeches and poetry, and on the other, he was both assumed (as a Black man) to be violent and experienced and observed White violence against Black people. Biographies for children by writers interested in Black Power emphasize these two aspects to varying degrees. As Liz Stanley points out, "the biographer is an active agent in the biographical process, in the sense that she *constructs* the biographical subject rather than merely representing them 'as they really were'" (*The Auto/biographical I* 9). The children's biographies of Garvey construct not only his personal history, but the history of a group of people, and how this group is defined and might—based on Garvey's ideals—define themselves.

One thing that many post-1960 biographies had in common was a focus on Garvey's ideas about Black self-love. Marcus Garvey led a worldwide movement that called on Black people to embrace their physical beauty and emotional strength, and to look to Africa as their homeland. However, when he died in 1940, he was largely forgotten until the Civil Rights struggle in the United States rediscovered—and reinvented—him

as a pre-cursor to and/or father of Black Power. Biographies, including biographies for children, of Garvey proliferated during and after the rise of Black Power, although the conclusions biographers draw about Garvey depend on the perspective of the author. American biographies of Garvey for children such as Jules Archer's *Famous Young Rebels* (1973) tend to focus on Garvey's influence on Americans only. Archer, a White American, began writing biographies because he was "dismayed at the clap-trap" ("Historical Note: Jules Archer") his three sons were being taught in school. A radical who mistrusted the government, Archer once said,

I cannot tell how much good my books have done in developing a new awareness of the whole truth about America and the rest of the world in the younger generation, although they are fortunately in tune with the thinking of many young people about what is wrong in our society and how to correct it.

("Historical Note: Jules Archer")

Although the famous young rebels in Archer's book include some non-Americans, such as Benito Mussolini and Jawaharlal Nehru, the book suggests that it is America that breeds radicals, where the majority of the book's rebels are born and raised. Archer's biography of Garvey, "Back to Africa! Marcus Garvey" does spend time on Garvey's life in Jamaica, but Archer's story starts and ends with Americans. Archer's opening line, "The parade began in Harlem" (43), creates an image of Black (American) bodies marching in unity and strength. Although "in August, 1914...[Garvey] founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association" (48) in Jamaica, he soon decided that Jamaicans were "apathetic" (48) due to "malnutrition and illiteracy" (48) and "he needed a larger base of operations to make his dreams flourish" (48). This broad base he could only find in the United States. Garvey, who in other biographies is depicted as worrying about the physical condition and poverty of Jamaicans, is indifferent in Archer's account. Archer connects Jamaicans' physical, undernourished bodies with their inability to understand and appreciate Garvey's message, and contrasts this with African American bodies marching through Harlem in a show of strength. Jamaican weakness of body is connected to a weakness of mind rather than the economics of White colonialism.

Violence, in Archer's text (as in Nikki Giovanni's poetry) is a threat; but (unlike Giovanni's poetry), the threat only comes from Black people. Although Archer introduces White violence, it is filtered through Garvey's eyes, and placed in the text after Archer labels Garvey as "Bitter at what he considered an attempt by white society to victimize him for rejecting an inferior role for blacks" (54). This bitterness leads Garvey to suggest that Blacks will rise up against Whites: "If the white world

did not [respect Blacks], he predicted grimly, "Four hundred millions of you shall... shake the pillars of the universe and bring down creation" (54). Thus, White violence is only introduced when Blacks consider responding to it with increased violence, making the Black subject appear vengeful and reactionary. Archer, despite his radical views, accepts the violent nature of the Black person without really questioning its source in White oppression.

These attitudes toward Black bodies and violence make Garvey's ultimate failure inevitable in Archer's text. When Garvey proposes his Back to Africa plan, the successful bodies (those of American Blacks) reject the prospect of transportation to another place of colonial-induced malnutrition and illiteracy, Africa. Archer views Garvey's success and failures through the words of two other famous Black leaders, Garvey's contemporary W. E. B. DuBois, who attacked Garvey's Back-to-Africa scheme as "a stale revival of old African colonization schemes, all of which had died of 'spiritual bankruptcy and futility'" (49); and 1960s radical Eldridge Cleaver, who wrote that "The practical prospect of Garvey's actually physically transporting blacks back to Africa turned most black people off" (55). Archer wants to redeem Garvey as a "famous young rebel," but by his choice of lenses through which to view Garvey (i.e., American Blacks both in Garvey's own time and during the Civil Rights movement who are critical of Garvey), Archer's biography suggests his inability to succeed in America as other than symbolic figure.

Indeed, it is White people in Archer's narrative who have the power to transport Black bodies; upon Garvey's release from prison, "he was immediately deported to Jamaica. UNIA foundered without him for a while, and then faded away" (55). Here it is the organization that dies rather than Garvey, but its disappearance is linked to Garvey's physical departure. That his achievements, such as they were, are American in nature can be seen in Archer's conclusion to his biographical sketch: "Celebrations have been held in Jamaica and Harlem of 'Marcus Garvey Day,' to commemorate the rebel who, more than any other black man, gave the mass of blacks in America a new sense of racial pride" (56). Archer wrote another version of Garvey's story in his 1987 *They Had a Dream: The Civil Rights Struggle from Frederick Douglass to Marcus Garvey to Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X*. In this second version, the focus remains on Garvey in the United States, but he alters the sentence from his previous biography slightly to read "Celebrations of Marcus Garvey Day have been held in Harlem and Jamaica to commemorate the rebel who more than any other black man gave the mass of blacks everywhere a sense of racial pride" (119), but in both cases, Blacks are depicted as a "mass" rather than as individuals—as they had been at the beginning of Archer's biography. Garvey is an individual who has achieved greatness by rising above the "mass of blacks"; Archer

makes Blackness equate to indistinctiveness, and without Garvey, Black Power is meaningless.

Like Archer, Therese Mills was writing in the midst of a Black Power movement when she published *Great West Indians* in 1973, but hers was not an American movement. “By mid-February 1970, Black Power exploded onto the [Trinidadian] national stage, erupting in social and political convulsions such as the country had never known in its recorded history” (“The Revolutionary Seventies” 322) according to Mark Fraser of the *Trinidad Express*. As news editor for the *Trinidad Guardian*, Mills had a particular interest in the Black Power movement and in honoring the leaders of the West Indies, of whatever background. But even though her book was produced as a supplementary reader for primary school history classrooms (“Introduction” iv), and therefore might tend toward a conservative view of history, Mills made choices about who to include that suggest she was not untouched by the influence of Black Power. She decided to “omit all the former and current Heads of State” (iv)—which included her own embattled prime minister, Eric Williams. Williams had hunted down and jailed members of the Black Power movement in Trinidad, even while using the language of the revolutionaries to win the 1971 election (Fraser 322), and although Mills does not explicitly say that her choices of biographical subjects were meant as comment on Williams’s actions, it is significant that many of her subjects were connected with a history of revolution and anti-imperialism. In addition to Garvey, Mills profiles Cuffy, Paul Bogle, and George Gordon, not to mention the anti-establishment Calypsonian, Sparrow. *Great West Indians*, for Mills, are those that highlight cultural and intellectual strengths of West Indians, and those who work toward unity.

Mills’s biography is the only one that does not mention Black Power by name—perhaps because it was causing such controversies in Trinidad at the time. As Mark Fraser goes on to say,

Before the Seventies turned into the Eighties, Trinidad and Tobago experienced a mutiny in the army, guerrilla warfare in the hills, unprecedented labor unrest, a bust-to-boom economy, the resignation of Dr. Williams (and its withdrawal), the decline of the dominant People’s National Movement (PNM) and obliteration of the opposition Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

(“The Revolutionary 70s” 322)

Much of the unrest was due to unemployment among youth, and even though Mills’s biography of Garvey does not mention contemporary events, her prose suggests that she believes Garvey’s message was one that would still resonate among the youth of her West Indies, too: “During his years in Kingston Garvey saw much poverty. Always, it seemed, poverty and bad conditions were the lot of the black man” (28). However,



unlike Archer, Mills connects the poverty to action rather than apathy. Black people are not “naturally” poor, and Garvey does not give up on the Jamaican people:

In 1912 he sailed for England, where he met students and seamen from India and Africa and learned about their countries. He came to the conclusion that the only way the Negro could be treated with the same respect as the white man was by gaining the independence of his native land.

(28)

Garvey uses evidence of poverty to go to other countries and see if it is the same everywhere, and ultimately connects the poverty to the White violence inherent in the colonial system. Like Archer, Mills' focus on the body is connected with poverty and its effects on Black people, but the Garvey that Mills describes uses his knowledge gained by physically traveling to multiple countries to embrace revolution in Jamaica and other colonized countries. This connection allows Mills to present Garvey as a “Great West Indian” rather than a failed leader of Americans.

The bulk of Mills' biography is set in the West Indies, not in the United States or in England as are the other biographies. Although it mentions Garvey's travels, Mills' biography suggests that everything Garvey did concerned the people of Jamaica and the broader West Indies:

Finally, he returned to Jamaica to enter politics and to form the People's Political Party. Among its aims were self-government for Jamaica, higher wages, more employment, the establishment of a Jamaican university, and protection of the rights of the individual.

(31)

In many ways, Garvey's aims for Jamaica were similar to the young Black Power protestors of the February Revolution. Brinsley Samaroo argues that Trinidad “maintained close links with the Garveyite movement” (99) through the Trinidad Workingmen's Association, and that their “underground movement would emerge with renewed vigor in the form of Black Power” (99). The revolution, Samaroo says, attacked “the structural violence of the status quo and the persistence of a hierarchical system of inequality” (103). By focusing on great West Indians like Garvey rather than Eric Williams, Mills indicates her sympathy with the demands of the Black Power movement as it was playing out in Trinidad, rather than as it manifested itself in America.

Archer's and Mills' biographies were written during the Black Power movement, and responded directly to the effect that movement was having on the people in their respective nations. One later biography that appeared after the Black Power movement's peak, but still within the

context of contentious racial politics, is Eric Huntley's *Marcus Garvey: A Biography*. Unlike the other biographies mentioned here, this was a book-length biography devoted to Garvey, and was initially published (for adults) as a centenary celebration of Garvey's birth in 1987. But the 1980s were a difficult time for Black people in Britain, where Huntley had been living for over twenty years. He and his wife Jessica had founded Bogle L'Ouverture Press in the late 1960s to publish and publicize the thinking of radicals in Britain and the Caribbean, including Walter Rodney, an academic who spent time exploring the conditions in Jamaica's notorious Trench Town, and Bernard Coard, a doctoral student from Granada who studied African colonization and its effects on the African people. It was the Huntleys who had produced the Coards' *Getting to Know Ourselves*, and Jessica Huntley commented the children's books were important as a means to "assist the young Black child in his search for his identity" ("Publisher's Note" *Getting to Know Ourselves*). The Huntleys' commitment to Black Power ideals was only strengthened by their life in Britain.

In the 1970s, their children's publications focused on self-image and identity, downplaying physical violence. But by the 1980s, it had become harder to ignore violence, especially toward the *young* Black body. The Huntleys had been part of the protests against the New Cross Massacre in 1981 and the police refusal to investigate it as a racist incident; and they had seen the riots in Brixton that same year, both of which had involved physical violence against youth. Paul Gilroy and Errol Lawrence point out that the press at the time of the riots suggested that Afro-Caribbean criminality was unavoidable, as it was ingrained "at a deeper level, the psychological wounds going back to slavery" (*Daily Telegraph* article quoted in "Two-Tone Britain" 122). Police worried that "Black Power and Black Alliance movements...were thought to be recruiting among the young unemployed," (Gilroy *Ain't No Black* 112). Thatcher's revival of the Sus law, giving police the right to stop and search anyone they suspected might be involved in illegal activity, made young Black Britons feel like criminals, and as if their bodies marked them out and put them under threat. Mainstream children's literature, such as Farrukh Dhondy's *The Siege of Babylon* (1978) portrayed the desperate measures taken by young British Blacks against White police officers (and society). But as Carl Gutiérrez-Jones suggests, "Asserting criminal stereotypes is part of a larger process by which a culture of fear and the ideology of 'choice' work together to maintain a fundamental cultural and social dependency for targeted communities" (*Critical Race Narratives* 144). The Huntleys wanted to counter this image of criminality and the damage that it might do to the identity of young Black Britons and to the Black British community as a whole. In July of 1983 they launched a project to produce a series of biographies for Black British youth with the aim, as Jessica Huntley later wrote, of "correct[ing] this gross imbalance in

the record of our presence in Britain” (unpublished notes of 6 September 1992 meeting, Huntley Archives).

The biographies project turned out to be quite difficult to achieve in the climate of the 1980s. A. Sivanandan argues that the political push toward multiculturalism and equal opportunities gave individual Black artists, writers, and publishers “trouble in and around articulating and recording our own experience” (Owusu “The Struggle” 422) because multiculturalism celebrated the idea of “similar differences”; West Indians and Pakistanis, for example, had different foods and celebrations, but they were all distinct from White people and thus all an undifferentiated Other. The Huntleys, through their project, attempted to create, not just individual stories, but a story of community by highlighting Black people as individuals working for other Black people. As Liz Stanley writes,

In feminist and cultural political terms, people’s lives and behaviors make considerably more sense when they are located through their participation in a range of overlapping social groups, rather than being portrayed as somehow different, marked out all along by the seeds of their later greatness.

(9)

Although the Huntleys had tried to engage a broad spectrum of authors and subjects, only three biographies were produced in the series, all written by Eric Huntley. The first of these was *Marcus Garvey* (1987). The Huntleys were interested in connecting Black British youth to their past and to the global African community, and this makes Eric Huntley’s biography of Garvey different from the others I have discussed here. It is also designed to be compatible with the (then new) National Curriculum’s key stage 2 history curriculum. This suggests that the Huntleys, though motivated by goals of promoting the identity and historical understanding of youth of African descent, still recognized that many of the children of the Windrush generation were not ever going to go “back” to the West Indies; these youth were Black British, and therefore had to manage to succeed in the British school system as Black people in a White society.

Nearly a quarter of the biography—eight pages—is concentrated on Garvey’s early life in Jamaica. In telling Garvey’s history, Huntley also tells a history of Jamaica. He writes that St. Ann’s Bay, where Garvey was born, was near to where “Columbus landed” (1); the stories that Garvey learns about as a young boy are not those of an enslaved past, but of those who fought the powerful: “Quaco, Chempong, Nanny, Paul Bogle and William Gordon” (2) as well as the Maroons “who had escaped from slavery and set up communities of their own” (2) and the fictional stories of the trickster Anansi (2). These historical

and fictional figures provide Garvey, and by extension the reader of the biography, with positive role models and an image of African people that is neither patronizing nor pitiable. Huntley's highlighting of community as a source of Black Power in Garvey's thinking is also unsurprising. John Rex argues that in Britain, unlike in the West Indies, trade-unionism does not unite or support Black Britons: "For the support that white workers get from the Labor movement and from working-class culture, [Black Britons] look to militant black movements which are neighborhood-rather than work-based" ("Black Militancy and Class Conflict" 83). The reference to the Maroons, rather than to worker movements as in Mills' biography, sets Huntley's version apart as clearly speaking to young Black Britons. Hope for improvement in the situation of Blacks could be found, not in the larger society, but in their community. Black Britons would help other Black Britons, not because of their ideas, but because of the color of their skin.

This is not to say that Huntley's biography ignores problems faced by Afro-Caribbeans. He describes Garvey's childhood experience of racism (4) and the devastating hurricanes in 1903 (6) and 1907 (7). While Garvey himself remained employed, the hurricanes caused high prices and unemployment throughout the region, and Huntley writes that it is through his efforts on behalf of his fellow workers that he loses his job as a printer's foreman: "Marcus...not only joined his fellow workers and went on strike but also led the discussions for higher wages on their behalf. As a foreman, he was not expected to support the strike and because of this he was dismissed" (8). Huntley does not allow the reader to see Garvey as a failure for being fired, however: Garvey "very soon was able to get another job, this time in the government printer" (8). Throughout the biography, Huntley is keen to show that difficulties, whether human-made (racism) or nature-made (devastating weather) need not hold an individual back. This is Huntley's version of Garveyism and of Black Power.

However, ultimately, Huntley's biography cannot focus only on small communities of Blacks working together to improve their lot. When Huntley describes the interaction between Blacks and Whites, it is often in violent terms, especially as Garvey became more well-known and powerful. In America, Huntley describes the situation of southern Blacks terrorized by the Ku Klux Klan, who tried to erase the Black "threat" by destroying their physical bodies:

Scores of black people were being burnt alive and their properties destroyed as terror swept across many southern states. The courts of law were also under the influence of the Klan and did not mete out justice to black people.

Huntley, like Archer, suggests that Garvey's response is one of violence in return, but he places it in a different context. Whereas Archer had suggested that Garvey overreacted to White violence because of his embitterment against the government, Huntley argues that it is a measure of self-defense: "When Marcus visited some of these areas to hold meetings, his vehicle had to be mounted with a machine-gun for protection from members of the Klan who were intent on murdering black people" (19). In the context of the British police violence toward Black bodies in the 1980s, Huntley's suggestion that Blacks have the right to protect themselves is significant. Having made the point that Black bodies are in danger, Huntley then drops the idea of violence, and returns to self-image, following the sentence above with a description of Garvey's message of self-reliance and the beauty and worth of the Black person. The Klan and white people in general, Huntley implies, see Blackness and associates it with violence; Black people, on the other hand "eagerly received" Garvey's message giving Blackness a new, more positive association (19).

In addition to writing a biography that teaches readers about history and improves their own self-image, the biography (unlike the Archer and Mills versions) makes an effort to posit Garvey as an international figure. Huntley's biography concludes with the international influence that Marcus Garvey had, which "reached into every corner of the world in which African people lived" (32). Huntley devotes paragraphs to Garvey's influence on Kwame Nkrumah, and Ghanaian independence; on South Africa's Steven Biko; and on Maurice Bishop of Granada. Culturally, Huntley points out, "singers... have carried forward Marcus's message" (34), including Bob Marley and "Winston (Burning Spear) Rodney" (34). Marcus Garvey's message is carried on most fervently, according to Huntley, through singing and speeches—through orality—rather than through the written text. The physical body can tell history better than a book. In the context of Huntley's Britain, where the White-dominated news media was not reporting the struggles of the Black community but Black performance poets (such as the young Linton Kwesi Johnson and future children's author Benjamin Zephaniah) and musicians were, the mistrust of the written text and embrace of oral culture was not surprising.

Black Power began as a silent fist, raised in protest, an image that raised fears in White society. If, as Stuart Hall argues, "cultural industries... have the power constantly to rework and reshape what they represent, and, by repetition and selection, to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit" ("Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'" 75), then the stories told about Black Power, its influences and its influence on a wider society, are important. Richard Delgado says that

The attraction of stories for [marginalized] groups should come as no surprise. For stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion,

shared understandings, and meanings. The cohesiveness that stories bring is part of the strength of the outgroup. An outgroup creates its own stories, which circulate within the group as a kind of counter-reality.

(“Legal Storytelling” 64)

Children’s literature about Black Power told a counter-reality about the Black body, one not (as in dominant media even today) invoking fear, but expressing beauty and community despite the violence that threatened (and still threatens) the very existence of Black people.

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### 3 “[I]t’s my skin that’s paid most dearly”

#### Katniss Everdeen and/as the Appalachian Body

*Roxanne Harde*

Whether Panem’s annual Hunger Games are described as a reminder of the rebellion by the Capitol, as “punishment for the uprising” by Katniss, or as the state’s ongoing strategy to discipline the Districts, the rules of the Games, in which “each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate,” ensure that the bodies of those children figuratively become their home districts (18). Each is, to use Michel Foucault’s terms, a body “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (*Discipline* 25). If the Districts are organized as political divisions, they are also arranged organically: each encompasses an ecosystem or landscape that contains a citizenry who specialize in supplying some category of consumable the Capitol needs or desires. These children are each part of the whole of their districts, and they thus synecdochically become the homelands they represent; their adolescent bodies are punished in place of the collective bodies-human and landscape<sub>s</sub> of their districts.

As Suzanne Collins’s main protagonist and narrator, Katniss Everdeen is at the center of *The Hunger Games* series, in both the novels and the films. Hers is the robust body of the warrior in both the Games and the rebellion, the beautiful body of the well-publicized “girl on fire,” and the disciplined body used to drive various social economies. Through the trilogy, as her body is used to first enforce the subjugation of the Districts and then to overthrow the Capitol, it becomes the tortured body - shot, broken, mutilated, and repeatedly burned, literally the girl on fire<sub>s</sub> and then, over and over, the restored and rejuvenated body. As with all the tributes, Katniss’s body functions in another, subtler, manner, as she embodies her home district, the Appalachian hills of the southeastern United States. In many ways, Katniss is Appalachia. Her body synecdochically stands in for her homeland, an ecosystem repeatedly destroyed and rejuvenated. Collins’s alignment of her main character with a particularly beleaguered American landscape opens the texts to a number of critical analyses, including Carissa Ann Baker’s fine ecocritical



reading of the novels, in which she points out that the relationship between human and nature “enables Katniss’s triumphs, serves as the basis of Panem’s culture and politics, and provides the foundation for... other important themes” (198). The theme this chapter explores is Collins’s constructions of Katniss’s body and/as the Appalachian body, as I argue that the resiliency of her body depends upon her connection to her homeland even as the rejuvenation of a tortured landscape adumbrates her repeated rejuvenations. This chapter first traces the connection Katniss has to her beloved home; from the food provided by its green hills to the cultural capital that makes her strong, including the “mountain airs” she sings, the restored verdancy of this ecosystem affords the historical and sociocultural matrix that makes her a survivor. I will then consider the processes her body undergoes—preparatory processes, such as aesthetic interventions and training; medical processes to heal the trauma she suffers, such as bone fusion and skin grafts—as representative of the exploitive processes visited upon the Appalachian range she calls home, with its actual history of underground, strip, and mountain-top removal mining, and its fictional destruction at the hands of the Capitol.

### **“Mountain airs”: Katniss and Appalachia**

Collins begins the trilogy by weaving the basics of her plot in with the myriad details offered by Katniss as she rises on reaping day and heads to the woods. Her path from her house “almost at the edge of the Seam,” the nickname for the part of District 12 where the coal miners live, takes her through “the scruffy field called the Meadow,” under the fence and into the woods where she meets Gale (*HG* 4). House, Meadow, fence, and woods, are all part of the District, background Katniss’s narrative, but the woods are where she can be herself, where she has a friend: “I can feel the muscles in my face relaxing, my pace quickening as I climb the hills to our place.... Gale says I never smile except in the woods,” and she describes Gale as being “only really alive in the woods” (*HG* 5; *CF* 5). Katniss’s family home in the Seam has rats and little comfort; the scruffy Meadow functions as a nondescript landscape that affords little food or protection for the District’s citizens; the fence, electrified or not, might keep out predators but mostly represents the Capitol and its pervasive oppressions. Though these areas comprise home, and she does describe herself and Gale as having “that Seam look. Dark, straight hair, olive skin, gray eyes,” the forest beyond means comfort, sustenance and safety to Katniss (*CF* 12). When learning how to feed her family, the forest “became our savior, and each day I went a bit farther into its arms... I thought of the hours spent in the woods with my father and I knew how we were going to survive” (*HG* 51, 32). Baker points out that in these novels, every character “can be understood in terms of his or her relationship to place, specifically natural and synthetic physical

spaces" (200). Katniss may live in the Seam, but she is truly alive in the Appalachian hills, the landscape that provided the training ground that ensured her survival.

Katniss's path throughout the trilogy always leads back to the forest, which allows her and Gale a place to be fully individuated and politicized: in *Catching Fire*, the woods "have always been our place of safety, our place beyond the reach of the Capitol, where we're free to say what we feel, be who we are" (CF 24). In *Mockingjay*, they return to their old hunting grounds where she reminisces about "countless days of hunting and snaring, fishing and gathering, roaming together through the woods, unloading our thoughts while we filled our game bags. This was the doorway to both sustenance and sanity" (M 127). Her path, if it is always to the Appalachian forests, does not always or eventually lead to Gale. His political rhetoric combines with her own ideas to afford her conclusions that look very like Michel Foucault's ideas about political power and the body's functions as machine. If the hills enable Gale, as befitting the strong wind that is his namesake, to express his anger and teach Katniss about how the Capitol works to keep them starving and divided, then Katniss is clear that his "yelling... doesn't change anything"; Katniss, named after an edible aquatic plant native to the Appalachians, concludes that "it doesn't make things fair, it doesn't fill our stomachs" (HG 14). In the terms of Foucault's bio-politics of power, "present at every level of the social body and utilized by diverse institutions... operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them," Katniss's practicality nonetheless shows her to be caught between two institutions, the state and the family, in an impossible situation that is only partially alleviated by her ability to depend on the hills and her abilities to provide for her family (*History* 141).

While Collins makes clear what her connection to the Appalachians affords Katniss, she leaves tacit how Katniss mirrors cultural understandings about how those hills have, for more than two centuries, turned a disparate group of immigrants into a fiercely independent and hardworking citizenry, how they have given natural abundance alongside hardscrabble farming, backbreaking labor in the mines, and exploitation by every economic and political system in the country (Burns; Butler). The southern Appalachians are known for their "rich and contested symbolism: as an unruly (and largely pre-modern) backlands/badlands; as a site of rural coalmining and subsequent post-mining economic depression; as the nurturing ground for rugged, resilient individuals and communities" (Fitzgerald and Hayward 76). Noting the parallels "between Katniss's home environment and Southern Appalachia," Tina Hanlon suggests "the Appalachian coalfields provide one of the best historical backdrops for a dystopian view of exploited workers, especially since that exploitation continues today" (60, 61). There is

very little distance between Katniss's illegal hunting, Gale's subversive politics, and the rise of Appalachian moonshining as an important cottage industry and political statement. Though the gesture offered by her countrypeople when she volunteers for the Games in Prim's place surprises Katniss, this gesture that says she is "someone precious" in her district, the kiss/salute that "means thanks, it means admiration, it means good-bye to someone you love" demonstrates that these people understand the meaning of her connection to and representation of them and their home (*HG* 24).

These connections help her survive, as shown by the multiple ways in which Katniss's life in the Appalachian wilderness makes her a formidable player of the Games. From the young lynx who becomes her companion until she has to kill him because he frightens off game, to her training as a climber, "I began to risk climbing trees to escape the wild dogs that quickly got bored and moved on," to the plants she learns about, noting their trickiness, "many are edible, but one false mouthful and you're dead," the challenges and bounty the Appalachians give her later keep her alive (*HG* 51). At a key moment in the games, Katniss offers the sum of her training in the hills—"I'm travelling uphill now, which I prefer, with a source of fresh water not only for myself but possible game"—a sum of physical training and skills learned in her Appalachian home (*HG* 195). In the arena, dying from dehydration, Katniss collapses near a pond and ponders the mud: "I love mud, I think. How many times I've tracked game with the help of its soft, readable surface, good for bee stings, too" (*HG* 178). Mud, of course, means water, and water means survival. After being stung in her determined act of aggression against the pack of Careers, Katniss tries to eliminate the foul taste of tracker jacker venom in her mouth with honeysuckle blossoms "The sweetness spreads through my mouth... warming my veins with memories of summer, and my home woods" (*HG* 195). After she wins the Games, she looks toward understanding exactly how the Capitol will continue to threaten and exploit her, leaving her questions "to be unraveled back home, in the peace and quiet of the woods" (*HG* 359). Reading landscapes as cultural and natural, geographic and historical, Jane Carroll argues that "Human experience of territory-be it inhabited, viewed, remembered, or imagined-focalizes and changes the nature of the site" (2). I would suggest that the nature of the site in turn affects human experience of it. The Appalachians are not simply a range of gently rolling, heavily forested hills; they are ancient mountains, among the oldest in the world, and they hold a seemingly deep and endless supply of fossil fuels even as their trees cover the scars of centuries of coal mining. They are a contested political ground, as is Katniss's body. In turn, because of the Capitol's exploitation, her awareness of it and resistance to it, Katniss's experiences in the Appalachians are political; her body has been as devastated for political and capital profit as has that landscape.

Her connection to the hills enables her survival, but that connection is forged at a tremendous cost.

Aside from providing a training ground, the Appalachians anchor Katniss both figuratively and literally. When she volunteers in place of Prim, as she tries to compose herself on the stage, she can see the hills she climbed that morning and this enables her to settle into her fate without showing weakness (*HG* 25). Realizing that she is going back into the arena a second time, Katniss instinctively heads to the woods and watches them from the train as she returns to the Capitol, “the last glimpse of my home” (*CF* 174, 188). Every time she faces death, she expresses the desire to spend her last hours in District Twelve, and she repeatedly thinks about death in the Games in terms of bodies “heading home” (*HG* 153). Even as this “girl from District Twelve of all places,” as the President identifies her, equates home with life, the connections to her District keep her alive in the arena (*CF* 21). Similarly, Katniss’s connection to Rue functions in a way that reinforces her synecdochic ties to the mountains of home.

Observing Rue during the training sessions in *The Hunger Games*, Katniss notes that “it’s hard to ignore the child. She slips up and joins us at different stations. Like me, she’s clever with plants, climbs swiftly, and has good aim”; like Katniss, Rue “can move through the woods like a shadow” (*HG* 99, 199). The similarities of their bodies—strong, though slight from hunger, adept from necessity—and their affinities for the natural world of their neighboring Districts, located in the American South tie these girls together in a connection that lives long past Rue’s death. Moreover, as Foucault points out, “sovereignty is not exercised on things, but first of all on a territory, and consequently on the subjects who inhabit it” (*Security* 96). These girls from neighboring Districts, girls who love the natural spaces of their homes, are subjected from birth to a totalitarian state and a system of exploitation that equates them to the territories in which they produce goods for the state.

Their relationship is also vested in music, the folk songs each brings from their home Districts, and each is attached to the mockingjays that carry their songs forward. Katniss remembers that her

father was particularly fond of mockingjays. When we went hunting, he would whistle or sing complicated songs to them and, after a polite pause, they’d always sing back. Not everyone is treated with such respect. But whenever my father sang, all the birds in the area would fall silent and listen.

(*HG* 41)

This mutated bird, a product of the jabberjay, an abandoned weapon of war, and female mockingbirds, a species native to the American south, particularly the areas in which Katniss and Rue live, can “recreate songs.

Not just a few notes, but whole songs with multiple verses, if you had the patience to sing them and if they liked your voice" (HG 43). The ties between the singing bird, beloved by her father and the singing Katniss, its home range, and the pin that comes to define her are clear. Mockingjays respond similarly to Rue, and Katniss later describes her family as "a flock of small dark birds" (CF 58). When Rue is killed, as Katniss puts flowers around her body, a young mockingjay "lands on a branch before me and bursts out Rue's melody. My song, the hovercraft, were too unfamiliar for this novice to pick up, but it has mastered her handful of notes. The ones that mean she's safe" (HG 238). Later when Katniss meets Rue's family she explains "I see her [Rue] in the yellow flowers that grow in the Meadow by my house. I see her in the mockingjays that sing in the trees" (CF 51). Traditional songs connect these girls in a subversive response to the Capitol, a response that works to reclaim bodies, human and territorial.

I have examined elsewhere the connections between the Appalachian socio-cultural milieu and the music it produces, including some of the songs on *The Hunger Games* soundtrack (Harde). In a study of songs and their significance in *The Hunger Games* novels and films, Jon Fitzgerald and Philip Hayward similarly focus on "The Meadow Song" as produced by mountain culture. While they don't go so far as my argument that Katniss ultimately stands in for her District, they read the song as coming from the pre-modern Anglo-Celtic tradition, that this part of the cultural capital of Appalachia "lends symbolic weight and context to the role of song in the novel and film, evoking a cultural continuity and dignity... that stands in stark contrast to the shallow and superficial world of the Capitol" (77). Both novels and films show Katniss's home as a repository of traditional Appalachian song, dance, and folk crafts. "The Meadow Song," Fitzgerald and Hayward conclude reconnects "Katniss to her cultural heritage.... The meadow described in the song's lyrics has a particular resonance since it is both a metaphorical safe place and an actual location in District 12 where Katniss goes to hide" (82). Therefore, even as she struggles in the arena in her first Games, even as she sings with, and then for, Rue, "The Meadow Song" takes her back to her District, and ties together the Seam, the meadow, and her beloved forest, becoming the song of home.

Other local songs matter in the series. Some are simply sweet memories: Peeta began to love Katniss when she sang the valley song in school (HG 301). Others are laden with darker meanings: Rue's song, taught to Katniss in the first arena, figures in *Mockingjay* when the crew is filming a propo by the lake in District Twelve, Katniss and Pollux begin whistling with a mockingjay: "I sing Rue's four notes, the ones she used to signal the end of the workday in 11. The ones that ended up as the background music to her murder" (M 122). The connection between these girls comes full circle as Rue is memorialized in a forest she never entered, and the suffering felt in all the Districts comes to the

foreground. In that same scene, Katniss sings "The Hanging Tree," a song she learned from her father, and one that her mother forbade her to sing at home. Dark in the manner of traditional English-Appalachian ballads like "Barbara Allen," "The Hanging Tree" is at the center of a scene that conjoins Katniss and her home to the misery caused by the governing regime. She first notes her discomfort with sharing this landscape with outsiders: "I straggle behind the film crew... feeling their presence to be a violation of my beloved woods. This is a private place, a sanctuary, already corrupted by the Capitol's evil" (M 121). Tormented by memories of the arena, Katniss performs the song: "I'm on my feet, moving back into the trees, resting my hand on the rough trunk of a maple where the birds perch.... I begin softly, sweetly, as my father did" (M 123). Collins presents the full lyrics, four stanzas worth, of this song, an original that draws so completely from Appalachian history and culture that they and the entire scene lay like a palimpsest over this landscape. Trees and lake, singing girl, and her crew of equally tortured peers overlay centuries of exploitation, bringing to light, as Katniss does when she explicates the lyrics in the following pages, a history of subjugation and oppression.

The trilogy's final scene of song comes after Katniss has assassinated the new president; a political act that also harkens to Rue, because it comes from her understanding that if Snow killed children in games and war, then the equally cold and power-mad Coin subscribed to a similar ideology. After her arrest, far from the Appalachians, she begins to sing:

something unexpected happens.... Hour after hour of ballads, love songs, mountain airs.... What's amazing is how clearly I remember them. The tunes, the lyrics. My voice, at first rough and breaking on the high notes, warms up into something splendid. A voice that would make the mockingjays fall silent and then tumble over themselves to join in.

(M 375)

If the singing comes unexpectedly, then it comes from her body: with traditional songs from the hills. Just as when she reacts instinctively, bodily, when she draws the arrow and chooses the correct target, Katniss's body makes a political choice, to sing herself "back home" and heal.

### **"The damage, the fatigue, the imperfections": Katniss as Appalachia**

The body, particularly the female body, has long been used in literature as an ongoing metaphor of the land, with both land and female body subjugated by institutions of power (Kolodny). The discussion above establishes the deep connections between Katniss and Appalachia, a

connection that Collins positions as distant from and the political opposite of the Capitol, which “was built in a place once called the Rockies. District 12 was in a region known as Appalachia. Even hundreds of years ago, they mined coal here. Which is why our miners have to dig so deep” (*HG* 41). The depth of the mines and the return of Appalachian miners to underground shaft mining gesture toward the deepness of the roots attaching Katniss and the members of her community to their home. Collins also crafts a postapocalyptic setting in which time and depopulation have allowed the Appalachians to return to a pre-Industrial Revolution verdancy. Trees now cover the deep scars of strip and mountain-top removal mining, the water again runs clean and clear, and the woods are alive with wildlife. The series thus begins with a landscape whose surface hides deep trauma even as it displays determined resilience, which is Katniss’s repeated fate. Her ongoing struggles with the Capitol’s attempts, largely through her hapless prep team, to change her natural appearance, gesture toward the changes wrought on the Appalachians through settlement and agriculture. Katniss’s ongoing battles in the arena and then in the rebellion result in a series of injuries that point directly to the devastation wreaked by contemporary surface mining; her equally repeated healings offer complex considerations of natural resilience and human destruction. Her body, like her home, functions as contested political ground. Her body, to draw from Foucault, is a useful political instrument only when it is both subjected and productive. Caught up in the relations of power and domination, Katniss’s body must be subjected to the prevailing aesthetic codes in order for it to produce the entertainment required, an entertainment that in turns keeps the rest of the population docile and subjected (*Discipline* 25).

During her first full-body preparation, the work of the prep team “has included scrubbing down my body with a gritty foam that has removed not only dirt but at least three layers of skin, turning my nails into uniform shapes, and primarily, ridding my body of hair” (*HG* 51). These representatives of the Capitol have to dig deeply to remove the traces of home from her body, to clean away dirt and coal dust, and to give her what they term “Beauty Base Zero.” Collins repeats this type of scene frequently in the trilogy: Katniss keeps returning to her natural state, getting dirty in the woods, growing hair. The reiteration of hair removal functions none too subtly as a reminder of mountain-top removal mining, and Katniss’s contemplation of body hair, in which that of the boys is left alone, reinforces the connection of her female body to the rolling contours of the Appalachians. She continually rejects the dominant social codes, considering the ways in which they treat and decorate their bodies as alien, and comparing unfavorably their quest to look “younger and thinner. In District 12, looking old is something of an achievement since so many people die early.... A plump person is envied” (*HG* 124–125). Even in his perpetually drunken haze, Haymitch notes how she

despises these people, and her body continually rebels against the Capitol, its food and fashion (*HG* 119). She shows admiration only for Cinna and his talents in dressing her as the “girl on fire.” I suggest that this seeming dichotomy—hatred for the Capitol’s fashions and appreciation for Cinna’s work—reflects her disdain for the superficial. Cinna gave her costumes that were beautiful, but also had hidden elements: offering both added means for survival and the interplay between coal and fire that brought her District to life on her body.

The first time Katniss is prepped in *Mockingjay*, the scene draws attention to the meaning of the scars she accumulates:

It’s no simple job getting me back to Beauty Base Zero.... My preps do pretty well until they try to address the spot on my arm where Johanna dug out the tracker. None of the medical team was focusing on looks when they patched up the gaping hole. Now I have a lumpy, jagged scar that ripples out over a space the size of an apple.

(*M* 61)

While the Capitol people react with revulsion to the scar, the result of hasty stitching, Katniss expresses her disgust with their superficiality. The scar stands as evidence of both her resilience and the effort that many people put into saving her and starting the rebellion. In the face of war, the destruction of District Twelve, news of which hit her like a “deathblow,” and an uncertain future, her disregard for the state of her skin aligns her body with the political battlefield, and the scar becomes her new “Seam” (*CF* 391). There will be other lasting scars, and she will accept them happily. When she visits the hospital in District Eight, the scene where she begins to understand and embrace her role as the Mockingjay, she does so without makeup. After first cutting all ties between herself and the totalitarian state, “How ridiculous, how perverse I would feel presenting that painted Capitol mask to these people,” she acknowledges her place among those the Capitol has made suffer: “The damage, the fatigue, the imperfections. That’s how they recognize me, why I belong to them” (*M* 90). The scars on her body represent survival as they connect to the scars on her home, the Seam where she grew up and the Meadow where she felt safe, but also to the mountains that withstood centuries of mining.

The litany of injuries Katniss suffers is remarkable for both the visceral descriptions and how they mimic the damage done to the landscape by coal mining. Her skin repeatedly suffers and heals: the fireball attack in the first arena gives her third-degree burns healed by sponsored ointment; tracker jacker stings cured by Rue’s herbs; the head wound from Clove mended by Peeta; the whip cut on her face stitched by her mother. In the second arena, the blisters from the poisonous gas that kills Mags are rectified with salt water and sand: “My remaining scabs are starting



to peel off. By gently rubbing a handful of sand up and down my arm, I clean off the rest of the scales, revealing fresh new skin underneath” (*CF* 356). Throughout the trilogy, Katniss’s ambivalence about the marks on her body denotes her rejection of the Capitol even as it gestures toward home. She wakes after winning her first Games to find her hearing restored and her body polished: “Not only are the scars from the arena gone, but those accumulated over years of hunting have vanished without a trace. My forehead feels like satin, and when I try to find the burn on my calf, there’s nothing” (*HG* 351). Tellingly, Katniss trusts none of this; she finds out the Gamemakers wanted to surgically enhance her figure, to give her curves, before her first public appearance as victor, and Finnick’s later revelation that the President prostituted the victors does not come a surprise. She cannot accept the appearance of the captured Peeta on television: “His skin is glowing, flawless, in that full-body-polish way.... I can’t reconcile this image with the battered, bleeding boy who haunts my dreams” (*M* 21). The Capitol’s willingness to damage and repair these young bodies, to make them tools of hunger games and war games, indicates they will continue to be used in games of politics and profit.

When the newly polished Katniss returns home, her admiration of Gale’s hands, “beautiful, capable fingers. Scarred, as mine were before the Capitol erased all marks from my skin,” demonstrates both her affinity for the reality of her home District and her connection to the Appalachians (*CF* 95). Under that verdant covering of forest, those hills hold the scars of surface mining. Katniss’s occasional descriptions of derelict mining buildings make clear that this is not a virgin wilderness, but a landscape as resilient as her body. Her decision to join the rebellion results in injuries that also heal, but remain with her as the marks of mining remain in the hills. After the battle in Eight, “I’m banged up and bloody and someone seems to be hammering on my left temple from inside my skull.... I feel fine really. Except for my head, and my leg, and the soreness from the bruises, and the nausea” (*M* 103). She reacts physically to the bombing of the Nut, because it reproduces the way in which her father died, but seems blasé about watching herself “get shot on television” (*M* 217). During the battle in the Capitol, she and her sister are victims of a bomb:

I am on fire. The balls of flame that erupted from the parachutes shot over the barricades.... one caught me, ran its tongue up the back of my body and transformed me into something new.... A badly burned girl with no wings. With no fire. And no sister.  
(*M* 348, 358)

These injuries also transform her from the polished face of the rebellion into a permanently scarred body; the makeovers have come to an end. She has hit, in Foucault’s terms “the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their

actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (*Power* 39). She will never again be the girl she was, both skin and psyche are permanently damaged:

The skin grafts still retain a newborn-baby pinkness. The skin deemed damaged but salvageable looks red, hot, and melted in places. Patches of my former self gleam white and pale. I’m like a bizarre patchwork quilt of skin.... I wouldn’t much care except the sight of my body brings back the memory of pain.... how I watched my little sister become a human torch.

(*M* 352)

Katniss’s ongoing disregard for her appearance, for the state of her skin, has not changed. However, these scars now stand as permanent evidence of the damage done by the nation-state. *Power*’s workings are now inserted into and onto her body, as they are on the hills, in markings from which she will never fully recover.

### Conclusion: “The face of the rebellion”

Bill Clemente suggests that although Katniss’s stormy psyche provides an appealing site of connection for young adult readers, the books, “argue for the necessity of increased awareness, despite the uncertainties and often painful consequences that [political] engagement brings” (21). Collins depicts Katniss’s politicization as a gradual transformation, from her initial resistance to Gale’s criticism of the Capitol, to her realization during the Victors Tour of the other Districts’ growing anger, to her resentment of a system in which children starve while the privileged vomit in order to eat more, to her acknowledgement that “every parent in every district in Panem” fears for the life of their child (*CF* 257). Even while hoping to protect her sister, she acknowledges the evil the Capitol has done as she gazes upon Prim’s body:

They have killed her father in those wretched mines. They have sat by as she almost starved to death. They have chosen her as a tribute, then made her watch her sister fight to the death in the Games.... And even that pales in comparison with Rue’s life.

(*CF* 122–123)

Katniss’s concern for her sister moves her toward rebellion; Peeta’s quest to “show them that I’m more than just a piece in their Games” certainly influences her; her hatred and fear of President Snow assuredly motivates her (*CF* 242). However, Katniss’s abiding connection to Appalachia matters more. Kenneth Olwig contends that the political landscape is intrinsically connected to the natural landscape, and the relationship

to that landscape informs our ideas of national and persona identity. Katniss's awareness of the politically contested nature of her beloved home District, and her understanding of her body as equally contested territory insist that she first subvert and then rebel. Katniss's connection to Appalachian history and culture ultimately turn her into "the face of the rebellion" (M 266).

Katniss becomes most fully the politicized Appalachian body in her role as the Mockingjay, and she notes her connection to the bird as a survivor:

A mockingjay is a creature the Capitol never intended to exist. They hadn't counted on the highly controlled jabberjay having the brains to adapt to the wild, to pass on its genetic code, to thrive in a new form. They hadn't anticipated its will to live.

(CF 92)

That will to live belongs to Katniss as well, so much so that before she enters into her final arena, the rebellion, she declares: "I am the mockingjay. The one that survived despite the Capitol's plans" (CF 387). Before heading to the Capitol, she describes herself as an "independently thinking victor with a layer of psychological scar tissue too thick to penetrate" (M 251). Like the bird, she adapts, figures out the political scene and avoids a re-enactment of Snow's totalitarian state by killing Coin. Her body painfully rids itself of its new vestiges of Capitol-ism:

It's a struggle to get to my feet and peel off my Mockingjay suit. I'm badly bruised and might have a broken finger or two, but it's my skin that's paid most dearly for my struggle with the guards. The new pink stuff has shredded like tissue paper and blood seeps through the laboratory-grown cells.

(M 374)

This is the last time she will wear the suit or Capitol skin.

Katniss's return home becomes a patchwork of scars: when she can finally face showering, "I strip, and flakes of skin the size of playing cards cling to the garments"; Peeta returns "Thin and covered with burn scars like me, but his eyes have lost that clouded, tortured look"; the Meadow is a mass grave that "although no one seeds it... turns green again" (M 383, 382, 388). The Appalachian woods insist upon her healing: "It is the old Katniss's favorite kind of day. Early spring. The woods awakening after the long winter.... Slowly, with many lost days, I come back to life" (M 385, 387). That life, Collins makes clear, is one that includes permanent physical and psychological scars. Like the wounds left on the exterior of the Appalachians from surface mining and the unfilled mining tunnels that combine to leave the entire region unstable, Katniss's scars show both healing and the need to continually deal with

the trauma she suffered. Her family’s book of native plants is the matrix of her healing, and “a new factory where we will make medicines” ensures that the natural bounty of the rejuvenated Appalachians will be used in restorative ways. Following Clemente’s ideas about the novels’ ability to inspire engagement, I contend that the continued connection between Katniss’s body and District offer an eco-political conclusion that might suggest to Collins’s young readers their own bodily connections to and political engagement with their homelands.

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## 4 Invisibility and (Dis)Embodiment in Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours*

*Heather Braun*

The emptiness of my body is vast, wide open spaces with nothing to hold on to.

—*Only Ever Yours* (46)

Louise O'Neill's dystopian novel *Only Ever Yours* (2015) is a compelling critique of eating disorders today that exposes the political scrutiny of female bodies and the intricacies of adolescent identity and self-worth. In it, teenage girls are taught that excellence is achieved through the extreme denial of their most basic needs and desires. These girls are the vulnerable targets of a despotic system that idealizes thin female bodies as the supreme reward for powerful men. What results are massively distorted conceptions of normal and ideal, ugly and beautiful. From the age of four, the novel's sixteen-year-old protagonist, freida learns to restrict what she eats, wears, feels, and says in order to elicit male desire and increase her odds of survival. Groomed within a boarding school under the largely invisible political regime known as the Zone, freida competes with other teenage girls called "eves" to be selected at the Ceremony as companions to young men known as the Inheritants. Despite freida's best efforts, her extreme self-discipline and self-denial lead her into a downward spiral of resignation, oblivion, and potential death. By exposing the dangers of equating ultra-thinness with sexual desirability, *Only Ever Yours* reveals relentless pursuit of female beauty and sexual power as leading to powerlessness, loss of identity, and self-destruction. This futile pursuit is most clearly seen in freida's descriptions of eating disorders, female rivalry, and the "emptiness" of self that results from both (46).

The goal of this chapter is to show how O'Neill's dystopian novel confronts our cultural obsession with and anxieties about female agency, sexuality, and physical appearance. In the first section, I examine how political pressures from the Zone to achieve an extremely thin body increase the likelihood and severity of eating disorders as well as other self-destructive behaviors. This constant focus on her appearance increases freida's self-doubt as well as her desperate need to control her

appetites, sexuality, and emotions in a world where she is granted no other control. Next, I consider how other female characters in this novel contribute to this intense focus on the body: the “chastities,” who teach at the School, and the other eves, who remind freida she must remain physically and emotionally detached in order to be attractive to men. This second section investigates the competing fates of reproductive companions, sexualized concubines, and asexual chastities. In the third section, I focus on freida’s recognition of her own powerlessness and her decline into a state of oblivion and utter loss of control. freida’s tragic awakening to her own defenselessness speaks to our society’s objectification and punishment of female bodies as a way of proving self-worth, attractiveness, and success.

### **Fragile Female Bodies: Thinness and Sexual Allure in the Political Spotlight**

Evocative of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *Only Ever Yours* illustrates how political dominance works upon and ultimately destroys vulnerable and deprived female bodies. The novel’s boarding school is run by nun-like “chastities” who train the eves in the arts of hygiene, homemaking, and desirability. Surveillance and self-discipline of their bodies are the primary facts of their existence within the School and the Zone; even when the eves are alone, their every move is monitored on Epads via social media called MyFace. This literal objectification of the female body online and in film creates a false mode of community that actively discourages female friendships while encouraging competition and conformity among the eves. These young women learn to be terrified that they will not make the final cut as a chosen companion and will become imprisoned forever in the School as chastities. Within O’Neill’s school-prison, everyone is an observer. Even those who do not participate in the official judging of the eves at the Ceremony are spectators to the construction and maintenance of female beauty at all costs. However, the eves are both observers and observed objections for appreciation or ridicule. Through them, O’Neill creates a claustrophobic world in which seduction, starvation, and successful matchmaking are the only means of female control and survival.

When readers meet freida in the opening of the novel, she is in a drug-induced stupor. The chastities have assured her that these drugs will make her more docile, less aware of her confinement, and therefore more likely to be selected as a companion. The drugs are in line with the School’s teachings of conformity to a bland, Stepford Wives’ ideal of beauty, first expressed by freida in her “yearning to join the perfectly synchronized breathing of my sisters” (2) who are also her competitors and potential enemies. After graduation, the eves will be forced to leave

their “harem” (68) to become one of three possible fates: companions, concubines, or chastities. Companions become traditional wives and mothers; around the age of forty, companion eves are “terminated” and promptly replaced with new, fresher, more emotionally controlled eves (180). Alternatively, concubines are used purely for sex and entertainment; they become the stars of video games with titles such as “Controlled Concubines” in which they are “hooked up to the sensors” and manipulated by the men holding the game controllers. The third fate is the all-sacrificing, asexual chastity, a fate that requires the shaving of their heads and the removal of the “useless womb” from their bodies before they can become fit to teach young women to pursue the ideals they could not (395). Chastities contrast sharply with the School’s insistence upon making female bodies sexually desirable to men and politically beneficial to the Zone as mothers. Their androgynous, disembodied role is to teach the eves how to control their physical urges and the restlessness of their minds in order to perpetuate the successful manufacturing of attractive female bodies.

Throughout the School’s grooming process, freida’s body is starved, drugged, filmed, and ultimately made foreign to herself. The constant surveillance of her body through technology objectifies freida to such an extreme that she comes to see herself as an object separate from her interior being. Indeed, freida never fully inhabits her body and is encouraged by these forms of objectification to see herself as a tool of a larger system: she is given drugs to temper her emotions and prevent her from comprehending her actual role in this dystopia: to mate and reproduce before being rendered unnecessary. She must entice men with her body while keeping her own desires in check. To be consistently “good,” she must eat as little food as possible, follow the chastities’ orders, and conform to extreme standards of female beauty from the bland to the exotic. Those eves whose bodies match a frail and passive model of femininity are perceived as the School’s strongest “products.” These girls create an illusion of perfection and uniformity through acquiescence, while those who actively rebel are dangerous liabilities to the larger political system. The reality freida must ignore—often through drugs and self-deception—is that her departure from the School means transferring to another kind of prison where she will continue to be an object of surveillance and political control. She can follow the rules, discipline her body into a specific size or shape, and still find herself insufficient due to fluctuating tastes for smaller, bigger, more exotic, or more traditional models.

Each of the three female fates is color-coded according to a symbolic hierarchy that has racial and sexual implications for women ranked and catalogued based exclusively on their physical differences: “The ivory of the companions, the scarlet of the concubines, the ebony of the chastity robes. Separate identities, but inextricably linked” (36–37). While race

is treated only tangentially in the novel, the contrast between the sexually pure and “ivory” concubines and the “ebony” chastities is clear: the greatest power one can achieve in this world is the perceived yet illusory control of the “ivory” companions. Meanwhile, to be a chastity is to be among the lowest of women, a fate that requires a self-renunciation so extreme that these “ebony,” asexual chastities are hardly considered women at all. Although the eves all need to believe they will be chosen as companions, the reality is that only a handful will be. Yet even this third fate has an important function within this dystopian society: “The chastities have their uses, of course—the School could not run without them—but they are not wanted like the concubines are. They are not *necessary* like the companions” (39). The absence of sexual desire in the chastities, their absolute disconnect from their own bodies, even in their efforts to control the bodies of their students, renders them powerless in a world that sees women as tailored for the specific needs and tastes of men. Yet, their role in the manufacturing of female obedience and thinness is crucial.

Susan Bordo’s work on the shaping of female bodies is particularly relevant to the ways in which freida and the other eves are defined, motivated, and packaged solely on the basis of weight, skin color, fashion, makeup choice, and varying levels of mystery and exoticism. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Bordo connects female eating and self-care to feelings of “emptiness, loneliness, and desperation” (Bordo 126): “[w]hen bodies are made into mere products of discourse, they remain bodies in name only” (35). Bordo goes on to clarify that power over the body—a “direct locus of social control” (165)—is exercised “from below” through “individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms” (27). Her description of female self-modification is quite fitting to O’Neill’s descriptions of the eves’s regime:

Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women—we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough. At the farthest extremes, the practices of femininity may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death.

(166)

O’Neill takes these daily disciplines of “normalizing” female beauty to horrific extremes that are disturbingly relevant today. For example, young women today continue to face what Bordo describes as a “double bind,” one that excludes the possibilities of “balance, moderation, rationality, and foresight” (200–201). Instead, they must find ways to navigate the precarious whore-prude binary, finding ways to be sexually



attractive while ensuring they do not give away too much of themselves in the process. Cloistered and alone, freida cannot recognize this double bind and instead becomes “demoralized and debilitated” in her pursuit of a heteronormative model of sexual attraction that places her in a similar situation as adolescent girls today: she is eager to be considered attractive by the Inheritants and her female peers, but both groups are quick to condemn her when she gives away her body too quickly and too willingly.

While starving oneself may ultimately delay sexual maturity, starving oneself at the School is treated as a tool for self-control, ultra-thinness, and sexual desirability. It also represents the best way to become attractive enough to be selected as a companion. Though freida understands she is “imprisoned in these walls,” she has little sense of the political powers controlling her body and her sense of herself within this “house made of mirrors” (O’Neill 2–3). In her drug-induced state, freida longs to escape her awkward physical body:

I watch in the mirrored ceiling as I spread my body out like a starfish, bending my knees away from the sticky sheet. My hands hit the clammy mirrored wall behind my head, the black silk nightgown gathering around my waist. I turn onto my right side, my forehead pressed against another mirrored wall, a heavy sigh misting the glass. I etch my fingertips over my high cheekbones, watching as I trace circles around my almond-shaped eyes. My skin feels crepe thin, as if it’s slowly dissolving into my bones.

(3)

This image of dissolving and disappearing foreshadows the ways in which female bodies become pliable commodities separate from independent minds. While controlled female bodies are at a premium, female minds threaten to subvert the structures within which the Zone mysteriously wields its power.

By giving us freida’s thoughts in these moments of self-denial and self-ridicule, O’Neill also helps readers understand some of the deep-seated causes of eating disorders. Through freida, she illustrates how eating disorders are rarely about food or weight but rather are rooted in a desperate need for control continually thwarted by the wish to make the body achieve an impossible physical ideal. Even when eves achieve their “ideal” weight, they are less satisfied and more critical of themselves than ever. By giving us freida’s most intimate thoughts on herself and the standards to which she is held, O’Neill refuses to trivialize the behavior of eating disorder victims; rather, she demonstrates how attitudes toward food are as much about societal pressures to conform to a specific female ideal of beauty as they are about the adolescent struggle for desire and self-acceptance. Echoing O’Neill,

Wioleta Polinska rejects the “belittling assumption” that eating disorders are ever really about “the world of fashion and thin ideals” (Polinska 575). Rather, as she illustrates in “Bodies Under Siege: Eating Disorder and Self-Mutilation Among Women,” eating disorders are directly connected to issues of individual power, satisfaction within one’s community, and one’s political status within a larger group (Katzman and Lee 392). In this way, *Only Ever Yours* reveals the intense self-ridicule that often results from a preoccupation with and denial of food and self. The act of eating or *not* eating, nurturing or depriving one’s body becomes the only way for these girls to rebel against a despotic system that treats them as physical objects and interchangeable commodities.

### Female Rivalry and the Sexualization of the Fragile Bodies

While the School unremittently limits how the eves think and move, it does not prevent them from acting like ordinary teenager girls. With five months remaining before the final Ceremony, the eves play a game that only increases the rivalry between them. Each girl is asked to name the group’s prettiest girl. One eve tries to assure unnamed “mean girl” megan this way:

“But, um, you have a nice personality, megan.”

“Nice? Nice? NICE?” megan shouts. I try to shush her but she’s beyond reason.

“Yes. You’re nice,” gayness lies again, looking perplexed at this reaction.

“Who cares about *nice*?”

“I do. I think personality matters.”

“Are you brain dead? Personality does NOT matter. All that matters is being pretty, you...” she stammers with rage, “you *feminist*.” There’s a horrified gasp. “Well, it’s true,” she says defiantly. “Being pretty is all that matters.”

(O’Neill 87)

This is the only time the word *feminist* is used in the novel, and it is a clear insult. If the ultimate key to being chosen as a companion is appearing passive and pretty, those who seek something other than a man’s approval of their sexual and reproductive bodies are labeled *feminists*. These are the eves who dare to question the political power in place, the strict gender roles they have been taught, or the fact that everything within the walls of the School is artificial and arbitrary.

The only definitive *feminist* act of rebellion in this novel comes from isabel, specifically her decision to eat in order to gain weight. The other

girls are aghast, but their horrified whispers barely mask their envy of and admiration for Isabel. As freida approaches her closest friend, she expresses both concern and intrigue:

“What’s going on with you, isabel?”

“I’m on probation.”

“I heard. You can’t keep eating at the Fatgirl buffet. It’s making things worse.”

My voice is rising. “If you keep gaining weight, you’ll never become a companion. You won’t even be good enough to be a concubine.”

No man likes a fat girl. We have been told this since design.

“Why are you getting so angry?” she asks. “It’s not *your* body.”

“I’m not angry,” I say, breathing to calm myself, to control these Unacceptable Emotions. “I’m afraid...I’m afraid for you.”

“Afraid of what?”

I can’t say the real words out loud so I just say, “I’m afraid they’ll make you become a chastity.”

Unlike freida, isabel does not fear the chastity life, which she sees it as a “peaceful” escape from the persistent rivalry of her peers and the pressures to conform. isabel’s choice to feed her body, to make herself less appealing to the Inheritants also demonstrates to the other eves that they, too, can control their fate. But to use this control, they must cut off female friendships and learn to hide their thoughts and secrets from each other and themselves:

No man will ever want a companion who thinks too much. I do try to be more controlled. I try to shape my mind into nothingness. But when night falls in the dorms the demons stir, their eyes flashing white in the dark, looking for something to feed on.

*I am a good girl. I am appealing to others. I am always agreeable. (2)*

Later in the novel, isabel chooses to lose a dangerous amount of weight and is once again regarded with jealousy and suspicion: “I can feel my temper start to rise and I breathe deeply to control myself. Only weak girls show emotion” (76). Being too emotional or too intelligent, too heavy or too thin is undesirable. Inevitably, the thin, compliant, passive girls “win” favor while the deviants are discarded or permitted to vanish on their own.

The intense rivalry among the eves looks remarkably like the competition of matchmaking reality shows such as *The Bachelor*. freida’s first and only “bachelor,” Darwin, is a reminder that “survival of the fittest” is determined by the unnatural selection of female bodies, a process sustained by the eves and Inheritants who participate. When Darwin selects freida for a make-out session called “the Heavenly Seventy,” they share

their first kiss. He tells her: “‘Let’s do this again.’ He reaches over to tuck a piece of hair behind my ear and my stomach swoops. ‘If you want to, that is’” (216). As Darwin assures freida she has some control over her fate, he also tries to hide his own bruises, suggesting that political physical control in this novel also extends into the realm of men. In a rare moment of introspection and agitation, freida expresses the irony behind the notion that she can control anything:

Astonishment silences me. Does he really think I have a choice in the matter? He still has my hand in his, but as the door releases he lets go and we break apart. The other Inheritants cheer at Darwin, Sigmund mock-tackling him, putting him in a headlock.

(216)

But this male banter does not distract readers from the dark realization that these are teenage girls trapped within political structures that require them to play a game in which they are victims as well as the ultimate prize. To play, they must express pleasure when men praise their bodies, even though this critical male gaze threatens to turn them into objects without thoughts and desires of their own.

In response to this objectification and cruelty, these young women do not seek solace and support in one another. They do not come together to determine the specific behaviors most prized by this patriarchy and figure out how to thwart them together. Rather, they betray each other’s trust and look out only for themselves. This is especially unfortunate since the most intimate connections created in this novel are among women. Judith Butler’s conception that “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender” works against the idea that there is such a thing as a “natural” sexual or gender identity (Butler *Gender Trouble* 25). Rather, the disciplined, anesthetized body becomes an instrument of social control that “performs” the expectations of a specific gender. What happens, Butler asks, when we consider the power of individual agency outside of a heterosexual model? As political objects, O’Neill’s eves are forced to participate in heterosexual norms, even though they are isolated from men until their fates are determined.

Although freida knows little about how to interact with men, she expresses true affection for isabel. While eves are denied the opportunity to articulate their sexual identities, freida has fleeting moments of awareness in which she recognizes herself as a sexual being. Perhaps the most sensual scene occurs in the first chapter of the novel when isabel enters freida’s cubicle:

She’s like an apparition, standing in the arched doorway between the corridor and my cubicle, her full-length bathrobe glowing in the shadows. She tilts her head, shifting her weight from one foot to the

other, waiting for me to say something. I nod and her tense face softens as she creeps into my narrow bed, aligning her body with mine, our limbs interlocking like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. We are reflected in all of the mirrors, splintering into parallel images, echoed from the ceiling to the walls and back, multiplied over and over again. Her milky-white legs entwined with mine, her white-blond hair bleeding into my dark brown waves.

(3–4)

This is a rare moment in the novel when a young woman physically and mentally inhabits her own body. Before we know anything about these girls or the School that forces them to control their bodies and desires, we see a connection between two women that defies the conventions set forth by the political regime. freida expresses relief that isabel hasn't become a chastity; then, isabel opens her robe, "laying her body bare" to freida, who expresses terror at its "thickening" and "roundness." Yet her "desire" for closeness with isabel remains strong as their attachment goes back to childhood and has developed into an affection that requires no speech, only bodies, to be expressed (7).

This homoerotic scene contrasts sharply with the only heterosexual "sex" scene of the novel as it reinforces the senselessness of the female rivalry that drives the novel. freida's first sexual encounter with Darwin hinges on freida's passivity and naiveté, borders on rape, and ends with Darwin's treating her coldly and dismissively. freida is confused about what has occurred between them and what crucial sexual boundaries have been crossed. She does not know the nuances and unspoken guidelines of this political landscape or her own sexuality. That their meeting is predicated upon physical attraction and sex means that she is, not surprisingly, "awkward" and self-doubting about her body and her behavior. In her efforts to please Darwin and to make him choose her, freida makes the biggest mistake she can in this political landscape: she gives him her virginity, allowing him to have sex with her because she has been taught only how to please men. She does not understand that she can say no or that saying no correctly could make her more desirable to Darwin. In her desperation to keep his interest, freida uses the only thing she feels she has left:

"Are you sure?" he says as he pulls me close again, the overwashed material of his T-shirt soft against my bare skin. I can't answer him. I don't know if I am sure but I know that I have to do something to keep him, and this is all I have to offer.

(330)

While more resourceful girls like megan claim to understand the correct way to withhold sex, in this scene, freida's body becomes an unwieldy object of seduction that she neither controls nor recognizes.

## Female Powerlessness and the Empty Pursuit of Physical Perfection

Although freida is vilified for having sex with Darwin and ruining her chances of getting “a rose,” the *Bachelor*-like arrangement remains precarious, especially for one so inexperienced socially and sexually. While these would-be companions are taught to withhold sex, the specific guidelines are murky: No one wants a girl that puts out before

marriage, except that they sometimes do want a girl that puts out before marriage, but only if she’s going to be a concubine. It all depends on what type of girl you are. And we can’t even be sure what type of girl that is until we are told by the men at the Ceremony. Are they making up the “guidelines” as they go along?

(268)

Such guidelines assume these girls know “what type of girl” they are before they are told their fate. They are instructed to withhold sex without offending men; yet many break this rule, having sex and still managing to be selected as companions. Meanwhile, the knowledge of what sex is remains something strictly reserved for concubines, those whose existence is predicated upon their sexuality: “Welcome to sex-ed for concubines. The only third who needs to know this stuff!” (226). Despite their lack of sexual knowledge, these girls discuss their sexual options with remarkable insight:

“No man is going to want his companion to have had sex with someone else.” “But we’re not allowed to say no to them. chastity-ruth said that we were to accommodate their every need. How did you say no to him?”

(195)

megan, the eve who claims to have the game figured out, replies that she uses modesty and a desire to “save myself for companionship” as the means to deny men just long enough to be selected as a companion.

After freida is rejected by Darwin and subsequently rejects the sexual advances of the other Inheritants, she stops thinking about surveillance, self-discipline, and the cultivation of sexual allure altogether. Instead, she becomes startlingly aware of her lack of options and freedom of choice, which leads her deeper into silence and self-effacement. Everything these girls have done and said has been a choreographed rehearsal for the ultimate test—the Ceremony. According to *The Audio Guide to the Rules for Proper female Behavior*, “whether they become a companion, a concubine or a chastity, all eves must play the role that has been assigned to them” (369). The Father “stands in the spotlight, one hand

raised in salute" (376) but says little as he tells the girls to be seated. "He settles into the throne, His bejeweled fingers resting on the velvet-covered armrests. His black shoes are poking out under the cloak, not quite touching the ground" (376). The Father presents himself as a politically powerful rock-star Inheritant, announcing that isabel has been chosen as his Premier companion:

All year isabel left a trail of breadcrumbs for us to follow, but we were blind to them. And it's too late now. It's too late.... So that's why she has been distancing herself from me all year. She knew I wasn't good enough to socialize with the Father's future companion, and that I never would be good enough. But she still saved me in the end. I failed, once again, and she had to step in and fix my mess. *I should feel grateful to her.*

(381)

While freida focuses on what she perceives as her friend's betrayal, her misperception of isabel's behavior, the Father emphasizes the political structures keeping them imprisoned: "Maybe some of those rules seem outdated to you. Maybe they seem overly stringent or exacting. But they are there to protect us. To ensure our survival. If we begin flaunting [sic] those rules, what will we have?" The answer, of course, is: "Anarchy... Chaos. Destruction," a political upheaval so severe that it can only be alluded to and quickly disregarded in a dystopia that lacks visible means of rebellion (O'Neill 364). The illusion of control over their bodies leads these girls further away from self-knowledge and prolongs the realization they control nothing, especially not their own bodies.

By detailing freida's quest for physical perfection and self-control, *Only Ever Yours* imagines the long-term effects of treating female bodies as sexualized objects. In freida's world, female survival depends upon the meticulous control of young female bodies: men are born and women are manufactured for male consumption, "[w]ound up and wound down, like mechanical dolls" (O'Neill 47). This process of female manufacturing and objectification leads not only to a sense of powerlessness but also produces competition, jealousy, and estrangement among intelligent and compassionate women who should otherwise be supporting and lifting one another up. freida recognizes this intense competition and lack of female companionship as an unfortunate fact: "We may be sisters, but in the future we will not associate with each other. We will not speak to one another. We will be invisible to each other. That is the way it has always been" (196). Instead, young women must face themselves and their ruined lives alone, despite the fact that they share the same history of discipline, denial, and destruction. Indeed, the only solace these girls have is memories of their intimate connections to other women.

Understanding the futility of this recognition that she is now estranged completely from the very women who might have helped her, freida wants only to reside in a place where no one can see or touch her: "I want to stay in here. I want to hide, fold into the shadows and become invisible so no one can look at me anymore" (13). Unfortunately, freida gets her wish. In the final scene, just before she heads toward certain oblivion or death, a male engineer in a white coat asks her: "You want to help with my research, don't you? Don't you want to be of some use?" (403). Blinded by a single wish to please and then to vanish, freida finally understands the futility of her resistance of system that has already failed her. Hence, the novel ends where it began: with freida in a drug-induced stupor, longing for an oblivion that can be attained only by escaping the body: "I hold out my arm, offering myself to him. The needle sinks into my skin, the liquid whispering, *forget, forget*, to my blood.... I am ready now too. I am ready to feel nothing, forever" (404).

## Conclusion

*Only Ever Yours* articulates a startlingly relevant message for twenty-first-century readers and for young women in particular: namely, that the desire to conform to a single female ideal of beauty leads most directly to the disappearance of the self. Like Anna Carey's *Eve* series and Amy Ewing's *The Jewel*, O'Neill's novel addresses ways in which dystopian societies control and distort conceptions of female beauty. Collectively, these novels employ a dystopian setting to explore female servitude and the dangers of objectifying and commodifying female beauty. Carey's *Eve* is able to escape her despotic school before it destroys her, and Ewing's *Violent*, also bred for the sole purpose of surrogacy and offspring, pursues forbidden love while continuing to rebel while avoiding certain destruction of herself or her suitor. O'Neill's novel, though, offers a more nuanced and specific critique of how we have come to define and treat eating disorders today. By refusing to limit her focus to food and weight, O'Neill reveals how focus on the superficial disempowers women even further by making them compete. Because they must survive in a world that denies them autonomy, skepticism, and physical pleasure, these girls cannot recognize the possibility of a nurturing female community.

O'Neill's novel investigates a topic that is intimate to her and extremely relevant today. In an interview in *The Observer* shortly after *Only Ever Yours* was published, O'Neill talks about the pressures to look sexy on social media without being sexual. A recovering anorexic herself, she explains the inspiration for the novel:

I was so sick and tired of feeling shame around my body and so weary of fighting the fact that women are seen as less.... I wanted to tell teenage girls that their stories aren't trivial. Their voices are



worthy of being heard. I wanted to say speak up, you don't have to silence yourselves.

("Selfies" 1)

The "lucky" ones in *Only Ever Yours* are, in fact, the silent ones, the nonrebels who remain quiet in order to secure futures similar to Atwood's handmaids. Their freedom relies on their ability to avoid self-reflection and thoughts of an uncertain future. But O'Neill's characters also embody a warning about objectifying women as pieces of machinery that serve a political power that regards them as voiceless, powerless objects. Her futuristic and feminist dystopia reminds women, regardless of their age, race, or experience, that they can control who they will become: they can choose to cultivate a rich interior life apart from their physical appearance, or they can choose to vanish in a sea of perfect foreign bodies.

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## 5 Kitchens and Edges

### The Politics of Hair in African American Children's Picturebooks

*Michelle H. Martin and  
Rachelle D. Washington*

In Willi Coleman's poem "Among the Things that Used to Be," the speaker comments on how much one could learn from "sitting in them/ Beauty shop chairs/Along with hair frying/Spit flying/And babies crying" (Coleman 8). The speaker also notes that women catch up with themselves and each other while getting their hair done and confesses that "Lots more got taken care of/Than hair" (Coleman 9). As children, in Boston, Massachusetts, and Columbia, South Carolina, respectively, we spent many hours between the knees of our mothers, getting our hair "done" during which, like the speaker in the Willi Coleman poem, "Lots more got taken care of than hair" (9). We both "graduated" to beauty parlors for getting our nappy spaces ironed out with heat or lye and lots of grease and blow dryers. We also made conscious decisions as adults not to do that anymore; Michelle goes to the barbershop, and Rachelle does her own hair and occasionally visits a niece's natural hair salon, appropriately named "We Speak Hair" to partake in rich conversations in a post-Willi Coleman-esque way. Michelle is raising her 13-year-old daughter, Amelia, to appreciate her thick, natural hair, which Michelle spent at least 3 hours per week washing, conditioning, parting, oiling, cornrowing, and beading until Amelia got Sisterlocks™ at age 11. Sisterlocks™ is a locking process that initially took 21 hours over 2 days; it now requires approximately 8 hours to tighten about every 4 weeks. But in 2012, Amelia's beads and braids attracted so much attention from strangers during our trip to China, that had she charged some yuan each time people stopped her and asked to take pictures with her, we could have funded a second trip to China. Because of the prominence of hair care issues and conversations in our lives, past and present, we have woven strands of our own hair stories into this essay.

The title of this piece, "Kitchens and Edges," shines a spotlight on parts of the African American female body that have long been a topic of heated conversation: hair. More specifically, because kitchens (hair along the nape of the neck) and edges (hair around the periphery of the head) often tend to resist treatments to which the rest of the hair responds more readily, a focus on kitchens and edges inevitably brings the

conversation around to resistance. These terms—*kitchens* and *edges*—are also double entendres in the African American cultural context in which we will discuss them, for much hair care takes place in the kitchens of African American families, and edges that do not respond to products designed to make them submit often draw the attention of critical eyes, pushing the wearer of said “nappy edges” to the margins of society. For readers unfamiliar with the term *nappy*, it is not the British word for a baby’s diaper; instead, it describes natural Afro hair that has a tight curl pattern. According to Carolivia Herron’s picturebook, *Nappy Hair* (1997), nappy means “knotted up, tangled up, twisted up,” and bell hooks’ *Happy to Be Nappy* (1999) frames it as “cottony.” Often used derogatorily against African Americans, this term has been reclaimed by those who see the value and artistry of natural Afro hair, and the concept of kitchens has expanded to include virtual kitchens, including face-to-face conversations, blogs, vlogs, videoclips, and websites for discussions of natural, nappy, or tightly curled hair.

Michelle’s mother had a sign in her kitchen when she was growing up that said, “No matter where I serve my guests, they seem to like my kitchen best.” It was true. We had a living room, a lovely dining room, and a den, but all of the “company” congregated in the kitchen, regardless of the event. The kitchen was the center of the action, of the intimacy, of the family when we were alone and of the “village” when others came. Hence, in literal kitchens, much African American cultural exploration and growth take place, but kitchens have also historically been where Black women have “done” their daughters’ and female relatives’ hair because the hot comb that straightens nappy hair traditionally required access to a stove for heat. Hence, when an African American woman talks about her “kitchen,” she may be referring to the cooking room, but in other contexts, she will be describing the place where the straightening comb historically or the flat iron now won’t reach. The “kitchen” is also a place of resistance because even if hair is chemically straightened, the kitchen will “go back” to its original state before the rest of the hair because it’s the shortest part of the hair and often a different consistency than the rest. Hence, this other meaning of “kitchen” provides an entry point into broader conversations about hair and the African American community in part because it is a term that has relevance within Black communities and among those who have nappy hair and kitchens but also because this kitchen is literally a place of resistance that, no matter how strong the chemicals or how high the heat, the kitchen ultimately returns.

“Edges,” also in our title, has a double meaning as well. “Edges” refer to the nappy hair around the periphery of the head that is not the “kitchen.” Scan the web for products to smooth and tame edges, and you will find a plethora of them along with testimonials that attest to the ability of said product to lay the edges down easy for the whole day or

even the whole week. And in the same way that “edges” inhabit the margins, on the one hand, the existence of nappy edges for Black children—especially Black girls—is often the impetus for marginalization or for being pushed to the metaphorical cultural edges. The picturebooks discussed in this chapter, on the other hand, center the margin and make private “kitchens” public. By making conversations about Afro hair, in all of its diversity, an overt center of focus, we can also address the shame that has historically plagued children with Afro hair and features and can help both those with and those without nappy hair understand what is wonderful about it and what is challenging about it, what it says about us, about our families, and about our lives as people of color.

In her groundbreaking September 1988 essay in *Z Magazine*, “Straightening Our Hair,” bell hooks explores some of the rituals surrounding how and when African American women and girls “do” their hair. She notes that hair pressing (with a hot comb) was

a ritual of Black women’s culture of intimacy. It was an exclusive moment when Black women (even those who did not know one another well) might meet at home or in the beauty parlor to talk with one another, to listen to the talk.

(hooks 221)

She likens women’s beauty parlor spaces to the world of the male barbershop that was somewhat shrouded in mystery and secrecy but also represented creativity and moments of change.

Hooks explains that she later came to realize the connection between this practice of hair straightening and White supremacist ideology that established straight hair, light skin, and Anglo physical features as the beauty standard by which Black women judge one another and to which mainstream society compares them. African American scholar Neal Lester points out that intra-racial racism is often even more problematic for Black communities when he cites Maya Angelou, who writes,

A hundred years ago,... there were churches in Philadelphia, in Virginia and in New Orleans which had a pine slab on the outside door of the church and a fine-tooth comb hanging on a string. And when you tried to go into the church you had to be able to stand beside that pinewood and be no darker than that, and take that fine-tooth comb and run it through your hair without snagging. That’s how you could get into the church.

(Lester 171–172)

This recognition led hooks to an acknowledgement of how insidious and detrimental these beauty practices can be, which prompted her to resist and speak out against them. hooks composed this essay in 1988, but the

pressure to conform to the White beauty standard persists in contemporary Black American culture, especially where hair is concerned. There may be even more pressure now that a multi-billion-dollar industry exists to support Afro hair alterations, and now that the technologies for straightening, extending, coloring, weaving, and, as we say, having it “fried, dyed and laid to the side” is so much more advanced and pervasive now than it was in the 1980s. (For more on this topic, see Chris Rock’s documentary *Good Hair* and Noliwe M. Rooks’s *Hair Raising*.) When we were growing up—Michelle in the Southeast and Rachelle in the Northeast—we had few childhood peers who had hair relaxers or extensions, but now, rarely does an African American girl reach puberty, regardless of income level, without having her hair relaxed and/or extended with artificial hair to make it straighter and/or longer.

In many African American adult texts, such as Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, how a protagonist—especially a female protagonist—deals with or relates to her hair oftentimes foreshadows the emotional development of that character, signaling a turning point in that character to those around her, or influencing her social or cultural position within the African American community. For example, when Janie returns from burying her lover Tea Cake, with her long wavy hair swinging in a braid down her back, sweeping the seat of her overalls, it catalyzes the gossip on the porch, causing the gossipers to think that Tea Cake has taken all her money and run off with a younger woman. Her conversation with her bosom friend, Phoebe, which constitutes most of the novel, tells the real story.

In children’s picturebooks, the subject of this chapter, hair generally does not function as a rhetorical device in these ways because of the brevity of these books and the young age of their intended audience. We believe that instead, the rhetorical power in African American children’s picturebooks about hair lies in their positively impacting protagonists’ self-image by showing beautiful, versatile, and creative images of Afro hair, by reframing cultural conversations around Black children’s hair, and by emphasizing the historical and political significance of Afro hair. These rhetorical and visual strategies help to change the protagonist’s, and by association, the reader’s, negative cultural associations with natural Afro hair, offering an alternative and Afro-centric approach to wholeness for Black children in general but for Black girls in particular.

Since the 1980s, a body of African American children’s picturebooks has emerged that combats this pressure to conform to the White beauty standard. This essay will focus on a number of these texts: Camille Yarrow and Carol Byard’s *Cornrows* (1979), Alexis De Veaux’s *An Enchanted Hair Tale* (1987), Natasha Anastasia Tarpley and E.B. Lewis’s *I Love My Hair* (1998), Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda’s *Nappy Hair* (1999), bell hooks and Chris Raschka’s *Happy to be Nappy* (1999), and Dinah Johnson and Kelly Johnson’s *Hair Dance* (2007). While this is

by no means an exhaustive set of picturebooks about African American hair, we selected these books because they represent a range of publication dates, which illustrates how Afro hair has been represented over time from the 1980s through today, because of the excellence of the illustrations, and because each brings something different and special to the critical conversation in its depiction of African American hair. Our discussion of African American hair as being uniquely political might give some readers pause, since every culture, to some extent, has its issues related to hair. However, because of the way that chattel slavery in America positioned African American hair as inferior, the vestiges of these beliefs remain intact in American culture. Hence, we do believe that Afro hair, particularly when it is allowed to do what it naturally does, is politicized much more frequently than is straight hair that lies flat or even curly, “un-nappy,” hair. These picturebooks place African American children in the center of that politicization and work toward transforming the conversation about them and their hair.

Natasha Anastasia Tarpley’s 1998 *I Love My Hair* and Dinah Johnson’s 2007 *Hair Dance* both emphasize the beauty, versatility, and creativity of Afro hair. Tarpley opens *I Love My Hair* with an Author’s Note that lays bare her motivation for writing this book:

This is how I fell in love with my hair. When I was a little girl, my mother would often comb my hair in the evening before I went to bed. I would make myself comfortable between her knees as she rubbed sweet-smelling oil along the line of my scalp where she had parted my hair. Then she would start to comb.

Her mother would tell stories to distract her from the pain of the combing, and despite the pain, Tarpley loved “being so close to my mother—the texture and sound of my hair sliding through her fingers, the different hairstyles she would create.” The tactile and olfactory memories gave her positive and lasting associations of this alone time with her mother. She also notes that, as an adult, she initially felt liberated by being able to do her own hair but then underwent something of a hair identity crisis. After trying everything from “relaxers, to punk-rock spikes, from braids to barely-there short natural,” she got dreadlocks: “For the first time since those nights when I sat between my Mom’s knees, I was at peace with my hair, at home again with myself.” In this revealing autobiographical blurb, Tarpley both explains the origins of the picturebook and highlights the struggle that many Black women undergo to become comfortable with their hair.

*I Love My Hair* tells a brief story about a young girl, Keyana, who, like Tarpley, sits between her mother’s knees and cringes and cries when she gets her hair combed because it hurts. Her mother tells her, “Keyana, do you know how lucky you are to have this head of hair?” She doesn’t.

So her mother tells her: it's versatile enough to be woven into a soft bun like yarn in a loom, it can be braided into cornrows like rows in a garden, or she can wear it like a halo around her head in her Afro style. Notably, the language of this picturebook reflects Keyana's growing self-awareness and acceptance of her own hair. Keyana narrates the story in first person, but then Mama's voice takes over. In the quoted parts, Mama tells Keyana about her hair and what she does to it to make it more beautiful. After Mama finishes, Keyana's narration once again takes over, and she now speaks of herself and what she appreciates about her hair. Her braids can remind her, with their "clickety clack," of what she needs to remember to get at the grocery store: "Tip tap, clicky clacky, milk, bread, peanut butter." As Keyana learns about and speaks of the wonders of her hair, E. B. Lewis's lush watercolor illustrations give readers—both those who know something about Afro hair and those who do not—a reference point as they come to understand and appreciate Keyana's shifting relationship with her hair.

In one illustration, a mother and father (the model for whom we believe is E. B. Lewis himself), dressed in African garb, gaze down at their daughter, who looks up at them as they all stand outside with trees and vegetation in the background. Keyana explains that once when she wore an Afro to school, other children teased her, but her teacher helped her to feel better by telling her that

when she was growing up, folks counted their hair as a blessing. Wearing an Afro was a way for them to stand up for what they believed, to let the world know that they were proud of who they were and where they came from.

Clearly, this conversation only becomes possible because Keyana has an African American teacher (who probably lived through the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements), which is not the case for most contemporary American children, but having both a mother and a teacher who can affirm Keyana's Afro hair and help her to accept it serves her well. After the parents contribute their voices to the narrative, Keyana thinks more highly of her hair. Adding to the positivity of this book is the way that both her mother and her teacher impart hair wisdom to Keyana, which emphasizes how hair lore gets passed from one generation of females to the next. Keyana's physical positioning near the end of the book as a bird in flight, with the two puffballs on either side of her head having become wings, suggests that she has embraced the freedom that her versatile hair affords her and will have a healthier perspective of it hereafter. Hair freedom that results in flight, in fact, appears as a visual motif in several of the picturebooks in this chapter.

Dinah Johnson's *Hair Dance*, published almost 10 years after *I Love My Hair*, accomplishes a similar goal of helping readers to appreciate the

versatility of Afro hair, but does so with photographs and poetry rather than with paintings and a story plot. The foreword opens the book with this note:

Hair comes in all colors, textures, and styles. Whether it is cut long or short, in braids or cornrows, or left natural, it plays a big part in who we are and how we feel about ourselves. Kelly Johnson's stunning photographs of girls wearing a range of hairstyles, together with Dinah Johnson's lyrical poetry, celebrate African American hair in all its diversity.

And the book delivers what it promises, showing colorful and engaging photographs of African American girls styling one another's hair, "in all kinds of ways," sporting long braids with lots of plastic barrettes; relaxed, straight, and blowing back in the wind; cornrowed into intricate designs, and "showing off my Afro puffs proud and pretty on my head." One brown-skinned beauty, hanging from a swing with her long braids trailing down, says, "Braids swing with me/like water, moving free/no matter how I wear my hair/it's a special part of me." Notably, while some of the girls are photographed by themselves, many appear within a community of girls (including the one girl who brushes the long tresses of another), which echoes bell hooks's discussion of the way hair care brought the girls and women in her family together. Hence, in both of these picturebooks, whether it be the story of Keyana, who gains a greater appreciation of her hair through some education and encouragement from her mom, or all of the girls in *Hair Dance*, who seem already to have an upbeat sense of self and confidence about their hair in all of its diversity, these books make conversations about Black girls' hair explicit and positive, resisting the cultural notion of Afro hair not being beautiful enough or valued enough, and helping to emphasize that Afro hair should be celebrated for all of the different ways it can be. Without books like these, hairism (the privileging of one hair type over another) becomes a norm in American society that most African Americans understand deeply but of which people of other races remain largely unaware. In these hair stories, self-expression and freedom to be oneself are critical departures from existing cultural norms. In this way, Tarpley's and Johnson's stories nudge readers to the center and away from the edges.

While Tarpley's and Johnson's picturebooks celebrate African American hair, Carolivia Herron's 1997 *Nappy Hair* and bell hooks's 1999 *Happy to be Nappy* reframe cultural conversations surrounding Black girls' hair. In fact, hooks wrote her picture book in response to *Nappy Hair*, which caused such a stir in Brooklyn in 1998 that a first-year third-grade teacher, Ruth Sherman, had to be removed from her school by police escort when several parents threatened her with violence for reading



*Nappy Hair* with their children, half of whom were African American, the other half of whom were Latino (Leyden). Herron wrote this story as something of an autobiographical work based on the wild, nappy hair she had as a child (and still wears sometimes as an adult). In it, Uncle Mordecai narrates this story at the family backyard picnic and tells of his niece Brenda who he says, “Has the nappiest hair in the world.” Uncle Mordecai accuses the naps on Brenda’s head of being willful and intentional, says her hair came straight through Africa and that though the angels tried to talk him out of it, God insisted on giving Brenda hair that could not be tamed. At the same time, he calls Brenda smart, says she talks the king’s and queen’s English and calls her hair “The only perfect circle in nature.” Herron also composed this story in the call-and-response style of the Black church, and whether readers see it as a work that insults Black features or as one that brings positive attention to them, Herron does at least attempt the work of cultural reclamation in this story. A valid critique that has circulated about *Nappy Hair* is that Brenda, the subject of Uncle Mordecai’s narrative, never says anything. She is the subject of other people’s opinions and attestations—both positive and negative—but she never speaks for herself and shows little or no agency throughout the story besides dancing, stomping, and kicking through “all the wimp hair.” The narrator lauds both her intellect and her verbal acuity, extolling her ability to speak both the king’s and the queen’s English, but readers never hear from Brenda herself. Some critics also consider the facial features of Brenda and her family, who have dark brown skin and full lips, exaggerated. Because this narrative takes place at a family gathering, it seems reasonable that the characters look more alike than if they were strangers. But even immediate family members in many Black families (as is the case with Michelle’s) can have a wide range of skin tones; hence, the sameness portrayed here could be problematic. Whether or not Herron succeeds in reclaiming the word “nappy” for positive ends in this book has been and continues to be debated, but one thing she did accomplish was further open the door—in a very public way, given the controversies surrounding the book—to conversations about nappiness and what it means within American culture.

bell hooks’s poetic picture book *Happy to be Nappy* both responds to *Nappy Hair*, which hooks strongly disliked, and continues the work of recovery. In this act of reclamation, hooks creates delicious adjectival descriptions for nappy hair, accompanied by Chris Raschka’s whimsical, carefree watercolor illustrations that bring hooks’s “girlpie” characters to life. The text says: “Girlpie hair smells clean/and sweet/is soft like cotton,/flower petal billowy soft,/full of frizz and fuzz” and describes this hair as both a halo and a crown, “a covering for heads that are round.” She associates hair with tactile experiences of touching and playing, emotional experiences—“hair to take the gloom away”—and connectedness with others as the hands that brush, braid, and care for

the girlpies' hair give them hope at the beginning of the day. One of the primary differences between Herron's and hooks's respective reframings of nappiness is that Brenda, though a part of a family, also stands apart from it because of her hair, while all of the characters in hooks's book clearly appear within Black communities in which nappiness is valued, respected, embraced, and loved. Despite the reverence that comes both from the relatives and from Uncle Mordecai toward Brenda and her hair, the relatives still "shout and jump back" when they initially look into her cradle and see her hair, while the "girlpies" in hooks's book are "Just all girl happy" to be who and how they are within their communities and in their own skin. Thus, the approaches that Herron and hooks take to reframing the term *nappy* stand in stark opposition to one another: the first using humor, bold, deeply saturated colors, call-and-response, and a lively and participatory family gathering; the other using poetry, a cursive, handwritten font, and pastel watercolor illustrations designed to comfort and soothe rather than to confront. Both play an important role in getting young readers and their parents to talk about what it means to have hair that grows up instead of down as it grows out.

Herron and hooks make cultural connections to Afro hair that work toward reclaiming nappy hair as a positive attribute, while Camille Yarbrough, in her 1979 picture book *Cornrows* and Alexis De Veaux, in her 1987 *An Enchanted Hair Tale*, focus on the significance of Afro hair historically to change characters' and Black readers' perceptions of their hair. In the 1980 Coretta Scott King Award winner *Cornrows*, illustrated by Carole Byard, Shirley Ann, a little African American girl, recounts some of her Mamma and Great-Grammaw's stories. The ritual of storytelling is a nightly event in their urban family. Because of Grammaw, Shirley Ann comes to understand that cornrows were labeled such because they looked like the rows of corn planted down South, in Alabama, where the family comes from. But Shirley Ann and Mike, her pesky little brother, nicknamed "MeToo" because he copies everything she does, also learn that the style in which Grammaw has braided Mama's hair is called a *suku* or "basket" in Yoruba and that among many rituals that existed in Africa and among the Yoruba, hair braiding was one. Grammaw explains that you could tell the gods they worshiped, the clan and village from which they came, and their status by the number and pattern of their braids. Byard chose to illustrate this book with charcoal images, and the black and white enhances the positive connections the family matriarchs make between their urban US life and their African ancestry. This is a lesson the children eagerly listen to and embrace.

Grammaw tells them of slavery and the Middle Passage, and MeToo asks, "Did the spirit die?" She responds that of course it did not. "If you're quiet/You can still hear the royal rhythms,/Still feel the spirit in the air." Hence, through helping these children connect something with which they have daily familiarity—their cornrowed hair (since MeToo

convinces Grammaw to cornrow his hair too)—with their ancestry and the practices that they still keep, Yarbrough and Byard help the children in the picturebook as well as those reading it to understand the significance and historical importance of Afro hair.

Though also connecting African hair with geography and history, Alexis De Veaux takes a more whimsical and fantastical approach in her Coretta Scott King Award-winning *An Enchanted Hair Tale*, illustrated by Cheryl Hanna, by exploring the dreadlocks of male protagonist, Sudan. He is the only male protagonist in this analysis. Like *Cornrows*, *An Enchanted Hair Tale* is illustrated in black and white, and it appears to have been created in pencil rather than with paints, as are most of the other texts. And we do believe that the black and white in this picturebook was also strategically chosen, given the story's Africanist focus. De Veaux's notes on her website mention that, "Writing is a way she reimagines the inequities of race, gender, sexuality and class in Black diasporic lives," and her approach to this picturebook is clearly intentional (De Veaux website). Like Brenda in Herron's book, Sudan feels ostracized within the Black community because of his hair. Dreadlocks are now commonplace in America but were much less pervasive in the 1970s and were often associated with radicalism or the Rastafarian lifestyle. Despite the fact that Sudan's mother and little brother also have locks, he cannot bear the insults he hears from adults and children alike about his hair: "It's uncombed" (14). Notably, these criticisms are initially about Sudan's hair but then it's as if his hair becomes the boy himself: "He's strange. He's queer. He's different" (14). One day Sudan finally explodes and runs away to the next block, where he encounters a troupe of Black circus performers, all of whom have locks: the Flying Dreads. With them, he finds love and acceptance and is able to return to his mother with a stronger sense of self. Furthermore, Cheryl Hannah's illustrations make the connections with Africa that the text does not address. The ball the performers use is a globe with Africa front and center; one page features a picture of an African pyramid, another a male performer riding a zebra, and still another holding a lion cub. According to Nancy Tolson, author of *Black Children's Literature Got de Blues: The Creativity of Black Writers and Illustrators* (2008), the zebra is "one of the most difficult animals to tame" and "represent[s] strength and loyalty to family" (42). In essence, this book naturalizes these images of Africa, making them just as much a part of the American landscape as the performers' locks are, and it makes Sudan, whose name also obviously comes from Africa, feel more at home in his community and in his own body with his "locks and lions and lagoons." Tolson notes that Sudan has, "A support system that expands beyond immediate family that exaggerates yet accentuates the positive imagery for a boy frustrated from the harsh stares he receives because of his dreadlocked hair" (37). She also writes that this book embodies the African proverb, "It takes

a village to raise a child” (37). Hence, it is notable that Sudan’s support comes not just from his immediate family but also from his extended family, whose connection to him comes from their hairstyles. The Flying Dreads also provide some male role models for Sudan, which he may lack at home since only his mother appears in the story.

In Rudine Sims Bishop’s often-cited essay, “Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors,” she notes:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror.... When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part.... When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what make us all human.

If we as African Americans want our daughters, granddaughters, and nieces to make positive decisions about their self-care and particularly about their hair—and it does have to be a deliberate and frequently repeated decision, given the social pressures to conform to the White beauty standard—then we need to introduce them to these virtual kitchens throughout their girlhood and even throughout their young adulthood. And with the help of books like these, that can serve as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, depending on the reader, we bring the edges to the center and model for Black girls how to advocate for their own worth and beauty as children of color. These books can also help children who are not of African descent understand what they don’t experience personally. Books like Tarpley’s *I Love My Hair* and Johnson’s *Hair Dance* celebrate Afro hair in diverse and wonderful ways that can thwart the fractured images from popular culture that so often inundate Black children. These books can also help readers—both Black and non-Black—understand more about the cultural and historical connections people of African descent share.

Michelle has spent all of her academic career and Rachelle has spent most of hers in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), teaching primarily White pre-service teachers and librarians who themselves will, in most cases, be teaching and serving more children of color than White children. In this context, books like these can create virtual kitchens for conversations about hair that can bridge the gap between White

teachers and librarians and non-White students, if the professionals are well prepared. As American's children become browner but the teaching and librarian pools remain White by overwhelming majorities, the need for books like these will become greater, as will their potential for use in classrooms and libraries. By integrating books like these in our own teaching, we encourage the next generation of educators and youth professionals to make virtual kitchens gathering places both for children of color who desperately need to feel safe within educational spaces, and for those who have much to learn about the lives of children of color. Creating virtual kitchens within educational spaces enables all gathered within to develop better cultural competence and sensitivity. Virtual kitchens also enable educators to better serve children whose hair is most often quite different from their own and to help them to see the power that culturally relevant books can have in fostering cross-racial understanding.

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## Section II

# Corporealities

Disability is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions. Disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do.

—Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 6

Whether constructing the somatic condition of the child's body as diseased or healthy, disabled or able, authors have drawn the physical state of the child's body as a marker of deviance or normalcy, as a locus of avoidance and abhorrence or as an aspirational and inspirational standard. In one of the earlier works in the field of disability studies, Rosemarie Garland Thomson, quoted in the epigraph above, focuses on the disabled body as the means to analyze human relations and institutions, as well as constructions of identity. However, in establishing that normative subjectivity emerges, "only when we scrutinize the social processes and discourses that constitute physical and cultural otherness," Thomson points the way toward reading any type of different, deviant, ill, or lessened body as a figure of otherness that is set in power relations even as it is marginalized, its cultural visibility legitimating the normative subject (8–9). If Thomson reveals the physically disabled body as a culturally and historically specific social construction in order to illuminate how it operates in literature for adults, then she also offers ways in which to read any other physically deviant body, including in literature for children. Although Michel Foucault does not focus specifically on disabled people in his various analyses of the body, Thomson draws in part from his historical delineation of the modern norm as unmarked, extrapolating from his work that the contemporary social identity of "disabled" emerged from the shifts in perception he charts and that this identity arose in conjunction with its opposite: the body not identified or marked in this way. As Foucault points out, bodies that deviate the most from the normative standard are the bodies most subordinated: Whiteness is concealed and neutral but Blackness carries the burden of

race; male executives mask power in standard business suits, but women are expected to show, at the very least, their legs. Foucault's argument, that "normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power," gestures toward the ways in which the economic and social statuses and assigned roles of people with different corporealities are constructed as the inevitable outcomes of the condition of their bodies (184). When he presents the normative body as both coercive and punitive by connecting it to social attitudes and institutions that devalue the non-normative body and that are legitimated by historical conceptions of deviance, he opens the way toward reading the operations of power on any body that is marked by difference. The physically diminished body in fiction, particularly the disabled or ill child's body, then easily becomes the exemplum meant to function as a social corrective.

Disabilities are used in fiction, David T. Mitchell notes, "to resolve or correct a deviance marked as abnormal or improper in a social context" (20), which seems particularly appropriate in a discussion of children's literature. However, Mitchell, like Thomson, discusses only texts written for adults, and aside from John Quicke's *Disability in Modern Children's Fiction* and Lois Keith's *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk*, there have been few extended studies of disability in children's texts. Where Quicke discusses how contemporary novels work to integrate the disabled child into society, Keith offers a historical survey of texts with far more complicated approaches to able and disabled children's bodies. She reads several nineteenth- and early twentieth-century children's novels to trace the ways in which disability functions as the punishment (for the wayward child in some cases, for a misguided family, community, or society in others) and physical restoration comes when the youngster, or the concerned family or community have learned their lessons. The three chapters in this section examine the portrayal of children's bodies in just these terms, as they consider texts published between 1872 and 1930, texts that endeavored to teach their young readers corporeal lessons about morality, citizenship, and wellness.

In "Disciplining Normalcy: *What Katy Did* and Nineteenth-Century Female Bodies," Julie Pfeiffer and Darla Schumm focus on Susan Coolidge's canonical 1872 novel to uncover the tension between the female body as embodied flesh and as acculturated ideal in nineteenth-century novels for girls. Moving from the many images of Katy's able body—scraped knees, torn skirts, and all—in which the body is a source of pleasure and power for the titular character, Pfeiffer and Schumm consider Katy's fall—the physical tumble from a swing to the hard floor—as a fall from the innocence of her identity as a playful child to a new identity as a disobedient girl. Katy's moral character, they argue, becomes the focus of the novel and disability is introduced as tragedy, loss, and just punishment. The result of redefining Katy's body as diseased and passive rather than capable and active leads to maturation,

authority, and the love of her family, and the novel, they argue, points to a larger pattern in girls' fiction: the body's failure, in this case disability, becomes linked to spiritual success in a particularly gendered, classed, and racialized way.

With a focus on the healthy child body and its implications, Kristine Moruzi's chapter, "Embodying the Healthy, Charitable Child in the Junior Red Cross" examines the *Red Cross Junior* magazine, published by the Canadian Junior Red Cross between 1922 and 1930, to show how the child reader was guided toward behaviors and attitudes designed to promote a healthy and charitable life. The monthly magazine incorporated a variety of content—including photographs, short plays, prize competitions, games, and correspondence—that encouraged JRC members to embody the healthy values of the organization. In discussing the magazine as a tool of normalization, Moruzi considers how the magazine encouraged readers to help others to also become healthy through nursing and education programs and by fundraising to help others in need.

Tying together Fabian socialism, the eugenics movement, and best-selling children's fiction from England and the United States, Amanda Hollander discusses how, in E. Nesbit's *Harding's Luck* and Jean Webster's *Dear Enemy*, children's bodies act as political loci for deeply troubling imaginings on the fates of non-normative children and nationhood itself. Her chapter, "Liberty in the Age of Eugenics: Non-Normative Bodies in Fabian Socialist Children's Fiction" studies the ways in which these authors imagine liberation and citizenship using the bodies of differently abled children. Hollander traces the disturbing implications as children in both novels are couched in narration that depicts them as fundamentally unfit and anti-utilitarian: Nesbit's disabled Dickie finds himself free only in a romanticized English past through a series of time slips—genre remedying what society cannot; Webster's Sallie, the acting superintendent of the orphan asylum, imagines a better future for her wards through sterilization and euthanasia.

If Disability Studies as an academic discipline has shown how to examine the meaning, nature, and consequences of disability, or indeed the body more generally, as a social construct, then this work has also led the way to wider considerations of how normalcy is constructed and ultimately enforced. In a study of fiction in which differently abled characters are kept on the sidelines or in the shadows, Lennard J. Davis suggests that "the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her" (11). Similarly, in her study of fiction for adults, Thomson argues that

corporeal departures from dominant expectations never go uninterpreted or unpunished, and conformities are almost always rewarded.



The narrative of deviance surrounding bodies considered different is paralleled by a narrative of universality surrounding bodies that correspond to notions of the ordinary.

(7)

However, work in the field has also, and more recently, offered new ways to think about disability. For example, in the newest edition of *The Disability Reader*, Davis calls on scholars to reconsider the disabled body in order to offer alternative readings of culture and power. In her recent book, *Disabling Characters*, Patricia Dunn provides analyses of young adult fiction. Looking at the relative agency of the disabled character alongside the other characters, Dunn shows how the texts she studies construct bodies that both challenge and perpetuate an unsatisfactory status quo, an inquiry undertaken by the following chapters.

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## 6 Disciplining Normalcy

### *What Katy Did* and Nineteenth-Century Female Bodies

*Julie Pfeiffer and Darla Schumm*

A best-seller in its day and still a classic girls' novel, Susan Coolidge's 1872 *What Katy Did* is of continuing interest to critics, many of whom see in Katy's transformation an example of the narrow definitions of femininity available in the nineteenth century. Much has been written about the ways *What Katy Did* moves Katy from a tomboy phase, to a period of illness and physical inactivity, to a new maternal/feminine role as the "heart of the house." Both feminist critics and disability studies scholars write about the ways that disability—and its attendant stereotypes of limitation and punishment—transform this wild girl into a good woman. Disability, it appears, is used to reinforce femininity. But the moment many critics see as the climax of the novel—Katy's fall from a swing—is only one in a series of transformative events in this episodic novel. We suggest that rather than relying on a simple binary of normal bodies versus disabled bodies, Katy before the fall versus Katy after the fall, this novel presents a collage of images and experiences of disability. While critics tend to see Katy's fall and period of illness as representative of a narrow and restrictive vision of disability, we argue that the novel presents complex and contradictory images of disability through its characterization of three female characters: Katy, Aunt Izzie, and Cousin Helen. Together, these women point to the ways that the female body must struggle against restrictive nineteenth-century ideals of femininity, and the ways that story and narrative can make visible these struggles. The movement of these women between images of saints, sinners, and misfits reveals a body in flux, a feminine ideal that cannot be easily identified or quantified. *What Katy Did* certainly relies on ideologies of its time; it also helps us see the hard work on which their construction relies.

Our discussion and analysis of *What Katy Did* draw on insights from disability studies, literary criticism, and religious studies—most particularly Christian theology—to argue that the child's body, with its constant shift from fitting to misfitting, disrupts our fantasy of the stable body as "normal" and therefore virtuous. Like feminist and gender studies, queer theory, and critical race scholarship, disability studies calls into question hegemonic definitions of "normal" corporealities. In what

follows, we review dominant interpretations of how disability functions in *What Katy Did*, consider the Christian roots of this critical perspective, and point to the ways that the three central female characters in this novel undo categories of normalcy and disability.

On its surface, *What Katy Did*, like other nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, utilizes disability as a metaphor with which to correct Katy's tomboy behavior. As Lois Keith says about nineteenth-century novels: "disability and illness were mostly used as metaphors, devices to bring the story through a period of trial or desolation into the bright light of resolution and happy ending" ("What Writers Did Next" 1). Ann Dowker summarizes the typical disability plot in this way: "A head-strong child, often a tomboyish girl, is injured, often through recklessness or disobedience, and learns discipline through weeks or months of suffering and relative immobility" (2). Whether Katy's sin is disobedience to Aunt Izzie (who warns Katy not to use the swing), or, as Shirley Foster and Judy Simons suggest, her real fault is "transgressing gender codes" (118), Katy's invalid status, and thus disability more generally, is assumed to be a form of punishment in this novel.<sup>1</sup>

Award-winning author Jacqueline Wilson concurs with this perspective that the novel relies on a reductive and negative version of disability. In response, she recently published her own version of *What Katy Did*, entitled simply, *Katy*. Her goal in rewriting this much-loved children's book was to provide another model for "all the real children in wheelchairs reading these books, wondering why religion and fresh air weren't working miracles for them too." Her book takes a different path, one in which Katy must learn to live with her disability: "She wouldn't need to be saintly—she'd need to be tough if she was going to cope." Wilson's commentary points to ways that *What Katy Did* appears to reinforce the troubling ideology that disability is punishment, an ideology that disability studies has traced through Western history. The disabled individual or character—in this case, Katy Carr—can, from this perspective, be seen as a scapegoat who embodies her culture's belief in the need for girls to be passive and compliant. When Katy resists her culture's message, this reading goes, she is punished with an injury.

From a Christian perspective, there are multiple and even contradictory interpretations of the disabled body. In her article "Embodiment and Disability," Darla Schumm notes that two common and contradictory interpretations are that disability connotes either a "marked sinner or a valorized saint" (26). As a signpost of sin, disability is viewed as punishment for wrong deeds and serves as a reminder of what happens when Christians go astray. In contrast, when a disabled person is elevated to the status of a saint, the disabled body functions as a source of inspiration for other Christians. Each of these perspectives is at play at different points in the novel and will be explicated in turn, but for now we unpack the roots of the troubling ideology that disability is a form of

punishment for sin. Many of the stories about Jesus performing healing miracles in the Christian gospels implicitly or explicitly communicate the message that disability is punishment for sin or a lack of faith. For example, when in John 5.1–15 Jesus heals a paralytic man, he implies that the condition was caused by sin. A post-healing conversation between Jesus and the man goes as follows: “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you’” (John 5.14). In a discussion of the use of the metaphors of blindness and sight used in the story of the healing of the man born blind in John 9, Schumm notes:

The metaphors in John 9 not only imply that those of us who are blind do not, or worse, cannot have “spiritual” sight, but this story, like the other miracle stories found in the Christian Scriptures, also implies that bodies that are disabled must be made physically “whole” before those who inhabit them can be spiritually whole.  
(“Holy Access” 25)

Demonstrations of “spiritual wholeness” or strong and appropriate faith are always either proceeded or preceded by restoration of “normal” physical ability in the healing stories of Jesus, directly linking lack of faith with the presence of disability and strong faith with eradication of disability.

Although sin may be too strong a word to describe Katy’s nonconformist tomboy behavior in the beginning of the book, a common interpretation of Katy’s fall from the swing is that it happens as a result of the “bad” choices she makes. Based on this interpretation, Katy’s subsequent spinal cord injury and disability are directly connected to her bad choices: Katy chooses to engage in risky and unfeminine activities; Katy has a terrible fall because she is doing something she shouldn’t do; Katy suffers a serious and debilitating injury because of her choices; Katy’s disability would not have happened if she had made better choices; therefore, Katy’s disability is a result of bad behavior or sin. The not-so-subtle messages behind this logic are that girls who transgress gender boundaries and inhabit undisciplined bodies will suffer grave consequences and a disabled body is a form of punishment for these transgressions.

Katy’s fall—the tumble from a swing to the hard floor—is not merely a physical fall, but it is also a metaphorical fall from the innocence of an identity as a playful child to a new identity as a disobedient girl. Her fall mirrors the metaphorical fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as understood in Christian theology. Like Adam and Eve, prior to her fall from the swing, Katy’s embodiment is undisciplined and unrestrained: where Adam and Eve wander freely, painlessly, and naked through the garden, Katy runs and jumps effortlessly, utilizing the full potential of

her young, strong body. But, also like Adam and Eve after the fall, Katy experiences psychological shame and physical pain and limitation. In Katy's case, her physical body is disabled. Katy's undisciplined body is literally stopped in its unrestrained adolescent tracks. Through Katy's fall and subsequent disablement, the novel sharpens the focus on Katy's nineteenth-century feminine moral character, and disability is introduced as a means through which spiritual maturity, gender conformity, and bodily discipline can be obtained.

Thus, from one perspective, the novel, and especially its nostalgic conclusion, appears to reinforce images of the able body as "normal body" and to rely on Katy's physical recovery at the end of the novel to reestablish a normal order. Disability studies scholar Lennard Davis argues in *Bending Over Backwards*,

Plot in the novel, then, is really a device to turn what is perceived as the average, ordinary milieu into an abnormal one. Plot functions in the novel, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by temporarily deforming or disabling the fantasy of nation, social class, and gender behaviors that are constructed as norms. The end of the novel represents a cure, a repair of the disability, a nostalgic return to a normal time.

(96–97)

Davis's perspective is much like that of critics who see Katy's success and the novel's resolution as intricately linked to her disability as a form of punishment and her cure at the end of the novel as evidence of her successful reformation. Yet Katy is not the only developed female character in this novel, and Katy's own characterization relies on images of disability more complex than this reading proposes. In his introduction to the *Children's Literature Quarterly* issue on disability, Scott Pollard rues the typical presentation of disabled characters in literature, writing "disability is the lure of the ham-fisted evocative symbol—the high concept—severely limiting across literary history the portrayal of disabled characters as complex, nuanced, and fully human" (264). This novel, we argue, manages to avoid the trap of reductive characterization and instead uses the embodied experience of disability to create, in Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's words, "something resolutely human and inherently interesting" (344).

*What Katy Did* begins in the middle of things—the fantasy of a healthy household has already been lost with the death of Mrs. Carr. We are put into a destabilized situation—an overworked aunt who doesn't understand her charges, a reckless young girl who seems totally unprepared to take on the maternal role bequeathed by her dead mother, a saintly cousin whose invalid status makes her unsuited to be a heroine. By the end of the novel much has been resolved: Katy takes her place

as heart of the family and thus fills the gap left by her mother. Her home is once again stable, but Katy's nostalgic conclusion exists side by side with unsettling images of death, loss, and disability. Aunt Izzie dies and Cousin Helen remains an accessory to the plot rather than a heroine deserving of her own story. Thus this novel both reinforces and problematizes nostalgia. A "normal" time comes at the expense of other lives. Katy's cure is simultaneously a family cure, as the Carr family once again has a maternal center. But rather than "neutralizing" disability (Davis, *Bending* 98), this novel relies on disability as a key and continuing aspect of that cure. Without women such as Aunt Izzie and Cousin Helen, whose emotional and physical disabilities allow them to do the hard work of curing Katy, Katy would remain physically healthy but spiritually abnormal, a child who sees herself as a playful character in the Garden of Eden rather than a responsible member of society. If we expand our consideration of disability and the body in this novel beyond Katy to these other two central female characters, we are left with multiple interpretations of "normal," disability, and femininity. In what follows we examine Cousin Helen and Aunt Izzie and the ways their characterization breaks down binaries of able-bodied and dis-abled. We then return to Katy as a character whose physicality resists defining disability simply as a metaphor for punishment.

Cousin Helen is so weak physically that she must be carried from room to room; it also quickly becomes clear that she embodies spiritual, emotional, and moral power for this family. The narrator tells us,

For to the imaginations of the children, Cousin Helen was as interesting and unreal as anybody in the fairy tales: Cinderella, or Blue-Beard, or dear Red Riding-Hood herself. Only there was a sort of mixture of Sunday-school book in their idea of her, for Cousin Helen was very, very good.

(93)

There is no evidence that Helen transgressed any cultural boundaries—gendered or otherwise—and yet she is permanently disabled. As noted earlier, when people with disabilities are seen as valorized saints, disability functions to inspire other Christians to appreciate what they have, and/or to bear whatever cross they have been given. The theological rationale behind this kind of thinking is that everything happens for a reason and that God has a special plan for each of us, which in some cases involves disability. Katy's cousin Helen is a poignant example in the novel of a disabled valorized saint. Dr. Carr, Katy's father, extols Helen's virtues, telling Katy Cousin Helen is

half an angel already, and loves other people better than herself. I'm very glad she could come here for once. She's an example to us all,

Katy, and I couldn't ask anything better than to have my little girls take pattern after her.

(106)

While Katy's disability appears to be a kind of punishment for her transgressions, Helen's is paradoxically a reflection of her perfection. Yet Helen also fulfills several stereotypes about the disabled. As Joseph Sutliff Sanders points out, part of Helen's message to Katy is that "the weak can become an eyesore, in which case they will be lucky to have any friends. Therefore, it is incumbent on them—as Helen, her father, and the novel argue—to be pleasant and pretty" (147). Katy's invalidism itself is not enough to shape her into womanhood, for that she must add a mental discipline, which Helen both models and teaches.

Thus, there may be an even deeper dimension to Helen's role in the novel in general, and in Katy's life in particular. As we noted earlier, the novel is, at least in part, a story of transformation from girlhood to womanhood. This is a story about a particular girl's intense struggle to reconcile her internal desires and nature with the external pressures and expectations of her family, class, gender, and society. Katy cannot do this work alone and many of the adults in her life are unable to recognize the battle within her between her genuine desire to be a "good girl" and her inability to curb her natural nonconformist tendencies. Cousin Helen's role in Katy's life is to provide a listening ear and a spiritual guide to help Katy do the hard work required for the multiple boundary crossings that Katy must make as she moves from othered, unruly, nonconforming child to the liminal space of disabled adolescent, to mature tamed woman and "heart of the household." In *The History of Sexuality* Volume I, Michelle Foucault describes the discursive ritual of confession as

a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile.

(61–62)

As her listening ear and spiritual guide, Cousin Helen is Katy's confessor. Katy is able to confide her fears and frustrations to Helen, and in turn, Helen gently chides Katy for her selfish behavior, but also assures her that she can reform herself, with or without a disabled body. Cousin Helen's primary tool as Katy's confessor is the "School of Pain." When Katy complains that her illness prevents her from attending school, Cousin Helen instructs her that she can continue her education from within the confines of her bed:

Now, Katy Carr, you wanted to go to school and learn to be wise and useful, and here's a chance for you. God is going to let you go to *His* school—where He teaches all sorts of beautiful things to people. ... It is called The School of Pain. ... And the place where the lessons are to be learned is this room of yours.

(136–137)

For Katy the “School of Pain” reflects her need to take on two new roles: disabled woman and maternal figure. Cousin Helen appeals to a model of disability as privilege and a path toward sainthood to convince Katy that her suffering should be embraced rather than rejected. By initiating Katy into the “School of Pain,” Helen guides Katy toward thinking about her disability less as a frustrating limitation and more as an opportunity for growth and learning. Helen’s listening ear is the reconciling force in the novel which enables Katy to successfully complete the transition from undisciplined child to disciplined woman.

As Katy’s “confessor,” Cousin Helen is a more complex and powerful character in the story than other readings of the novel recognize. She is both a passive, permanently disabled, valorized saint as well as a powerful consoler, judge, and guide in the hierarchical relationship of the confession. Cousin Helen is the only character in the novel who can guide Katy through the tricky waters of her maturation process, not in spite of her disability, but precisely because of her disability. Helen’s disability imbues her with power and authority, and she is thus able to act as a catalyst for Katy’s transformation. Under Helen’s tutelage Katy makes the transition from disabled dependent to productive member of the family. Helen shows Katy how, even with a disability, she can be a vital center of the family. In this way, Helen ushers Katy into the moral maturity that Aunt Izzie longs to see in her nieces. Katy not only begins to contribute to the practical details of running a household, but she also becomes the moral center of the family and assumes responsibility for the guidance and care of her siblings. Cousin Helen provides the moral fiber that weaves Katy into the moral center of the family.

The significance and success of Katy’s transition to mature feminine conformity are illustrated by the illness and death of Aunt Izzie. As Katy gains her moral and spiritual strength, Aunt Izzie begins her decline into ill health and eventually death. The parallel could not be more striking; it is almost as if there is no room in the Carr household for two maternal figures. In a sense, Katy’s maturation process sucks the life out of Aunt Izzie’s body. Although the primary focus of Katy’s transition is her moral and spiritual maturation, Katy does also eventually heal physically. Only after Aunt Izzie has died does Katy learn to walk again. The implication here is that, although Katy becomes fully functional as the maternal figure of the household before her body regains “normal” functioning, the reverse would be unlikely. In other words, Katy’s physical



body can only heal after her moral and spiritual self falls into gender conformity and after her surrogate mother dies.

Like Helen, Aunt Izzie also judges Katy for her behavior, but in an ironic twist she functions as a blockade instead of a catalyst for Katy's development, even though she is as desirous of Katy's transformation as Helen. For example, in the opening chapter of *What Katy Did* we are given two perspectives from which to view Katy and her siblings, Aunt Izzie's perplexed and even resentful perspective on her wild charges, and Dr. Carr's approval of his exuberant children. The narrator moves between the two perspectives, telling us that Dr. Carr "wished to have the children hardy and bold, and encouraged climbing and rough plays, in spite of the bumps and ragged clothes which resulted" and also sympathizing with Aunt Izzie's dissatisfaction (3).

Aunt Izzie's perplexity stems from her sense of the children's otherness. While Aunt Izzie "had been a gentle, tidy little thing, who loved to sit as Curly Locks did, sewing long seams in the parlor, and to have her head patted by older people, and be told that she was a good girl," Katy "tore her dress every day, hated sewing, and didn't care a button about being called 'good'" (2). Aunt Izzie isn't just worn out; she is confused by these creatures whose perspective is foreign to her. Interestingly, she defines her own inability to understand the children's perspective as a trait located in the children. The children's physical activity

was very perplexing to Aunt Izzie, and she found it hard to forgive the children for being so 'unaccountable,' and so little like the good boys and girls in Sunday school memoirs, who were the young people she liked best, and understood most about

(3)

The fact that Aunt Izzie doesn't understand the children is defined as a lack on their part. They are "unaccountable," a word that locates the mystery of their behavior as a lack in their self-presentation rather than as a lack in Aunt Izzie's interpretation. Aunt Izzie's proper girlhood is set up as the norm and her nieces are defined as deviant and even disabled in that they lack the ability to account for themselves.

The text takes this disability a step further with the language of forgiveness, which defines this unaccountability as a moral transgression. The nineteenth-century use of "able-bodied" is relevant here; in all of the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions from the nineteenth century, able-bodied is linked to the ability to work. This highlights the contrast between the children's "able-bodied" status—they are capable of work (and we do see Katy mending stockings)—but they choose to make work for others (Aunt Izzie) through their wild play rather than contributing to the industry of the household. Again, the narrator

appears to focalize Aunt Izzie with the initial description of the six children, which integrates moral judgment with physical descriptors. We are told,

[t]hey also liked to mount the ridge-pole, and then, still keeping the sitting position, to let go, and scrape slowly down over the warm shingles to the ground. It was bad for their shoes and trousers, of course, but what of that? Shoes and trousers, and clothes generally, were Aunt Izzie's affair; theirs was to slide and enjoy themselves (4)

There is an edge to this description as there is an edge to Aunt Izzie's interaction with these heedless children. Yet, at the same time, all six children are presented as engaging, attractive, interesting characters, and through these blurred visions of Katy, the reader is able to see Katy as at once desirable and aberrant.

Aunt Izzie longs for the time when Katy behaves as the "good girls and boys in the Sunday school memoirs," but it is, at least in part, her inability to cultivate a genuine understanding of and connection with Katy that keeps Katy's and Izzie's relationship stuck in the same unproductive patterns: Katy misbehaves, Aunt Izzie is perplexed and frustrated, Katy tries to hide her shenanigans from Aunt Izzie, and the cycle continues. Katy is not alone in her struggle to fit into her community's norms, and her struggle may in fact reflect some of the ways her culture sought to explore the tension between the natural and the civilized body. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that a shift occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when discipline was introduced as a means of regulating the body for economic and political purposes. For Foucault, discipline, regulation, and subjection are used to create a body that is at the same time more productive and more passive. As Foucault writes, "Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (138). If Aunt Izzie had her wish, Katy's body would be a "docile body," both productive and obedient. Katy herself struggles with the tension between Aunt Izzie's wishes and her own inability to temper her wild embodiment.

Although Aunt Izzie does not attempt to push Katy into the formal economic structure of her time, her expectations of Katy—indeed of all of the Carr children—are that they inhabit "docile bodies." The difficulty, however, is that for the first part of the novel, Katy's body does not comply with these standards. It is only after her injury and paradoxically her recovery that Katy's body is as Aunt Izzie wishes, docile in its obedience and usefulness to the gender regime. In the first full description of Katy, she comes across as an awkward hoyden:

Katy's hair was always in a snarl; her gowns were always catching on nails and "tearing themselves"; and, in spite of her age and size, she was as heedless and innocent as a child of six. Katy was the *longest* girl that was ever seen. What she did to make herself grow so, nobody could tell; but there she was—up above papa's ear, and half a head taller than poor Aunt Izzie. Whenever she stopped to think about her height she became very awkward, and felt as if she were all legs and elbows, and angles and joints.

(8)

This description is full of images of passivity that contrast with Katy's apparent exuberance. Her gowns tear themselves, she grows wildly, and when she thinks about her body she becomes still more awkward. Katy's physical self is unmanageable and riotous and she lacks the maturity to manage her body. Thus, long before her fall from the swing, Katy's body is defined as aberrant and in need of a cure. Ironically, that cure is disability.

In the first half of *What Katy Did* we are inundated with images of Katy's able-bodied self in visceral form, scraped knees, torn skirts, and all. The body is a source of pleasure and power for Katy, allowing her access to imaginative spaces. In spite of the pleasure and power Katy derives from her tomboyish embodiment, the novel makes clear that her behavior as an active and curious girl is unruly, unacceptable, undisciplined, and indeed aberrant. As Lennard Davis writes in his discussion of nineteenth-century cultures, "Disease involved excess, excitability, noise, attention, irritation, stimulation" (111). This is a perfect description of Katy's character before the fall, and highlights the paradox that her able body is the source of her disability. In a lunchtime frolic, Katy turns her classroom into a wild ocean. Her teacher returns to find that Katy "capered like a lunatic on the platform" (31). Katy's high spirits on this day result from her physical triumph over the rival school, but the result of her physical capacity is apparent mental incapacity.

Katy herself yearns at times for femininity even before her transformative illness. In an early scene, the narrator tells us, "Then bending over toward Dorry, [Katy] added in a voice intended to be of wonderful sweetness: 'I am a fairy, Dorry!' 'Pshaw!' was Dorry's reply; 'you're a giraffe.—pa said so!'" (14). This is a moment when Katy tries to align herself with "good girls" and is told by a younger brother that her physical self—awkward and gangly—overrides any claim to feminine sweetness. Katy's charming personality is, from the beginning, linked to a body that is defined as grotesque. While the novel rejoices in Katy's freedom and vigor, it undermines the lively body on which these qualities rely. In a world where girls are supposed to be more like fairies than giraffes, Dorry's comment (which comes with his father's endorsement) defines Katy as other, as peculiar, as a misfit. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson

coins the term *misfit* to make visible embodied incongruity. She writes, "The discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is, produces fits and misfits" (593). While Katy's father may encourage his children to be active and playful, he still recognizes the disjunction between cultural expectations and Katy's instinctive physicality.

Katy's insecurity also shows up in the scene where the children imagine their futures. While Clover and Cecy imagine their future beauty, Katy thinks about what she will do rather than what she will look like. Katy imagines a world in which there are machines to do housework: "we'd never sew or knit garters, or do anything we didn't want to." Instead, Katy wants to do something heroic: "And when Aunt Izzie sees it, and reads about me in the newspapers, she will say 'The dear child! I always knew she would turn out an ornament to the family'" (16). Katy shows an awareness here of Aunt Izzie's disapproval and a desire to please her; she knows Aunt Izzie sees her as a misfit and that judgment disconcerts her. Ironically, Katy continues to misunderstand Aunt Izzie's desires. While Aunt Izzie would indeed like Katy to be an "ornament to the family"—fixed and decorative—heroism, the means Katy imagines for accomplishing this goal, is itself at odds with Aunt Izzie's perspective on the proper place for a young girl. Aunt Izzie wants Katy to decorate her home, not the newspaper; her goal for Katy is less exuberance rather than more impact on her world.

There is something touching about Katy's attempt to reconcile her desire for adventure with her desire for approval from a maternal figure. But what the reader knows is that Aunt Izzie would find even Katy's dreams of heroism unaccountable, and Katy's success in this arena would simply make Katy more inexplicable to her. The narrator acknowledges the challenges of Aunt Izzie's situation: she is to raise six children she finds "unaccountable." And the novel provides significant sympathy for the work this project entails.

Despite this sympathy, the narrator questions Aunt Izzie's effectiveness as a caregiver. She is described initially as "a small woman, sharp-faced and thin, rather old-looking, and very neat and particular about everything" (2). While we will learn that she is physically capable—"sixty stiff white pantalette legs" on the clothes line every Monday prove it (3)—she has physical markers that link her with invalidism. For example, a key indicator of Katy and Cousin Helen's illnesses is "thinness." When we are introduced to Cousin Helen, we hear "Her face was thin, but except for that you wouldn't have guessed that she was sick" (96). Similarly, the first physical indicator of Katy's invalid status is that her "face had grown thin" (135). So while Aunt Izzie dashes about running a household, we are given an early clue that she too is disabled, a limitation that we learn ultimately has to do with her inability to show her love for the children.

This novel closes with what looks like a return to “normalcy” and the improvement of all of the children: “Katy was evidently the center and the sun. They all revolved around her and trusted her for everything” (218). Cousin Helen “saw the change in Katy’s own face: the gentle expression of her eyes, the womanly look, the pleasant voice, the politeness, the tact in advising the others, without seeming to advise” (218). This passage reads as a catalog of the traits of a good woman and her idealized role in the home. Yet these are traits that don’t rely on Katy’s physical recovery/cure, since Cousin Helen has them all despite her invalidism and Aunt Izzie didn’t have them despite her able body.

Ultimately, *What Katy Did* both relies on the “evils” of disability to help its heroine grow up and to recreate a stable home for the younger Carr children, and questions this simplistic definition and use of disability as a metaphor. By linking physical disability to emotional maturity, the novel destabilizes simple binaries. Despite being able-bodied, Aunt Izzie is unable to meet the needs of her charges; despite her capable body in the first half of the novel, Katy is defined as aberrant, a misfit. It is Cousin Helen, whose disability is not cured, who is able to bring full healing to both Katy and her family. While disability studies has tended to focus on the ways that society attempts to shape the disabled individual, this novel emphasizes the intersection of multiple forms of shaping and multiple disabilities.<sup>2</sup> As Lennard Davis argues,

Under normalcy, the fact is that no one is or can be normal, as no one is or can be equal. Everyone has to work hard to make it seem that they conform, and so the person with disabilities is singled out as a dramatic case of not belonging. This identification makes it easier for the rest to think they fit the paradigm

(117)

Katy’s injury and subsequent invalidism draw our attention to this novel as a fruitful site of investigation; the novel itself highlights the ways that “no one is or can be normal.” Disability in this novel is not simply a metaphor or plot device whose resolution brings closure; instead, *What Katy Did* describes the impossibility of normalcy.

The complex exploration of forms of disability in this novel pushes us to see that growing up is hard work, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. Rather than a coming-of-age novel in which the heroine becomes a woman simply by getting older, *What Katy Did* dramatically and viscerally describes a maturation that includes bodily injury and the “School of Pain.” Becoming a woman hurts, says this novel, and though it ends with the reestablishment of domestic harmony, a reassertion of gendered roles, and Katy’s delight in her success, it gets to that neat conclusion through a story that resonates with the body in motion, the body in battle with infection, and the body that can only be made acceptable

through constant and intensive discipline. Katy's docile body emerges not as the result of a natural progression, and not simply as a product of the schoolhouse or domestic sphere, but through a violent and unnatural shaping.

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## Notes

- 1 Lois Keith summarizes this perspective in her book, *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability, and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls*. Keith claims that typically authors of classic girls' books use disability as a negative metaphor and cure as positive resolution (248–249).
- 2 Simi Linton's article in *PMLA* is one example of this tendency. Linton writes, "Disabled people are to be acted on, shaped, and turned out as best as can be done to fit into the existing social structure" (518).

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## 7 Embodying the Healthy, Charitable Child in the Junior Red Cross

*Kristine Moruzi*

Although Canadian children actively contributed to a variety of fundraising and other charitable activities during World War I, many of which were organized by or for the Canadian Red Cross, the Junior Red Cross (JRC) was not formally established in Canada until 1922. After the war, when its *raison d'être* was no longer as obvious, the Canadian Red Cross became a vital organization that could assist federal, provincial, and local governments in their efforts to improve health and prevent disease. The JRC, it was felt, could “do better work than the grown-ups, because good health depends largely on the practice of right health habits, and these are more easily learned in childhood than in adult life” (“What” 3). One of the primary ways in which JRC ideals about health and disease prevention were conveyed to children was through the pages of its official publication, the *Red Cross Junior* magazine. This chapter examines the early years of the magazine between 1922 and 1930 to show how Canadian children were guided toward behaviors and attitudes designed to promote a healthy and charitable life. The monthly magazine incorporated a variety of content that encouraged JRC members to embody the healthy values of the organization. These values included becoming healthy, but also helping others to become healthy through charitable activities.

Pierre Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* provides a framework for understanding how the healthy child is embodied in and through the pages of the *Red Cross Junior*. He describes *habitus* as a set of “individual and collective practices” that are produced by and emerge from “a system of dispositions” that “tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices” (54). As Claire Edwards and Rob Imrie explain, “Habitus, then, seeks to focus on the corporeal, embodied experiences of everyday life and to understand systems of interaction between individual social beings and broader social structures” (241). The *habitus* of child health is produced by a set of practices that are “inscribed on bodies” (Bourdieu 59). The *Red Cross Junior* attempts to enact the *habitus* of child health by promoting a series of health rules to be adopted by child readers in the hope that they will



become internalized to the extent that they will seem natural and will activate similar practices in other children. The ongoing enactment of the *habitus* is central to its perpetuity since it generates ideas and actions within the “limits set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production” (Bourdieu 55). By creating the *habitus* of child health for child readers, the magazine also presumably hoped it would continue into adulthood as the children grew up and became adults who likewise valued children’s health.

Michel Foucault provides a complementary framework that operates within the *habitus* to embody the healthy child. The child readers of the *Red Cross Junior* are encouraged to govern themselves according to the rules and guidelines provided by the magazine and the JRC organization. Foucault describes governmentality as “the art of self-government” based on “a form of surveillance and control” (“Governmentality” 91, 92). The child readers of the magazine are encouraged to self-govern by observing and controlling their actions and activities to produce a “docile body” (*Discipline* 136) that is relatively “ignorant of what is being done to it” (“Governmentality” 100). The child reader is guided toward practices of health and charity, but remains relatively ignorant about the significance of these activities in the broader social context.

The embodiment of child health was enabled through the cooperation between Canadian public health workers and provincial departments of education. According to the Canadian Public Health Association in 1911, its primary focus was on the “rising generation” through whom they hoped “first of all to create a strong and healthy race” (qtd in Sutherland 39). Schoolchildren were more likely to contract infectious diseases at school, which meant that the school was an important arena in which to examine, treat, and educate children about habits of healthy living. By the advent of World War I, Canadian cities had largely already implemented campaigns to improve children’s health while rural areas were considerably behind urban areas in understanding the value of maintaining sanitary schools and medically inspecting schoolchildren.

In post-war Canada, the healthy body of the child was an especially salient symbol. As Nancy Janovicek observes, young people became “the cornerstone of modern prosperity and industrial development” (446) in the twentieth century. The healthy child became an indicator by which the nation’s health and wellbeing could be measured as well as a rallying point for a healthy society following the devastating years of World War I. A healthy, prosperous nation must be able to produce healthy children. This chapter argues that the *Red Cross Junior* was an important vehicle through which children were encouraged to embody and promote habits of health in the post-war years.

## Defining the Healthy Child

The *Red Cross Junior* took on the task of helping to formulate a healthful *habitus* by simultaneously asserting the idea of the healthy child as innately natural and inherently good while also instructing children about how to be healthy. The *habitus* of healthy children in the magazine includes a definition predicated on the able-bodied child who is “crucial to the smooth operation of traditional theories of democracy, citizenship, subjectivity, beauty, and capital” (Breckenridge 350). The healthy child’s body meets norms pertaining to weight, activity, and its physical movement through space but is also subject to regulatory practices related to cleanliness and emotion. Children are asked to regulate their own behaviors to meet this normative ideal with little discussion of the children who do not, and cannot, satisfy the requirements of the *habitus*. This “self-government” (“Governmentality” 91) is fundamental to the development of the healthy-child *habitus* of post-war Canadian society. As Chris Shilling explains, this notion of governmentality contributed to a *habitus* “in which embodied subjects were encouraged to structure their lives in particular ways” (3). The child reader and the children depicted in the pages of the magazine were subject to and operated within the networks of power defined by the school and the family.

The JRC was intended to help children to fulfil their potential as healthy Canadian citizens, yet the magazine’s ideal was somewhat narrowly defined to include only certain Canadian children. Nation was an explicit framework for the Canadian JRC, although Junior Red Cross organizations around the world were inducting their children into similar patterns of healthy behavior. The *habitus* of child health was promoted through nationally written and published magazines, but was based on a shared international belief in its importance. The ideal of health in the *Red Cross Junior* was thus not distinctively Canadian, except insofar as many of the models of health that appeared in its pages—in fiction, illustrations, or photographs—were defined as Canadian. Child readers of the magazine were encouraged to see themselves as part of an “imagined community” (Anderson 46) of healthy Canadian and international children who both comprised and contributed to the *habitus* of health.

The magazine’s rhetoric is characterized by slippages between its ideal and the myriad of children it served. The 1922 *Annual Report* describes the Canadian Red Cross belief that “a sound, clean and strong body” was “the birthright of every child” (CRC *Annual Report*, 1922, 20) and would enable clear thinking (and thus intelligence), the ability to appreciate beauty (a signifier of character), and the ability to be unselfish (a quality of good citizenship). Its lofty aims “to promote Health, Humanitarian Ideals and Good Citizenship” (CRC *Annual Report*, 1922, 21) were predicated on a narrow understanding of JRC children as predominantly White, able-bodied, and largely middle class.<sup>1</sup> It promoted

membership by the “issuing of special Junior Membership badges and certificates, to which each child shall be entitled on the payment of a membership fee of twenty-five cents” (*CRC Annual Report*, 1919, 17). Not all children would have been able to raise the membership fee to become a member. The healthy ideal of childhood, enabled by and facilitated through membership in the JRC, was thus available only to children who could afford the annual subscription fee.

### Creating the Healthy Child in the *Red Cross Junior*

Although some unofficial Junior Red Cross branches emerged during the war, the organization rapidly expanded after 1922 when the Junior Red Cross was formally established and introduced into Canadian schools. As James Robertson, Chairman of the Canadian Red Cross Society Council, explained, the primary purpose of the JRC was

to get the boys and girls interested in learning and doing voluntarily those things which promote health knowledge and health habits, linking up a knowledge of hygiene with habits of living so that the child may have them for all time.

(4)

Children were encouraged to join the JRC, where they would

acquire habits of healthy living, become actively interested in their own health and that of others, find opportunities for the exercise of their natural altruism and develop a friendly interest in their contemporaries in all the civilized countries of the world.

(“Canadian Red Cross Society” 93)

These objectives reflect the JRC interest in embodying health in Canadian children but also in inspiring children to help others.

The JRC school health campaign operated alongside the increasing intervention of school health doctors and nurses into children’s lives through regular inspections. A proper school medical program “detected contagious disease, discovered physical defects in pupils, made the school ‘the most sanitary place in the community’, inculcated hygienic habits in young people, provided for their physical training, and improved the methods and materials of health instruction” (Sutherland 49). Thus, the school medical program simultaneously examined children’s bodies for physical imperfections when measured against a normative standard as well as inspecting them for communicable diseases. This medical examination of children’s bodies was accompanied by a concurrent campaign to instruct children in proper habits of health, hygiene, and physical development. These combined efforts coincided with a “sharp rise”

(Sutherland 52) in the standards that were being applied to the care of children.

The *Red Cross Junior* was an obvious method by which the JRC shared its health, hygiene, and physical development objectives with its members. The publication was intended to “attract and interest children and young people, and to be of service to teachers and organizers of Junior work” (CRC *Annual Report*, 1919, 17). It contained stories, games, puzzles, correspondence from other JRC branches, and educational articles to promote the threefold ideal of health, citizenship, and service. By 1930, it had a paid circulation of approximately 30,000 (“Canadian Red Cross Society” 93). Each sixteen-page issue featured an illustrated black-and-white cover depicting the cross and title in red. Edited by Jane Browne, national director of the Junior Red Cross, the magazine included Canadian content such as informational articles on beavers, as well as photos and illustrations, poetry, songs, and reading recommendations. It also regularly featured reports from Junior branches in Canada and around the world, intended to help promote the national and global breadth of the organization.

One of the main methods for encouraging children to learn about and embody health was through the establishment of “The Health Game,” which introduced twelve health rules in the magazine to encourage proper eating habits, hygiene practices, and regular exercise. The rules included regular baths, frequent brushing of teeth, drinking milk and eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, using a handkerchief when coughing or sneezing, daily outdoor activities, and sleeping at least ten hours each night. These rules presumed access to healthy food that was predicated on an assumed standard of living in which such food was regularly available. The model of the health game was intended to make it entertaining for children while also providing a clear set of rules to be followed.

While Bourdieu argues that the field (“the pitch or board on which it is played, the rules, the outcome at stake, etc.”) of the game is clearly understood as “an arbitrary social construct” (67), the stakes of the JRC health game were not clearly articulated in the magazine. Instead, children were encouraged to become healthy by adhering to “a policy of coercions that [acted] upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior” (Foucault *Discipline* 138). The consequences of failure were both moral and physical, with children who failed to abide by the rules seen as spiritually weak and physically inferior. Yet the rationale for the rules, and the context that made the introduction of these rules necessary, was elided. Canadian children were merely told that they should follow these rules for the betterment of themselves, their friends and family, and their nation. Healthy children were the product of this *habitus*, and the normativity associated with the idea of “health” remained unquestioned.

Prize competitions were a common way that the *Red Cross Junior* supported the *habitus* of child health as they encouraged children to learn and remember these healthy habits. A health poster competition was one such example. Readers under the age of fifteen were asked to illustrate one or more of the health rules. The winning poster by fourteen-year-old Gladys L. Cook of Hamilton, Ontario, is reproduced in the magazine, with a smiling and healthy Gladys pictured below (Figure 7.1). Entitled “HEALTH RULES FOR YOU,” the poster directs readers to see the rules as relevant and applicable to them since they are rules “for you” as the reader. Cook has illustrated six rules with simple drawings of children performing these good behaviors. Readers are encouraged to see



Figure 7.1 “Reproduction of the First Prize Poster” *Red Cross Junior* Jan. 1923.

themselves following the health rules and consequently becoming both healthy and happy. This idealized self-government enabled the “subtle coercion” (Foucault *Discipline* 137) of the child readers to produce the embodiment of health.

The poster competition functions like a game, much as the “Health Game” does. There are rules, winners and losers, and a field of play. The *habitus* of health enacted in and through the magazine means that competitors are presumably sufficiently in agreement with the magazine’s principles to submit to the competition, thereby encouraging reader identification with the magazine and its ideals. The participatory culture of the magazine is encouraged through these types of competitions. Readers want to “play” the game by submitting their visualization of the rules and contributing to the magazine’s culture of health. Through the inclusion of Cook’s photo, she becomes—or at least appears to be—an example of the model of healthy childhood that the magazine encourages. She embodies the health rules while also contributing to the magazine’s construction of the *habitus* of health through her participation in the competition.

A 1923 *Red Cross Junior* health story competition likewise encouraged child readers to provide examples of how health could be embodied and how challenges to health could be overcome. In the winning story, “The Runt and the Red Cross Rules,” author W. Owen Conquest of Calgary, Alberta, demonstrates how healthy children could help unhealthy ones by encouraging them to become healthy.<sup>2</sup> This *habitus* of health dominates the story. New student Billy Hooley is quickly nicknamed the “Runt” and described as a poor, unhealthy child who neither knows about nor follows the health rules. He is “a wan-faced, puny-looking, shrivelled-up lad of, perhaps, twelve summers” (Conquest 10). His Irish accent signifies his working-class origins, and the “Runt” soon confides to his teacher that his mother died when he was young; his father works in the mines and “hasn’t any time” (Conquest 10) to look after him. His weak body is a consequence of ignorance, poverty, and the lack of maternal care. The tellingly named teacher, Miss I.M. Kind, resolves to approach her JRC members to see if they would be interested in helping the Runt become “a healthy normal child” (Conquest 10). Soon they have organized a benefit concert to raise money, with which they anonymously provide Billy the food he needs to become healthy. The fresh milk they provide is accompanied by an initial note: “Billy, drink one glass at each meal” (Conquest 10). In addition to the milk, Billy needs to be educated about proper health habits. The requirement for good food to be supported by education is a central premise of the magazine and is reinforced in the story.

Billy is gradually introduced to patterns of Foucauldian self-government that improve his health, while also making the stakes of the health game more clear. A weak, underdeveloped runt can be transformed

into a specimen of health and vigor. In addition to regular good food and fresh air, Billy is guided toward disciplinary practices related to hygiene and is finally given a complete list of the "Rules of the Health Game." A player of the health game can "win" only if he or she has the appropriate supplies and understands the rules. The successful potential of the health game is demonstrated when the "Runt" gradually gains his strength as a result of following the rules, and the story concludes with him winning a running race as "one of the best athletes in the West" (Conquest 11). From a child who, because of his ill health, could contribute only minimally to Canadian society, he has been transformed into an athlete. Sporting achievement has long been connected to nationalism, as Shilling notes, and Billy models Canada's success in producing healthy children when he becomes a regional winner. In this story, the healthy JRC members help other, less fortunate, children to embody the ideal of health, and unhealthy children are encouraged to pursue the health habits to become contributing members of society.

The implied child reader of the magazine thus has a dual obligation as a member of the JRC. Not only must he or she be healthy, but the child must also help others to be healthy as well. As the editor explains: "The JRC member takes upon himself the obligation of *actually putting into practice* the facts he has been taught about health" ("Junior Red Cross" 9, emphasis added). The child reader must do more than simply consider the health habits; he or she must embody them and become healthy. The fictional stories contributed by *Red Cross Junior* readers provide an imaginative space in which children explore how and why to embody health in addition to helping others to do so.

In contrast to Conquest's story, which is focalized through the ignorant, unhealthy child in need of outside assistance, "Some Game" demonstrates how children with the ability to embody health should transform their behavior and adopt the disciplinary practices that will enable them to conform to the JRC ideal.<sup>3</sup> In this story Billy Smith eats poorly throughout the day. Consequently, he gradually loses "all his 'pep'" with no energy for play and no interest in his lessons (G.G.N. 11). When his teacher introduces the Health Game by hanging a growth chart on the wall, Billy is unsurprised to find that he is below weight because he has not been "playing the game" (G.G.N. 12). In this case, the health game is framed within a set of norms for weight based on height, age, and sex. Once the students begin following the health rules, they soon embody the healthy ideal. In contrast to Billy the runt in the first story, who lacks the requisite knowledge to become a "docile body," Billy Smith is easily able to learn about and adopt the rules that will make him healthy.

Margaret Beetham, in describing nineteenth-century women's magazines, explains how "femininity is always represented... as fractured,

not least because it is simultaneously assumed as given and as still to be achieved" (1). Likewise, the *habitus* of health in the *Red Cross Junior* is simultaneously assumed to be true for children while also still needing to be achieved. Only certain (White, able-bodied, middle-class) children depicted in the *Red Cross Junior* magazine are able to adopt the practices of healthy self-government without any outside intervention or resources. Child readers who saw similarities between Billy and themselves could be inspired by the ease of Billy's transformation. Alternatively, a child reader who already abides by the health rules can follow Billy on his journey to health. Although both stories feature male protagonists, the health rules are clearly intended for both boys and girls and are designed to encourage self-governing healthy behaviors in all able child readers. A character like Billy could represent any White, working- or middle-class child, with parents who care for him and who are concerned about his unhealthy habits. His ready ability to buy candy suggests a certain degree of financial stability and implies his middle-class standing. This kind of story presumably also functioned aspirationally for working-class readers who hoped to improve their material circumstances.

### Charity in the *Red Cross Junior*

Entwined with the *habitus* of health are disciplinary practices related to service. To become a good Canadian citizen, the JRC encouraged habits of health, but also expanded upon the wartime necessity of helping others through charitable giving. The fundraising in the *Red Cross Junior* is oriented toward health, as readers are reminded in June 1922:

there are many unfortunate children in the world who, through no fault of their own, cannot enjoy good health, because of some physical defect. We all know of such cases that are not receiving the necessary treatment because their parents are unable to pay for it. It is the work of Junior Red Cross branches to raise money to make possible the treatment of such children.

("What" 3)

The healthy child readers of the magazine are expected to help other children who require medical attention—and possibly surgical intervention—to be healthy. In "A Letter from the Editor" in September 1922, the editor reminds child readers to "[p]ractice all the good health habits that you already know" so that there will not be "so much sickness and suffering in the world" (16). She also hopes that JRC members "will give even more thought... towards helping less fortunate children" ("Letter" 16). The health habits are intended to produce "subjected and practised [healthy] bodies" (Foucault *Discipline* 138), but ideally they will be accompanied



by altruistic behaviors that will contribute to the governance of unhealthy bodies as well.

The value of these altruistic behaviors is embedded in the *habitus* that children should be healthy and that society should help them to become so. The *Red Cross Junior* employs the rhetoric of helping less fortunate children in ways that are similar to Red Cross fundraising campaigns during World War I. Consequently, child readers' engagement with the fundraising "game" is not entirely a "conscious act," but is instead based on their "ignorance of all that is tacitly granted through [their] investment in the field and [their] interest in its... existence and perpetuation" (Bourdieu 67). The demand that Junior Red Cross members should help other children is part of a set of behaviors perpetuated by the Red Cross in conjunction with society at large through examples appearing in the magazine. In "A Junior Red Cross Patient in Saskatchewan," for example, readers are introduced to Gladys, a "happy-looking little lady" (11) who was born with deformed feet. Without a "very difficult and expensive operation," she would "always be a cripple" ("Junior" 11). With the help of the JRC, she undergoes a successful operation. Her feet are now "like those of other children," and when she grows up, she may have forgotten that she has "suffered a great affliction" ("Junior" 11). Child readers are shown how their fundraising has helped to transform an unhealthy child, reinforcing the charitable rhetoric in the magazine and the value of their work.

Ill health is explicitly made into a spectacle encouraging healthy and charitable disciplinary practices in the pair of photos appearing directly under the article about Gladys. The two photos are of Stanley B, who lives in Nova Scotia and was also born with deformed feet. Unlike Gladys' feet, which are hidden under the bedcovers, Stanley is depicted in before and after photos. In the left-hand photo, Stanley is being helped to stand as he balances on feet that point inward. In the right-hand, postoperative photo, Stanley stands alone, dressed for the outdoors. His feet, now straightened, are encased in boots. Unlike the first photo, which emphasizes his dependence on others, the latter photo depicts a child ready and able to play outdoors. The caption explains that, with the help of the Junior Red Cross, Stanley can now "walk and run about and is a happy little boy" ("Junior" 11). The two photos are clear evidence of the original disability and Stanley's transformation into healthy able-bodiedness. Stanley is now a healthy child who—consciously or not—follows the rules of the health game by eating "lots of bread and butter" and drinking "plenty of milk" ("Junior" 11). The *habitus* and disciplinary practices of health have produced a new, productive member of Canadian childhood.

This *habitus* presumes a "compulsory able-bodiedness" (McRuer 383) that is based on an industrial capitalist society requiring able-bodied people to work and be productive. The magazine never articulates the

future for unhealthy children, nor does it offer possibilities that incorporate disability within the *habitus* of child health. Robert McRuer explains that the origins of compulsory able-bodiedness “emanate from everywhere and nowhere” (386), much like the *habitus* of health that permeated Canadian culture in the 1920s. The transformative potential from ill health (which is broadly defined to include both sickness and disability) is positioned as desirable for all readers of the magazine and to be enacted on unhealthy children in the community.

Special reports about branch activities were occasionally included in the *Red Cross Junior* to demonstrate how JRC branches—in Canada and internationally—enacted the *habitus* of charitable fundraising while also inspiring further events, thus reinforcing and maintaining the disciplinary logic and practices of helping others. One such report from Grace E. Cummings of summarizes her branch’s successful bazaar. The report discusses the practicalities of the event, including the eight summer meetings where the older girls sewed dresses, aprons, and fancy work while the younger girls helped with minor tasks like basting and crocheting edges. The meetings opened with the singing of the “Maple Leaf,” the unofficial Canadian national anthem of Anglo-Canadians, closed with “God Save the King,” and included refreshments. These meetings deserve attention for the way that they demonstrate how JRC members functioned as “docile bodies” united in their desire to organize a successful event that enacted the *habitus* of health indirectly through fundraising. They also show how the girls functioned as a self-governing body by adhering to social conventions, possibly learned at school assemblies, related to opening and closing anthems that demonstrated their nationalism and imperialism. By providing refreshments, the *habitus* of charitable work that was promoted by the JRC was complemented by the prospect of a sociable gathering and enjoyable food.

The details of the bazaar show that the *habitus* of helping others is not exclusively the province of girls. Instead, children and adults should exhibit charitable behaviors, thus making the whole community responsible for the success of the fundraising efforts. The boys, Grace is careful to note, “played their part” (Cummings 15) by erecting tables and platforms and running errands, and the district ladies kindly contributed much of the supper. Boys and girls, adults and children, are expected to work toward the charitable ideal promoted by the JRC. Grace’s example demonstrates how the community is collectively a docile body that has been employed to circulate and promote the *habitus* of child health through indirect means.

The extent to which the *habitus* of health has become ubiquitous and the community adheres to disciplinary practices related to philanthropy is evident by the brief mention of the charitable cause itself. Although this fundraising is intended to help children in need, Grace makes only one slight reference to the children who will be helped, asking “Are we

not trying to do our bit in aid of the poor suffering children?” (Cummings 15). In a summary that is otherwise full of practical details about the bazaar, its organization, and its success, this rhetoric is striking in its lack of sentimentality or detail. The idea of the “poor suffering children” seems to have been so intrinsic to the *habitus* of health and charity that it required no additional discussion. Instead, the importance of the bazaar lies in how it promotes and reinforces practices of health and philanthropy for JRC members.

## Conclusion

The post-war years of the Red Cross enabled it to consolidate its efforts to attract children to its organization through the formal establishment of Junior branches around the world. Its relatively rapid uptake in Canada reflects Canadian interest in developing a *habitus* designed to guide children toward habits of health. The *Red Cross Junior* magazine was one of the main methods by which the JRC taught child readers about these habits and encouraged them to govern themselves according to clearly defined health practices. The magazine inspired Canadian children to acquire “habits of healthy living and of serving others less fortunate than themselves” (“Canadian Red Cross Society” 94). The “health game,” one of the main strategies for promoting this culture of health, appeared in fictional and informational forms in the pages of the magazine and encouraged children to practice and promote the rules of health while simultaneously suggesting that they should also be thinking of how they could aid in the transformation of unhealthy children.

Underlying the embodiment of child health were disciplinary practices designed to encourage children to adopt certain behaviors as part of a tacit understanding that improving Canadian children’s health was beneficial to the children themselves and to society as a whole. Child readers were expected to govern themselves in ways that supported the magazine’s ideal of health by eating properly, exercising regularly, and practicing good hygiene. This self-government was accompanied by charitable practices intended to enable other, less fortunate, children to become healthy as well. The magazine’s success appears in philanthropic reports like those from Grace Cummings, in which the *habitus* of child health and charity was so obvious and intrinsic to the attitudes and behaviors of JRC members that it barely receives a mention in her discussion of her branch’s fundraising efforts. Nonetheless, this *habitus* of health and philanthropy, and the disciplinary practices that children were encouraged to adopt, presupposed two types of children: those who were ready and able to embody these ideals; and those who needed assistance to adapt or transform themselves. That these children could be differentiated based on race, class, or able-bodiedness is a complication that the

magazine neglects to explicitly address. Instead, the *habitus* of health elides these differences and produces disciplinary practices that could be applied to any who failed to meet the White, middle-class normative standards.

## Notes

- 1 Mona Gleason has similarly argued that public health reform in British Columbian schools at the turn of the twentieth century reflected “the values and priorities of white middle-class professionals” (287).
- 2 Launched in February 1923, this competition was aimed at JRC members aged fourteen and over, with submissions of less than 600 words and dealing with a health topic. Only three prizes were to be awarded, with \$10 for first prize, \$8 for second, and \$5 for third. The results were published in September 1923.
- 3 This story does not emerge from the health story competition. Instead, it is contributed by G.G.N., presumably a paid contributor.

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## 8 Liberty in the Age of Eugenics

### Non-Normative Bodies in Fabian Socialist Children's Fiction

*Amanda Hollander*

Our prisons are one-third full of feeble-minded convicts. Society ought to segregate them on feeble-minded farms, where they can earn their livings in peaceful menial pursuits, and not have children. Then in a generation or so we might be able to wipe them out.

—Jean Webster, *Dear Enemy* (106)

In Jean Webster's 1915 best-selling young adult novel, *Dear Enemy*, narrator Sallie McBride enthuses in her letter about the formation of eugenic protocols to, as she terms it, wipe out Americans deemed "feeble-minded". Webster, better known for her beloved novel *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912), here delves into the insidious and influential claims by eugenicists that such drastic actions would free the US government from the burden of caring for its own citizens and even posited that such action benefited those designated for extinction. Similar reasoning would later appear in a well-known Nazi poster advocating sterilization policies, in which propaganda depicts three severely disabled young children accompanied by the statement "Sterilisation: Nicht Strafe-sondern Befreiung," or, "Sterilization: Not punishment, but liberation." Early twentieth-century eugenicists disturbingly aligned liberty with death and sterilization. In the quotation from *Dear Enemy* above, pastoral bliss becomes a way of annihilating a future generation of the "feeble-minded" in one of the most popular children's novels of its time. I argue that eugenics seeped into mainstream British and American children's literature, particularly works such as *Harding's Luck* (1909) by Fabian founder E. Nesbit and, across the Atlantic, *Dear Enemy* (1915) by best-selling children's author and socialist Webster. Liberation, as imagined by these two authors, takes on disturbing implications as children in both novels are couched in narration that depicts them as fundamentally unfit and anti-utilitarian. Dickie Harding, the hero of *Harding's Luck*, only finds freedom through a series of time slips to a romanticized English past in which he becomes able-bodied—genre remedying what society cannot. Sallie,

acting superintendent of an orphan asylum, imagines a better future for her wards through sterilization and even euthanasia. The internal war between scientific advancement through eugenics and the need and even desire to nurture even those children termed “sub-normal” manifests in the epistolary form in which Sallie’s letters themselves become regulated bodies. As such, in these novels children’s bodies act as political loci for deeply troubling imaginings on the fates of non-normative children and nationhood itself.

Fabian socialists, following their mandate of “reform, not revolution,” had a standing interest in the overlap of labor conditions and public health, but by the early twentieth century began to express concerns about the disabled figure as draining rather than contributing to productive labor. Fabian Society founder and activist Sidney Webb wrote many tracts on social patterns and conditions throughout his career, but in 1907 he turned his attention to the falling birth rate in England: “To the present writer it seems that only by some such ‘sharp turn’ in our way of dealing with these problems can we avoid degeneration of type—that is race deterioration, if not race suicide” (19). Nor were these concerns limited to the Fabian Society. In 1908, the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded released a formal document in which they included a statement from the Association for Promoting Employment of the Mentally or Physically Defective. The association, begun in 1901 and focusing its attentions on the most desperately impoverished neighborhoods of West London, as noted in the Commission’s appendices, carefully segregates the disabled populace into three main categories: “families of low type,” “families which have sunk to a low level morally or physically,” and “families of the respectable working class” (237). The association’s work receives mention in Fabian materials and there are glancing references in A. R. Orage’s socialist journal, the *New Age* (1907–1922). Everywhere, anxiety about shifting demographics and disabled workers plagued socialist publications. On the same page as an article celebrating the presence of Fabianism in Turkey, one socialist critic of the employment of the disabled writes with evident frustration:

We have, of course, no kind of objection whatever to the employment in some pleasant form of these unfortunates; but the irony of the situation is really rather oppressive. With 8 per cent of our skilled workers walking the streets idle, and their wives and families living God knows how on next to nothing, it does seem strange that so much fuss should be made about the employment of the unemployables.

(363)

Read together, these documents reveal a plethora of troubling attitudes toward the mentally and physically disabled in Edwardian England.

Human worth becomes intrinsically tied to the individual's facility to participate in the workforce—a hierarchy in which the able-bodied are designated as the deserving. The remarks of the association's general statement showcase the conflation of disability, morality, and class in a way that soon would become adopted with eager fanaticism by eugenicists on both sides of the Atlantic.

The *New Age* diatribe then sets up a secondary problem in its appropriation of well-worn political rhetoric that the undeserving take jobs from the deserving—in this case the former being disabled persons and the latter the iconic working man so celebrated by all socialist movements, including Fabianism. They cast the disabled as thieves of work within a collectivist political movement rooted partially in an ideology advocated by John Stuart Mill. Serialized in *Fraser's Magazine*, Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861) popularized his position as heir to the philosophical tradition that began with Jeremy Bentham and was sustained through Mill's father, James Mill. For socialist children's book writers, the disabled child becomes a particularly troubling figure as they both advocate in favor of childhood agency and fear the disabled, reproductive adult that same child eventually will become.

### "The Little Cripple from Deptford"

*Harding's Luck* appeared at a moment when England had a distressed fixation on the pervasive belief that forms of social and moral degeneracy were widespread. The novel, which shifts the outlook from a middle-class perspective to that of a child who, in his transitions from disabled slum-child to historical aristocrat, starts to recognize and recoil from his own marginalization. *Harding's Luck* narrates the adventures of Dickie: a physically disabled, hardscrabble boy living in a London slum. Dickie begins to slip back and forth in time between the Edwardian period and the Jacobean era. *Harding's Luck* has a superficially similar plot to its predecessor, *The House of Arden* (1908), in which siblings Eldred and Elfrida travel through different historical eras in their quest to restore their family estate in the twentieth century. When the brother and sister visit the Jacobean period in this time-slip tale, they meet their cousin, Richard Arden, later revealed to be fellow Edwardian Dickie Harding. In *Harding's Luck*, Dickie moves from the margins to become the central character. Intellectually ambitious but often disregarded because of his lame foot, he struggles to find a stable place for himself when adult figures prove unreliable and the society around him devalues him because of his disability. Through this critically neglected work of fiction, Nesbit reflects on urban poverty, juxtaposing the brutality of the slums and streets with an idealized, undeniably halcyon view of England's early modern history. By having Dickie repeatedly visit an idealized past in which he becomes able-bodied, Nesbit imagines English



national promise while tentatively considering physical disability from within a socialist political organization increasingly focused on eugenics.

*Harding's Luck* centers on Dickie's struggles to overcome the social prejudices and setbacks surrounding disability. For Dickie, finding a way to achieve economic independence and ultimately real agency directly correlates with his sense of self-worth. In the modern age, he tries to encourage those around him to see beyond his lameness, usually through his verbal acuity and by presenting himself "with the dignity of the dream boy who was not a cripple" (115). Yet the adult characters around him continually view him through the lens of disability and charity. No one will teach him a skill or trade. In his first long excursion into the past, however, an able-bodied Dickie suddenly finds those around him willing to teach him marketable skills. When he returns to the modern era, Dickie finds that he can earn money carving wooden boxes, the skill he learned in the past. He articulates how this correlates with his sense of value as an English citizen: "Old Sebastian told me every one ought to do some duty to his country, or he wasn't worth his meat and ale. And you don't know how good it is having money that you've *earned yourself*" (132). To be sure, Nesbit's children, in all of her novels, seek to direct their own futures, but it is Dickie who wants to do so through taking on useful labor. This attitude reflects the influence of Utilitarianism on Fabian thought in particular and in Edwardian culture more pervasively.

*Harding's Luck* considers how Dickie has been denied a trade until in Jacobean times he learns carving: a skill that enables him in modern England to feel that he has social value. Certainly, when British politician John E. Gorst wrote his follow-up to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration's report, he employed the language of Utilitarianism: "The disablement of a child deprives the community of his future services, and imposes upon it the cost of his future maintenance" (9). Gorst deliberately chose his words in order to rouse the Edwardian public to action in his call for medical care and better nutrition for the struggling and destitute of urban areas.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, his discussion of disability focused on the ways in which boys like Dickie became economic burdens, reducing them to passive sufferers and denying them any agency. Dickie, conversely, longs to have agency and economic independence but no one will hire a lame boy (11). Edwardian society dismisses the disabled person as inherently valueless in a culture that commodifies human bodies.

Dickie offers a continued resistance to attempts to coddle or exploit him. He strives to be useful and productive through carving and the moral reformation of Beale, a criminally inclined tramp. However, during his penultimate excursion into the past, Dickie ends up in a battle and kills a Roundhead soldier. On returning to the present day, he makes a self-aware connection between his agency in the past and being able-bodied. Stumbling down the hill with cousins Elfrida and Eldred

in Edwardian England, Dickie realizes that for all that he has achieved in the modern era, he does not have the opportunity to be a hero in any traditional narrative. As Dickie and his cousins escape the fray and slip forward in time, the narrator slips away in a moment of free indirect discourse: "the children went down the hill as quickly as they could—which was not very quickly because of Dickie's poor lame foot. The boy who had killed Cromwell's man with his little sword had not been lame" (267). Since the boys' adventure novel usually centers on a male child who acts as a powerful agent, in this moment Dickie consciously apprehends that he cannot and will not be the hero he envisions in modern discourse. When Lord Arden announces to the community that Dickie is, in fact, the true heir and that he will cede the title to Dickie, the latter's lameness becomes even more pronounced: "Dickie, little lame Dickie, who stood there leaning on his crutch, pale as death" (272). That littleness evokes Tiny Tim and a position of weakness and subjugation, exaggerates Dickie's disability. His agonizing sense of unworthiness cannot be separated from the lame foot. He rues that the wealth, titles, and land of his cousins will be transferred away from them to Dickie, who thinks of himself as "the little cripple from Deptford," the boy with the "lame foot," "only a tramp boy" (274). In the Jacobean past, he rescues his cousins. In the Edwardian period, they must rescue him after he is kidnapped and bound.

Ultimately, Dickie—by choice—returns to a past where he has never been dropped as a baby or run over by a carriage in a crowded London street. The narrator describes Dickie's Jacobean life and the sword has once again taken the crutch's place:

And Dickie himself. I see him in his ruff and cloak, with his little sword by his side, living out the life he has chosen in the old England when James the First was King. I see him growing in grace and favor, versed in book learning, expert in all noble sports and exercises. For Dickie is not lame now.

(280)

Strangely, the novel appears to equate Dickie's book learning with his able-bodiedness, in direct contradiction with the earlier sections of the novel in which Dickie shows himself a voracious reader, able to assimilate highly complicated material and remodel his speech to sound more educated. Perhaps what is most striking in this passage is the gap between Dickie and the narrator. The narrator, also the voice guilty of historical revisionism and romanticizing English aristocracy, does not see Dickie as he views himself. In a way, the narrator only comes to recognize Dickie once he is able-bodied. Dickie, however, has always recognized himself as an individual capable of imagining and inhabiting grand adventures which, as the novel's plot bears out, he does. At the

start of the novel, class is a performance that Dickie nearly performs with success. By the conclusion of the story, he inhabits his new class and body fully, showing that class may be a performance, but that Dickie cannot succeed without abandoning his disabled body. In mentioning the little sword—a traditional symbol of battle and sexual prowess—Nesbit unintentionally calls to mind the infamous phrase, the “impotent poor,” as weapon supplants crutch. In a bucolic seventeenth century, he matures and becomes a supporter instead of the supported, both economically as the heir to a valuable estate and in a more literal sense. The narrator romantically proceeds: “I see him, a tall youth, straight and strong, lending the old nurse his arm to walk in the trim, beautiful garden at Deptford” (280). Just as his body is unbroken and restored, so too is an imagined England—one uncorrupted by encroaching industrialization and the stratification of rich and poor.

Changes in Fabian attitudes toward the disabled were on the horizon. Shaw’s *Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism* appeared a full decade after the end of World War I, and disabled bodies in the wake of the blinding, bone-crushing, and psychologically shattering brutality of the trenches took on new meaning. The state, Shaw argues, holds responsibility for these mutilated young men as much as for the Dickies of urban England. As he recounts the celebrations at the conclusion of World War I, he claims that the joy has less to do with victory than an ending: “the stoppage of the Red Cross vans from the terminuses of the Channel railways with their heartbreaking loads of mutilated men, was what we danced for so wildly and pitifully” (156). The state continues to recruit and break bodies, but Dickie’s foot remains in pre-1914 England the ultimate symbol of the physical deterioration so despised and feared by the English government. Until the aftermath of World War I, when the English government would be forced to recognize its culpability in the destruction of citizens’ bodies, the body broken is a symbol of deterioration from within the state.<sup>2</sup>

The only solution to fixing these bodies, *Harding’s Luck* implies, is in completely rewriting the past, but since this cannot be done outside the realm of fantasy, a magical history can be a place of only temporary refuge. Bodies human and urban have moved terrifyingly and grotesquely out of control and socialist promise wilts. Viewed as historical fantasy, the novel may more accurately be read as a socialist tragedy, or perhaps in its darkest moments a tale of dystopic London. When Dickie realizes during his first time slip that he can walk, he joyfully races around the room:

He sprang out of bed and went leaping round the room, jumping on to chairs and off them, running and dancing.

“What ails the child?” the nurse grumbled; “get thy hose on, for shame, taking a chill as like as not. What ails thee to act so?”

“It’s the not being lame,” Dickie explained, coming to a standstill by the window that looked out on the good green garden. “You don’t know how wonderful it seems, just at first, you know, *not* to be lame.”

(129–130)

Restored to an England of revisionist fantasy, he plainly states that the nurse cannot know what his restoration means. Only in the past can England herself be restored and rewritten along with Dickie. As the novel acknowledges, bodies move, warp, and circulate in ways difficult or impossible to control, and across the Atlantic it is this concern that drives the fiction of American Fabian Jean Webster.

### Genetics in the Orphan Asylum

*Dear Enemy* quickly became a bestseller after its 1915 publication and garnered numerous favorable reviews. Karen A. Keely, one of the few scholars to work on Webster’s fiction and its eugenic ambitions, writes “The 1915 sequel (and Webster’s last novel before her death in 1916), *Dear Enemy*, had a smaller current audience, but was very popular when published; it was among the top ten best sellers of 1916” (363). The novel had enough popularity that it even appeared in a parody piece the following year in *McBride’s Magazine*. Alaric Watson’s short piece features three caricatures in conversation in which the Tired Business Man conversing with a Critic and Frivolous Young Person advocates for Webster’s novels:

I suppose all you highbrows will pour vials of scorn on me when I say that I liked “Daddy Long Legs” immensely, and that I waited impatiently for Miss Webster’s new book, “*Dear Enemy*,” to appear. I’ll stand by my colors, though; and I think I differ from most of you only in that I am man enough to speak out in meeting.

(155)

Notably, the parody specifically situates Webster’s novel as popular fiction, ergo not “highbrow” material. The fact that the novel is for girls and focuses on charity—often relegated to the realm of women—suggests that its parodying reflects American society’s belittling of girls and their reading. A man, the joking article implies, should look ridiculous for having an interest in the thoughts of a young woman. Strangely, Watson’s classification of Webster’s works as lowbrow contrasts directly with contemporary reviews, which posit *Dear Enemy* as a serious—even instructional—work on eugenics and orphan asylum reform. A reviewer for the *Atlanta Constitution* enthusiastically endorses the book, like several other contemporary critics, not only as entertainment, but also as

a piece of didactic literature for those working on institutional reforms: “Miss Webster made a study of these institutions before she wrote this book about Sallie and her little charges. A copy of the book should be in the hands of every superintendent of any kind of public institution” (E1). Here, suddenly, the slippage between novel as fiction and novel as instructional text becomes immediately apparent. Part of the reason for the public’s enthusiastic embrace lies in its real basis on extant models of orphan asylum reforms, such as the Pleasantville Cottage School (Keely 369). The novel’s eugenic elements take on extra importance when considering that reviewers and readers saw *Dear Enemy* as a practical manual as much as a work of fiction, one that had its roots in the debates about eugenics raging during the publication of its literary predecessor.

While *Daddy-Long-Legs* dominated bestseller lists across America in 1912, the British Eugenics Education Society hosted the first International Eugenics Conference in London. Founded by Sybil Neville-Rolfe, the British Eugenics Education Society, as noted by Angelique Richardson,

aimed at promoting, in [Francis] Galton’s words, those agencies under social control that would lead to racial improvement. The society had close links with the Committee of the Moral Education League (founded in 1898), whose motto was “character is everything.”

(29)

Soon after the conference, a plethora of eugenics texts, studies, and novels flooded the book market. They included Meyer Solomon’s “Science and Practice of Eugenics; or Race Culture,” Scott Nearing’s *Super Race: An American Problem*, and Helen Baker’s *Race Improvement, or Eugenics* (Cleere 142). Most important, though, were two other books published that year: Havelock Ellis’s *Task of Social Hygiene* (1912) and Henry Goddard’s *Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912). The two studies brought eugenics to the forefront of public discussion. Ellis, in 1912 a member of the British Eugenics Education Society, had a brief affiliation with London’s Fabian Society during the fin-de-siècle and wrote on a wide array of topics that touched on socialist interests. Ellis’s book on social hygiene, in particular, joined the discourse of socialism with the discourse of eugenics and argued that the two together might promote a particularly strong strain of individualism.

The debate about the need for individualism amid socialist theory had, for some time, been an urgent topic among intellectual radicals. Wilde argued in the *Soul of Man under Socialism* (1891) that rather than inhibit or limit individual agency, socialism was the political theory to realize greater freedom: “Upon the other hand, Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism” (6). Yet when the individual in question was an orphan or other person of disreputable

genetic origin, socialism feared that those individuals' greater needs would hinder social progress. The first major family heredity study in the United States was undertaken by Richard L. Dugdale in his research on incarcerated men ultimately advocated this type of positive eugenics. During his research on prisoners, he discovered that many in New York State had links to the same family, one with a history of disorders and criminal records. In his discussion of what he terms nervously disordered stock, Dugdale specifically mentions that the numbers must be, he infers, artificially low: "The number tabulated is greatly under the actual facts, because so many are either orphan or abandoned children who know nothing of their ancestry" (86). Critically, his mention of orphans shows an assumption that they must be not only hereditarily suspect, but also implicitly degenerate. Yet Dugdale advocates the improvement of conditions as a solution rather than assuming nature has predetermined the fate of families like the Jukes.

By contrast, Goddard's book rejects environment as having more than a cursory influence and instead insists on the unavoidability of genetic degeneration, thus necessitating, in Goddard's mind, a policy for negative eugenics, which mandates exiling, sterilizing, or even executing those declared unfit. In his infamous study, *The Kallikak Family*, Goddard declares:

The question is, "How do we account for this kind of individual?" The answer is in a word, "Heredity."—bad stock. We must recognize that the human family shows varying stocks or strains that are marked and that breed as true as anything in plant or animal life.  
(12)

Although Goddard strikes a hard line for genetic determination, he hesitates regarding sterilization:

At best, sterilization is not likely to be a final solution of this problem. We may, and indeed I believe must, use it as a help, as something that will contribute toward the solution, until we can get segregation thoroughly established.  
(115)

The American brand of eugenics would become the most aggressive model until Nazi socialists began their pursuit of the eugenic state (and their tactics were largely based on American studies and policy during Goddard's lifetime). Eventually eugenicists divided into two main contingents as noted by historian Donald H. Pickens:

Thus the scientific community of the nineteenth century contained both environmentalists and hereditarians. The former group

stressed education and differences in opportunity and the plasticity of human nature; the latter element emphasized innate character, differential fecundity among the social classes, genetic determinism; and was pessimistic about improvement in human nature.

(39)

In short, what is at stake in *Dear Enemy* is at once Sallie's education in eugenics and the novel's internal debate between environmentalist and hereditarian schools of thought and, by extension, negative eugenics (often favored by the environmentalists) and positive eugenics (the more popular brand of eugenics with hereditarians).

The dilemma faced by *Dear Enemy*'s protagonist echoes throughout the Fabian Society: having argued for the innate equality of humankind and the possible improvements in society through the amelioration of social conditions, could they now argue that ultimately heredity overruled all social reform? Keely sees Webster as taking a primarily hereditarian approach. She writes:

Webster became increasingly convinced by hereditarian reasoning and used her novels as a medium for didacticism on the subject, explicitly teaching her readers about eugenic family studies and implicitly supporting laws mandating the involuntary sterilization or segregation of the mentally disabled and some classes of criminals, legislation that began appearing at state levels in 1907. Nevertheless, as the literary, historical, and biographical evidence makes clear, Webster's eugenics is decisively moderate: she insists on the importance of improving environments as well as limiting reproduction for society's poorest and least healthy members.

(364)

I argue, however, that *Dear Enemy* ultimately is trapped between two competing brands of eugenics. The juxtaposition of environmentalist and hereditarian approaches helps to clarify several of the paradoxes and inconsistencies found within *Dear Enemy*. In its environmentalist eugenics, the novel operates in a place where laws as well as orphans may be reformed through proper nurturing. As a romance, the eventual love and future marriage of Sallie and Sandy, the asylum doctor, represent a hereditarian eugenics in which the two healthy individuals will reproduce and, in doing so, provide new, strong citizens of known origin for the state.

When it comes to her charges, Sallie alternates between highly ambitious plans to give the orphans in her charge every advantage, and much eugenics-induced handwringing. When told by one trustee that Sallie risks raising the orphans' expectations higher than befits their station in life, she writes to Judy in a fury:

At that my Irish blood came to the surface, and I told him that if God had planned to make all of these 113 little children into useless, ignorant, unhappy citizens, I was going to fool God! That we weren't educating them out of their class in the least. We were educating them *into* their natural class much more effectually.

(183)

Yet within the span of a few letters, eugenics starts creeping into Sallie's correspondence more openly. Sallie, under Sandy's direction, decides to expand her research into eugenics: "A person in my position ought to be well read in physiology, biology, psychology, sociology, and eugenics; she should know the hereditary effects of insanity, idiocy, and alcohol" (90). This new fixation by institutional reformers reflects an accurate historical trend in the United States during the early part of the century. Noted disability studies scholars Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell write of the rise of eugenics in the latter nineteenth century: "U.S. eugenics developed as a hegemonic formula from an array of Victorian ideologies. These included proliferating institutions for the incarceration of 'defective' citizens; the ascendancy of neo-Darwinism (or social Darwinism) in relation to the purification of human hereditary stock" (73). Fabians, as previously noted, saw much of their ideology driven by utilitarianism and an ardent commitment to Darwin's theory of evolution. Combined with the new pathologizing of anyone deemed a "defective person," eugenics particularly exploded in popularity with the publication and dissemination of the aforementioned *The Jukes Family*. Its author, Dugdale, watched in horror as eugenicists appropriated his work, declaring that it supported their belief in the inevitability of hereditary defect (24). Webster's novel vacillates between a commitment to the importance of promoting eugenic policies in the orphan asylum and a determination to see the value in all children. After a trying day, Sallie writes: "Those awful questions of heredity and environment that the doctor broods over so constantly are getting into my blood, too; and it's a vicious habit" (103). Interestingly, Webster presents the interest in eugenics as progressing much like a disease that infects Sallie.

Ultimately, Sallie exerts control over the narrative with a troubling efficiency. The doctor's wife, she learns, conveniently died having disintegrated following what reads quite like a case of postpartum depression, the same illness depicted in Webster's fellow Fabian Charlotte Perkins Gilman's most famous work, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). Sallie concludes that the death was a good and necessary one. Between Sallie's feeble-minded orphans, an advanced dipsomaniac teenager, and one mentally ill adult, Sallie would consign many to the grave as an act of mercy. Bodies—like letters—are controlled and removed



from circulation. In her final letter to Judy, Sallie summarizes the doctor's history:

[H]e knew at the time of his marriage that he ought not to marry her, he knew all about her nervous instability; but he thought, being a doctor, that he could overcome it, and she was beautiful! He gave up his city practice and came to the country on her account. And then after the little girl's birth she went all to pieces, and he had to "put her away," to use Mrs. McGurk's phrase. The child is six now, a sweet, lovely little thing to look at, but, I just from what he said, quite abnormal. He has a trained nurse with her always.

(345)

Sallie is thus positioned to become stepmother to a girl who belongs to a group of "feeble-minded" individuals that Sallie comments should be isolated from society. Although Sallie at times displays greater compassion, her compassion itself is the threat, given that she agrees with the conclusion of Goddard that segregation and sterilization are the most compassionate solutions for treating those deemed defective by eugenics. In its conclusion, the solution is utterly Fabian. Rather than an outright slaughter, slowly institute reforms that enable the state to perform these very actions to slowly annihilate those considered a drain on society. Even Sallie's solution (via Goddard) provides some utilitarian role before they are to expire childless.

Fabian socialism never finds a concrete solution on how to reconcile childhood advocacy and eugenics where the former intersects with disability. Rather, writers like Nesbit and Webster attempt to navigate ways both fantastic and pragmatic to ultimately remove the disabled child from view, whether that is to the recesses of romantic history or the margins—both geographical and on the page—of society. *Harding's Luck* and *Dear Enemy* delve into the dark reality that the perception of the non-normative child has shifted from Tiny Tim into the specter of genetic corruption. Gone is the Victorian romance with childhood as eugenics ushers in the age of dystopic childhood. Perhaps the shift is best captured in a 1909 review of Nesbit's short story collection, *These Little Ones*, in the socialist periodical the *New Age*. Reviewer George Allen writes:

[people] are so apt to talk of the mysterious primrose path, and of the delightful simplicity of childhood that we tend to overlook the truth, that the child is, as the author would have us believe [...] one to whom life is, in fact, anything but a gay awakening.

(82)

## Notes

- 1 The Women's Local Government Society, as part of the Fabian Society, addressed published letters to Gorst in his role as vice president of the Committee of Council. One such letter emphasizes the importance of both women's education and their roles in civil government as they move forward into positions of local government, necessity for certain provisions to ensure women a fair chance of progress given historical prejudice.
- 2 The language of disability peppers Fabian writings but gains noticeable prominence in Nesbit and Shaw. Though the two had increasingly differing visions of socialism and suffrage, they seemed to agree certainly on one point made by Shaw in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*: "In giving all the work to one class and all the leisure to another as far as the law will let it, the Capitalist system disables the rich as completely as the poor" (165).

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## Section III

# Reading Bodies

I lay down as an educational axiom that in teaching you will come to grief as soon as you forget that your pupils have bodies.

—Alfred North Whitehead (50)

In a recent study of her own childhood reading, Margaret Mackey (“Embedded, Embodied”; *One Child Reading*) contrasts the frequency with which we consider the situatedness of the author’s life when interpreting a work of fiction with the paucity of such considerations in relation to the situatedness of the reader. Using autobiographical criticism as her starting point, she illustrates how paying “attention to individual readers’ social, cultural, and historical contexts” can contribute to our understanding of how children’s investments in their own bodies affect their capacity to enter the fictional world (“Embedded, Embodied” 289). Mackey’s study recalls and reconstructs the circumstances surrounding her readings, in order to reflect on how the embodiedness of the reading situation impacts on the process of meaning-making both then and thereafter. Using philosophical study of each of the five senses, as well as the aesthetic as modes of meaning, Anna Orhanen raises similar concerns in her examination of how the reader is situated in Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* sequence. She observes how often readers recall reading a particular book not in relation to the content of the story as such, but in relation to their bodily situatedness. Our third example of a critic responding to the embodied nature of the reading experience and memory comes from the Afterword to the collection of papers we edited on *Pollyanna* (Harde and Kokkola). In this section, Marina Endicott recalls her first encounter with Porter’s novel:

I first read *Pollyanna* when I was nine, while my family was spending the summer in a borrowed Victorian rectory high on a hill in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. A veranda wrapped around the house, a comfortable apple tree hugged up against it, and inside, in a warren of dark corners and unused bedrooms, there were a thousand places to lie and read. Crammed bookshelves lined the children’s rooms

where my siblings lay suffering with measles, one after another; healthy and ignored, I read my way through the days and nights all summer.

(263)

Note how Endicott invokes the physical space she inhabits, the sensation of being “healthy and ignored” and her movements through the house and garden seeking spaces to read. These inform her interpretations of the novel as she finds parallels between Pollyanna’s story and her own, and contrasts the reading body that first encountered the text with the adult body recalling the events of that summer.

When Alfred North Whitehead forcefully insisted that educators “will come to grief as soon as you forget that your pupils have bodies” (50), he was discussing a broader range of issues. His axiom, as the chapters in this section will show, holds true for understanding the embodied nature of the reading process and recalling the text thereafter. The reading body is intimately intertwined with the processes of meaning-formation, critical and emotional response, and the forging of memories.

In an early endeavor to capture children’s responses to literature in early years of children’s literature scholarship, Peter Hunt proposed “childist readings”—where adult readers endeavored to return to the position of a child—an appealing idea, but one that failed to stand up to methodological scrutiny. For some considerable time, the project was dropped, and examination of living children’s responses to texts was primarily assigned to those working within education, while literary scholars focused on the implied child reader constructed by the text. In this separation, the child’s body was neglected. In recent years, cognitive literary theory (also known as cognitive poetics) has proffered an alternative route to accessing the interplay between children’s bodies and their interpretation of texts, and three of the four chapters in this section draw from this emerging discipline, each with a different loci of concern. The section begins, however, with an educational project that endeavors to capture the self-reflective connection between self and text that the writings of Mackey, Orhanen, and Endicott capture in retrospect. Erin Spring investigates adolescent readers’ responses to literature *in situ*. Using reading discussion groups and place-journals (composed of visual responses, such as maps), Spring endeavors to give voice to adolescents from a Blackfoot First Nation. In her study, teenagers living on a reserve in Alberta responded to culturally relevant, place-based fiction. Her findings illustrate their varied, complex, embodied constructions of place, and allow her to consider how these places and texts appear to be shaping their ethnic identities. An implicit element of her discussion is that books that reflect the readers’ experiences of place and selfhood will contribute to their wellbeing.

The connection between the sense of embodied attunement in fiction and the broader field of wellbeing studies is explored more fully in Adrielle Britten's chapter on picturebooks for young children. She considers the extent to which depictions of subjective agency in three picturebooks can be said to offer young readers realistic ideas about the concept of flourishing. Britten's analysis draws directly from cognitive literary theory. Maria Nikolajeva's introduction to this form of analysis for scholars of children's literature, *Reading for Learning*, demonstrates how the approach allows us to take the child's cognitive development into account more precisely without, necessarily, studying live children. Nikolajeva pays particular attention to Theory of Mind (ToM): our capacity to assess what another person is thinking and feeling. Literature, she suggests, is uniquely situated to enable children to develop such skills as literary characters have what Dorrit Cohn dubbed "transparent minds" in her book of the same name. That is, literature allows us access to the inner thoughts and feelings of characters, in a manner that is impossible in real life. Similar points of view have been more fully explored by Suzanne Keen and Blakey Vermeule, but both these studies assume a mature adult reader. Nikolajeva, in contrast, suggests that this approach is particularly valuable for studying children's literature because children's minds are in the process of maturing. Cognitive poetics, she suggests, not only finds explanations for young children's solipsism, forms of moral judgment and inability to ascertain how perspective affects which information is made available (to mention just three examples), it can also reveal how children's literature can enable young people to hone such skills, which is why, for Nikolajeva, all reading is a form of learning.

A further central tenet of cognitive literary theory is that the mind exists in a state of profound interconnection with the body. Since childhood and adolescence are periods during which profound bodily changes are occurring, the role of the body in learning to read and interpret texts needs further analysis. The chapters by Margaret Mackey and Lydia Kokkola in this section proffer starting points for such a line of inquiry, including drawing on research within the neurosciences that reveals how the brain processes information. Such research is possible due to technological advances in how neurological information can be accessed noninvasively. One central method is functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which is used to detect blood flow. When the neurons in the brain are active, they require more oxygen, and so fluctuations in blood flow can be used to identify which areas of the brain are working and thus provide researchers with a dynamic view of how the brain responds to texts.

Some caution is needed when interpreting the findings from fMRI research. First, we know that the contexts in which reading takes place matter greatly. Laboratory data are collected in an environment that

differs markedly from reading in school and home environments. Second, as neurology experts, Hruby and Goswami advise teachers to pay more attention to common sense and experience rather than neophrenology (the study of how different parts of the brain function together) (157). Neurological evidence is often perceived as being more “truthful” as it is deemed to supply neutral, indisputable, factual data which are devoid of contextual issues that muddy the waters of our understanding of the reading process. This is a problem on several counts. First, as this brief description of how fMRI scans work already shows, the information gained from this methodology simply reveals *where* and *when* blood flow increases. It does not reveal *why* the blood flow increased. Researchers assume that it is a response to the stimuli and then match these patterns onto responses to other stimuli in order to form interpretations. The data are thus neither neutral nor indisputable: neurologists are providing reading scholars with interpreted data. One particular problem with the interpretation of these data raised by Eklund, Nichols, and Knutsson lies in the statistical methods used to analyze the significance of such findings. Statistical significance is used to measure the likelihood of an event happening by chance, and figures with a less than 5% chance of occurring by chance ( $p < 0.5$ ) are usually considered sufficiently likely to have been caused by the manipulation of the variables, and less than 1% ( $p < 0.1$ ) provide a “gold standard.” However, Eklund et al. found that many of the statistical measures used to analyze the results produced false-positives. A false-positive means that the data appear to suggest that the results were caused by a stimulus or the manipulation of a variable, but were in fact caused by chance. In the data sets they examined, Eklund et al. found statistical significance 70% of the time, when they should have found it in less than 5% of cases. So, the data are not neutral; more specifically, the data are not neutral in a way that may be skewing what we can learn from these techniques. What can be said, with certainty, is that novice readers are less precise than skilled readers, and so make more generalized use of the various areas of the brain. Learning to read creates neural pathways that are rehearsed until readers experience them as instantaneous. But although caution is needed in interpreting the findings, the findings cited in this collection align closely with the common-sense and experience findings endorsed by Hruby and Goswami. They add texture and depth to our understanding of the embodied nature of the reading experience.

The principles on which cognitive literary theory is based dovetail with Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on the body-subject and Thomas Osborne’s suggestion that the body should be conceived “not just as an ‘obstacle’, but as a vehicle for thought and action” (192). The bodies of children are largely ignored: little attention is paid to problems arising from the poor ergonomics of school chairs and desks, whereas the tests

of abstract forms of knowledge, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, make front-page news (McElroy, Ulmer, and Ollison; Panagiotopoulou et al.). The increasing presence of digital tools in the classroom has attracted more attention to the reading body. Anne Mangen and her colleagues, for instance, have noted how the ways in which we manipulate objects in digital image (by swiping and clicking) differ from the direct manipulation of paper pages and reflects on how these differences affect comprehension (Mangen; Mangen and Schilhab). Equally, the use of eye movement technology can help us more precisely determine what readers pay attention to when they read digitally, but as Mackey points out in her examination of how young adults make sense of narratives in print, film, and video game, the same information can be gained from the low-tech method of asking readers to put sticky Post-it<sup>®</sup> notes on pages they find interesting (*Narrative Pleasures* 138–139).

Margaret Mackey's and Lydia Kokkola's chapters in this collection draw on this kind of evidence to provide a fuller description of how the bodies of children contribute to their reading comprehension. Mackey's chapter takes a tour through the contributions by the eyes, hands, ears, and other input from the body in the reading process. She provides evidence from her own empirical studies of young readers, her own readings, as well as experimental evidence as she allows contrasts in how the body is involved in interpreting print and digital command centers and consoles to highlight how her arguments have been forged. Kokkola's chapter picks up where Mackey's chapter leaves off as she examines how the brain responds to different text formats, content, and reasons for reading. She concludes by summarizing tentative suggestions about how changing the ways in which we use our bodies while reading might aid comprehension.

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## 9 “My story starts right here”

### The Embodied Identities of Blackfoot Readers

*Erin Spring*

In her article “The Embedded and Embodied Literacies of a Young Reader,” Margaret Mackey argues that “children use their newly developing awareness of their own world to make sense of their texts, and then use their texts to help them observe their own world with more sophisticated eyes” (289). In order to illustrate the reader response process, Mackey calls for a renewed focus on the historical, cultural, and social contexts of readers, explicating that

While it may be impossible to explore every child’s background in such depth, it is important to take note of the role of such complexity in the reception of literature. The cross-section of trajectories that marks each child’s place in the literate world is dynamic, idiosyncratic, and local, and we need to pay better attention to all its rich possibilities.

(“Embedded” 306)

To understand the ways in which young people interpret and respond to texts, I similarly argue that asking readers to look beyond the page, to address their embodied identities is critical. By this, I mean the various forces that encompass their sense of self: the geographical places they call home, their personal and family histories, their memories of childhood, and what cultural and social networks they are included in or excluded from.

Tim Wynne-Jones has asked, “must literature always lead us away from the physical world, never back to it?” (118). My research suggests that reading is inherently embodied; readers can never be physically untethered from their place, culture, or history. While it undoubtedly allows individuals to view the world through a different lens, reading never *fully* takes us away. Instead, I have found that readers’ responses to fiction are tangible representations or reflections of how they understand themselves and their worlds. Mona Gleason provides a working definition of *embodiment* that can be used to underpin a conversation about embodied readings of place. She addresses the connections between our identities, memories, and bodies, writing

I use the word embodiment here for the remembered experiences in which the body figured prominently. They range from memories of dressing up, to the meaning of physical labor, to forbidden sexuality, to the humiliation of bullying, to the horror of sexual abuse. Embodiment, in effect, represents a process whereby power relations between children and adults in specific historical circumstances are manifested at the level of the body.

(114)

My interdisciplinary research draws on a range of theoretical frameworks to understand the ways in which young people interpret texts using their remembered, embodied knowledge of the world. Rather than the child/adult power dynamics that Gleason calls attention to, I am particularly interested in the intersections between our bodies and place, and how encounters in *and* through places inform our identities, and therein the reading experience. I perceive place to be a geographical, social, and cultural construct that is experienced by our bodies (and thus our identities) in a plethora of ways. Generally speaking, my ongoing research is framed by questions such as the following: What is it like for young people to read about place? In what ways does reading encourage adolescent readers to deliberate on the role of places within their own lives? What aspects of their embodied identities are brought into focus? As my research, cited below, shows, using culturally relevant and local, place-based fiction encourages adolescents to have discussions about their cultural, social, and place-based identities within and beyond the text.

### **Research Context: Why This, Why Now?**

My current project is a participatory study with Blackfoot Indigenous youth, ages twelve and thirteen, who live and attend school on a rural reserve in southern Alberta, approximately eighty kilometers from the nearest urban center, the city of Lethbridge. The reserve is bordered by three rivers—the Old Man, St. Mary, and Belly—and stretches from the Rocky Mountains in the west, east to Saskatchewan, and south toward Yellowstone, Montana. It is the largest reserve in Canada and the second most populous.

Numerous children's literature critics have interpreted and challenged the colonial assumptions that are embedded in Indigenous fiction, most often through a postcolonial framework (Johnston; Johnston and Bainbridge; Bradford). Clare Bradford reminds us that

it is common for Indigenous characters in children's books to conform to a limited number of types, including the old sage, the young activist, the disturbed teenager (often prone to substance abuse),

and (in historical fiction) the noble savage, whereas non-Indigenous characters are accorded far more diversity and complexity.

(332)

While I share Bradford's concern about stereotypical representations of Indigenous cultures in fiction, my work goes beyond the text to consider the reading experiences of First Nations youth. Within a Canadian context, I am aware that Aboriginal readers lack opportunities to read culturally relevant texts (Korteweg, Gonzalez, and Guillet; Bradford). Contemporaneously, I have found a striking omission of the *voices* of First Nations youth in our understanding of the ways in which young people, more generally, engage with fiction.

While some texts perpetuate the exclusion of Indigenous voices, as Bradford and others have reminded us, other texts offer narratives that *do* feature characters, cultures, and settings in diverse, complex ways. Debbie Reese is a member of the Nambé Owingeh Tribe from New Mexico. Her blog, "American Indians in Children's Literature," discusses and reviews texts that "accurately portray Native people and our nations... in all of our humanity" (n.p). For Indigenous readers, such texts have the potential to be transformative in that they allow readers to catch glimpses of themselves and their worlds within the pages. Reading and discussing carefully selected texts as part of this project is encouraging Blackfoot readers to contemplate, share, and celebrate the values and identities that were stripped from their Elders, families, and communities through cultural assimilation. As I am a settler scholar who is not a member of the cultural or social community where this research is situated, I have been working closely with a Blackfoot teacher and librarian on the reserve; they have helped me to select texts that, in their opinion, most closely represent the cultural worldview of their students. The texts that I have selected have an Indigenous reader in mind.

In contemporary Canadian communities, ongoing colonial practices of assimilation and dispossession continually threaten Indigenous peoples' rights, freedoms, and cultures. Reconciliation work is necessary between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, including—and perhaps most urgently—for young people. Wab Kinew writes that, "First Nations children begin life facing longer odds on the road to success than others, because they lack equal access to education, health care, and social services" (266). In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its response to the Indian Residential School legacy. From the 1880s to the mid-1990s, approximately 150,000 Aboriginal children were forced to attend residential schools, funded by the federal government, and run by churches. Children were removed from their families and communities, and were stripped of their languages, traditions, and cultural identities. Most experienced emotional and physical abuse. At least 6,000 children died (Vowel). In its

report, the TRC names this experience *cultural genocide*. As a result, “families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity” between generations (1). In an attempt to “redress the legacy of residential schools” (Vowel 1), the TRC has outlined ninety-four recommendations and calls to action.

In order to respond to the calls for action addressed in the TRC, particularly the need to develop culturally appropriate curriculum, and to build student capacity for intercultural understanding, the voices of First Nations youth need to be heard. My overarching research aims are a direct response to these calls for action. I hope to understand (1) the ways in which Blackfoot adolescent readers’ identities are tied to their understanding of social, cultural, and physical places; and (2) *how* and *if* the experience of reading culturally relevant, local fiction incites these readers to deliberate on the role of places within their lives. Before outlining my methodological design, I briefly explicate what is meant by “place” within the context of this chapter.

### **Place: A Collection of Stories**

My work is informed by cultural geographer Doreen Massey’s conceptualization of place (Spring “From”; Spring “Place”; Charlton et al. 2014). Massey writes about place as a “bundle of trajectories” (47) where each living and nonliving thing comes together to comprise that place. Each of these contributors is coming from somewhere, and is going somewhere else, through a range of temporal and spatial scales. Rather than perceiving place as a flat, geographical surface that does not change, such as a map with clear borders, Massey encourages us to think about place as a “bundle of trajectories... always under construction” (119) or as a “simultaneity of stories-so-far” (9). Places are characterized by the convergence of these stories. In perceiving place in this way, we can come to understand the complexities of our place-identities. As Gleason might suggest, my body carries with it a unique history that becomes a lens through which all experiences, including reading, are mediated. Construing place as multiple and shifting facilitates my acknowledgment of the layers of meaning and memory that are built into my participants’ trajectories; each of them has an individualized understanding of place, one that is the result of their past experiences, histories, and cultures (Sipe; Brooks and Browne).

While my research is concerned with the ways in which place shapes the reading experience, it is important to articulate that, in my understanding, place is not always geographically rooted. Interpreting my participants’ reflections requires a simultaneous mediation on the social, temporal, historical, and cultural elements of their experiences. The intersections of these factors have influenced the identities of my participants, therein informing how they interpret and “recreate” these

texts. Massey's musings on place correlate with Louise Rosenblatt's explication of the reading experience as a transactional process, wherein readers "draw on [their] reservoir of past experiences with people and the world" (*Meaning* 75). Mirroring Mackey's reflection, shared in the opening of this chapter, this "reservoir" of experiences is dynamic. As with places, there can never be two identical readings of a text:

"the poem" comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and "the text"... each component of the reading process functions by virtue of the presence of the others. A specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place: change any of these, and there occurs... a different poem.

(Rosenblatt *Reader* 25)

The parallels that can be drawn between Massey and Rosenblatt are helpful connections for my project design.

## Research Setting and Design

As a settler scholar, I recognize that power imbalances are consistently at play, and that academic research has been used to colonize (Smith). As a result, I have worked diligently to ensure that my research is child-centered, ethical, and focused on the lives, experiences, and values of my participants, their cultures, and their community.

Ten participants volunteered to be part of my project (four male, six female). The students are twelve and thirteen years old. They were born and are being raised on the reserve. One of the students moved from another reserve at age six, but the remainder of the participants have never lived elsewhere. While some have shared stories of traveling to Lethbridge or Calgary to visit family, for example, it is clear to me that their personal identities and family histories are strongly rooted in this place, both geographically and culturally. My participants' responses to the research texts illustrate the ways in which they perceive their identities in relation to the reserve; as Gleason suggests, their bodies have "figured prominently" in their remembered experiences of childhood in this specific place (114). Their bodies know this place, and this personalized knowledge informs how they interpret the world, including the texts they read.

The participants are attending unstructured reading discussion groups outside of classroom time. I have found that readers appreciate the openness and flexibility of the discussion group forum, where they are free from the structure of classroom and/or curricular demands (Spring "From"; "Junior"). We began by reading some texts aloud as a group, which allowed me to build rapport with the students. My aim is for the students to lead the conversations. I am often the one reading

aloud, but students interrupt with questions or comments. This open, flexible style of discussion aligns with my underlying belief that reading is a social practice, and that close, collaborative talk is an integral part of the interpretive process (Chambers; Mercer; Wells; Cliff Hodges). In *Tell Me*, Aidan Chambers argues that children are capable, critical readers. Rather than reading in a linear fashion, meaning is “discovered, negotiated, made, arrived at organically” (50). The conversations that occur are particularly important to my ongoing understanding of how these individuals perceive and construct their identities.

Additionally, my participants are creating a place-journal, containing visual and written responses, both to the text and to the ways in which they consider place to be influential within their own lives. Visual methods are useful for accessing a range of stories and experiences that are often difficult to articulate verbally (Cele; Rose). Art can also work to decolonize (Hill and McCall). I have provided each participant with a list of possible methods of reflection (maps, sketches, photographs). Ultimately, however, I leave the decision as to what to include in their journal up to them. Some students have chosen to include written place narratives; these reflections offer an alternative story of place that often complement or contradict what they have shared during our discussion group sessions (Azano).

In the following sections, I provide an example of the kinds of texts that I am sharing with my students on the reserve. I also offer some early reflections on the kinds of conversations that are emerging.

### **An Embodied Reading of Place: “*I live on the Blood Reserve in Southern Alberta*”**

To begin our reading discussion groups, I shared two picturebooks with my participants: *Sierra and Blue Go to Town* and *Sierra and Blue*, both written by Deborah Yawney and Makai’stoo-Leo Fox, and illustrated by Annette Nieukerk. Texts often perpetuate stereotypes, reifying “otherness” through their imagery and depictions of Indigenous cultures. The *Sierra and Blue* picturebook series breaks away from this model by offering a realistic, culturally appropriate representation of Blackfoot life within its iconotext.

The local, southern Alberta landscape is portrayed vividly in the illustrations of both texts. Local landmarks such as the Rocky Mountains, open fields of wheat, a grain elevator in Magrath, the Lethbridge train bridge, coulees, and a straight highway leading to Calgary are featured. More culturally specific references are highlighted, such as the buffalo berries that grow along the road to Standoff, Chief Mountain, and houses reminiscent in size and style to those found on the reserve. Place names are not fictionalized: Sierra and Blue mention Spring Coulee, Magrath, and St. Mary’s Dam as they drive to Lethbridge. They call their dog Windy, “after the weather” (n.p.). I expected that these texts

would prompt my participants to reflect on their own negotiations with these places.

Nieukerk's illustrations are a representation of the geographies that my participants see when they drive to Lethbridge or Calgary, or when they look outside of their classroom window toward the Rockies. While, on the surface, these illustrations preempt an immediate connection with the local typography, Gabrielle Cliff Hodges, Maria Nikolajeva, and Liz Taylor remind the reader of the hazy margins between real and fictional places:

It is interesting to consider what happens when the fictional and the actual are closely aligned. Our imaginative reconstruction may be a recognizable version of a specific location, so that we are seduced by it and collude in its apparent authenticity; but however lifelike it may be, it is still not the place itself.... it offers a perspective from which to reflect on our relationship to it.

(201)

My participants have embodied the landscapes and cultural practices illustrated within these picturebooks in different ways; the subtleties of their experiences were teased out during our discussion group settings.

For one male participant, Leon, the illustrations "were still not the place itself." His response, shared below, signals the ways in which he used his embodied interactions with place, outside of the text, to challenge how the same locations and landmarks were depicted inside the text. On the seventh double-spread in *Sierra and Blue Go to Town*, the verso page features an illustration of a road as it passes by a grain elevator. In the distance, there is a small, rectangular blue shape. When discussing this page, there was some disagreement among the group members; several of the readers interpreted this shape as a billboard, or a house in the distance. Leon, however, read this shape as a blue bus traveling down the highway in front of Sierra and Blue's car, driving west toward the reserve.

Leon's interpretation of the illustration contradicted his personal knowledge of that specific stretch of highway, particularly his body's remembered experience of moving through that landscape as he drives to or from the reserve. He explained:

No buses go from town to the reserve. You can't take a bus or I'd see my cousins. I'd go see them all time in Lethbridge. They live beside Dairy Queen. But there are no buses. I have to wait for my grandma to go, which isn't often.

As a resident of the reserve, his feelings of social and geographical isolation from his extended family, especially those who live in Lethbridge,



came through in his responses. His language emphasizes how negative this experience is for him (“no buses”, “you can’t”). He expected the text to offer a representation of this place in a way that was authentic to his experience, but there was a disconnection; he felt somewhat betrayed by the suggestion that it was easy to move between the reserve and the city, as this is not the case for him. In doing so, the picturebook offered a perspective from which he was able to share his embodied knowledge of place. Leon’s perception of place is, as Massey suggests, a culmination of trajectories or stories. His understanding of Lethbridge is associated with his cousins, with Dairy Queen, and with his grandmother. His travels within and between these places contribute to his understanding of both the reserve and Lethbridge.

While Leon’s observations focused on information gleaned from the visual text, a female participant, Taylor, drew upon the verbal text to share how her experiences outside of the text corresponded with Sierra’s interaction with her grandparents. Throughout both picturebook series, there is a strong emphasis on the Blackfoot language. The first double-spread of *Sierra and Blue* opens with: “My name is Sierra Lane and I live on the Blood Reserve in Southern Alberta with Naaáhsa (my grandma), Naaáhsa (my grandpa), and nissisa (my little brother) Blue” (n.p.). Immediately, Sierra draws an explicit connection between her self-perception (“My name is”) and where she lives (“and I live”). On the left-hand side of the page, the reader is presented with a map of the reserve, with place names labeled in both Blackfoot and English (“Sikoohkotoki/Lethbridge”). The end pages of both texts contain a glossary of Blackfoot terms, alongside a pronunciation guide.

Taylor connected with this element of the text, explaining that,

[I] am learning Blackfoot from my grandmother, who lives in Lethbridge. On Saturday mornings Mom and me drive there, to her house, and sometimes she comes out here, too. Like Sierra, we make lists. We walk through Safeway and translate the names of fruit [laughs].

While Taylor draws a connection between learning Blackfoot and the relationship that she has with her grandmother, her reflections are ultimately bound up in her embodied understanding of place. The first thing she tells us is that her grandmother lives in Lethbridge, not on the reserve. She specifies that their interactions occur “on Saturdays,” when Taylor and her mother “drive there, to her house.” But sometimes she comes “out here,” meaning to the reserve. Taylor’s references to place (“there,” “house,” “out here,” “Safeway”) illustrate her embodied identity. Her relationship with her grandmother is intrinsically place-based; she must physically leave the reserve and travel to the city in order to see her grandmother, mirroring Leon’s reflections, shared above. Taylor

makes an explicit connection between her grandmother, learning Blackfoot, and specific places in her life where these exchanges occur. While, like Leon, she draws a dichotomy between various places (here versus there, Lethbridge versus the reserve), her response signals her awareness of the negotiations or connections between these places, as Massey might suggest. She notes that her grandmother "comes out here too," reiterating that there is a straightforward transfer of knowledge and culture between these two places, however far apart they might seem. Taylor's embodied understanding of place, and the experiences that occur within and between them, shaped how she engaged with these picturebooks.

### **An Embodied Reading of History: "*I want to get rid of the Indian Problem*"**

My participants are reading a series of graphic novels by Blackfoot writer Jason EagleSpeaker: *We're More Than Just Beads & Feathers*, *Luke Warmwater & the Man*, and *Napi the Trickster*. Like the *Sierra and Blue* series, EagleSpeaker's graphic novels are written for a wide audience, but they have a Blackfoot reader in mind. While the physical geography is not as specific as the *Sierra and Blue* series, there are several panels that feature the characters standing in a landscape that clearly resembles the prairie or mountainous regions of southern Alberta.

Additionally, the thematic elements of these texts speak directly to the Blackfoot culture and worldview, particularly through their focus on oral storytelling traditions. *NAPI the Trickster* focuses on the adventures of NAPI, a traditional Blackfoot trickster figure who loses his braids, another symbolic representation of colonialism and residential schooling. On his website, EagleSpeaker explains that, "for the Blackfoot, NAPI legends have been used to educate and motivate for thousands of years. Countless generations have survived, and thrived, from knowledge that NAPI introduces" (NAPI). He argues that introducing young readers, specifically those of the Blackfoot culture, to NAPI, will help readers to "achieve integrity based results" as "traditional values are a roadmap to success" (NAPI). EagleSpeaker's texts celebrate and teach Blackfoot language and culture, and are therefore important texts for this project.

In EagleSpeaker's *UNeducation Vol 1: A Residential School Graphic Novel*, the theme of reframing history, or adding the Indigenous (specifically Blackfoot) perspective to the dominant colonial narrative, runs throughout the text. The cover page is a traditional Hilroy school notebook; however, the word "education" has been scratched out and replaced with "uneducation," and "notebook" has become "scarbook."

Throughout the text, the comic-style panels are intercepted with residential school newspaper clippings, featuring titles such as "Native kids 'used for experiments'"; "UN panel condemns Canada's treatment

of aboriginals” (n.p.). The first double-spread includes a quote from Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and the creator of the Indian Act. In large black font, the text reads: “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed” (n.p.). The historical, educative narratives, offered within the newspaper clippings, and through references to Campbell Scott, are interwoven with the narrator’s (an “ndn” or *Indian*) own present-day perspective. His voice adopts a cautionary tone:

As an ndn [sic] person whose family still suffers the impacts of residential school, all I ever ask of my fellow Canadians is to just BE AWARE. You owe it to yourself as a Canadian to BE AWARE of true Canadian history... what you do with your new found awareness is up to you.

(n.p)

Numerous quotations can be found among the newspaper clippings, including, “our teachings survived residential school. Anything that can survive that kind of persecution is something our future needs” (n.p.). These messages of hope and resilience speak directly to the opposing counternarrative that is offered throughout the text, such as Campbell Scott’s musings, quoted above. Placing these verbal and visual narratives in direct contact on the page has a powerful message for all Canadian readers about our national history. While I recognize the cross-cultural, educative value of this text, in the final pages of this graphic novel, EagleSpeaker includes a short comic that is written in Blackfoot. In doing so, he invites Blackfoot readers into the text as insiders, while the rest of us are purposefully excluded.

I argue that this graphic novel speaks directly to the embodied histories of my participants. Adjacent to their school is the residential school that was attended by many of their family and community members. As a physical landmark on the reserve, the residential school is also part of my participants’ everyday encounters with their own school place. As entries in their place-journals, some of my students, inspired by EagleSpeaker’s text, decided to draw their own comic strips. A female participant, Star, recently shared the early stages of her comic with me. It features four frames, each taking a quarter of the page. Each frame features a different place on the reserve, including her house (labeled “my house”), the school, and her friend Maya’s house. Although “Maya’s house” is the label, her illustration within this frame includes three girls standing next to a dog, rather than a physical house. In the final frame, she has sketched the residential school. She is standing beside her grandmother; they are smiling, and holding hands. A speech bubble hovers above her, reading: “*My story starts right here.*”

Star's comic tells me many things about her embodied relationship with the reserve as a physical and cultural site of significance in her life. While physical landmarks are highlighted (her house, the school), there is a strong social current that runs throughout her comic's narrative. Maya's house is clearly a safe space for Star and her friends, but the social connection that she has with these girls takes precedent over the house itself. Nonetheless, their social interactions occur at "Maya's house," as Star's labeling clearly indicates. It is interesting to note that the label, "My story starts right here," begins on the final frame. While there are other elements of Star's identity that are brought to the forefront within the first three frames of her comic, emphasis is placed on this final frame. Here, the positive relationship that she has with her grandmother (seen through their smiles and clasped hands) takes center stage. It is clear that the residential school is not only part of her grandmother's embodied understanding of this place, but also her own.

Star's use of the word *here* is ambiguous, as it could refer to a number of aspects of her identity: the relationship that she has with her grandmother, the residential school, or the physical place where they are standing. While it is ambiguous, I argue that Star is suggesting that these options are interrelated, and ultimately impossible to untether. Star's "story starts" on the reserve, where she has a present-day connection with her grandmother. Her grandmother's knowledge of place is ultimately shaped by her embodied relationship with the residential school, a place that presumably continues to inform her culture and history in complex ways. Star's embodied identity begins and ends on the reserve, as it is the only place she has ever known. Her relationship with her grandmother insists that her own knowledge of place stretches back into the past to include the residential school. In short, Star's grandmother's embodied understanding of this place ultimately informs Star's own; the residential school is therefore part of her own story, her own body's experience of this place. As Massey suggests, Star's "story" of place is a "simultaneity of stories-so-far," or a "coming together" of these multiple parts of her identity (9). These aspects of her story were conjured in response to EagleSpeaker's text, particularly through its overlapping historical narratives, and strong emphasis on familial and cultural connectedness.

### Self-Representations of Embodied Places

In *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Edward Casey writes that

moving in or through a given place, the body imports its own emplaced past into its present experience: its local history is literally

a history of locales. This very importation of past places occurs simultaneously with the body's ongoing establishment of directionality, level and distance, and indeed influences these latter in myriad ways.

(194)

Leon, Taylor, and Star's responses illustrate how their identities have been shaped by their remembered, embodied encounters in place. In particular, as Casey suggests, moving in, through, or between places has informed their identities, specifically in relation to culture, history, and family relations. Leon's interpretations were seeped in his body's recollections of driving to and from Lethbridge to visit family. His comments about the 'blue bus' reiterate how the distance between these two geographical places negatively separates him, physically, from his cousins. Not seeing them puts a strain on these relations. Leon's responses to the texts allude to a potential lack of freedom in place; he can only travel to Lethbridge when his grandmother offers him a ride from the reserve. Someone else mediates his negotiations of place. Similarly, Taylor interpreted the text by drawing on her knowledge of both the reserve and the city. Like Leon, the city is a positive place that is aligned with family. For Taylor, however, the links between the reserve and Lethbridge are less tenuous or strained than they are for Leon. While her Blackfoot lessons happen in the city, her grandmother frequently visits the reserve. There is not the same reliance on *leaving*; the familial and cultural connections between these two places seem to flow back and forth easily. For Taylor, the places do not feel as far apart. Star's knowledge of the reserve is shaped by her grandmother's own embodied history. In particular, Star's reflections mirror Massey's description of place as a bundle of trajectories. She understands that her story "starts" where her grandmother's does, and vice versa. Interestingly, all three participants' understandings of place were shaped by their grandmothers.

As readers, Leon, Taylor, and Star drew on a "cross-section of trajectories" (Mackey "Embedded" 306) to engage with these texts. My methodological design purposefully situates these youth as experts in their own embodied experiences of place. I play the role of facilitator, allowing the focus, content, and direction of our conversations to come from the participants themselves. Positioning my participants as experts in their own culture empowers the young people to take ownership of their knowledge bodies, histories, and stories without relying on the same power dynamics that have historically undermined resilience. Asking them to create their own self-representations allows them to articulate and recall their body's movement across, through, between, and within places in a way that feels most authentic to their experiences of the world.

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## 10 A Feeling Connection

### Embodied Flourishing as Represented in Contemporary Picturebooks

*Adrielle Britten*

Flourishing (or wellbeing) has obvious ideological links with notions of self and how one functions well with other people and the world. An exploration of what it is to live well as an individual, and in connection with other people and the world has long been a central theme in children's literature. As John Stephens observes, the quest for intersubjective agency—or a subjectivity that “arises intersubjectively, that is, within interrelationships with others”—is “a metanarrative that underlies and pervades most children's fiction” (“Subjectivity” 246). While flourishing and intersubjectivity are not the same, connected states are central to both: this paper explores how the picturebooks that form my primary corpus illustrate contemporary ideas about wellbeing. It argues that the primacy of the affective emotional systems is imagined in narrative form in Bob Graham's *Silver Buttons* and Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen's *Extra Yarn* to convey a deeply embodied, deeply feeling, and deeply relational kind of flourishing. Furthermore, the narratives are infused with the belief that this kind of flourishing is abundantly available in an ordinary, or *good enough*, way.

An appreciation of how the primary emotions function in the body to connect humans with themselves, others, and the world is fundamental to an understanding of flourishing and how it is represented in picturebooks. While the concepts of wellbeing (that is, flourishing) and happiness are highly contested and defy neat definitions, for the purpose of discussion it is necessary to construct working definitions of them. To this end, I adopt Martin Seligman's definition of happiness as a positive emotion, and just one part of wellbeing (16). This concept of happiness is refined with Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven's view that happiness is the cognitive derivative of joy (ix). In this view, happiness is a result of cognition, and “created by perceptions, learning, and higher brain functions” (63), and joy is one of the “raw emotional feelings generated directly by brain tissues” (64). The broader concept of wellbeing (or living life well) is defined as experiencing the five elements in one's life that are identified by Seligman's PERMA wellbeing theory: Positive emotion, “the pleasant life”; Engagement or flow, “Were you completely absorbed by the task?”; Relationships, “very little that is positive is solitary”; Meaning,



“belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self”; and, Accomplishment, “the ‘achieving’ life” (19). While Seligman’s wellbeing theory provides a broad framework for discussion of overall wellbeing, my intention in this paper is to investigate the various ways in which very young readers of picturebooks are encouraged to think about emotional wellbeing.

This chapter, then, investigates how the body is imagined in two contemporary picturebooks as the primary site wherein the basic emotions are felt and expressed, so that an embodied, feeling connection is represented in the overall conceptualization of flourishing. To underpin this discussion of emotions, I turn to a new scientific discipline called *affective neuroscience*, and Panksepp’s primary emotional systems theory that emphasizes the status of humans as “deeply feeling and deeply biological creatures who possess values handed down to us not simply through our sociocultural environment but also by the genetic heritage derived from our ancestral past” (*Affective* 303). As Panksepp explains, emotional systems theory highlights the essential role emotions play in the human capacity to not only survive, but to mediate feeling right with oneself, others, and the world (“Affective”). The importance of the basic emotional systems that are hardwired into humans (and other mammals) through the evolutionary process, and which function well when in a *balanced* (homeostatic) state is central to Panksepp’s theory (“Affective” 541). There are at least seven primary process emotional systems (“ancient neural networks”) situated in the lower brain from which affects (feelings) arise: SEEKING (expectancy), FEAR (anxiety), RAGE (anger), LUST (sexual excitement), CARE (nurturance), PANIC/GRIEF (sadness), and PLAY (social joy) (Panksepp and Biven ix–xi). Panksepp and Biven observe that the primary-process emotions are not only “the sources of some of our most powerful feelings,” but are also “all connected to movements [...]” (x).<sup>1</sup> For example, the CARE system is seen in the way “the hint of a frown or an uncomfortable twist of the baby’s body will evoke a mother’s comforting ministrations, and [how] her smile produces a burst of responsive joy from the baby” (Panksepp and Biven 285–286). The importance of bodily movement is also seen in the rough and tumble play (and laughter) that characterizes the PLAY system (Panksepp and Biven 352). As a media that uses image and text, picturebooks are well suited to conveying the interaction between the body and its emotions to young readers. This chapter seeks to demonstrate how in Graham’s *Silver Buttons* the CARE and PLAY systems are imagined to foreground connections between bodies in motion, intensely pleasurable feelings, and people feeling with each other in caring and playful ways. Barnett and Klassen’s *Extra Yarn*, on the other hand, barely imagines the intensely pleasurable feelings arising from the pro-social CARE and PLAY systems, but is more interested in conveying an idea of flourishing as an embodied, feeling, and relational kind of

meaning and belonging. In this way, the SEEKING system—which as Panksepp points out, energizes the “search for self-identity and meaning in life” (“Brain” 436)—is imagined in narrative form, so that optimism, satisfaction, and purpose arise as key feelings.

How picturebooks imagine flourishing is of current interest, for flourishing is a widely debated and contested topic. While interest in how human beings live life well goes back at least as far as Aristotle, this interest has gained momentum in the first part of the twenty-first century. Researchers and commentators such as Hugh Mackay, David Malouf, Jaak Panksepp, and Martin Seligman are just some of those who observe a (perhaps increasing) difficulty humans of all ages are experiencing with living life well in contemporary Western society. Indeed, a general malaise or disappointment with life that is unique to twenty-first-century living seems to abound. David Malouf’s view is that we should not ask how to live happily<sup>2</sup> but why happiness seems elusive:

The question that arises is not so much “How should we live if we want to be happy?” but how is it, when the chief sources of human *unhappiness*, of misery and wretchedness, have largely been removed from our lives—large-scale social injustice, famine, plague and other diseases, the near-certainty of an early death—that happiness still eludes so many of us? What have we succumbed to or failed to do that might have helped us? What is it in us, or in the world we have created, that continues to hold us back?

(8)

On the spectrum of human experience of wellbeing in contemporary life, my discussion seeks to locate itself in the view that there is a reasonably widespread, *disappointment* in contemporary life; the discussion does not aim to engage with what some view as a crisis in wellbeing, not because it does not exist (it may or it may not), but because this is another line of questioning.

There is compelling evidence that the human condition is one of innate restlessness or dissatisfaction (Turner “Cognitive” 16–17), or to use Malouf’s term, *unrest* (16–28), so that what humans might regard as a healthy motivation and enthusiasm may also be viewed as disappointment and dissatisfaction. Panksepp and Biven’s research in affective neuroscience, for example, contends that the positive feeling or euphoria of anticipation goes to the core of the primary emotional system that is a part of our ancestral past: in emotional systems theory, it is identified as the SEEKING emotional system at work (95–96). As I have argued elsewhere (166–169), this SEEKING system—which is “a major source of life ‘energy’” and gives humans the curiosity and drive to engage with the world (Panksepp “Affective” 537–538)—may underpin what has been identified in cognitive neuroscience as an innate drive humans have

to create stories (Turner *Literary* 12). Mark Turner argues that the capacity to create stories and project them to make meaning is what makes human life possible; so much so, he observes, that without this capacity we “do not have a human mind,” but just “chaotic experience” (*Literary* 12–14). In this discussion of contemporary children’s picturebooks, my focus is on the extent to which the narratives conceive of overall human flourishing as underpinned by an embodied, feeling, and relational flourishing that functions in *good enough* balance.

The concept of the *good enough* was coined by D. W. Winnicott, in the 1950s to describe the kind of ordinary or *good enough* mother he felt infants needed in order to thrive (4, 34, 152); as Boddy, Smith, and Statham explain, it “aimed to avoid idealizing ‘ordinary’ mothering, to recognize that children need sensitive and adaptive care, but not perfection” (183). My contention here is that while the picturebooks under investigation offer different views of flourishing and how a young child might experience it, both offer a view of *good enough* flourishing: it is sensitive and adaptive, and does not aim for perfection. If Hugh Mackay’s identification of the “Utopia complex” (3–40) is accurate, Winnicott’s idea of the *good enough* may offer a useful way of repositioning what Mackay sees as a powerful drive for perfection in contemporary Western society (17–18). Mackay argues that parents and other adults, in an effort to create the perfect childhood for their children, focus on external measures of success such as personal achievement and possessions to the extent that the good life becomes getting what one wants (7–16). By conceptualizing flourishing as arising from an embodied, feeling, and relational state—yet in an ordinary, everyday kind of way—I argue that Graham’s *Silver Buttons* and Barnett and Klassen’s *Extra Yarn* offer young readers a concept of *good enough* flourishing. In this way, they implicitly call into question the powerful drive in contemporary Western society for perfect, or near perfect, lives.

### **Embodied Flourishing: Feeling, Relational, and Abundant**

*Silver Buttons* narrates the minute in time (9.59 on a Thursday morning) in which Jodie’s brother, Jonathan, took his first step. The narrative is set in the city, and rather than depicting the city as a space in which children do not thrive—a dominant paradigm in many genres of children’s literature which eventuated because of Romantic ideology’s insistence that children could only flourish in nature (Rudd 236–237)—in this picturebook children living in the city do well. Through the verbal and visual text, Graham explores the interconnectedness of people—and also the randomness of human existence—and provides an effective illustration of flourishing. This is a flourishing that is grounded in human relationships and interrelationships; moreover, in that it offers

readers an alternative view of flourishing to the utopian one, it is also a *good enough* kind of flourishing. *Good enough* flourishing in this picturebook is embodied, feeling, relational, and ordinary enough to be abundantly available on an everyday basis. The story covers a range of events that take place during a single minute. The story is framed by a frontispiece in which Jodie “drew a duck,” and her family form the focus (n.p.). Next to her, Jodie’s baby brother (Jonathan) “took his first step” and in the room next door, “Jonathan’s mum played ‘Merrily Kiss the Quaker’s Wife’ on her tin whistle.” The narrative closes when Jodie yells “Mummy!... Jonathan’s just taken his first step.” Mother rushes into the room, and both of them become completely absorbed in celebrating Jonathan’s achievement: Mother by embracing her young son, and Jodie by looking on in silence. This key narrative event is framed by multiple other, simple, and (mostly) everyday events that happened simultaneously with Jonathan’s first step, such as a jogger “puffed on by” the front gate, pushing her toddler in a stroller; “Bernard had his shoelace tied for the second time that morning”; “a soldier said goodbye to his mum”; “the breeze blew a fine spray over children sailing boats in the fountain” at the nearby park; and “in Mercy Hospital, a baby was born” to two very excited looking parents. Graham’s skill lies in how he marks each of these events as important. Meaning is also interesting, because the pictures leave it to the reader to determine how to make sense of the fragmentary events depicted—that is, how to tie them together to form a narrative.

Cognitive criticism is especially useful for investigating human embodiment, emotions, and relationships, for as Ellen Spolsky explains, it endorses “a view of human life within the material world as dynamic and relational rather than as static and hierarchical” (85). The cognitive tool of conceptual blending provides a way to analyze how Graham positions readers to construct a concept of the *good enough* family, which projects into the high-level blend of *good enough* flourishing to foreground the ordinary, everyday availability of the kind of embodied flourishing that is grounded in relationship. The individuals in Graham’s *good enough* families do well together when they use their bodies to feel with each other (and themselves) in sensitive and adaptive ways. According to blending theory, conceptual blending—or “the mental operation of combining two mental packets of meaning” to create a third one that has “new emergent meaning”—explains how inferences are created in fiction (Turner “Cognitive” 10–12). In the final image of the embrace between Jonathan and his mother, two input spaces that project into the blended space of *good enough* families are the visual image of Mother’s closed eyes and the way her whole body envelops Jonathan in a hug. When these spaces project into the blend of *good enough* families (that is, the third *new* space), many possible inferences arise: that a seemingly small event like the first step of a child is worthy of attention; that a

child's first step is an event to be celebrated with tenderness and joy; and that feeling with other people in nurturing ways may involve embracing them.

Closure is an especially fruitful narrative space in which to investigate the central beliefs of a narrative, for it is at this moment, as Catherine Belsey explains, that the "events of the story become fully intelligible to the reader" (65). In the final scene in *Silver Buttons* described above, the input spaces of tender, loving feelings produced by the prosocial CARE emotional system, and evidenced in the embrace, project into the blended space of *good enough* families, and the reader is encouraged to mull over the space to find the overall meaning of the narrative. This is how conceptual blending creates meaning. As Turner explains, the blended space powerfully activates input spaces (they provide projections to and from the blend) and keeps them "easily active while we do cognitive work over them to construct meaning" (*Literary* 61). The cognitive map in which CARE is central to bodies feeling with each other in tender and loving ways that support flourishing is thoroughly mapped in the Graham's closure; moreover, these intense feelings are not only shared abundantly in human relationships, but are also a normal part of everyday human life. Thus, in the narrative's overall target story of how humans live well together, *good enough* flourishing is imagined in relational terms, and most of all in terms of one's relationships with other people. This view that quality relationships are central to human wellbeing is also consistent with the broader field of wellbeing studies (Bourgeois, Carroll, and Houghton 97; Eckersley 633; Panksepp and Biven xv; Peterson 249). As Seligman observes, "*other people* are the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up" (20).

*Extra Yarn* is (like *Silver Buttons*) a narrative for young readers and is about a girl (Annabelle) who is somewhat disconnected and sad (that is, she is not flourishing), but by the end of the narrative she is flourishing. Annabelle finds "a box filled with yarn of every colour" in the "cold little town" in which she lives. She flourishes when she knits a jumper not only for herself, but for everyone and everything in her town: a magical part of the story is that the yarn never runs out. Annabelle transforms herself, her community, and even (in some measure) her world, for people come from around the world "to see all the jumpers and to shake Annabelle's hand." A demanding Archduke "who was very fond of clothes" wants to buy Annabelle's yarn, but she refuses to sell it (even for ten million pounds). When he steals the box, it is useless to him; when he opens up the box, it is empty, and he hurls it out the window. The box "magically" returns across the sea to Annabelle, and the narrative closes with her sitting high up in a tree with her dog: all three (girl, dog, and tree) are wearing their warm, colorful jumpers. Annabelle appears quietly pleased to have her precious box of yarn back again, and the text notes that she is happy.

While the central significance in *Silver Buttons* is that people flourish when they feel with each other in everyday, feeling, and embodied ways, *Extra Yarn* does not privilege this type of emotional engagement with other people in its conceptualization of flourishing. In this narrative, flourishing is conceived of as a satisfying sense of belonging and meaning-making. A feeling and embodied connection with oneself, and the living and nonliving world (people, animals, birds, trees, the built environment) underpins this view. A key input space projecting into the blended space of *good enough* flourishing in *Extra Yarn* is the knitted jumpers. Turner explains how input spaces work in blends through partial projection (*Literary* 60), and from the input space of the jumpers the part that projects into the blend of *good enough* flourishing is the idea of the body wearing warmth and color. Turner also explains how input spaces—or input stories—project structure, proffer completion, and develop elaboration in the blended story to create meaning (*Literary* 83–84): the jumper input space provides the structure of the body feeling good through moving (knitting, wearing). This same input space of the jumper also gives completion in the blend, as the concept of the warm and colorful body links—in the blend—with the feelings generated by a balanced SEEKING system: enthusiasm, hope, purpose. In this way, a cognitive map is formed to link flourishing and embodiment: the jumpers are literally worn on the body; they create warmth and color; people, animals, and things feel good when they wear the jumpers (if things can feel); meaning and belonging arise from within one's body, and it feels good. The sustained mapping of this conceptual blend (in which flourishing, embodiment, meaning, belonging, and positive emotion are linked to flourishing) is how the key significance in the narrative is propelled. As Stephens explains, cognitive mapping—in which mental space is treated as a stage for narrative events—“may function as a geographical metaphor for physical, mental and emotional transformation” (“Cognitive Mapping” vi). In this case, I would argue *Extra Yarn* offers young readers a transformed view of emotional flourishing in the context of overall flourishing. This is a view in which human wellbeing is conceived of as a profoundly interconnected state between oneself and the world. Turner's explanation of this process also helps to illuminate how story works to create meaning over several spaces to create a blended space (or story) that is a rich and complex construction of multiple concepts melded together in different ways: “the aggregate meaning resides in no one of them [the spaces], but rather in the array of spaces and in their connections” (*Literary* 85).

There are two exceptions to the abundance of warmth and color in *Extra Yarn*, and they function to further instantiate the cognitive map of flourishing as embodied, feeling, and relational. The first exception is how the story opens, with a rather sad Annabelle and town. The first double-spread functions as an establishing shot to convey a powerful

sense of Annabelle's depleted flourishing before she is transformed by knitting jumpers. In this first scene, Annabelle's town is described and pictured in bleak terms: the words "white," "black," and "soot" describe the color of the town, and the adjective "cold" is repeated twice; the picture also depicts a cold, dark town. No words are used to describe Annabelle or her feelings, but she is pictured by herself, also in dark, monochrome colors and with a downcast expression on her face. However, there is a glimmer of curiosity conveyed with color (the faintest shade of pink) and line in her face as she looks down at the box of yarn she has found. The only other black-and-white scenes are those involving the Archduke, who (as already noted) fails to recognize what the box of yarn really is, and believes it to be a consumable item that can be bought and sold. When these input spaces—evoking the sense of being cold, and the lack of color—project into the local blend of Annabelle's flourishing the meaning that arises is that flourishing, embodiment and feelings are intrinsically linked: in this space, the bleak feeling created by the dark colors, together with that of being physically cold, link with the concepts of a lack of hope, curiosity, creativity, and enthusiasm (feelings generated by a healthy SEEKING system). This linking of the body, SEEKING, and human flourishing is consistent with Panksepp's view in emotional systems theory; as he explains, "the primary-process emotions are all about dynamic movements" (*Archaeology* 465). The meaning that emerges when the local level blended space of Annabelle's flourishing projects into the high-level blend of *good enough* flourishing, is that the body and feelings are profoundly connected to flourishing. This is the SEEKING system imagined in narrative form; as Panksepp explains, a healthy SEEKING system supports thriving through promoting "growth-enhancing engagements with the world" (*Archaeology* 436), and in this fictional representation, an embodied, feeling connection with oneself and the world is at the heart of flourishing.

The key concepts of belonging and meaning that are evoked throughout *Extra Yarn* are thoroughly mapped onto the cognitive map of flourishing in the narrative's closure. The jumpers Annabelle creates are physically warming and visually colorful, and these concepts not only function literally, but when they blend with the concept of flourishing, they take on the metonymic significance that flourishing feels warm and colorful (pleasurable, satisfying) in the body. In this way, in both the local blended space of Annabelle's flourishing, and the high-level blend of *good enough* flourishing, the concepts of warmth and color are linked with Annabelle's (and her community's) growing sense of purpose and belonging in the world. Closure also functions to emphasize the stark contrast between Annabelle's somewhat sad emotional state at the beginning of the narrative, and her growing sense of enthusiasm and purpose that underpin her emerging state of flourishing. This is seen, for example, in the visual difference between her cold, black-and-white

world at the beginning of the narrative, and her abundantly warm and colorful world at its close. Annabelle's face also expresses a transformation: while she does not appear abundantly joyful at the end of the narrative, she is no longer downcast, but appears calm, pleased, and satisfied. The concept of "up" has strong connotations with positive emotion, and in this final scene instead of Annabelle being pictured looking down into the box (as she is at the beginning of the narrative), she is pictured looking outwards, and sitting high up in the branch of a tree. From this image, a sense of optimism and power is evoked as she looks out over the world from above. Most of all, perhaps, in this final double-spread the concept of abundance is lavishly projected into the blended story of *good enough* flourishing: color and warmth are abundantly displayed, so that everything in Annabelle's world (Annabelle, her dog, and the entire tree) is (almost) completely covered with the colorful, warm jumpers that Annabelle has created. When these input spaces project from the blended space of *good enough* flourishing into the target story of how a rather sad child and community begin to flourish, the overall meaning that arises is that life is abundantly full of hope, and that good things happen when humans connect with themselves, others, and the world in feeling, embodied ways. In that this conceptualization of flourishing in *Extra Yarn* imagines humans doing well by nurturing ordinary, sensitive, and adaptive connections (freely available in one's own body), this is a kind of *good enough* flourishing.

Metaphor also functions in both *Silver Buttons* and *Extra Yarn* to forge strong links between the concepts of human embodiment, feelings, relationship, and flourishing. The metaphors of drawing and knitting, for example, link sensory experience with the primary emotions (chiefly CARE and PLAY in *Silver Buttons*, and SEEKING in *Extra Yarn*) to embed the significance that by creating with one's own hands, positive feelings and flourishing arise. In a discussion of children's poetry, Karen Coats highlights the way metaphors "are almost always rooted in sensual experience, [and] help us understand who we are as subjects and objects in a world of signs" (134). In the picturebooks under discussion, metaphor is not only embedded in the senses, but also the primary emotions, so that the idea of the healthy body as one connected with its senses and feelings is imagined. Right from their very beginning, the narratives instantiate the link between the senses, the body in motion, emotions, and flourishing through their tactile titles evoking the embodied activities of the female protagonists: Jodie in *Silver Buttons* who draws buttons on her duck's boots and Annabelle in *Extra Yarn* who knits garments for everyone and everything with her yarn. In that both protagonists flourish (in part) through drawing and knitting, these creative bodily actions forge further links between the body, feelings, and connection, to create the cognitive map of flourishing as embodied, feeling, and relational. Barnett and Klassen explicitly link Annabelle's



knitting and her capacity to live life well, for the central interest in the story is how her act of knitting facilitates her connection with herself, her community, and her world. It could be argued that by positioning Annabelle's knitting as central to her capacity to flourish, Barnett and Klassen explicitly foreground the feminist ethics of care: that connection with the body and its emotions are essential to living life well. As Nigel Parton explains, rather than a reliance on abstract reasoning and knowledge, in a feminist ethics of care "the importance of sensory knowledge, symbolized by the unity of hand, head and heart is underlined" (1). By contrast, Graham implies a connection between Jodie's act of drawing and flourishing. Rather than positioning drawing as central to Jodie's flourishing, Graham frames the narrative with Jodie's act of drawing her duck with the silver buttons: it is named after the buttons on the duck; dedicated to "Rosie who drew me the duck"; it begins and ends with Jodie drawing the duck; and Jodie is pictured a few times completely absorbed in drawing her duck. However, except for the first double-spread, Jodie's drawing is incidental to the "real" action of the story which is Jonathan's first step. In this way, Graham implicitly draws attention to Jodie's act of drawing and creating, and also (perhaps) implies that it is an ordinary everyday occurrence that does not require a great deal of attention. The overall meaning that emerges when the input spaces of drawing and knitting project into the high-level blended spaces of *good enough* flourishing is that these creative, embodied acts connect people with their sensual and emotional systems, and are a part of what humans do when they live life well. This meaning is emphasized in Graham's narrative through his inclusion of multiple other instances of humans connecting with their bodies in the process of living life well: Mother playing on her tin whistle, and several other adults and children holding hands, jumping, running, embracing, tying shoelaces, playing with sticks, stones, boats, leaves, and seaweed; as well as probably the most embodied action of all: a mother giving birth to a baby. All of these activities in *Silver Buttons* imagine humans of different ages living life well in families and community in playful, nurturing, and (mostly) pleasurable ways that are also deeply embodied, feeling, and relational. These activities also heighten the central meaning projected from the last image of the embrace between Jonathan and his mother, that feeling with others in tender, loving, joyful, and playful ways underpins human flourishing. From an ecofeminist viewpoint, it could be argued that by imagining humans and their place in the world in relational terms, Graham offers young readers a narrative simulation of how it feels to live a relational life. In this view, in which the body-mind is conceived of as "thoroughly engaged in a social world from the very beginning" (Curtin 54), the life well lived is the life lived in relationship.

Another role metaphor plays in both picturebooks is a metonymic one that establishes further links between embodiment, feelings, and

relationship: one concept that is consistently foregrounded metonymically—and connected to flourishing—is that of abundance. The yarn in *Extra Yarn* is an instance of this, for it functions literally as an object Annabelle uses to create jumpers, as well as taking on a figurative function, and standing for Annabelle's inner creative strength, purpose, and meaning (and capacity to flourish). The order in which Annabelle knits and cares is also significant: she first knits and cares for herself, and then for others. The idea of abundance is repeatedly projected into the *good enough* blended space throughout the narrative as Annabelle and her town are transformed through her knitting: "And when Annabelle was done, she had some extra yarn"; "And even after... she still had extra yarn"; "And even then Annabelle still had extra yarn."

In a different way, abundance is also linked powerfully to flourishing in the blend of *good enough* flourishing in *Silver Buttons*. In this narrative, abundance is linked to the tender, loving, joyful feelings that arise when humans move their bodies in the process of caring and playing together. Most of all, this abundance arises in the narrative's closure, through the all-encompassing embrace between Jonathan and his mother: an abundance of feeling is evoked through the strength of the embrace, the full attention from both Jodie and Mother, and the abundance of sunlight that floods approximately two-thirds of the picture. Abundance of sunlight (evoking warmth and lightness) is also evoked in the final words of the narrative: "Sunlight from all over the city streamed through the window and the kitchen clock struck ten." Like the yarn in *Extra Yarn*, sunlight takes on a figurative function in this final image of *Silver Buttons* to thoroughly map the cognitive terrain of flourishing by linking the concepts of warmth, light, love, tenderness, joy, attention, and most of all, feeling with others. These are just some of the ways conceptual blending functions in the narratives to create meaning. By repeatedly linking the concepts of embodiment, feelings, and relationships, the picturebooks propel their central significance that the emotions are embodied, and that humans do well when they connect with them in positive ways.

## Conclusion

Cognitive narratology helps to demonstrate how narratives privilege some worldviews over others (Herman 113). Through an investigation of the blended spaces of *good enough* flourishing in *Silver Buttons* and *Extra Yarn*, I have attempted to demonstrate how these contemporary picturebooks privilege a deeply embodied, deeply feeling, deeply relational, but also ordinary, kind of flourishing. I have argued that both narratives imagine, in quite different ways, a fictional account of how humans flourish by connecting with their bodies and feelings to form relationships with themselves, others, and the world. In *Silver Buttons*,

people feel with others and experience intense feelings of tenderness, love, and joy as they CARE and PLAY together. In *Extra Yarn*, an embodied, feeling connection enables a profoundly satisfying sense of meaning and belonging to transform Annabelle and her community and to some extent, her world; in this way, young readers are offered a fictional experience of a SEEKING system finding balance. Of interest in this narrative is that while the intense feelings from the pro-social CARE and PLAY systems are only evoked through the warmth and color of the jumpers (and actual bodies caring for and playing with each other are barely imagined), Barnett and Klassen lay the foundation for more abundant CARE and PLAY in the future. Panksepp may point out that the SEEKING system underpins and oversees all the others, and that *Extra Yarn* imagines the early stages of a transformation of a rather sad girl and town, to one that is hopeful, purposeful, and enthusiastically looking forward to a more embodied, feeling, and relational future. According to Panksepp and Biven, an appreciation for how the primary emotions function homeostatically is vital for an overall understanding of human thriving. As they explain, “all aspects of mental life can be influenced by our primary-process feelings, and the overall affective spectrum of the lower MindBrain [or emotional brain] is foundational for higher mental health issues” (xii). By enhancing an appreciation of the emotional brain, and how mind-body interactions function to enable flourishing, *Silver Buttons* and *Extra Yarn* may offer readers a view that imagines a fundamentally different kind of flourishing from “perfection” or “utopia.” Rather than linking various conceptions of perfection (perfect achievement, perfect happiness, perfect relationships) with flourishing, the view that arises from *Silver Buttons* and *Extra Yarn* is that feeling, embodied and connected flourishing is also an everyday kind of flourishing: it is sensitive, adaptive, ordinary, and *good enough*.

In this way, *Silver Buttons* and *Extra Yarn* construct a cognitive map of human flourishing that position young readers to imagine it as an embodied, feeling connection. In that this vision of flourishing also imagines the body, its emotions, and the relationships that surround humans as being sensitive and adaptive, as well as ordinary and everyday, these picturebooks may also offer readers a twenty-first-century reconceptualization of Winnicott’s concept of the *good enough*. If Turner is correct, and most human experience, knowledge, and thinking are constructed into stories (*Literary* 3–11), contemporary picturebooks for young readers play an important socializing role in how young readers are shaped to think about how human beings live life well. The narrative imaginings in *Silver Buttons* and *Extra Yarn* of humans living well when they connect with their bodies, feelings, and others may help to socialize young readers into a transformed view of the world, in which humans flourish when they SEEK, CARE, and PLAY.

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## Notes

- 1 I follow here the convention Jaak Panksepp employs of capitalizing the emotional systems. As Panksepp and Biven explain, “the capitalizations indicate that real physical and distinct networks for various emotions do exist in mammalian brains” (2).
- 2 In that Malouf is discussing how humans live life well (and is not just referring to positive emotion, or happiness), I would argue that what Malouf identifies as *happiness* here is what Mackay, Panksepp, and Seligman would define as *wellbeing*. This is a complex and confusing issue, for as Malouf notes, the distinction (or lack of one) between happiness and wellbeing is part of the current problem with how they are being experienced in contemporary life (9–15).

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# 11 The Child's Reading Body

*Margaret Mackey*

We read with our eyes. All sighted readers must learn to transform the visual information conveyed by abstract black marks on a page into mental images of one kind or another. But although mainstream reading certainly includes a heavy focus on ocular work, a complete account of the activity entails something much closer to a full-body experience than we normally assume.

This chapter investigates the physicality of reading, particularly in childhood. It explores how we invest our bodies in the mystery of what goes on in our heads as we scrutinize and decode the black marks and then vivify them mentally to our own satisfaction or frustration. Reading is an abstract process, but one that also acknowledges the concrete particularities of the material vehicle supplying the text to be interpreted. Any contemporary account of reading must be fleshed out in differential detail to take account of the affordances and limitations of different forms of presentation. Today's children meet texts via paper, dedicated e-readers, smart-screen apps, and transmedia compilations, and also through what might be called the outlier format of audiobook.

In exploring the physical act of reading, I mainly focus on able-bodied readers because my project is already complex enough without bringing in multiple exceptions, but the significance of these differently abled exceptions is that they prove that almost every generality I present here is not a necessary condition of reading. On the same basis, I work from a foundation of experiences available to young Western children, simply because they supply the broadest sample of exposure to textual variety, and thus inform our considerations in the widest-ranging way.

Bodies are invariably located in geographical, temporal, social, cultural, and economic spaces. (See Erin Spring's chapter in this volume for further discussion of this important topic.) It is essential to remember that all reading occurs within specific settings, and that these contexts also play a role in how we interpret textual materials.

Reading is an extremely intricate phenomenon, and a single chapter does not provide room to address every element of its multifaceted complexity. A century ago Edmund Huey recognized this complexity,

commenting that “reading itself, as a psycho-physiological process, is almost as good as a miracle” (5). I address this “miraculous” process through a brief consideration of the eyes’ role, and then explore the role of hands, ears, and whole body as represented in the mind.

## The Eyes

We see the words on page or screen and translate these abstract marks into a live form of mental image. A large science is devoted to the refinements of this exercise, down to the fine detail of measuring eye movements as we peruse the page. The American Optometric Association gives a succinct overview of the relevant biology: “Reading requires the integration of a number of vision skills: visual acuity, visual fixation, accommodation, binocular fusion, convergence, field of vision, and form perception.” Maryanne Wolf describes the same process in slightly different terms: “Your visual system race[s] into action, swooping quickly across the page, forwarding its gleanings about letter shapes, word forms, and common phrases to linguistic systems awaiting the information” (8).

Being able to focus on the words in ways that will enable the mind to bring them to life is only one part of a complicated story. Huey provides a poetic account of what is activated in the mind by the sight of decodable black marks:

A wonderful process, by which our thoughts and thought-wanderings to the finest shades of detail, the play of our inmost feelings and desires and will, the subtle image of the very innermost that we are, are reflected from us to another soul who reads us through our book.

(5–6)

To make a long story short, reading is much more than simply what we see. In this chapter, I explore that idea through the prism of a single idea: how the framing of a text affects what the eyes take in. For example, whether readers perceive a text as factual or fictional affects what they perceive (Altmann et al. 22). Altmann and her team presented readers with identical short narrative passages, but for some readers a text was labeled as factual and for others the same text was presented as fictional. Their neural activities were then monitored, both by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and through timing their interactions. Even with identical words in front of their eyes, the participants’ brains showed signs of activity in different sites according to whether they were processing the story as fact or invention. We need to be cautious because fMRI is still in early stages of development (see the comments in the Introduction to this section and in Kokkola’s chapter),

but the contrasts in brain illumination were matched by different time conditions: "participants responded faster when a story had been presented in the real context condition" (Altmann et al. 24). Reading the same words as factual was a different experience from seeing them as fictional, an exercise that involved "constructive content simulation" (Altmann et al. 26).

Other kinds of framing also affect what we see when we read. Ecker et al. investigated the impact of headlines on how readers interpret the words they see (324). Whitenton looked explicitly at the role of framing in website development, and provides an example of people seeing the same information in positive terms (16/20 succeeded) versus negative (4/20 failed); usability tests determined that their idea of an appropriate next step differed sharply. The challenge to the simple idea that "seeing is believing" is palpable. The relationship between what the eyes see and what the mind processes is exceedingly complex. Visual decoding of words is only one element in the visual process we call reading.

Beyond the impact of framing, other, perhaps smaller, questions of divergence also affect the work of a reader's eyes. Are the words presented on a fixed paper page, or a screen where they make a temporary appearance? Are the written words accompanied by a voiced version that provides a performance of pronunciation and an interpretation of significance, or might they be associated with moving images and/or a complex soundtrack? Somehow, no matter the context, the eyes "race into action," forwarding abstract shapes to the mind that brings them to life. But how that mental life is shaped is dependent on much more than the raw data concerning abstract black marks that the eyes present to the brain.

## **The Hands**

Reading is also a manual activity. Paper books and many electronic controllers occupy what Nicholas Holmes calls "hand-centered space," directing "hand-centered attention" (57). Holmes points out that humans (and indeed some other primates) make use of "a relatively stable hand-centered map of visual space that is created and used by the brain when needed in the service of object-directed hand actions" (58). In other words, the brain uses the hands as reliable markers and coordinators to help with delineating the space within range of the eyes. If the hand, as Holmes persuasively argues, "is an important and salient visual stimulus," and if "both visual perception and attention are affected merely by the presence, position, and visibility of the hands," (61), what are the implications for how we think about reading? And how do these implications shift with the type of text under consideration?



*The Hand as Attention Organizer*

Elaine Scarry provides a detailed description of how hands work in orchestrating attention toward a paper book:

first, the fingers must discriminate the delicate edge of the page from the full array stacked in the book, and then they must lift or flip it away from the others.... [W]hile the left-hand page is read, the right-hand fingers find the upper right-hand edge of the page that must eventually turn; then, as the right-hand page is read, the fingers move down along the page edge to the bottom corner, where, once the reading of the two pages is complete, the turning motion will be carried out; the right-hand page will be folded over and smoothed into place where it now becomes a left-hand page, and the hand moves back across the two-page surface and up to the upper right-hand edge to prepare for the next turn. Meanwhile, new worlds keep swimming into view.

Reaching, stretching, and folding are the actual motions the hand carries out—like a spell of hand motions performed over the book—as one reads.

(147)

Scarry highlights the fine-tuning of active touch that our hands conduct, largely beyond the reach of our conscious attention as we focus on the contents of the words rather than the mechanics of managing the page. But we need only watch a toddler trying to grasp and turn even the more robust pages of a board book to realize we are talking about a manual skill of great precision and significance.

I drew on Scarry's extended description in 2002 while reporting on a study of pairs of eleven-year-olds and fourteen-year-olds reading David Macaulay's picturebook, *Shortcut* (1995) (Mackey *Literacies*). Scarry accounts for private, individual readers who relegate page management to the furthest reaches of their tacit attention, and her description remains largely true for the fluent reading of paper books. What I saw in my video recordings of the paired readers of *Shortcut* was a more social event: readers using their hands to orchestrate each other's best attention to salient pictorial and textual details in this comically confusing story. In 2002, I was struck particularly by two aspects of the readers' work with this picturebook: the degree to which they used their hands to elicit their partner's attention, and the potential importance of the affective power of coordinating manual forms of attention. I suggested,

This element of connecting with hands may be one of the specific pleasures of reading graphic texts together and one reason why

picture books are so often cited as creating bonds between the adult and child who read them together.

(*Literacies* 119)

In 2002, electronic texts were more cumbersome to process than they are today. I commented on the one-handed nature of mouse use, and was clear about the limitations of the e-book as it was constituted in those days. My participants worked with a Rocket E-Book; I observed that it “appears to be designed for one-handed use. The screen is generally not as receptive to the laying on of pointing fingers as is a page of paper, and it requires a certain posture of attention” (*Literacies* 118).

This observation remains true today for Kindles, Kobos, and other dedicated reading platforms. They lack many of the manual affordances of a paper book; their glassy screens do not yield to the touch as bound paper does; the scrolling screen normally displays only one page at a time, so much of the information conveyed by left-hand, right-hand orientation is lost. Furthermore, readers know that the set of marks represented on a particular page is not securely held in one hand or the other, even while out of sight. On an e-reader, the only page with any kind of visual or manual, “reality” is the one currently displayed. The loss of much of the manual contribution to the brain's capacity to orchestrate assorted sources of information is palpable and significant. But the shift toward the one-handed e-book, of course, was interrupted by the arrival of the smart screen, most iconically represented by the Apple iPhone and iPad. Suddenly the screen is profoundly reactive to the laying on of pointing fingers. Compared to the cumbersome training and practice needed for hands to turn paper pages or operate a mouse, this screen responds to taps and swipes even from small, untrained fingers.

The use of hands to manage perceptions in a shared reading of a picturebook is bounded by an essential quality of paper that becomes more evident in contrast to electronic options. Unless the book is a *movable*, a work of paper engineering that permits some limited interaction, the words and images in a picturebook do not alter in response to contact with a finger. No matter how lively the dance of multiple hands across the pages, the images remain *what* they are and *where* they are. This contrast with the responsiveness of an app page is important. With a paper book, hands can locate and highlight, but they cannot actually render any real changes. The role of the hands is to refer back to the brain through the orchestration of attention, and also to store locative information about the data contained in the pages.

In contrast, in reading an app, the hands play a constitutive role. Within the developer's limits, Scarry's “spell of hand motions” actually *shapes* the story being interpreted. I viewed private video records of children reading an iPad app together: their hands do not just point at what already exists (though that role continues to be important), they are in a

state of constant experimentation. It is perhaps too glib to suggest that the hands have moved from a role of exploring *what is* to investigating *what if*, but something of that nature is occurring. On an app screen, not everything is *there* at first glance; it must be excavated. And while the eyes play a focal role in this probing for possibilities, the intelligence of the hands is also hard at work.

Guy Merchant investigated the use of iPad apps in a nursery class and developed a “Typology of Hand Movements” used by children and adults in processing app stories:

- 1 Stabilizing movements
  - Holding—using one or both hands to support the tablet as one might hold a tray
  - Holding and resting—as above but using the knees for additional support
- 2 Control movements
  - General tapping—using three or four fingers in a slapping motion
  - Precision tapping—using the forefinger (like the pointing gesture) or with the hand palm downwards slightly lowering one of the first three fingers so that it activates the screen
  - Swiping—hand palm downward using one or more fingers to drag across the screen
  - Thumb pressing—using the thumb to tap, swipe or operate the home button
- 3 Deictic movements
  - Pointing, nodding and other gestures—directing attention to the screen or visual items framed by the screen.

(124)

Merchant’s categories include management of the physical platform (equivalent to holding the paper book in focal range), management of access to the content (although the tapping and swiping are more directive of content than is the mere turning of the page that Scarry describes so carefully), and management of intellectual response to the content (most closely equivalent to the handwork that orchestrates how two or more readers help each other think about the story in the reading of a paper book).

In Scarry’s, Merchant’s, and my own accounts of the role of the hands in reading, the manipulation of the physical object creates conditions of attention that ignite significant interpretive processes. Obviously it is easier to observe the external gestures of the hands at work, but some indirect perception of associated cognitive efforts is at least implied in all of these descriptions. But our hands contribute to our mental activities in a second (and possibly secondary) way as well, especially for

contemporary children who are learning about reading in a corporate world that invites them to interact with their texts through a variety of vehicles.

### *A Broader Repertoire of Touch*

Merchant discusses children exploring an app that involves Peppa Pig and her family. To pursue this question of tactility, I entered Peppa Pig's name on the Amazon website in March 2016, and turned up nearly 9,500 entries. The first screen contained sixteen items. Six were paperback books and a seventh was a board book. Four entries presented plush toys of one kind or another; two offered hard plastic renditions of the Pig family along with plastic vehicles. The remaining three commodities on this opening screen were items of clothing: a jacket, ankle socks, and a tutu dress. Even this small sample demonstrates that this title supplies a number of routes into the story that convey a high tactile quotient. A child who takes a plush Peppa Pig to bed every night will have a haptic and proprioceptive sense of the character to add to available visual information. Similarly, a child who manipulates the plastic Pig family will have a strong muscle memory of fitting them into their vehicles, but with a different set of tactile associations. To a lesser degree (perhaps depending on the child), wearing Peppa Pig clothing may also alter the child's kinesthetic sense of the story. I do not want to linger on the commodification of Peppa Pig and many hundreds of other children's characters, but the physicality of contemporary children's contacts with their toys enters their reading repertoires in a variety of ways that we should not ignore.

### *Hands-On and Hands-Off Forms of Interpretation*

The huge array of textual formats available today renders each of them more visible by contrast to the others. Films, television programs, streaming video, and other forms accessible by viewing (and listening) make relatively little demand on actions of the hands, after the equipment has been set up to play. Eyes and ears are the organs of interpretation. Materials conveyed through audio alone call mainly on the ears to process. In contrast, other formats call for highly skilled and attentive manual engagement. Scarry's account of page-turning describes an important but very routine set of actions. Any text that is interpreted via console or keyboard requires considerably more significant decisions about hand actions.

About ten years ago, I worked with several groups of young adults, each comprising three undergraduates, interpreting complete narratives in book, film, and video game formats. As they made themselves familiar with the manual demands of the console in the early stages of

assessing the PlayStation game *Shadow of the Colossus*, it was possible to see the groups dividing their attention along the lines of Merchant's division of "control" and "deictic" movements (124). In this example, Martin is in charge of the console, and his comments are about control, partially in response to a question from Sumana and partially to organize his own attention. Tess is responding deictically to elements of the story as she makes suggestions to Martin about his next action. The divide is articulated clearly:

(Martin pulls down map)

SUMANA: What did you press?

MARTIN: Functions. *Zoom in; zoom out, turn back, map, move, left analog stick.* All right so they don't have ...

TESS: I still say you go to the sun and do the sword thing. It seems like that was the last instruction he [the voice-over of an unnamed god] really gave, short of kill those gigantic idols on the wall.

MARTIN: So you ... left analog stick is movement. You press X to make him go and make him stop or actually, not to make him stop. You press X and you can go faster and then hard back on the left analog stick.

(Mackey Narrative 89)

Tess suggests hand motions in service to their plot functions; Martin, who is responsible for coordinating the physical actions at this point, still thinks of the buttons in relation to his fingers. The collective approach of the group may be compared to a toddler reader who fluently recites the contents of a page of a familiar book but is thrown into a state of highly explicit manual attention when it comes time to manage the page turn.

The difference, of course, is that no matter how much the two-year-old fumbles with the page turn, the contents of the story remain the same. In this little game-playing scenario, Martin's inability to get the horse moving because of his clumsiness with the buttons actually prevents the story developing for some considerable time. Compared to the game player whose manual interventions actually make the story go, a print reader's hands enable but do not create the interpretive potential of the text. But compared to the hands-free viewer or listener, a reader is involved in an experience that makes an active call on the hands in order to keep going, whether by page-turning, or clicking, or swiping.

## The Ears

Much reading is silent. Experienced adult readers need not speak the words aloud to themselves in order to make sense of them. There is,

nevertheless, an essential connection between the visual and the aural for readers of alphabetic or syllabic scripts; our minds convert letters to the sounds of words. Wolf describes how the linguistic systems of a reader's mind "rapidly [connect] subtly differentiated visual symbols with essential information about the sounds contained in words. Without a single moment of conscious awareness, you [apply] highly automatic rules about the sounds of letters in the English writing system" (8). Wolf applauds the brain's "uncanny ability to learn to connect and integrate at rapid-fire speeds what it sees and what it hears to what it knows" (8). So some form of converting the seen word to the heard word seems essential to interpretation. It seems likely, however (though with such a subjective aspect of response it is difficult to be certain), that silent readers vary substantially in the degree to which they *experience* any kind of internal "voicing" of the words on the page as they process their meaning. Though relevant areas of their brains are activated (Perrone-Bertolotti et al. 17554), the degree to which they attend to any such internal voicing may be individually variable. Advocates of speed-reading claim that subvocalization is an impediment to the rapid processing of information from the page, and suggest readers work on tactics to reduce their dependence on such mental efforts.

Regardless of the role of the internal voice in silent reading, most young hearing children initially learn about reading with their ears. The idea that black marks on the page translate into any kind of constant sense needs to be mediated aloud for children to register its significance. They may look at the pictures and the associated words on the page, but they may also simply listen. And today they may listen to the voice of a local adult or older sibling or cousin, or to the recorded voices on an audiobook, or an e-book with voice activation, or an app. In the latter cases, the cadences of these voices are as invariant as the black marks that denote the words in the written version.

Susan J. Douglas, whose book *Listening In* carries the evocative subtitle *Radio and the American Imagination*, presents a telling account of the emotional force of listening:

even though the visual system of the brain is larger and much more extensive than its auditory system, it seems that hearing's immediate and transitory quality is what gives it such power. The fact [is] that we hear not only with our ears but also with our entire bodies—our bones, our innards, vibrate, too, to sounds, and certainly to music.... We can close our eyes but not our ears.... And since the auditory world is a fleeting world, an immediate world—words, unlike images, are perishable; gone as soon as they are uttered—listening encourages a concentration on the present.

(29–30)

Children, who start hearing before they leave the womb and recognize voices from their pre-natal past even as newborns, learn about this essential evanescence of sound—but they also learn about the power of repetition. Radio is fleeting but many forms of recorded audio are completely reproducible.

Contemporary babies learn about aural repetitiveness from a variety of sources. Their families, in time-honored ways, provide them with many ritualized repetitions of language experience such as nursery rhymes, lap games, lullabies, and much more. Many, from a young age, are exposed to the recurring powers of books read aloud, always the same words in the same order. Today there are also many other audio sources to consider. As Merchant points out, babies' activity centers produce a variety of aural texts for children who are too small even to sit up, permeating their activity mats and baby seats and walkers:

Digitally reproduced nursery rhymes, counting games and alphabet songs have become commonplace in the lives of many infants and toddlers.... And these toys themselves are certainly not passive objects—not only are they carefully scripted but they are often programmed to “wake up” after a period of inactivity, to begin an audiovisual action sequence prompted by gentle touch, movement or accidental collision.

(Merchant 121)

Parental tablets and smartphones supplement these digital toys with apps and a wide variety of family soundtracks, which provide further lessons about continuity and repetition.

When I was a child, I could look at the pictures in my books independently, but I was unable to recollect the narrative sequence of any story without drawing on the remembered cadences of my parents' voices as they read it aloud. My only access to the words was through those voices; nobody else in our household at that time could read. And as I mastered the art and craft of reading, my own voice entered the mix as I rehearsed my developing skills aloud.

Most Western children today have access to their favorite characters through a variety of sources, not just a book read by a parent or grandparent. Let us return briefly to Peppa Pig. Amazon lists more than 100 currently available DVDs and I found four audiobooks, and four Android and five iPad apps. Much more access to Peppa and her family can be found online; a search on Google in late March 2016 turned up nearly 18 million hits. Even if 90% of them are repeat or dead links, there is a lot of Peppa Pig around. One significant implication of such ubiquity is that many contemporary children reading any of the books that feature Peppa Pig will involuntarily run an internal soundtrack for Peppa's own speaking voice that is imported from any of the huge

number of audiovisual representations. Importing an invariant external voice for a fictional character into a reader's mind is not a brand-new phenomenon, but it does not go back much more than a century, to the time when radio and the talkies brought character voices *inside* the minds of the audience. What are the consequences of such a change?

Harold Brodkey famously described reading as "an intimate act, perhaps more intimate than any other human act. I say that because of the prolonged (or intense) exposure of one mind to another" (1). Readers think somebody else's thoughts inside their own heads. Readers conditioned by the kind of external audio information that is provided in the transmedia world of *Peppa Pig* are also thinking somebody else's *voice* in among the cadences of their own internal enlivenment of the words on the page. The great thing about an internal voice is that you can hear *Peppa Pig*'s British accent in your head without having to reproduce it in practice. A less obvious point is that we do not know much about the role of local accent and cadence in the development of an internal voice.

At the age of 21, I moved from Canada to Britain and began teaching secondary school students. I soon discovered that, while I could keep my own pronunciation of words, I was a much more successful communicator with these students if I adopted British cadences. For example, the rise and fall of the voice that flags a question is different in Britain than in North America, and my students were much better able to hear the interrogative element of my question when I shifted my stress patterns.

We know far too little about the role of the internal voice, both in terms of its production and also of its reception. When we read silently, are we *voicing*? Are we *hearing*? We know that auditory areas of the brain are at work during the course of silent reading, but there is no certainty that such a response necessarily entails a conscious internal sense of hearing (Perrone-Bertolotti et al. 17561).

As a result of my own bicultural experience, I am aware that my silent mental cadence for a question I am reading is likely to alter inside my mind according to whether I am interpreting the prosody of the text as representing British or North American English. I present this private, introspective observation as an exemplar of hybridity. I suggest that the exposure of children to numerous forms of mediated expression set up many kinds of hybridity in how their inner voice enlivens a character whose audio characteristics are inviolate. Many audio performances also introduce issues of class; middle-class accents predominate in many audio versions, in ways that inadvertently recall the snobbery of earlier times when all fictional children went to boarding school and all radio voices spoke the Queen's English. The question of inaudible minorities raises ethical issues of considerable importance.

In my hypothetical example, a child reader may incorporate *Peppa*'s known voice into the internal expression of a story otherwise framed within the child's own personal patterns of stress and intonation. In an



equally common option, the child hears a complete audio text every time he or she looks at a story on a computer screen or an app. In such a case, what is melded into the mental experience of this narrative is an external voice. Does extensive visual exposure to written words that are always attached to fixed audio renditions make a difference to a child's sense of his or her own internal voice? Could we ever find a way to assess such a question? Is it important to know? Does it matter?

Other mediated audio elements in early reading experience may be less dramatic but they are not negligible. For example, many electronic texts for children (and many e-book software arrangements for adults) are quick to provide an audible pronunciation of an unfamiliar word. Such an affordance effectively turns a phonetic challenge into a sight word, and we do not know if the implications of this technological scaffolding are trivial or important. A gain in fluency and local accuracy may be achieved at the expense of developing a certain kind of phonetic make-do resourcefulness on the part of the reader. But it may not matter much in terms of the scale of miscellaneous tactics we bring to bear on the challenge of reading. Or it may affect individual readers differently.

### Input from the Body

We can think of reading in relation to the body in two ways: by exploring the physicality of the act itself, and also by considering how readers invest the energy and knowledge of their own bodies into the characters they read about. I will take a brief look at the first of these considerations and then tentatively explore how brain science is beginning to alter our understanding of the latter. (This topic is addressed in more detail in Chapter 12 by Lydia Kokkola.)

In a column for *The New York Times*, Verlyn Klinkenborg comments on how audiobooks, on various platforms, have replaced reading aloud as a social pleasure, and provides an eloquent testimonial to the physicality of reading, especially reading aloud. His account of the lost virtues of reading aloud is sensuous in its detail:

Reading aloud recaptures the physicality of words. To read with your lungs and diaphragm, with your tongue and lips, is very different than reading with your eyes alone. The language becomes a part of the body, which is why there is always a curious tenderness, almost an erotic quality, in those 18th- and 19th-century literary scenes where a book is being read aloud in mixed company. The words are not mere words. They are the breath and mind, perhaps even the soul, of the person who is reading.

More than a century ago, E. B. Huey also referred to the soul, as quoted above. It was not my intention, when I started working on this chapter,

that a consideration of embodied reading should encompass two very different approaches to the soul. And yet there is something in the way we lend our own bodily capacities to flesh out our understanding of the figments on the page that bears further investigation. When I read fiction, I assume that the bodies of the characters will behave in ways recognizable to my own body. Furthermore, I can only read their awareness of living in a body, even a fictional one, in terms of my own sense of inhabiting my body. It is at this level, I believe, that the word *soul* enters the picture, though it is not a word I would choose myself.

How do we understand this transfer of awareness from a reader to the virtual beings created on the page or the screen, through these unyielding black marks? Alice Major refers to the idea of a “shared body plan” (14) between human beings. Shaun Gallagher talks about a “structural equivalence” (75) that even babies assume in their relations with other bodies in action. If we acknowledge such a sense of shared bodily parameters between living human beings, how much greater a step is it to suggest that readers posit a structural equivalence between their own capacities and those they award to fictional characters on the pages in their hands, before their eyes?

One route to understanding how we are able to transfer understanding from our own body to another's comes with the concept of mirror neurons. A brief explanation of these recently discovered (and sometimes contested) cells is that they appear to prime the relevant parts of the brain to take action, not only when an action is planned and executed but also when such an action is simply observed or described. Much scientific discussion addresses the question of whether, by alerting corresponding brain cells, mirror neurons give us an understanding of the intention of the other or just some access to the actions themselves.

To date, the correlations between mirror neurons and the behaviors of readers are not well developed, but it already seems clear that, at most, mirror neurons account for only some of the story. Paul Armstrong makes the strongest case I have been able to locate for a connection between the role of mirror neurons and what happens in our reading brains, and even he moves beyond mirroring to simulating and theorizing:

The experience of primary intersubjectivity is something mirror neurons provide, even if the resonance between action and observation alone cannot always by itself explain the meaning of others' behavior. Reading literary texts can set in motion all of these ways in which self and other interact, from the primary intuitive resonance of mirroring to various levels of simulation and explicit theorizing about motives, goals, and intentions.

Vittorio Gallese was involved in the initial work with mirror neurons. He has partnered with Hannah Wojciehowski to explore the role of what they call “liberated embodied simulation” in literary response. They warn us, “The truth is that neuroscientists do not yet have a clear model of how humans understand each other.” Their theory is that people, in physical, involuntary ways, react with their own bodies to observed or even imagined actions by others, thus embodied simulation. This sensation is “liberated” when it is freed from actual consequences by taking place in an aesthetic zone, in a work of fiction. “Through an immersive state in which our attention is focused on the narrated virtual world, we can fully deploy our simulative resources, letting our defensive guard against daily reality slip for a while.” Gallese and Wojciehowski argue their case elegantly and persuasively, but there is clearly a great deal more we need to know.

According to their proponents, mirror neurons are activated by seeing, by hearing, by encountering a verbal description, by imagining. Many of the textual formats at our disposal today would thus be able to activate their enabling awareness of the other. Gallese and Wojciehowski, however, add one further condition to their account of liberated embodied simulation that is worth a brief consideration: “Another important element of liberated simulation consists in the fact that when we read a novel (or watch a movie, a theatrical play, or behold a painting), we do it almost completely still.” They seem to be arguing for a “hands-free” stance. We have already seen that reading is further along the “action” spectrum than some of the other spectator roles described here. What happens when we move toward reading in game or app form, where the activity of the user plays a constitutive role in creating the fiction? Gallese and Wojciehowski suggest that

the aesthetic experience induced by different forms of art, like theater or cinema, consists of a sort of emotional transfer between actors and spectators that, being forced to inaction, are more open to feelings and emotions.... We believe that the same logic applies to reading novels, stories, poems, etc.

Stillness, they contend, “enables us to deploy fully our embodied simulation resources at the service of immersive relationship with the narrated characters.”

But fictional immersion comes in more active guise as well, especially today as ever more sophisticated apps and games open doors to reading opportunities that call for the body to be exercised in managing the exposure to the story as well as reflectively simulating the embodied actions of the fictional creations. Clearly many questions remain to be considered in the light of ever more explicit brain science and the related theoretical considerations that come in its wake.

## Conclusions

There are more options for reading formats today than there were fifty years ago. The different ways in which children can approach the challenge of learning to read raise many questions about which affordances scaffold what kinds of behaviour. At the same time, neuroscience is beginning to raise questions that would seem to offer insights directly relevant to our understanding of reading.

Located at historic and scientific crossroads of opportunities—both for reading options and for a better understanding of how reading works—this chapter necessarily remains tentative. Nevertheless, one point shines through clearly. There are many ways in which our awareness of the miracle of reading—in relation to a variety of reading platforms—can be enriched by considering the role of the body in this complex achievement.

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## 12 Hands on Reading

### The Body, the Brain, and the Book

*Lydia Kokkola*

Reading is to the mind, what exercise is to the body. As by the one, health is preserved, strengthened, and invigorated: by the other, virtue (which is the health of the mind) is kept alive, cherished, and confirmed.

—Joseph Addison (1)

Joseph Addison's contributions to *The Tatler* (1711–1714) include the above, often-cited, snippet that uses exercise as a metaphor for reading. In this chapter, I take this statement literally as I examine how reading affects our bodies and, vice versa, how our bodies affect our reading. Research in this area has increased during the past decade as changes in the reading practices and developments in research methodologies have converged. The shift from reading printed texts to reading digital screens has brought many aspects of reading that had been taken for granted, and thus made invisible, to the fore. At the same time, developments in functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology have enabled us to detect blood flow within the brain more accurately and less invasively than earlier methods. When areas of the brain are active, they require more oxygen and so fluctuations in blood flow can be used to identify not only which areas are working, but also the sequence in which the various parts of the brain communicate with one another. This technology allows researchers to see how the brain responds to the text in real time. This interplay between brain and text is usually described in ways that privilege the active role of the brain and its actions as it interprets the text. Acknowledging Addison's suggestion that reading is like exercise, I also wish to consider how the text acts upon the brain. And, just as skiing and discus throwing impact differently upon the body, I present evidence indicating that different forms of texts have different impacts on the brain. Children have exceptionally plastic brains at the age they are taught to read, and synaptic pruning during adolescence hones the neural pathways to perform repeatedly needed functions (such as reading) more efficiently, and so the relationship between reading and the body is truly forged in childhood.

As Margaret Mackey highlighted in the previous chapter, human bodies are composed of much more than a brain. The shift to digital formats has also highlighted the other ways in which our bodies are involved in the reading process. Early digital screens were uncomfortable for the eyes, and although digital ink is starting to replace backlighting, many readers still claim that they tire more easily when reading from a screen, and choose to print the text when they need to concentrate. The hands also move differently: the turn of the paper page is not the same as the swipe, tap, and click movements needed to navigate in digital environments. The shift from paper to screen has alerted researchers to the impact these kinds of movements have upon meaning-making while reading. Using the digital-paper distinction as a point of access, I provide an overview of the evidence suggesting that the bodily actions performed around literacy activities affect reading comprehension and also transportation (the feeling of being transported into a story-world). The research on transportation has mostly been conducted on university students, although anthropological material about the integration of digital formats into children's lives enables me to draw tentative conclusions about how the child's body is being shaped in relation to different formats.

If there is a direct connection between bodily actions and reading comprehension, then it might be possible to help children with reading difficulties overcome their problems and become better readers by changing the way they move. The evidence here is still scanty. Reports from specialist teachers are largely positive, but mostly come in the form of anecdotes and sales pitches. There seems little reason to doubt that activities such as combining dance or yoga movements with reading activities seems to help children with problems such as dyslexia and autism, but before such activities are enshrined in educational lore or law, more information about whether they work for the reasons teachers claim they work is needed. As Nina Spada has recently pointed out in relation to second language acquisition and pedagogy, the transmission between theory and practice is not seamless, and can even be damaging if applied without due rigor. Nevertheless, as I argue, this line of inquiry seems promising.

I begin my discussion by comparing traditional paper reading with digital reading, highlighting areas of difference and identifying areas where the reading body seems to play a pivotal role in generating these differences.

### **Meaning-Making Online and Offline**

Since the New London group (led by James Gee and Allan Luke) coined the term "New Literacies" in 1996 to describe the activities involved in making sense of online digital texts, there has been

considerable debate about the extent to which these literacy skills differ from traditional book reading. At the same time, digital technology is developing so that issues like eyestrain caused by poor quality screens are having less impact and printed books are starting to resemble website designs. Attempts to summarize the vast array of research on meaning-making in online and offline environments will inevitably fail to capture the nuances of reading behavior. Moreover, these studies still tend to treat paper reading as the “normal,” unmarked category from which digital reading differs, whereas from the child’s point of view, the two mutually coexist. Since my interests lie in capturing the reading child’s body, the overview below highlights research connected to the reading body.

Clearly there are physical differences in the way readers interact with screens as opposed to paper pages in books. Hand-held devices like Kindles have reduced the differences, and made it possible to snuggle up in bed with a text in either format in a manner that was impossible with early e-books. Nevertheless, as research by Jackie Marsh and her team at Sheffield University has established, young children’s access to digital technology usually takes the form of iPads, laptops, and smartphones rather than Kindles, and they are usually used in semi-supervised family spaces such as living rooms and kitchens rather than beds (Marsh, and Bishop; Burke and Marsh; Willett et al.). Given the connections between space and identity explored in Erin Spring’s contribution to this collection, it seems reasonable to assume that the physical spaces in which reading takes place contribute to meaning formation. Moreover, as I noted in the introduction to this section, reading is often suffused with nostalgia: readers recall not only the book but the experience of reading; where they were, what else was happening in their life at the time, how they felt, and various other sensory reactions. Alison Waller’s study of elderly people’s recall of books they read as children is filled with recollections of far more than the literature itself: physical spaces and physical sensations as well as emotional reactions are intimate parts of the meaning-making process.

Although equivalents of the functions that surround reading—such as highlighting, marking, skimming, cross-checking—can all be performed in both formats, in practice people tend to read fiction on paper and information on digital formats (Nielsen Books). As academics, the advantages of digital journals for locating information, citing easily, and quick scrolling are familiar. The tendency to read fiction on paper is not as easily explained. For children, the situation is slightly different. In the first place, sales of information books intended for young readers are still very low in both formats (Nielsen Books). School books and internet use, which do not show up in the Nielsen data, are the main sources of information texts for young people. Sales of e-books have increased greatly, led by a significant rise in the number of people buying young



adult fiction to read on tablets of various kinds, although it seems that the figures are somewhat distorted by a few key books—*The Hunger Games* is specifically mentioned as causing a spike in sales for Kindle (Millot, Nielsen Books). Nevertheless, 50% of teenagers surveyed still strongly or generally prefer print, and only 21% strongly or generally preferred e-books (the remaining 28% expressed no preference) (Millot). For younger children, the expense of tablets means that access to digital formats tends to be controlled to a far greater extent than access to paper books. These differences affect the interactions formed around the reading.

As Betty Sargeant has surmised, “people *read* e-books, whereas they *use* book apps” (454). That is, e-books are primarily a text-based experience, whereas book apps are primarily associated with activities: in the case of the reading child, this means playing. The different formats, then, are associated with slightly different reasons for reading. Content and form—in practice—are divided. Consequently, the ways in which readers’ bodies are involved in the physical act of reading tend to be divided by content. Louise Rosenblatt’s distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading—broadly speaking for child readers—maps onto form. Readers tend to touch, swipe, tap, and scroll on digital devices when reading for information (“efferently”), whereas they tend to snuggle and turn pages when they are reading fiction (“aesthetically”).

Since form and content appear, broadly speaking, to be connected, then the impact of form on meaning-making, and the role of the body in this process are urgent issues. Comparisons of how efficiently information is processed in digital and paper formats have been published regularly since the early 1990s when screen quality was much poorer. These early studies revealed that people understood and retained less information when they read it on screen (Dillon), and despite great leaps in digital ink technology, the physical strain digital formats place on the body continue to affect comprehension (Mangen, “Putting”) and memory recall after reading (Mangen, Walgermo, and Brønnick). Moreover, paper formats seem to improve readers’ capacities to digest complex information (Stoop, Kreutzer, and Kircz), and immerse themselves into a story (Mangen “Digitization”; Mangen, and Kuiken). Digital texts, on the other hand, are superior for “quick information gathering, communication and navigation” (Stoop, Kreutzer, and Kircz). The reasons for these differences are not yet clear, but the physical ways in which our bodies perform literate acts and how our brain processes materials have proved the most likely lines of inquiry. More research is needed to identify exactly which features of the digital/paper forms and their associated bodily movement are causing these differences (Margolin, et al.; Kokkola), but considerable research on how the brain and text interact while reading is already available.

## **Brain-Text Relationships in Meaning-Making**

The reading process begins with the hands as they bring the text into view. The eyes then begin to skim the surface, and the brain provides tools for interpreting the symbols. Before I describe what the brain is doing when it interprets symbols, I should point out that the brain was not designed for the purpose of learning to read, and so has to make use of processing devices that, from an evolutionary point of view, were designed to perform different functions (Sousa 32). Maryanne Wolf observes that developing the alphabet took 2,000 years, yet children are expected to grasp this principle within 2,000 days of life (19). By 3,000 days, they are expected to be able to read silently and independently, and from 4,000 days onward the expectation is that the majority of their learning will come from reading. Although the brain is not designed for reading, by learning to read humans have “rearranged the very organization of our brain, which in turn expanded on the ways we were able to think, which altered the intellectual evolution of our species” (Wolf 3). In short, children’s developing bodies are altered by learning to read, and this affects all areas of their lived world.

In their review of neuroscience for reading education, researchers Hruby and Goswami caution against paying too much attention to such matters at the expense of common sense and experience (157). As I observed in the introduction to this section, neurological evidence should not be treated as though it were either neutral or indisputable. Nevertheless, neophrenology (the study of how areas of the brain function) reveals how demanding the task of automating reading is for the child’s brain as it identifies features of letters, examines the context of the letters, the sounds associated with them, and the meanings of those sounds, and moves swiftly to evaluating the syntax and semantics. This process is not linear: the frontal lobes that enable readers to form decisions and activate memory and the cerebellum that is critical for timing brain functions are constantly activated (see Kokkola 63–64 for a fuller account). When children are learning to read, they make more general use of each of these areas. When faced with a very complex text, readers of any age will also resort to a more generalized use of each area. Adult readers’ efficient text processing is a result of synaptic pruning in adolescence. Synaptic pruning simply means that the most valuable neural pathways are clarified because those that are rarely used are “pruned” away. For most people, the pathways for reading concentrate in the left hemisphere known as the ventral route (Wolf 142). Wolf also notes that dyslexic readers take the dorsal route through the right hemisphere, but cautions that it is too early to say whether this difference is a cause or consequence of dyslexia, and Hruby and Goswami caution against using such techniques for diagnosing reading difficulties when inexpensive, tried and trusted pen-and-paper tests are just as effective.

Studies of how the brain processes the material after the initial decoding phases described so far are still in their infancy, but some exciting patterns have been uncovered. For my purposes here, studies demonstrating connections between language and action are the most valuable. Friedemann Pulvermüller and his research team have identified functional links between the motor and language systems in the brain (Pulvermüller; Pulvermüller et al.). By comparing the fMRI scans of the same subjects as they either read or performed physical actions, they were able to demonstrate that

the left hemispheric cortical systems for language and action are linked to each other in a category-specific manner and that activation in motor and premotor areas can influence the processing of specific kinds of words semantically related to arm or leg actions.  
(Pulvermüller et al. 793)

What this finding suggests is that reading about an action is processed in the same way as actually performing the action. Moreover, this comparison of the same person's brain under related circumstances controls for the problem of false-positives raised by Eklund, Nichols, and Knutsson. Eklund et al. demonstrate that the statistical tests used to measure large sets of fMRI data appear to reveal the existence of a phenomenon (a false-positive) 70% of the time, when they should reveal it in only 5% of cases. The evidence from researchers such as Pulvermüller and his team is more qualitative, and is controlled by its use of repeat subject design. It offers support for the idea that the transportation experienced by readers arises from the very literal sensation of feeling that the ideas on the page are transformed into lived experiences. If the human brain processes action (and perhaps emotion) in the same way that it processes text about actions (and perhaps emotion), then the feeling that readers are trying to describe when they explain how a fictional character has influenced their lives may—on a physical level—be the same as for living people.

The above studies examine only how text is processed by the brain without reference to the medium in which the text is read. Learning to read in either format increases the capacity to think and feel. As Wolf continues, “Paradoxically, the developmental shift to specialized left-hemisphere activation for basic decoding purposes allows more bilateral activation for meaning and comprehension processes.... We are no longer mere decoders of information” (143). The forging of efficient neural pathways during childhood and honing them through synaptic pruning in adolescence—the changes that reading enacts upon the reading body—create space for what Birkerts terms “deep reading”—that is, the reader's complete immersion in the fictional world or the argument and logic of factual information. This evidence does not distinguish

between online and offline reading, but there is evidence to suggest that online reading is less likely to produce deep reading. With our current screen technology, fatigue problems are still likely to be a causal factor for some time, but the evidence suggests that this is not the sole problem. In terms of neurology, at least, the difficulties of reading deeply online appear to come from a more primitive source.

Nicholas Carr draws attention to the increased activity in the frontal lobes where decision making takes place when readers are reading online as opposed to reading on paper (116). He locates the problem as lying in the distractors like hyperlinks, pop-ups, and so on. The human brain is designed to pay attention to moving objects, for the obvious reason that they can cause harm. Flags announcing the arrival of email, and so on, harness this survival mechanism. When the reading brain responds to distractors like this, it forms neural pathways that expect diversion. In short, online reading has taught readers to expect distraction rather than immersing themselves in the text. In the following section, I review empirical studies of this phenomenon by Anne Mangen and her colleagues. Together with van der Weel, Mangen proposes three explanatory frameworks as to why hypertext novels have not proved popular (Mangen and van der Weel). One of their frameworks is about the pleasure readers take in "transportation": the feeling of being lost in a book. The hyperlink breaks the illusion, and so is undesired. In contrast, internet reading is primarily motivated by the desire to seek information, making hyperlinks desirable albeit at the expense of deep reading. The ubiquitous multimodality of the internet celebrates readers' desire for distraction with images, links, and numerous other means of tearing us away from solid lines of text. The activity of clicking from link to link keeps readers engaged and active in ways that continuous prose cannot offer, but they are not engaged in processing the text. They are immersed in the technology, not the content.

Gary Small and his team of researchers investigated more precisely how the brain is altered by online searching activities. Their original goal was to examine whether these activities could stimulate the brains of the elderly, and they used fMRI techniques to map what happened. They found that after just an hour of internet use a day for 5 days, activity in the areas of the brain that are associated with decision making (the frontal pole, anterior temporal region, anterior and posterior cingulate, and the hippocampus) more than doubled (Small et al.; Small and Vorgan). Again, caution must be exercised before we claim that the results are the same for children learning to read. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence available to claim that following hyperlinks and other link-click-link literacies do forge different neural pathways from traditional print narratives. And these pathways produce more superficial information processing than materials without distractions.

The eyes and the brain are not the only parts of the body involved in reading. I began this section with a reminder that reading begins with the hands that lift the text into view. The hands continue to play a part in meaning-making as they enable readers to navigate around the text: scrolling, flipping, swiping, and turning involve the hands. In the following section, I examine how other parts of the body contribute to the reading process.

### **The Haptics of Reading: Bodily Movements and Meaning-Making**

The emergence of digital technology, and the shift from page turning to swiping and scrolling that it heralded in, have provided an impetus for examining the haptics of reading. Not since the previous technological leap from scrolls to books some 800 years ago has there been such a significant change in the way in which we use our hands to read. Nevertheless, as Margaret Mackey points out, finding “a study of reading processes that takes full account of what the hands are doing as the reader comprehends the text” is difficult (112). Mackey’s contribution to this volume goes some way toward addressing this lacuna in our knowledge of meaning-making, and so does the work of Anne Mangen and her colleagues based at Norway’s National Centre for Reading Education and Research. I draw heavily on their findings as I continue to use contrasts in the way in which the body relates to digital and paper texts to examine the role of the child’s body in learning to read.

Although the clicking, scrolling, and swiping of e-books and the page turning of paper books involve the hands, Mangen suggests that they are very different, primarily because the former “takes[s] place at a distance from the digital text, which is, somehow, somewhere inside the computer, the e-book or the mobile phone,” whereas the movements on paper are tangible (*Hypertext* 408). That is, our hands are physically the cause of the turning page, our fingers feel the texture of the paper surface—glossy magazines, newspaper and printed books literally have a different feel—finger, thumb, and eye coordination combine to result in the lifting of the page, whereas the movements on screen depend on algorithms. Gravity plays no role in digital environments. Mangen refers to this distinction between the actual manipulation of the paper text versus the virtual manipulation of the digital text as “the ergonomics of reading,” and suggests that it plays a critical role at the point when readers shift from learning to read to reading to learn, that is, in the pre-teen years (“Putting” 14–16).

Drawing on the work of Marie-Laure Ryan, Mangen distinguishes between “technological immersion” and “phenomenological immersion” (*Hypertext* 406). The former refers to the immersion into the world of game-playing. Gaming can be an immersive experience capable of

keeping players highly alert for sustained periods. Some games require no more than the keyboard and mouse or touchpad, but others involve more specific tools, the most common being variants of the joystick but can also include simulation devices that are game specific (for instance, golf clubs are used to operate devices that provide feedback to people who want to improve their golf swings). Strategy, high-speed decision making, and the power to alter the course of events are key aspects of the pleasure taken in technological immersion. Technological immersion is an embodied immersion, but so too is phenomenological immersion. Phenomenological immersion refers to the sensation of immersing oneself into a fictional world or into another's argument, sustained primarily by one's own mental capacities for imagination, logic, prediction, and so on. Since these activities take place inside our heads, their embodied characteristics have been overlooked, but researchers like Mangen and Mackey suggest that the tactile experience of navigating a paper text may be more important than was realized. That said, Mackey's study of the pleasure young adults took in reading novels, watching films, and playing video games found that there were more similarities than differences across the various formats.

Arguing that there is "a crucial link between the sensory-motor experience of the materiality of the support and the cognitive processing of the text content," Mangen (*Hypertext* 406) proposes that technological immersion arises from the ease of the sensory-motor affordances provided by computers. By proffering "something beyond our present experience," hyperlinks and other opportunities to respond during reading are experienced as a demand, "and such affordance is necessarily incompatible with phenomenological immersion" (Mangen *Hypertext* 409). For phenomenological immersion, readers must—as Coleridge taught us—willingly suspend disbelief and allow the text to take the lead. Whether one is reading fiction or academic argumentation, deep reading involves accepting the authorial lead and genuinely endeavoring to understand the world or argument as it is presented in the text (Sell). Mangen's argument is that the lack of responses demanded during bodily negotiations with paper texts is conducive to immersion. Readers do not suspend their critical facilities when they slavishly read the pages in the order of presentation, but they do process the text on its own terms as well (Mangen "Putting" 13; "Digitization" 98ff). Together with Jean-Luc Velay, Mangen examined children using electronic tool boxes to create geometric shapes, and noted that the technology demands greater abstract thinking skills than producing the same shapes with a pencil (76). Consequently, the children focused on the technology rather than the geometry. Mangen and Velay's point is that technologies that encourage technological immersion at the expense of phenomenological immersion will inhibit children from engaging deeply with the content. Phenomenological immersion allows for both completely uncritical

immersion in a fantastic world, and the double perception of critical reading. Both forms of reading are dependent on a lack of choice. The pleasure of technological immersions arises from the sensation of choice. (I use the word *sensation* advisedly: in practice, the game-makers have predetermined limited ranges of choices.)

Mangen has followed up her theoretical arguments with empirical testing, and her views are strongly supported by the evidence. In collaboration with Don Kuiken, she investigated readers' experiences of transportation when reading fiction on iPads, Kindle apps, and paper booklets. They found that iPad readers reported the lowest levels of transportation, and that this correlated strongly with their weaker ability to form narrative coherence. In their supplementary analyses, they noted that iPad users had more difficulties resisting distractions related to manipulating the reading medium, even among those who were experienced with the technology. The differences for nonfiction were not as stark. (See also Mangen, "Putting" 21–23; Mangen and Schilhab for overviews of research in this area.) Some caution should be exerted in interpreting these findings, however. Ackerman and Goldsmith's comparison of students' comprehension and retention of factual information suggests that the differences are not directly caused by the medium, but by expectations about the medium. When the experimenters controlled the time allowed for study, no differences between students' ability to comprehend and retain information read in digital or paper formats were found. However, when the students determined how much time should be spent, they allowed far less time for study. This led Ackman and Goldsmith to surmise that digital reading is assumed to be shallow, and that this effectively becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (29). A similar effect may have influenced the findings by Mangen and Kuiken. Moreover, a study by Morineau et al. suggests that the concrete materiality of cues provided by books provides a crucial link between the sensorimotor system and memory. They are referring to the phenomenon of remembering that a crucial piece of information was located "about one third through the book, on the left-hand side, near the bottom of the page." This kind of information is not available in the e-book: page or location numbers are not transformed into a tactile experience, and even the position of the page is altered as soon as one scrolls, which prevents readers from using spatial cues to locate information.

If researchers like Mangen are correct in their suggestions that changes in the way the body connects to the text are the cause of differences in comprehension, then the logical proposal would be to consider how changing the ways children use their bodies when they are learning to read could support them. In the final section, I describe a literacy education program that suggests that this would indeed produce the desired results.

## Dancing into Literacy?

Penny Bryson, founder of Reading in Rhythm®, is a speech pathologist whose methods of working with children with learning difficulties, primarily dyslexia, attention-deficit disorder, and autism are based on the assertion that changing people's bodies can help them resolve these problems. As a newly qualified speech therapist, she was working with a group of boys whom she could not persuade to stay calm enough for long enough for her to teach them. Despite her best efforts, the children were constantly fidgeting, rough-housing, and interrupting the flow of the lesson with their scuffles. To provide each student with a clearly delimited space of his own so he could not disturb others, she taped together some large boxes, the kind in which a washing machine might be delivered. The boys excitedly climbed into the boxes and, for the first time, were quiet and expectant. Bryson turned on some taped music and got them performing a simple side-to-side dance step. This was simply intended to be a way of keeping their bodies occupied on something other than messing about while she taught the things she had planned for her earlier lessons. The positive effect it had on the students' reading performance led her to research that could explain the phenomenon. Since then, she has developed a system that combines dance movements with literacy education. Children in her programs begin by responding to electronic stimuli on a screen, and gradually increase the complexity of both the physical movements and the material they are reading. Most of the time, both staff and students are barefoot, which increases the stimuli the body can provide to the brain. Bryson's successes are impressive: at the Nineteenth European Society for the Study of Literacy's conference in Klagenfurt, she presented a case study of a child born with cerebral palsy who not only learned to speak, read, and write, he also became an American football player!

Bryson claims that her success lies in the way the choreography targets the brain. More specifically, diagonal movements that demand cross-hemisphere communication are used to increase communication across the corpus callosum and to "tune" the cerebellum (which is responsible for the timing between the various parts of any complex process like reading). This is a practical, hands-on interpretation of what Nicolson et al. dub "the cerebellar hypothesis," which is based on four major claims:

- 1 Learning difficulties such as dyslexia can be described as difficulties in skill automatization.
- 2 The cerebellum deficit hypothesis can predict difficulties in information processing and motor skills.
- 3 Dyslexic adults show signs of cerebellar impairment.
- 4 The main cause of dyslexia is impaired implicit learning arising from cerebellar abnormality.

(paraphrased from Nicolson et al., "Dyslexia" 508–9)



The hypothesis was first presented in *Trends in Neurosciences*, and other experts in the field were invited to critique the proposal. A major criticism that Nicolson et al. acknowledge (“Dyslexia”) is that the evidence lies on correlational data. In other words, like the classic finding that death by drowning and eating ice cream correlate strongly (but are not causally related), one should not yet assume that cerebellar impairment is the cause of dyslexia. The cause may be Factor X: in the ice-cream and drowning case, the causal factor is hot weather that persuades people to go swimming and to eat ice cream. In the 15 years since the cerebellar hypothesis was floated, no clear Factor X has been identified, but researchers are still cautious about the full-scale acceptance of the theory. Catherine Stoodley, for instance, notes that other areas of the brain are also involved, and the specific role of the cerebellum “in the etiology of dyslexia is still not clear” (199).

One possible Factor X is that all forms of exercise improve academic achievement. This idea was proposed by Sibley and Etnier, who examined the effect sizes of a range of variables that identified exercise as a key factor in young children’s cognitive development. In school settings, experiments investigating the impact of sport on learning have largely uncovered success stories. Kubesch et al., for instance, found that a 30-minute exercise break was enough to improve 13- to 14-year-old students’ ability to focus on a task, but a 5-minute break was not enough. Stroth et al., for their part, provide findings that suggest that there is an upper limit. General fitness did improve executive control (the ability to concentrate), but acute exercise had a negative impact. Budde et al., however, used exercises that resembled those used by Bryson to rehearse coordination to produce an improvement in the ability to concentrate. And using information about physical activity and social class to predict academic achievement, Stevens, Stevenson, and Lochbaum found correlations for mathematics and reading, but not general academic performance.

Wading through the evidence, I find no reason to doubt Bryson’s claims about the success of modifying bodily behavior in order to improve reading abilities, but I am not entirely sold on the claim that the cause is the fine-tuning of the cerebellum or the opening of the corpus callosum. The evidence—both in the research and in classroom practice—favors the conclusion that exercising before reading improves performance. At the very least, this means that we need to pay more attention to children’s bodies as they learn to read. Reading is an embodied act.

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## Section IV

# Commodifications

Our final section examines how the child's body functions as a commodity within Western cultures, focusing on how popular culture functions as a means of disciplining the child into a limited range of possible outcomes. The Cartesian separation of mind and body paves the way for this commodification of the body to the extent that Elizabeth Grosz claims that the body "must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production or constitution... it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product" (23). Taking up the same notions, Justine Coupland and Richard Gwyn identify a paradox at the heart of Cartesian dualism that has allowed the commodification of the body to flourish: "If I am to be judged exclusively on the evidence of my body, how do I reconcile this with the person my body denies me from being?" (5). Consumer culture is driven by industries devoted to body-care, bodily adornment, dieting, and keeping fit. Social media feed these industries as individuals are expected to expose images of themselves to surveillance daily if not hourly. Children today are growing up in an environment where their images may be posted on social media several times a day, often in a manner designed to promote an ideal of family happiness. We do not know how this constant exposure will affect children, but the chapters in this section offer some insights into how various media treat the child's body as a commodity.

Coupland and Gwyn are solely concerned with adult bodies. Their interest in youth does not extend beyond pointing out the valorization of youth and how this affects perceptions and experiences of the aging body. They mention the familiar phenomenon of feeling like the same person one was in one's twenties, despite inhabiting an aging body (a feeling that embraces Cartesian dualism to the full), and note that a similar disparity exists between how disabled people view their own bodies and how they are perceived by others. These observations are equally relevant for understanding the child's body as a commodity. In *Relentless Progress*, Jack Zipes explains that

It is one of the worst kept secrets in the world that, within the past fifty years or so, we have reconfigured our children to act and

behave as commodities and agents of consumerism, and we continue to invent ways to incorporate them flawlessly into socio-economic systems that compromise their integrity and make them complicit in criminal behavior such as mutual economic exploitation.

(27)

If, as Grosz claims, the body is the most significant cultural product, then the valorization of youth has resulted in children's bodies becoming one of the most highly contested cultural products. The child's body, as already noted, is constantly subjected to adult gaze. Children learn to understand their bodies in a consumerist environment. The result, as Kelly Hager explains, is that "children's culture reveals an overwhelming interest in describing, depicting, and reproducing images of the body in order to educate, orient, and delight the child consumer" (17).

Hager's observation addresses just one part of "children's culture": the culture that adults provide *for children*, but there are two other aspects of "children's culture" that this collection endeavors to bring to the fore: images of the child's body that are primarily intended *for adult* gaze. Eva Cherniavsky observes that mass culture "circulates bodies promiscuously; its technologies and commercial logic ensure the production of desirable body images made available to the widest market" (29). This "widest market" must appeal to adults who hold the purse strings. At the same time, Alissa Quart's study of how teenagers are "branded" (immersed into the world of consumerism and guided into loyalty to consumer brands) demonstrates how "children's culture" is also *about* the youthful body. The third aspect, indicated by the possessive apostrophe "s" in children's culture is the least examined: the culture children create for themselves.

Iona and Peter Opie's ground-breaking work on children's own culture—*The People in the Playground*—captured children's use of games, riddles, and rhymes that could be traced back hundreds of years. For Mackey, playgrounds "are also spaces in which received culture is made local, housed in children's own bodies" (291). Mackey's discussion of play, including responses to literature and other cultural artefacts through play, highlights the body as a means of knowing:

Children out in the school playground, even today, are marshalling their physical, intellectual, and imaginative resources to sharpen their interpretive tools in ways that make sense in their bodies as well as in their minds. They adapt the stories they have inherited through all the myriad cultural routes now at their disposal to conditions as utterly local as the playground markings and drain covers.

(305)

Mackey makes this point amid fears that this rich culture was being destroyed by the simultaneous emergence of digital media in the home

and a surveillance culture that rendered playing outside “dangerous.” She continues by asking how this will affect children’s ability to make sense of narratives:

Many children today live in worlds where their physical expression is highly constrained and externally organized. Are we closing off an important source of both physical and mental equipment that provides them with invisible ways of coming to terms with the stories that are most salient to them? If so, we may be creating new forms of poverty.

(305)

In response to the kinds of fears Mackey articulates so clearly, Jackie Marsh and her colleagues at Sheffield University have engaged in a broad range of ethnographic studies that examine how children’s own culture has changed (Marsh *Popular Culture*, “children’s play”; Marsh and Richards; Brooks et al.). Like the Opies, they still find that playgrounds are “sites where culture is practiced, produced, reproduced, regulated and negotiated” (Marsh and Richards 10), and they provide evidence of children recreating sequences from video games in the playground. In addition, they find exactly the same rhymes being adapted to local or recent events that the Opies found in their study. They also provide evidence to show that children integrate digital media into fantasy play, and note that digital formats, such as Skype, allow for exactly the same games their grandparents played (for instance, they cite examples of grandparents playing peek-a-boo via Skype). To summarize and somewhat oversimplify the numerous studies of Marsh and her colleagues, children’s own culture seems remarkably resilient and unchanged.

This resilience should not tempt us into complaisance. Games involving acting out sequences from loved and shared narratives may be the same, but the content of those games is largely determined by adult promotions of ideas *for* and *about* childhood. Those of us who grew up acting out sequences from *Tarzan* or “Cowboys and Indians” films may deservedly burn with the shame for the racist content of our childhood play, even as we offer our own children equally questionable values for their consumption. In an endeavor to capture the constant presence of popular culture in informing children’s perceptions of their own bodies, we begin the section with an historical paper on the culture of food preparation in nineteenth-century children’s stories. Samantha Christensen and Roxanne Harde’s chapter “Little Cooks” highlights the use of food and eating behavior as a means of shaping and disciplining girls’ bodies. Their analysis draws on Michel Foucault’s discussions of the disciplined body, Hartsock’s consideration of female bodies and power, and Bordo’s work on the constrained female body to reveal the body politics of the stories by four authors. They show how nineteenth-century



authors predominantly promoted ideals of thinness and deprivation, although—like Martin and Washington in our section on political bodies—they also see that some authors celebrate the kitchen as a space for female bonding.

Jennifer M. Miskec picks up where Christensen and Harde leave off in her study of ballet books. Using a Siebert Award Honor book *To Dance*, a graphic novel by Siena Cherson Siegel, to illustrate her argument, Miskec shows how ballerinas are not people who practice the art of ballet, they are creatures who simulate balletic movement and wear ballet costumes. Comparing the figure of the ballerina with witches, fairy princesses, and mermaids, Miskec reveals how the dancer is defined by her disciplined body. As a result, she is simultaneously real and not real, and how the idealization of her body negates the representation of its exploitation. In other words, the problematic cultural standards that surround ballet narratives actually discourage readers from appreciating the “messier aspects” of a ballerina’s exploitation (even when explicitly shown), such as the damage done to her feet by pointe work.

Kate Norbury continues the discussion of dance with a chapter analyzing how same-sex desire in *Leading Ladies* (2010) and *Glee* (Seasons 3–6: 2012–2015) is expressed through dance. The dancing body, Norbury suggests, provides access to forms of knowledge and cultural production, even as it provides a means by which the dancer can express herself and communicate with others nonverbally. Lance Weldy’s chapter concludes the section with an analysis of a much younger dancing body. Weldy homes in on the commodification of the young child’s body in beauty pageants. Like Miskec, Weldy focuses on the commodification of the young child’s body as a site of sexual desire as he studies a real child, six-year-old Alana “Honey Boo Boo” Thompson. Thompson is a beauty pageant star who attracted public attention during a performance of a “Daisy Duke” routine in *Toddlers & Tiaras* (2009–2013) to the extent that her family received their own reality TV series, *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (2012). Weldy’s examination of the culture of children’s beauty pageants exposes how performances of both the sexualized and knowing child are marketed and popularized. At the same time, he points to the implicit classism as the series showcases the Thompson family’s redneck culture.

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## 13 “Little cooks”

### Food and the Disciplined Body in Nineteenth-Century Stories for Girls

*Samantha Christensen and Roxanne Harde*

The body is not only a text of culture. It is also... a *practical*, direct locus of social control.

—Susan Bordo (165)

Early in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Amy experiences a “Valley of Humiliation” after her teacher discovers that she is hiding pickled limes in her desk. After she explains to her sisters the necessity of possessing this treasured food in order to establish a comfortable niche in the social hierarchy of her school, Meg asks, “Are limes the fashion now?” (69). At this moment in the novel, food acts as a determinant of social classification and acceptance for the March girls. Laden with meaning beyond its purpose for nourishment, food, in this case the limes, can become both the marker for and means of disciplining the attractive and marketable female body. Throughout her long career, Alcott described the ideal feminine body and its opposite through food. Food, for Alcott, offers a means of disciplining girls’ bodies into thin, perpetually hungry beacons of marriageability, all the while shaming young women who indulge their appetites. Food also offers a means of situating girls’ bodies in their appropriate social classifications. With this intimate connection between gender and social construction, food can take on oppressive characteristics and create tension and anxieties in eaters, especially in the lives of female eaters. Appetite suppression, embodiment, and domestic confinement played enormous roles in the lives of girls and young women in nineteenth-century America. This chapter explores the ways in which several nineteenth-century stories use food and eating behavior as a means of shaping and disciplining girls’ bodies. Our discussion is grounded in children’s texts from women authors. These stories, all published between 1875 and 1885, use food as a means of shaping their female characters into opposed bodies. We begin with Louisa May Alcott’s and Eleanor Putnam’s stories about girls and young women whose bodies are commodified through constrained, servile relationships to food. While Alcott’s and Putnam’s girls cook and serve, they are not meant to eat. However, in “Marigold House,” Sarah

Orne Jewett's "little cooks" *do* eat—they push the boundaries of the disciplined female body and gesture toward a more progressive politics of female eating. Jewett's girls raise questions about the possibilities of more liberatory relationships to food in these texts, and lead to a discussion of Sarah Winter Kellogg, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who create girls whose active and autonomous bodies are written with food.

### **"Macaroons, lady's-fingers, and bonbons": Disciplining the Body through the Appetite**

In "The Candy Country" (1885), Louisa May Alcott creates a fantastical food space and warns children, particularly girls, against the dangers of overindulgence. She reminds her young readers of the social obligations women face regarding food and its preparation. The story begins as Lilly, a privileged girl given to "throwing stones at turtles," takes her mother's umbrella to walk to school against the advice of her nurse (16). When the wind picks up both umbrella and child, Lilly ends up in the Candy Country, where everything is edible, but nothing is nutritious. Alcott indulges in fanciful descriptions of the sweet and sparkling place and in Lilly's indulgence in all manner of candy, even as the narrative offers a telling commentary on what Lilly eats and the lessons she learns. In the Candy Country, even the people are edible, and the consequences of Lilly's "going about tasting so many different kinds of sweets" reinscribe social codes surrounding gender and indulgence. She finds the boys and men filled with cordials, so that "when she slyly ate one now and then," her punishment comes in the form of a "hot, strong taste" (17). Old people are comfortable flavors, but old maids are bitter. She is fondest of "dear babies" and "delicately flavored young ladies," and she longs to eat "the lovely white brides" but forbears rather than spoil a wedding (18). Lilly eventually becomes badly behaved, "as children always are when they live on candy," and after running amok and knocking off the king's head, the candy people chase her away (18). Lilly escapes first to Cake-land, where she finally becomes interested in her lessons and learns to make gingerbread. Her final stop is Bread-land where she stays until she has perfected the art of bread-making. Her perfect loaf is her ticket home, where she makes "a nice little housekeeper," as she changes from being "a sickly, fretful child into a fine, strong healthy woman, because she ate very little cake and candy" (23). Even as it forces home the didactic lesson about too much candy, the story suggests that a girl's preferred food can predict her future. Lilly will marry a proper young man (not one filled with liquor) and have "sweet" babies, but first she must develop an appropriately restrained appetite—one that cultivates a thin, attractive body—even as she learns the domestic arts.

Alcott is not alone in coding the bodies of girls and young women to suit both gender and social expectations. In many of these texts, girls

"nibble" or "daintily" pick at their food rather than actually eating, whereas boys are driven by hearty appetites (Silver 55). In her short story, "Fanchon's German" (1885), Eleanor Putnam outlines these distinctions between boys' and girls' appetite expectations as her young female characters organize an important social event. Fanchon (who was born Frances, but was much too elegant to be called such an American name) organizes a "german"—a coming-of-age cotillion, typically commencing at midnight, where guests share a late meal and partake in dancing afterward—with her five closest friends. While preparing for the most important social event of her teenage life, she is presented with a difficult decision between helping a starving homeless child and booking a fashionable musician for her party. Fanchon and her close friends, referred to as the "bosom six," seem to have achieved an effortless relationship with food (204). As they work together to organize a "heap of brilliant, useless" party favors, they "[refresh] themselves with a nourishing repast of macaroons, lady's-fingers, and bonbons," daintily nibbling at the unsubstantial delicacies (204). They are fashionable young members of the American bourgeoisie, and they must behave as ladies in social situations involving food. For these young women, eating is a social event, and these girls must behave appropriately by limiting their food intake and behaving as though their appetites are nonexistent. As Fanchon "[pours] chocolate from the most charming turquoise pot ever seen," it becomes obvious that the main objective for this "nourishing repast" is not to satisfy the girls' hunger, but to flaunt material wealth (204). Rather than an opportunity for nourishment, the meal is social pageantry that solidifies bourgeois status. The girls' disciplined appetites situate their bodies in their appropriate social positions, as they are grounded in upper-class *feminine* convention. Had these girls been boys, the feast may well have involved a hearty meal fit to satisfy the celebrated appetites of strapping young men, but the fact that they are young women keeps them in a perpetual state of hunger, mitigated only by nibbling at dainty refreshments.

Susan Bordo notes that Victorian women were the first to deny themselves food in order to achieve an aesthetic ideal as preoccupations with body image became particularly consuming (185). In the late nineteenth century, cultural correlations between slender bodies/repressed appetites and ideal femininity led to discussions of appropriate female eating behavior in popular fiction and conduct manuals for women and girls. Women were instructed, as Bordo notes, to "consume in a feminine way (as little as possible and with the utmost precaution against unseemly shows of desire)" (116). In "Fanchon's German," Putnam's girls adhere to these eating precautions as they nibble delicately at in-nutritious snacks while organizing party favors. The girls acknowledge the division between masculine and feminine food as they fill "the fanciful bonbonnières," being sure to separate the "masculine favors from

the feminine" (204). By separating the party favors according to gender they ensure that girls eat dainty, "feminine" food while the boys eat like men. The girls' curbed appetites contribute to their slender bodies—an attribute that is confirmed in the single illustration of the young women included in the story—and help crystalize their femininity. However, not every member of the bosom six conforms to the precedent of thinness (and hunger) set for them. Jessie Cabot, whose image seems to be excluded from the illustration in the story, "was as lazy as a luxurious yellow kitten, and looked not so very unlike one, as she nestled in her low chair by the fire, with her round little face" (204). Beth Younger points out in a study of contemporary thinness in young adult fiction a fact that is no less true in earlier stories, that readers assume a character is thin until given cues that denote her as chubby. Jessie Cabot's "round" face and "sleepy eyes" set her apart from the other young women in the group, and relegate her as the opposite of ideal femininity. She contributes little to the party preparations, as she rejects the benevolent actions that shape the other girls' days and decisions; her coming-out party, hosted a few months prior to Fanchon's, becomes the benchmark of failure and a sign that she will not marry well or even maintain her friendships with this coterie of girls. Thin, hungry, and domestically *useful* bodies situate these young women in upper-class femininity, and work to develop polarity between acceptable and unacceptable female eating behavior.

Alcott, like Putnam in "Fanchon's German," focuses on female attitudes toward food and advocates relationships to eating and the appetite that are embedded in control, repression, and appropriate social identity. Like the bosom six in Putnam's short story, Alcott's young women in "Jerseys; or, the Girls' Ghost" (1884) learn to control their appetites in order to enter into womanhood as healthy, attractive, and socially conditioned members of upper-class American society. As the story opens, the young female students at Madame Stein's Select Boarding School gossip about Miss Orne, their new teacher, whose "fine figure" and lovely "roses and cream" complexion become a preoccupation for the young scholars (680). The girls, whose "minds and manners were much cultivated, but bodies rather neglected," recognize that Miss Orne's "fine figure" is not a product of French corsets or complicated back braces, but rather of "plenty of rest, fine food, and fresh air," and become concerned that Miss Orne's healthy habits will be encouraged in their own education (682). "Plump Cordelia" worries that Miss Orne is energetic, and proclaims, "I do hate to be hurried," while fashionable Maude says, "I do hope Miss Orne isn't full of the new notions about clothes, and food, and exercise, and rights and rubbish of that sort. Mamma hates such ideas, and so do I" (681). Alcott's push for young women's "healthy habits" is progressive, as she envisions a regimen for taking the girl out of the corset, but her ultimate goal for these young women remains

entrenched in disciplining their bodies. Alcott advocates relationships to food and physical activity that create slender bodies and restrained relationships with food, and these relationships ultimately prepare her girls for courtship and wifehood.

Noting that sexuality is historically defined and constructed, Nancy Hartsock works to understand how Western women negotiate their appetites in a patriarchal society that targets their hunger as particularly unacceptable, and explains, at least in part, Alcott's narratives on food and the girl's body (156). If sexuality operates on relations of domination and submission, Hartsock suggests that discourse on food and appetite repression builds a social understanding of eating constraints that is embedded in female experience (157). Hartsock's theories can be adapted to desire for food, since hunger is closely connected to sexual appetite, and the libido is "the psychic drive or energy, particularly associated with the sexual instinct, but also that inherent in other mental desires and drives" (*OED*). Following Michel Foucault, Hartsock suggests that the libido has become a secret in Western society, but at the same time appetite is the driving force behind human survival; both sex and eating are necessary for continuation of the species, yet they have become topics of anxiety and discomfort. A girl's enjoyment of food, as made visible by a chubby body, signals desires that might become highly problematic as she grows up.

Miss Orne introduces a lesson plan for her students based on dietetic reform and the young women's appearances benefit. Miss Orne's lessons in food and eating, while beneficial to their overall health, ultimately prepare them for success in upper-class wifehood—her weight loss regimen for "dear, fat Cordy" involves "brisk runs [...], and less confectionery, sleep, and lounging in easy chairs," while in the cafeteria, "[p]itchers of fresh milk took the place of tea and coffee; cake and pie were rarely seen, but better bread, plain puddings, and plenty of fruit" (682, 683). The ultimate goal for these young women is not necessarily to become beacons of health, but rather to "wear a jersey and have it sit elegantly," that they may return home and turn the heads of the boys they left behind (680). Upon her return to the boarding school, Madame Stein, impressed with the physiological improvements Miss Orne was able to make in her students, says to herself, "Looks are everything with women, and I have never been able to show such a beautiful bouquet of blooming creatures at my breaking up as I shall this year" (684). The girls return home from Madame Stein's with waists "in perfect proportion to the rest of [their] youthful shape[s]," and Cordy boasts that she no longer looks like Charles Dickens's Clara Peggotty (685). Looking to the illusion of gender as self-constructed, Bordo points out that this illusion is "discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (186). Strict dietary reform with an emphasis on milk, fruit, and



especially good bread shapes these young women into attractive, marriageable subjects. While they do not necessarily return from boarding school with well-developed cooking skills, they do re-enter fashionable society with relationships to their appetites appropriate to their futures as wives. This notion of the regulated female appetite is one that permeates these children's texts for upper-middle-class children, and it remains an issue embedded in socio-economic status. Cordy's identity in "Jerseys" mirrors that of Jessie Cabot in Putnam's "Fanchon's German," as both girls function as ridiculed subjects in need of reform. Amy Erdman Farrell suggests that "fat is a mark of shame, a stain, something that discredits a person," and suggests that "fatness" serves as "a crucial marker of social status, or rather lack thereof" (18, 2). A supposed lack of control over the appetite and the resulting obesity function as a "mark of shame" in the lives of these girls and young women (Farrell 18). Their bodies are marked by their uncontrolled appetites, and they become embodiments of their failure to adhere to circumscribed conventions of eating for girls.

Control over female appetite also underwrites the narrative in Alcott's "Grandmamma's Pearls" (1882), which begins when Grandmamma Catherine offers her granddaughters (all named for her) a prize of heirloom pearls for the one who behaves best while serving refreshments at "the *café* of a great fair" (144). Interested in instilling "the old virtues—modesty, obedience, and self-denial" in her granddaughters, Grandmamma clearly wants the girls in her family to conform to dominant social codes surrounding their appetites and, in turn, their bodies (144). The three cousins, Kate, Kitty, and Cathy, align themselves with vanity, willfulness, and greed, respectively, but each struggles with desire and appetite as she tries to conform to social codes and win the pearls. The first few days of the fair find them indulging in their varying appetites: Kate for attention and flattery, Kitty for rebellion, and Cathy for food. While Kate and Kitty learn their lessons fairly easily, and while both girls' use of the ten-dollar coin from their Grandmamma is left tacit, Alcott keeps Cathy's self-indulgence at the center of the story. In the early days of the fair, she is resentful because the African American women working in the kitchen get the delectable leftovers: "These lost tidbits haunted her even when she took her own lunch, and to atone for the disappointment she ate so much that her companions no longer wondered that she was as plump as a partridge" (146). She finally begins to restrain herself after "the salad she had gobbled behind a screen," leads to a "fit of dyspepsia" (146). The story is laden with descriptions of beautiful clothes, luxurious goods, and delectable foods, even as it cautions its young audience not to indulge in any of these. When not gobbling food, Cathy spends her time examining the merchandise at the fair and planning how to spend her ten dollars. Her real "opportunity for self-denial" comes when she

overhears the "colored women talk as they washed dishes" (149). As they lament the cold weather and their inability to buy warm coverings for their children, Cathy decides to spend her money on nutritious food and blankets for these families. While her cousins rather pleasantly learn modesty and obedience, Cathy pays the highest price of the three for her lesson in self-denial. Alcott makes clear that Cathy's relationship with food and eating is the most problematic of the story's girlish sins. In her article on eating bodies in nineteenth-century children's literature, Jacqueline Labbe explores the ways in which children with voracious appetites in these texts are the eaters, while "the pure, uncorrupted child is not the noneater but rather the eaten" (94). A lasting lesson in self-denial will ensure that Cathy will lose her plumpness and achieve the slenderness that signals that she will be an acceptable wife and member of the privileged class, and will prepare for her role as wife: the noneater and the eaten.

The young women in these texts struggle to come to terms with their embodied markers of class, as they negotiate their desires to eat with social forces acting upon their social identities. In *Little Women*, Amy, the most social and fashionable of the March sisters, struggles to strike an appropriate balance between her relationship to food with her family's poverty. Amy plans an elegant luncheon for her fashionable peers, and after learning from her father that he cannot afford lobster for the event, and that the kittens had gotten at the chicken left out for the occasion, Amy decides that she "*must* have a lobster, for tongue alone won't do" (281). She decides to use her savings to procure her precious lobster and "a bottle of dressing, to prevent further loss of time at home" (281). As she rides home on the omnibus, one of Laurie's wealthy, handsome college friends, referred to as "Tudor," flirtatiously greets her, while "Amy utterly ignored the basket at her feet" (281). During their conversation, an old woman "[i]n stumbling to the door, upset the basket, and—oh, horror!—the lobster, in all its vulgar size and brilliancy, was revealed to the highborn eyes of a Tudor" (282). Preoccupied with her fashionable image, Amy is humiliated that the handsome young bachelor is aware of her intentions to eat such a "vulgar" creature, and as she reluctantly explains that it is indeed hers, her face turns "nearly as red as her fish" (282). Amy's body is marked with shame as the lobster's "vulgar size and brilliancy" trigger assumptions about Amy's indulgence in "ugly" food, and her body takes on the appearance of the "vulgar" and shameful seafood (282). She quickly recovers from the situation by laughing at herself, but she is concerned that the Tudor will tell Laurie about the embarrassing incident, and keeps the experience to herself after she returns home. Amy struggles to maintain her social rank by providing a delicacy at her luncheon, but at the same time she must negotiate between her desire to *eat* these luxurious foods and the expectation that she has no need to indulge.

**"Some unsuccessful cake": Negotiating Social Codes around Food and the Body**

Like Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett considers social codes around girls and eating, but if she, also like Alcott, conforms to social codes around the girl's body and appetite, she at least moves her young characters toward female community and autonomy, albeit in the kitchen. Kyla Wazana Tompkins suggests that the kitchen is the space from which the cook "threatens to speak. In so doing, she threatens to infuse the food she produces ... with the stifled political affect that the walls of the kitchen are supposed to contain" (17). For Tompkins, the nineteenth-century kitchen is a political space that could be used in order to free "stifled political affect" from its confines (17). In Jewett's "Marigold House" (1875), Nelly Ashford becomes the envy of her friends when her father purchases a playhouse for the garden. Spending each day in the playhouse, baking cakes and throwing dinner parties, the girls learn "much about housekeeping and cooking which they will not forget," and prepare themselves for housewifery while creating strong female relationships in the microcosmic domestic space (45). Nelly's wealthy Aunt Bessie "used often to come out to the play-house with her painting, and tell stories, and sometimes sing, while the children sewed and took care of dolls" (44). The girls' "fondness for dressmaking," however, "did not last long, and the kitchen proved much more interesting" (44), and with the help of Aunt Bessie, the little housekeepers begin dedicating their afternoons to baking and preparing small meals in Marigold House's cooking space. Not only do they learn how to prepare meals, they also learn how to keep a hygienic cooking and eating area. They were

required to keep everything tidy about the kitchen, and they soon learned to be orderly; but at first they had a fashion of putting away sticky dishes and forgetting to wash them. Once, Nelly was away for a few days, and when she came back there was blue-mold on some unsuccessful cake she had carefully stored away in the kitchen-closet. (45)

Nelly's mishap with the moldy cake functions as a source of shame for the budding cook and hostess, and she ensures that her workspace consistently exists also as a comfortable and safe eating space. Marigold House offers the girls a space for collective learning and food sharing as it foregrounds cooking and eating experiences based on inclusion and community.

On an afternoon when Nelly's parents were away, she and the other little housekeepers decide to host a "grand dinner-party" much larger than any they had previously undertaken (45). As she begins to collect ingredients and cooking supplies before the arrival of her guests, Nelly

rethinks her decision to begin cooking by herself, as her "guests were usually entertained in the kitchen on such an occasion as this, and, indeed, would have felt defrauded if they had not been allowed to help with the cooking" (46). Cooking together is a special activity for these girls, and while Mrs. Ashford does limit the amount of time spent in Marigold House's kitchen in order to prevent "continual feasting," the playhouse functions as a food space free of the constraints of social expectations (44). For the "little cooks," the kitchen in Marigold House is not about the food, but rather it is about the sense of community that goes along with sharing a meal. However, made uncomfortable by the girls' "continual feasting," Mrs. Ashford, sets restraints on the girls' cooking, and limits the girls to preparing "one thing each day... and they could only have one party a week" (572). However, the amount of time spent in the playhouse itself is never restrained, and the children are thus encouraged to develop domestic behavior that will prepare them to be housewives.

Bordo discusses the notion of the ideal wife as "she who stands... famished before her husband, while he devours, stretched at ease, the produce of her exertions" (118). By spending each day familiarizing themselves with kitchen tasks even as they learn to limit the amount they eat, the young girls are preparing themselves for domestic lives. Bordo also notes that "Only occasionally are little girls represented as being *fed*; more often, they (but never little boys) are shown learning how to feed others" (124). Western culture perpetuates the notion that women are gratified by preparing and serving food to others, and pressures women into domestic destinies from childhood (Bordo 118–119). In "Marigold House," Jewett makes cooking an empowering experience shared between young women, but the skills they develop are for hungry husbands, not their own bodies and desires. Though not free from the gendered food constraints faced by Alcott's and Putnam's young women, Jewett's "little cooks" create a foundation for more liberal representations of and more possibilities for girls, their bodies and food. If prolific authors such as Alcott, Putnam, and Jewett are creating "little cooks" whose relationships to food discipline their bodies into thin, hungry, and, above all, marriageable subjects, is there space for alternative representations of food and the body in the genre? Among these perpetually hungry and constrained future wives, where are the well-fed girls, and what statements do they make through their satisfied, rebellious appetites?

### "Ginger-beer": Subverting the Social Codes of Food and the Body

Sarah Winter Kellogg and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps develop far more subversive, and occasionally liberatory, relationships between girls and food than do their contemporaries discussed above. In "Cynthia's Dilemma"

(1877), Kellogg alternates between reinforcing social codes surrounding food and the body and subverting them as she tells the story of an obese six-year-old. On the one hand, the narrative makes clear that adults view Cynthia with discomfort, even repugnance: Cynthia is nicknamed “Wattles” because “[h]er cheeks hung over with fatness, till her father said she looked like a Brush Wattle Bird” (116). Her dilemma comes about when visiting Brother Cartwright, a Presbyterian minister, takes her up on his knee and does not present the option for her to climb down, and having been told that “she was heavy as lead,” Cynthia is concerned she will tire the minister (116). On the other hand, she cares little about being chubby, and eventually abandons her perch on his knee for a freshly baked treat. In his analysis of indulgence and obesity, John Coveney suggests that since the nineteenth century, discomfort regarding obesity has become implicit in Western culture, and the anxieties surrounding overweight children derive from physical appearance, from the socially deviant body (142). Kellogg’s story reiterates that the adults in Cynthia’s life ridicule her for her obesity—her own father giving her a cruel nickname—and the fact that she is overweight strips her of her identity as a little girl. Cynthia’s ostracization becomes problematic, because while food commonly acts as a reward for good behavior, she has obviously penetrated the division between overindulgence and reward but nonetheless comes to be identified largely by the social stigma linked to obesity.

As Cynthia works to politely remain on Brother Cartwright’s knee, one temptation that proves to be difficult to resist is the aroma of her mother’s fresh baking. She “snuffed the savory odor of freshly baked ginger-snaps from the kitchen, and her mouth watered for some; it seemed to Wattles that she never in her life before hankered for a fresh ginger-snap,—that never was she so hungry” (116). Cynthia reacts to the smell of the cookies like most children would—the delicious, comforting food is a compelling distraction—but the fact that she is overweight makes the food problematic, conveyed in part by the porcine verb Kellogg uses. Coveney argues that in a society obsessed with thinness, obesity becomes more of a moral concern than a matter of health, and although the obese *child* must face ridicule and social condemnation, her eating habits ultimately reflect the moralities of her parents (152). Cynthia’s mother fills her kitchen with fresh baking and Cynthia’s hopefulness that her mother has brought home “candies, or peanuts, or oranges for her,” and the narrative thus suggests that she encourages Cynthia’s obesity (116). Although Cynthia is dehumanized—called inanimate objects like lead, for example—and scorned for her appetite, the anxieties presented by the adults are not present within Cynthia. Neither her weight nor her eating habits cause her shame or disgust; she is mildly concerned about being too heavy for Brother Cartwright’s knee, but that fades as she worries about escaping his “affectionate hands”—which

adds a different and fraught subtext—so that she can watch the circus parade (116). While the narrative makes clear that her obesity—her blue eyes “so shadowed by the rolls of fat that you would have declared they were very dark gray,” her body “a solid cube of marble”—is socially unacceptable, Cynthia’s success at escaping the minister and claiming both the cookies and the parade reinstate her identity (116). Hartsock argues that in understandings of appetite grounded in masculine experience, “hostility and domination, as opposed to intimacy and physical pleasure, are central” (157). Kellogg enacts the problematic relationships that Western women develop with food as she waivers between hostility toward Cynthia’s chubby body and the right of the child to good and comforting food prepared by someone who loves her. She gives the child authority to fulfill her needs and desires even as she suggests that Cynthia must (eventually) comply with oppressive social conventions and control her appetite.

A far more progressive thinker who worked on dress reform, animal rights, and women’s enfranchisement, Phelps joins Kellogg in giving the girl’s growing body the right to her culinary needs and desires, but Phelps refuses to punish her girls for eating. Throughout her *Gypsy Breynton* series, which follows the titular Gypsy from girl to young woman and from home to boarding school and back again, Gypsy deviates from the social forces that attempt to regulate her appetite, and separates herself from conventional femininity. In the first novel of the series, *Gypsy Breynton*, after a series of household catastrophes, Gypsy explains to her mother, “God made a mistake when he made me, and put in some ginger-beer somehow, that [is] always going off” (31). It is telling that Gypsy draws on a food metaphor to justify her domestic mishaps; Phelps takes care to build a healthy relationship between Gypsy and food, depicting her as an active girl who spends more time outside than indoors, with a consequently hearty appetite.

Gypsy’s body is depicted as strong, busy, and a model to which all girls should aspire. While Gypsy is able to strike a freer, more liberatory balance between her identity as a young woman and her appetite, she struggles to understand food relationships across classes. Like many of these authors, Phelps outlines strict divisions between the food of the rich and the food of the poor, and as Gypsy works to create cross-class friendships with her charitable interests, she must learn an important lesson in terms of appropriate charitable food donation. As one example, in *Gypsy Breynton*, Gypsy attempts to alleviate the hunger of a bedridden Irish woman, who explains that her only opportunities to eat arise when others bring her food, and asks the child for white sugar and “some fresh salmon and green peas” (135). As Gypsy relays the request to her mother, she does not understand the error in her promises to the old woman. Mrs. Breynton explains that white sugar is expensive, and she cannot afford “to spend several dollars on fresh salmon—a delicacy

which we have had on our own table but once this season" (139). As unaware of the class structures working around food and eating as she is of the "appropriate" female eating behaviors embedded in the dominant discourse, Gypsy is simply eager to help. Her eagerness to be charitable suggests that Phelps uses this girl to challenge social codes around class as she does those around food and the female body.

In *Gypsy's Year at the Golden Crescent* (1867), Gypsy attends a fashionable young women's finishing school, where she learns to "dance, and play, and sew, and talk French" (19). Gypsy is "countrified" and her family is not as wealthy as those of the other young women. She struggles to situate herself in the social hierarchy of the Golden Crescent, and begins to adopt the frivolous behavior that she has heretofore avoided. However, one social convention she defies, along with many of the other girls, is the constraint against food indulgence: they compensate for their inability to eat publicly by indulging privately. The "Eating Society" meets privately every Tuesday, at which time the girls eat "[c]akes, and turnovers, and pies, and lemons, and candy, and nuts, and all the indigestible horrors that the heart of a school-girl could devise" (86). In the privacy of a locked room, the girls gorge themselves with food they procure from the kitchen throughout the week. They deviate from social expectations that they will deny their appetites and eat as ladies. In this female community, the girls are safe from the hostile forces of domination in male-driven society, and are free to indulge their appetites for delicious foods and excitement. Phelps offers both critique of and resistance to social codes surrounding the appetites of girls and young women; whereas Fanchon, the young women at Madame Stein's boarding school, and Amy March struggle to adhere to the social forces that regulate their appetites, Gypsy is able to maintain an unconstrained relationship with food. The girls in *Gypsy's Year at the Golden Crescent* have the opportunity to escape patriarchal sanctions against food and eating because their wealth allows them to attend a boarding school and provides them with rich foods. While the girls are able to create an entirely female space free of judgment and condemnation surrounding food, the indulgent eating space is temporary: the girls, when caught, must abandon their "eating society" and adopt socially appropriate relationships to food.

Although nineteenth-century literature for girls and young women encourages domesticity, the pressure to become little housewives can be avoided through independent and progressive female characters. Phelps's Gypsy resists the oppressive social forces that beckon her into the kitchen. Throughout the series, she spends most of her time outdoors and remains a lively and unconventional young woman. Her relationship with food and eating reflects her freedom from social constraint. She cooks only on special occasions and has a particular distaste for "hateful old sewing," and she continually shocks the women in her life

by her refusal to embrace the domestic (*Gypsy Breynon* 81). Gypsy's rejection of the private sphere makes her more inclined to the public, and her fondness for outdoor physical activity leads to behavior more commonly attributed to young boys. Gypsy feels a natural contempt toward socially appropriate female behavior. Holly Blackford suggests that food and cooking can act as expressions of female desire that often "take on a life of its own," and Gypsy's reference to her mischievous behavior as ginger beer functions as a metaphor for her unleashed female desire, and indicates her unwillingness to conform to conventional appetite repression (42). Self-denial and domestic servitude feel unnatural to Gypsy, and throughout the series she maintains a relationship with food that liberates her body from domestic confinement and proves that food preparation and appetite repression are *not* fundamental aspects of womanhood.

### Conclusion: Appetite and the Female Body

Exploring food as an extension of social structure in nineteenth-century children's texts develops understanding of girls' problematic and culturally embedded relationships with food and eating. The social forces of conventional eating habits are particularly oppressive in girl's lives, and struggles with body image, appetite repression, and domestic confinement are overwhelmingly present in these texts. Cynthia, Cordy, and Cathy are surrounded by food they desire and then ostracized for eating it; Fanchon, Amy, and Nelly learn the social codes that demand appetite remain hidden in the kitchen or reduced to nibbling in the parlor. If the body "often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figures as 'external' to that body," Bordo contends, any theory of the body, "ought to question 'the body' as a construct of suspect generality when it is figured as passive and prior to discourse" (175–176). However, although power relationships, prevailing forms of selfhood, and subjectivity, including gender, are maintained chiefly "through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms," power relations are unstable: "resistance is perpetual and hegemony precarious" (Bordo 27–28). Gypsy offers a meaningful model of resistance, and the series ends with her still a single and active young woman. Analyzing implications of food in nineteenth-century women's coming-of-age literature develops a particular vantage point from which to uncover the oppression inherent in social expectations surrounding food and the bodies of women and girls; Alcott's girls are not terribly far removed from those created by Louise O'Neill in the recent bestseller, *Only Ever Yours* (discussed in Chapter 4 of this volume). Implications of food continually intersect with gender and class construction, and there is a deeply interwoven correlation between food and social structure, as all of these girls learn to prepare and consume food (or not) to elevate or



maintain their social status. Just as women are oppressed in patriarchal Western society, so too are their appetites, and recognizing the restraints placed on female eating habits can lead to more liberatory relationships with food and eating.

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## 14 Break Dancing

### Reading the Ballerina in *To Dance*

*Jennifer M. Miskec*

Published in 1983, *Off Balance: The Real World of Ballet* is a labor story about the American ballet establishment in which journalist Suzanne Gordon both exposes objectionable working conditions—low pay, “pressure to perform when [dancers] are ill or exhausted or already suffering from a minor injury” (xviii), little to no power to improve conditions—and reaffirms what any gender critique would point to as problematic about professional standards for ballerinas: passivity, isolation, eating disorders, subordination, and objectification. Gordon reminds readers that ballet dancers are not born but molded into the ethereal, otherworldly beings who captivate balletomanes and regular folks alike, problematic and yet “[s]o accepted a part of our culture that it is now used in advertisements selling everything from panty hose to public television” (10). For the ballerina, Gordon points out, having her own ideas and life skills, an academic education, and interests outside of dance are not deemed necessary and might even “indicate a diminishing ardor... ballet is a jealous and demanding lover” (Gordon 45–46). Elunid Summers-Bremner notes that “all that is not interpretable according to an economy of visible forms is banished from the imagined bodily scene” (95).

In “Consuming the Ballerina: Feet, Fetishism and the Pointe Shoe,” Keryn Carter argues that the ballerina is rarely understood as more than parts and pieces, a collection of iconic simulacra. The image of the pointe shoe in particular is often a stand-in for the whole ballerina, and “sometimes these pointe shoes represented as completely disembodied; sometimes they appear with ‘amputated’ feet and ankles attached” (84). It is the disembodied ballerina who is packaged and sold. And yet, “ballet is an artform in which young girls in the West are expected to be interested,” and thus, “pointe shoes appear regularly on greeting cards, picture frames, carry-bags, soaps and so forth, and that these products are aimed at a specific market: the pre-pubescent and early adolescent girl, ballet student or not” (84). The fetishism of the ballet establishment perpetuates the disembodying, commodifying attitude that defines ballerinas culturally, and creates the ideological frame for ballerinas to understand themselves, to become, according to Gordon, “children of their

own imaginations" (8), reveling in a cultural narrative that casts them as "special beings, a breed apart" (215). Gordon's project, to politicize the figure of the ballerina, to move our understanding beyond the visual, and to remind viewers that she is a lived, material body, seems especially poignant within girl-oriented children's literature in which ballet imagery is common and yet almost entirely unproblematicized.

While Gordon's exposé is over 30 years old, its concerns and cultural impetus are hardly outdated. A case in point is *To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel* that is author Siena Cherson Siegel's autobiographical account of the intensive ballet training that spanned her childhood and teens; Siegel's husband, Mark Siegel, is the artist of the graphic narrative. Siegel's story takes place during the same era as Gordon's study, the late 1970s and early 1980s, and even at the same ballet school, the School of American Ballet (SAB). But Siegel's story complicates typical ballerina stories for young readers; instead of just being the fetishized (and commodified) parts of ballet—"tutus, toe shoes, tights" (McLean 3)—Siegel's story is one of many years of dedicated training, physical pain, familial sacrifice, and other more realistic elements of what it takes to become a ballerina, which also addresses issues such as access and the "right" body type. In many ways, Siegel's is not the typical romanticized ballet story of perseverance alone. Like Gordon's project, Siegel's story is one that emphasizes the big picture of ballet and the material body of a ballerina. In fact, in 2007, *To Dance* was awarded an Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) Robert F. Sibert Honor, an award for the best informational book published in English for young readers. Despite the fact that it is an award-winning piece of nonfiction for children, and despite the fact that Siegel does include some of the grittier aspects of high-level dance training, *To Dance* nonetheless invites a type of reading that encourages readers to understand ballet stories within the romanticized, fantasy ideology. This is troubling as this type of reading continues to fetishize the exploited ballet body and mark it as ideally feminine.

This idealized femininity is evident in professional reviews that laud Siena Cherson Siegel's story, and mostly ignore the grittier parts of her experience. Reviewers describe the text in mostly fantastic terms. On the back cover, for example, words like "magical," "beautiful," "dream," and "loveable" appear in reviewers' blurbs without any reference to the text being informative, factual, or realistic. Resources such as *Publisher's Weekly* assert that the novel is "as inviting to balletomanes as to aspiring ballet dancers" (65). *The School Library Journal* promises an "inspiring message about the dedication required to become a ballerina" (Schene 168). And, according to Library Media Connection, *To Dance* is "a wonderful story of how one little girl carries out her dream of dance. Readers see throughout the storyline the girl's perseverance and the family's sacrifices to help her obtain her dream" (Glantz 64). By describing

Siegel's autobiographical account as "magical," "inviting," "inspiring," and "wonderful," the reviewers endorse the problematic cultural standards that surround ballet narratives and overlook the messier aspects of a ballerina's embodiment.

Despite Gordon's social work, and despite Siegel's honesty about the ballet establishment, and even despite being published in post-second-wave feminist America, all of which seem to invite a more critical reading of an exploitation of women and their bodies, contemporary fantasies about ballet and ballerinas, especially those written for children, often live outside of a critique of gender and power. Instead, ballet is steeped in nostalgia, and interpreted as Romance and Beauty and Culture. Although the ballerina is real, she is not understood as being real. In contemporary children's books, especially, the "ballerina" is not a person who practices the art of ballet but rather one who simulates balletic movement and wears ballet costumes: a fantasy, dress-up identity akin to witches, fairy princesses, and mermaids. When young girls like Fancy Nancy or Angelina Ballerina or, as I will discuss in a moment, the Tutu Twins want to be ballerinas, they can be with mere declaration and appropriate decoration; they can

masquerade as "a ballerina," partly through the accumulation of, and self-decoration with, the various components of her appearance which are so unique (pointe shoes, pink tights, short or romantic tutu, a highly stylized stage make-up and hair drawn back into a severe bun).

(Carter 86)

In children's literature, ballet does not easily translate as something other than a dress-up identity that invites readers to filter the story through their desire for ballet to teach life lessons and a have happy ending, to be enviable and beautiful, apolitically disengaged from any ideological flaws.

Siena Cherson Siegel's *To Dance*, then, becomes a fraught place where the material, political body of the ballerina is reported as real and true but then undermined by the disembodiment that the ballet establishment produces and popular imagery perpetuates. Mark Siegel's graphic interpretation likewise invokes a recognition of the real—professional ballet performances and the New York blackout of 1977 as well as famous figures in ballet like George Balanchine and Mikhail Baryshnikov—alongside of Siegel's personal experiences. Still, readers are invited to understand *To Dance* in conventional ways, the ways that culture conditions us to do so, by overlooking—or worse, justifying—the fact that Siegel's journey to becoming an elite ballerina means being ideologically disembodied. Despite what the critics and reviewers report, ballet and the ballet establishment are not the "wonderful" part of Siegel's story;

rather, in the narrative arc it is actually her escape from it that is the resolution. However, beginning on the cover, the reader is invited into the story with the promise of a young girl's dream ballerina. In a pastel pink thought bubble that takes up the top half of the page is the iconic image of Odette from *Swan Lake*, white feather headpiece and white tutu, arms raised behind her like swan wings, *en pointe* in pale pink toe shoes. The tale of the thought bubble points to a young girl's wistful face. Whether she is dreaming of being a ballerina in general or of Odette and *Swan Lake* in particular is not clear from this image—though *Swan Lake* does exist as a metaphor of transformation, pain, and otherworldliness throughout the story—but it doesn't matter much, for the idea of a young girl idealizing the figure of the ballerina, and the ballerina as a visual object, coded with ideal notions of beauty and femininity, is highly recognizable. Readers are invited to dream alongside of the young girl in ways that are common in children's ballet stories. One might argue, then, that while Siegel's story does actually show a more honest depiction of ballet than is typical in children's literature, her acceptance of the exploitation throughout, as well as Mark Siegel's straightforward graphic illustrations, actually “change the metrics of measurement” (Penaz 101), obscuring Siegel's ultimate liberation from the ballet establishment as the happy ending by both discussing and illustrating more typical images of ballet stories for young readers.

Telling Siegel's story as a graphic narrative is, of course, both perfectly appropriate for a story about ballet (a visual commodity), and the beginning of the ideological problem within this story. According to Babak Elahi,

In this sense, then, pictorial framing can be related to ideological framing—the filtering of information, of news, of time, of identities, of nationality and gender—through templates, through structures of feeling that produce predetermined judgments of value or narrativized translations of experience. Both political framing *and* sequential-art framing aim at recognition, not analysis.... Ideally, the reader of a graphic novel is meant to disappear into the flow of frames just as surely as the reader of a popular novel is meant to disappear into the flow of the plot.

(314–315)

Even beyond the cover, the narrative itself begins with rather standard iconography of children's ballerina stories by establishing a dreamy girl's innate drive to dance: “Big, empty spaces always made me dance,” a young Siegel claims as she is shown dancing in a series of what Scott McCloud calls word-specific panels, from a beach scene to a hallway to an empty street (1.1; I use numbers to denote image and page of the unpaginated book). Siegel's narrates, “A long hallway or a parking lot

just begged for dance... like it wanted to be filled... and I wanted to put dance in it" (1.2, 1.3, 1.4) and the images are meant to show this. Readers, then, understand that the young, dark-haired girl, her body open, arms outstretched, hair swung to the side, eyes squeezed shut, one leg behind the other in a leaping position, is filling space with dancing. In the largest panel on the first page of *To Dance* in particular is a medium-long shot of Siegel in a parking lot, highlighting both Siegel's movement and how that movement fills the public space of her setting, but also the realism and ordinariness of her space as she dances between parked cars, buildings, and palm trees. As Will Eisner reminds us, scenes shot from eye level are often meant to show realism (95), and here, dancing freely, unrefined and exuberant, the young girl and her setting are all meant to be understood as a recognizable *every-girl*: who she is, at least, until she finds formal dance training that makes her special. In contrast, later images of Siegel dancing, after she has begun formal dance training, are much more controlled: arms rounded, hands relaxed, toes pointed, often shown dancing in unison with other dancers. But, of course, she has no choice but to dance; it is portrayed as her "destiny."

What is interesting here is how visually and ideologically similar this opening is to other opening images of ballet dancing children, even silly, over-the-top, and decidedly fictional depictions. *Tutu Twins* is one example, a nonsensical Easy Reader story about Nina and Tina, two chubby pink pigs who love to dance. Similar to the large panel of Siegel, in the first panel of *Tutu Twins*, Nina and Tina are shown leaping down a city sidewalk, eyes closed, motion lines around their arms and feet to depict movement. In both books, guileless, public displays of untrained and nontechnical dancing establish the characters' innate passion for and drive to dance. Both stories continue onto another familiar scene to children's ballerina stories, a young girl's first dance class, where innate desire meets formal training and critique. While Siegel is successful, Nina and Tina's attempt at dance tryouts is a disaster. While Siegel and Nina and Tina stand out from the other kids in the class by moving more than their peers, including being depicted airborne while their peers remain connected to the ground (Siegel 2.6; Bergen 14.2), Nina and Tina ultimately crash into each other and fall to the ground (14.3). The dance director then shouts "Next!" and in the following panel the door to the dance studio is slammed shut behind the pair, thus ending their formal dance training (16.1). By the end of Siegel's first dance class, though, she leads a line of her classmates in a bleed panel that suggests ongoing movement, which is, in fact, indicative of Siegel's story of a lifetime of movement, dancing even beyond the boundaries of the ballet establishment and public viewing.

Readers will see that Nina and Tina are not good dancers. The visual humor of Nina and Tina dancing ballet is that they are chubby pigs and not sylph-like at all. When the duo falls to the ground, they display

comic dancing, “a ludic aesthetic that [bristle] bodily and rhythmically against the dominant hegemonic ideals, comportment, and movement of domestic femininity” (Landay 131). Nina and Tina are ballerinas by assertion alone: “We are ballerinas,” Nina tells a tutu salesperson, a purple and white poodle, “and we need tutus!” Tina follows (3.3). Despite being appropriately costumed in recognizable ballet attire—which, incidentally, Siegel also remembers fondly about her first ballet class: “We all had these white chiffon skirts. I liked those, too” (3.3)—Nina and Tina do not know that “one is not born a dancer... and the process of ‘becoming’ a dancer is never finished” (Summers-Bremner 90–91). Siegel, on the other hand, slender and musical, has the potential to be a ballerina, even if her real body does not have the training yet. And the audiences of her story—even those who have little to no dance training themselves—may recognize her potential due to what dance theorists and audience researchers call “kinesthetic empathy,” the pleasurable cognitive responses spectators have due to such factors as the perceived cultural capital of an event, admiration of virtuosity, the brain’s capacity to imagine one’s own movement or “inner mimicry,” the anticipation and suspense produced by choreography, as well as the pleasure found in the “interplay between different senses” like movement and music (Reason and Reynolds 63). My point here is this: despite the fact that Siegel’s story ultimately challenges typical ballet stories by reminding readers that ballerinas are real and not just a dress-up identity, Mark Siegel’s chosen moments position the reader in typical ways, ways that reinforce the fantasy of the ballerina rather than the truth of this identity.

Nonetheless, the “truth” of Siena Cherson Siegel’s story and the non-sense of Nina and Tina’s are framed the same way; the reader is expected to recognize both sets of girls as dancers using the same set of visual cues. The same way readers know that *Tutu Twins* is funny—the strikingly incongruous images of pigs as ballerinas—we know Siegel has potential, because our frame of reference for ballet stories is the same. Indeed, it is often through mediation that audiences are conditioned to read ballet stories in the same way. As Ralf Remshardt argues that “the phenomenal body in the act of performance signals its own phenomenality, and so becomes mediated; not so much in itself but because it meets the consciousness of an audience whose perceptual frame is now irreducibly one of mediation” (134–135). Cultural narratives about ballet so abound that most readers understand what a potential ballet body looks like, a “culturally privileged version of ‘femininity’” (Carter 88). In fact, this cultural knowledge is from the same fantasy space as Siegel’s; she becomes a child of her own imagination, understanding her own potential as well as the process of ballet through mediation just like we understand and anticipate hers. We might call this recognition *ballet habitas*—that is, the ability to read the codes of ballet stories—that Siegel, ironically, models for the reader.

In a later scene in Siegel's story, while first taking ballet lessons, she reads *A Very Young Dancer*, a photo-essay picturebook, and watches the documentary *The Children of Theatre Street: The Story of the Kirov Ballet School*, and realizes that children just like her—with ideal bodies, familial support, money, access to the best teachers—will be able to succeed. She also comes to understand the pain and sacrifice that is to be expected in elite ballet environments. "Some days I felt like I couldn't hold my legs up anymore" (9.6), Siegel remembers, but it was all part of the expectations she has internalized. While only a beginner, she knows that was how it was supposed to be. As Grace Kelly narrates in *Children of Theatre Street*, "Ballet has flourished because whatever the outward condition, one thing has remained the same: the immense inner joy of the dancer. There is always the deep satisfaction of learning and conquering and freeing oneself from an earthbound state." As Siegel watches the ballerinas, she is coming to ballet habitus; or "the process by which social and economic conditions produce (pre)dispositions in taste";

[t]his means that our general disposition to consume and seek exposure to certain kinds of things—whether or not we choose to watch dance, for example—is not random or even necessarily wholly self-aware but instead deeply ingrained into embodied cultural practices. (Reason and Reynolds 55)

Siegel's ballet habitus is learned through watching. Throughout *To Dance*, readers are positioned watching Siegel watch other dancers perform, beginning with watching Odette transform herself on stage when the Bolshoi Ballet performs *Swan Lake* in Boston, Siegel's first professional ballet, and after which she declares, "I wanted to be a ballerina" (6.6). This is significant in many ways, as *Swan Lake* can be read as a metaphor for how ballerinas function in children's literature. On the surface, *Swan Lake* is a ballet that is rich in fairy-tale romance with beautiful and iconic costuming and choreography, fitting easily into what children's literature likes ballerinas to be: fantastic, romantic, and iconic. But *Swan Lake* can also be read less favorably. Suzanne Gordon, for example, reads *Swan Lake* as a metaphor for the way power works in the professional ballet world, where the swans are the powerless ballerinas, controlled by men who are not evil sorcerers but are the choreographers who "decide how they are to look, feel, act, and think" (111). The enchanted swans—half human, half bird—are a good way of understanding *To Dance* as well, where Mark Siegel's graphic narration invokes the iconography—the superficial treatment of ballerinas in children's literature, the fantasy of ballerinas—to engender a particular response from readers, while also engaging with the deeper, more real side of the profession that tells Siegel's story: "She had become the



swan!” (6.5). The human dancer had so transformed through dance that she had become something other than human, a breed apart, inhuman, extraordinary. Thus, Siena Cherson Siegel’s transformation from young girl to ballerina serves as a metaphor for the unnatural and intense but beautiful transformation from human into bird.

The swan’s loss of her human body, her disembodiment, mutated as she is into a different creature is doubly significant. As readers watch Siegel watching ballet performances, prima ballerinas, and George Balanchine, watching from the wings, ballet habitus is being reinforced. The choice of image invites us to watch the way Siegel watches. Through powerful cultural influences such as *A Very Young Dancer* and *The Children of Theatre Street*, Siegel is learning to appreciate virtuosity, but also the fantastic cultural narrative of ballerinas that includes prescribed demands on the ballet body. If readers adopt this frame of reference, they too will accept the exploitation of the ballerina. Interestingly, it is with her memory of watching *The Children of Theatre Street* that Siegel first offers readers insight into her own internalization of the inevitable disembodiment of the ballerina, conditioned to isolate and focus on body parts as will be done to her. Siegel recalls in particular the legs of the Russian girls dancing: “Those legs! I’d never seen anything like them. They looked like REAL dancer legs, strong, beautiful, grown-up legs on girls who were no older than me” (11.4). Fetishizing their legs in this way foreshadows how she too will be dismantled and examined, all contextualized by an unproblematic fetishizing of virtuoso.

Just like Siegel with the children of the Kirov Ballet, readers are invited to start watching Siegel’s arms and feet and body develop and change as she learns technique. The panels telling the story of Siegel at *Swan Lake*, for example, take the reader first to the lobby of the auditorium (4.1); then move our eyes to a pair of ghostly white hands, crossed at the wrists, palms facing in (4.2); and then craft a stage scene where the stage is the boundary of the panel in which the reader is positioned above and behind the dancer, Odette, on the stage, to both get a sense of the stage space (4.4) and also to watch Siegel watch Odette (4.3). We then realize that the earlier panel is a close-up of Odette’s hands. Perhaps we are meant to understand what Siegel is looking at in particular—Odette’s hands in isolation—in a manner that resembles her fetishization of the ballet students’ legs. As Siegel begins to identify with professional ballerinas, she too is increasingly depicted in these amputated terms. For, a good ballerina is one who looks exactly like everyone else. Siegel’s success will be when her hands and feet are interchangeable with other elite ballerinas. Staged, visible, and legible, “The very operations of reduction and bracketing could be those of the proscenium stage itself” (Franko 1). Thus, Siegel must focus and isolate in order to perfectly emulate the professional dancer’s hands and legs; the boundary of the stage marking the boundaries that define success for the dancer. Siegel’s line, “It was

VERY important that the audience didn't see you" (33.7), becomes doubly significant in this respect.

Ironically enough, Siegel's journey toward elite status in the ballet establishment begins because of one body part in particular: flat feet. In fact, her young life's trajectory is due to the male doctor's pronouncement that she has flat feet and there is nothing anyone can do about it. It is unclear in the story why having flat feet is such a bad thing, thus the reader's cultural conditioning about the female body is left to fill in the blanks—that the feminized, eroticized foot is arched, ready to inhabit high heels and toe shoes alike—for why this scene is significant outside of the fact that it first introduces the idea of dance class to Siegel. Her mother asks the doctor about dance class, to which he replies, "No, no, that won't help. Forget it" (2.2), but this idea inspires Siegel who begs to be able to take dance class anyway, and her mother submits. Interestingly, this first image of her body being inspected is actually a panel of her whole body on an examination (2.1). When we see her foot being inspected again, this time by Madame Tumkovsky at Siegel's audition for SAB, Siegel's body is outside of the frame of the image; readers only see her from the calf down (15.1). Although Madame Tumkovsky's hand obscures Siegel's arch, one could assume that it is a "good foot" since the next panel sequence is a phone call informing Siegel that she had been accepted into SAB (15.2, 15.3). Another twenty pages pass before Siegel tells the reader that her feet were no longer flat, and this is after she is fitted for toe shoes at Capezio and had graduated to pointe work (40.4).

The context for Madame Tumkovsky's inspection of Siegel's foot is an interesting scene, where a tall, wide, bird's-eye-view panel (14.1) slows down the reader after a quick series of action-to-action panels that show Siegel's nervousness about her impending tryout (13.3, 13.4, 13.5). In the room, instead of multiple people staring close up, it is just Siegel, Madame Tumkovsky, and a pianist in a large room in which the bodies, and even the piano, take up little space (14.1). Siegel narrates, "And that was all. It was very simple" (15.1). Following this panel, Siegel is shown in *arabesque* at the barre in a series of moment-to-moment panels as Madame Tumkovsky raises Siegel's leg, then again, and then again (14.2, 14.3, 14.4). As McCloud notes, "by offering a view of the action that barely the reader is encouraged to focus on what does change, such as the position and attitude of the character" (20); "Madame Tumkovsky wanted to see whether my body was suited to ballet and if I could move, if I was musical" (15.1). In fact, while elite ballet is about hard work and perseverance, it's also about the right body, coordination, and flexibility that one is born with. The fantasy of ballet marks it as a narrative about hard work and dedication, to overcome all obstacles, as if it is a willful endeavor, when in fact it is about genetics and access even more than it is about desire.

About the same time that she is going through this process, Siegel's father installs a mirror in her room to enable her to practice at home. However, "he had to use lots of small squares" instead of one large mirror. What results "turned out a little strange," distorting Siegel's body, breaking it apart into disproportionate pieces, including taking the middle out of her reflection so that she appears thinner in the reflection and has lost her mouth (24.5). Although grotesque, Siegel loves it, fetishizing her own distortion; she is no longer a coherent whole and is, instead, a collection of parts. Interestingly, this image of the reflection also omits her feet. Instead, a panel below the mirror image shows just her calves and feet, shod in pink slippers, ribbons not yet sewn on (she performs that act in an image on the next page) (24.10). Also on the next page is the mirror again, this time an image of just her feet in the mirror, distorted and further amputated at the calves, but also foreshadowing how this piece of her body will become the signifier of her identity as a ballerina (25.2). It was her feet that got her into dance, and it is her feet that get her into the ballet company, and it is her feet that will be fetishized by the public. Chaney explains:

The doubled self-portrait invokes the classic topos of *mise en abyme*, a reflection of a reflection. On one hand, the doubled reflection seeks to assuage by confronting those anxieties of duplicitous self-consciousness...on the other hand, it enacts the same homology of reflective content and systems of reflection described by Jean Baudrillard. Both gestures affirm the sincerity of [the author's] authorial address by raising questions of mediation and veracity as part of the obligatory "autobiographical pact," as theorist Philippe Lejeune calls it (1989), whereby autobiographers establish authority according to subjective, rather than verifiable, truths.

(22)

Juxtaposed against a dreamy montage bleed of the meta-panel showing Siegel sewing the ribbons onto her first pair of pointe shoes (25.1), the next three-panel sequence shifts scenes to show Siegel's first classes *en pointe* where thought bubbles betray her silent suffering: "OUCH! These really hurt!" (25.3) and "Is this going to go away?" and "My foot is burning" (25.4) and "I think my toes are bleeding" (25.5). Eisner would argue that what goes on inside the panel is primary (65), but by the next page Siegel has evidently learned to ignore her pain, for we see that she is skilled enough to have been cast in her first ballet, *Pierrette*. What immediately follows a close-up of Siegel cheering—"I looked down are the list and there was my name!" (26.5)—is the meta-panel bleed, another nicely contrasted image, showing another young lady crying, apparently not cast in *Pierrette*. This scene assuages any anxiety created by her pained toes on the

page before, for that initial discomfort is being ignored, for Siegel is succeeding at ballet.

Indeed, the pain has not gone away; she is shown rubbing her aching toes (37.1) when she practices every day after school. A few pages later, a series of scene-to-scene panels of injuries show her nursing a sore foot, both wrapped in a bandage and covered in Band-Aids (43.5), an ankle in a cast (43.6), on crutches (43.8), and then a wrapped knee in a hospital bed (43.10). Between each image of an injury, Siegel is shown dancing, either through the pain or causing more; even in an ankle cast and on crutches, her long strides suggest that she will not slow down (43.8). Her pain is never narrated, though its constant presence is apparent: as she gets better, practices increase, and the toll it takes on her body increases. Here, too, is a three-panel sequence in which we see three images of Siegel, one as a young girl (43.1), then a few years later (43.2), and finally as the sixteen-year-old she is at that point in the story (43.3). Each image shows Siegel at a table with dinner in front of her. In each image her plate of food grows smaller, her drink goes from something dark to clear water, and her face loses its smile. In fact, while the first image shows silverware crossed, cutting into a steak, by the second panel she is only holding a fork with what appears to be fish on her plate, and finally her hands are under the table; she is not even reaching for the food that is a fraction of the amount she is digging into in the first panel. On the same page are the injury images, showing both types of sacrifice.

The pressure to deny one's natural body in order to maintain a sylph-like physique is a pressure on dancers like Siena Cherson Siegel, and so she includes the psychological reality of her physical and emotional disembodiment in her story. And yet while society routinely panics over this kind of body dysmorphia, it is so normalized in this context that it is often celebrated as indicative of a dancer's dedication and evidence of hard work, and, in Siegel's case, for overcoming a bad home life. The subplot of Siegel's story is of her parents divorcing, living apart, her father in Puerto Rico and her mother with her in New York, yelling and fighting when they are together: "There was no peace at home" (44.6). According to Siegel, "Dance class was the only time I could really get away from what was happening between my parents" (45.1); "All the hard work at SAB became a refuge for me" (45.2); "In spite of all its struggles, it was my peaceful time" (45.3).

In other contexts, we would see fit to send a young girl to rehab for punishing her body as Siegel does, especially in that she does it to escape her home life, to shut down her emotional brain. But her purposeful, self-injurious behavior for ballet is not read in this way. Even more frustrating, it is in these moments of turmoil and emotional escape that Siegel is the blank slate that is idealized in ballet and that Gordon fights against in her project. The control—of her body when she cannot control her family and the turmoil—seems to be alienating Siegel from her

own body in ways we might see in anorexia nervosa medical discourse, for example,

The ways in which the body show up as uncanny in anorexia are similar to the ways of alienation we identified in somatic illness, in that the body becomes an *obstacle* and an *enemy* that needs to be controlled, but they also concern ways of being objectified in an everyday manner in the social world by the gazes of others...The objectification by way of the looks of others in anorexia equals a finding oneself in a cultural pattern of norms regarding the feminine, the healthy, the beautiful, and the successful. The gazes of others are soon made into a self-surveying gaze by the anorexic girl, in the process of which the image of the own body is made gradually, increasingly unrealistic and self-punishing.

(Svenaesus 89)

According to Gordon, “interviews with dancers suggested that teenage dance students viewed their art as a structured activity in which to receive discipline, to enter a transcendent state... to forget the world, or to feel powerful” (9). Ultimately, ballet serves Siegel as cutting and other forms of self-injury do for others, as an escape from an intense and imperfect home life. Ballet habitus being as strong as it is in both Siegel and for most readers, even if they are young, and even if they are not dancers, encouraged readers to unconsciously recast the punishment and fragmentation she experiences as building blocks to success in the real world.

Many readers will focus on Siegel’s success as a ballet dancer and misread it as the point of the story, an avenue for life lessons. According to the arc of the story, it is her life after ballet that actually heals the traumas imposed on her by ballet wounds; the happy ending is the day she leaves the establishment, not the fact that she dedicates herself to it for so many years. The page before she stops dancing, at eighteen, Siegel is shown at a performance following George Balanchine’s death. Here her fragmentation is at its most noticeable. Where one panel is just her head, at the bottom of a tall, black panel (53.2), another a close-up of her rounded and relaxed ballet hands (54.2), then a close-up of her profile (54.4), her feet in fourth position (54.5), and finally her right ankle and foot, shod in pink toe shoes, escaping the page (54.7). Though she has not left dance altogether, she has left the ballet establishment. As Gordon notes, “There was as much anguish as art in ballet, and that anguish was created by the ballet establishment; it was not inherent in the art” (xviii). Yet, Siegel’s life after ballet, although it is shown in terms of being intellectually and personally fulfilling, seems a pale resolution to the real story: the broken body, willingly, romantically, enviably donated to the ballet establishment.

Roger Copeland critiques the Balanchinian notion that “ballet is a purely female thing; it is a woman—a garden of beautiful flowers, and the man is the gardener.... Women [are] buds to be planted, clipped, and arranged by the male imagination” (90). But as long as that holds sway, we run the risk of never seeing the material body of the ballerina as anything other than a cultural fantasy, where her stylized identity will always distract from a sense of her as a real person. In turn, even nonfiction, autobiographical, instructional texts will be read as fiction, where the ballerina is merely a caricature, and even grittier accounts of the ballet establishment are romanticized in problematic ways. And, in the case of Siegel’s *To Dance*, she is further trapped in a cycle of mediation by her husband’s sense of her, ballet, and graphic storytelling. To be fair, though, as Charles Hatfield notes, “Thus autobiography in comics, as in prose, often zeroes in on the contact surface between cultural environment and individual identity” (113); “Paul Jay sums up the skeptical position thusly: ‘the attempt to differentiate between autobiography and fictional autobiography is finally pointless’” (qtd. in Hatfield 113). In fact, the imagery Mark Siegel uses invites us to reframe Siena Cherson Siegel’s story as familiar even though it is personal. Because graphic narrative traffics in recognition, the account of the ballerina is easiest understood within the frame of mediation, visual currency. We do not know Siegel, probably not even the ballet establishment, but we know how to read leotards, toe shoes, bunned hair, tutus, ribbons, and even virtuoso-as-celebrity worship, and Siegel uses this. As Rocio G. Davis argues, “To read their works organically, therefore, requires us to move beyond the personal to engage the cultural forces that produced these graphic artists and the particular forms of their work” (Davis 254). In the case of ballerinas, especially in children’s culture, we must indeed consider the cultural forces that contribute to Siegel’s graphic illustration as much as we need to attend to Siegel’s own mediated identity, especially how they invite readers to see only the story they are conditioned to expect, that of the romanticized exploitation and commodification of the ballerina’s body rather than the flawed system in which readers and dancers are similarly complicit in accepting.

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## 15 Embodied Performances by Lesbian Cheerleaders and Dancers in *Glee* and *Leading Ladies*

*Kate Norbury*

The White cheerleader has traditionally been an ideal embodiment of normative girlhood and adolescent femininity in North American popular culture. Even outside of her traditional heartland, the cheerleader evokes a certain image. She stands visibly for ideas of conventional femininity because she literally cheers with her body in a performance intended to support and generate support for the male football team (Miles 224). She can be thought of as a figure of “purity, innocence, and youthfulness” (Miles 228); on the other hand, with her skin-tight Lycra outfits, short skirts, and athletic moves, she can also be considered a figure of desirable feminine “sexuality and temptation” (Miles 2005: 228). As La'Tonya Rease Miles points out, the cheerleader is an idealized heroine in several contemporary television series and films (224–232). She is also a ninja warrior in *Cheerleader Ninjas* (2002) and *Ninja Cheerleaders* (2008), and an antagonist in *The Hot Chick* (2002) and in several contemporary young adult television series (*South of Nowhere*, 2005–2008; *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, 2005–2006). In *Glee* (2009–2015), she is also a lesbian. In *Glee*, the lesbian and bisexual female cheerleader characters are versatile and talented dancers who can also dance in the ballroom style.

Similarly, the ballroom dancer can be regarded as an idealized embodiment of traditional femininity. She has appeared in a range of dance films, some aimed at young adult audiences and many at general audiences. The lesbian dancer character's love of dancing connects her with other dancers and the female peer group in the audience. Traditionally, the ballroom dance couple consists of a male dancer who wears “debonair tuxedos designed to convey economic success and physical prowess” (Leib and Bulman 603), and a female dancer who wears “delicate, sexually alluring evening gowns designed to convey physical beauty and emotional fragility” (Leib and Bulman 603). *Leading Ladies* (2010) challenges this tradition as it is both aimed at young adults and centered on a same-sex female ballroom dance couple. *Leading Ladies* retains the generic conventions of the traditional ballroom dancing story while re-working the nature of the female ballroom dancer and the ballroom dance couple. In this chapter, I argue that viewers, particularly young



adult female viewers, will have an engaged response to the embodied performances on screen, and that these responses will enable them to align themselves closely with the cheerleader and dancer characters who are also lesbian.

### **The Visible and Kinetic Female Body in Television and Film**

When characters such as Santana Lopez and her girlfriend Brittany S. Pierce perform a cheer or a dance in *Glee*, or when protagonist Toni and her girlfriend Mona dance in *Leading Ladies*, the audience registers those particular movements in their own brains and bodies. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty foregrounds, “by considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them” (102). We cannot perceive the world from any position other than the one that we physically embody. Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of experience modifies previous accounts that either prioritized rationalism, the mind and language, or emphasized empiricism, behavior, and behavioral science (2). Each on-screen character is, self-evidently, embodied, but so too is each audience member. The embodiment of a character may have a significant impact on teen audience members.

The actions that viewers see on screen are “mirrored” in the brain by mirror neurons, or “brain cells that activate when a primate does an action but also when a primate observes an action” (Landay 130). It is highly energizing to watch rehearsals or performances of cheerleading, dance, and ballroom dance, and those performances are even more stimulating for those who have carried out the same movements or steps themselves (Landay 130). As Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee explain, “Your mirror neuron system becomes more active the more expert you are at an observed skill.... The actions you mirror most strongly are the ones you know best” (169). Therefore, female cheerleaders and female dancers in the audience will have a particularly engaged response as they watch Santana and Brittany (in *Glee*), or Toni and Mona (in *Leading Ladies*) dance on screen. Those who excel at these creative activities will have the most intense mirror neuron response and that response will be partly shaped by gender. For example, research has demonstrated that ballerinas have a stronger physiological or embodied response to other ballerinas, and that male ballet dancers respond most actively to other male ballet dancers (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 169). Blakeslee and Blakeslee’s research directly suggests that identification is based on similarity of experience, of brain and body actions and responses, and of gender. The mirror neurons in the brain are still activated for those who are not cheerleaders or dancers, but, as Lori Landay explains, these

responses are more general and related to the individual's experience of movement—that is, in a less intense way than the mirror neurons of an expert cheerleader or dancer or even of an average one (130). This finding has significant implications for the effect that these performances potentially have on young adult audiences, particularly young adult female viewers, and the possibility of influencing attitudinal and hence social change.

In her analysis of the silent flapper film *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928), Landay argues that this film created a new aesthetic of the visual body, which was reinscribed through dance (129–136). The spectator's "dance" is an interior and neurological one and thus embodied, albeit not as obviously as dancing. The spectator stays seated in the audience but is "moved," and this sense of being moved is deeply connected to her emotions and sense of empathy: "The flapper spectator's mirrored kinobody—that interior, neurological, not physical but still embodied reaction, so connected to emotions and empathy—dances along with Diana, with Joan Crawford" (Landay 131). Similarly, the spectators of *Glee* and *Leading Ladies* are likely to be moved by the dance performances that they observe on screen.

Moreover, Landay suggests that the female dancing body as a "site of kinaesthetic femininity" that runs counter to tradition is not limited to Jazz Age silent-film flappers (131–132). She refers to Lucille Ball's comedic performance of the Charleston in the middle of an episode entitled "The Ballet" from *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951–1957). Ball's version of the Charleston extended the flapper's aesthetic performance onto the television screen and into the home. Ball's use of her body in *I Love Lucy* introduced a female performer who disrupted 1950s' ideals of femininity and domesticity (Landay 132). She defied several taboos, including dancing as a pregnant woman at a time when the word *pregnant* was still not socially sanctioned in public. Correspondingly, Naya Rivera's embodiment of Santana Lopez in *Glee* and Laurel Vail's embodiment of Toni Campari in *Leading Ladies* incorporate a new aesthetic based on the lesbian body that equally disrupts dominant hegemonic ideals of normative femininity. This is because, although Santana and Toni are attractive to male characters and male viewers, their characters are not romantically interested in males but experience desire for another female character and actively express that desire on screen.

The mirror neuron response that takes place in the brain during a dance or a cheerleading performance involves a set of mirror neurons that are deeply connected to the viewer's sense of empathy. Marco Iacoboni argues that a mirror neuron response in empathy reflects

an experience-based, pre-reflective and automatic form of understanding of other minds.... The interdependence between self and other that mirror neurons allow shapes the social interactions

between people, where the concrete encounter between self and other becomes the shared existential meaning that connects them deeply.

(265)

In her in-depth discussion of reader empathy in relation to fictional characters, Blakey Vermeule makes a similar point, citing Vittorio Gallese and his analysis of mirror neuron systems in humans (40). This type of emotional empathy blurs the boundaries between self and other, and differs markedly from a conscious cognitive attempt to perceive and understand another person's point of view or experience. A third form of empathy is compassionate empathy, occurring when the person who feels empathy is moved to assist the other, if necessary. Cheerleaders and dancers typically perform a powerful and influential form of adolescent femininity. Viewers, particularly young female viewers, are positioned to identify with those same dancer characters.

Both *Glee* and *Leading Ladies* introduce the characters and establish their talent for dancing before they fall in love. Viewers are therefore directed to align themselves closely and preconsciously with the female character and her sense of self, which is positively centered on her dancing body. She does not lead with her sexual orientation but with her creative ability. The inclusion of successful cheerleaders, dancers, and, in the case of Santana and Brittany, also successful singers, who also happen to be lesbian, creates the potential for emotional and cognitive change in the audience. Female viewers, especially those who dance or cheerlead, encounter here two texts that will direct them to re-consider their negative or stereotyped view of lesbian girls as they identify positively with Santana and Brittany's performances as cheerleaders and dancers, or with Toni and Mona as dancers. Viewers are likely to engage in and respond to Santana and Toni's performances as their brains and bodies automatically and pre-reflexively respond to the movement, athleticism, and dance and technical skills that they observe on screen.

### The Latina Lesbian Cheerleader/Dancer in *Glee*

*Glee* is a multi-award-winning television series predominantly produced for young adults and watched by mainstream global audiences. All the Glee Club members both sing and dance, making a separation of dance from music almost impossible, but I concentrate here on dance. *Glee* also features the school's football team, the Titans, and its cheerleading squad, the Cheerios. Three teen characters are initially introduced as cheerleaders, namely, Quinn Fabray, who is the captain, and her best friends, Santana and Brittany. The Cheerios are introduced in the opening sequence of the first episode of the series ("Pilot": 2 September 2009), and their cheerleading performances continue to feature throughout

each season. Each season of *Glee* contains multiple episodes, and each episode is forty-five minutes long, comprising 121 episodes in total, so my discussion of *Glee* focuses on Santana and her romantic relationship with Brittany. Santana's name is symbolic; it is unisex and means "holy." Her surname links her with one of the best-known Latina performers in the United States, Jennifer Lopez. Santana and Brittany are the most talented female dancers in the Glee Club, a point acknowledged by the other club members, and in their relationship, they embody both lesbian subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Santana is introduced in *Glee* in 2009 and her character develops and evolves through all six seasons. In 2012, she graduates from the fictional William McKinley High School in Lima, Ohio. After graduation, Santana initially accepts a full cheerleading scholarship to study at the University of Louisville, but leaves university before completing her degree and moves to New York to live with two other former Glee Club members, Rachel and Kurt. As *Glee* has positioned Rachel and Kurt at the top of the social and creative hierarchy from the first season onward, Santana's move to New York and the series' alignment of Santana with Kurt and Rachel suggests her equivalent move to the top of the hierarchy. In the final season, Santana and Brittany are married ("A Wedding": 2 February 2015).

At the outset of *Glee*, Santana is sixteen years old and is represented as a popular and desirable cheerleader. Santana dresses in highly feminine clothing, is slim, and has large brown eyes, long dark hair and painted nails. In brief, she appears to perform a traditional notion of the sexualized "hot Latina stereotype" (Merskin 134), except that it soon becomes apparent that she is romantically involved with Brittany. Kathryn Hobson argues that Santana is "unapologetically outspoken and charismatic, making her behavior a challenge to heterosexist femininity as well as traditional racialized roles" (103). Santana is known for her quick retorts, her irony and sarcasm, as well as for her sense of humor.

During *Glee*'s second episode, "Showmance" (9 September 2009), it becomes apparent that Santana can also sing and dance. The Glee Club performance in the school assembly encourages the trio of cheerleaders, Quinn, Santana, and Brittany, to try out for the Glee Club. They audition with a cover version of Dionne Warwick's "I Say a Little Prayer" (1967). The new choir director, Will Schuester, says "Well, let's see what you got," as he switches on the CD player. When the music begins, they break into a formation of Santana and Brittany on either side of Quinn, the lead. Each girl stands with her hands on her hips and moves her hips in time to the music in a conventional performance of teenage femininity. The camera moves smoothly between the girls' dance moves and Will Schuester's reaction shots. He clearly enjoys their performance in which the female dancing body is treated as a commodity. Santana, Brittany, and Quinn use hand gestures to synchronize with the song's

lyrics, so that “the moment I wake up” is accompanied by the girls flicking their hands up on the word “up” and “before I put on my make-up” is accompanied by gestures that suggest using a mirror and a brush on the word “make-up.” When the girls sing “I say a little prayer for you,” they extend their arms and point toward Will Schuester on “you.” The girls sing as if he is the object of their affections, a gesture he happily receives. In this original audition, the three girls enact heteronormative adolescent femininities.

At the beginning of “Duets” (12 October 2010), and after twenty-three episodes of dancing and singing, there is a scene between Santana and Brittany that enacts same-sex desire on screen as the opening credits appear. The scene unfolds in Brittany’s bedroom, which looks like a typical teenage girl’s room. In a single-shot sequence, the camera pans from right to left along a series of framed photographs of Brittany as a young child, an older child, a cheerleading tween, and a young teen. It briefly pauses on four feet, which are in white ankle socks and entwined. As the camera moves up the bed, it becomes clear that Santana, who is in her cheerleading costume, is lying across Brittany and kissing her neck. As she lies on her bed, Brittany refers to “sweet lady kisses” and “a nice change from all that scissoring” (lesbian nonpenetrative sex). The music on the soundtrack is the distinctive piano refrain or leitmotif used whenever something significant, meaningful, and genuine is being said or taking place. Brittany, for her part, is focused on the Glee Club’s assignment, but Santana rejects her suggestion that they perform a Melissa Etheridge number, insisting that she “doesn’t want to sing about making lady babies” with Brittany. The scene suggests that Santana at this point is only willing to enact same-sex desire in the private space of Brittany’s bedroom. Nevertheless, the scene does represent and make visible adolescent lesbian desire.

A full two years after their first appearance in *Glee*, Santana and Brittany are acknowledged as a romantic couple and out of the closet at school in “Pot O’ Gold” (1 November 2011), but Santana has not yet told her parents that she is in a lesbian relationship. Cheerleading coach Sue Sylvester apologizes to Santana as she warns her that she will be “outed” on television by one of Sue’s political opponents. Viewers are again aligned with Santana, who is clearly distressed and who decides to come out to her parents before they watch her being “outed.” She also comes out to her grandmother at her grandmother’s home (“I Kissed a Girl”: 29 November 2011). *Glee* does not splice a few words of Spanish into an English conversation; the entire conversation between Santana and her grandmother or “abuela” takes place in Spanish and is subtitled for viewers. Viewers are positioned to respond emotionally to Santana who is immediately and harshly disowned by her more traditional Latina grandmother. Santana and her “abuela” are not reconciled until *Glee*’s final season.

As Santana's lesbian sexuality begins to emerge publically in Season Three, so too does her Latina subjectivity. Rivera, who plays Santana, has described her ethnic background as half Puerto Rican, a quarter African American, and a quarter German. Her ethnicity is immediately apparent on screen through the color of her skin, her eyes, and her hair, but in Season Three, it also becomes foregrounded through her use of the Spanish language, as well as through Santana's dance styles and musical preferences. Latina ethnicity and Santana's cultural knowledge are thematically developed in episodes such as "The First Time" (8 November 2011), which concentrates on the production of the school musical *West Side Story*, and "The Spanish Teacher" (7 February 2012). *West Side Story* (1961), which can be characterized as a teenage-oriented film, is a significant film for both focus texts in this chapter. Santana plays the Puerto Rican character Anita in the school musical and in the pro-American musical number, "America," she dances and sings in a Latin style. On stage, Santana, as Anita, wears a red halter-neck dress with full petticoats, red lipstick, and high heels. She twirls, rustles her skirts, clicks her fingers, does high kicks, and claps as she dances solo and with the rest of the Puerto Rican girls in the "Sharks." Stacey Wolf suggests, in "Gender and Sexuality," that the single-gender groups in the dance number, "America," both "expand and define the meaning of masculinity or femininity" (218). The musical number certainly performs femininity, nuanced by Santana's lesbian subjectivity.

The Glee Club director, William Schuester, is also the school's Spanish teacher, but Santana, who is far more knowledgeable about Hispanic languages and cultures than he is, effectively encourages him to re-think his position. Schuester's two muddled performances during this episode are unsuccessful and cause him to feel ashamed while also appearing comical to viewers. His first performance is a clichéd rendition of "La Cucaracha." In his second performance, he is dressed as a Spanish matador while two members of the Glee Club appear on stage with him dressed as bulls. His version of "A Little Less Conversation" is accompanied by a Mexican mariachi band. In other words, he has failed to differentiate between diverse Hispanic cultures. Throughout the episode, Santana foregrounds the need to consider Hispanic cultures and the Spanish language from the standpoint of knowledge. She shows that she takes her education seriously, is well-educated, hard-working, and informed, a further contradiction of the Latina stereotype.

The appeal of night-school Spanish teacher David Martinez, played by gay-identified Ricky Martin, is harnessed by Santana to her advantage. She invites David to perform a Latin dance duet with her to Madonna's "La Isla Bonita" ("The Beautiful Island," 1987). The duet has a lesbian character and a male character played by a gay man dressed in fashionable black clothes dancing a romantic partnered piece together. The two dancers dance rapidly, flick their heads, use precise footwork, and move

smoothly between different steps. They incorporate ballroom dance moves into the Latin dance. The performance is highly stylized and lit by neon blue strobe lighting originating from overhead lights on stage. Angharad Valdivia suggests that the tropical narrative is the “ascending paradigm for representing Latina/os in popular culture” (106). Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman first proposed the term “tropicalization” (1997) to refer to the themes of island elements and dynamic movement narratives that represent cultures from the tropics (Valdivia 106). The “tropical narrative” locates Latinas/Latinos within a narrative of modernity in contrast to the “narrative of stasis” which positions them outside of contemporary urbanism and progress (Valdivia 106). Santana and David’s tropical island dance replaces the traditional Mexican “narrative of stasis” with an upbeat and memorable performance. Unlike Will Schuester, Santana speaks a set of Spanish lyrics confidently and competently.

In the Whitney Houston tribute episode, “Dance with Somebody” (24 April 2012), Brittany and Santana dance together as a couple in their cover version of Houston’s “Dance with Somebody.” Santana and Brittany incorporate swing dance moves into their performance. During the dance, the two appear to leave the choir room and dance in a white space. The dance is performed at a rapid speed, and the camera cuts between them both as they sing, smile, laugh, as they embrace each other, and as they dance surrounded by six Cheerios in cheerleading costume. The pronouns in the lyrics are transformed from “he” to “she” and the nouns from “man” to “woman.” Brittany clearly dances and sings for her girlfriend, with the full approval and admiration of the Cheerios and the Glee Club. Santana and Brittany perform a way of being in the world which is both visible and kinetic, or, to use Lori Landay’s phrase,<sup>1</sup> Santana embodies a “modern kinetic aesthetic—a kinaesthetic—of an active ludic femininity” (129). Similarly, Toni, in *Leading Ladies*, is also a lesbian dancer whose embodied performances convey an active femininity.

### The Female Ballroom Dance Couple in *Leading Ladies*

*Leading Ladies* has been marketed as an independent version of *Glee* or *High School Musical*, and is a romantic comedy film produced for young adults by Daniel and Erika Randall Beahm. It focuses on two sisters, their mother, their gay best friend, and the changing family dynamics when one sister becomes pregnant with twins and the other sister announces that she is lesbian. *Leading Ladies* gently engages issues of gender and sexuality. The protagonist Toni’s personal transformation from wallflower to leading lady intertextually references *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) with its emphasis on Latin dancing. The central significance of swing dance echoes Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers’ dances in *Swing*

*Dance* (1936) and Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron's swing dances by the River Seine in *An American in Paris* (1951).

As a title, *Leading Ladies* points in two directions; the ladies who lead, specifically those who lead the dance, and those who are primary actors. At the heart of the film's title is assertive "ladies" who have agency, self-determination, and ultimately, independence. In the first instance, the "ladies" are Toni, her younger sister, Tasi, and their single mother Sheri Campari. At the film's outset, Toni is definitely not a leading lady, but seems rather to play second fiddle to her sister and her sister's dancing talent. The entire family is focused on Tasi and her dance partner Cedric's ballroom dancing. Their ultimate goal is to win the Midwest Regional Ballroom Dance Competition. In an early scene, the "Toothbrush Tango," the two sisters are sent to bed with a clap of the hands by their overbearing mother who reminds them to clean their teeth. The girls brush their teeth in front of a large mirror and in unison, but it is Toni who puts toothpaste on Tasi's toothbrush, Toni who tears off a piece of dental floss for Tasi, Toni who offers her the bin for the floss, and Toni who pours mouth rinse into a cap for Tasi. The camera pans from right to left and left to right, views them from above, and then from the side, and the combination of synchronized moves, in time with the tango music, creates a comic effect. The scene suggests that even something as mundane as brushing your teeth can be experienced as a playful and joyful sequence of dance moves.

In the first half of the film, Toni is mostly invisible. Her creativity is hidden, as is her sexuality. She blends in with the studio background, her pale shirt the same color as the dance studio wall she stands against while she watches her sister and Cedric rehearse. However, a long dolly shot frames Toni as the subject of interest for the camera as well as for viewers. Even though Toni is silent as Cedric and Tasi dance and even though she functions only as Cedric's stand-in, the camera concentrates on her and slowly moves in to focus close-up on her face. Cedric and Tasi dance in the foreground and the frame includes snippets of their elbows and feet. But Toni is the center of the image and the central focus of the film narrative. When Toni dances by herself, it is clear to viewers that Toni is an equally talented ballroom dancer, but at this point she prefers to dance privately, not to compete.

The traditionally male role of family breadwinner is played by Toni, although her earnings as a pizza cook and waitress mean that the family lives modestly. Far from being overly serious in carrying out her family responsibilities, Toni playfully incorporates dance moves into everything she does, including organizing the condiments for the restaurant tables, pairing salt and chili pots and salt pots together, all choreographed in time to the music on the soundtrack, and foregrounded because there is minimal dialogue. She wraps a fork and a spoon in a paper napkin and, in case viewers have missed her earlier facial expression when putting



two salt pots together, she gives another smile as she puts two spoons in one napkin, which metonymically suggests two people of the same sex in the one pair. This brief gesture suggests an awareness of her own lesbian desire, but she has certainly never acted on it, nor has she ever come out to anyone.

A version of the “coming-out” script is, however, enacted when Toni meets Mona on the dance floor at Cedric’s dance club. Toni becomes overtly aware of the nature of her own desire immediately after she has danced with Mona for the first time. To begin with, Toni observes other couples on the dance floor. Then she is in among the audience who watch Cedric and his boyfriend dance on stage with the band Danny Leisure and the Suites. She clearly enjoys watching the fast-tempo performance that re-configures the heterosexual dance couple as a gay male couple (“By the Bye”). Shortly afterward, Toni and Mona literally bump into each other, a reference to the first time Tony and Maria meet in *West Side Story*. Before they have had time to introduce themselves, Toni offers to show Mona how to swing dance, and they dance as a couple for the duration of Crytzer’s Blue Rhythm Band’s big band number “Chasin’ the Blues.” The camera cuts between their dance moves, their smiling faces, their feet, and Mona’s swirling dress.

When the music shifts tempo into something slower and more romantic, Toni and Mona continue to dance together, but the camera moves to a position high above the dance floor and the dancing is filmed in slow motion, seemingly outside of time. In a lengthy overhead shot in the style of Busby Berkeley, the fixed camera looks down at the kaleidoscopic patterns and shifting configurations of dancing couples, but the female couple always remains central in the image. There is no dialogue only swing dancing for the duration of “By the Bye” and “Toni Meets Mona,” two scenes that last for nearly ten minutes, and the second scene functions as a compressed version of an entire evening together.

The following scene, “Mona’s Apartment,” is an inversion of “Toni Meets Mona.” This time it is Mona who takes the lead and there is only one couple in the dance of romance, which is filmed in pink and purple tones. Dance is represented as the catalyst for personal transformation and the context for Toni’s sexual awakening. Yet in the film’s only love scene, Toni and Mona both keep most of their clothes on. Mona initiates the more intimate end to the evening when she sits astride Toni on the velvet chaise longue and kisses Toni on her face and neck while the camera moves behind Mona. The image on screen for the most part is the back of Mona’s 1950s satin dress and her pointed foot as she bends her leg and then extends it behind her in what looks like another dance move. Toni, for her part, acknowledges her lack of relationship experience, but is secure in what she says and does with Mona as “it feels entirely natural.” Both girls sit closely together on the chaise lounge, and Mona undoes her halter-neck tie, with Toni stroking her décolletage.

The two girls stand up again and Mona unzips the remainder of her dress so that she is now wearing only a strapless bra and petticoats. Toni slowly spins Mona around so that she almost “unwraps” Mona out of her dress, an ethereal and dance-like movement that makes them laugh gently together.

As Mona and Toni dance together, they comment on their own performance. When Mona asks what Toni is short for (which Maria asks Tony in *West Side Story*), she tells her “Antoinette” and Mona replies, “I like it. It lasts longer.” (Tony’s name in *West Side Story* is short for Anton.) The name Antoinette also links Toni to Marie-Antoinette who is believed to have engaged in sexual relationships with her maids of honor (Thomas 1989). Mona’s comment has an obvious double meaning in that Mona also suggests that women enjoy slower foreplay and that a sexual encounter between women is likely to be more prolonged than heterosexual sex, but this process of re-naming “Toni” to “Antoinette” does change the way she is seen by Mona and the audience; it also changes her self-image. In a later scene, when Toni comes out to her mother, she asks her mother to use her full name. Toni becomes simultaneously more adult and more differentiated from her family of origin.

In the film’s concluding scene, the characters self-consciously perform a Hollywood happy ending in “Happily Ever After.” Toni has come out, Tasi has had her twins, and their mother is fully reconciled to the new directions the girls’ lives are taking. The extended family, which now includes Mona and the girls’ best friend Cedric, is filmed outside for the first time in the film, taking a walk in the park and enjoying a peaceful picnic together. There is no dialogue, only music and dancing; Toni dances with Mona, Tasi dances with Cedric, and Sheri plays the role of new grandmother and looks after the newborn twins. One of the most popular dances in the film is the tango, which was originally performed by two males (Miller 2014). Here, it is performed by two female characters and for the most part, the two dancers enact scripts present in recent dance-themed films aimed at young adults. The difference is that the two dancers together enact a lesbian relationship.

## Conclusion

Mirror neuron research sheds light on how subjectivity and intersubjectivity can be created through spectatorship of performance, especially of movement. Mirror neurons in our brains effectively blur the distinction between self and other or between viewer and character. The neural system creates a bridge between the viewer and the viewed, which Marco Iacoboni suggests is central to the development of culture and society. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is a permanent condition of experience, that we perceive the world through our bodies, and that we are always embodied subjects.

Embodied performances create an intersubjective relationship that emotionally connects the viewer and character or performer.

Viewers who cheerlead or dance are likely to have particularly active mirror neuron responses to on-screen performances, but all viewers can pre-reflexively and automatically understand and emotionally connect with Santana and her enactment of the lesbian cheerleader and dancer. Given *Glee*'s viewing figures, which are in the millions, the show has the potential to influence attitudes among its audience, particularly among young female viewers. Santana's relationship with Brittany moves through several different stages but is represented as intersubjective and significant to them both. The adolescent lesbian romance is a central part of the television narrative over a period of seven years. In the final season, Santana and Brittany are married. They continue to dance and to understand themselves through their bodies. Similarly, Toni and Mona meet on the dance floor, dance together before they really talk to each other, and remain a romantic couple. They continue to dance in the film's closing scene.

Both Santana and Toni are at the centers of their individual narratives. They are strong individuals who generate viewer engagement and empathy. Viewers may even end up caring deeply about both characters. Santana and Toni defy lesbian stereotypes, as do their girlfriends. Santana also resists Latin American stereotypes. Ultimately, it is Santana and Toni's creative dancing talent that renders them visible, empowers them, and enables them to express themselves. Both are physically active, attractive, hard-working, playful, and compassionate. They have a positive contribution to make to society. Dance enhances their agency and power, and moves audiences both on and off screen.

## Note

- 1 She employs the phrase in relation to Joan Crawford's dancer in *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928).

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## 16 “A dolla makes her holla”

### Honey Boo Boo and the Collaborative Gaze of the Twenty-First-Century Knowing Child

*Lance Weldy*

A sassy, blonde, 6-year-old girl walks on stage to perform her talent, dressed in short jean shorts and a red gingham mini-shirt that exposes her full belly. With country music playing in the background, she sashays through a dance routine with her mother mimicking in the audience, or is it the daughter mimicking the mother? Whichever it is, the mother encourages her by saying, “Shake your butt, baby!” This 6-year-old, Alana “Honey Boo Boo” Thompson, became immensely popular in America in 2012, aided by media exposure on YouTube and the 2009–2013 Reality TV series *Toddlers & Tiaras* (TT), a show about children, mainly girls, who compete in child beauty pageants. Child beauty pageants follow the general format of adult beauty pageants and allow children to compete for awards within their own age division as well as for more coveted awards available to all contestants. A variation of the “Ultimate Grand Supreme” award typically denotes the title won by the winner of the entire pageant. To win these awards, girls are judged by their participation in a range of categories, such as modeling (e.g., expensive gowns or swimsuits) and talent.

The most popular child beauty pageants can be categorized as either “glitz” or “natural” (Shannon and Thompson and Levesque 120); TT focuses on the former, described by Leandra H. Hernandez as pageants where “prepubescent, sexualized girls... compete in beauty pageants with highly regimented hair, makeup, costumes, and on-stage performances” (163). A typical episode follows three girls preparing for and competing at a specific child beauty pageant; to incite drama, producers make sure at least two of the three girls are competing against each other in the same age category or for the same overall prizes. Hernandez’s use of the word “sexualized” in this context is no accident: the much-publicized murder of JonBenét Ramsey in 1996 brought child pageantry to the forefront of America’s attention, fueling popular and academic arguments about child pageantry as a sexualizing apparatus.

In 1998, Anne Higonnet introduced another term into this conversation about the adult concern for the physical and psychological

state of children: the "Knowing" child. Higonet introduces this term in her discomfiting study of visual representations of childhood innocence, *Pictures of Innocence*. She argues that "Knowing" children are not completely innocent, but instead "have bodies and passions of their own" and "are also often aware of adult bodies and passions, whether as mimics or only witnesses" (*Pictures* 207). The extent to which those children know about adult "bodies and passions" and the mindset in which they may reproduce such knowledge obviously varies from each child's background and home experience, which undoubtedly "confronts adults with many more challenges as well as many more pleasures than any idea of childhood has done before" (*Pictures* 209).

Consequently, the biggest challenge for me has been determining the difference between a sexualized and a knowing child. Are these terms mutually exclusive? And where does Honey Boo Boo fit on this spectrum? "Sexualized" implies a quality or state of being that is enacted (by adults) on another, that is passively and, for the most part, unknowingly or naively received (in this case, by children), while "Knowing" would imply a quality intuitively or actively received, instilled, or informed without the express help or intent of others (adults). Agency could be an elemental distinction between the terms, but while these two terms imply contrasting ontological forms, the actual knowledge or content (of adult themes) conveyed to the viewer could conceivably be similar, leaving the audience to wonder about the extent to which the children understand or merely perform an understanding. As part of their lens for viewing literature about teen sex workers, Lydia Kokkola, Elina Valovirta, and Janne Korkka employ Higonet's terminology and argue that "treating teenagers as knowing children has resulted in adolescent readers who think that they know a great deal about sex" when they probably "know less than they think they do" (67). Scholars could consider the landscape of texts featuring children in a similar way: that adults overestimate the capacity of knowing children and carefully mediate the sensitive information a child can access. Conversely, adults could believe that children are too innocent to understand any carnal desires they might perform; instead they must have been sexualized (i.e., corrupted) by adults. No matter how adults look at this subject, most would likely lean more favorably toward a knowing child figure rather than a sexualized child because, at least with the former, the child possesses some agency and seems less victimized.

In the case of Alana, it becomes difficult at times to deduce exactly when she is actually a passive tool of the producers and when she is manipulating the audience into thinking she is a passive tool. Because of the very nature of Reality TV, she is in a symbiotic relationship with the producers of the show: they profit from commodifying Honey Boo Boo's persona, while Alana receives immediate positive reinforcement

from the show's crew and protracted gratification from fans. Instead of restricting the conversation solely to a sexualized/known child binary, I discuss Alana in terms of a collaborative gaze: how she is portrayed and marketed by the show's producers, how sensitive information is disseminated to her through her mother, and how much she is aware of and responsive to this constructed persona from both adult parties. A pedophilic gaze is objectionably gratified by the sexualized beauty-pageant girls, but a collaborative gaze reveals how Alana playfully interacts with the adults behind and in front of the camera in ways that indicate she is knowingly watching us just as much as we are watching her.

This chapter charts Alana's transition from a sexualized child beauty-pageant contestant on *TT* to a more knowing child in her family's 2012–2014 reality show, *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (*HCHBB*). First, I provide the constructs of Reality TV and how this genre has influenced the way adults interpret the authenticity of children's behavior, especially when they are sexualized. From there, I briefly establish the conflicted messages about children and sexuality as well as clarify the nebulous differences between children and adolescents. Next, I show how Higonnet frames and complicates how children are represented in art and media, specifically through photography, and how her term, the *Knowing child*, relates to Reality TV. Finally, I argue that *TT* and the first season of *HCHBB* present Alana as a twenty-first-century knowing child because her knowledge is mediated, and, more importantly, because she is aware of how her knowing-ness is informed and managed by the producers and her mother.

## Reality TV

Early in his essay about Reality TV, John Corner lists three "classic functions" of the documentary (48) and notes a fourth has been added: "Documentary as Diversion," where "the primary viewing activity is on looking and overhearing, perhaps aligned to events by intermittent commentary" (50). This summary describes the kind of format that most reality shows follow, with the "intermittent commentary" given through what is called the *confessional mode*, where the participant talks directly to the camera, usually in an intimate studio setting, to share thoughts about events that the audience is watching. Corner adds that "when a piece of work in documentary format is entirely designed in relation to its capacity to deliver entertainment, quite radical changes occur, both to the forms of representation and to viewing relations" (52). This radical shift in representation raises fundamental questions begun by the work of Higonnet and others: is the child in a photograph or moving picture an authentic representation of childhood, or a performance for the camera? Does it matter if the performance is artificial if

the conveyed message potentially "pollutes" the child? The convergence of the sexualized child with the genre of Reality TV seems to suggest that manipulation by the producers to deliver entertainment is accepted and can include instances of sexualization to improve ratings. In the case of Alana's experiences, child beauty pageants are fraught with sexual innuendo.

The ambiguity of the child's behavior in Reality TV can be applied to what Corner says about this shift with the new form of documentary: "belief in the veracity of what you are watching is not a prerequisite to engagement and pleasure. Indeed, quite the reverse rule would seem to apply" (54). Adults' minds are engaged while watching an unscripted documentary designed to appear as informative nonfiction, yet they do not have to believe the show represents truth to enjoy it. In the case of child beauty pageants, then, the sexualized child could be viewed as simply a performance that adults are delightfully scandalized by because they believe the performance has no real consequence.

But many adults believe the sexualizing consequences from *TT* are real. In September 2011, three-year-old Paisley performed in an outfit and wig similar to Julia Roberts' prostitute character in the film *Pretty Woman*, sparking outrage from Sherri Shepherd on ABC's *The View* and Tim Winter of *The Parents Television Council* (Canning and Pereira). Corner remarks that the new tone in the documentary genre "cut[s] through questions of sincerity and authenticity" and instead gives "a busy dialectic of attraction and dislike" that "provides the mainspring of the entertainment" (56). This dialectic between "attraction and dislike" forms the foundation for the responses of both pleasure and disgust that sexualizing shows like *TT* evoke in the average American today, causing adults to question both the authenticity of children's behavior and the pleasure adults take in watching it.

## Children and Sexuality

Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley ask an important question: "What is the magic age of childhood? Those who discuss age-of-consent laws seem to consider anyone under that age (usually sixteen) to be a child" (xxv). Their response acknowledges adult familiarity in framing legal boundaries between childhood and adolescence, but Richard D. Mohr exposes this boundary as a recent and dynamic social construction when he notices that "Until 1900, the age of consent in half of the United States was ten" (28). Bruhm and Hurley continue their discussion by pointing out that legal definitions of these age boundaries have been scrutinized, especially when minors commit acts of sex or violence, a notion reinforced by Carrie Hintz and Eric L. Tribunella in their children's literature textbook (29–31). Ultimately, Bruhm and Hurley conclude that "there may very well be no definition of 'child' that applies to



all situations, as defining the child is itself often the source of debate in any legally contested form of sexuality” (xxv). On Facebook, reactions were mixed about the six-year prison sentence 26-year-old professional footballer, Adam Johnson, received for sexual assault of a 15-year-old. Some believed six years was excessive, citing other offenders who committed worse actions and received less time; others questioned Johnson’s pedophile label: Courtney Mitchell said it is “ridiculous that he is being called a pedophile (lover of children)[.] At 15 nobody is a child[;] they are young adults.” Mitchell’s comment about inaccurate labels (pedophile versus hebephile) underscores this ambiguous boundary between childhood and adolescence.

Kokkola argues that “by exaggerating the turmoil of adolescence, the myth of the innocent child can be preserved or even exaggerated” (6). This innocent child myth—exposed and deconstructed by scholars like Jacqueline Rose, Higonnet, and James R. Kincaid—serves as both a protective and restrictive force-field around children. Kokkola problematizes the “need to care for the teenagers as though they were children in the same sense as a seven-year-old, and the recognition of the teenager’s carnal desire,” especially because this emergent carnal desire is often interpreted as the loss of childhood innocence and the beginning of an embodied sexuality (27). Consequently, the adolescent becomes daunted at the mixed signals, and, as Kokkola points out elsewhere, the “social categories of childhood, adolescence and adulthood” become more stratified, especially between children’s sexual innocence and an adolescent’s sexual potential (9).

When transferring this topic to sex and children, I notice similar contradictory messages, but with a different complexity. Most expect teens to be plighted with sexual dilemmas; the same cannot be said for children. Michel Foucault observed the historical regulation of sexual discourses with sexually active children, noting that “practically all children indulge or are prone to indulge in sexual activity” but that this “sexual activity posed physical and moral, individual and collective dangers,” so much so that adult guardians and professionals would have to be careful to monitor and curb any sort of sexual manifestation in children (104). He specifically focuses on masturbation, but the figure of the child as capable of “precious and perilous, dangerous and endangered sexual potential” (104) applies to current simultaneous fascination and disgust with the image of the contemporary sexualized child, and I argue that Alana best represents this image as the most publicized, contemporary example of a child beauty-pageant contestant.

Peter Coviello sums up Kincaid’s crucial scholarship about the sexualized child and provides an articulately constructed foundation for looking at the dichotomous lens through which adults see children: “we cannot, today, think of children without thinking of sex, if only because

of the unrelenting vehemence of our determination that children ought not to be thought of as sexual" (136). Telling America to stop connecting two concepts (children and sexuality) causes the opposite reaction: intense scrutiny. Still, the "dominant narrative about children"—as told by Bruhm and Hurley—that "children are (and should stay) innocent of sexual desires and intentions" governs mainstream ideology (ix). Despite public outcry, child beauty pageants remain popular and have turned Alana into a celebrity, reinforcing how "Our culture has enthusiastically sexualized the child while denying just as enthusiastically that it was doing any such thing" (Kincaid 13). However, for the persona of Alana to sustain her level of celebrity (at least for the life of her own reality show), her narrative must transition from her avant-garde position in a sexualized context (i.e., solely devoted to child beauty pageants) to a more family-centered one. To better understand the exploitative element of Alana's sexualized context, I next investigate and apply Higonnet's discussion of child objectification.

### Higonnet and the Gaze of Objectification

In a 2002/2003 interview in *Cabinet* magazine, Higonnet explains how the myth of childhood innocence became influential in the nineteenth century with legal reforms that developed "a separate justice system for children and for adults." She segues into a discussion of child pornography laws and how they help increase "anxiety and guilt over issues about the boundary line between childhood and adulthood," especially in regard to "the domain of the visual." For a knowing child like Alana, this visual element becomes crucial to establishing her awareness of how her body is viewed by adults, and how she can capitalize on that knowledge. Higonnet traces the media evolution of the innocent child image from portraits to illustrations to photographs and argues that "the most popular and influential images of childhood... in the 20th century... are overwhelmingly American" ("Picturing"). Gaylyn Studlar corroborates Higonnet's assertions about the role nostalgia plays in restricting girls as innocent. For Studlar, the "pedophilic gaze" does not refer to males attracted to Mary Pickford's cinematic appearances as a young girl; rather, she describes it as a "cultural pedophilia that looked to the innocent child-woman to personify nostalgic ideals of femininity" (209). Pickford's success in early twentieth-century America with her performances as old-fashioned girls illustrates how the childhood innocence myth was perpetuated through technological advances: in this case, from the photograph to the silent moving picture. Moreover, as I argue in this chapter, Alana continues this American tradition of being one "of the most popular and influential images of childhood" for the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Higonnet's 1996 article served as a precursor to *Pictures of Innocence* and asks several key, uncomfortable questions about what exactly constitutes child pornography:

Are photographs poised exactly on a boundary between reality and representation? To what extent do photographs belong to the realm of the imaginary, and to what extent do they record events or persons? Can we know what a photograph "really" represents?.

("Conclusions" 2)

Her questions provide an appropriate segue into the twenty-first-century media world and America's current cultural pedophilic gaze with shows like *TT*. The next logical step from silent films into moving pictures comes with these same questions: Is Reality TV real or just a simulacrum of the real? How does this affect the viewing and reception of potentially sexualized children in contexts that require them to perform as miniature adults in beauty pageants? Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray address this question about the authenticity of Reality TV, noting "new relationships between 'reality' and its representation" (7), one of which could include questioning the authenticity of a potentially sexualized child represented on a show like *TT*, and how the viewer's gaze and interpretation affect such representation.

Furthermore, Higonnet's interview claims the term "objectify" works better than "sexualize" in describing this phenomenon, because "the sexualization of the child is an objectification of the child" and because "it is a strategy of a consumer culture that leaves children vulnerable," which she labels "exploitive." She believes this distinction is important because not all forms of sexualizing are objectifying, and, she argues, fetishizing a child's innocence is objectification, too. This complexity of child representation in visuals echoes the previously mentioned difficulties of finitely setting the boundaries of childhood itself. I want to focus on the exploitative element she mentions as a means of understanding *TT* as a venue to sexualize and commodify the girls, understanding that my and any scholar's use of the word "sexualize" will specifically connote "objectify."

This next section applies the theoretical constructs from the first part of the chapter and demonstrates how Alana's character shifts from an objectified gaze in *TT* to a more collaborative gaze through her knowingness in *HCHBB*. By diminishing the sexualized-child element in Alana's Reality TV career trajectory and supplanting it with a knowing-child element, the pedophilic gaze of objectification, which works only one way from the viewer onto the child, becomes diffused into more of a collaborative gaze, which operates in both directions between Alana and her TV producers and mother. Since Alana appeared in only two episodes of *TT*, the amount of material by which to critique her behavior

in this series is limited, but from observation, Alana's body becomes a site of exploitation and commodification, and she demonstrates an early awareness of the collaborative gaze, specifically her influence on the filming crew.

### *Toddlers & Tiaras* and Exploitation

The child beauty-pageant circuit in *TT* serves as a sexualized zone because of the exploitative public display aided by the girls' mothers or primary caregivers. The show has consistently invoked that dialectic of "attraction and dislike," with most of the dislike stemming from the exploitation. For Alana, her knowing child status that develops in *HCHBB* is certainly aware of the sensual and the reproductive, and her curvy body that she manipulates in *TT* for the producers accentuates her femininity in ways most the other prepubescent pageant girls cannot.

Alana appeared on *TT* in the first episode of the fifth season, "Precious Moments Pageant 2011," in January 2012, and she soon became a celebrity. As of January 2017, a two-minute montage clip of Alana by YouTube user badkuipx has reached over 11 million hits. This clip perfectly revealed Alana's outrageous personality and provided instances that not only suggest she is a sexualized child through the encouraged use of her body to attract positive attention from the judges, but also that she has been coached on the conventions of the Reality TV genre and knows how to mimic adults. Alana haughtily introduces herself as a 6-year-old "beauty queen" and models *trash talk*—a Reality TV convention of having an overly confident self-image while denigrating the competition: "Those other girls must be crazy if they think they're gonna beat me, honey boo-boo child," thus establishing her nickname.

Next in the montage, Alana mentions winning money at pageants, which leads to her second famous catchphrase: "A dolla make me holla, honey boo boo." This line immediately garners audible guffaws from the off-screen crew, likely from the sexually charged meaning behind that catchphrase. With its allusions to prostitution, Alana's trash talk evokes adult humor. The positive response Alana receives from the crew from such a naughty statement encourages her precocious onscreen persona, and as she laughs at herself upon hearing their laughter, she is cognizant of being under the objectifying gaze of adults behind the camera. Her new moniker, formed because of these two adult catchphrases, is a mutually lucrative bonus for her and the adults.

The rest of the YouTube clip focuses on Alana's experience at the beauty pageant itself, where she displays and manipulates her body for the approval of various adults. During the talent segment, her mother, June, screams from the audience for Alana to "work them judges," meaning to woo them through seductive eye contact. In the full episode, Alana's mother repeatedly instructs Alana to accentuate her exposed

belly to the judges as a way of appealing to them; she even rubs her belly from the audience as a reminder. Many different *TT* episodes have reinforced this importance for children to make a personal connection with the judges while on stage, especially through eye contact. Higonnet emphasizes this same beauty-pageant directive (*Pictures* 145). While June's competitive strategy of rubbing the belly may seem a puzzling form of flirtation to the judges, it nonetheless reinforces the exploitative gaze of objectification inherent in child beauty pageants through manipulation of the child's body.

Next, the montage shows Alana in a confessional studio, dressed in an undersized undershirt that exposes some of her belly. She repeats her mother's directive to the camera about showing her belly to the judges before grabbing both sides of her belly so that the excess skin becomes accentuated. Again, the camera crew guffaws at the unexpected sight, clearly unusual at a competition where beauty standards dictate that a child's weight and build not have excess skin to manage such a practice. This second instance of making the crew laugh has cemented her understanding of how she can exploit her body for adult approval. Furthermore, when she performs in the talent portion as Daisy Duke "with a style of dress that many would consider inappropriate for children" (Weldy and Crisp 371), June tells her to shake her butt for the judges, and, in her own confessional thoughts about Alana's routine, aired in the full episode, she remarks that Alana's Daisy Duke routine was "so so cute."

By early 2012, Alana had struck a chord with Americans. In August, she returned for the episode, "Georgia's Most Beautiful Girls: Going for Gold," where she wore a homemade t-shirt that says "Honey Boo Boo," revealing how her family commodified Alana's popularity by literally using their daughter's body as an advertisement. Further, Alana explores other ways to accentuate her bodily functions for comedic effect, like farting in her massage chair before the pageant and in the confessional time during the pageant. However lighthearted and juvenile the farting sounds may be, the sexualized objectification continues with the T-shirt Alana wears during this confessional: a picture of a porcupine with the words "Don't Touch" at the top. Such a picture and command about the dangers of inappropriate touching reinforce protecting the myth of childhood innocence while unintentionally connecting childhood with sex—as Kincaid via Coviello has suggested—because of the shirt's sexualized double entendre for an objectified gaze.

Interspersing objectified moments with moments of play—or "innocence"—gives the audience mixed signals. This phenomenon of contradictory signals continues in *HCHBB*, specifically in how Alana's body becomes censored, which seems to sexualize her childhood innocence and confuse the viewers' gaze. As I argue in the next section, these instances of contradiction can be understood through Higonnet's work

as the result of the producers' attempts to commodify a child's body for a mass audience. Overall, however, Alana's character transitions from a sexualized to a twenty-first-century knowing child, but while her knowing becomes regulated through the adults around her, her awareness of the adult gaze flourishes.

### *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and the Collaborative Gaze

*HCHBB* faced controversy, too, both on and off screen, the most shocking of which relates to the show's cancellation when news spread that June was again dating a former boyfriend who had been accused of sexually assaulting one of her own children ("I'm Hurt"). This scandal might have been expected on the hypersexualized *TT*, but not for *HCHBB*, which heavily promoted the importance of family.

When Howard Lee explains that "we couldn't build an entire series on the shoulders of a young child," he verbalizes what I would argue is a transition in focus from Alana participating as an objectified, sexualized child on stage to more of a knowing child as part of an ensemble cast. André Cavalcante effectively argues that the family is as authentic as the Reality TV genre allows, remarking that the family "escapes pure caricature" (50). This point helps answer the questions that Higonnet and Corner raise about authentic representations of children and Reality TV and supports Alana's knowing-ness as real. On the very night Alana's second *TT*'s episode aired (August 8, 2012), TLC aired the first two episodes of *HCHBB*, which were a ratings hit ("TLC's"). Throughout the ten episodes of the first season, Alana's character solidified into a twenty-first-century form of Higonnet's knowing child, thanks to the collaborative gaze provided by the Reality TV genre. In this section, I point out representative instances of Alana's knowing-ness thematically so that I can also discuss the collaborative gaze in action as well as the mixed messages the producers give about Alana's body and her innocence.

Alana's awareness and application of queer sexualities and identities serves as the first example of her knowing-ness in this *Photographs of children* series. In Episode 2, "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig," Mama June and Sugar Bear give Alana a teacup pig, called Glitzy, to boost her morale after a disappointing pageant (Shannon and Thompson and Levesque 130–132). Glitzy reveals Alana's knowing child awareness and raises questions about her reference to different forms of sexuality and possible gender fluidity, specifically about how Alana understands the biological sex of the pig to be male, yet wants the gender identity to be female as her pageant partner. She says, "We're gonna make you a pageant gay pig" (130). In future episodes, however, the gender references become fluid. In Episode 3, "She Oooo'd Herself," the title references Glitzy as defecating "herself" on the dinner table. In Episode 5, "What Is a Door Nut?" when Alana takes Glitzy with her to practice for the pageant, she says,

“Glitzzy, we’re gonna be the prettiest girls at the pageant.” Later in that episode, the gender pronouns switch several times when Alana learns she cannot keep Glitzzy. She pleads, “We should keep Glitzzy, because he’s good,” but a little later, she says, “The thing I love about Glitzzy is that she loves me.” After Sugar Bear takes Glitzzy away, Alana admits, “He really does need a new home.” Alana may play the pronoun game as a form of modeling adult practices—especially in the gay community—of lovingly referring to queer men as women, and the appearance of Alana’s gay uncle in several episodes could support this theory, but the different contexts in which she does this makes it unclear. Nevertheless, it reinforces her knowing-ness through her twenty-first-century affirming awareness of queer sexualities and identities.

Second, Peter Hunt, among others, has argued that “food can be seen as an important feature of children’s books—a substitute, quite possibly, for sex” (81). In Alana’s case, using food as a metaphor for sex diffuses viewer anxiety and restricts any overt sexualizing carryover from *TT*; it also maintains Alana’s innocence for the audience by reducing her level of knowing. In Episode 2, the family accompanies the oldest daughter, Anna “Chickadee,” who is 17 years old and pregnant, to her ultrasound appointment. This scene showcases Alana’s education in anatomy and sexual reproduction when she asks how they know the baby’s sex. The technician safely responds that the baby has “girl parts.” But when Alana asks, “Where’s her biscuit?” the scene cuts immediately to June explaining in confessional their family use of “biscuit” for female genitalia: “It’s called a ‘biscuit’ cause it looks like a biscuit, ya know, when it opens up,” and she likens it specifically to a biscuit from Hardee’s fast-food restaurant. At the end of this segment with just June and Alana on their couch at home, her knowing-ness appears one last time when June asks Alana where babies come from. Alana looks to the camera and begins with an innocent story of when a mommy and daddy love each other—but after a brief pause, she looks to June and quickly says “it actually does come from your biscuit.” With her mediated version of sexual anatomy through food metaphors, Alana demonstrates her knowing-ness for the camera and to her mother, who provided her with her sexual vocabulary.

As a twenty-first-century knowing child, she exhibits this food-as-sex metaphor knowledge again for the collaborative gaze. In Episode 8, “Time for a Sketti!” Alana provides more convergence of food and sex-organ talk in her confessional: “Kaitlyn’s coming out of Anna’s moon pie any day now.” But then she says, “Everybody’s talking about how Kaitlyn’s gonna be born, and it sounds gross,” followed by, “Anna started having contractions. And that’s when you pull your baby out with your biscuit.” This modified knowing applied to a medical scenario—using the word “contractions” and “biscuit” in the same statement—invokes a slight giggling from the crew and a snarky face on Alana, who knows she has again amused/scandalized the adults.

Third, Alana's knowing-ness continues in Episode 4, "I'm Sassified!" in ways that show conflict with her mother—the one who has mediated her language—and that reveal a twenty-first-century application of Higonet's contradictory goals in commodifying child bodies. June celebrates her eighth anniversary of living with Sugar Bear by going to a beauty salon with her daughters, and Alana models her mother's language about body maintenance. After June says, "I decided I'd put a little paint on this old barn and look good tonight," the producers cut to Alana, who says, in imitation, "They gotta shine up this old barn for the judges," intentionally crafted to highlight her innocent humor. But the next few scenes reveal more of a knowing child's awareness of adults and sex in ways that put her at odds against her mother, the one responsible for keeping her knowing-ness age-appropriate. Perhaps in mimicking June's wanting to look sexy for her date, Alana prepares for her next pageant by saying "I gotta make myself sexy," only to be immediately corrected by June with a serious face, who says, "cute." Immediately after this, the producers play night club music as a soundtrack while Alana sways. To reinforce her message, June says, "You look *cute* running around" (emphasis mine). Higonet explains this difficulty of managing child bodies in pictures:

Photographs of children that appeal to a large consumer audience have to accomplish simultaneously two contradictory goals. They have to make children look physically charming, but not intentionally. They have to provide child bodies to their audience without making those bodies enticing or even available. They have to allow us to enjoy the sight of children and think "cute," not "desirable," let alone "sexy," and maybe not even "beautiful." Basically, successful commercial photographs have to make children seem there and not there.

(*Pictures 77–78*)

June and the producers face the same contradictory challenges in a twenty-first-century context when the child endeavors to mimic adult behavior in a reality show, oftentimes resulting in mixed messages. June wants her daughter to be cute but, using humor, Alana performs what she thinks is sexy, and the producers indulge this comedy through the dancetrack as a way of promoting this dialectic for the audience. However, these aided or manufactured contradictory moments by the producers illustrate the difficulty in casting a child's body as carefree but not dangerous. Furthermore, Alana must deal with her changing body in this scene, which affects how she can appeal to the judges' gaze. During her pageant dress fitting at home, it is implied that Alana has gained weight or grown; Alana notes that the placement of her short skirt has gotten too high, so she complains, "Everybody's gonna be seeing my



stuff.” Because of her understanding of sex organs as a knowing child and her collaborative gaze with the adults, Alana is body-conscious. Consequently, Alana must get a new dress, this time with a bodice that laces from behind to ensure it can be worn as her child body continues to develop.

Finally, these contradictory challenges to profitably commodify a child’s body appear in several episodes involving censored/uncensored images. Although the producers have diminished her sexualized persona from *TT*, adult assumptions of the sexualized child and censorship become complicated in Episode 6, “A Bunch of Wedgies.” In an earlier episode, Glitzy the pig defecated on the dining table, with the actual feces blurred because the FCC has put restrictions on “indecentcy,” defined as “programming [that] contains patently offensive sexual or excretory material that does not rise to the level of obscenity” (“Consumer”). Yet Episode 6 contains a modified Coppertone moment when the bottom part of Alana’s new dress falls to her ankles and her bottom is blurred, though she is clearly wearing underwear and not completely nude. The juxtaposition of these two censoring instances raises important questions: Does this blur for a 6-year-old child’s underwear qualify as sexual material according to the FCC? Has she passed a stage of childhood into a knowing one where more modesty is required? As Higonnet’s work has shown, sometimes adults err on the side of caution with images of children, but blurring out her underwear in this scene only reinforces what Coviello has said about sexualizing the forbidden: blurring the underwear in the name of modesty only calls attention to how adults have unnecessarily eroticized an incident, especially when Alana and other children in *TT* have worn unblurred, skimpier bikini bottoms (136). In this specific scene, the producers have unsuccessfully attempted to make Alana “seem there and not there” by calling attention to the blurred element of her body they were trying to protect.

“It Is What It Is,” the final episode of the season, provides two more important instances of mixed messages about censoring images of children. The family poses for a picture outside, and after sitting down for the picture, Alana discovers that her bottom is dirty as she walks up the steep hill. Likely for comedic effect, the producers zoom on Alana from behind, specifically on the un-blurred, stained, white, short shorts that Alana wears underneath a short, white skirt; but this sequence’s editing casts the family photographer within the scene as complicit in zooming on Alana’s stained bottom, too. This should confuse the audience: is Alana’s rear-end sexualized (through blurring) depending on her wearing underwear or just short shorts under a skirt where the faintest outline of underwear can be seen? Shouldn’t the audience feel uncomfortable looking up a child’s skirt? The FCC decides if material is indecent based on context, and apparently, in this instance, she is not a sexualized child figure or in need of protection via the censoring blur.

The mixed signals continue, however, when Anna gives birth to Kaitlyn near the end of the episode. While Glitzy's feces and Alana's underwear were blurred as indecent, the producers provide a full frontal shot of newborn baby Kaitlyn lying in her baby bed, with no blurring of her "biscuit." Sugar Bear talks about putting some clothes on her for modesty's sake, but the producer vetoes this suggestion and believes the frontal nudity of newborn Kaitlyn does not qualify as indecent. In light of Higonnet's argument about the contradictions of commercially successful images of children, the producers showed "child bodies"—Alana's dirty shorts and Kaitlyn's full frontal—"without making those bodies enticing or even available," which seems inconsistent with Alana's underwear blurring, yet satisfies Higonnet's paradigm.

### "There and Not There": Knowing, but Not

*HCHBB* illustrates how adults incorporate desires to mystify and modify sexual elements for children for selfish reasons. Knabe reports that if the Jodi Foster prostitute character in *Taxi Driver* represents "the sexually knowing child, the female child as an 'innocent victim' emerged more clearly during the 1990s" (93). Alana as a twenty-first-century knowing child represents a combination of these personas, authentically fleshed out in *HCHBB* through her mediated vocabulary and through her catering to a collaborative gaze made possible by Reality TV. "Anything that was invented once can be invented again," Higonnet says (*Pictures* 193), and in Alana's case, this reinvention involves a regulated knowing child more aware of reproduction than the erotic, and who revels in the adult gaze.

Alana is largely innocent, but she has also moved from being passively sexualized to a more active, comedic-filled form of a knowing child who uses food as a metaphor for sex. Kokkola notes, "A child who behaves in 'knowing' ways can be reclassified as a teenager, thereby retaining the purity of the child," and she argues that creating a tweens category as a knowing group proves the adults' desire to keep innocent children as a separate, protected group (36). However, at 7 years old by the end of the first season and arguably too young to be a tween, Alana's behavior seems to test this theory and call for another category of knowing individuals between children and tweens. At some point this method will unravel and only newborns will be innocent, which is perhaps why baby Kaitlyn's naked body was not blurred.

Higonnet describes knowing children as "neither available or controllable" (*Pictures* 211), and Alana demonstrates this uncontrollable nature because she is an innocent girl, but she's not; she knows about vaginas, but only as biscuits; she's authentic, but also mimicking. Considering the show's premature cancellation, it is impossible to predict how long the producers could have successfully commodified Alana for the masses in

light of Higonnet's contradictory goals of being "there and not there," but, to paraphrase a twenty-first-century application of those goals: A successful Reality TV show about a girl should show her to be innocent but not boring, to be sassy but not obnoxious, and to be aware but not dangerous. She must seem real and not real. It is this contradictory interchange of mediated awareness—knowing but not—that makes Alana a fascinating representation of the twenty-first-century knowing child.

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# Notes on Contributors

**Heather Braun** is an assistant professor of English at the University of Akron. Her research and teaching interests include Young Adult Literature, Romantic and Victorian literature, the Gothic, and women writers. Her work has appeared in *Women's Writing*, *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet*, *Victorian Comedy*, *The Irish Studies Review*, *The Norman Mailer Review*, *Parlour*, and *Journal of Gender Studies*. She is the author of *The Rise and Fall of the Femme Fatale in British Literature, 1790–1910* (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2012) and editor of the forthcoming volume, *The Lady on the Drawingroom Floor with Selected Poetry and Prose by Mary Elizabeth Coleridge* (Hesperus, 2017).

**Adrielle Britten** is a PhD candidate at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. Her research focuses on representations of the flourishing child in fiction for children and adolescents, and engages with the broader field of wellbeing studies.

**Samantha Christensen** is a sessional lecturer in English at the University of Alberta, Augustana Faculty. She completed her Master of Arts in English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta in 2014, and her thesis focused on food in nineteenth-century children's fiction.

**Roxanne Harde** is Professor of English and Associate Dean (Research) at the Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta. She researches and teaches American literature and culture, with an emphasis on American and Indigenous children's literature and culture. She has published articles in journals such as *The Lion & the Unicorn*, *Jeunesse*, and *International Research in Children's Literature*, and chapters in several collections including *The Sands of Time: Children's Literature, Culture, Politics and Identity*, *To See the Wizard: Politics and the Literature of Childhood*, and *Seeking Home: Tradition and Modernity in Appalachia*. Her most recent book is *Pollyanna: A Children's Classic at 100*, co-edited with Lydia Kokkola.

**Amanda Hollander** is an assistant professor at Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY. She currently is working on her book project, "The Fabian Child: English and American Literature and

Socialist Reform, 1884–1915.” She also is an author. Her first picturebook, *Petra the Pirate*, is forthcoming from Simon & Schuster.

**Lydia Kokkola** is Head of English and Education at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. She is currently the Principle Investigator in a Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg foundation funded project *Matching Reading Strategies with Purposes and Text Types*, which funded the research for this article. Her main areas of research include Reading in a Foreign Language, Adolescent Literature, and Holocaust studies. Kokkola’s most recent monograph—*Fictions of Adolescent Carnality: Sexy Sinners and Delinquent Deviants*—was published by John Benjamins.

**Margaret Mackey** is Professor Emerita in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alberta. She researches, writes, and teaches in the interdisciplinary field of young people’s literacy and literature in both print and other media. Her research interests include interpretive approaches to print, graphic, digital, and media texts; children’s and young adult literature; popular culture and young people; commodities and merchandising for youth; and reading processes. Her most recent book is *One Child Reading: My Auto-Bibliography* (University of Alberta Press, 2016).

**Michelle H. Martin** is the Endowed Beverly Cleary Professor for Children and Youth Services in the Information School at the University of Washington, where she teaches children’s and young adult literature and youth services courses. From 2011 to 2016, she was the inaugural Augusta Baker Endowed Chair in Childhood Literacy at the University of South Carolina. She is the author of *Brown Gold: Milestones of African-American Children’s Picture Books, 1845–2002* (Routledge, 2004).

**Jennifer M. Miskec** is an associate professor of English at Longwood University where she teaches courses in children’s and young adult literature and directs the Children’s Literature minor. Her most recent work includes *The Early Reader in Children’s Literature*.

**Kristine Moruzi** is a lecturer and ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University. She is currently working on a project about children and charity between 1840 and 1930. She is author of *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850–1915* (Ashgate 2012), and co-editor of *Colonial Girlhood in Literature, Culture and History, 1840–1950* (Palgrave 2014), and *Girls’ School Stories, 1749–1929* (Routledge 2014).

**Kate Norbury** was awarded her PhD, *Re-Writing the Script: Representations of LGB Creativity in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Film and Television* in 2014 (Macquarie University). She received an

MA in Modern Languages (Cambridge University, 1993), an MA in Children's Literature (Surrey University, 2004), and has published on teen television and film, most recently in *The Journal of Popular Culture* (August 2016).

**Julie Pfeiffer** is Associate Professor of English at Hollins University, where she teaches children's literature, the nineteenth-century novel, and Milton. She has published on Charlotte Brontë, picturebooks, and novels for girls and is the editor of *Children's Literature*.

**Karen Sands-O'Connor** is Professor of English at Buffalo State College in New York and the 2015–2016 Leverhulme Visiting Professor at Newcastle University in England. She has published extensively on Black British literature for children, most notably in her monograph *Soon Come Home to this Island* (Routledge 2007) and her forthcoming work, *Children's Publishing and Black Britain* (Palgrave 2017).

**Darla Schumm** is Professor of Religion at Hollins University. Her PhD in Religion, Ethics, and Society is from Vanderbilt University. Darla is the co-editor of three volumes as well as a textbook on world religions and disability, and is writing a book tentatively titled: *Religion and Disability in America*.

**Erin Spring** is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Institute for Child and Youth Studies at the University of Lethbridge. She received her PhD in Education from the University of Cambridge. Erin's work considers how adolescent readers respond to the intersections between place and identity, within and beyond the text.

**Rachelle D. Washington**, the Executive Director of First Year Experience and Honors Programs at Allen University, administers student-focused programming and teaches seminars with sociocultural emphases. She has published in the area of language and literacy and social justice. A special interest is hair narratives of Black women.

**Lance Weldy** is Associate Professor of English at Francis Marion University and has recently co-edited the *C. S. Lewis: The Chronicles of Narnia New Casebook* (Palgrave Macmillan). His research interests include the intersections of queerness and fundamentalism, and his most recent book chapter about the queerness of religious comics can be found in *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults: A Collection of Critical Essays*.

**Janet Wesselius** is Professor of Philosophy and Associate Dean (Teaching) at the Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta where her research focuses on epistemology, feminist theory, and environmental philosophy. She has a special connection to *Anne of Green Gables* since it was the first book her mother, as an immigrant child, read in English.



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