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## **The Role of Critical Literacy in Challenging the Status Quo in Twentieth Century English Children's Literature**

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THE ROLE OF CRITICAL LITERACY IN CHALLENGING THE  
STATUS QUO IN TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH CHILDREN'S  
LITERATURE

by

René Elizabeth Fleischbein

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

Although many children's literature critics focus on the two divides between instruction and delight and between the fantastic and the realist, this dissertation focuses on the occurrences in twentieth century English children's fantasy of critical literacy, a mode of reading that challenges the status quo of society and gives voice to underrepresented and marginalized groups. Twentieth century English children's literature is especially concerned with narrative structure and good storytelling rather than with what lessons might be learned from the texts, but lessons are there nonetheless. I examine the works of four authors, E. Nesbit, C. S. Lewis, Diana Wynne Jones, and J. K. Rowling, and how their works portray instances of critical literacy as a means of empowering young characters that can then serve as a role model for readers. Using methodologies of critical literacy and rhetoric, I examine these texts for their portrayal of critical literacy through the rhetorical choices that the characters make and what consequences these choices may have not only for the characters but also for readers. In each author chapter, I focus on topics such as expanding the empowerment of young characters, achieving literacy, creating the ideal Self, and making value judgments about texts. Children's fantasy literature is an ideal vehicle for critical literacy because, as it is an imaginative genre meant for children, it is therefore often regarded as unthreatening and lighthearted. However, these seemingly benign texts afford the opportunity to mold or change the way people think of society in general, as well as giving voice to individuals and groups of people who are muted or silenced by society. Thus, critical literacy, through the low-stakes genre of children's fantasy, can effect changes in society

through individual readers who, like the characters they read, are voiced, active, and thinking.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Academic achievements, like all other accomplishments, require assistance from others. I am particularly indebted to the following individuals: Jameela Lares, my committee chair, continues to be an amazing role model and example. Dr. Lares has given me immeasurable knowledge and guidance, which I will never be able to pay back, so I will pay forward. My committee members, Eric Tribunella, Kate Cochran, Damon Franke, and Farah Mendlesohn, provided invaluable insight throughout this journey. Ken Watson, originally a member of my committee, provided unwavering moral support and sound advice. Jackie Stallcup started me on this journey, for which I will always be grateful. And Tanja Nathanael, my friend and colleague, has generously provided time and patience in proofreading and editing, visits to cafés, and the occasional road trip. Though this dissertation was created with the guidance of others, any mistakes are my own.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My parents have always given their unwavering love and continuous support while instilling in me the value of knowledge. My mother, Mary, has been an inspiration to me in her life-long quest for equality, justice, and learning. Though my father, Robert, was a complicated person, he was always passionate about fairness, justice, and the pursuit of knowledge. My daughter, Savana, inspires me with her amazing intellect and insight. My beautiful, brilliant sister, Shae, was always a calming influence, especially in times of stress and frustration. My brother, Paul, who shares my passion for languages, generously takes care of our family. Thank you all for trudging along with me.

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## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

The literature that makes the most impact on society and culture is that which questions common assumptions and challenges the status quo. Works such as Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) are both critical of war, in general, and of some of the United States's military actions in World War II, in particular. Literature for children also often questions common assumptions and challenges the status quo, though instances of questioning and challenging in children's literature may be more subtle than that of other genres. While many children's literature scholars have written about the significant issues of didactic literature—narratives that aim to instruct young readers—of the Georgian, Romantic, and Victorian eras, as well as the early twentieth century, there is little conversation about critical literacy and its effects in English children's fantasy literature of the twentieth century. In this dissertation, "critical literacy" in children's literature is the cumulative and ongoing knowledge gained by a character through the reading of texts. Critical literacy is gained when characters read or listen to stories, and process information that has been gained from experience. By following examples of the characters in the books they read, young readers see the process of challenging the status quo. In challenging the status quo, the works I examine reject societal conventions that may have worked at one time but have since become oppressive, stagnating the progression of culture and society.

Children's fantasy literature plays an important role in demonstrating for readers how to negotiate their own world as it presents child protagonists who are voiced, active, thinking, and subjective, traits child protagonists in children's fantasy provide to readers that they can emulate in real life. Mitzi Myers, one scholar who has written on children's

literature in earlier periods, suggests that late-eighteenth century literature for young people conveys what society expects of them (“Impeccable Governesses” 33), an attitude that I believe set a precedent for the literature that followed. Elaine Ostry argues that nineteenth-century conduct books and Victorian and Edwardian children’s fantasy all address maturity in the same way (27), that is, by using rhetorical moves that direct children on the course to adulthood, but a course, nonetheless, set by adults. Jack Zipes contends that children’s literature has been used as a tool of socialization for children since its inception (“Second Thoughts” 24).<sup>1</sup> Adults who write for young people decide which lessons to offer, which aspects of society to emphasize, and which traditional values to pass on to succeeding generations—making this literature a continuation of the didactic genre in the form of critical literacy. And in his discussion of the history of children’s literature, scholar Peter Hunt contends that only after the nineteenth century did “children’s books worldwide demonstrate tensions between educational, religious and political exercises of power on the one hand, and various concepts associated with ‘freedom’ (notably fantasy and the imagination) on the other” (*Understanding* 5).<sup>2</sup> Within the scope of this conversation, scholarship has not considered twentieth century English

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Matthew Arnold, in reports on the state of elementary education published when he was employed as a School Inspector, advocated for universal education with a common curriculum with literature at its core, which would, for example, “elevate and humanize [students], who at present [...] are wholly uncultivated” (1852, 20); in recounting the lack of literature, Arnold insists that if “instead of literature, his reading-book, as is too often the case, presents him with a jejune encyclopædia of positive information, the result is that he has, except for his Bible, no literature, no *humanizing* instruction at all” (1860, 87; italics original); and as to the value of literary instruction, Arnold argues that “It will be observed [...] what I have noticed as the signal mental defect of our school-children—their almost incredible scantiness of vocabulary. We enlarge their vocabulary, and with their vocabulary their circle of ideas. At the same time we bring them under the formative influences of really good literature, really good poetry” (1876, 211).

<sup>2</sup> Hunt further asserts that “The earliest books for children were [...] based on traditional materials, or overtly didactic; children’s literature in its modern form is largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon” (*Understanding* 5).

children's fantasy and the role of critical literacy nor does it position such works in the didactic tradition; I argue that this silence is because of the covert nature of the didacticism in English children's fantasy literature of this era and because there has been a decided shift away from the overtly didactic in children's literature since from the end of the eighteenth century. The English children's literature of the twentieth century provides examples of and portrayals of critical literacy. Sheila Egoff argues of twentieth century writings for children, that authors had moved away from overt didacticism and toward genuine storytelling ("Mockingbird" 244) and that their stories are shaped by art and "an inner consistency that comes from a coherent view of life and a truthful observation of great issues and small details of life ("Mockingbird" 244).<sup>3</sup> Throughout my dissertation, I examine through rhetorical analysis the ways that twentieth century English children's fantasy continues to offer young readers examples that will help them to negotiate the world around them and to develop into functioning adults—critical literacy. I also contend that this literature provides specific lessons on the importance of literacy, which I use in its extended sense: not only "the ability to read and write in order to communicate" (*OED* 1), but also "The ability to 'read' a specified subject or medium; competence or knowledge in a particular area" (*OED* 2). I will discuss this term in depth in the "Methodology" section of this chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> In this passage, Egoff is referring to *Charlotte's Web* (1952), *The Borrowers* (1952), *The Children of Green Knowe* (1955), *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954), *The Hobbit* (1938), *The All-of-a-Kind Family* (1951), and *The Moffats* (1941).

## Argument

While there have been studies on the shift from instruction to delight,<sup>4</sup> twentieth century English children's fantasy literature, pleasurable as it is, is also a model for critical literacy,<sup>5</sup> which has been overlooked even though these works demonstrate to young readers how to behave in ways that are liberating—such as being adventurous, thinking, and free to act and use their voice. In this dissertation, I argue that the persuasive rhetoric of English children's fantasy texts of the twentieth century present a challenges to the status quo that foster and encourage in readers the creation of a Self, a term defined later in this chapter, that can more readily negotiate the realities of life in the twentieth century. It is important that—in order to be successful—characters know stories from which they can draw. I must explain that when I use the term *rhetoric*, I intend its older sense of “the art of using language effectively so as to persuade or influence others, esp. the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques to this end; the study of principles and rules to be followed by a speaker or writer striving for eloquence, esp. as formulated by ancient Greek and Roman writers” (*OED* 1.a.). I refer to this didacticism as “new” because of the critical literacy of twentieth century English children's fantasy literature; life has fundamentally changed for this generation of children who live in a world upended by two World Wars.

The move toward more imaginative, fantastic literature for children began early in the twentieth century. Librarian Marcus Crouch contends that after the First World War

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Patricia Demers *From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children's Literature to 1850* (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Chapter II provides an explanation of the term critical literacy and how I employ this concept in this dissertation.

and in the build up to the Second, writers like Walter de la Mare, Eleanor Farjeon, and John Masefield wrote of imaginative worlds or past times though “Such writers were not hiding from reality; they preferred to interpret timeless themes, like the necessity of courage and the truth of love without relating them directly to the ills of contemporary society” (17). At a time when Europe was coping with the aftermath of World War I, fantasy literature became for many a tool for engaging in and negotiating important aspects of the real world while holding it at arm’s length through imagination and fantasy. However, as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, the nature of the lessons and the lessons themselves shifted along with the transitioning society. In discussing twentieth century English children’s fantasy literature, I examine the rhetorical moves used to deliver critical literacy lessons to its audience. I demonstrate that the rhetoric of twentieth century English children’s fantasy introduces a new kind of literacy, a critical literacy that infuses a pleasurable story with the challenges to the status quo in a way that is less obvious and overbearing than literature from previous eras, which allows young readers to acquire lessons in critical thinking and rhetorical inquiry that are important for them at a time unlike any other, as discussed shortly.

My demonstration of this use of critical literacy is somewhat related to didacticism that is informed by the functions of rhetoric as defined by Marcus Fabius Quintilianus—Quintilian—(c. 35-c. 99), whose *Institutio Oratoria* continues, even today, to influence not only the teaching and the study of rhetoric but also education. A rhetorical approach to didacticism in children’s literature scholarship acknowledges the didactic that is inherently present in children’s literature and allows us to see and

appreciate what these subtly didactic texts offer young readers, namely, practical skills of critical thinking and rhetorical inquiry.

*Situating Children's Fantasy Literature in Time and Space*

*Changes in English Children's Literature in the Twentieth Century*

In considering the historical implications of twentieth century children's fantasy, I focus specifically on English children's fantasy rather than American or other regions of the Anglosphere. Not only does English children's fantasy have a demonstratively longer history than American children's fantasy, but it also has a closer connection to its setting. English fantasy has a wealth of mythical creation stories of Britain to draw from that American fantasy lacks. Children's literature scholar Peter Hunt explains that British children's fantasy has a structural dimension that is part of the narrative because of the rich, sometimes mythical, history of the landscape, which provides "a subtext for the journeys: places *mean*. [...] Their reference points are more concrete, deep-rooted cultural symbols which seem to lie, sometimes literally, underfoot" ("Landscapes" 11; italics original).<sup>6</sup> English children's fantasy authors make good use of the ancient myths, legends, and folklore of their country, which provide an historical element that is absent in the much more recent American culture. For example, in L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy travels from Kansas to Oz in a cyclone which "set the house down very gently [...] in the midst of a country of marvelous beauty" (18); in

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, when British author Neil Gaiman, who lives in the US, discussed setting *The Graveyard Book* in England rather than in the US, his comments were met with controversy. Gaiman's remark that "The great thing about having an English cemetery is I could go back a very, very, very long way. And in America, you go back 250 years (in a cemetery), and then suddenly you've got a few dead Indians, and then you don't have anybody at all, unless you decide to set it up in Maine or somewhere and sneak in some Vikings" (Baenen), provides insight into the differences between British and American fantasy.

contrast, in Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, the dwarf Fenodyree explains to Gowther, when Gowther demands details about their quest to recover a magical stone and save the world, "I do not mean to give offence, [...] But I must ask you to lean on our judgment in this venture. You are in our world now, and without us you will not regain your own, even though it lies at your feet" (184).

The literary histories of children's books in Britain and America tangibly demonstrate the different attitudes toward fantasy of each. As journalist Colleen Gillard argues, it is significant that fantasy books such as *The Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Peter Pan*, *The Hobbit*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* have solidified Great Britain's place as a force for children's literature, yet children's literature in "the United States [...] deals much less in magic. Stories like *Little House in the Big Woods*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Yearling*, *Little Women*, and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* are more notable for their realistic portraits of day-to-day life in the towns and farmlands on the growing frontier ("Why the British"). Indeed, the British have embraced the fantastic on a much grander scale than Americans have, perhaps because British history itself is rooted in myth, unlike its American counterpart. The early American rejection of the fantastic can be attributed, in part, to its Puritan origins and perhaps a resulting consequence of its founding during the Enlightenment, which rejected the imaginative, the fantastic, and the unverifiable in favor of what could be proven through scientific or empirical evidence.<sup>7</sup> Americans were not the only demographic affected by the rejection

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<sup>7</sup> Gore Vidal, on American children reading E. Nesbit's fantasies and fantasy in general, asserts that "the absence of imagination is cruelly noticeable at every level of the American society, and though a reading of E. Nesbit is hardly going to change the pattern of a nation, there is some evidence that the child who reads

of the imaginative, as literary scholar M. O. Grenby explains that in England the classic French fairy stories were enjoyed by both adults and children until the mid-eighteenth century, when they became unpopular, perhaps as a result of the developing “suspicion of any writing involving the supernatural. This skepticism can be ascribed either to Enlightenment rationalism or Evangelical fervor, or both” (1). The skepticism of the imaginative helped to banish fairy stories from the literary *salon* and relegate these tales to the nursery. Among the children’s literature scholars who describe Puritan attitudes toward fiction, Gillian Avery argues that “To the seventeenth-century Puritan [...] fiction did not only deflect the reader from more profitable occupation, [...] It was untrue, therefore a lie, and therefore damnably wicked [...] This abhorrence of fantasy was still often expressed in nineteenth-century America” (26). Because of the overwhelming influence of Puritan thought, fantasy was slow to enter the American literary canon. Therefore, American children’s fantasy falls outside the scope of my study and will receive only cursory discussion here.

An additional reason that English children’s fantasy is worthy of consideration for my study of critical literacy can be found in the development of the genre as a subversive form. Although children’s literature, as previously demonstrated, has a long history as a didactic genre, British children’s fantasy writers since the Victorian and Edwardian eras have increasingly and progressively flouted instructive form, imagining literary worlds in which children have adventures and are free from the confines of social expectations—an example of critical literacy. While there is certainly an abundance of children’s fantasies set wholly in self-contained alternate worlds, the plots of many Victorian children’s

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her will never be quite the same again, and that is probably a good thing” (3)

fantasies—for example, Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863), and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books (1865, 1871)—engineer entry from a contemporary “real world” Britain into an alternate world or universe through a portal of some kind. In such a fantasy world, which is often an alternate version of “reality,” the child protagonist is able to explore the power of selfhood, that which is often stifled by adult-imposed societal expectations and restrictions in the real world. Some of these Victorian and Edwardian works include such additional elements as encounters with magical beasts (*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*) and the possession of special abilities, like flying (*Peter and Wendy*). This portal pattern of moving out of the real world and into a fantastic one<sup>8</sup> allows young protagonists, once out of the constraining material world or real universe that they are intimately familiar with, to take adventurous journeys, use their own voices without being stifled by adults, make decisions for themselves, and learn from their own experiences rather than from adult lectures—often a marked contrast from the mundane everyday life of the child reader. Furthermore, children thus empowered must learn to use their power wisely and justly through their own actions, decisions, and even mistakes, as demonstrated in E. Nesbit’s *Psammead Trilogy*, in which the children bargain with the *Psammead*, the sand fairy, for one group wish each day. The children’s wishes, however, do not work the way they are intended.<sup>9</sup> The children’s failed attempts at phrasing their wishes in the right way in order to get what they want teaches them to be

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<sup>8</sup> Alternative world fantasies borrow heavily from the British landscape. J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* series begins in the Shire which is reminiscent of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Birmingham area, and Lewis’s *Narnia* resembles his childhood home in Belfast.

<sup>9</sup> For example, when the children wish to be “as beautiful as the day,” the wish is granted but they do not recognize each other, nor do others recognize them, which is problematic for receiving dinner from their nursemaid (22). When the children wish for wealth in gold, they find it heavy to carry and, because it is not British coin, difficult to spend, especially since the children are dirty from the gravel pit where the sand fairy lives and from carrying heavy gold; they are eventually taken to jail (44-64).

more careful about what they say and how they phrase their wishes.<sup>10</sup> Although it would appear on the surface that fantasy rejects the didactic, or at least the didactic as it was traditionally conceived, I contend that lessons were and still are prevalent in English fantasy for children in the form of critical literacy. For this dissertation, I am concerned with what knowledge or wisdom is offered and gained from the texts through the use of critical literacy.

Before I support my claim of the presence of critical literacy in twentieth century English children's fantasy literature, I will explain in more detail what modes of thought influenced the move away from the overtly didactic.<sup>11</sup> Since antiquity, the need for both the didactic and pleasure in teaching has been well established. Roman poet Horace (65-8 BCE) is only one of several ancient rhetoricians who addressed the need for literature to be both instructive and pleasing. In *Ars Poetica* Horace advises poets to combine instruction with delight, explaining that writers "Who can blend usefulness and sweetness wins every Vote, at once delighting and teaching the reader"<sup>12</sup> (333-65). Rhetoricians added the duty of moving one's listeners. Early Christian scholar Saint Augustine (354-430 CE), who taught rhetoric before his conversion, also advocates combining instruction with delight, suggesting that, in following Cicero's advice, "the eloquent should speak in such a way as to instruct, delight, and move their listeners" (*On Christian Teachings* 4.12.27). Roman politician and rhetor Cicero (106-43 BCE) contends that "it is the business of an orator to instruct, to please, and to move the passions" (*Brutus* 347). The need for combining instruction with delight thus dates from antiquity. The rise of

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<sup>10</sup> In Nesbit's *Five Children and It*, for example.

<sup>11</sup> I discuss didacticism in depth further in this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Jameela Lares for this insight.

literature specifically marketed for children followed the wisdom of ancient rhetoricians and scholars by combining instruction with delight. As discussed earlier, British children's fantasy written during and since the Victorian era seemingly rejects the didactic; however, I argue that it rather refines the didactic.<sup>13</sup> Works for children at the mid-eighteenth century, such as the alphabet books with religious rhymes and conduct books, were plainly didactic, then became pleasurable and, some might argue, not instructive. I propose that English children's fantasy provides examples of critical literacy, even if it is subtly so. Indeed, twentieth century English children's fantasy literature best embodies "the Horatian understanding that good literature is a blend of instruction and delight,"<sup>14</sup> which is what I seek to prove in my dissertation.

Pre-World War II books that moralized and preached would certainly not have suited every child or even every writer. Perhaps it may be impossible to know the authorial intent of fantasy writers in the Victorian era, but there is evidence that some writers wanted to produce and offer readers something other than didactic works. Among the first writers to bridge the transition from didactic to entertaining is Charles Kingsley in *The Water-Babies*. In this work, Kingsley combines didacticism with an engaging story about a boy who slips into an alternate state of consciousness through death and into a fantastic world. Though Kingsley does not completely reject the didactic tradition

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<sup>13</sup> For discussions on pre-World War II children's literature, see, for example, Sheila Egoff's assertion that after World War I, there was "a loosening of the restriction of childhood" which allowed for more school stories about girls and that the young characters in these stories "value honor, fair play, courage, and friendship" ("Mockingbird" 240-41), and the "independent-child" books of Arthur Ransome, whose books feature "healthy, happy, sane, self-reliant, friendly" children both between the two World Wars and after the Second World War ("Mockingbird" 243).

<sup>14</sup> Lares 5. I am grateful to Professor Jameela Lares and her conference paper "Reclaiming *Movere*: Discovery as Virtuous Action in the Fantasy of Diana Wynne Jones," which also alludes to Cicero's discussion about pleasing, instructing, and moving.

in children's literature—his *The Water-Babies* is heavily moralized<sup>15</sup>—he focuses on storytelling and entertainment rather than on moralizing. For example, protagonist Tom wants sweets and rationalizes that “he would only touch them [...] and then he would only taste one [...] and then he would only eat one [...] and then he would only eat two, and then three, and so on” (167) until they were gone. The next day when Tom is offered sweets as usual, “he hated the taste of them; and they made him . . . sick [...] all the week after” (171). Then Tom develops prickles all over his body as, the narrator moralizes, “was quite natural; for you must know and believe that people's souls make their bodies [...] And therefore, when Tom's soul grew all prickly with naughty tempers, his body could not help growing prickly too” (172). Finally, Tom can no longer take the sweets and confesses (171-73).<sup>16</sup> The focus on entertainment that was prominent in Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* was enhanced by Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll, who along with Kingsley<sup>17</sup> were among the most well-known Victorian writers to subvert didactic

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<sup>15</sup> See also, for example, Gillian Avery's argument that early “Victorians, seizing on the new license to write fantasy, used the literary fairy tale as a medium for expressing the moral or religious truths that were close to their hearts [and] Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* [sic] (1863) was the most eccentric example” (*Gold* 131); and, Colin Manlove, who contends that in *The Water-Babies* the protagonist, Tom, has a “moral evolution [that] involves Tom developing into his true form” (*Gold* 156).

<sup>16</sup> Jessica Straley argues that Kingsley was a proponent of naturalistic education, a “prescription for active, outdoor education [as well as] natural history and scientific instruction at all levels” (57); but what natural science is “Missing for Kingsley is knowledge of God and human distinctness that only the expansion of the imagination yields. Imagination, however, requires a literary education: fairy tale, fantasy, and nonsense provide the essential lessons for [the] final leap into humanity” (57-59). Tobias Wilson-Bates asserts that Kingsley “was deeply enmeshed in the educational, scientific, religious, artistic, and social debates that informed the intellectual atmosphere of the mid-century, and this fact may help to explain the impressive, but sometimes dizzying, scope of his surreal aquatic fable *The Water-Babies*” (390).

<sup>17</sup> Straley, for example, argues that *The Water-Babies* “offers a parody of Victorian education” as she recounts protagonist Tom's encounter with pupils on the Isle of the Tomtoddlies, who have been turned into vegetables—all heads and no bodies—because their heads are so full of useless information in order to answer questions from the Examiner (57). Straley further explains that the scene is “a reaction to the Revised Code of 1862 that linked school funding to student performance” on state exams (57). Straley contends that other prominent Victorians were also opposed to this education code, including Charles Dickens and Matthew Arnold (57). For more information about the Revised Code of 1862, see J. Stuart Maclure's *Educational Documents: England and Wales 1816 to the Present Day* (79-80).

children's literature and whose rejection of the British education system is well documented, and even criticized throughout works of fiction such as Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) and Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.<sup>18</sup> These landmark texts openly mock how and what children were taught in British schools in the Victorian age. Alice, somewhat like the protagonist of *The Water-Babies*, also enters a fantastic world by slipping into an alternate state while dreaming, and it is in this world she learns to think and speak for herself rather than parrot what adults have taught her.

The lessons taught by twentieth century English children's fantasy are of course different from those of the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, as children's literature in general changed significantly just after the Edwardian era and with the advent of World War I. Humphrey Carpenter argues that "the 'movement' of the great Victorian and Edwardian writing for children petered out," marking the end of the Golden Age of children's literature (210).<sup>19</sup> Carpenter asserts that a "fairly firm case *can*, in fact, be made for the First World War as the cut-off point between classic children's books and the present day" (210; emphasis original). Just as the Industrial Revolution previously compelled many adults to forego the countryside and abandon many of the pastimes of the pre-Industrial Revolution in an effort to adjust to a changing society—for example, cottage industry and crafts, farming, and extended open air exercise—so too did

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<sup>18</sup> Jessica Straley, for example, contends that "From Alice's desperate attempt to recite her school lessons [as she falls down the rabbit hole] in *Wonderland* to the Red and White Queen's preposterous examination at the end of *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* [...] the *Alice* books repeatedly mock common pedagogical practices (86). And, for example, John Manning asserts that *Hard Times* "attacks the overloading of children with facts" (83) and demonstrates that "a pupil's ability or inability to repeat the definition [of an object] by rote is no proof of his familiarity or unfamiliarity" with the object (131).

<sup>19</sup> The First Golden Age of children's literature is widely acknowledged as the mid-nineteenth century to World War I.

the needs of children and the importance of the lessons they required change after in the twentieth century. Young protagonists in English children's fantasy literature from the mid-twentieth century still learn ethical and behavioral lessons from the books they read, as demonstrated throughout this dissertation. The works themselves offer a more subtle approach to challenging the status quo even when the focus is on the entertainment value of the narrative. Fantasy literature offers readers an alternative to overt didacticism, yet those who read fantasy literature can still learn from the protagonists how to be assertive, voiced, active, and adventurous—examples of critical literacy. Just as the protagonist maintains these empowering attributes even after returning from the realm of fantasy, so, too, does the reader have such an opportunity to incorporate what the characters have learned—and what the reader has learned vicariously—after closing the book. Twentieth century children's fantasy literature has provided and continues to provide a model of agency and subjectivity for young readers.

“Subjectivity” in this dissertation is the more positive “subject of” rather than the oppressive meaning “subject to” someone or something. Characters become the “subject of” their own narratives, and thus establish their own *Ethos*, when taking on the primary role of the action taker and the person with power. Hence, “subjectivity” is akin to Self, in that the character who uses narrative to create the Self is taking his or her place in the most prominent position in a story. Roberta Seelinger Trites explains that “subjectivity,” is a language based fluid concept that privileges the individual as the first person of a text and the agent of action. In the works I examine, I consider how language helps develop and shape a character's agency because “One of the most important functions of children's literature is to depict children who enact the agency that children in real life

may not have” (*Waking* 26-29). Young protagonists who take the subject position and situate themselves in the “first person” and recognizing the Self as the “agent of action” as a model to young readers for acquiring such agency.

For my purposes in this dissertation the “Self,” with a capital S, is the constructed identity of an individual that has been shaped through a person’s experiences, including literary experiences. The self is “a true or enduring personal identity” (*OED*). The Self is the inner identity that remains through superficial changes in a person’s appearance or circumstances. Literature can help shape the Self because texts provide examples of characters who often experience their own transformation to become their own ideally constructed Selves. Children, because of their lack of experience, go through a process of developing their constructed Selves, and children’s literature can assist in this endeavor. In his discussion of “Boyhood,” scholar Eric Tribunella explains that “children’s literature can provide sources of comfort and pleasure, models for behavior and identity, reflections of self and reality” (*Keywords* 25). What I am arguing is not only that in texts, children—and adults—can find models for behavior and identity, but that they can adopt that which is appealing and contributes to the construction of Self. In literature, readers can see reflections of the Self they wish to become. Twentieth century English children’s fantasy offers young readers examples of characters who, like them, must find a way to negotiate a changed world with changed expectations. And so, just as children’s fantasy has progressed, offering ever more autonomy, critical thinking, and adventurous characters, so too have the children who read it.

My examination of twentieth century children’s literature throughout this study reveals that critical literacy lessons, once taught by or through an “overt authorial

narrator” or through “character dialogue,” are no longer as obvious as they once were, demonstrating how the act of challenging the status quo has been encoded and has evolved in the twentieth-century. In her discussion of literary competence among children, Maria Nikolajeva contends that the literary history of young readers influence their perceptions of texts because “Texts do not appear in a vacuum; instead, they participate in an ongoing dialogue in terms of themes and values, narrative structure, styles and genres. The further meaning of a text is revealed for the reader against the background of other texts, at crossroads between them” (“Meaning-Making” 156). The works I examine offer lessons of critical literacy that have been subtly incorporated into narratives, the meaning of which is revealed “against the background of other texts” and “at the crossroads between them,” as Nikolajeva describes. The absence of overt narration<sup>20</sup> brings the reader closer to the story because there is one less intervening layer between the reader and the action of the story, thus enabling closer identification with characters and creating an opportunity for the reader to process the lesson in much the same way characters do—through a more direct observation of the learning and trial-and-error processes—and, subsequently, the application of what is learned to their own lives.

*Historic Intersections between Fantasy, Children’s Literature, and Critical Literacy*

Before examining critical literacy in twentieth century English children’s fantasy, I will briefly delve into the history of didacticism in children’s literature and the more current attitudes towards didacticism. As noted earlier, both the didactic and the fantastic

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<sup>20</sup> Though the Narnia books have an adult narrator, in chapter IV I explain how Lewis’s occasional narrator is not intrusively didactic.

have a long history in books for children. Consideration of the critical literacy in twentieth century English children's fantasy is important because of the shifts in what is deemed important, through textual representations, for the generation of young readers, especially immediately after the Second World War, and subsequent generations after the mid-twentieth century, who are experiencing a world that is in some ways completely changed from all previous generations.

In my reading of twentieth century English children's fantasy, I argue that critical literacy is evident in twentieth century English children's fantasy, that it has a recognizable function in this era, and that it gives readers examples of how to question the status quo and achieve necessary changes in society. This is an issue recognized by Sheila Egoff in a 1987 critique of didacticism in children's literature, when she asserts that "the aim of children's writing [should] be delight not edification; that its attributes be the eternal childlike qualities of wonder; simplicity, laughter and warmth; and that in the worldwide realm of children's books, the literature be kept inside, the sociology and pedagogy out" ("Inside and Out" 355). I disagree with Egoff, because the didactic is present in all literature, and in the twentieth century English children's literature the didactic is embedded in storytelling and provides instances of critical literacy. Although children's books have evolved from the heavily instructive to lightly delightful, as mentioned in the Hunt reference above, scholars such as Egoff are adamant that didacticism should be completely expunged, yet critical literacy is more than didacticism.

The attempt to relegate children's literature to either side of the false binary of the didactic or the pleasurable is itself a problem that fails to recognize that literature often combines genres and purposes, for example the pleasurable and the didactic and the

school story and the detective story. Children's literature scholar Perry Nodelman attempts to bridge the divide between instruction and pleasure when he explains the presence of both academic and pleasurable forms of the didactic: "Stories we identify as didactic encourage children towards acceptable adult behaviour, whereas pleasurable ones encourage their indulgence in what we see as natural behaviour. But of course, both types are didactic" because both "teach" children: one teaches how to stop being "child-like" and the other teaches how to be *acceptably* "child-like" rather than uncivilized and animal-like ("Decoding the Images" 135). Children's literature, perhaps more than any other, is often expected to provide its targeted audience with instruction, necessary information, or usable knowledge in this effort to "encourage children towards acceptable adult behaviour"; twentieth century English children's fantasy provides lessons for young readers while allowing them to retain some of the autonomy already gained. The children's literature is always present, but it is less obvious now than in the past and it is in the form of critical literacy. Illustrating the changes in didacticism in children's literature, Maria Nikolajeva asserts that children's literature is, more than any other, considered to be didactic by default because of its intended audience, and that the lessons it provides are educational as well as moral ("Meaning Making" 151-52). Nikolajeva's argument encapsulates the expectations of learning through reading from various groups involved in the book industry. Children's literature, a term that often includes works for adolescents and young adults, which is also how I employ it, is perhaps the most conspicuous example of didactic literature because of the inequitable dynamic between those who are usually adults—the writer, the publisher, the marketer, the consumer—and the intended audience, who are imagined to be young people. In order to illustrate the

unbalanced relationship between the adults involved in children's book publishing and the intended audience, Perry Nodelman describes this relationship as *colonial*, borrowing from Edward Said's *Orientalism* to demonstrate that children's literature is "an adult style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over childhood" ("Other" 29). Nodelman concludes that controlling the content of the books that children engage with becomes an effective means of making sure young readers continue their indoctrination into the approved, sanctioned society adults wish to maintain, even in the twentieth century.

Once children began to have their own literature, there was a shift from the overtly imaginative or pleasurable, in fairy tales for example, to the overtly didactic, highlighting the tension between fantasy, the imaginative, and the need for temperance grounded in reason. In describing the juxtaposition between pleasurable and imaginative works and the mundane didactic, literary scholar David Sandner argues that "The moral tale and the literary fairy tale negatively required one another in order to define themselves. Moral tales are established as a counter to fairy tales; nineteenth-century children's fantasy is presented as a countertradition to the moral tale" (28). Sandner's key argument is that there is a triangulation in the relationship between fairy tales, moral tales, and fantasy. This is not to say that the rise of the didactic or the rise of fantasy is a conscientious reaction of one from another, but rather that the advance of each genre highlights the perceived needs of young readers in juxtaposition to the perceived needs of the adults who write, publish, market, and consume literature for children. As Kathryn Hume explains, "Didactic literature concerns itself with two subjects: the nature of man and the nature of the universe. More specifically, didactic literature focuses on man and the

morality of everyday life and lays down rules of proper conduct” (102). When the masses of a newly-literate public needed to learn the rules of “proper” and “acceptable” conduct, children were—and still are—often seen as the audience most in need of and receptive to such indoctrination into these rules. Consequently, while more individuals were reading and buying books, there was an additional perceived-need to dispense with the kinds of stories that those previously of the lower classes who moved to the merchant class were inclined to buy.

Once literacy was more widespread, there was a concerted effort to rid the upwardly mobile class of their more colloquial roots. The rustic beliefs of the masses were seen as a danger to society, as O’Malley argues, there existed “the need to rid the nursery of the vicious and potentially subversive influences of the chapbooks and fairy tales” and a desire to replace such texts with more suitable, less subversive works (“Coach” 19), which then led to an increase of more pragmatic, less fantastic literary works for children. O’Malley also concludes that in the early nineteenth century “the dangers of fantasy, chapbooks, and fairy tales to the impressionable minds of middle-class youth were almost universally acknowledged by the leading pedagogues and children’s writers of the day” (“Coach” 26). Therefore, it became important to teach those of the new middle class what was expected and required of them and their children: that which was believed to be far beyond the common fantasy and fairy tale, such as pragmatism, adherence to the Church, and the realities of hard work over the fanciful. Meanwhile, technological advances during both World Wars, along with dynamic changes in the lower and middle classes, saw a return to the fantastic in literature and a rejection of the didactic, which will be discussed in more detail later.

In order to support my argument that the didactic was refined in the twentieth century, I will also provide here a brief background of the didactic in literature written specifically for children prior to the twentieth century. The first books recognized as children's literature in English were specifically meant to teach children various lessons about how they should conduct themselves both morally and socially, while at the same time providing instruction in reading and writing: literacy. John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744) is generally regarded as the first book marketed to children, though because of uncertain documentation practices it remains impossible to name, definitively, the first such book.<sup>21</sup> Those who made books for children often neglected the desires of actual children. In her discussion of John Newbery and his innovative marketing and business success and how adults neglected the wants of young people, children's literature critic Cornelia Meigs argues that no one considered what children desired in the books they read, even though John Newbery successfully marketed books for children that coupled instruction with delight. Meigs asserts that "children's stories must have action and gaiety and sympathy with children's lives, or they were not stories for children at all" ("Female" 72)<sup>22</sup> even if they also contained the moral lessons that parents desired in the books they bought for their children. The original publication page of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* includes a description of the contents of the book and

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<sup>21</sup> Brian Alderson and Felix De Marez Oyens contend that tracing the publishing of books for children is difficult because of the disregard for such publications. Many books were produced by "obscure or anonymous" writers, illustrators, and publishers and records were not well kept "because they were children's books nobody troubled too much to keep records of them anyway." (xii-xiii; emphasis in the original).

<sup>22</sup> Cornelia Meigs, et al, have compiled a list of other delightful yet didactic works published by Newbery, subsequent to *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, including *Circle of the Sciences* (1745), the *Land of Cakes* (1746), *The Nutcracker* (1750), *Be Merry and Wise* (1758), and [in 1767] *Giles Gingerbread* (67). As Meigs's list indicates, Newbery's new niche of children's book publishing garnered him commercial success and enduring acclaim; and thus, the success of pairing instruction with delight is well-established.

reveals that the book is in part “A Little Song-Book, Being a New Attempt to teach Children the use of the English Alphabet, by Way of Diversion” (Title Page), thus the stated intention of the book—the desire to teach children reading and writing in the guise of amusement—is explicitly indicated. Meigs’s comments on Newbury’s innovative marketing approach points out the gap between the previous marketing of books for children and the intended audience of those books. The publication of *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* began a trend of marketing children’s books that were simultaneously entertaining and instructive for young readers. In focusing on what would please children, Newbury became a fundamental force in creating children’s literature; however, he also understood that since it is adults who actually purchase books for children, pleasing adults was also fundamental to the success of his new marketing approach. Along with moral and social lessons that parents expect in the text, Newbury includes some rhymes and games for fun. When first sold, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* could be coupled with a toy for the child-reader at an additional cost, thus combining didactic instruction with physical delight, even if the object of delight was sold separately from the text. Inspired by Newbury’s success, the publishing of books intended for and marketed to children flourished over the next century and beyond, aided by the rise of the middle class, by more economical printing techniques, and by the new model of providing entertainment for young readers while pleasing parents with embedded didacticism. As I discuss later, Newbury’s model of combining the didactic with the pleasurable has been refined since the mid-eighteenth century and, I argue, is further refined in the twentieth century.

Critical works have been presented that extensively demonstrate the evolution of children’s literature since John Newbury began publishing books and note the overt

didacticism of the earliest works, including that of the conduct book,<sup>23</sup> in literary histories of scholars Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, and several others.<sup>24</sup> Conduct books, originally for children of European courts, exemplified the behavior expected of these children through their respective gender socializations, served as moral guidelines,<sup>25</sup> and were especially popular reading for young people in the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> While many of the books published during the eighteenth century were entertaining, including Mrs Mary Cooper's *The Child's New Play-Thing: Being a Spelling Book Intended to Make the Learning to Read, a Diversion instead of a Task* (1745), Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (1749), and Newbery's *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), they were almost always overtly didactic. Librarianship scholar Alec Ellis explains that "the prevalent view in the eighteenth century was that children's stories should always be designed to inculcate a moral [and] it became the practice to interweave them with the narrative" (5). By examining the presentation of the various types of knowledge offered in what is considered the early works of literature specifically for children—most notably conduct books and primers—one can argue that these books were meant to pass on to readers the culture and values of the eighteenth century.

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<sup>23</sup> Conduct books belong to the subgenre of books of instruction, which also includes courtesy books and advice books. Courtesy books focused on proper behavior at noble courts, and "By the seventeenth century, the shift in focus from courtesy to conduct, from court to a burgeoning middle class, was beginning to become apparent in the target market for books of instruction" (*Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* 1417).

<sup>24</sup> For more about the evolution of children's literature, see also, for example, Harvey Darton (8, 23, 60, 249, 290, and 310), Maria Nikolajeva's *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature* (ix, x), Seth Lerer (171 and 175), and Peter Hollindale's "Ideology and the Children's Book" in *Literature for Children* (21).

<sup>25</sup> For more discussion on conduct and courtesy books, see Daniel Kline (30-33), Norbert Elias (45-182), and Barbara Hanawalt (69-88).

<sup>26</sup> For a definition of conduct books, see Harvey Darton (42-43).

In the following century, other factors, including the Elementary Education Acts of 1870, which made education compulsory for children ages 5-13, and of 1880, which imposed penalties on businesses employing children ages 10-13, fueled the demand for literature for children both in school and out. This demand led to the creation of subgenres of children's literature, such as the school story, domestic fiction, epistolary works, and histories; nevertheless, all such texts were still, in essence, overtly didactic. While didactic children's literature was appropriate for school and perhaps pleasing to parents, some Victorian writers of children's books began writing texts that were more focused on entertainment and delight. Toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth-century, books featuring magic, fairies, never-before-seen creatures, and other tropes of fantasy began to appear. Like all other trends, prevailing styles of the literary come and go, and by the time children's fantasy was becoming popular, the publication of conduct books and primers was waning.

The once heavily didactic literature for children gave way to more amusing forms; nevertheless, the didactic is still present, but it is now in the form of critical literacy and utilized for different purposes, as some scholars have observed. For instance, Lee A. Tally directs our attention to the young adult problem novel, which was heavily didactic (230).<sup>27</sup> Yet reading itself is an informative act. It is, I posit, impossible to read without at least improving in some way, if only by becoming a better or stronger reader, which in itself makes all reading didactic in the broadest sense of the word. But critical literacy can be subtle, unobtrusive, and even entertaining. When children's literature scholar and

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<sup>27</sup> For more discussion of deceptively didactic young adult novels, see Michael Cart's *From Romance to Realism* (1996) and Roberta Seelinger Trites's *Disturbing the Universe* (2000).

author C. Butler asked Diana Wynne Jones if there was a didactic element to her books, Jones suggests in her reply that any didacticism should not be overt or preachy, though some form of wisdom will be present because of what adults know that young people do not. Discussing her position regarding didacticism in her work, Jones explains that

if they notice I'm doing that, then I've done something wrong. [...] But I do think that if you write for children as an adult [...] you have more experience, and this is something you can give children the benefit of. This is where any moral element might come in, but if it comes in overtly and directly this is a great mistake." (168)

Jones's reply is indicative of the trends away from the overtly didactic in twentieth century children's literature, moving toward critical literacy. But these same twentieth century texts, nonetheless, offer readers new lessons and experiences that young people would now need in order to negotiate life in the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond. A discussion of how fantasy and didacticism work together, then, is a necessary component of my dissertation.

### *The Critical Literacy Benefits of Fantasy Literature*

Though the notion of children's literature's being didactic is perhaps obvious, it may not be immediately recognizable that children's fantasy literature provides lessons for young readers—or how it does—because of the subtlety of critical literacy, either moral, as in *The Water-Babies*, or empowering, as in twentieth century English children's fantasy. The subtlety of twentieth century English children's fantasy is found in what the works lack, rather than in what they have. For example, there is no explicit moral in these works because the works focus on narrative and storytelling rather than on any lessons to

be learned. Twentieth century English children's fantasy, like most fantastic works that take place outside of our universe, lacks the immediacy of a real-world setting. Because the settings of these works are elsewhere, the characters are not necessarily bound by the conventions, social constructs, or even physics of the real world, and are thus able to explore their autonomy, their power, and their problem-solving skills in this other world. One of the benefits of the critical literacy in fantasy is that readers can observe how characters face challenges and model their own actions and behaviors on the successes of the characters they read. Fantasy offers readers respite from their own lives, as, in his landmark essay "On Fairy Stories," J. R. R. Tolkien asserts that for children and perhaps more so for adults, "fairy-stories offer also, in a peculiar degree or mode, these things: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation, all things of which children have, as a rule, less need than older people" (*Reader* 67). Though it was important for Tolkien in 1939 to sharply differentiate fairy tales from child readers so as to make way for adults to be able to read them, that concern is less important now, but his points about the nature of fantasy remain. Through reading fantasy, readers can approach the problems of their own world through the lens of the fantastic narrative. In his discussion of the impact that fantasy has on us, fairy tale theorist Jack Zipes argues that "It is through fantasy that we have always sought to make sense of the world, not through reason. Reason matters, but fantasy matters more [...] it nourishes us and gives us hope that the world can be a better place" ("Why Fantasy Matters" 78).

Building on Zipes's argument, I contend that twentieth century English children's fantasy offers much needed instruction on how to negotiate an ever-more complex world; additionally, I propose that the link between fantasy and the critical literacy becomes

apparent when one purposefully looks for it. When a fantastic narrative discusses the problems of the world in the book, the conflicts characters face within the text, the arc of the text usually sees a solution to the challenges therein, allowing readers to experience vicarious participation in arriving at solutions, which readers can then employ in their own lives. Some examples of conflicts and resolutions in fantastic narratives include Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), in which Meg Murry must learn self-acceptance; Garth Nix's *Sabriel* (1995), in which the young protagonist is comfortable in two worlds, demonstrating multiculturalism; all of the Harry Potter books (1997-2007), in which Harry must contend with his hostile relatives who do not like him and refuse to accept him as he is and with an antagonist who wants to kill him; and Chris Wooding's *Poison* (2003), in which a young girl must accept responsibilities she at first rejects.

While realistic literature may also allow readers to explore problem-solving techniques, realistic literature confines young characters, and by extension young readers, to their own world, where there are limits on autonomy, voice, and action because children, in real life, have little power. Fantasy literature, however, offers an opportunity to explore, uninhibited by the real world, possibilities in problem-solving. Explaining the comfort in turning to texts, Zipes offers a social literacy explanation for the importance of imaginative, fantastic, or allegorical works because we need, as a respite from the real world, "fantastic artworks for diversion [...] to take our minds off reality, to enjoy a moment of calm [...] to appreciate the extraordinary in the ordinary, to reassess our values and alternatives to determining social forces [...] and to contemplate alternatives to our harsh realities. More than titillation, we need the fantastic for resistance" ("Why Fantasy Matters" 79). Zipes illustrates what Tolkien has already asserted: that we turn to

fantastic stories as a means of coping with and escaping from and resistance against reality and everyday life. Fantasy is necessary because it gives our minds a break from stark reality so that we may process and incubate our experiences and find solutions to real world problems and new paths through reality. In the texts that I examine, young characters have the opportunity to find new ways to negotiate their realities. Because readers have these characters to emulate, there is no need for the overtly didactic, as the subtlety of the lessons is embedded within the story.

More than merely using reading as a diversion, then, readers of fantasy can incorporate what they learn from fantasy into their own lives. Fantastic literature, Crossley asserts, is important because it can change the perspective of the reader, allowing her or him to see the world differently because fantasy expands belief and allows for expanded possibilities (288). Thus readers see through and with fantasy literature that they are not bound by conventions because the fantastic narrative is not beholden to any particular reality. Fantasy literature allows readers to vicariously experience situations that might be similar to their own real life problems. In the low-stakes activity of reading about problems and working out solutions, readers learn to resolve conflicts and solve problems through observing their literary role models. Diana Wynne Jones asserts that fantasy books expand the imagination, which is “the growing point of the mind [...] where a mind can expand beyond accepted ideas, examine and then envisage new shapes for the future” (*Reflections* 74). Fantasy allows readers to imagine the possibilities of what the world can be.

In addition to benefitting the individual, fantasy also provides a pathway to the evolution of culture and society. For example, Crossley argues that fantasy provides for

new possibilities—new ways of thinking (288). Without imagining potentialities, the new possibilities—advancement—would cease because the motivation to strive for what is next would be diminished. In discussing the creative and destructive forces in fantasy, Crossley further argues that in fantasy, “not previous knowledge, but the inertia of previous ways of thinking is discredited. The appeal to fantasy in education makes possible the restoration of the worth of an idea, to which complexity will add a *later* delight” (288; emphasis in the original). Fantasy literature, then, can be useful in developing critical literacy as it provides new ways of thinking, which leads to more imaginative and creative problem solving in the real world, with the added benefit of engaging in texts focused more on narrative than on the lessons readers must learn.

Ultimately, young readers of fantasy literature can benefit from the connection between the literature and learning, as well as between knowledge and wisdom. Because of the freedom to break with social conventions, fantasy writers and readers can participate in adventures and occurrences that are not available in other genres, freeing both communities to explore unlimited possibilities. The richness of fantasy and imaginative works of twentieth century English children’s fantasy offer readers narratives in which critical literacy is a model to emulate rather than a set of explicit directions to follow.<sup>28</sup> Many of the characters I discuss explore and make discoveries about who they are or want to be through their engagement with literacy in the texts. These processes of

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<sup>28</sup> For models of emulation in fantasy see, for example, Terry Pratchett’s *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents* (2001), a retelling of the folktale “The Pied Piper,” in which children help to save rats from being taken by rat catchers, and *Nation* (2008), in which a young British royal and an island boy, who have both suffered tragedies, must learn to trust each other as they work together to help other people who have survived a tsunami; Chris Wooding’s *Poison* (2003), in which a young girl leaves her home in order to recover her kidnapped sister, using her knowledge learned from stories, reasoning skills, and bravery; and Susan Cooper’s *The Dark is Rising* (1973), in which young Will Stanton must take his place in the fight against the Dark that wants to destroy the Light.

exploration and discovery have the potential to guide readers to—and through—their own similar, real life processes. Fantasy literature is didactic because engaging in it requires what Crossley calls “imaginative participation.” Crossley maintains that “The structure of a fantasy novel is a source of delight and stability for readers, but what they learn from fantasy comes from their imaginative participation in the work, not from any tendentious designs of the author” (292). Unlike the kind of reading required for the dry facts of a textbook or the often tedious nonfiction narrative, fantasy allows the reader to access his or her own imagination and create a new sense of the world and its possibilities.<sup>29</sup> I argue that after the two World Wars, young readers, and likely many others, had to make sense of a changed world in the shadow of global conflict which, especially for British and other European children, brought the horrors of the Wars into the spaces that are usually thought of as safe: home, school, and family.

### *Chapter Summaries*

In order to reveal instances of critical literacy and how it operates and is gained in twentieth century English children’s fantasy, I organize my chapters around four key authors—E. Nesbit, C. S. Lewis, Diana Wynne Jones, and J. K. Rowling—and how their work provides models of the power of rhetoric and the force of language in order to create a new Self—autonomous, thinking, voiced, and active. These works also contain literary models for utilizing cultural knowledge, critical inquiry, heroic action, and rhetorical and narrative power in order to create a constructed identity, values system, and ultimately, the essential Self. As these literary models develop their essential Selves, by extension readers can emulate in reality what they find beneficial for the characters in

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<sup>29</sup> I am not discussing domestic fiction in this dissertation.

the texts. Because all literature is to some extent didactic, as I have argued above, any act of reading provides a learning opportunity or at least an occasion to practice reading skills. But reading, and what the individual reader takes from the act, depends on the individual who is reading and on his or her motivation. Reading just for facts is accessing information, but not necessarily acquiring knowledge. The facts being read are already memorialized—recorded in writing—and thus accessible. Knowledge, and indeed wisdom, is more than knowing things—like facts—that are practical; knowledge, and its higher order, wisdom, is the ability to use what is learned for some greater purpose.

In addition to this introductory chapter, my remaining chapters will be organized as follows: in chapter two I discuss literacy and rhetoric and how these two elements combine to make a space for critical literacy. Literacy is more than reading and writing, and is made stronger by the effective use of language that is informed by rhetoric.

Chapter three provides a discussion of Edith Nesbit (1858-1924) and her important role as a threshold author between Victorian and Edwardian eras and post-World War II British children's fantasy literature. Nesbit's fantasy texts for children anticipate the shifts in the cultural needs of children in the coming decades by featuring children who are more adventurous, autonomous, and thinking, while learning as they progress through the narratives. In this chapter, I focus on three of Nesbit's fantasy stories: *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), "The Cathood of Maurice" (1912), and *Wet Magic* (1913). Each of these works presents child characters who must learn the importance of a certain type of literacy and the consequences and benefits thereof.

Chapter four examines the contributions of C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) to twentieth century English children's fantasy through a focus on *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

(1952) from his Narnia books. Lewis himself was greatly concerned with literacy, as I will show, and this Narnia text in particular demonstrates the kind of literacy demanded by twentieth century realities.

In chapter five, I explore *Fire and Hemlock*, a coming-of-age fantasy by Diana Wynne Jones (1934-2011), an author who was herself a child during the confusing time of World War II. In *Fire and Hemlock*, reading becomes the protagonist's path to creating her ideal Self, regaining her memories, and rescuing her friend Tom Lynn from the Fairy Queen in both the mundane world in which she mostly lives and in the fantasy world that complicates her existence.

Of course, not all books are harmless. In chapter six, I turn to the topic of forbidden knowledge in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), a fantasy in which some knowledge, books, reading, and ideas from writing are forbidden to the characters. This chapter also considers how misleading, manipulative, or unreliable narrators in such fantasy can still be a source of knowledge and learning.

Chapter seven will conclude my dissertation by identifying the implications of my research on studies of fantasy literature and children's literature. I also suggest further avenues for research on this topic, including the relation between domestic and fantasy literature for children and the relationship between science fiction for children and other genres of children's literature. Indeed, I hope to pursue my inquiries into how fantasy literature has appropriated structures of moral and social development from conduct books and primers, an inquiry that will also serve for evidence of this appropriation in publishing and buying trends.

In discussing the works I examine in this dissertation, occasionally I have silently adapted punctuation to MLA requirements.

## CHAPTER II - CRITICAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH CHILDREN'S FANTASY LITERATURE

### *Methodology*

#### *Unveiling Critical Literacy*

Critical literacy is a literacy that allows readers to read the world. Unlike the traditional literacy of decoding texts for elemental purposes of reading and writing, reading with critical literacy utilizes rhetorical analysis and allows readers to analyze and understand language. Critical literacy helps readers create meaning from the texts they read. Reading with critical literacy “encourages individuals to develop the critical awareness necessary to challenge the status quo and discover alternatives to existing social inequalities” (Beck 393). Critical awareness and challenging the status quo lead the reader to see the possibilities of a more just society where the marginalized of society are empowered. By reading with critical literacy, readers who are unrepresented or underrepresented in texts have the opportunity to question the lack of voices like their own in texts. Reading with critical literacy empowers readers to ask “who *is not* represented” in texts in addition to the more readably observable question of who *is* represented in texts. A potential result of reading with critical literacy and searching for who is missing from texts is the opportunity for authors, publishers, and marketers to produce and make available works that feature unrepresented or underrepresented groups. Marginalized groups are underrepresented in society and its literature, and so reading with critical literacy “enables human subjects to understand and engage the politics of daily life in the quest for a more truly democratic social order” (Lankshear and McLaren xviii) and then to rewrite the world with greater equality. Critical literacy allows for the

enfranchisement of those who are considered outside of societal norms. Australian education scholar Allan Luke argues that one role of critical literacy is to analyze the agenda of a text in order to determine the source of the material interest and discourse it serves and how these affect readers (20). In understanding the motives of those with material interest in the text and of who benefits from the discourse of the texts, readers can then design a remedy for countering these agendas. Giving voice and representation to marginalized groups allows for those groups to be included in the canon of texts for young people. In this dissertation, I examine how young characters are empowered, often by rejecting the status quo of their communities and creating a reality for themselves that is better suited to their needs and desires. Polly, for example, rejects her mother's ideals about domesticity and education, Eustace, in essence, rejects his upbringing and adopts a more chivalrous manner, and Harry, in his life at Hogwarts, embraces a world that is the complete antithesis of his life with the Dursleys.<sup>30</sup>

In order to reveal critical literacy in the texts I examine, my methodological approach includes an investigation of rhetoric and its functions within the texts I have selected for this dissertation. Once again, I am defining rhetoric as “The art of using language effectively so as to persuade or influence others, *esp.* the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques to this end; the study of principles and rules

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<sup>30</sup> For more about critical literacy, see, for example, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970; 2000) extols the use of critical literacy to empower oppressed peoples through resolving social inequities; Freire and Donaldo Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987), in which the authors advocate for an education system that does more than give information but empowers students, especially those who are marginalized in society and the curriculum; Rogers, Mosley, and Folkes's article on using critical literacy to enact socioeconomic equality and stave off the deregulated, privatization of public services found in neoliberalism social and economic policies; and Elizabeth P. Quintero's article on using critical literacy when teaching non-native English speakers as a way of engaging students in their literacy acquisition while making the transition from home language to English more fluid and ultimately empowering the students.

to be followed by a speaker or writer striving for eloquence, esp. as formulated by ancient Greek and Roman writers” (*OED* 1.a.). My approach is occasionally informed by Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and Quintilian (c. 30-100 CE), though mostly by the modern children’s literacy theorist Margaret Meek (1925- ), who has studied how children learn from texts. Meek is Reader Emeritus at the Institute of Education in London, England. Meeks’s monographs include, *Learning to Read* (1982 and 1986), *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* (1987), *On Being Literate: Living with Difference* (1991), *Information and Book Learning* (1996), and *Achieving Literacy* (2014). Meek is also the author of *Coming of Age in Children’s Literature* (2003) with Victor Watson. Meek explores learning to read, the acquisition of literacy, and how young characters develop in texts for children and adolescents.

While rhetoric has been discussed, debated, and defined for millennia, rhetoric is “the art of speaking well,” as defined in *Institutio Oratoria* by Quintilian, one of the foundational authorities in education, born in Spain circa 35 CE, and educated in Rome. Quintilian’s excellence in teaching was recognized and rewarded by the State, which provided a salary for him to teach at a publically funded school.<sup>31</sup> This salary, James J. Murphy explains, was for his position as chair for Latin rhetoric (xi). Murphy further elucidates Quintilian’s popularity in the early Renaissance, describing how Quintilian rationalized the “educational program in literary culture” already in effect and demonstrates “a humane approach to literacy” in his book (xiii); and literacy, of course, has been a dominant element of children’s literature since the inception of the genre. In

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<sup>31</sup> In Rome, Quintilian “was the first rhetorician to set up a genuine public school and receive a salary from the state” (Butler viii);

*Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian declares that rhetoric is “the art which we should acquire by study, and is the art of speaking well” (II.xiv.5; 299-301) and “the science of speaking well” (II, xv, 34). For my purposes, speaking well includes writing well, as writing is the primary mode of demonstrating acquired instruction in educational institutions today. My position on Quintilian is enhanced by Quintilian’s role as rhetorician and educator—and the importance of his contributions to both practices—is highlighted by classicist George Kennedy’s glosses on the various terms in the definition:

‘Well’ [. . .] means morally right [and] artistically right, [...] The word ‘science’ is used rather generally to mean a body of knowledge; Quintilian certainly does not mean that rhetoric deals with certainties, for he seems to think of ‘science’ and ‘virtue,’ that is, a good quality in a man, as much the same thing (II.xv.36), and [later] equates rhetoric with an art and again with virtue. (58)

Rhetoric in Quintilian’s estimation is thus speaking and writing with moral authority and artistic aptitude, which many of the protagonists I discuss gain from their experiences throughout the narratives in which they occur. If rhetoric is about following the “ideal man”—or in this case the “ideal child”—then of course there are lessons to be learned and there are expectations that readers will choose to emulate the “ideal child.”

To further reinforce that “speaking well” aligns closely with “writing well,” I utilize ancient Greek rhetor Aristotle’s views and teachings on rhetoric, presented in *The Art of Rhetoric*, which preceded Quintilian’s by several hundred years. In examining the primary texts of my dissertation, and the characters therein and their actions, I employ Aristotle’s formative discussion of the argumentative appeals to *ethos*, *logos*, and

*kairos*.<sup>32</sup> *Ethos*, ethical proof, depends on the character of the person speaking or writing, and *logos*, logical proof, must be present in the proposed argument. *Kairos* is the strategic use of opportune time.<sup>33</sup> By learning to speak and write with moral authority and artistic aptitude, the protagonists of twentieth century English children's fantasy provide a process of learning that necessarily includes learning to recognize *kairos*, knowing that there is an advantageous moment in which to speak, write, or act. I propose that the young readers of the texts I examine learn negotiating skills not only from reading the texts—the narratives of which form their own moral authority and artistic aptitude—but also through the learning processes of the characters within the texts, whose experiments, errors, and final achievement of rhetorical power provide a model for readers to emulate. I argue that what readers learn is important to them because their world is so different from any time previously, and childhood is no longer idealized in literature in the ways eighteenth-century, Victorian, or Edwardian, childhoods were.

### *Literacy*

Critical literacy in twentieth century English children's fantasy offers a wide range of lessons on a variety of subjects. However, I must also acknowledge that young readers, just like adult readers, may miss some of the lessons and knowledge provided by the texts. Maria Nikolajeva demonstrates that "Occasionally, readers can achieve a detailed retelling or answer the researcher's questions [about a narrative], yet more subtle analytical tools reveal that they have in fact not understood the text" ("Meaning-Making" 146). While I agree that young readers do not fully understand everything that they read,

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<sup>32</sup> For this dissertation, I am omitting discussions of pathos.

<sup>33</sup> For modern readers see, for example, Crowley and Hawhee (13, 45).

they do understand some of it and, because they have engaged in the didactic process of reading, they have learned something, whether it is an actual lesson from the text or it is better comprehension skills for the next reading task. Furthermore, what is read at one time may require an unconscious period of germination, so that when a need for that information is presented, the information will resurface, as demonstrated by Polly, the protagonist of Diana Wynne Jones's *Fire and Hemlock* discussed in chapter four of this dissertation. As I will explain there, when Polly must save Tom, her prior reading allows her to work out what she can and cannot do to help him. A child's not being able to understand a text completely does not negate the knowledge that the text provides at the time of reading. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that with the lessons presented in works of twentieth century English children's fantasy, young readers can learn how to negotiate a changed world, and that through this fantasy they can explore possible existential scenarios through texts and be better prepared for life.

Works of twentieth century English children's fantasy that utilize critical literacy to convey lessons to readers for surviving and thriving in the twentieth century world have taken the place of conduct books of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As I explained above, conduct books—or guides—are books of instruction that demonstrate expected behavior and provide lessons on social norms; however, as discussed previously, in the twentieth century, what passed for “normal” had changed dramatically. Like their nineteenth-century predecessors, the texts I examine demonstrate the shift towards a new set of expectations for children living in a post-World War world. The new expectations for children and young adults include being voiced, active, thinking, and assertive, traits that are presented in these works. In Diana Wynne Jones's books, for

example, there are characters who, because of absent or disinterested parents, must be self-reliant. For instance, Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* learns to be voiced, active, and thinking as the story progresses. C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* also depicts child characters who are rhetorically apt—voiced, active, and empowered—demonstrating to readers the means of realizing their own abilities and potential. I analyze how and to what extent the protagonists in texts discover that they possess rhetorical power—that is, that they can negotiate social and linguistic situations to their benefit—and how they learn to access and maintain that power. Children's fantasy is especially situated to offer readers the literacy of power—that is, a means to acquire agency—that is unrestricted, by its very nature, from the rules and physics of our world. Literacy, as James Paul Gee argues, “can be *liberating* (‘powerful’) if it can be used as a ‘meta-language’ (a set of meta-words, meta-values, meta-beliefs) for the critique of other literacies and the way they constitute us as persons and situate us in society. Liberating literacies can reconstitute and resituate us” (9; emphasis and parentheses in original). Fantasy literature creates a situation for “meta-language,” as defined by Gee above, that demonstrates through texts a means for audiences to observe and critique the literacies and the realities of our world. Twentieth century English children's fantasy literature provides positive textual role models who are voiced, active, thinking, and assertive while they critique negative traits or behaviors that are no longer beneficial in the world of the twentieth century. And thus, twentieth century English children's fantasy is a means of escaping the traditional power structure and (re)creating the Self.

Furthermore, the freedom from overt didacticism that children's fantasy writers experienced in twentieth century Britain allowed them the opportunity to explore social

issues that young people face without lecturing to them or sounding preachy. Such books include, for example, Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), which presents such themes as poverty, responsibility, and the importance of family; Diana Wynne Jones's *The Time of the Ghost* (1981), which addresses the issue of domestic violence; Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002), in which the young protagonist must contend with her parents' decision to move house, along with loneliness, and fear, and *The Graveyard Book* (2008), which features a successful blended family and the cooperation of a community. Children's fantasy writers focus on the narrative and the dilemmas that characters face, giving readers the opportunity to observe strategies presented in the text for surviving and thriving.

Through fantasy texts, young people can learn some of the skills that can help them negotiate reality as they vicariously experience the problem solving processes of characters. Nikolajeva explains that even though childhood gets idealized, it is not always pleasant, but that "By exposing the young characters (and thus the young readers) to a variety of other, more harmonious and solid worlds, the author suggests that harmony can be achieved, perhaps at some later stage of life [which is] a positive message to the readers ("Heterotopia" 31). Children's fantasy shows readers—without the disenchanting effects of overt moral or didactic messages—that the world can be a better place. And in the other fantasy worlds, there are often young people who have agency and can find resolutions to conflicts and circumstances by being voiced, active, thinking, and empowered, unlike in our world.

*Fantasy in Context*

My discussion of twentieth century English children's fantasy necessitates a discussion of how I define fantasy. For the purposes of this dissertation, I argue that fantasy literature has an element of the impossible or supernatural, that it enables its characters to perform feats that are otherwise impossible, and that it is set in a world or universe that is recognizable to the reader.<sup>34</sup> But children's fantasy additionally presents characters who have or gain agency, who are able to subvert or circumvent socially prescribed, restrictive roles, and who are adventurous, active, and voiced. Indeed, many works of fantasy empower both characters and readers, because characters in fantasy works such as Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986), Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2008), and Terry Pratchett's *Nation* (2008) enjoy autonomy and are free to actively engage in problem solving, therefore providing a schema for young readers to follow for their own problem solving needs. Though the fantasy world may seem familiar to the reader, it does not have to be in a universe known to readers; the alternate world can be in another universe (or rather, a different part of the multiverse) in works such as *The Homeward Bounders* (1981), *Deep Secret* (1997), and *The Merlin Conspiracy* (2003) by Diana Wynne Jones, *The Dark Is Rising* sequence (1965-77) by Susan Cooper, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) by Alan Garner, and many, many others, or it can be a world hidden within our own such as in the Harry Potter series (1997-2007) by J. K. Rowling, inaccessible to those characters who lack the necessary specialness, skills, or knowledge to enter.

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<sup>34</sup> I will add that fantasy notably values morality and justice, though I will be saying less about this aspect as my focus is on rhetorical power. For more on morality and justice in fantasy, see, e.g., Farah Mendlesohn's *Fantastic Tradition* xv.

Because fantasy is a genre among many competing classifications, definitions of genre necessarily include subgenres. Fantasy is a branch of fiction encompassing many additional divisions, creating numerous ways in which critics define fantasy. For example, Mitzi Myers implies a very broad definition when she suggests that Maria Edgeworth's "Madam de Fleury" from *Tales of Fashionable Life* "conjures all the conventions of fantasy" because Victoire, the heroine, fulfills the child fantasy of rescuing an adult—in her case, of saving her teacher from financial ruin and execution ("Erotics" 12), whereas C. Butler argues that one kind of fantasy writing "sets magical events in a world otherwise recognizable as our own" ("Now Here" 66). The period of publication can also influence definitions. For example, critic Karen Sands-O'Connor argues specifically of British children's fantasy that

fantastic fiction for children before 1945 used the past to inform future generations of their duty [...] or just gave children a sort of vacation from their present, [and] post-1945 authors often use fantasy to recall an England of the past. [...] Because nostalgia and fantasy are often linked [...] it is not surprising that British children's fantasy fiction after 1945 consists in part of a nostalgic, sentimental, unreal view of the British nation and its people. ("Nowhere" 13-14)

There is a direct influence of the past, both historic and literary, in children's fantasy. Sands-O'Connor focuses on British fantasy, but the impact of these works are further reaching than the realm of Great Britain, as many of the works published in Britain migrate to other parts of the English-speaking world and, through translation, even beyond that. Another definition is that of W. R. Irwin, who explicitly defines fantasy as

“a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition of the contrary to fact into ‘fact’ itself. [...] It is at the least a welcome release from dailiness” (4). In contrast to this sense of “violation,” literary critic C. N. Manlove defines fantasy as “a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms” (*Modern Fantasy* 1).

Several of the definitions of fantasy stress subtle distinctions between cognate terms. Murfin and Ray claim that “*Fantasy* should not be confused with *fantastic*, a related term applicable not only to fantasy but also to other literary forms [...] that contain fanciful, supernatural, and otherwise incredible elements [along with an] uncertainty that distinguishes fantastic plots” (152). According to Murfin and Ray, the uncertainty lies in not knowing if these incredible elements are delusion or real, since they cannot be trusted in the first place. For example, Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) contains fantastic elements because the governess believes she is seeing ghosts; however, since the narrative never specifies whether these encounters are delusional or real, the text would not be classified as a fantasy. Defining fantasy is also difficult because it is such a broad and therefore vague term, unlike Victorian or Renaissance.<sup>35</sup> Because of the vagueness of “fantasy” and the potential confusion between fantasy and reality, there are several definitions already in use. For example, several glossaries of literary terms assert that fantasy fiction takes place in a world other

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<sup>35</sup> Jack Zipes, for example, argues that “there is only a vague consensus of what fantasy is” because we “shall never know the difference between reality and fantasy” (*Why Fantasy Matters* 79).

than our own (X. J. Kennedy 63, Baldick 81; Holman 181; Fowler 88; Murfin 151). This fantasy world—an element in numerous definitions—is recognizable and familiar to readers, and yet these alternate worlds provide numerous possibilities for the extraordinary. Roger Fowler argues that one purpose of having a world that is familiar is that “references to familiar everyday activities render these worlds more homely and comprehensible” (88).

Portals to alternate fantasy worlds can be metaphysical rather than physical. An example of a metaphysical portal is Alice’s dream in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Other portals are located in physical space, like those in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter books (1997-2007)—the courtyard wall at the back of The Leaky Cauldron, and platform nine and three-quarters, located at the barrier between platforms nine and ten at King’s Cross Station—which transport wizards and witches into the magical world. But whether the fantasy world is physical or metaphysical is often ambiguous, as when Philip, in Edith Nesbit’s *The Magic City* (1930), builds a city from books but enters it only after he has been asleep. Many scholars also insist that there is an imaginative, dream-like, or at worst nightmarish quality to fantasy (X. J. Kennedy 63; Yelland 72-73; Holman 181), which suggests that the fantasy world does not actually exist outside of the mind of whomever is creating the world. Such works include *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Water-Babies*, and the MGM’s *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), a film adaptation of L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900).

In addition to the definitions of fantasy above, some scholars also insist that fantasy literature concerns itself with the natural and supernatural (X. J. Kennedy 63; Fowler 88). Products of the mind are real to the one imagining or dreaming the events;

that is, perceived reality is “real” for the one who envisions it, but the events may not be “real” for others. X. J. Kennedy et al. report that “fantasy literature freely pursues the dreamy and nightmarish possibilities of the imagination, keeping open the question of whether the events have a natural, supernatural, or psychic source” (63), as E. Nesbit’s “Man-size in Marble” (1893) does; thus it remains uncertain whether fantastic events occurred or were only imagined. Moreover, it is sometimes impossible to determine from a fantasy narrative itself whether the dream or imagination is meant to access an alternate reality or if such fantasy is a product of the mind only. Furthermore, theorist Theodor Adorno explains that “fantasy is also, and essentially so, the unrestricted availability of potential solutions that crystallize within the artwork. It is lodged not only in what strikes one both as existing and as the residue of something existing, but perhaps even more in the transformation of the existing” (173-74). Although I have provided my own definition of fantasy above, I must acknowledge that while there are many definitions of fantasy, it is important to keep in mind that fantasy fiction presents the impossible (Holman 181; Yelland 72-73; Murfin 151-154; *OED* (“fantasy | phantasy”)); that some scholars argue that fantasy literature is a protest of what is (X. J. Kennedy 63; Holman 181; Yelland 72-73); and that others trace how fantasy literature overlaps with other genres (Murfin; *OED* *ibid.*).

Throughout my research, I make use of several comprehensive studies of the modes of fantasy, such as Brian Attebery’s *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) and Jack Zipes’s “Why Fantasy Matters Too Much,” among others. Attebery argued that even though interest in fantasy literature is growing, it is still disregarded by many academics who deem fantasy unworthy of serious scholarship or ignore the genre all together (vii). The

dismissal of fantasy literature in general is one aspect of a two-fold rejection of children's fantasy, what I call the "double negative" of children's fantasy, since children's literature itself is often met with disdain in academia,<sup>36</sup> as indicated by the belittling tag of "kiddie lit." Adults often dismiss children's fantasy because of its lighthearted, non-realistic, and unthreatening nature, as Northrop Frye asserts when discussing the history of the fantastic, "Fantasy still belongs more to children than to adults; fantasy still remains marginal to the 'great tradition' of realistic, adult works" (42-43). The marginality of children's fantasy allows the genre to be overlooked by adults and academics.

But the double negative of children's fantasy literature is also its strength; children's fantasy is free to be subversive because adults are not threatened by it. This subversion has been noticed by Zipes, who argues that fantasy "wants to undermine what passes for normality, to expose the contradictions of civil society, to right the world out-of-joint in the name of humanity" (*Relentless* 50). Adults often want children to learn to fit into society rather than learn to question current societal beliefs as many fantasy works do. I believe that one of those hidden riches Attebery alludes to is the shaping of children and that there has been an evolution of characters in fantasy who have become progressively more assertive, subjective, voiced, active, and thinking, just as society has evolved to expect these traits from children, especially, as I demonstrate in my research, in the twentieth century.

*Literature for Children (Or Not)*

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<sup>36</sup> For dismissals of children's literature as an academic topic, see, for instance, Beverly Lyon Clark's *Kiddie Lit* (1-15), Shelia Egoff's *Worlds Within* (1), and Anne Lundin's *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature* (59).

Of course, many of the early works I discuss were not categorized into either children's or adult literature when they were first published, as both adults and children read these texts. Although fantasy literature in general is often distinguished as mainly for children and in opposition to didactic literature, the development of children's fantasy literature has been a progression, a gradual metamorphosis from overt didacticism to delightful fantasy, as we know it. For example, some of the fairy tales of Hans Christian Anderson, such as "The Little Mermaid" (1837), incorporate elements of fantasy. When the fantasy mermaid character dies, she turns into sea foam and is told that if she does well enough in this state, she can gain a soul and go to heaven; Anderson is thus mapping human moral imperatives onto a fantasy character. From Anderson we can turn to Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1864), a text that is both fantastic and didactic.<sup>37</sup> The protagonist, Tom, for example, has drowned and become a water-baby, steals sweets from Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid; however, she does not punish him. But Tom feels guilty even without punishment, and when he receives sweets from Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid, he cannot tolerate the taste of them and is ill. The story, though fantastic, provides the same moral lessons to readers that are found in more overtly didactic literature, because Tom suffers from his misdeed through guilt, illness, and growing prickles on his body so that he cannot be cuddled by Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby; his suffering is alleviated when he confesses his theft and feels remorse. *The Water-Babies*, while not quite subverting previous children's literature, blends the didactic with the entertaining. Indeed, Elaine Ostry insists that "Kingsley follows much of the structure and themes of the conduct

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<sup>37</sup> One could also cite George Macdonald, John Ruskin, and Oscar Wilde, who are among Kingsley's children's literature contemporaries.

books, even as he disparages the form” (“Magical Growth” 32). Writers in the mid-nineteenth century who wanted to publish entertaining stories for children had to consider the dominant market and the will of the parents who bought the books for their children. Negotiating a way into the buying trends while still pleasing parents, Ostry argues, provided writers with a challenge, for which *The Water-Babies* is a suitable answer, as it “engages in similar techniques and attitudes to the conduct books,” though the presentation is more entertaining (“Magical Growth” 32). I will add that children’s fantasy continues to present lessons for readers, even as they are embedded in narratives of magic and wonder, as demonstrated through the threshold author E. Nesbit in chapter three.

Among the children’s book publishing histories I have consulted is Brian Alderson and Felix de Marez Oyens’s *Be Merry and Wise* (2006), a bibliographic study of children’s book publishing. Alderson and Oyens originally conceived their project as a catalogue for the 1990 exhibition of children’s books at The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City, but they extended the initial concept to include the publishing history of children’s books in England from 1650-1850, including the shift from the overtly didactic to overtly pleasurable. The title of the study reflects the authors’ belief that during the two hundred years that their work encompasses

there had to be a shift in the general perception of childhood itself. Some recognition was needed that education might be more subtly conducted than through the narrow channels of alphabets and syllabaries and predigested question-and-answer formulae [...] and also of the interesting notion that there

might be a general benefit if learning were to become an experience that is pleasant rather than painful. (1)

Because perceptions of childhood had changed, the needs of children also required reexamination, including the written works with which they were presented. Providing children with written material that was pleasurable expanded the canon of children's literature but also broadened the opportunities to teach children through more texts. Alderson and Oyens trace the change in works for children during the Restoration and the long eighteenth century, a change that was caused by the recognition that children are more than little adults and have requirements that need to be met in new and inventive ways. The authors also stipulate that during this same time period, children enjoyed the books newly published for them more than they had those previously offered to them; the publishing industry shifted to meet the needs of young people that were newly recognized (1), something I argue occurred again in the twentieth century as a result of the perceived changes in childhood. In the Preface to Alderson and Oyens's work, Charles E. Pierce, Jr. suggests that the authors hope "to produce more than just a record of an exhibition but rather a copiously illustrated documentary history of these innovative publications, like them combining entertainment and instruction" (xi). Twentieth century English children's fantasy, finally, successfully infuses a good story with the didactic in the form of critical literacy.

In addition to consulting publishing histories of children's literature, other studies of sociocultural histories have also been of great assistance to my research. For example, Barbara Wall's *The Narrator's Voice* (1990) illuminates the role of the narrator in children's literature and how this role has changed up to the mid-twentieth century, which

is the time period I address in this dissertation. Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer's *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (2003) contributes to my understanding of the social constructs of children's literature and how, for example, adults reframe narratives according to what adults believe children need, as I argue happened in the twentieth century.

Though I am not necessarily looking at traditional didactic examples of teaching child readers how to read, write, and recite, there is, in *Fire and Hemlock* (1985) by Diana Wynne Jones for example, a clear relationship between the improvement in Polly's writing skills and the breadth of her reading with her development of critical thinking skills, rhetorical argument, and initiative.

English children's literature in the twentieth century reflects the changed world that English children inherited through the advances in technology, wars, and the changing attitudes on gender. To illustrate the need for changes in literature for children, Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer argue that

What people in the past believed children needed—and so, presumably, what they really did need—was something quite different from the modern idea of children's literature. *The children's and the adults' conception of a childhood—significantly different from ours—became what was true and defined how children behaved.* (83; emphasis added)

I believe that the relationship between children's and adults' conceptions of childhood becoming true and defining how children behave is symbiotic. Adults decided on the needs of children and presented texts according to that perceived need. This symbiotic relationship was brought to fruition at the marketplace; however, if adults write, publish,

and market books that young readers reject, there can be no agreement of what can become “true” about what children need, and no consensus of “how children behave.” Fantasy literature is what children needed after the devastation of the two World Wars. Fantasy literature for children was the result of psychological necessity, especially in Britain where civilians—including children—had been exposed to the horrors of the War.

*The “Reader”*

Finally, it is necessary that I take time to discuss “the reader” as referenced and meant in this dissertation. Although I discuss literary texts and what those texts are doing, I stress that what the texts rhetorically demonstrate about empowerment, voice, agency, and thinking can be emulated by those reading these works, just as characters in the works I examine are influenced by the texts they read and even write within the stories. I do not suggest that every reader will get the same message or inspiration from the texts I examine, but that the texts themselves demonstrate literacy, the acquisition of power, agency, and voice, and the creation of the Self, which may benefit readers who engage with these texts.

Young people are better equipped use their imagination to push the boundaries of what constitutes reality, and imaginative texts help them to do so. Children may be an especially ideal audience for fantasy because, as Rustin and Rustin argue,

Child readers can also be expected to be curious and exploratory about the world, and interested in the business of making sense of it, while being little encumbered or divided by their factual knowledge about it. They will thus be interested to explore imaginary worlds as acceptable representations of the real thing. (“Deep Structures” 61)

Even very young children grasp the difference between fantasy and reality, and young people appreciate narratives and so are more open to the possibility of story, whether fantastic or real. For example, one might take note of the discussion from Paul L. Harris, et al., on the perception of reality in very young children—that young children understand and can differentiate between real and imagined objects, including an object’s permanence—and that “preschoolers appear to have a firm grasp of the distinction between imagined entities and real entities, even when behavioural-sensory criteria might be misleading” (105-06); and on the difference between fantasy and reality, that “Young children appear to have a firm grasp of the distinction between fantasy and reality. They understand that the products of their imagination are not publicly visible or real” (120); and finally, that, for children, “Despite their ability to distinguish sharply between fantasy and reality, young children might still remain unsure of the rules that govern transformations between those two realms” (121). So if the lines between the real and the unreal, the fantastic and reality, are blurred, then young people are not bound by the constraints of what is “possible” and “impossible.”

Yet the audience for children’s books is expansive and its readership includes, by necessity, an untold number of adults. Before books reach young readers who are their intended audience, adults write, proofread, edit, and publish these works. Booksellers must then advertise and advise consumers about these books. Parents often at least look through books before they purchase them or perhaps follow recommendations of other parents or reviewers who have read the books. Furthermore, because there is a tradition of reading works meant for children aloud to children, the readership for these books also necessarily includes as audience the parents, grandparents, teachers, babysitters, aunts,

uncles, older siblings, and other caretakers of young people who read these texts to the intended audience. But because children's and young adult literature is free of such temporal or theoretical divisions as Victorian era literature or postmodernism, the actual terms *children's* and *young adult* are concepts that are more fluid; while they imply a younger audience, it is impossible to restrict these works to just those demographics. Many adults read children's and young adult literature because they enjoy it. What makes a successful text for children and young adults can also be appreciated by adults, whether it is the lovely artwork of a picture book or the plot of a school story. And because all adults were once children, reading works for young people may be a nostalgic experience for an older audience, or a reminder of a time when pressures of adult life were not yet a burden.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the relationship between literacy and rhetoric is important for creating the necessary space for critical literacy. The acquisition of literacy is more complex than just learning to read and write. As I discuss below, the nuances of literacy include comprehension skills and being able to "read" what is not explicitly stated in texts. Literacy also extends beyond what is associated with reading and writing, and is necessary, as discussed below, for the various and multiple tasks that we perform every day.

### *The Rise of Literacy and Literature for Children*

The trend toward didacticism was a response to the shifting of the social classes and, especially, the rise of the middle class. The rise in mass literacy in England can be traced to the seventeenth century when, as Cecile M. Jagodzinski argues "the growth of a merchant class with leisure time, increased opportunities for education for most classes,

and the social, religious, and political upheavals of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contributed to a new way of thinking about the individual person” (2).

However, in the history of children’s literature, there was a deliberate shift upon the rise of literacy in the wake of the rise of the merchant class to move literature for children firmly into the didactic, moral sphere. This disposition toward didacticism was hardly an anomaly, as Sarah Trimmer, for example, in her 1802-06 *Guardian of Education*, made a concerted effort to rid the nursery of imagination—that which is not based in reality, but fantasy.<sup>38</sup> Similar comments were made by Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Elizabeth Hamilton. Of the shift toward the didactic, children’s literary scholar Andrew O’Malley argues that “middle-class values of utility, industry, and book-learning were becoming increasingly prevalent in children’s books, and while Trimmer insisted that these be tempered with an education in the Scriptures, she welcomed the change” (“Coach” 19). The changed emphasis to instilling middle-class values in children’s literature was amplified with the widespread availability of books and other printed materials for children after the mid-eighteenth century and the rise of literature specifically written, published, and marketed for children. This increased access to books and other printed material, especially for children, created a space in which children had, and still have, access to information that is no longer public,<sup>39</sup> no longer strictly sanctioned by the Church or State, and thus potentially subversive or corrupt, especially to young minds

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<sup>38</sup> For discussion of Trimmer’s disdain for imaginary works for children, see, for just a few examples, David Sandner’s *The Fantastic Sublime* (7, 22-23, 25, 28), Shelia A. Egoff’s *Worlds Within* (30-32), M. O. Grenby’s “Tame Fairies Make Good Teachers” (2, 5-6, 8, 16-17), Andrew O’Malley’s “The Coach and Six” (18-19, 27, 31) and *The Making of the Modern Child* (18).

<sup>39</sup> Cecile M. Jagodzinski proposes that “the emergence of the concept of privacy as a personal right, as the very core of individuality, is connected in a complex fashion with the history of reading” (1).

that have yet to be indoctrinated into society's acceptable norms. O'Malley identifies this attitude in Trimmer and others like her:

One of the main points on which she and the rationalist children's writers fully concurred was the need to rid the nursery of the vicious and potentially subversive influences of the chapbooks and fairy tales, which had perennially stocked its shelves. The fairy tales "which were in circulation when those who are now grandmothers, were themselves children," such as "Cinderella," "Blue Beard," and "Little Red Riding Hood," had by now become the potential sites of "danger" and "impropriety." ("Coach" 18 and Trimmer 4: 74-75)

Once literacy through printed works is easily accessible, the perceived threat of loss of control over what printed information and ideas children are exposed to necessitates that adults—parents or otherwise—attempt to regulate what written works children read and what information readers encounter within these works in order to protect young readers and preserve society.

Closely related to didacticism and rhetoric is the concept of literacy, which is fundamental to this discussion. Literacy in itself is vital to the rise of the middle class, and one of the consequences of the creation of the middle class was the inception of a literature just for children. Many children no longer spent their days working in factories and performing other labor because of the Education Acts, and so the nature of being literate changed. Children's literature scholar Lissa Paul surmises that reading became political in the late eighteenth century and that "'literacy' conventionally came to mean both reading and writing, but was [...] becoming a powerful cultural tool, used to inculcate ideas of national identity" (*Keywords* 142-43). The middle class, along with

children and other traditionally marginalized groups, saw the creation of a society in which being literate was no longer solely for the privileged, but was a means to socioeconomic advancement and general empowerment. As Nikolajeva asserts, in addition to the near-universal meaning that the word *literacy* is arguably the ability to read and write, the aptitude to use and benefit from fiction—and especially fantastic works—must include other areas of knowledge, such as the capacity to understand rhetorical devices and the manipulation of language (“Meaning-Making” 147).

Nikolajeva insists that

On the most basic level, we must know how to read, how to make sense of letters, words and sentences—what is normally referred to as literacy. Fiction is, however, more complex than, for instance, everyday language, since it also involves figurative speech and other features and artistic devices which need special knowledge to be understood. (“Meaning-Making” 147)

For the purposes of my dissertation, I utilize this more complex, more nuanced view of literacy, going beyond the practical knowledge of everyday language and toward a deeper understanding of the use of language.

Fundamental to this dissertation is the concept that didacticism in children’s literature includes the teaching of literacy through texts. Instilling literacy has arguably always been an objective of children’s literature since the inception of the recognizable genre in the mid-eighteenth century. Beginning with the first books written for and marketed specifically to children, these works taught readers simple rhymes that advocate good behavior, Christian values, and the learning of letters. Indeed, in her discussion of

what historically constitutes literature for children, Mary V. Jackson goes so far as to argue that early children's books were "largely propagandistic," because:

They were tools for social, moral, religious, and political conditioning. They represented the enormously powerful collusive efforts of parents, producers of books, and indeed most adults—in a word, of society—to program the young, to engineer conformity to the prevailing cultural values. (16)

Even though there is a genre called "children's literature," it has often been more for adults than for children because adults used this literature to instill the values they wished children to assume. Children's literature as a tool that adults use to indoctrinate children into the culture includes, by the virtue of passing culture through written works, literacy. Perhaps the most common concept of literacy, that of reading and writing, was only one type of literacy offered in the first books for children, yet it was and continues to be a significant component of children's literature.

Literacy is not merely the decoding of letters to make words, nor is it acquired by surface reading that fails to provide nuances of meaning. Margaret Meek also provides valuable insight on the connections between reading, literature, understanding, and literacy. Meek explains in a workshop booklet that literacy includes engaging in texts, recognizing intertextuality, and understanding that words are more than just what they say and that texts have power. Meek argues that "the most important single lesson that children learn from texts is *the nature and variety of written discourse*, the different ways that language lets a writer tell, and the many and different ways a reader reads" (*How Texts* 21; emphasis in the original). Indeed, I assert that the texts I examine provide readers with a variety of lessons—in the multiple literacies that Meek speaks of—that can

help them negotiate a changed world while providing literary role models who are voiced, active, and thinking.

Meek's work is especially important to my argument that engaging with literature is in itself didactic, because the reader must use the skills of decoding and reading comprehension in order to understand what is being read. Literature implicitly promotes the literacy of reading because the more one reads, the better he becomes at reading. Literacy also perhaps encourages better writing skills because as the reader reads, she begins to intuit the constructs of narrative styles, and thus her writing is likely to improve. Twentieth century English children's fantasy presents multiple literacies for readers in a twentieth century world. The necessity for multiple literacies stems from the need for children, and adults too in all likelihood, to learn to negotiate a changed world brought on by the horrifying events of the Wars.

The need for a new kind of literacy in the twentieth century is a result of the changes brought about by advancements in technology and conflicts that affected so much of English life, but instruction in rhetorical aptitude has been a priority for the development of youth from antiquity to the present, as James J. Murphy's translations of books one, two, and ten of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* clarifies.<sup>40</sup> Murphy observes that schools were invented as a place where young people could gather in groups to "receive purposeful instruction in the methods and values dear to those societies" (ix). Twentieth century Britain was in need of "purposeful instruction" to negotiate the changed society.

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<sup>40</sup> However, I acknowledge that *rhetoric* has become a pejorative term and its instruction has only begun to recover that name since the 1960s, mostly as writing instruction.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I argue that reading allows for autodidacticism through which readers can be instructed in the cultural values dear to their societies, even when outside of formal school settings. Murphy stresses that “instruction always beg[ins] with the matter which made all other learning possible [...] language and the use of language” (ix). A methodological examination in my selected texts of language and its effective uses, i.e., rhetoric, reveals that it is through language and literacy that the characters achieve knowledge and wisdom, which information then passes to readers by means of both language from the texts and examples from the characters.

### *The Multiple Literacies of Fantasy*

#### *Literacy in Britain*

Literacy provides readers, including child readers, with a privacy, as they engage with a written text, that is unavailable in predominantly oral societies.<sup>41</sup> Stories may have been shared within a family setting but there were also theatrical traditions such as Everyman plays in the public sphere, often regulated or sanctioned by the Church or State. Though many of the oral tales changed over time and between tellers, the tales performed a service to audiences in the form of passing knowledge. However, knowledge by itself is not enough for successful life lessons. Along with knowledge, which might be considered just basic facts, must be the opportunity to act upon or at least imagine what to do with this knowledge. It is through the purposes to which we put knowledge that we create wisdom, a higher order of knowledge.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, wisdom can be gained

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<sup>41</sup> Philippe Ariès asserts that England is “the birthplace of privacy” (*Private Life*, vol. 3, 5).

<sup>42</sup> In Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills, passing knowledge is “Bloom’s Level III: Application: Solve problems in new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different, or

through the oral traditions when the consequences of actions are played out in the telling of a story or theatrical production. For example, an audience member need not personally experience the fatal outcome of shouting “Wolf!” once too often. In the hearing of the tale or the viewing of the performance, the audience members learn that there are consequences, often grave, to particular actions.

Literacy is defined in several ways, as shown below, but I contend that the definition of literacy must also include the ability to contextualize information.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the most common understanding of literacy includes the decoding and using of signs and symbols of a language in order to communicate through texts.<sup>44</sup> Effective literacy also necessitates reading comprehension and comprehensive writing skills to communicate successfully. There are, however, other forms of literacy that are subject-specific and indicate understanding and functionality; for example, computer literacy, emotional literacy, media literacy, and so on. Since I am talking about the literacy of the works I examine, I will provide a brief discussion of what constitutes literacy. Linguist James Paul Gee defines “literacy” more broadly as the “*mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse*” (9; italics and capitalization original). Discourses, according to Gee, are defined as

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new way” (3); see also Maria Nikolajeva’s extensive discussion of the development of cognitive skills through reading narratives in *Reading for Learning* (2014).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as “the facility [*techne*] of finding the available means of persuasion for any situation whatever” (*Rhetoric* 1).

<sup>44</sup> See also, for example, John Guillory, who argues that “literacy is not a simple matter of knowing how to read or write, but refers to the entire system by which reading and writing are regulated as social practices in a given society” (79);

ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes.

A Discourse is a sort of ‘identity kit’ which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize. (6-7)

*Literacy* can thus mean more than reading and writing. It entails familiarity with contextualized events; it is the ability to contextualize, whether through reading and writing or through Discourse and discourse, as will become clear in a moment. Twentieth century English children’s fantasy offers readers the opportunity to contextualize—become literate in—the changed world through lessons in how to negotiate this world through being voiced, active, thinking, and assertive. Fantasy literature works well to contextualize the world changed by the Second World War because it offers a respite from reality. Gee further explains that Discourse with a capital “D” is the “way of being in the world,” as opposed to discourse with a lower case “d,” which “means connected stretches of language that makes sense” (6). Secondary Discourses are those that are social and public rather than primary Discourses, which “we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others [and it] constitutes our original and home-based sense of identity” (7-8). I utilize Gee’s argument that literacy is always plural and “*literacies* (there are many of them, since there are many secondary Discourses, and we all have some and fail to have others)” (9; emphasis in the original). In this dissertation, I demonstrate that twentieth century English children’s literature addresses the need for a new kind of literacy for the post-War generations. In specific reference to children’s

literature, Lissa Paul explicates the history of the term “literacy” in her discussion of the word in *Keywords for Children’s Literature* (2011), in which she traces the origin and various meanings of “literacy,” concluding that because of recent disproportionate reliance on standardized testing,

for the first time in history “literacy” is defined not by reading and/or writing, but by grading [...] at one end of the spectrum [and] at the other, literacy has blossomed into literacies, including adult literacy, adolescent literacy, balanced literacy, computer literacy, critical literacy, cultural literacy, early childhood literacy, emotional literacy, family literacy, information literacy, mathematical literacy, media literacy, technical literacy, and visual literacy, among others.<sup>45</sup>

(*Keywords* 145)

These multiple literacies exist in children’s literature, meaning that a variety of knowledge is accessible to readers. Multiple literacies may be especially widespread throughout children’s fantasy because of how creativity and imagination are coupled with the indisputable suspension of disbelief.

In each of the following chapters I explore the most obvious literacy: reading and writing. I focus on the importance of literacy, the opportunities gained from literacy, and how these skills are developed by the characters and subsequently passed on to the readers through the didactic nature of the text. In this dissertation, “knowledge” has a

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<sup>45</sup> My own observation while working in K-8 schools for several years is that standardized tests for measuring literacy cannot measure in-depth comprehension of texts. One means of “promoting” reading in US primary schools is the use of the Accelerated Reader (AR) program, in which students are offered books—and not many—at their reading level and must read these books to earn points. Points are awarded based on how well students perform on a computerized test about the book they have read. The tests, though, ask questions about content only. Students who take these tests do not learn to engage in or with the texts, rather they seek out details that may be presented in test questions, thus foregoing the most fundamental aspect of literacy: comprehension through contextualization.

specific meaning that I contend is knowledge through reading literature, especially fantasy, which is important for developing strategies of negotiating the world. These outcomes position knowledge differently than does Benjamin Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bloom's Taxonomy classifies the goals of the educational system, separated into three domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Of the six major classes of the cognitive domain, knowledge is the first. Knowledge is broken down into a further 12 subcategories from general concepts to abstract concepts (*Taxonomy*, vol. 1).

CHAPTER III - EDITH NESBIT: THE THRESHOLD OF TWENTIETH CENTURY  
ENGLISH CHILDREN'S FANTASY

Edith Nesbit's fantasies featuring child characters are important to this dissertation in three ways: her works demonstrate a narrative shift away from the heavily didactic works of the Victorians, her child characters are empowered with more agency than their Victorian predecessors, and her works emphasize the power of language as connected to that agency. As I proceed in subsequent chapters to examine the relationship between rhetoric, literacy, and agency in twentieth century English children's fantasy, Nesbit's influence, both on children's literature and other writers of children's literature, will be seen to have made a significant contribution to critical literacy that I argue is present in the works of that period. Nesbit fantastic works for children are important to the study of critical literacy because they pose a lesser threat to social established social orthodoxies that would realist texts. This chapter will demonstrate Nesbit's importance as a bridge between the Victorians and the twentieth century of English children's fantasy literature.

Edith Nesbit's important contribution to children's literature is evidenced by the continued scholarly interest in her works. Some of the most noteworthy recent studies of Nesbit include Raymond E. Jones's edited volume of essays *E. Nesbit's Psammead Trilogy: A Children's Classic at 100*.<sup>47</sup> Essays topics in this volume include gender,

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<sup>47</sup> For more on E. Nesbit's writing for social changes, see, in the same collection, Claudia Nelson's "The 'It' Girl (and Boy): Ideologies of Gender in the Psammead Trilogy," in which Nelson explores the how Nesbit challenges traditional gender norms in this trilogy by featuring girls who are active and courageous and boys who care for younger children; Suzanne Rahn's essay highlights the socialist Fabian influence on Nesbit's works and the effort show young readers a combination of the best of the past with the present in order to produce a better society (139); and Grant Bage's critical work on the use of Nesbit in teaching through storytelling, contending that Nesbit used stories to challenge the privilege of wealth and power (39).

Fabianism, humor, issues of time, and morals. Indeed, Monica Flegel's essay in this volume explores the complications of Nesbit's Fabianist socialist beliefs on her writings for children. However, that Nesbit wrote works that challenge the status quo of the English class system demonstrates the portrayal of critical literacy in her works.<sup>48</sup>

Nesbit is an ideal threshold author because her works, successful as serial publications and complete books, span the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth Centuries. Nesbit's career of writing for children stretches from the Victorian era to just after the Edwardian era, with her first book for children, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, being published in 1899; the last book for children published in her lifetime, *Wet Magic*, was published in 1913; and *The Five of Us and Madeline* was published in 1925, the year after her death. Unlike many Victorian writers, Nesbit presented children who faced difficulties but who thrived nonetheless. In the first book of the Psammead Trilogy, *Five Children and It*, the young protagonists are in the country while their father is away on business and their mother is staying with her mother who is ill (5); in book two, *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, the children are at home in London with their parents although they are not overly supervised (11-33); and in book three, *The Story of the Amulet*, the children are in London with their old nurse while their mother convalesces abroad and their father reports on the Russo-Japanese War from Manchuria

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<sup>48</sup> For more on E. Nesbit's impact on children's literature, see Mervyn Nicholson's article discussing Nesbit's influence on later writers of children's literature, especially C. S. Lewis, and her depiction of ordinary children who are able to have magical adventures; George M. Johnson's article which examines children in Edwardian literature, who argues that the children in many of Nesbit's stories are able to restore their dispersed families to wholeness, which is empowering; and Lee Garver's article that discusses the influence of the social reform group, the Fabian Society, on Nesbit's and other writers' works.

(3). In these texts, even though Nesbit refrains from explicitly protesting war, she makes clear that the impact war has on families and society is far reaching and of consequence.

On the cusp of the twentieth century, Nesbit created characters that reflected the changes in society that had lately taken place. With more women—including herself—actively and openly participating in society, the resulting freedoms for children were not lost on Nesbit. In his discussion of the significance of Nesbit, librarian and children's literature scholar Marcus Crouch describes in detail how Nesbit serves as a threshold figure because she

stands squarely in the doorway between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. She owed much to the Victorians, even if she made affectionate fun of them. She transmuted their good solid base metal into pure gold. In her hands the Victorian conscience lost its self-consciousness; their insight became sharper and more richly aware of the incongruities which make for humour; above all, she threw away their strong, sober, essentially literary style and replaced it with the miraculously colloquial, flexible and revealing prose which was her unique contribution to the children's novel. (16)

Crouch's observation of Nesbit's "colloquial, flexible and revealing prose" illustrates how Nesbit changed children's literature in this period and made the language of children's books less heavily didactic and more appealing to the intended audience with her focus on the narrative itself rather than the lesson that could be learned from it. Some engaging narratives of the period nevertheless do have overt morals, including Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *The Second Jungle Book* (1895) and Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) and *The Story of a Fierce Bad Rabbit* (1906).

But while Nesbit's works for young readers provide moral lessons, her focus on the story rather than on the didactic aspects of her works for young readers is important because she moves further away than her predecessors from pleasing the adult consumers' demand for overt didacticism. Nesbit further refined the didactic in children's literature, a refinement that I argue continues in the twentieth century in the guise of critical literacy. Nesbit, a founding member of the Fabian Society, was concerned with social justice, and so her writing reflected her beliefs by giving children—a marginalized group—a voice through her characters.

There were, of course, fantasies for children published between Nesbit and 1945, such as John Masefield's *The Midnight Folk* (1927) and *Box of Delights* (1935), J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937), and Hilda Lewis's *The Ship That Flew* (1939). I am not arguing that fantasy is not present between Nesbit and the twentieth century, but rather that Nesbit is a threshold writer between the Victorian/Edwardian eras and the second half of the Twentieth Century. Among those critics who recognize the importance of E. Nesbit is Alison Lurie, who in her seminal critical work *Don't Tell the Grownups: The Subversive Power of Children's Literature* (1990) contends that because Nesbit challenged the previous pattern of didactic children's literature, "it is possible now to speak of juvenile literature as before and after E. Nesbit" (99). Nesbit, then, is a major figure in literature for young readers.

Nesbit's ability to remember and accurately portray what it was like to be a child profoundly contributed to her success as a writer of children's stories. In a reply to a child's letter about her characters, Nesbit explained that her characters in *Five Children and It* seem real because she was once a child and "by some fortunate magic I remember

*exactly how I used to feel and think about things*” (*Fairy Stories* vii). Nesbit also used her own early experiences in her works for children, which perhaps allows her stories to resonate with her audience. In 1858, Nesbit was born in Kennington, Surrey, near London, to a middle-class family. Nesbit’s father died when she was three years old, an event that shaped much of her writing. The impact of Nesbit’s father’s death echoes throughout much of her writing for children. As Julia Briggs reports, “the absent [...] parent unavoidably detained elsewhere, is a pattern that recurs throughout her children’s books [and her] success as a writer for children is closely bound up with her peculiarly vivid memories of the joys, pains and passions of childhood” (Briggs 1-2). Nesbit began her writing career as a poet, but switched to writing about children in order to earn an income as her husband, Hubert Bland, had difficulty maintaining employment. The fantasy narratives for children she published under the name “E. Nesbit” demonstrate a decided shift in the genre, linking the moral lessons of the Victorians to the increased agency of later children’s fantasy. The popularity of her writing for children afforded Nesbit the opportunity to publish her works in various formats, each of which earned her an income. Many of Nesbit’s works for children were first serialized in various publications and then marketed as bound whole texts. Several of Nesbit’s works remain

popular and are now available in audio format,<sup>49</sup> paperback, hardback, and electronic books.<sup>50</sup>

To this day, Nesbit continues to be a marketable author of children's fantasy. Among Nesbit's well-known tropes are a call to abolish vast class disparities and for greater autonomy for children, as demonstrated through the adventures of her child characters. Many of Nesbit's fantasy works for children also feature the important role of magical words in moving a narrative from the domestic to the fantastic. Nesbit places great emphasis on words, on their importance and potential for power, and even, in some cases, on their unaided magical power without objects as a conduit or focus for magic. These magical words give power to those children who speak them, whether the children are aware of the power of the words or not.

The elements of Nesbit's contributions in her fantastic stories that are particularly relevant to my dissertation are her depictions of the use of language and rhetoric, because they give power to ordinary, middle class young people. Through Nesbit's characters, young readers see that language has power—and consequences—and knowing how to use language makes available this power to anyone who cares to learn to use it. Nesbit, in her works, takes language seriously because language is power and, as Mary C. Daane

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<sup>49</sup> From Amazon.com: On 2 March 2017, *Five Children and It* (three versions), *The Railway Children* (two versions), *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (two versions), *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare*, *The Enchanted Castle* (four versions), *The Book of Dragons* (two versions), *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (three versions), *The Children's Shakespeare*, *The Fiery Dragon*, *The House of Arden*, *The Story of the Amulet*, *Last of the Dragons*, *The Magic World*, (two versions) *The Complete Book of Dragons* (a compilation of all of Nesbit's dragon tales; two versions), *New Treasure Seekers* (two versions), *The Book of Beasts*, *The Deliverers of Their Country*, *Wet Magic*, *The Island of Nine Whirlpools*, and *The Ice Dragon: Do as You Are Told*, *The Wouldbegoods* (two versions).

<sup>50</sup> From Amazon.com, as of 2 March 2017, there are tens of titles available in various formats, many in multiple editions. Amazon.com, for example, lists several works that will be published in 2017, including *Five Children and It*, *The Railway Children*, *The Enchanted Castle*, *The Book of Dragons*, *The Magic World*, *The Magic City*, *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, and *The Story of the Amulet* in various formats.

explains about language, it has the “power to change lives and, consequently, the world”

(1). Edith Nesbit changed the world of children’s literature through her influence on many authors, including those discussed in the following chapters.

Nesbit’s tremendous impact on children’s literature and its writers is well documented. Children’s literature scholar Suzanne Rahn asserts that Nesbit “could be called the children’s writer’s children’s writer of our century. Not to mention her formative influence” on other authors and subgenres of children’s literature (124). Nesbit is a significant figure in the advancement of children’s fantasy because of her inventions within the genre and influence on her contemporaries as well as subsequent generations of writers, including C. S. Lewis, who read Nesbit’s books as a child, and Diana Wynne Jones, who to her delight discovered Nesbit as an adult.<sup>51</sup> Harry Potter author J. K. Rowling has praised Nesbit’s “very real” child characters.<sup>52</sup> While explaining that she “identif[ies] with E. Nesbit more than any other writer,” Rowling also describes Nesbit’s *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* as “Exhibit A for prohibition of all children’s literature by anyone who cannot remember exactly how it felt to be a child.”<sup>53</sup>

Edith Nesbit’s literary peers have also honored her works, particularly her fantastic works, by citing her books as their own childhood reading, proclaiming her as an influence in their own works, and, most flattering at all, borrowing elements from

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<sup>51</sup> Jones asserts in an interview, “I think one of the main influences on me is that I never had any books I really liked, and I’m now writing the ones that I wished I’d had. But, as a result of this, when I had children of my own, I discovered all the things that had been around for years and that we’d never had as children ourselves. So I came to them with an adult eye and an adult enthusiasm, which probably helped, actually. One of them was E. Nesbit, whom I thought was blindingly wonderful.” (*Exciting* 171).

<sup>52</sup> J. K. Rowling. “J. K. Rowling at the Edinburgh Book Festival.”

<sup>53</sup> J. K. Rowling, “From Mr. Darcy to Harry Potter by way of Lolita.”

Nesbit's stories.<sup>54</sup> Author and intellect Gore Vidal asserts that "After Lewis Carroll, E. Nesbit is the best of the English fabulists who wrote about children (neither wrote *for* children) and like Carroll she was able to create a world of magic and inverted logic that was entirely her own" ("Writings"). Vidal thus positions Nesbit in the company of other great children's literature authors. Other than her established place as an important author, Nesbit's writing and works also influenced several generations of authors after her literary success. Amanda Craig further solidifies Nesbit's importance to children's literature when she proclaims the wide range of her influence:

[Her] stories, whether magical or not, are firmly rooted in the real world and have been hugely influential on books of the Second Golden Age—Diana Wynne Jones's Chrestomanci books, Lucy M. Boston's Green Knowe series, Joan Aiken's Wolves of Willoughby Chase sequence and Eva Ibbotson's hilarious witches and ghosts. Her quarrelsome, highly believable brothers and sisters were echoed by Enid Blyton, Arthur Ransome, Noel Streatfeild, Roald Dahl and, more recently, a constellation of contemporary authors like Hilary McKay, Anne Fine, Cathy Cassidy, Frank Cottrell Boyce, and Francesca Simon. Above all, she is acknowledged as the single greatest influence on J. K. Rowling, presumably because her conception of mixing the magical with the mundane is sharply satirical.

Craig's judgment is not published in a critical journal of limited circulation, as valuable as such journals are in our profession, but rather in *The Independent*, a British newspaper

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<sup>54</sup> Marcus Crouch asserts of Nesbit and her later literary peers, that "No writer for children today is free of debt to this remarkable woman [as] she managed to create the prototypes of many of the basic patterns in modern children's fiction" (16).

with circulation in the tens of thousands. Nesbit's works thus continues not only to influence other writers nearly a century after her death, demonstrating her importance in the history of children's literature, but it also continues to be acknowledged to the contemporary British reading public.

Perhaps the most significant influence that Nesbit has had was on C. S. Lewis, who reportedly remarked to the American scholar Chad Walsh that he had begun a children's book in the tradition of Nesbit—that is, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—and that she “was one of the few children's writers whom Lewis himself had enjoyed as a child.”<sup>55</sup> Lewis also explicitly mentions Nesbit's Bastable characters at the beginning of *The Magician's Nephew*, in which the narrator explains that this story takes place at the time when “Mr. Sherlock was still living in Baker Street and the Bastables were looking for treasure in Lewisham Road” (7). Literary scholar David Downing explains (30) that Lewis's Narnia series contains plot elements that appear previously in Nesbit's *Five Children and It* (1902), *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), and *The Story of the Amulet* (1906). Nesbit biographer Julia Briggs notes that Lewis borrowed heavily from Nesbit in his book *The Magician's Nephew*, including turning “a cab-horse into the Pegasus,” the name Digory, and Nesbit's representation of London (215). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis borrows Nesbit's “idea of a wardrobe that opens into a different world” and of time outside this world's not passing, no matter how long a character has been in the other world (Briggs 216-17). In the preface of his discussion of E. Nesbit's “The Aunt and Amabel,” Douglas Anderson points out that Lewis read Nesbit

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<sup>55</sup> Downing (30).

from childhood. Nesbit's story "prefigures Lewis's first Narnia adventure in that the young girl Anabel enters another world by means of a wardrobe, finding therein a magical train station called "Bigwardrobeinspareroom." In [...] *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, [...] Mr. Tumnus similarly speaks of "the far land of Spare Oom" and of "the bright city of War Drobe" (7).<sup>56</sup> Briggs also discusses where Nesbit got these same devices that Lewis used in his works, arguing that the "likeliest source is a book by 'F. Anstey' (Thomas Anstey Guthrie, 1856-1934), [...] a writer whom Nesbit read, admired, and, on occasion, imitated" (217), clearly indicating a cycle of intertextuality among fantasists. Lewis's appreciation of Nesbit's work and acknowledgement of her influence helps attest to Nesbit's important contribution to children's literature.

Nesbit's fantasy works for children are highly focused on the power of words. The three texts under discussion in this chapter, *The Story of the Amulet*, "The Cat-hood of Maurice," and *Wet Magic*, emphasize magic's occurring because of a word or a phrase rather than an object, a portal, or a dream. The elevation of words to magical status is of course not unique to Nesbit, as this trope of the magic phrase like "abracadabra" or the revealed name like "Rumplestiltskin" is important to many works of children's fantasy, but prior to Nesbit, such magic had not usually been wielded by children. It was the queen in the fairy tale who had to learn Rumplestiltskin's name. Similarly, in "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," all of the characters who use the phrase *Open, sesame!* to access the treasure cave are adults. Indeed, Ali Baba and his brother are married (Burton, vol. 13, 219-246). Nesbit gives her child characters more power than did her predecessors.

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<sup>56</sup> "The Aunt and Anabel" was first published in 1909 and again in 1912.

Nesbit's use of words as a means of magic also gives the children in her stories an agency that they lacked in the Victorian and Edwardian society that she knew. Many children in Nesbit's domestic and fantasy works have remarkable freedom for children of the English Victorian and Edwardian eras, even though this freedom is often occasioned by such distressing circumstances as the absence, illness, death, imprisonment, or job obligations of a parent, and even with the financial ruin of the family as a consequence of one of the above situations. Nesbit understood and appreciated the general need for children to have time for themselves in which they were able to play and explore without excessive supervision and with an extent of privacy, as presented in *Wet Magic*, where the parents are described as

Jolly as any father and mother you ever met, but they were not always fussing and worrying about their children, and they understood perfectly well that children do not care to be absolutely always under the parental eye. So that, while there were always plenty of good times in which the whole family took part, there were also times when Father and Mother went off together and enjoyed themselves in their own grown-up way, while the children enjoyed themselves in theirs. (109)

The children's unsupervised state is what allows them to have adventures.

Thus the children not only have agency but also the opportunity for adventure. This combination of agency and occasion for adventure is crucial in *The Story of the Amulet*, in which the protagonists travel to various times and places in search of half of an ancient magical artifact. Because the children can travel back and forth in time they can manipulate history. This ability to influence or even shape history is remarkable power

for children, who are too often only the victims and casualties of history rather than the makers of it.

In examining three of Nesbit's fantasy narratives for children—*The Story of the Amulet*, “The Cat-hood of Maurice,” and *Wet Magic*—I explore the power of words in these tales and the young characters' ability to use words to work magic. In many of Nesbit's narratives, the child protagonists do not have to be especially fortunate to fall into an extraordinary dream, to have access to treasures through royal connections, or to find a portal to a magical world. With words themselves as the magical element, it is possible for any child to have a fantastic adventure. And if any child can enter the world of magic, then she or he need not be beautiful, rich, or privileged by birth. Thus, ordinary young readers can identify with the protagonists of these stories. The protagonists are prone to be like Nesbit's readers—ordinary, middle class—an attribute shared, I argue, with twentieth century English children's fantasy literature as seen in such works as the Chronicles of Narnia, the Harry Potter series, and most of Terry Pratchett's works for children.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Story of the Amulet*

Edith Nesbit wrote several series for children, including the Psammead Trilogy about five children who find a wish-granting “sand-fairy” but discover early in the first book (*Five Children and It*, 1902) that their wishes never turn out the way they expect or intend. In *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904) these same children find a Phoenix egg wrapped in a magic carpet; with these magical possessions the children have several

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<sup>57</sup> For more on the Chronicles of Narnia and Harry Potter, see chapters III and V; I regret that I will not be able to discuss Terry Pratchett's *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents* (2001).

adventures. In *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), four of the five children from the first two novels once again encounter the wish-granting sand-fairy while their parents and youngest sibling are abroad. Cyril, Robert, Anthea, and Jane find the Psammead, now a captive, for sale in a pet shop in London, where they are staying. After rescuing the Psammead, the children learn they can unfortunately no longer ask it for such urgent wishes as the reunification of family. Still, the Psammead wants to help the children, so he gets them looking in a different direction:

“Look here; you must have some new kind of charm [...] there's one of the strongest charms in the world not a stone's throw from where you bought me yesterday [...] I saw the charm in a sort of tray, with a lot of other things. If you can only buy THAT, you will be able to have your heart's desire.” (24)

Once the children buy the amulet, they find they have only one half of it. The Psammead assures the children that even though they have only half, the amulet can still perform incredible feats (32). With half of the amulet, the children can travel to other times and places to search for the even more powerful other half (32). The children desire the whole amulet because with it they can have their hearts' desire, which is to reunite their family.

In *The Story of the Amulet*, Nesbit underscores the importance of words as soon as the children have half of the amulet. To access its capability, the children must get the amulet to speak, and to do this they must read the writing that is on the back of the amulet. Though the Psammead, a creature who is thousands of years old, believes reading the words on the back of the amulet to be a simple task, it proves difficult for the children because the writing is in hieroglyphics. The children seek help from a scholar-lodger in their house, but first the Psammead cautions them, “Be careful. If he knows a greater

name than this and uses it against you, your charm will be of no use. Bind him first with the chains of honour and upright dealing. And then ask his aid” (34). This admonition is the first indication of the great power of words in the story. Once the children solicit the help of the learned gentleman, Robert explains to him that they need the name that appears on the amulet,

“It won't work unless we can say the name that's on it. But, of course, if you've got another name that can lick ours, our charm will be no go; so we want you to give us your word of honour as a gentleman—though I'm sure, now I've seen you, that it's not necessary; but still I've promised to ask you, so we must. Will you please give us your honourable word not to say any name stronger than the name on our charm?” (39)

Robert and the other children want to be sure that they will be able to use the amulet and that the learned gentleman will not interfere with their search for the missing half, which will ensure that the children maintain their agency. The amulet is powerful, but a word is required to access its power, and a word can also defeat its power. Whoever speaks the “word of power” (43) possesses the power of the amulet, whether she or he is young, old, wealthy, or poor. The amulet thus can be used by the children, and they need not depend on an adult to accompany them on their travels with the amulet. Though there is a physical magical object, the right word must be spoken so that it can perform its magic. While having both an object and a word is not new to children’s literature, what is innovative is that it is children who are able to speak the word and to use the object.<sup>58</sup> In

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<sup>58</sup> Time-slip fantasies for children are also an important innovation by Nesbit, but discussing them as a genre is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

fact, Nesbit so focuses on language, the power of words, and agency for her young characters that sometimes her focus on them diminishes the magical object in favor of words or sometimes ignores magical objects all together.

The children of this narrative are fortunate enough to have found the Psammead, who knows the power of the amulet and the key to making it work, and also the learned gentleman who tells the children how to say the name written on the back of it. With these various pieces of information, the children discover just how impressive the amulet is, even when half of it is missing. The amulet, when prompted with the word of power, not only speaks, but also unexpectedly seizes control of the natural elements surrounding the children and their ability to see and hear. When Anthea spoke, “Instantly the whole light of all the world seemed to go out. The room was dark. The world outside was dark [...] And all sound went out too, so that there was a silence deeper than any silence you have ever even dreamed of imagining. It was like being suddenly deaf and blind, only darker and quieter even than that” (44). With a single word spoken by a child, the power of the amulet is released for the children to use as a means of time travel, which as I have said is another, ground-breaking development for children’s fantasy.

The power that the children gain when activating the amulet is in direct contrast to the lack of agency they are experiencing in their mundane lives. Their holidays began as their father is in Manchuria reporting on the war there, and their mother and youngest brother are in Madeira because she is recovering from an illness. The children are staying with their father’s old nurse because she is the only one able to keep the children (3). The children have thus been uprooted from their home and separated from their parents due to

circumstances beyond their control, but with the amulet and its power, the children gain an agency they lack in their mundane condition.

Demonstrating the empowerment of children and their ability to reason and act without the direct supervision of adults is an inclination toward critical literacy and the challenging of the status quo. The children's ability to rescue the Psammead, to access the power of the amulet, and to perform a role in shaping history all exhibit the children's potential agency, but that agency is linked to language. Yes, there is a magical object in the novel, but Nesbit stresses that language is necessary to wield it—in this case, language in the form of the word of power. Using words, the children can fantastically travel in time and place as they seek the means of reuniting their family and restoring their domestic haven. Once domestic order is restored, the children will no longer need the fantastic, though they will continue to use language. However, when the characters are told how to use the word of power, the narrator says directly to the audience that she is “not going to tell [them] how this is done, because [they] might try to do it” and be disappointed (43). By not actually disclosing the word in the book, the narrator suggests she is protecting children—from themselves, from a misuse of power, and from disenchantment—all while still asserting the power of words. However, this suggestion that children need to be protected from themselves, from disappointment, or from the misuse of power is an example of where Nesbit's text veers toward the explicitly didactic—that magic, and by extension the agency that comes with it, is not transferrable to the domestic world, or perhaps transferable only in a limited fashion. Nesbit's works differ from later twentieth century English children's fantasy, as I argue later, in that later

works suggest that critical thinking skills and the power of language are very much transferable to the domestic world once the adventure is over and the book is closed.

*“The Cat-hood of Maurice”*<sup>59</sup>

While words provide Nesbit’s child protagonists a means of time-and-place travel in *The Story of the Amulet*, words allow a young boy to switch places with a cat in “The Cat-hood of Maurice.” In this short story, Maurice is a young boy whose cruelty to the cat, Lord Hugh Cecil, causes the boy to be sent away to a reform school. Just before leaving, he wishes that he were a cat, because being a cat is not so bad, since having “your hair cut is not painful, nor [is] having your whiskers trimmed, [and putting] walnuts on Lord Hugh’s feet and then [watching] him walk on ice [is], in Maurice’s opinion, as good as a play” (1-2). Lord Hugh advises Maurice to be a cat if he really wants to, and that to do so he need only say a special word and he will become one. Maurice says the word and becomes the cat, but Lord Hugh also becomes Maurice.

Nesbit introduces the tale in a way that prepares the audience for the possibility that Lord Hugh will speak and be understood, with a narrative in the voice of the cat that prepares the audience for Lord Hugh’s eventual speech. The narrator even makes logical and reasonable statements concerning the anatomy of a cat from the cat’s point of view, by using the second person when describing having hair and whiskers cut, and the ache of “round wooden shoes, shaped like bowls are not comfortable wear, however much it may amuse the onlooker to see you try to walk in them” (1), thus preparing the reader for Lord Hugh to voice his own opinions. The narrator goes on to explain why the actions of Maurice hurt Lord Hugh and says that Lord Hugh “except under violent suffering, was at

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<sup>59</sup> I have found no contemporary criticism on this story.

that time anyhow, dumb” (2). The use of the phrase “at that time” further prepares the reader for the possibility of Lord Hugh speaking, because if he is dumb “at that time,” there will come a time when he is not. In a way, Lord Hugh’s cry, occasioned by the tin can tied to his tail by Maurice, is the beginning of Lord Hugh’s linguistic power, because when the cat cries out, Maurice is caught being cruel. When he gets in trouble for his malicious behavior toward the cat, he attributes the cat’s cry of misery to tattling: “Why couldn’t the beastly cat have held his tongue and sat still?” (3). In so saying, Maurice acknowledges that Lord Hugh has a voice. When his father admonishes Maurice, he tells him that “This cruelty to dumb animals must be checked” (4), thus reemphasizing that Lord Hugh is voiceless.

Maurice’s father plans to send his son to Dr Strongitharm’s, a frightening school “for backward and difficult boys,” which has “windows, dulled with wire blinds, its big alarm bell, the high walls of its grounds, bristling with spikes, the iron gates, always locked, through which gloomy boys, imprisoned, scowled on a free world” (5-6). Not expecting banishment as a punishment, Maurice is distressed about going to such a school, especially when he did not actually intend to be cruel because “all the unwelcome attentions he had showered on Lord Hugh had not been exactly intended to hurt that stout veteran—only it was interesting to see what a cat would do if you threw it in the water, or cut its whiskers, or tied things to its tail” (3). Maurice does not understand that what he finds interesting, Lord Hugh finds dreadful, and that for his persecuting of the cat he must be punished.

When Lord Hugh does speak to Maurice, he informs him that words have the power to change Maurice into a cat: “If you think cats have such a jolly time [...] why

not *be* a cat? [...] You've only got to say the word" (7). Maurice at first declines the suggestion because he is concerned that he might remain a cat forever (7). Lord Hugh assures Maurice that he will only remain a cat as long as he wants and when he wants to be a boy again he need only have someone say, "Please leave off being a cat and be Maurice again" (8), thus assuring Maurice that words, just as they can make him a cat, will turn him back into a person again. Maurice does not want to go to Dr Strongitharm's school, and he wants his father to be sorry for being angry with him and sending him away, so he agrees to turn into a cat (8). "The Cat-hood of Maurice" leaves it to the young protagonist to exercise agency and become a cat if he chooses, and he is given the words to revoke this power, if he chooses.

Once Maurice has decided to become a cat for a while, he asks Lord Hugh once more what the word is; again rather than disclose it, the narrator writes a blank where this powerful word should be. The narrator explains that she "will not tell you, for fear you should say it by accident and then be sorry" (7). Maurice, less prudent than the narrator, says the word and becomes a cat, though the word is still represented as a blank, thus highlighting the word's power and significance. Though Maurice physically transforms into a cat, he still thinks like a boy. Experiencing the physicality of a cat and hoping he is dreaming, Maurice hears a voice "he knew and yet didn't know . . . and a huge face came quite close to his. It was his own face [...] And the voice [...] was his own" (8). Lord Hugh has taken on Maurice's form as a boy and is enjoying himself while Maurice immediately wants to return to being a boy. Lord Hugh explains that he "like[s] being Maurice. I am so large and strong. I could drown you in the water-but, my poor cat—oh, so easily. No, don't spit and swear. It's bad manners—even for a cat." What Lord Hugh

failed to tell Maurice, and what Maurice failed to consider, is that if he is a cat, one that looks exactly like Lord Hugh, then someone will have to be him. When Maurice argues that he did not agree to Lord Hugh being him, Lord Hugh explains “That’s poetry, even if it isn’t grammar [...] if you are I, I must be you? Otherwise we should interfere with time and space [...] and as likely as not destroy the solar system” (10).

While “The Cat-hood of Maurice” invites the audience to consider the importance of words, through example it also encourages readers to consider how their actions might be experienced by others. For example, Maurice also fails to consider is that others may not understand his cat speech. Thus this short story is both demonstrating the importance of understanding the various ways words can be used while suggesting that one consider the possibility of losing the ability to speak and be understood and thus forgo all agency. Lord Hugh understands the power and importance of words, and he knows that Maurice will have difficulty finding someone to say the words necessary for him to change back into himself. Lord Hugh, now in the body of Maurice, knows that when Maurice the cat tries to talk to anyone, the only sound he will make is the “meow” of a cat. Though Maurice will be thinking in human-English, his voice and vocabulary will be that of a cat. Lord Hugh thus takes advantage of Maurice’s lack of appreciation for the subtleties of language to manipulate Maurice in several ways, including neglecting to tell Maurice that his ability to speak will be hindered when he is a cat and by failing to explain to Maurice what will happen to Lord Hugh once Maurice is the cat. Through this manipulation, Maurice learns what Lord Hugh experienced when he was a cat and Maurice was playing tricks on him. Though Maurice is cruel to Lord Hugh because he is exercising the only

control he has—that is, control over a weak animal—he must realize that he could have even less control by being as helpless as Lord Hugh.

While Maurice experiences an epiphany about the difficulties of being a cat, Lord Hugh also makes his own discoveries about being a boy. When given the opportunity, Lord Hugh proves himself to be as mischievous as Maurice. When the boy Lord Hugh returns after a week at Dr Strongitharm's school, he almost immediately asks Maurice to leave off being a cat and be a boy again, explaining, "Oh, I've had such a time! [...] I've been caned and shut up in a dark room and given thousands of lines to write out [...] A boy's life a dog's life" (23-24). "The Cat-hood of Maurice" does more than just show the young protagonist and readers that it is wrong to be cruel to those weaker; the story also illustrates that power is situational, and one who has power in one instance is powerless in others. For a brief moment after saying the words that turn Maurice into a boy again, Lord Hugh is also a boy, perhaps to demonstrate an equality and understanding between the two characters. Maurice, still not quite understanding how words have changed him back into a boy, is told to ask Lord Hugh to leave off being a boy and be the cat again. Words are the magic that cause Maurice to understand others and change his behavior. Indeed, through their shared and exchanged experiences, Maurice and Lord Hugh both understand the difficulties of each other's lives.

Nesbit establishes a scenario for the use of critical literacy as Maurice is, as a cat, subjected to an even more harsh disenfranchisement than his own. Maurice's behavior toward Lord Hugh at the beginning of the story can be interpreted as Maurice's desire to exercise some power in a world where he, as a child, is powerless. Maurice achieves a kind of agency in torturing the cat by cutting his whiskers, putting the nutshells on his

paws, and getting him wet, even though he is being callous. When Maurice has the power to become a cat, he says the word that will transform him, though hesitantly. Maurice's objective in becoming the cat is to prove to himself and to Lord Hugh that being a cat is not difficult, even considering how he himself has been treating one. What Maurice finds is that being a cat is very difficult, even without a young boy torturing him. When Maurice is a cat he understands that he cannot communicate very well with humans, who constantly misunderstand him. As a cat, he has lost the important ability to speak, which "The Cat-hood of Maurice" has already shown is a tool of great power. Through his tenure as a cat, Maurice learns what it is to be helpless and at the mercy of others, which leads him to be more kind and compassionate toward Lord Hugh. Once Maurice regains his human form and his voice, he never again mistreats Lord Hugh. Rather, at the end of the story, he murmurs in the cat's ear, "Oh, you needn't be afraid, old chap. It's Pax right enough." And the cat, "arching his back under Maurice's stroking hand, replied with a purrrr-meaow that spoke volumes" (25). Maurice, while still having to go to the reform school, has learned to be good to the cat who has even less power than he does, and to wield a different kind of power: kindness. The narrator insists that Maurice did not become a model boy, thus indicating that he continued to be mischievous in other situations. Nevertheless, through kindness to the cat, and perhaps also by exploring his agency elsewhere, Maurice creates an important agency for himself in the form of self-control and compassion for those who are weaker than himself.

*Wet Magic*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> I have found no contemporary criticism on this story in regards to critical literacy.

In *Wet Magic*, words are not required to travel or transform; rather, words are used to summon fantastic creatures—mermaids—to the protagonists. *Wet Magic* again features four siblings whose parents appreciate the children’s need for a measure of autonomy. This autonomy is inhibited by Aunt Enid, who is minding the children while their parents are away. The children—Francis, Mavis, Bernard, and Kathleen—go on holiday to the seaside and there meet another child, Reuben. While in the seaside village of Beachfield, they help rescue a captured mermaid, then visit her kingdom and help defend it against an attack. The words in this narrative that allow the children to move from the domestic to the fantastic are from the poem “Sabrina Fair”<sup>61</sup> by John Milton (1608-1674), a poem inscribed under a picture of mermaids in the children’s house.<sup>62</sup> These words take the children from the domestic to the fantastic and provide agency for them.

This agency is, however, harder to come by in this work than in *The Story of the Amulet* or “The Cat-hood of Maurice” because of the excessive control that Aunt Enid exercises over them. Their “aunt”—in fact a long-time family friend whom the children respectfully address familiarly—dictates when the older children have to be in bed, determines when, where, and what type of bath they will have, refuses to allow the children to take what they want on holiday, selects books for the children to read on the train, and even forbids the children to read a newspaper. Francis, in anticipation of going to the seaside, buys an aquarium so that he can collect objects from the sea. The passages

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<sup>61</sup> It may not be obvious to US readers that Sabrina is pronounced with a long *i* in British English.

<sup>62</sup> In Milton’s original *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, popularly known as “Comus,” Sabrina is the spirit of the River Severn, not mermaids. Sabrina is the Latin term for Severn. Sabrina’s song appears at lines 859-66.

involving the aquarium offer an acknowledgement of the desire for learning when, as they are discussing what will go in the aquarium and how they will place it in the window, Kathleen exclaims, “perhaps some great scientific gentleman, like Darwin or Faraday, will see it as he goes by, and it will be such a joyous surprise to him to come face to face with our jelly-fish; he’ll offer to teach Francis all about science for nothing” (5). The importance of learning is evident in the child characters, and in the text, which creates a space for critical literacy.

Aunt Enid, however, denies Francis his desire to take the aquarium on holiday, so his sisters and brother set up the aquarium as if it had marine objects in it, which pleases Francis. As he looks into the aquarium filled with water and dahlias, Francis begins to recite the poem and while she is doing so, he thinks he sees a very small Sabrina (12-14). His sister, Mavis, suggests that the aquarium is magic, though Francis points out that they were not saying a spell when he saw the little creature in the aquarium, but then realizes that he was reciting “Sabrina Fair.” When Francis protests that he was not saying a spell, he indicates that he indeed believes that some words hold power when spoken in a deliberate way. As he repeats the poem, he sees the tiny creature again, thus reassuring himself that what he saw was real, even if he is not sure of what he saw or why. When he repeats the poem and experiences the same result, Francis realizes that the words of “Sabrina Fair” have power. The reappearance of the creature at the recitation of the poem suggests to Francis and Mavis that the words themselves are magic. Seeing the tiny mermaid is the first indication that strange and wonderful things will happen once the children are at the seashore, and seeing the mermaid at the moment of recitation of the poem—a poem by one of the most important literary figures in English—underscores the

importance of language. The power of language comes not just from the recitation of Milton's poem, but from other elements of language, as discussed below. Through the words that call the mermaid, the children gain control of something that their overbearing aunt can have no part of: magic mediated by language.

In order for the children to enjoy their discovery of the power of Milton's words, their freedom must be restored. Their autonomy, curtailed at first by Aunt Enid, is reestablished once the children arrive at the seaside, since at that point Aunt Enid leaves to continue her travels and the children are reunited with both their parents and their autonomy. Before Aunt Enid had confiscated their newspaper on the train, Francis and Mavis read of a captured mermaid. To exercise their newly restored autonomy, Francis and Mavis go to the ocean where Francis again recites Milton's "Sabrina Fair." The recitation of the poem once more invokes the fantastic, and the children hear the voice of a mermaid imploring them to save her captive comrade, explaining, "We die in captivity" (42). Once the children discover that the words of Milton's poem will call mermaids, the children experience an unusual form of agency, one in which their words create a fantastic experience. It is only when their autonomy is intact that the young protagonists can have their adventure, which now includes helping someone in need.

Further exercising their autonomy, the children go to the local fair to help the captive mermaid who is on display, but the words of Milton's "Sabrina Fair" do not prepare them for their encounter with the captive mermaid. As Francis utters the first three lines of Milton's poem, the children are surprised when, from the tank holding brown seaweed in dirty water, an indignant mermaid proclaims, "Translucent wave, indeed! [...] I wonder you're not ashamed to speak the invocation over a miserable

cistern like this. What do you want?” (65). The lines of the beautiful poem bring forth an irritated and rude mermaid who does not conform to the children’s expectations. The mermaid’s demand “What do you want?” indicates that she assumes the children want something from her since they summoned her with the spell-poem. The mermaid’s presumption that the speaker of the poem wants something indicates that the poem and its words possess a power that has been used—and perhaps even abused—before this episode. The children, in being confronted with hostility, experience critical literacy as they learn that this magical creature has been exploited before, and does not wish to be so again. Her voice, even though irritated, makes clear that being in servitude to others is not what she wants.

Though the words of Milton’s poem have the power to call the mermaid, other words have the power to mislead the children. Once the mermaid is freed from captivity, she invites the children to her home, but the children hesitate because of what they have learned in stories and poetry about mermaids, such as the one in Heinrich Heine’s “The Lore-Lay,” who enchants a skipper who is drowned and his skiff sunk because he hears the mermaid’s song and runs aground, or the tale of Undine, who gains a soul, unlike most mermaids, when she marries a human but must kill her husband if he is not true to her. Ironically, just as the children use the misinformation they have learned in books to evaluate the mermaid and her motives, the mermaid does the same, but with mer-literature. The mermaid explains to the children her reasons for asking them to come in the dead of night, saying

It’s the usual time, isn’t it? [...] It is in all the stories. You know we have air-stories just as you have fairy-stories and water stories,—and the rescuer almost

always comes to the castle gate at dead of night, on a coal-black steed [...] but as there were four of you, besides me and my tail, I thought it more considerate to suggest a chariot. (120-21)

The mermaid's eccentric requests concerning the rescue and subsequent meeting are therefore explained, and just as she has used books to guide her interaction with the children, they have used the literature they have learned to guide them.

In her works, Nesbit makes clear the magical power that words can have, and the restorative quality they hold in shared interactions, but she also highlights the importance, and perhaps magical qualities, of the delivery of words, i.e., how those words are voiced. As most parents know, a calm and loving voice can often sooth the most distressed or frightened child, and sometimes a younger sister knows the power of voice as well. The mermaid will not accept the children's refusal to visit her home and gives each a lock of her hair so that they can breathe underwater. When the children reiterate their refusal, the mermaid seizes Kathleen and pulls her under, at which point the others jump in to rescue Kathleen. Once in the water, their fear diminishes and is completely eliminated once Kathleen calls out "Hurry up, France—Come on Mavis—" (126). The sound of her voice soothes the children, underscoring the importance of tone of voice.

At the height of action in the narrative, Nesbit returns to the theme of the power of words of social interaction, and demonstrates the effectiveness of words of contrition. Perhaps the most important magical word used in the narrative is the one that brings about the end of a long-standing war between the mer-folk and other underwater dwellers called the Under Folk. The two nations have been at war so long that no one can recall why they are fighting. Once the mer-king decides that the hostility has gone on long

enough, he offers the magical words of peace saying, “If we have wronged you, we ask your forgiveness. If you have wronged us, we freely forgive you. Say: Shall it be peace, and shall all the sons of the sea live as brothers in love and kindness for evermore?” (259).<sup>63</sup> With these words, which have their own magical power, the two peoples of the underwater world forego their differences, reconcile, and end their fighting. The resolution of the conflict, brought about through conversation and understanding without the use of magic, is vital to the futures of the underwater peoples. And so once again, Nesbit demonstrates, words create all kinds of magic, including ones that anyone can perform.<sup>64</sup>

Edith Nesbit was, in many ways, ahead of her time. In creating ordinary, middle-class characters with a discernible measure of autonomy who learn to use language in order to facilitate magic, Nesbit’s fantasy works for children anticipate the coming generation. As more women leave the domestic space to take their place in the public space of the early twentieth century, Nesbit’s texts demonstrate children’s increased autonomy as a result. Nesbit’s books are also forward-looking in establishing tropes and themes, especially the effective use of language—rhetoric—for critical literacy. Nesbit is the catalyst for critical literacy because of her characters’ experiences with language and how to use it and because her fantastic works are not viewed a threat to the established social order as realist texts might be. In Nesbit’s fantasy stories,

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<sup>63</sup> I regret that Nesbit’s role in antiwar protests is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, the devastation of war is portrayed in some of Nesbit’s works, including *The Railway Children*, in which the children’s father is falsely imprisoned for selling secrets to Russia (199); *Wet Magic* and *The Deliverers of Their Country* in which the children participate in warfare; and *The Story of the Amulet*, in which the father is a war correspondent in Manchuria (12).

<sup>64</sup> As tempting as it would be to explore at length the role of memory in reading, the scope of such an exploration is too vast for this dissertation.

language itself is empowering, which will be useful to subsequent generations of more autonomous children who must be able to use language to negotiate their world.

## CHAPTER IV – C. S. LEWIS AND THE CRITICAL LITERACY OF FANTASY AND IMAGINATION

Twentieth century English children's fantasy literature provides readers with a new meta-language that helps them negotiate the changed world in which they now live. Though there are a significant number of books written for children that provide examples of characters who learn throughout the works, and while J. K. Rowling's Hermione Granger of the Harry Potter series is perhaps the best known character for loving and using books to assist her in her various endeavors, C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952) makes encountering stories and reading the means by which useful knowledge, including morals and duties, is acquired by characters over time. In *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), Lewis himself advocated reading books of various sorts rather than strictly "lowbrow" or "highbrow," because many lowbrow books invite rereading and therefore provide multiple meanings for readers. Lewis also suggests that how readers read a text is more important than how it is written because "unliterary" readers fail to reread texts because they do not appreciate the value of the text or reading while "literary" readers return to texts again and again in order to savor and the work and thus find more meaning in the text with each rereading. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate that *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* subtly demonstrates desirable qualities in characters and that some characters evolve through their encounters with imaginative stories.

Lewis's use of rhetoric in his imaginative works is grounded in his extensive study of the classics, philosophy, literature, and rhetoric. Lewis was, in fact, a rhetorician

in the ancient sense of the word, someone engaged in persuasion by using the “available means” referenced at the beginning of Aristotle’s rhetoric. Closely related to rhetoric is language itself, as rhetoric is the effective use of language for persuasion. Lewis’s use of language in his fiction demonstrates how his use of language—the available means in his works for young people—contributes to understanding the critical literacy I examine in Lewis’s works. James Como, a Lewis scholar, describes the centrality of rhetoric for Lewis, explaining that Lewis employs a rhetoric of his own which consists of tactics and strategies that draw on rhetorical devices as needed in various rhetorical situations (“Centrality” 1). Como further insists that Lewis’s expertise in Medieval and Renaissance literature allowed him to talk extensively about rhetoric and its uses and functions, as critic to evaluate its use by others, and as a creative writer to apply it in his own work (“Centrality” 1-2). Lewis thus engaged in rhetoric throughout his academic career, as a student and educator, and as a novelist. In another text, Como even describes Lewis as “the wary yet energetic, ambivalent yet committed *Homo rhetoricus*” (“Branches” 180, qtd. in Greg Anderson 195). Rhetoric was essential to Lewis and remains essential to fully appreciating his works.

Because Lewis’s academic and literary works are influenced by his study of rhetoric, there are instances of his use of rhetoric that we can examine. And because these uses of rhetoric are present, it is possible to garner lessons in rhetoric from his works. Indeed, because of his own attitude about the study of rhetoric, that the lack of study and understanding of rhetoric keeps modern readers from fully understanding our ancestors,<sup>65</sup> critical literacy portrayed by Lewis can be discovered in his works, especially those for

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<sup>65</sup> *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 61.

young readers. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, I demonstrate in this chapter, provides examples that help readers get “back to the sort of conceptual clarity” that rhetoric represents (Greg Anderson 200).<sup>66</sup>

Fantasy literature presents readers with examples of critical literacy because engaging in it requires what Robert Crossley calls “imaginative participation.” Crossley maintains that the structure of a fantasy novel “provides for “favorable conditions for the voyage, a sense of purposefulness, a way of organizing meanings; and above all, the search for identity, relation, and religious experience is a search for personal meanings in a world of disembodied facts” (292). Fantasy literature is a low-stakes means of exploring what it means to be a human being, a citizen, and an individual, and any number of roles in between. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* demonstrates that reading fantastic and imaginative texts is especially important, because fantasy encourages readers to use their imagination to ask and answer “what if” questions in creative, innovative ways that makes resolutions to their real-life experiences possible.

Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963), who was familiarly called Jack and published under the name of C. S. Lewis, was born in Belfast, Ireland, in 1898, to Albert, a solicitor, and Florence, a clergyman’s daughter. Lewis was the second of two children, having an older brother, Warren. Lewis’s parents were bookish and well-read; his mother

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<sup>66</sup> For more discussion of Lewis’s use of rhetoric and language, see, for example: Bruce L. Edwards, Jr., discussion of Lewis’s employment of “rehabilitation” criticism in his scholarly writings on George Macdonald and William Morris and Lewis’s treatment of the *Sehnsucht*, or longing, a form of *movere* found in the works of these two authors; Basil Chadwick Chrisholm’s dissertation which, in part, explicates Lewis’s success as an author of children’s literature in that he addresses not only the intended child audience but also the inevitable adult audience as well, while examining Lewis’s own method of rhetorical criticism; Charles A. Huttar’s essay which examines Lewis’s poetry and the way that Lewis uses language, even though language is an abstract that fails to capture reality perfectly; and Nicholas R. Pertler’s dissertation highlights Lewis’s critique of modern education’s favoring of method and technique of rhetoric over tradition as Lewis advocates classical education with its emphasis on morals, virtue, and reason,

achieved a degree in mathematics from Queen's College in Belfast, and his father was a self-made man (*Surprised* 3-4). Lewis had a happy childhood until his mother died when he was nine years old. After the War, Lewis studied at Oxford University, where he taught after his studies were complete.

*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the third book published in the Narnia sequence,<sup>67</sup> is much concerned with the power and influence of books and with literacy. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is the story of an adventure into Narnia with Lucy and Edmund Pevensie and their cousin Eustace. In this story, the three children sail to the world's end with their friend Caspian, now leader of Narnia, to seek seven unjustly banished lords. This book emphasizes reading the right books, which are books that allow readers to explore possibilities, i.e., fantastic and imaginative texts. Lewis may be speaking from his own experience, as he was an avid reader from an early age, and retained nearly everything he read (*Surprised* 10, 14). The "right sort of books," indicates fantasy and imaginative works. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the narrator, like in most of the Narnia stories, often directly engages the reader. For example, just after describing the *Dawn Treader*, the narrator admonishes readers, saying, "By the way, if you are going to read this story at all, and if you don't know already, you had better get it into your head that the left of a ship when you are looking ahead is *port*, and the right is *starboard*" (5). Explaining these nautical terms is moment of critical literacy, which

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<sup>67</sup> The publication order of the Narnia books was the original ordering of the texts before HarperCollins began publishing them as The Chronicles of Narnia. This publication order is *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), and *The Last Battle* (1956). HarperCollins has reordered the books in the order of chronological events of the books: *The Magician's Nephew*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair*, and *The Last Battle*.

indicates that readers have the opportunity to learn through this text. The use of the second person and speaking directly to the reader, though not exclusively used by Lewis or in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, breaks the literary fourth wall and invites the reader into the action, thus creating a more engaging, less passive, experience. However, even though the narrator directly addresses readers, the tone of the narrator is not condescending but rather matter-of-fact, indicating a camaraderie with the reader, rather than an authoritative figure. Although the narrator also presents readers with a lesson in the passage quoted above, the critical literacy structure of the lesson more accommodating than condescending, especially through the phrase “if you don’t know already.”

Lucy and Edmund are staying with Eustace’s family because they could not accompany their parents and sister Susan on an expensive summer trip to America, and their brother Peter is elsewhere preparing for an exam. Eustace and his family have an avant-garde relationship that defies conventional family hierarchy, which makes Eustace a snobbish child from a modern family. Eustace is described as a child who “didn’t call his father and mother ‘Father’ and ‘Mother,’ but Harold and Alberta. They were a very up-to-date and advanced people. They were vegetarians, non-smokers and teetotalers, and wore a special kind of underclothes” (1). Harold, Alberta, and Eustace are thus modern, elitist people who separate themselves from the wider society through their choices, attitudes, and behaviors. Eustace’s attitude towards education also contributes to his lack of imagination, which is evident when he begins recording events in his little black notebook and the narrator explains that Eustace “always had this notebook and a pencil with him and kept a record of his marks in it, for though he didn’t much care about any

subject for its own sake, he cared a great deal about marks and would even go to people and say, ‘I got so much. What did you get?’” (30). Eustace does not appreciate learning. Keith Dorwick contends that “though it is not named in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Eustace’s curriculum is a prime example of the education that deadens our souls and causes a loss of our own humanity” (60). Eustace’s upbringing and schooling amplify his contempt for the imaginative.

Eustace also lacks imagination. Having learned about Narnia from his cousins, he is quick to tease Lucy and Edmund about their “imaginary” country, because Eustace “thought of course that they were making it all up; and as he was far too stupid to make anything up himself, he did not approve of that” (6). Eustace, like many cruel people, ridicules what he does not understand. Part of Eustace’s teasing includes a limerick, “Something like this: Some kids who played games about Narnia / Got gradually balmier and balmier—” because Eustace failed to rhyme Narnia correctly, Lucy points out that, “Narnia and balmier don’t rhyme, to begin with,” to which Eustace retorts, “It’s an assonance” (6). Eustace, with his claim of assonance, hints that Lucy is incapable of understanding superior poetic style, yet Eustace’s failure to rhyme Narnia could also signal his lack of imagination, which is a major flaw of his character and why he disparages his cousins’ conversation. The mentions of Eustace’s lack of imagination in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is one way that Lewis emphasizes the importance of reading and literacy. Reading, especially reading fantasy, stimulates the imagination while also offering a space for hypothesizing solutions to possible situations. Eustace’s superiority combined with his rejection of what he does not understand contributes to an

overall closed-mindedness that perpetuates his inability to engage with imagination and fantasy—and most of all, with true literacy.

Eustace's lack of imagination compels him to try to stop the fantastic while he is experiencing it. As Lucy and Edmund are talking, they examine the picture hanging on a wall and how the ship in the picture looks like a Narnian ship. Eustace, disliking the talk about Narnia, asks Lucy why she likes the picture. Lucy explains,

“I like it because the ship looks as if it were really moving [...] the water looks as if it were really wet [...] the waves look as if they were really going up and down.” [...] at that very moment [Eustace] looked at the waves and saw that they did look very much indeed as if they were going up and down. He had only once been in a ship [...] and had been horribly seasick. The look of the waves in the picture made him feel sick again. He turned rather green and tried another look. And then all three children were staring with open mouths. [...] the things in the picture were moving. (7-8)

For Lucy and Edmund, speaking of Narnia in terms of both the imaginative and realistic is normal, because to them Narnia is real. The picture, both before Eustace enters and when he is first in the room, is just a picture hanging on the wall. It is once Lucy vocalizes how the picture looks—“really wet,” “really going up and down”—how realistic it is the objects in the picture begin to move. Once Lucy speaks, the power of language in the text takes effect in this story,<sup>68</sup> and the picture comes to life: “at that very

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<sup>68</sup> Of course, Lewis does not permit certain kinds of magic to happen in the Chronicles of Narnia. For example, the children are usually called into Narnia. In fact, the idea of having some kind of magical way of forcing entry into Narnia is explicitly rejected in *The Silver Chair*. Jill wants to escape into the better world of Narnia, as he describes it, but as he explains to her, “But really, we can only ask [Aslan]” (6).

moment [Eustace] looked at the waves and saw that they did look very much indeed as if they were going up and down” (7). In the next moment, the three children are wet from the waves splashing out of the picture and Eustace “found himself standing on the frame; in front of him was not glass but real sea” (9). Lucy and Edmund had been looking at the picture of the Narnia ship before Eustace came into the room. Aslan permits Lucy’s words to be like the utterance of “Open Sesame!” which animates the inanimate and instigates action.<sup>69</sup> Whether Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace have gone into the picture or it has expanded to encompass them is immaterial; what matters is that they are now in Narnia. Unlike the previous journeys into Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), which employed a portal at the back of a wardrobe or in *Prince Caspian* (1951), which involved the blowing of a horn, this new excursion requires the picture of the ship as the portal as well as Lucy’s voiced description of the picture’s realistic attributes to make it come to life. While the picture of the Narnia ship is important because it depicts the point at which the children enter Narnia, Lucy’s voiced articulation of what she sees—and her rhetorical power—is vital to opening the portal and animating the scene.

*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and its narrator prize the knowledge found in works of fantasy, not because the knowledge is fantastic but rather because fantasy stimulates the imagination and allows for the preparation of “what if” scenarios. Eustace’s lack of imagination and lack of appreciation for the fantastic is again demonstrated by his reaction to the impossibility of entering Narnia, even while it is

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<sup>69</sup> It is not surprising that it is Lucy’s voice and articulation that opens the portal to Narnia, as she was the first to enter Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the first to feel the presence of magic and make an utterance in the station in *Prince Caspian*.

happening. Lucy notices the picture on the bedroom wall and comments on the lifelikeness and Narnian qualities of the ship in the picture. When the scene in the picture becomes real, Eustace tries to smash it and unwittingly pulls Lucy, Edmund, and himself into it and Narnia. In his panic, “Eustace jumped to try to pull it off the wall and found himself standing on the frame; in front of him was not glass but real sea, and wind and waves rushing up to the frame as they might to a rock” (9), because at this moment Eustace is confronted with the impossible, and does not know how to react. Had Eustace read books that gave him the opportunity to explore what-if scenarios, he might not panic when the unexpected occurs.

The narrator of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* makes it clear that Eustace’s lack of imagination is the inevitable result of his disdain for inventing fantastic narratives—or partaking in invented ones—and this disdain produces many of his misadventures while with his cousins in Narnia, along with his ignorance of such values to be found in fantastic texts as chivalry, honor, and the self-sacrifice that allows good to triumph over evil. On the contrary, being selfish and somewhat lazy makes Eustace a willing victim of his own ignorance of the fantastic. Eustace demonstrates this lazy selfishness when, upon the *Dawn Treader*’s landing on an unfamiliar island, he immediately skives off work. Eustace sets off alone to explore the island, without telling anyone he is going and leaving everyone else to do the hard work of setting up their encampment. Eustace ignores that everyone else’s work is increased because he refuses to do his part of the work. Had Eustace read fantasy tales of knights and battles, he would know that the only right action when there is work to be done is to do it and that success very often requires cooperation among the individuals in a group.

And had Eustace read the right books, especially works of fantasy, he would have known that the right thing to do in a place like Narnia is to first obey Prince Caspian and then to work with the others to help ensure the safety of the whole party. But Eustace is selfish and lazy, which has a price: something else he would have known if he had read fantasy texts. As Eustace is exploring, he becomes stuck in a valley and tries to use practical knowledge to find his way out. Had Eustace had the additional benefit of reading about fantastic adventures, he might be surprised when he sees from a cave

two thin wisps of smoke were coming. [...] Something was coming out. Edmund or Lucy or you would have recognized it at once, but Eustace had *read none of the right books*. The thing that came out of the cave was something he had never even imagined [...] He never said the word *Dragon* to himself. Nor would it have made things any better if he had. (88-89, emphasis added)

Although criticizing Eustace's reading choices, the narrator also implicitly praises the readers of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, subtly implying that there is a difference between "right" and "wrong" books and that imaginative books are the right ones.

Eustace, trapped in his logical, modern world that glorifies the individual and the desires of the self, might have fared better in his misadventures because "Most of us know what we should expect to find in a dragon's lair but [...] Eustace had read only the wrong books [that] had a lot to say about exports and imports and government and drains, but they were weak on dragons" (91). Eustace is clueless because he read the "wrong books," preferring the practical to fantasy stories, and thus he has not had the opportunity to explore, through his imagination, what he might do in such an unusual situation. Eustace is, as Lewis describes, a "lowest type of reader who wants sensational narrative but will

not accept it unless it is offered him as ‘news.’ On a higher level it appears as the belief that all good books are good primarily because they give us knowledge, teach us ‘truths’ about life” (*Experiment 74*). While sensational narrative may have an appeal, rejecting anything that is not news presupposes that the information found within such texts is established fact, and therefore beyond questioning or scrutiny. To Eustace’s further peril, in his excitement over finding the dragon’s treasure, he attempts to hoard it and is cursed for trying to keep a dragon’s treasure. Had he read the “right books,” Eustace would have known that when one behaves like a dragon and covets the dragon’s treasure, one becomes that which he imitates: a dragon. Eustace reads too many of the “wrong kind of books” and thus has a diminished chance of success, which more readily comes after reading an assemblage of books on copious subjects and in many genres. Such affection for books may be taken directly from Lewis’s own life as, in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis himself comments on the presence of books in his childhood, explaining that his father

bought all the books he read and never got rid of any of them. There were books in the study, books in the drawing room, books in the cloakroom, books (two deep) in the great bookcase on the landing, books in a bedroom, books piled as high as my shoulder in the cistern attic, books of all kinds reflecting every transient stage of my parents’ interest, books readable and unreadable, books suitable for a child and books most emphatically not. (10)

Lewis grew up with a reverence for books and knowledge. A clear correlation can be seen between Lewis’s childhood experience with books and the way they are presented in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, in which the Magician’s books are well-cared for in his library and highly regarded by the Magician and others. As we will see, Lewis

specifically advocates cultivating imagination through reading works of fantasy literature, which is fundamental to achieving objectives because readers can use their imaginations for problem-solving.

Through reading the right books, Eustace would have first learned that dragons are possible. Eustace would also have learned that many dragons are fought and some are killed by knights and other fighters, as shown in many tales of King Arthur and other stories.<sup>70</sup> In reading the right books, Eustace would know that dragons hoard treasure<sup>71</sup> and that it is dangerous for a human to possess the dragon's treasure, even if the dragon dies,<sup>72</sup> and that humans can become dragons.<sup>73</sup> From reading English Edwardian children's author E. Nesbit's stories about dragons, to use an example that was known to Lewis, Eustace would have known that dragons are gluttonous,<sup>74</sup> insincere tricksters,<sup>75</sup> and that gold, pearls, diamonds, and rubies are a feast for dragons.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Eustace read the wrong books, so he does not know how stories function and is unable to tell stories. Once he is in the form of a dragon, Eustace returns to the camp the others set up while he explored. Eustace tries to explain to his cousins, Caspian, and the crew of the *Dawn Treader* how he became a dragon, but he is unable to do so:

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), Edmund Spenser's *The Fairy Queen* (1590), Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), E. Nesbit's *The Last of the Dragons* (1925), and C. S. Lewis's *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933).

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Apollonius of Rhodes's *Argonautica* (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937).

<sup>72</sup> For example, William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon's translation of the Icelandic *The Story of the Volsung* (1888).

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Arthur Rackham's illustrated editions of Richard Wagner's operas *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie* (1910) and *Siegfried and The Twilight of the Gods* (1911).

<sup>74</sup> Nesbit's "The Book of Beasts" (12, 13) and "Kind Little Edmund" (156).

<sup>75</sup> "The Purple Stranger" (24).

<sup>76</sup> "The Fiery Dragon" (87).

In the first place Eustace (never having read the right books) had no idea how to tell a story straight. [...] As a result he never got nearly to the end before the tide came in and washed away all the writing except the bits he had already trodden on or accidentally swished out with his tail. And all that anyone had seen would be something like this—the dots are for the bits he had smudged out—

I WNET TO SLEE ... RGOS AGRONS I MEAN DRANGONS CAVE CAUSE  
ITWAS DEAD AND AINING SO HAR ... WOKE UP AND COU ... GET OFF  
MI ARM OH BOTHER ... (106-07)

Eustace, who read nothing but the most practical books and thus does not know how stories work, could not convey the narrative of his fantastic transformation into a dragon, because he does not know how stories function. Now, when he wants to write out what has happened to him, and be understood, he cannot do so in any intelligible way.

Perhaps Eustace's plight is a warning about abusing the gifts of communication, for they may be taken away. Lewis references losing such gifts in both *The Magician's Nephew*—when Aslan warns the Talking Beasts that should they regress to the ways of the Dumb Beasts they will lose their ability to talk (71)—and *The Last Battle*—where Ginger, the talking cat of Narnia, conspires with the captain of the invading Calormenes to advance their joint agendas through manipulating the other Talking Beasts of Narnia. At a crucial point in the narrative, Ginger aims to demonstrate that he is not afraid of a false deity known as “Tashlan”—an amalgamation of the Calormene god Tash and the true God represented by Aslan—by walking into the stable where Tashlan is said to be housed. Ginger has known before now that “Tashlan” is only a ruse, but when he enters the stable, he is so frightened by what he has seen that he can no longer speak. By

misusing his gifts of speech and his power of rhetoric, Ginger incurs the punishment of such misuse and loses both his ability to speak and his place among the Talking Beast of Narnia (727-28).<sup>77</sup>

By contrast, Eustace develops the ability to tell stories, which in part entails listening to the many stories of Reepicheep, as I will explain below. Eustace has disapproved of non-utilitarian texts until he finds that he actually needs some lessons in imaginative, fantastic stories. Eustace's negative relationship to literacy proposes that reading even what may be undesirable is also beneficial because knowledge and critical and creative thinking will be enhanced.

*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* also demonstrates that stories have an important role in civilization because our sense of history and our place in the various communities to which we belong are often learned through stories. For example, Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolition novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) demonstrates the injustice of slavery and the need to end the practice, and the incompatibility of slavery and Christianity. Another example is Kenneth Grahame's pastoral novel *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) about a community of anthropomorphized animals in the English countryside, which demonstrates friendship and loyalty. Stories provide nuances and emotional connections lacking in books of facts. Rosemary Sutcliff's *Outcasts* (1955) explores rejection and isolation, and *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954) contemplates the disappointment of a Roman soldier after a physical injury leaves him unable to fulfill his commission.

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<sup>77</sup> Something similar happens to some of the rats of *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents*. When the rats are frightened, they lose the ability to speak, though they have had this ability since they ate from the wizards' enchanted garbage (140).

Eustace initially dislikes Reepicheep the talking mouse, but storytelling helps them forge a friendship. Once Eustace is transformed into a dragon, his hubris is depleted and he is ashamed to be with the others from the *Dawn Treader*. It is at this point, when Eustace's concept of reality has ended, that he can now recover what C. S. Lewis describes in *The Abolition of Man* (1947) as what is lost when humans try to "[explain] things away" (81). Now Eustace can begin to recover, through fantastic stories, something which he has never fully appreciated: understanding. Now that Eustace must approach his own reality in a new way, he can no longer "see through"—and discount—what he does not understand. To help Eustace on his journey to what is for him a new understanding, Reepicheep joins Eustace on the beach each night, and

There he would explain that what had happened to Eustace was a striking illustration of the turn of Fortune's wheel, and that if he had Eustace at his own house in Narnia [...] he could show him more than a hundred examples of emperors, kings, dukes, knights, poets, lovers, astronomers, philosophers, and magicians, who had fallen from prosperity into the most distressing circumstances, and of whom many had recovered and lived happily ever afterward. It did not, perhaps, seem so very comforting at the time, but it was kindly meant and Eustace never forgot it. (108-09)

Reepicheep tells Eustace of stories from the right sort of books—books, from their description above, about people and adventures and love and suffering—perhaps all of the ones that Eustace missed out on while he was reading books filled with information and with pictures of grain elevators (2). Eustace's preferred reading before his adventures in Narnia is what Lewis argues is "useful to the community," but this usefulness has lost

touch with a higher cause, one that connects us with Nature (*Abolition* 19). Indeed, such utilitarian views lead one to sacrifice, as Lewis suggested, the divinity of stars as astronomy develops, and thus some of magic and mystery is lost to us (*Abolition* 44), just as enchantment, delight, and imagination were lost to Eustace through his focus on practical reading material. Once Eustace is free of his dragon form, he tells everyone the earlier part of his story (118-19). Though Lewis does not explicitly say so in the text, it is now, after so many nights with Reepicheep telling him stories, that Eustace can finally tell his story in the right way, even though it is fantastic. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* provides positive examples of the power of literacy to transform individuals and communities and demonstrates critical literacy message of the text.

*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* also stresses the importance of the relationship between reading comprehension and literacy, as well as the discerning application of knowledge. While books are powerful because they hold accessible knowledge, readers must remember to use the power of texts wisely, justly, and unselfishly, a *caveat* that is occasionally forgotten. On one of the islands visited by the *Dawn Treader*, Lucy meets invisible creatures called Duffers, who explain how they became invisible when they secretly consulted the magician's magic book to find a spell to take away what they call their "ugliness" (150). The Duffers did not respect the book or its owner and do not know how to use the book properly. Lacking appropriate comprehension, the Duffers instead make themselves invisible. The chief explains that his daughter read the spell because "she reads beautifully, and there we all were as invisible as you could wish to see" (151).

The example how the Duffers became invisible demonstrates that the ability to read, even "beautifully," does not necessarily entail comprehension of the words being

read. The rote skill of recognizing letters and pronouncing them—decoding—does not necessarily guarantee that one can access the knowledge or wisdom in a text. The Duffers suffer the consequence of illiteracy and must wait for someone else who can read the book—Lucy—to help them out of their predicament by saying the spell to make them visible. Interestingly, like Eustace, the Duffers are what Lewis would call unlitrary readers who “never [intend] to give the words more than the bare minimum of attention necessary for extracting the Event” (*Experiment* 32). In this case the event is to take away their ugliness. The Duffers are also unable to tell stories or listen to them properly. For example, when the chief Duffer fails to mention the reason why they need Lucy to read the Magic Book for them, the other Duffers praise him, saying, “No one couldn’t have left it out cleaner and better” (152-53). The chief Duffer does not know how to tell a story, but the other Duffers are also oblivious to the mistake the chief has made in telling the narrative.

The importance of books as highly-regarded objects is made clear when Lucy approaches the library where the magic book is housed that will restore the Duffer’s literacy:

a large room with three big windows, [...] lined from floor to ceiling with books; more books than Lucy had ever seen before, tiny little books, fat and dumpy books, and books bigger than any church Bible you have ever seen, all bound in leather and smelling old and learned and magical. But she knew from her instructions that she need not bother about any of these. For *the Book*, the Magic Book, was lying on a reading-desk in the very middle of the room. (162)

The description of the books in the room and the prominence of the Magic Book at the very center of the room indicates the reverence the Magician has for books and their importance to his life and work, clearly indicating in the text that books are of great import and should be regarded and treated as such, like the many books in Lewis's childhood home.

Books in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* are also valued for their contents, which offer their own form of temptation and danger—even more than a dragon's gold, as it happens. The Chief of the Duffers is unable to tell Lucy where in the Magic Book she might find the spell to make them visible again. The chief simply tells Lucy to start at the first page as he “seemed rather surprised at her asking. He expected her to begin at the beginning and go on till she came to [the right spell]; obviously he had never thought that there was any other way of finding a place in a book” (163). The chief indicates that even though his daughter said a spell, she and the other Duffers have little idea about the construction of this book—or perhaps any other—how it is organized, or how to use it with efficiency. Lucy finds many intriguing spells as she leafs through the book, but throughout the book, as soon as she turns the page she forgets what she has read previously (164).

Lucy is tempted by some of the spells, but resists until her curiosity overpowers her and she decides to try one that will let her know what her friends think of her. Eavesdropping on a conversation between two of her friends, Lucy is upset by what they are saying. After hearing this first pair of friends, Lucy decides that she does not want to know what anyone else thinks of her and “with a great effort she turned over the page, but not before a large, angry tear had splashed on it” (167-69). Lucy has strayed from her

mission of finding the spell to make the Duffers visible and in doing so has misused the Magic Book to spy on others. An instance of critical literacy in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is Lucy's anguish over the conversation she witnessed, a consequence for her violating the text of the Magic Book—just as being invisible is the consequence the Duffers suffer—which suggests that it is important to use texts in the right way—with reverence for the information therein and the power associated with it—and not selfishly.

Reading stories also fosters the ability to recognize a good story. Just before Lucy finds the spell that will allow her to make the Duffers visible again, she reads a story that went on for three pages and before she had read to the bottom of the page she had forgotten that she was reading at all. She was living in the story as if it were real, and all the pictures were real too. When she had got to the third page and come to the end, she said, “That is the loveliest story I’ve ever read or ever shall read in my whole life. Oh, I wish I could have gone on reading it for ten years.” (169-70) Lucy loves the story so much that she wishes she could have gone on reading, but like the other parts of the book, she cannot go back to this story, not even in her memory. Once Lucy invokes the spell to make the Duffers visible, she sees Aslan, The Lion and High King. Asking if she will ever be able to read that story again, Aslan tells Lucy, “Indeed, yes, I will tell it to you for years and years” (169-73). The story that Lucy could not remember is one that, from that day on, what she “means by a good story is a story which reminds her of the forgotten story in the Magician’s Book” (170). Because of this story, even though it is forgotten, Lucy has a model for what a good story is and should be. Lucy’s inability to turn back the pages of the book or remember what she has already

read is perhaps a comment on the fleeting nature of knowledge and the often-narrow window of opportunity for learning.

While self-narrative is important to creating the Self that one wishes to be, naming—and even misnaming or renaming—what is encountered contributes to reality. Naming and nomenclature in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is a demonstration of power, both political and rhetorical, in the text. As king of Narnia, it is Caspian's right to designate the names of the discoveries on this voyage, yet as a compassionate ruler, he honors those who have been tested and triumphed on this journey. When Edmund, Lucy, Eustace, and the others from the *Dawn Treader* prepare to leave the island where Eustace became a dragon, "Caspian caused to be cut on a smooth cliff facing the bay the words: *DRAGON ISLAND / Discovered by Caspian X, King of Narnia, etc. / in the fourth year / of his reign. Here, as we suppose, the Lord Octesian / had his death.*" (119). Caspian, in naming this island, annexes it as part of Narnia. Though there was a dragon on the island when the Narnians arrived, only Eustace saw the dragon before it died, when he was avoiding work. Because the only dragon Caspian encounters on the island is the transformed Eustace, one might surmise that Caspian, in calling the island Dragon Island, is commemorating and honoring Eustace, who is now transformed—a transformation that is more than from a human to a dragon and back, but from a sardonic, unimaginative boy into an empathetic, humble storyteller. Caspian's written proclamation on the island also serves as a means of resolution for the fate of the lost Narnian explorer, Lord Octesian. In resolving his story, those left to wonder about Lord Octesian can finally heal, knowing that Caspian has determined this island as the likely end of the explorer. Caspian, in this

act of naming, paying tribute, and resolving mysteries, advances the story of Narnia, solidifies the metamorphosis of Eustace, and completes the story of Lord Octesian.

Yet naming is not reserved for only the primary characters in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*; even the small can utilize this rhetorical power, demonstrating to readers that this power is available to all. Reepicheep, the brave and loyal talking mouse of Narnia, also exercises the privilege and power of naming, though not as permanently as Caspian. Reepicheep helps to rechristen the invisible creatures that the Narnians encounter. These creatures, at first called Duffers, were turned into one-footed creatures when punished by the Magician Coriakin. The Duffers, however, believe that they looked better in their pre-monopod form and consider themselves ugly in their present form. Once the duffers are visible, Reepicheep sees the monopods and explains that the Monopods can use their “huge single foot [...] as a natural raft or boat” (187), which also enhances their perspective of themselves and their abilities. While they called themselves Duffers before Reepicheep’s address,

The Duffers were also very pleased with their new name of Monopods, which seemed to them a magnificent name though they never got it right. “That’s what we are,” they bellowed, “Moneypuds, Pomonods, Poddymons.” [...] But they soon got it mixed up with their old name of Duffers and finally settled down to calling themselves the Dufflepuds; and that is what they will probably be called for centuries. (187-88)

Significantly, based on Reepicheep’s suggestion, the Dufflepuds choose a new name for themselves; thus they create a new identity, one that helps them accept their new form. Simply adopting the name that Reepicheep calls them lacks autonomy and a sense of

constructing their own identity. When the Dufflepuds combine their old name with the new one, they create for themselves who they are and thus this name endures.

Caspian's power of rhetoric is his political ability, as King of Narnia, to use the language as a means of changing what he sees is wrong and re-narrating, thus recreating, the current reality to form a more just society. In the Lone Islands, the furthest outlying region of Narnia, King Caspian's rhetorical power is demonstrated in various ways that are necessary to counter the toxic slave trade and the local government that allows this vile practice in the islands. As Caspian, Lucy, Edmund, Eustace, and Reepicheep are walking across the island Felimath, they are captured by Pug and other slave traders. The group, about to be taken to the slave market, is warned by Caspian not to reveal his identity. Caspian responds to the idea of *kairos*, an advantageous moment in which to act and speak. Fortunately, Caspian gains an advantage as Lord Bern, loyal to the crown of Narnia, buys Caspian away from the slavers because the young man reminds him of his former king, Caspian's father (44-47). Caspian, like the fairies who mitigate the curse on Sleeping Beauty, has the rhetorical power to change—in the moment—the narrative of the Lone Islands through his political power as king.

Waiting for the right moment to speak prevents further complications for the group; if those who captured them are willing to abduct the group as they pass by, to know that they hold the King of Narnia might give them dangerous power over the whole of Narnia and its populace. Though his silence allows the group to be taken, Caspian reveals himself to Bern when he knows Bern is honorable and loyal.

A moment of critical literacy in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* occurs when Caspian uses a display of logic to verify his identity. Proving to Bern that he is, in fact,

king of Narnia, Caspian argues that he does indeed look like the former king, but then also says by way of proof,

I know within six guesses who you are. You are one of those seven lords of Narnia whom my uncle Miraz sent to sea and whom I have come to look for [...] if your Lordship will give me a sword I will prove on any man's body in clean battle that I am Caspian, the son of Caspian, lawful King of Narnia, Lord of Cair Paravel, and Emperor of the Lone Islands. (47-48)

Caspian knows some of the details of the voyage of the seven lords, but he also has the sword training and eloquence of a noble. Caspian's speech is that of a king, but he is also an idealized figure, the epitome of the fairy tale prince, righteous and unassailable.

Through his birth into royalty and his opportunities for education and privileged environment, he conveys himself as only the King of Narnia can.<sup>78</sup> His display of high rank through swordsmanship, his honor in requesting a "clean battle," and his pronouncement of his titles demonstrate that Caspian utilizes and embodies the rhetoric of high nobility. Lord Bern's only reply to Caspian's eloquent speech is "By heaven, [...] it is his father's very voice and trick of speech" (48). Because of his shrewdly persuasive speech, Caspian gains his freedom and an ally in Bern so that they may free the other captives and end the slave trade in the Lone Islands. Critical literacy occurs when, with the capture of the group, the selling of Caspian, and Caspian's decision to trust Bern, the text demonstrates that though something can be said, one must judiciously decide when it

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<sup>78</sup> Lewis also refers to the manners of a king in *The Silver Chair* when the lost Prince Rilian is rescued: "there was something in his face and air which no one could mistake. That look is in the face of all true Kings of Narnia, who rule by the will of Aslan and sit at Cair Paravel on the throne of Peter the High King" (245-46).

is best to keep silent or speak. Caspian's example of *kairos* illustrates the importance of waiting for the most advantageous moment to act.

Caspian's rhetorical power is also demonstrated in his clever overthrow of the slovenly Governor Gumpas. For example, Caspian demonstrates superior appeals to logic when he encounters Governor Gumpas, who is operating through a number of potential fallacies. Caspian and his authority are initially rebuffed by Gumpas with an appeal to tradition because in the Lone Islands there are "no interviews without appointments except between nine and ten P.M. on second Saturdays" (57) and there is "nothing about [Caspian's visit] in the correspondence [and] Nothing in the minutes" (57), and the Governor had "not been notified of any such thing. All irregular" (57). But he is "happy to consider any applications" (57). By refusing to acknowledge Caspian's authority, the Governor forces Caspian to demonstrate his supremacy. Caspian is, in addition to the ultimate authority in Narnia, the superior rhetor. Caspian first expresses his ascendancy by ignoring everything the Governor says, behaving as if the Governor has not spoken at all. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, throughout Caspian's dealings with Gumpas, demonstrates Quintilian's definition of rhetoric, that when something is morally wrong it cannot be justified logically and must be countered with good words from a good person. In employing rhetorical strategies to dominate the Governor, Caspian exemplifies Quintilian's definition of a rhetor: "no man can speak well who is not good himself" (II.xv.34). The Governor, who is not good, cannot embody the virtues of oratory and the character of the orator in the same way that Caspian does.

In further displaying his dominance, and because he realizes that the Governor and others behave the way they do because the Lone Islands have been left to their own

governance for too long, Caspian demands an explanation for the lack of taxes paid by the islands for the last century and a half (58). Once again, Gumpas tries to dismiss Caspian by saying, “That would be a question to raise at the Council next month [...] If anyone moves that a commission of inquiry be set up to report on the financial history of the islands at the first meeting next year, why then ...” (58; ellipses original). At the Governor’s further attempt to deny his authority, Caspian again cuts the Governor off, yet this time directing the consequences of noncompliance directly at the Governor himself, proclaiming, “I also find it very clearly written in our laws [...] that if the tribute is not delivered, the whole debt has to be paid by the Governor of the Lone Islands out of his private purse” (58). Only when Caspian threatens his personal wealth, using the authority of the law of Narnia, does Governor Gumpas directly address what Caspian is saying. The narrator explains that “At this Gumpas began to pay real attention. ‘Oh, that’s quite out of the question,’ he said. ‘It is an economic impossibility—er—your Majesty must be joking.’ Inside, he was wondering if there were any way of getting rid of these unwelcome visitors” (58). Though Gumpas now attends to Caspian’s rhetoric, he is still reluctant to recognize the absolute power that Caspian wields; however, Caspian’s superior rhetoric and his position of ultimate authority in the land forces Gumpas, finally, into submission.

Once again demonstrating his supremacy over Governor Gumpas, Caspian continues to ignore his points of contention. In disregarding Gumpas, Caspian shows that what the Governor says is inconsequential and that the power of voice and speech lies with the King. Caspian is especially angry about the illegal yet prevalent slave trade of the Lone Islands. Citing Narnian tradition, Caspian appeals to tradition as he demands to

know “why you have permitted this abominable and unnatural traffic in slaves to grow up here, contrary to the ancient custom and usage of our dominions” (59). Using the rhetorically charged words “abominable and unnatural” to describe slave trading, Caspian clearly demonstrates his opposition to the practice. Calling the commerce “contrary to the ancient custom and usage of our dominions” implies that it is not only offensive to the royal “we” of Caspian himself but also to the whole of Narnian society throughout the ages. However, as Caspian is king, his word is law, and Caspian’s rhetoric confirms both his abhorrence for human trafficking and his authority over the Lone Islands and Gumpas.

Although Caspian has clearly demonstrated his authority, Gumpas again tries to circumvent Caspian with the logical fallacy of *argumentum ad consequentiam* or argument to the consequence, one of the Red Herring fallacies. Gumpas attempts to explain the slave trade as “Necessary, unavoidable, [...] An essential part of the economic development of the island, I assure you. Our present burst of prosperity depends on it” (59). Gumpas claims that the welfare of the entire population of the Lone Islands hinges on the slave trade and that without the economic benefit of human trafficking, the Lone Islands would suffer from impoverishment, though these negative consequences are neither proven nor evidenced. Caspian pointedly asks Gumpas “What need have you of slaves?” (59). But Gumpas understands Caspian’s use of the word “need” in economic terms. While the Lone Islands may profit directly from the sale of slaves, they also enjoy the extemporaneous financial benefits of traders visiting the islands. By failing to recognize Caspian’s meaning of the operative word “need,”

Gumpas sidesteps the issue of the overall abomination of the slave trade in favor of the economic advantages of human trafficking.

Caspian, having already proven he is the superior rhetor, thwarts Gumpas's faulty reasoning once more by addressing the crucial, operative word that Gumpas refused to acknowledge and pinpointing the crux of Gumpas's actions, concluding, "In other words, [...] you don't need them. Tell me what purpose they serve except to put money into the pockets of such as [the slaver] Pug?" (60). Exposing Gumpas's flawed argument and confronting him with the truth of the situation leaves Gumpas with one final logical fallacy. Gumpas next employs an *ad hominem* argument, attacking Caspian personally, saying, "'Your Majesty's tender years,' said Gumpas, with what was meant to be a fatherly smile, 'hardly make it possible that you should understand the economic problem involved. I have statistics, I have graphs, I have—'" (60). Gumpas can say no more as Caspian cuts him off. Through the insinuation that Caspian is immature and thus incapable of understanding how the real world operates, Gumpas shows how desperate his rhetorical position is at this moment. Caspian dispenses with Gumpas's insult by using Gumpas's own words, rearranged, in reply. Caspian argues,

Tender as my years may be, [...] I believe I understand the slave trade from within quite as well as your Sufficiency. And I do not see that it brings into the island meat or bread or beer or wine or timber or cabbages or books or instruments of music or horses or armor or anything else worth having. But whether it does or not, it must be stopped. (60)

Caspian's inversion of the order of Gumpas's words—"Your Majesty's tender years" to "Tender as my years may be"<sup>79</sup>—begins the final assault on Gumpas's faulty logic. Demonstrating his complete grasp of the situation, Caspian lists many of the things that the slave trade does not do, even if the practice does enhance the economy. Caspian's list includes staples such as food, raw materials, cultural and educational materials, livestock, and military paraphernalia. In this exchange, Caspian makes sure to acknowledge that the people have more than basic sustenance even without the added revenue slave trade—wine, books, musical instruments—and that the comfort of the populace does not depend on human trafficking. In the Lone Islands specifically, and Narnia generally, one has no need for material excess other than to satisfy the vice of greed. Though Caspian has won this and several previous rhetorical rounds with Gumpas, the Governor continues to argue.

In his final rhetorical move, Gumpas argues that the end of the slave trade will adversely affect the Lone Islands, exclaiming, "that would be putting the clock back, [...] Have you no idea of progress, of development? [...] *I can take no responsibility for any such measure*" (60-61; emphasis added). Gumpas is appealing to recent tradition, but one that is not sanctioned by the wider society and thus a fallacy. Gumpas privileges unexamined progress over the true Narnian tradition that Caspian advocates.<sup>80</sup> Gumpas's final words are meant to threaten a disruption of governance as well as to show his

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<sup>79</sup> This rhetorical move is known as an *antimetabole*.

<sup>80</sup> Sometimes called the *fallacy of progressivism* or the *appeal to time fallacy*. Interestingly, Lewis relayed his thoughts on progress in these terms, explaining that "'chronological snobbery,' the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. You must find why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood" (*Surprised* 207-08).

disapproval of Caspian's claims, though his ultimatum is essentially a bluff. As with most logical fallacies that accompany ultimatums, Gumpas's last, desperate attempt to sway Caspian proves to be his undoing. Caspian's prompt reply is a decisive, "Very well then, [...] we relieve you of your office" (61). Caspian, who throughout his dealings with Gumpas, proved repeatedly that his rhetoric and logic were beyond Gumpas's, maneuvered Gumpas into removing himself from power and position, allowing Caspian to restore honor, justice, and Narnian values to the Lone Islands. For Caspian, and anyone else concerned with human dignity, there is no excuse that Gumpas could have offered to rationalize the buying and selling of humans and other rational beings in Narnia.

The abilities that the characters discussed in this chapter gain through their interaction with texts are invaluable to the successful fulfillment of their various tasks. Hearing and reading about adventures, heroes, myths, legends, and characters who have triumphed demonstrates the processes of gaining knowledge and skills through their reading. Readers then have a model for use in their own lives while adopting the positive traits and characteristics of those examples from the texts they read. In discussing how young readers gain knowledge from what they read, educator Myles McDowell contends that "a good children's book makes complex experiences available to its readers" (52). The critical literacy of these works includes the actual reader seeing the learning process that a character goes through, and her subsequent success, and then the ability of the actual reader to apply what she learns to her own life. Thus the depiction of characters' reading takes on great significance because the layers of reading, learning, and application of knowledge found in texts. Readers of such twentieth century texts have an example to follow. These readers can also imagine the results of taking on certain

characteristics that are positive and empowering. Reading in itself is a low-stakes way of imagining and then incorporating positive attributes that allow readers to flourish in their actual lives and circumstances. Once young readers are voiced, active, adventurous, and thinking, like the characters in twentieth century English children's fantasy texts they encounter, they can then begin to create the narrative of their own lives, weaving in what they find valuable in what they have read. With reading, learning, and understanding, young readers can then create their greatest text: the Self they construct with critical literacy.

CHAPTER V DIANA WYNNE JONES AND LATENT LEARNING IN *FIRE AND HEMLOCK*

Much of what we know comes to us from the texts we read. At times, however, there are lessons in texts that are missed by some readers at the first encounter. Later, however, when the latent knowledge readers have acquired becomes necessary, what was learned can become apparent. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate that *Fire and Hemlock* uses critical literacy to show that knowledge is acquired through reading, even if the reader is unaware of what is being gained. Polly, the protagonist of *Fire and Hemlock*, only later realizes how much she actually knows from what she has read—what she has latently learned through all the books she has read—and is able to use that knowledge when it is necessary. The critical literacy of *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates a learning process that Polly goes through, because, as Margaret Meek explains, “texts teach [...] a process of discovery for readers” rather than a program of instruction (*How Texts Teach* 19-20). I also examine Polly’s development of her Self through the hero-narrative she creates.

Diana Wynne Jones (1934-2011) was born in London to a middle-class family. Jones’s parents were intellectuals; her mother was Oxford educated and her father was an educator.<sup>81</sup> When she was a child, Jones experienced instability. Scholar C. Butler explains that during the war, Jones was moved “from London to rural Wales, back to London, then to Coniston Water in the Lake District, to York, to London for a third time, and finally to Thaxted in Essex” (*Four British* 9). Jones’s parents ran a school for boys, Clarence House, which allowed Jones to access many literary works as a child. Jones

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<sup>81</sup> Diana Wynne Jones Autobiography (archive.is/nNhY#selection-367.1-367.9).

read—i.e., majored in—English at Oxford University and attended lectures by C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, but she did not begin writing until she had children of her own.<sup>82</sup>

While Jones may not be as well known in the United States as some other English writers, her works have attracted critical attention, as is particularly evidenced by *Diana Wynne Jones: An Exciting and Exacting Wisdom* (2002), edited by Teya Rosenberg, Martha P. Hixon, Sharon M. Scapple, and Donna R. White, a collection of essays that examine aspects of Jones's works, including identity, myth and science, representations of Good and Evil, and magic as metaphor, and Farah Mendelsohn's *Diana Wynne Jones: Children's Literature and the Fantastic Tradition* (2005), which explores why Jones, an author of works for young people, is so important to critics of fantastic literature, demonstrating that Jones plays with, challenges, and expands traditional notions of fantasy in her works. But these works are not alone. For example, Susan Ang discusses Jones's contribution to the renewal of fantasy literature by "dissolving the various rules and dogmata of fantasy" (284). I will be discussing further Jones criticism below as it particularly relates to one of Jones's novels.

Literacy was important to Jones, and her own literary influences shaped her writing—especially her hero narrative, *Fire and Hemlock*. Jones's literary influences are known because she discusses her childhood reading and literary history in "The Heroic Ideal," in which she explains, "As a child, I was an expert in heroes. The eccentricity of my parents meant that there were almost no books in the house except learned ones, or books they used for teaching—and I was an avid reader" (129). Before she was ten, she

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<sup>82</sup> Diana Wynne Jones Autobiography (archive.is/nNhY#selection-367.1-367.9).

had read collections of Greek myths including the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* and the story of Hero and Leander, but did not read children's books until she had a family (129-33). The use of characters who are active, voiced, thinking, and subjective moves toward shaping young readers who acquire these positive attributes through the examples in the text. Fantasy literature provides readers with a means of exploring various solutions while working to solve problems. Indeed, Jones asserts that

Fantasy certainly does provide comfort [as it] state[s] a problem as a "what if" [and] stated in this way, the problem (parent? bully?) is posed for the widest possible number of people, but posed in a way that enables the reader to walk all around it and see the rights and wrongs of it [and] what a child gains thereby is a sort of blueprint of society. Reading the story, he or she is constructing a mental map—in bold colors or stark black-and-white—of right and wrong and life as it should be [and] this child will now have the mental map for guidance. (77-78)

In the case of *Fire and Hemlock*, a reader may not have read all of the books that Polly mentions, but that reader will gain an awareness of them through the novel and the characters' discussion of them. It is also possible—and perhaps probable—that through reading about all of the books mentioned in *Fire and Hemlock*, readers may be curious enough to find those books and explore them for themselves. One of the critical literacy lessons of the text, then, is that reading has value—a lesson not overtly stated, but suggested by the mention of so many books and authors, not to mention the overlapping of multiple narratives.<sup>83</sup> Mendlesohn asserts that at the end of *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly,

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<sup>83</sup> The ancient Scottish ballads "Tam Lin" and "Thomas the Rhymer," T. S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" and "The Waste Land," and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* are just a few of the influences of *Fire and Hemlock*.

having read many stories of heroes over the years, must do what is right her situation.

Polly rejects the traditional heroic actions, which is “a revision of her relationship with the tales she has read [as] she needs to synthesize and re-vision them” (XIX). Thus, *Fire and Hemlock* is an example of critical literacy in that the protagonist adapts what she has learned from literary sources and makes it her own. Readers are also privileged to this instance of critical literacy, seeing that tradition can be modified for their own times and circumstances.<sup>84</sup>

Jones’s *Fire and Hemlock*, is the story of Polly Whittacker, a young girl who imagines herself as a “hero-in-training” who must save her adult friend Tom Lynn by defeating Tom’s former wife Laurel, the Fairy Queen herself, an evil woman with many lifetimes of experience. In her quest, Polly must contend with many difficulties, including the divorce of her parents; the hysteria of her mother, Ivy; the inept parenting and absence of her father, Reg; the social stigma of divorce in her community; the threats from Laurel’s family, including those of her husband, Morton Leroy, and stepson, Seb; and the supernatural loss of part of her memory. When ten-year-old Polly is first introduced, she is rather shy and unimaginative (19). As Polly and Tom become friends, she learns about heroes from the books Tom sends her, unknowingly absorbing the knowledge she will need to save him. Polly must learn to reject those rules of society and gender that would defeat her purpose to save Tom. She must find her voice and learn to

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<sup>84</sup> For more discussion of *Fire and Hemlock*, see Martha P. Hixon’s essays, “The Importance of Being Nowhere,” in which she examines the intertwining ordinary, creative, and supernatural dimensions of the novel and also “Tam Lin, Fair Janet, and the Sexual Revolution,” which examines the sociocultural elements of the traditional ballad “Tam Lin” in *Fire and Hemlock*. See also Akiko Yamazaki’s essay that examines the intertextuality of *Fire and Hemlock* and C. W. Sullivan III’s essay on Jones’s use of traditional ballads in *Fire and Hemlock* as well as other texts.

be herself rather than submit to her mother's desires to domesticate her or to surrender completely to dormancy through being embarrassed by Laurel. Polly uses the knowledge that she gains from years of reading to outsmart a woman who is used to taking what she wants or needs from others without protest or consequence. Polly willingly forgets part of her life because Laurel embarrasses her, but later she must fight to regain her missing memories and understand the reason for their loss in time to save Tom.

In *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly must find her own authentic voice, and literacy helps her to do this, as I will demonstrate below. However, in order for readers to want to benefit from Polly's process in their own lives, that process must be realistic enough for them to want to emulate it. Like Polly, readers can create their own narratives and constructed Selves. Though *Fire and Hemlock* is a fantasy text, the fantastic itself is not necessary for acquiring the positive attributes of voice and agency; what is necessary is the process of literacy by which the character, Polly, and, subsequently, young readers can achieve these positive characteristics. Part of the critical literacy that twentieth century English children's fantasy teaches is that heroism is attainable.

At a crucial point in the novel, Polly enters what Roberta Seelinger Trites would identify as a "sleeping state," or time of passivity.<sup>85</sup> For Polly, this passivity occurs in the period when she forgets Tom Lynn. However, *Fire and Hemlock* deconstructs this classic literary device by demonstrating that Polly, though inactive, continues to retain what she has read and learned. Trites, in discussing feminism's contributions to children's literature, argues that "too often throughout history, female voices have been silenced [in]

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<sup>85</sup> See Trites, *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, where the author examines how voice, passivity, the role of girls, and relationships between females are reimagined in feminist children's novels, and how females writers empower readers through feminist ideology in their works.

traditional depictions of female passivity” (47), and that “those who are denied speech, denied language, are also denied their full potential as human” (62). Female voices are silenced when young female protagonists are in a dormant stage—asleep like Sleeping Beauty, or temporarily dead, like Snow White—and must be rescued by a male character. But Critical literacy gives voice to those who have been so silenced, humanizing those who have been marginalized. In contrast to the usual pattern, *Fire and Hemlock* uses the dormant stage, the time when Polly has lost her memories, as tool for this feminist protagonist.

Throughout *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly’s reading has tremendous impact on how she creates her literary and actual Self. On the day that she meets him, Polly tells Tom that the thing she likes to do best is playing a game called “being things.” Polly explains that playing “being things” is “making things like heroes up with other people, then being them” (27). Polly further describes the game as pretending “you’re not really you at all. In real life you’re really something quite different” (27). Polly, in constructing her narrative-self, is using her narrative and the books she reads to create the person she wishes to be in reality. The importance of names is discussed by Diana Wynne Jones in “The Heroic Ideal,” in which she explains that, as a child she “puzzled long over the story of Hero and Leander. Hero did nothing but let her lover do all that swimming. Obviously the girl was a wimp. But she had that *name*” (129, italics original). Polly names herself in the narrative she creates with Tom in *Fire and Hemlock*. Indeed, for Polly, the name she chooses contributes to who she is, who she wishes to be, and, when the name is changed, who she leaves behind. Jones herself has explained that her mention of and the influence of other texts in her own works is deliberate and that when readers read those other texts

later, “it will chime somewhere” because this is how we learn (Butler, “Interview” 172). It is through Polly’s created text, influenced by the stories she reads, that she can create the Self she wants to be. The recognition of intertextuality is only one aspect of the critical literacy in Jones’s works. Polly’s gradual empowerment is fostered through critical literacy because she models her own behavior after the characters in the books she reads. As discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, Maria Nikolajeva asserts that “Occasionally, readers can achieve a detailed retelling or answer the researcher’s questions, yet more subtle analytical tools reveal that they have in fact not understood the text” (146). But the lack of immediate utilization of what is read is hardly an indication that the information was completely missed by the reader; rather, the seed of knowledge is germinating, and will be used when the reader needs the information and once the imbedded concepts ripen.

Since Jones’s text valorizes reading and writing, it is fitting that *Fire and Hemlock* begins with nineteen-year-old Polly reading a book, in a scene that immediately implies that Polly is a studious young woman, well read enough to be a critical reader. The novel begins with Polly getting ready to return to Oxford University for her second year of studies. As she lies on her bed, Polly is reading the book *Times Out of Mind* rather than packing, while at the same time analyzing and critiquing the book she holds. She determines that, of the stories in the collection, “none of them were much good” and in particular, the story “‘Two-timer’ [...] about someone who went back in time to his own childhood and changed things, so that his life ran differently the second time [...] wasn’t worked out at all well” (12-13). In her recognizing that the story is not “worked out well,” *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates that Polly is aware of how stories should work and

that she knows enough about literature to make value judgments about what she reads. Additionally, Polly's acceptance to Oxford and her apparent success in her first year are also testament to her scholarly abilities. Even before the story shifts to the past and Polly's memories, it is clear that Polly is intelligent, analytical, and well read, making *Fire and Hemlock* an example of a book that subtly advocates literacy.

Polly the university student is well read by design rather than by accident, because over several years Tom sent her books, which she devoured. Throughout her early adolescence, the books that Polly reads—such as *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *The Lord of the Rings*—teach her not only about heroes, honor, and duty, but also about how stories function, including what makes a successful narrative. The books Polly receives from Tom are all from used bookshops that he visits in his travels. As becomes apparent in the narrative, Tom hopes these books will teach Polly how to save him. Polly appreciates the books and is delighted by Tom's clever method of avoiding notice by signing his notes with variations of his name: T. G. L. (99, 109, 178, 183, 185, 186), Mr. T. Geeling (187), T. O. Massling (187), Mr. Tomlin (187), A. Namesake (187), Lee Tin (187), and Tea-Gell (208) among others, suggesting further the meaningful range of language. *Fire and Hemlock* portrays critical literacy because it shows Polly becoming a voracious reader while learning vital information from the books even if she is unaware of the eventual benefits of that knowledge.

Polly becomes a sophisticated reader throughout the novel because this process allows her to become the hero she needs to be in order to save Tom; the process also encourages readers to themselves become literate. *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates how Polly improves her reading skills, her writing skills, and her imaginative power. When

Polly gets her first letter from Mr. Lynn at ten years old, the narrator explains that, “Polly, in those days, was slow at reading” (51). Her literacy sophistication emerges when, at Christmas, Polly receives a gift from Mr. Lynn that contains twelve books that encourage her to read. Polly

hovered [...] between *Five Children and It* and one most enticingly called *The Treasure Seekers*, and then picked up at random *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*. She began to read it. She read for the rest of Christmas [...] Polly read greedily, picking up another book as soon as she had finished the first one. She felt like a drug addict. She had read *The Box of Delights* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* too before she went home, and was beginning *The Sword in the Stone*. She read the rest in the week before school. Then she surfaced, with a flushed face and a deep sigh. The feast was over. (99-100)

And later still, over the summer holiday when Polly is staying with Granny, Polly “had got a reputation in the library for liking long, hard books. The librarian said to her, ‘Here’s a book you might like. [...] There is a shortened version, but I saved you the long one. Don’t be put off if you find it difficult at first.’ [...] It *was* difficult. [...] Polly read it twice” (136-37; italics original). This full-length text that Polly reads twice is Alexandre Dumas’s *The Three Musketeers*. Polly quickly learns to read better and faster, demonstrating here and throughout the novel a critical literacy lesson that reading inspires further reading, thus fostering literacy. For both Lucy in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and Polly, reading is transformative, as their actions demonstrate and as Lewis argues,

the first reading of some literary work is often, to the literary, an experience so momentous that only experiences of love, religion, or bereavement can furnish a standard of comparison. Their whole consciousness is changed. They have become what they were not before. (*Experiment 3*)

Lucy and Polly are not merely delighted or instructed by what they have read, they are transformed by it. Both of these characters have also given up the part of themselves connected with their respective texts, and have to wait—Lucy, until Aslan tells her the story, and Polly, until she recovers her memories—for the lost part of themselves to be restored. Once knowledge is lost, it is not easily regained, and once the opportunity to learn has passed, another opportunity may not present itself; thus critical literacy in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is the admonition to be mindful and open to the knowledge and opportunities for learning that we have.

Polly's literary experience is enhanced by the number and variety of books she reads. Many of the books Tom sends are classics with proven staying power and multigenerational appeal, including, among others, [*The Story of*] *The Treasure Seekers* and *Five Children and It* (E. Nesbit 1899, 1902), *The Wizard of Oz* (L. Frank Baum 1900), *The Box of Delights* (John Masefield 1935), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (C. S. Lewis 1950), *The Sword in the Stone* (T. H. White 1938), *The War of the Worlds* (H. G. Wells 1898), *Kim* (Rudyard Kipling 1901), *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and *The Man who was Thursday* (G. K. Chesterton 1904 and 1908), *The Thirty-nine Steps* (John Buchan 1915), and *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Philippa Pearce 1958). Though not all of the books are exclusively for children, each has contributed to and influenced

the Anglosphere through its exploration of imagination and what is possible and its demonstration of moral choice.

Many of the books Tom sends Polly are hero epics featuring a seemingly ordinary and often even dejected young person on his or her journey to greatness. While reading the books, Polly learns about heroes of epic narratives, many of which have contributed to British identity, such as *The Sword and the Stone*, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Polly's reading of fantasy in particular and her absorbing of positive character attributes she finds therein helps her to create herself by imagining what she wishes to be and then living out that vision in reality.<sup>86</sup> As Polly reads the books that Tom sends her over a period of five years, she ingests the knowledge of heroes that she will later call upon to help her in her quest to become a true hero and save Tom.

Reading is not the only skill that Polly improves upon throughout *Fire and Hemlock*. Reading so many books about heroes inspires Polly to write down the hero narrative that she and Tom began on the day they met. Reading so many stories has taught Polly, though covertly, how stories function and what makes a good story. Just as her reading becomes better with practice, so too does Polly's writing improve as she continues to write. After her Christmas book feast,

Polly was mortified that she had only sent Mr. Lynn a card for Christmas and he had sent her all those books. She had a letter, written before Christmas, ready for him but "when Polly looked at it, [the letter] seemed very thin and out of date. *The*

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<sup>86</sup> I have modified this conclusion from Jack Zipes's "Why Fantasy Matter Too Much," "We all have fantasy, and through fantasy we seek to encounter the voids in our lives by generating visions of how we want to live and realize whatever potential we have" (90).

*twelve books she had read since made her realise how little she had really said in it. There was a lot more she wanted to say anyway. So she crouched on the floor [...] and wrote three more whole pages, like a girl inspired.*” (100; emphasis added)

Reading motivates Polly to read more, but it also cultivates a desire in her to improve both the quantity and quality of her writing. Reading so much also makes Polly realize she has more to say than she thought. The depiction of Polly’s writing after she reads is tantamount to what many students are told: to be a better writer it is necessary to read more.

However, Polly is a realistic character, and so there comes a time when, in her enthusiasm for a book, her own writing depends too much on the motif and plot points of the authors she reads. When Polly reads *The Lord of the Rings*, she begins to model her narrative quest with Tom on Tolkien’s ring plot device. She writes a story and sends it to Tom, who writes back, “You stole that from Tolkien. Use your own ideas” (185).<sup>87</sup> Polly is angry that Tom is critical of her writing and story development. She receives a postcard from Tom apologizing and explaining to Polly, “you used to have much better ideas on your own” (186). Contrite, Polly does use her own specific ideas, while continuing to learn, through reading, about story structure in general. As Polly develops the hero narrative she began with Tom, she adds a quest object, but for a long time cannot think what it is. When she is finally sure about the quest object, Polly calls it the Obah Cyp, “an egg-shaped locket with [Tan Coul]’s hair in it,” which is a completely original idea (193). *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates that though a reader may learn from, be

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<sup>87</sup> Jones so disapproved of bad Tolkien imitations that she parodies them in the *Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1996). Jones herself attended Tolkien’s lectures on narrative when she was a student at Oxford.

influenced by, and admire a novel, to create her own narrative requires original imaginings; otherwise, the story is not her own and there is no cultivation of an authentic voice.

Polly's voice and writing skills develop as she continues to mature as a person, a reader, and a writer. In developing the narrative of her Self, Polly devises strategies to negotiate the surveillance of Morton Leroy, Laurel's current husband who serves as her agent against Tom Lynn. Polly devises a plan to invite Tom to see her performance, having her friend Nina address the envelope with the tickets and Nina's mother post the envelope (193-94). After the pantomime, Leroy threatens Polly to stay away from Tom. Polly, surprised by her fervent rebuff of his threats, is brave even though she is afraid, a necessary stance she learned while reading about heroes. As an act of defiance against Mr. Leroy and Laurel, and as a way to continue her narrative with Tom even if she does not see him often, Polly "began compiling a book called *Tales of Nowhere*" (205). Polly's growing confidence, sense of justice, and self-determination is demonstrated when she behaves like a hero<sup>88</sup> as she continues to work on the collective narrative even though she really is afraid of Morton Leroy. Polly's determination in the face of fear is an important attribute gained from her growing literary experience and hero literacy.

Polly's extensive reading of diverse books is an illustration of the power of texts. *Fire and Hemlock* also demonstrates how literacy connects the individual to society and society to the individual and how books, whether beneficent or maleficent, can take over a community. At their new school, Polly's friend Nina starts a superstition club after

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<sup>88</sup> Examining the hero status of Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* is the focus of my Master's Thesis, in which I make a similar argument. However, in that study my focus was very much on Polly's development as a traditional literary hero, not as here on how she achieves that status through her reading.

finding a book called *Popular Beliefs*. Nina decides that to join the club one has to believe in a superstition that is not in her book. Polly is a founding member because she believes the necklace that Granny gave her for her birthday is good luck. To Nina's delight,

the club became all the rage [...] And as the club grew, a wave of superstition grew with it, [...] until it mixed with everything everyone did. [...] The club gained a mighty boost from the approach of Hallowe'en. By then everyone in the school was a quivering mass of strange beliefs. [...] a magpie landed on the windowsill during School Assembly. Assembly stopped while everyone scuffled to cross fingers, touch wood, and intone, "Hello, Mr. Magpie, how is your wife?" (140-42)

Nina's superstition club begins with a book. The Superstition Club, though originating from a book, lacked the permanence of other text-based movements such as the crazes for Harry Potter, Game of Thrones, Twilight, and Lord of the Rings that have swept through the Anglosphere and beyond. The prominence of books throughout *Fire and Hemlock* signals—through, for example, Nina's book on superstitions and the reaction to it—that what people read, and what they believe of what they read, can have a powerful, sweeping impact not only on individuals but societies as well. Nina's superstition book begins a trend that sweeps through the school. It is only through adult intervention that the trend and the influence of the text begin to subside. Once interest in the superstition club fades, Polly goes on to a sports club, ultimately leaving the superstition club with ease. The inclusion of the various episodes having to do with the book *Popular Beliefs* in

*Fire and Hemlock* is important because it demonstrates the power of text—an issue that becomes vital to the resolution of the novel.

For Polly—and for readers, in general—the process of becoming literate and well read has the added advantage of learning about and thus avoiding social missteps. *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates that reading informs readers of subtle social nuances and shows why some things that seem acceptable really are not. For example, as Tom and Polly get to know one another, Tom asks Polly if she can call him something other than Mr. Lynn. Polly asks if “Uncle Tom” would be better. Upon asking if she had read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Tom tells Polly to “Read it. And find out why that name won’t do” (119). When Polly reads *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* she

understood why Mr. Lynn had not wanted her to call him Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom was a slave. Polly read to the place where the villainous Simon Legree came in, and suddenly realized she was reading “Leroy” every time the book said “Legree.” She stopped, appalled, and took the book back to the library. (136)

Leroy is the last name of Laurel’s husband, who along with Laurel and his son Seb, is trying to keep Polly away from Tom. In showing the substitution of “Leroy” for “Legree,” *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates that when we read we can make unconscious connections that prove to be beneficial. One such benefit is the introduction of the concept—and perhaps Polly’s nascent recognition as such—that Tom is somehow bound to Laurel, not as a slave but not as quite free either. Slavery was abolished in England decades before it was in the Americas, yet Tom Lynn still does not want his name associated with the representation of the title character in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. And though the events in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s classic abolitionist novel are set in another

country on a different continent, *Fire and Hemlock*'s mention of the anti-slavery masterpiece, and the message it presents, demonstrates the far-reaching and powerful influence that literature often has.

For Polly, as for many people who read, books are more than just products to consume or a means of gathering information. Books become part of who we are, and it is to books we turn when in need. Works of fantasy may be especially important when we are in need because, as Jack Zipes argues, “through fantasy we seek to encounter the voids in our lives” (“Why Fantasy” 90). Polly needs fantasy because she desires an escape from her reality—divorced parents, depressed mother, absent and indifferent father—and wants to fill the voids that her parents have created through their selfish actions. For example, when Polly’s mother Ivy and her new love interest and lodger David Bragg are arguing because Ivy is being possessive, distrustful, and jealous—just as she was with Polly’s father, Reg—Polly goes to her room and reads *The Castle of Adventure*<sup>89</sup> because it “almost distracted her from the sound of Ivy’s voice downstairs” (192). Polly knows that she can lose herself in the pages of a book and escape the chaos around her. Polly’s escape through reading is an act of empowerment because she is choosing to disengage, even from the passive act of listening.

Polly becomes more invested in what she reads as her reading improves, demonstrating the development of her empathy, which is another benefit of reading. Indeed, while staying at Granny’s house over the summer holiday, Polly consoles herself with reading. During this time, Polly becomes more emotionally attached to the stories and the characters in the books she reads. Polly

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<sup>89</sup> Enid Blyton, 1946.

got out *Black Beauty*, which made her cry outraged tears. [...] Then, trying for something for cheerful, she got out Sherlock Holmes stories and found herself wanting to shake Sherlock Holmes for being so superior. Since he played the violin and obviously looked rather like Mr. Lynn, he should have behaved more like Dr Watson. She wanted to shake Watson too. (135-36)

The characters in the books she reads affect Polly emotionally. She is saddened by their grief and annoyed at their arrogance. Polly's connection to the books she reads suggests that the books are becoming part of her identity. Significantly, even when Polly's memories have been altered and she has forgotten Mr. Lynn, she has not forgotten the books she read during the years of her friendship with him, or what she learned from those books. Polly "remembered reading those books, all of them, vividly, and, what was more, she had gone on remembering them even through the plain four years when her memories ran single again" (316). The knowledge from the books remains even though Polly's memory has been scrubbed, demonstrating that the books Polly reads and the knowledge she gains from those books are a part of her. Because the knowledge remains, Polly will be able to use it when she needs it, which is a fundamental lesson of *Fire and Hemlock*.

Books are crucial to the resolution of the *Fire and Hemlock*, which indicates that reading and literacy can aid in problem solving. What begins with a book the night before Polly returns to Oxford for her second year of studies also requires a book to complete. As the story progresses, Polly needs to decipher what Tom has been trying to tell her through the books he sent to her over the years. But first Polly has to remember what she did that made her forget Tom. Polly, when explaining to her grandmother about Tom

Lynn and how everyone has forgotten him, says, “I’m telling you [...] I did something awful, and I can’t remember what I did,” but her grandmother cannot help her until Polly figures it out (307-08). This interaction with Granny demonstrates that it is Polly who must discover the problem that she created before it can be reconciled, and that she must use her intellect and the knowledge she has acquired from the stories she read to solve the problem. As Polly is leaving for Oxford, the day after realizing that she has two sets of memories, Granny asks about the memories,

“What set you off?”

“A book,” said Polly. (32)

And as Polly was getting into Mr. Perks’ car, Granny notices that Polly is still troubled.

She looked at Polly again as she reached up to kiss Polly goodbye. “Take care,” she said. “And if a book set you off, a book may help again when you’ve fetched it out of you. Try it. Goodbye. And don’t forget to write.” (320)

Granny’s suggestion of using a book to resolve the mystery of forgetting Tom and the dual set of memories demonstrates once again that books are far more than products of consumption, fact gathering, or entertainment. *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates that there is a wealth of knowledge and information that is accessible in them, ready to be utilized.

As sometimes happens with knowledge, Polly uses what she has learned from her books in the wrong way. Polly’s misuse demonstrates the very human, realistic trait of selfishness, which for a time hinders her ultimate quest. Before her memory was altered, Polly cast a spell to spy on Tom. Because of her extensive reading of the fantastic, Polly has become well-versed in the tropes of magic and able to collect the ingredients needed for the spell, “amazed at the amount she had worked out and the things she knew, almost

by instinct” (342). Polly knew what to do because of the books she had read over the years; all the subtle knowledge made her actions second nature. Gaining knowledge through this instance of critical literacy in texts is possible because, as Maria Nikolajeva argues, “a book as an artifact has a number of unrealized possibilities, and it is up to the reader to ‘realize’ them, to extract a meaning already encoded and merely waiting to be uncovered” (“Meaning-Making” 150). The “meaning already encoded” and “waiting to be uncovered” is, I argue, the critical literacy present in twentieth century English children’s fantasy literature.

Because of the latent knowledge she has gained through reading, Polly knows how to proceed in spying on Tom. In the smoke the spell produced,

with a sort of flick, she seemed to be somewhere else where she could see perfectly well. It was a room she did not know. [...] When Tom got up from the large sofa in the strange room and came hurriedly towards her, she knew he could see her as if she were standing there. [...] She leaned cheerfully and cheekily round him to see [...] Laurel asleep and looking staggeringly, heart-rendingly beautiful. Polly said indignantly, [...] “How often do you get together with Laurel? [...] Does Laurel own you, or something?” (343-44)

The success of the spell affords Polly the opportunity to spy on and question Tom, but her indignation at seeing Laurel reveals her jealousy. As Laurel wakes, “Polly looked at her and met Laurel’s eyes. After that, Polly was only aware of Laurel and the empty tunnels of Laurel’s eyes. . . . Everything went a little muzzy then” (344, ellipsis original). Laurel’s awareness of Polly’s spell-induced presence and Polly’s gaze into the soullessness of Laurel begins the erasure of Polly’s memories. Polly’s realization—which

hurts her deeply—is that the spying “had been an awful thing to do. [...] It had not been knowledge she was after. She had been just like Ivy—a miser who thought her hoard [of happiness] was being taken away” (349). Polly’s misuse of knowledge from the texts she read consequently caused her to become that which she disliked in her mother: overbearing, jealous, and invasive.

Even though she knows she has misused the knowledge in the books she read, Polly also knows she must return to books and their knowledge in order to fulfill her heroic quest to save Tom. Once Polly finally remembers what she did to cause herself to forget Mr. Lynn, she returns home to read her grandmother the narratives out of *The Oxford Book of Ballads*. “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin” are ancient Scottish ballads about a man named Tom who is taken to the land of fairies to be the mate of the Fairy Queen. Thomas—Tam, in some dialects—has a true love in his own world, Janet, and she must figure out how to save Thomas from his predicament. Significantly, Polly believes that reading holds the key to saving Tom. In a pivotal moment, as Polly and Granny are discussing the ballads “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin,” Granny says,

“Read me the charm out of the second song again.”

“Charm?” said Polly.

“Goose,” said Granny. “The bit that sticks out from the rest. [...] Here we are [...] *The night it is good Hallowe’en / The fairy folk do ride, / And they that would their true-love win / At Miles Cross they must bide*. There’s what you do. Plain as pikestaff.” [...] She seemed so certain that Polly took the book back and looked at the rest. The instructions, once you began to see them as that, were very clear and detailed. (358-59)

Because of Granny's comment and the literacy that Granny herself possesses, Polly begins to look at the stories of "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin" in *The Oxford Book of Ballads* in a new light. Polly now sees the "instructions" to wait for the fairy folk at Miles Cross on Halloween in order to win her true love, which in turn allows her to view her narrative with Tom differently and shows her the next step she must take to save him. However, Polly recognizes that these instructions are not to be followed verbatim but require critical thinking on her part, an active rather than passive stance to the text. Of extracting and using meaning from texts, Nikolajeva explains that

readers do not simply retrieve the preset meaning from the book, but the meaning is created from their immediate and continuous reactions to what they read, including emotional reactions, such as empathy, sympathy, and antipathy; and cognitive reactions, that is, understanding the text's deeper dimensions.

("Meaning-Making"151)

Therefore, part of the critical literacy involves the reader's realization that meaning is made through an active and nuanced engagement with a text. Polly's considerable reading over the years, along with her conversation with her grandmother, allows her to understand that this situation with Tom and Laurel is another version of an ancient story. Polly is now sure that although Janet, hero of the ancient ballad "Tam Lin," was able to save her Tom by holding on to him, she will have to do something slightly different, because this is a different time and place from "Tam Lin," despite the similar scenario of a sacrifice to the Fairy Queen.<sup>90</sup> Just as Tom had admonished her to use her own ideas

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<sup>90</sup> For more information about Jones's use of the ballad of "Tam Lin" in relation to *Fire and Hemlock*, see, for example, Jones's article "The Heroic Ideal," Sullivan's "Traditional Ballads and Modern Children's Fantasy," Hixon's "'Tam Lin,' Fair Janet, and the Sexual Revolution," and Butler's "Alan Garner's *Red*

rather than rely on Tolkien's when developing their narrative, Polly must find a way to combat Laurel that is unique to this situation. Polly's extensive reading is vital to Tom's understanding of his predicament as well, even her reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Had Polly not read Stowe's novel and indicated to Tom that she had unconsciously substituted the name of one bad man for another, of Morton Leroy for Simon Legree, Tom would probably not have understood that Laurel had substituted his own life for that of his brother's, that she had bound him, and that she meant to kill him eventually in order to preserve her own immortality.

The knowledge gained through literacy helps Polly to problem-solve as she revisits her literary experience while trying to work out what she can do to help Tom. Even the music being played in the background informs her ideas. Polly

found her mind dwelling on Nowhere, as she and Tom used to imagine it. You slipped between Here and Now to the hidden Now and Here—as Laurel had once told another Tom, there was that bonny path in the middle—but you did not necessarily leave the world. Here was a place where the quartet was grinding out dissonances. There was a lovely tune beginning to emerge from it. Two sides of Nowhere, Polly thought. One really was a dead end. The other was the void that lay before you when you were making up something new out of ideas no one else had quite had before. That's a discovery I must do something about, Polly thought, as the lovely tune sang out fully once and then fell away to end, as the piece had begun, in a long, sullen cello note. And her mind was made up. (377)

Reading as much as she does shows Polly how stories function, allowing her to create her own story out of the cacophony of so many other competing narratives. Writing out her narrative shows Polly how difficult it is to make a story work, but that with practice, and much reading, it is possible to create something new and beneficial as it adds to the collective body of knowledge found in stories. And so Nowhere is like Polly's narrative: "something new out of ideas no one else had quite before." Thus it is important throughout the novel and to the resolution for Polly to develop her own voice and her own ideas. *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates through Polly's acquisition of power—along with its misuse, loss, and redemption—that with extensive reading one gains knowledge, but having that knowledge is not enough. The abuse of knowledge often has devastating consequences. *Fire and Hemlock* also shows, if subtly, that even though Polly is not consciously developing her store of literacy and literary knowledge, she is through her continued reading constantly adding to her knowledge base, which is important not only for her studies at Oxford but also for helping Tom escape from Laurel. Polly's positive relationship with literacy and literary knowledge demonstrates how the imbedded nature of a text, along with the reader's experience of that text, can impact the behavior and attitudes of the reader and reveal the presence of critical literacy.

Of the authors I discuss, perhaps none provides readers with so many vital tools to negotiate the twentieth-century world than Diana Wynne Jones. Jones's young protagonist Polly demonstrates the successful negotiation of a changing world by employing literacy, reading, and the acquisition of positive traits from the books that she reads. Most importantly, Polly's use of narration as a means of building her rhetorical power is key to her taking an active role in her society. In *Fire and Hemlock*, shifting

attitudes about gender roles, ideas about heroism, and a growing sense of justice contribute to Polly's narrative about her Self and shapes her construction of her more ideal Self. Critical literacy in *Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates the importance of the symbiotic relationship between the construction of one's personal narrative and the construction of Self.

Many of the societal changes that influence Polly's life are caused by the shifting attitudes about gender roles in the twentieth century. Polly's mother, Ivy, is caught between her perceived obligation to the domestic space and her tacit desire to work outside the home and cultivate a nondomestic identity. In the home, Ivy attempts to create the perfect environment, believing that her hard work in achieving this perfection will earn her the gratification she desires but cannot attain. For example, Ivy decorated their home with "bright flowered wallpaper with matching curtains [...] pulling the curtains was like pulling the walls across the windows" (48). The effect of matching curtains and wallpaper, though, is that there is an illusion of being enclosed in a box—a pretty one, perhaps, but a box all the same, confined, stifled, and hidden away. While focusing on the domestic, Ivy forces domesticity on Polly with toys such as a sewing machine, dolls (49), and a doll house (99). Yet Polly's own preference is her friend Nina's toys—cars, action figures, Lego bricks, and electronic machines (48-49). Ivy, self-confined in the domestic sphere, attempts to trap Polly there as well through an imposed rehearsal of domesticity with toys, which is one of the societal constructs with which Polly must contend. Polly intuitively feels that there is more for her than the domestic sphere that Ivy prizes, because she has

read about female heroes in her favorite story (29).<sup>91</sup> Having a literary role model is important to Polly's creation of her Self.

*Fire and Hemlock* establishes early on that Polly utilizes narrative to imagine herself as something "other." Polly's burgeoning knowledge of heroes, as learned from her books, assists her in creating the other Self she chooses to become. The novel demonstrates the connection between reading and becoming in the creation of the Self when Tom asks Polly what name she will go by when they are in their literary guise, to which she replies,

"Hero," said Polly. "It *is* a real name," she protested, as [Mr. Lynn] swung down to look at her. "It's a lady in my book that I read every night. Someone swam the sea all the time to visit her."

"I know," said Mr. Lynn. "I was just surprised that *you* did."

"And it's a sort of joke," Polly explained. "I know a lot about heroes, because of my book."

"I see you do," said Mr. Lynn, smiling rather. (29)<sup>92</sup>

Polly is confident that she has chosen the right name for their narrative, because if she is going to be a hero then Hero is an ideal name.<sup>93</sup> One doubts that Polly would have known

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<sup>91</sup> The story is undoubtedly "Hero and Leander," though it is not explicitly named in *Fire and Hemlock*. Jones references "Hero and Leander" and the name of the protagonist Hero in "The Heroic Ideal" (129).

<sup>92</sup> The story Polly is referencing is surely the Greek myth "Hero and Leander," though this information is never explicitly acknowledged.

<sup>93</sup> Jones explains in "The Heroic Ideal" that "my grandmother gave me a book she had won at the age of six as a Sunday School prize (which she confessed she had chosen for its grand and incomprehensible title). It was called *Epics and Romances of the Middle Ages*. It contained almost every heroic legend from Northern Europe that was not part of the Arthurian cycle: the Charlemagne cycle, the stories connected with Dietrich of Berne, the entire Nibelung cycle, including the bits that Wagner did not use, the story of Beowulf and of Wayland Smith, and many more, all illustrated with wonderful woodcuts but otherwise in no way adapted for children. I read it until it fell to pieces" (131).

about the name Hero had she not read about heroes every night, as evidenced by Tom's amazement at and appreciation of her knowledge. The name Polly chooses reinforces the identity she is creating through the narrative.

Polly is made realistic through her need to learn, her imperfections, and her struggle to develop a true Self. *Fire and Hemlock* portrays Polly as a typical young girl who struggles to work out the details of the narrative game she and Tom invent, who feels obligated to justify the name she chooses, and who is frustrated when language fails and Tom does not quite understand what she is trying to say. If *Fire and Hemlock* portrayed Polly as completely proficient in making up her narrative and explaining it to Tom, Polly's character would not grow and the potential lessons from Polly's development would be lost. As a character, Polly would be stagnant and would not go through the processes of learning to use her own voice and trusting her own ideas, which is essential for development of voice and identity. But Polly's acquisition of knowledge and her evolution as a reader and writer do not occur in an unrealistic vacuum; Polly learns through reading and writing and seeks assistance when she needs it, even at the end of the novel. *Fire and Hemlock's* demonstration of Polly's development—as a reader, writer, athlete, hero—is realistic because the development of any skill takes time and practice, as does the development of a Self.

*Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates the rhetorical power of creating the Self when Polly, seeing herself as a hero-in-training through her hero narrative with Mr. Lynn, constructs her narrative self as a model for her actual Self. And after reading the dozen books Mr. Lynn sent her for Christmas “Polly began training seriously to be a hero” (101). Polly's training includes engaging in activities she sets for herself such as running

around the playground (101), and gauging the strength of her muscles by testing “them every night by trying to lift her bed in the air, all four legs at once” (101-02). But Polly’s dedication to hero training is problematic for several reasons. For one thing, Nina, having long had much influence over Polly, is not pleased that Polly joined the Athletics Club and orders Polly to stop. Nina, using a coercion that has worked in the past, threatens to stop being friends if Polly refuses to do as Nina demands. To Nina’s horror, Polly replies, “‘All right. Don’t be.’ It gave her a savage, free feeling to say it and then turn away, leaving Nina gaping” (101). Standing up to Nina is a display of Polly’s newfound assertiveness, developed in part through her reading about heroes and constructing her own hero-narrative with herself as the subject. The creation and development of Polly’s new Self is an example of critical literacy in this text, which can serve as a role model for readers who may have had a similar experience of manipulation. Standing up to a friend who would present such an ultimatum is difficult, though Polly’s example demonstrates confidence and self-reliance.

Not everyone is pleased when a previously timid and meek girl gains agency. While Polly’s acquisition of positive traits is good for her, her interest in sports has also attracted negative attention. As Polly begins playing football at school, she is jeered at by Mira Anderton, the school bully. *Fire and Hemlock*’s depiction of Polly’s reaction is believable, because

Polly was frightened at first. Then she straightened her shoulders and reminded herself that bravery was what training was all about. She was not going to be scared of Mira. She supposed she had better fight Mira at once and get it over. Then she had second thoughts. Heroes do not fight for themselves, but for other

people. I'll wait until she does something to someone else, Polly thought. Then we'll see. (102)

Like Caspian combatting Gumpas in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Polly waits for the *kairos* moment—the most advantageous moment to act. Polly further considers what makes a hero, based on what she has read, and “said to herself, it’s not just strength that heroes need. They need courage and good skills and timing. They need something to make the adrenaline really flow” (102). Polly finally confronts Mira when she catches her bullying another child. In her surprise at being challenged by the once timid Polly,

Mira went over backwards into a puddle, and the only thing she managed to do to Polly was give her an accidental slap in the face as she fell. Polly’s nose wept some drops of liquid. She wiped it off and looked at it as she walked away. It looked like blood to her, but it could have been adrenaline, and she was on the whole pleased at the way her training was coming on. (103)

Polly is as concerned with honor as she is with gaining strength. She embodies heroism, making sure that her motives are pure and altruistic. Polly avoids being just another bully by emulating the heroes in her books. She knows the difference between being someone who is merely strong and being a hero because of the books she has read. She knows that she need only wait for the right moment to act in order to confront Mira, because Polly knows that bullies are cowards and will act only when they believe there is no one nearby who is willing to challenge them. As Polly becomes more assertive vocally, she also becomes more assertive physically, but she tempers this behavior with the knowledge that she must act to benefit her community rather than for self-gratification. The critical literacy in the passage above is that Polly understands that being just the right sort of

person—a true hero who is concerned with honor and justice—is as important as being physically strong.

*Fire and Hemlock* demonstrates the importance of every facet of being a hero, even those that may be uncomfortable. Polly takes every aspect of being a hero very seriously, so when she is sent to the Headmistress of her school for fighting Mira she cannot lie to the school authority when she is asked why her recent behavior has changed so drastically. Polly considers that “this question seemed to call for the truth. Heroes have to be honourable. ‘I’m training to be a hero [...] the adrenaline has to flow” (104). Polly knows what a hero is because of the books she has read; however, she also understands the difference between a hero and a heroine, as “Polly came away from the Headmistress to find that the rest of the school regarded her as a heroine. This is nothing like being a hero, which is inside you. This was public” (104). Polly, being a true hero, sees her deeds and actions as altruistic, unmotivated by any desire for praise or even recognition. This increased awareness, or self-knowledge, is markedly different from Polly’s dearth of self-awareness in the beginning, and is further evidence of her creation and adoption of a new Self—one that is better able to negotiate the challenges of her culture and personal relationships. Polly sets a goal to become more physically strong and then she uses her strength for defense rather than to intimidate others, including bullies. Polly’s actions provide critical literacy with a course of action to become physically stronger and metaphysically altruistic.

Polly, like her literary heroes, wants and seeks justice, even for herself. When Polly arrives home with a letter from the Headmistress and two black eyes, her mother, as on many other occasions, greets Polly with the accusatory question: “What have you been

up to *now*?” (50.) Interestingly, Polly’s attitude toward this accusation is telling of the influences that reading and hero-training have had on her: “It occurred to Polly, as she handed the letter over, that Mum always seemed to expect her to have been up to something. It annoyed her—not for now, but for all the other times in the past when she had been quite innocent” (105). Polly, having finally done something worthy of her mother’s accusative question, realizes that she has been suffering injustice for a very long time. If Polly remained unconcerned about the fairness of her own situation, she could not truly be a hero for others, because being a hero means defending those who are defenseless, including her former self. This development is crucial when Polly finally discovers that her long-time friend Tom is the one whom she must save.

Young characters in narratives of the twentieth century English children’s fantasy determine the reliability, trustworthiness, and benefits of the texts they encounter. The critical literacy in these works, as demonstrated through my discussion of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, is found in the situations in which young characters learn to make value judgments about the texts with which they engage. In this fantasy narrative and others I discuss, the process of learning *how* to make value judgments, such as determining the *ethos* and *logos* of a text, provides low-stakes lessons that the reader may apply to real-life situations. The texts further demonstrate that learning to read and write effectively have value—that increased literacy leads to becoming voiced, autonomous, and empowered individuals. Furthermore, these narratives provide critical literacy through the use of rhetorical devices that present literacy and critical thinking in a positive light. Depicting the characters’ formulae for evaluating texts, as well as demonstrating the practical and positive value of literacy, provides the lessons and tools

necessary to encourage young readers to successfully navigate the complex worlds of the texts, the latter twentieth century, and beyond.

## CHAPTER VI J. K. ROWLING AND TEXTUAL VALUE JUDGMENTS

Literature for young people often features characters who go through a process of achieving autonomy, voice, a measure of freedom, and the opportunity to develop their own powers of logic and reason so that they may become thinking individuals. Adult characters are often present to offer guidance to the young during this process, to keep them safe, and to ensure their well-being. Such guardianship includes warnings about what is or might be dangerous and instructions on how to proceed if faced with a dangerous object or situation. Just as in the real world, in literary works for young people there are texts that are considered dangerous, misleading, or manipulative and thus inappropriate for young characters. The text I examine in this chapter, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), is one in which young characters must learn to distinguish between texts that are reliable, trustworthy, and beneficial, and those that are exploitive, deceitful, and malicious. The characters in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* learn to assess a text. The suspect text can be examined for its logic and whether or not any argument in the text contains logical fallacies. The critical literacy in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and others that present suspect texts<sup>94</sup> lies in the demonstration of characters engaging with various texts, learning to recognize that there are reliable and unreliable texts, and using their own powers of logic to make a value judgment as to the trustworthiness of a text.

Joanne Rowling, who publishes under the name J. K. Rowling, was born near Bristol, England in 1965. Rowling, like Lewis and Jones, had access to an abundance of

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<sup>94</sup> Such works include Diana Wynne Jones's *Fire and Hemlock* (1985) discussed in chapter 5, Terry Pratchett's *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents* (2001), Chris Wooding's *Poison* (2003), and China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* (2007).

books when she was young. She attended Exeter University where she studied French and Classics. After University, Rowling worked at various jobs in London. Rowling moved to Portugal to teach English but returned to the UK to live in Edinburgh. Her literary success was achieved through her Harry Potter series about a young wizard, and though she has also published other books for children, she has also published books for adults under her own name and under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith.<sup>95</sup>

It is perhaps inevitable that with the incredible commercial success of the Harry Potter franchise there is an abundance of literary scholarship on the texts. Indeed, several books have been published about the Harry Potter series that focus on such topics as religion and spirituality in Harry Potter,<sup>96</sup> the films adaptations of the books,<sup>97</sup> and literary works that influence Harry Potter.<sup>98</sup> Scholarship on *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* is often couched with discussion of other books in the series or with works from other authors. Scholar Lauren Byler discusses the potential objectification of Harry because of his fame (120)—a fame he acquired as an infant but never sought to fortify. Jessica Seymour uses Game Theory in her analysis of the Harry Potter series and argues that Harry’s friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger become surrogate siblings for Harry and that his relationship with the Weasley family is strengthened in

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<sup>95</sup> J. K. Rowling, [www.jkrowling.com/about/](http://www.jkrowling.com/about/).

<sup>96</sup> Some titles include *Looking for God in Harry Potter* (2006) by John Granger, *Field Guide to Harry Potter* (2007) by Colin Duriez, *The Lord of the Hallows: Christian Symbolism and Themes in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter* (2009) by Denise Roper, and *Life, Death, and Resurrection in Harry Potter* (2009) by John Killinger.

<sup>97</sup> Titles include *Harry Potter: Film Wizardry* (2010) by Brian Sibley, *Transforming Harry: The Adaptation of Harry Potter in the Transmedia Age* (2018) edited by John Alberti and P. Andrew Miller, and *Inside the World of Harry Potter: Critical Essays on the Books and Films* (2018) edited by Christopher E. Bell.

<sup>98</sup> Titles include *The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter: A Treasury of Myths, Legends, and Fascinating Facts* (2004) by David Colbert, *Unlocking Harry Potter: Five Keys for the Serious Reader* (2007) by John Granger, and *Harry Potter’s Bookshelf: The Great Books Behind the Hogwarts Adventures* (2009) also by Granger.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, a juxtaposition to his actual—yet abusive—relatives, the Dursleys (456).

Education is a well-discussed theme of scholarly criticism of the Harry Potter books, as the arc story takes place in Harry’s secondary school years, up to Year 13 (6<sup>th</sup> Form). While the whole of the story centers on Harry and his nemesis Voldemort, the setting of most of the stories—until the final book of the series—is Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where Harry attends classes on subjects such as Potions, Herbology, History of Magic, and Defence Against the Dark Arts. The Harry Potter series is itself educational at least in the respect that it exposes readers to Latin in some of the spells that students learn and use.<sup>99</sup> Literary criticism of the Harry Potter series with an emphasis on schooling, learning, and literacy includes Signe Cohen’s article, which traces the mythologies that inform the series and how these varied ancient myths are modernized to emphasize diversity within the series. Heather A. Haas’s article examines the proverbs used in the Harry Potter series, as compared to J. R. R. Tolkien’s use of proverbs. And Boon Liang Chua examines the use of cryptography in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, arguing that the literary event can be used in middle school classrooms to teach students about encryption, mathematical function and their inverses, and mathematical concepts and algorithms.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Some examples of the spells said in Latin and their English translation include *Crucio*/I torment, *Accio*/I summon, *Expecto Patronum*/I await a protector, *Lumos*/light, and *Nox*/night.

<sup>100</sup> For more information on Harry Potter and schooling, learning, and literacy, see, for example, Farah Mendlesohn’s article “Crowning the King,” in which she examines ideology in the Harry Potter series, even if that ideology is unintentional; Renée Dickerson’s article in which she discusses teaching pedagogies at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and argues that Headmaster Dumbledore is perhaps the best teacher because of his methods; and Edward Duffy’s article which highlights Rowling’s writing mechanics and argues that the flow of the writing is unobtrusive to the reader, yet a model for young readers and future writers.

In literary works for young people that feature such potentially harmful or malevolent texts, it is usually adult characters who warn the child protagonist(s) about these untrustworthy texts, even though these same adult characters often overlook or dismiss why the young characters desire access to this unsuitable material, and these reasons are more important than warnings and rules. What the adult characters in these situations overlook, as Alison Lurie asserts, is that “children already know some of the secrets of adult life of which they are supposed to be ignorant” (xii). If the young characters already know that there is information that they need in books that are forbidden to them, then there is no more need—or at least a greatly reduced need—for the adults to protect young characters through denying access to these forbidden texts.

There are degrees of perceived inappropriateness of texts for young characters, which create many reasons for restricting access to certain books. Sometimes child characters are forbidden access to certain texts because adult characters believe that these texts contain knowledge from which the child must be protected, either because the child may not yet possess the sophistication to understand any subtlety found therein or, perhaps more often, because the text might be considered dangerously misleading. Along with overly sophisticated and misleading texts, there are untrustworthy texts that often appear benign or even benevolent, though they are in fact manipulative and conniving and so these texts, too, can be dangerous. Other texts can be unreliable only because they convey misinformation. In the Restricted Section of the Library at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the Harry Potter series, for example,

Harry wandered over to the Restricted Section [...] Unfortunately, you needed a specially signed note from one of the teachers to look in any of the restricted

books and he knew he'd never get one. These were the books containing powerful Dark Magic never taught at Hogwarts and only read by older students studying advanced Defense against the Dark Arts. (*Philosopher's* 145-46)

Harry later uses his invisibility cloak to sneak into the Restricted Section to search for information on Nicolas Flamel (*Philosopher's* 151-52); Hermione flatters Defense against the Dark Arts teacher Gilderoy Lockhart into signing special permission for her to access the Restricted Section (*Chamber* 122-23); and Harry is given special permission to use the Restricted Section to help him with one of the tasks of the Triwizard Tournament (*Goblet* 121). While child characters must make choices about which texts to believe and rely on, these characters often face the consequences of wrong decisions. Likewise, there may be times when children are forbidden access to texts by adult authority figures, yet the child protagonist is forced to either circumvent the adults or forgo whatever information might be found in the forbidden text. Child characters, when faced with the decision to access forbidden or dangerous information or to forgo that information, demonstrate the process through which readers may also learn to make important decisions. By witnessing the decision-making process in a low-stakes fictional environment, with its experiments with logic, trial, and error, readers learn the skills by which they may negotiate their own situations, learn to make decisions responsibly, and work out solutions to their own problems.

Books that demonstrate how to negotiate situations and work out solutions to problems have a long history in children's literature. Indeed, many of the most enduring works of children's literature are in fact reactions to their respective cultures and societies. As children's literature critic Alison Lurie claims, "Most of the great works of

juvenile literature [...] express ideas and emotions not generally approved of or even recognized at the time” (4). Books for children that teach young readers to circumvent or ignore the rules and warnings of adults in certain situations teach readers to think for themselves and consider their particular circumstances when defying adults and their rules. While adult audiences may not agree with the ideas put forward in books that teach young readers to ignore adult-imposed rules, I would question how many adults have themselves ignored or circumvented societal rules because these rules failed to take into account, understandably, every possible situation. This is not to say that we do not need rules and should ignore them. I am simply pointing out that the situations we all face are unique and sometimes incompatible with universal rules, and so knowing how to make decisions of when to circumvent authority is a valuable tool.

In twentieth century English children’s fantasy, young characters have or achieve a great measure of autonomy, as I have been demonstrating in the previous chapters. But with autonomy comes the need to protect oneself. While teaching about literacy is important, demonstrating the need to critically evaluate texts is also imperative for both the fictional characters and for the young reader. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* demonstrates that written works cannot always be trusted and that some texts must be ignored so that the young protagonist can find a better solution. Like many forbidden objects, such forbidden texts become more appealing. Because twentieth century English children’s fantasy provides readers with models of active, voiced, thinking young characters, readers have the opportunity to observe the process of learning how to distinguish between times when they should heed adults’ warnings or proceed on their own, and how to judge the trustworthiness of the texts they encounter.

The danger of engaging with texts that are untrustworthy is a central theme in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), the second book of the Harry Potter sequence. In this installment, the legendary Chamber of Secrets is opened in the wizarding school, Hogwarts, and various students—especially those from non-magical families—and other residents are attacked, as the school is seemingly under threat from a dark force. This Chamber is rumored to have been built by Salazar Slytherin, cofounder of Hogwarts and eponymous founder of the House of Slytherin, from which a disproportionate number of bad wizards have come (*Philosopher's* 61-62). Central to the plot of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* is a mysterious diary, which is later discovered to have been written fifty years earlier by Tom Riddle, the infamous Slytherin alumnus who later becomes Harry's arch-nemesis, Lord Voldemort. While one may argue that the diary is a ghost, it is also a text—a codex—that is used to convey information to the reader. The essence of Tom Riddle that is part of the diary is a memory (227), preserved in an object called a Horcrux, containing a piece of his soul that has been separated from the rest through dark magic and the act of murder (*Half-Blood Prince* 467-68). Additionally, Tom Riddle also manifests himself independently of the diary (231). The consequences of trusting this problematic book—nefariously delivered to the unsuspecting Ginny Weasley at Flourish and Blotts Bookseller in Diagon Alley—are suffered by many of the characters in this installment of the Harry Potter series, suggesting that malevolent texts can have far-reaching consequences.

How a text is acquired may indicate the trustworthiness of that text, meaning—especially in a magical world—that if an object appears unexpectedly and without explanation, it might be harmful. As revealed at the novel's end, the diary mysteriously

comes into the possession of Hogwarts student Ginny Weasley, sister of Harry's best friend Ron, when she finds it among her schoolbooks. Harry, however, finds it in the lavatory of Moaning Myrtle, the ghost of a Hogwarts student who died at the school fifty years before the action in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. In a flooded bathroom at Hogwarts, Harry and Ron find a "small, thin book [with] a shabby black cover [that] was as wet as everything else in the bathroom" (172). In an instance of critical literacy, as Harry moves to retrieve the book,

. . . Ron suddenly flung out an arm to hold him back.

"What?" said Harry.

"Are you mad?" said Ron. "It could be dangerous."

"Dangerous?" said Harry, laughing. "Come off it, how could it be dangerous?"

"You'd be surprised," said Ron, who was looking apprehensively at the book. "Some of the books the Ministry's confiscated—Dad's told me—there was one that burned your eyes out. And everyone who read *Sonnets of a Sorcerer* spoke in limericks for the rest of their lives. And some old witch in Bath had a book that you could *never stop reading!* You just had to wander around with your nose in it, trying to do everything one-handed." (172)

In the wizarding world—as in the real world—there are untrustworthy, even dangerous books that should be handled cautiously or avoided completely. Ron, who knows much more about the wizarding world because, unlike Harry, he grew up in a wizarding family, gives Harry adequate justification for leaving the book alone or at least being wary of it.

But the innocuous appearance of the book draws Harry into its trap. Harry picks up the object and sees

at once that it was a diary, and the faded year on the cover told him it was fifty years old. He opened it eagerly. On the first page he could just make out the name “T. M. Riddle” in smudged ink. [...] Harry peeled the wet pages apart. They were completely blank. There wasn’t the faintest trace of writing on any of them, not even “Auntie Mabel’s birthday”, or “dentist, half past three”. “He never wrote in it,” said Harry, disappointed. (172-73)

Rather than heeding Ron’s advice, Harry not only picks up the diary but keeps it, even though it seems to be useless and unused. Harry also fails to consider that someone—later found to be Ginny Weasley—deliberately attempted to discard the diary by leaving it in the bathroom that Moaning Myrtle haunts and students avoid. Part of Harry’s curiosity about the diary is that it is fifty years old. Fifty years ago is when the Chamber of Secrets was last opened at Hogwarts, so the turning up of the diary is fortuitous for Harry’s investigation into past events. Finding the diary ultimately proves to demonstrate the ambiguity of unpredictable texts, how a seemingly innocuous text may be untrustworthy and possibly dangerous, and yet also how curiosity about an (un)reliable text can lead to significant discoveries. Harry’s decision keep the diary eventually leads to his discovery of its magical properties. Knowing what the diary is and engaging with it contribute to the resolution of the narrative, with positive outcomes for many of the characters. Harry’s decision to ignore Ron’s warnings, and his subsequent investigation of the diary, demonstrates how to use texts and how much to trust them.

The diary's innocuous appearance hides the malevolent true intent of the creator of this magical object: to vanquish those deemed by some as inferior. Trusting this manipulative text has had severe consequences and put a number of characters in peril: Ginny has her mental stability threatened and then even her life; Mrs. Norris, the cat of Hogwarts caretaker Argus Filch, is petrified (106); students Colin Creevey (135-36), Justin Finch-Fletchley (151), and Hermione Granger and Penelope Clearwater (189-91) are also petrified, along with Gryffindor ghost Nearly Headless Nick (151); and Hogwarts is threatened with indefinite closure because of the seemingly unstoppable attacks on students. Furthermore, Harry's use of the manipulative diary sends Rubeus Hagrid to the wizarding prison, Azkaban (193-96) and costs Professor Dumbledore his post as Headmaster of Hogwarts (194-96), at least temporarily. Though these consequences are unintended, they would not have happened had Harry—and earlier Ginny—refused to interact with the untrustworthy and manipulative diary. While Harry's curiosity about the diary and his attempt to discover what makes it special is admirable, the critical literacy for readers lies in Harry's mistake of trusting a mysterious magical object rather than his own experience and knowledge.

Even though things ultimately work out for Harry, his discovery of how the fifty-year-old diary communicates with present day Hogwarts students should have spurred Harry to inform someone—an adult—of his discovery.<sup>101</sup> Harry accidentally learns more about the mysterious diary when ink spills over the contents of his schoolbag but does not

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<sup>101</sup> In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), the third installment in the series, Professor Lupin tells Harry he is astounded that Harry did not turn in the Marauder's Map when he found it and confiscates it (213), but Harry's misdeeds prompt Lupin to watch the map and thus to spot Peter Pettigrew (254). Part of Harry's rule breaking is his learning how far to take the initiative.

mark the diary (178-79). Even now, seeing that the diary is more than it appears to be and having no way of judging the *ethos* of the text or that of its owner, Harry continues to ignore Ron's previous warnings about dangerous magical objects and begins experimenting with the diary. Curious about the diary's lack of ink from the earlier spillage, Harry writes in the diary,

"My name is Harry Potter." The words shone momentarily on the page and they too sank without a trace. Then, at last, something happened. Oozing back out of the page, in his very own ink, came words Harry had never written. "*Hello Harry Potter. My name is Tom Riddle. How did you come by my diary?*" (179; italics in the original)

Rather than being concerned about the seeming cognitive awareness of the diary, Harry interacts with the enchanted book, forgetting in his excitement Ron's cautionary warnings. Harry continues to engage with the diary, writing in it that someone tried to dispose of the diary and that Harry found it. Riddle piques Harry's curiosity, writing,

*Lucky that I recorded my memories in some more lasting way than ink. But I always knew that there would be those who would not want this diary read. [...] this diary holds memories of terrible things. Things which were covered up.*

*Things which happened at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.* (179-84)

Although the diary seems to inform Harry of the events of the past, the descriptive "terrible" that Riddle uses is a subjective term that shifts meaning from person to person. Memories are also subjective and rely on perception, so they are also biased. The enchanted diary is a portal that allows Riddle to take Harry into the past. Under the power of this misleading text, Harry witnesses a memory of Riddle's that implies that Hagrid,

beloved gamekeeper of Hogwarts and Harry's friend, was responsible for opening the Chamber of Secrets fifty years earlier.

Even though Hagrid's moral character and loyalty have never been questioned by either Dumbledore or Harry, Harry is now filled with doubt. An example of critical literacy in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* is that Harry fails to consider the *ethos*, or persuasive character, of either the author of the diary itself, the text, or the memories found therein. Had Harry considered the *ethos* of either Riddle or the claim that is made through the diary in comparison to what he knows about Hagrid, he would have questioned Riddle's memory of events that occurred fifty years in the past. Harry also fails to question the reliability of memory itself—that memories, including recent memories, are subject to imperfection, misinterpretation, and falsification, even without motives such as manipulation and deception. A diary of memories, and perhaps even more so one that is so clearly enchanted, is subject to the same perils as regular memories. However, that the diary exists at all, and in its deviously innocuous form, should also make it more suspect than other books because of Riddle's words, "I always knew there would be those who would not want this diary read" (179). Riddle does not say why some would not want the diary read; however, the implication is that the diary holds a secret truth. There is, however, nothing in the text to indicate that the information that the diary contains is true and accurate rather than false and misleading. Riddle's enticing words make Harry believe that the diary holds an ultimate truth because someone wants the information concealed.

At the height of action, Harry searches for Ginny in the Chamber of Secrets, where he meets a burgeoning manifestation of the sixteen-year-old Tom Riddle of fifty

years ago, but “strangely blurred around the edges, as though Harry was looking at him through a misted window” (227). Harry’s interaction with the diary in part leads to the manifestation of Tom Riddle, who explains that he is “a memory [...] preserved in a diary for fifty years” (227).<sup>102</sup> Had Harry heeded Ron’s warnings, or simply refused to engage with the enchanted diary because of his own knowledge about magical objects, he would not have been manipulated into his part of restoring Riddle to the material world through his preserved memory in the diary.

Harry is humanized for readers through the mistakes that he makes, as is another, less prominent, even younger character in the novel: Ginny Weasley, the younger sister of Ron. Harry discovers from Riddle that Ginny has also been interacting with the diary and was manipulated into opening the Chamber of Secrets, which resulted in the attacks on Hogwarts students. Ginny’s trust of the diary, an obviously enchanted object because of its ability to respond to what is written in it, is what has triggered the opening of the Chamber of Secrets that had been “sealed [...] so that none would be able to open it until [Salazar Slytherin’s] own true heir arrived at the school. The heir alone would be able to unseal the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and use it to purge the school of all who were unworthy to study magic” (114).

But just as Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* is advised by her grandmother that if a book set her off, then a book may help her to figure everything out, Harry uses the

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<sup>102</sup> Quintilian confirms that writing serves as memory, because “In writing are the roots, in writing are the foundations of eloquence; by writing resources are stored up, as it were, in a sacred repository, when they may be drawn forth for sudden emergencies, or as circumstances require” (10.3.iii).

malevolent, manipulative diary to defeat the nearly restored-to-life manifestation of sixteen-year-old Tom Riddle. Harry does so by destroying the same magical object—the diary—that Riddle uses to wreak havoc on Hogwarts fifty years after he first opened the Chamber of Secrets (237). Harry, attacked and nearly killed by the monster of Slytherin—a huge serpent called a basilisk—is helped by Headmaster Dumbledore’s phoenix, Fawkes, whose tears have healing powers which help Harry when he is injured, and is able to defeat the monster. Once the giant serpent is dead, Harry plunges one of its deadly fangs into the diary, which kills the magic and the memory hidden within its seemingly innocuous pages (237). Harry, now understanding the malevolence of the diary, does not care about the consequences of destroying the object. He has learned, nearly dying in the process, that some texts cannot be trusted.

Clearly, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* offers lessons about learning to distinguish between reliable and unreliable texts. Because both Ginny and Harry made the mistake of trusting Tom Riddle’s diary and suffered the consequences of doing so, the importance of the lesson of the text is compounded by its repetition. What is demonstrated through this double lesson is that one must be wary of believing or accepting what a text says without first determining its reliability. Once Harry and Ginny are safe, Harry must finally explain to the adult authorities what has been going on at Hogwarts during the year. Once Ginny confesses her part in the events of the school year, her father exclaims,

Haven’t I taught you *anything*? What have I always told you? Never trust anything that can think for itself *if you can’t see where it keeps its brain*. Why

didn't you show the diary to me, or your mother? A suspicious object like that, it was *clearly* full of Dark Magic! (242-43; italics in the original)

Ginny's father has made sure to warn his children about the dangers of magical objects, especially those of unknown origin. Arthur Weasley's expertise is fortified through his work in the Ministry of Magic and his role in the department of The Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office, the primary role of which is to contain Muggle objects that have been enchanted (*Chamber* 28). Mr. Weasley is also the author of the Muggle Protection Act, which prompted raids of wizards' homes in search of maliciously enchanted Muggle-made objects and other items that might be used to harm Muggles (*Chamber* 34, 43). Because of her father's previous warnings and his position within the Ministry of Magic, and because of the known threat to Harry Potter and everyone at Hogwarts from Lord Voldemort, Ginny should perhaps have been more careful about keeping secrets and using a suspect magical object. But *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets's* characters, like real people, are imperfect, and so Ginny learns that there are some texts that cannot be trusted. While Mr. Weasley may be right in asserting that the diary must be suspect because its origin is unknown, it is nevertheless still necessary to acquire and learn to use the tools that make distinctions between reliable and unreliable texts possible. One might argue that such life or death situations are too dangerous for a wise headmaster like Dumbledore to permit, but I have been arguing that fantasy permits a low-stakes opportunity to *readers*—not *characters*—to learn how to negotiate the world.

In literature that provides young people with tools to negotiate their societies and world, it is important to include characters that are imperfect and who must also learn to function in a complex social system. In showing Ginny's mistaken use of the diary,

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* presents a realistic character, much like Polly in *Fire and Hemlock*, whose errors readers can understand. Ginny is realistic because she knows better than to trust something that could “think for itself,” as her father had warned. Ginny explains why she kept the diary, neglected to tell her parents about it, and then used it, saying she “found it inside one of the books Mum got me. I th-thought someone had just left it in there and forgotten about it. . . .” (243). Even though set in a magical world, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* offers realistic scenarios in which young characters must learn from their mistakes.

Ginny’s discovery of the diary was something special for her, much like Harry’s finding out in the first book of the Harry Potter sequence that he is a wizard. Upon finding the diary, Ginny would not have known at first that it was enchanted because its pages were blank. Happening upon a seemingly unused diary, even one that is fifty years old, may be thought of as a boon for the young girl about to start her first year at the famed Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The critical literacy in the narrative of Ginny’s learning that there is a difference between reliable and unreliable texts is as much education for Ginny during her first year at Hogwarts as any she gains from her classes.

Throughout *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the lesson about unreliability is also reinforced by the unreliable texts of the new Defense against the Dark Arts teacher. Professor Gilderoy Lockhart is a pompous braggart who has published many books of the accounts of facing and defeating various nefarious magical creatures and individuals. His books, expensive exercises in self-congratulation and boasting, are required for Hogwarts’ students, which is a burden on the Weasley family and others who

are not wealthy. Lockhart is revealed, through the action in the novel, to have misrepresented himself in the books that bear his name. Rather than performing the feats he has written of, he listened to the stories of others who actually had these triumphs, and then obliterated their memories, plagiarized the stories, and took credit for the actions. Even though Lockhart destroyed the memories of the people who actually did the deeds that he takes credit for in his books, he memorializes their actions in the enduring form of writing. Moreover, he tells the wizarding world of the deeds of these other witches and wizards, even if he steals recognition and acclaim. Just as the diary is destroyed by the Basilisk, which also destroys the manifested memory of Tom Riddle rather than Harry, so too is Lockhart's mind destroyed when he tries to wipe the memories of Harry and Ginny with a faulty wand as he attempts to cast a spell that backfires and catches him instead of his intended target.

The dangers of manipulative texts can be mitigated by those who learn to discern between reliable and unreliable, trustworthy and untrustworthy texts. Like Polly, Harry—having been manipulated through a text—has the opportunity to turn the tables on those who misused a book, and he uses a book to do so. Waiting for the right opportunity to act—the *kairos* moment—Harry, with the help of the enslaved House Elf Dobby, discovers that Lucius Malfoy, father of Harry's school nemesis Draco Malfoy, is responsible for Ginny's receiving Tom Riddle's diary in the first place. Malfoy, wizard bigot and practitioner of dark magic, is also responsible for Headmaster Dumbledore's temporary removal from Hogwarts because he has not been able to stop the attacks on students. Once the memory of Riddle is destroyed and the students who were attacked are recovering, Lucius Malfoy arrives at the school, demanding an explanation of

Dumbledore's reinstatement. Malfoy is shown the diary and given an explanation of the events surrounding it (228). As Dumbledore is showing Malfoy the diary, Dobby the enslaved house elf tells Harry by his gestures that it was Lucius who slipped the diary into Ginny's book purchases on Diagon Alley at the beginning of the book:

And Harry suddenly understood. . . . "Don't you want to know how Ginny got hold of that diary, Mr. Malfoy?" said Harry.

Lucius Malfoy rounded on him. "How should I know how the stupid little girl got hold of it?" he said.

"Because you gave it to her [...] In Flourish and Blotts. You picked up her old Transfiguration book, and slipped the diary inside it, didn't you?" He saw Mr. Malfoy's white hands clench and unclench.

"Prove it," he hissed. (247)

Lucius Malfoy used the diary to try to continue Voldemort's—and Salazar Slytherin's—effort to rid the school and the wizarding world of those he felt were unworthy of magic. Consequently, Harry uses the same book that began the ordeal in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* to bring about its conclusion and impart some measure of justice, much as Polly uses her books in *Fire and Hemlock* to bring about a resolution to her dilemma. As the enraged Malfoy is leaving, he physically takes his anger and frustration out on Dobby. Harry and Dumbledore "could hear Dobby squealing with pain all the way along the corridor" (248). Harry demonstrates that his use of logic is improving by quickly formulating a plan that will return the diary to its former owner and grant Dobby his freedom. After asking Dumbledore if he can give the diary back to Malfoy,

Harry grabbed the diary and dashed out of the office. He [...] took off one of his shoes, pulled off his slimy, filthy sock, and stuffed the diary into it. Then he ran down the dark corridor. He caught up with them at the top of the stairs. “Mr. Malfoy,” he gasped, skidding to a halt, “I’ve got something for you.” And he forced the smelly sock into Lucius Malfoy’s hand.

“What the—?” Mr. Malfoy ripped the sock off the diary, threw it aside, then looked furiously from the ruined book to Harry. [...] He turned to go. “Come Dobby. I said, *Come!*” But Dobby didn’t move. He was holding up Harry’s disgusting, slimy sock, and looking at it as though it were a priceless treasure.

“Master has given Dobby a sock,” said the elf in wonderment. [...]

“Master threw it, and Dobby caught it, and Dobby—Dobby is *free.*”

Lucius Malfoy stood frozen, staring at the elf. Then he lunged at Harry.

“You’ve lost me my servant, boy!” (248-49; italics original)

Harry uses the same text that was the means of instilling so much fear and harm to rescue the abused house elf who is, essentially, a slave who can be freed only by receiving clothes from his masters (133). At the resolution of the novel, Harry’s final use of the diary, his *kairos* moment, does not ignore Mr. Weasley’s advice, for the book’s power has been destroyed and it is no longer dangerous. Now that Harry’s understanding of manipulative texts has deepened, he has no need to fear it. Indeed, to maintain a superstitious fear of the text would not only be unwise, as that fear would cause Harry to miss an opportunity to save the loyal friend that Dobby has become. Harry intuits that the diary can still serve one final manipulative purpose—one that is beneficial to the abused house elf rather than harmful to students. His using the instigating book against Lucius

Malfoy, the minion of Voldemort, in a way that is counter to Voldemort's own evil purposes is a critical literacy moment, demonstrating that though manipulation might be successful for a while, the same manipulative texts can be the means of justice, if one thinks critically and creatively.

Young characters in narratives of twentieth century English children's fantasy determine the reliability, trustworthiness, and benefits of the texts they encounter. The critical literacy in these works, as demonstrated through my discussion of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, is found in the situations in which young characters learn to make value judgments about the texts with which they engage. In this text and others I discuss, the process of learning that occurs provides low-stakes lessons in making value judgements and determining *ethos* and *logos* that can then be applied to real life situations. Depicting the characters' formulae for evaluating texts provides the lessons and tools used to help navigate the complex worlds of the texts, the latter twentieth century, and beyond.

## CHAPTER VII – CONCLUSION

Though readers may not be consciously aware of it as they read, reading provides information that is absorbed and can be accessed in the future. I refer to this information as critical literacy. Because all literature is didactic, and every act of reading is one of learning, reading is a method of gathering knowledge, whether consciously or unconsciously. Texts can offer readers an escape from their reality of powerlessness and voicelessness into worlds in which they can experience power and voice vicariously, through the characters. In these escapes, young readers can learn what it is like to possess these attributes, and how they might, in their own lives, go about acquiring such characteristics. Twentieth century English children's fantasy texts, in particular, offer young readers some imaginative allies—young protagonists and other characters—who desire and need rhetorical power and who by example help guide the reader's way to autonomy, self-actualization, and agency by demonstrating the usefulness of critical literacy.

In the works I examine, the passing of knowledge through books is vital to the characters in the novels, and by extension, to the readers of those novels. These works demonstrate that critical literacy is paramount to acquiring the necessary skills that each protagonist needs in order to succeed in her or his endeavor, to become the hero that he or she needs to be, and to create a Self. One attribute gained from reading fantastic stories is how narratives work, a key concept of literary awareness. Texts that feature readers within their stories provide literary models of active readers who engage with, learn from, and emulate the texts and characters within the texts they read, which in turn may influence their success.

The works I examine also provide examples of critical inquiry and processes for making value judgments about texts. Because texts are inanimate objects, they may be mistakenly seen as harmless or innocuous, just as Harry did with Riddle's diary. Learning to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy texts is a model for making other value judgments through critical inquiry. Readers can again see that making mistakes, in this case trusting the wrong book, sometimes happens though the mistakes may not be detrimental. Readers also encounter rhetorical devices, such as *ethos* and *logos*, which can be applied to both authors and their texts in order to gauge an author's reliability.

These fantastic texts reaffirm what young readers already know—that words have power—which is demonstrated every time they say “please” and receive that for which they ask. What these young readers may not know, however, is that language has the power to shape identity and help them to create their Self. Readers of fantastic texts vicariously experience the development of a character's constructed Self, which can then be emulated in the reader's quest to create an ideal Self. Through fantastic texts, readers can see the power of language as portrayed in these works. However, readers will find that this power is not confined to the texts and is accessible to them as they negotiate their world and create the Self they wish to be.

For this project, I originally sought to pursue research that draws a direct line from the British primers and conduct books of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to twentieth century English children's fantasy, as I suspect there is a correlation between these disparate genres and time periods. In my further research, I would like to examine critical literacy in twentieth century American children's fantasy, though the didactic scope of such research might be more obvious than that of the English, because unlike

British children's literature, American children's literature is noted for its emphasis on learning lessons rather than on reading stories for pleasure. In my further research, I would also like to explore various other types of literacy such as the gender constructs, peace and conflict, nationalism, and religious literacies in twentieth century English and American children's fantasy and investigate any direct connection between these literacies and the primers and conduct books of the long nineteenth century. I am especially interested in how some contemporary texts present literary models for readers with characters who are of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, which is much more diverse than their eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth century counterparts.

Though many readers of fantasy wish that the worlds we encounter in these texts were real—part of the appeal of many of these texts is that they seemingly could be real and accessible as the narratives slip from our world into that of the fantastic—and that perhaps one day we will be fortunate enough to find the passage into them, there is much to be gained from these texts that has nothing to do with magic and yet everything to do with the power of language. Our love of these texts and our imagination keep us searching for the passage at the back of the wardrobe, a transforming wall behind a pub in London, or a doorway in a forest; this love provides models of the heroic that are accessible without magic. Fantastic texts, which make those who read them want to be worthy of such access to the places found in the books we love, teach us that one can become her ideal Self through understanding that words are more than what they say and that power lies with those who embrace heroic ideals, even without threats from magical creatures or quests into other realms. If perhaps the portal is there, just beyond where we are now and waiting for us to venture through to the fantastic beyond, the force of

language and the ability to construct the Self that we wish to be might be the portal of these works that opens when we open the books and discover the rhetorical means of creating an ideal Self.

APPENDIX A - Actual Books and Authors Mentioned in Diana Wynne Jones's *Fire and Hemlock*

Author Name or Title as Mentioned in Novel	First Mention Page Number
Asimov	178
<i>Black Beauty</i>	135
<i>The Box of Delights</i>	100
<i>The Castle of Adventure</i>	192
<i>East of the Sun and West of the Moon</i>	178
Fairy Stories with Cinderella	171
<i>Five Children and It</i>	99
<i>The Golden Bough</i>	208
<i>Henrietta's House</i>	100
<i>Heroes</i>	14
<i>The Hundred and One Dalmatians</i>	100
<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	195
<i>Kim</i>	187
<i>King Arthur</i>	171
<i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i>	100
<i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	181
<i>The Man who was Thursday</i>	187
Michael Moorcock	178
<i>The Napoleon of Notting Hill</i>	187
<i>The Oxford Book of Ballads</i>	187
<i>Perilandra</i>	187
<i>Popular Beliefs</i>	140
Sherlock Holmes	136
<i>The Sword in the Stone</i>	100
"Tam Lin"	11
<i>The Thirty-nine Steps</i>	187
<i>The Three Musketeers</i>	136
Thomas the Rhymer	48
<i>Tom's Midnight Garden</i>	187
<i>Treasure Seekers</i>	99
<i>Twelfth Night</i>	262
<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>	119
<i>The War of the Worlds</i>	187
<i>The Wizard of Oz</i>	99
<i>The Wolves of Willoughby Chase</i>	99

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