

“THE LITTLE ACTOR”:
PERFORMING CHILDHOOD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Adam McCune: “The Little Actor”:
Performing Childhood in Nineteenth-Century British Literature
(Under the direction of Laurie Langbauer)

Lord Byron’s “To Ianthe,” Lewis Carroll’s Alice books, Henry James’s *Turn of the Screw*, and Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* reinvent the portrayal of childhood. Didactic literature by authors such as John Newbery, Mary Wollstonecraft, Isaac Watts, John and Charles Wesley, and Hannah More, though it assumed that growing up meant the transformation of an essential inner identity, paradoxically represented childhood not as an essential quality, but as a prescribed role to be performed by the child. Children’s performance of morally or culturally approved roles was, in fact, the mechanism by which they were supposed to be transformed into successful adults. Didactic authors expected the child to imitate a single model: the moral, educated, well-mannered child. Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling instead point to multiple models, multiple ideas of how children could behave. In their works, children can choose from different “scripts” of childhood and perform them to reinvent childhood and themselves: the children imitate models but choose which ones to emulate. James and Kipling go a step further, depicting children who use their performance of social roles to influence adults and pursue their own goals. Finally, Kipling questions (much like the late twentieth-century critic Judith Butler) whether his young protagonist even has an essential identity separate from the performance of social roles. The four authors imitate didactic literature’s idea of childhood-as-performance but transform it, asserting children’s agency against the adult authority of didactic literature. This study’s analysis

of these authors' works expands Marah Gubar's focus on child agency (rather than passive vulnerability to adult influence) in children's literature to depictions of children in the broader field of nineteenth-century British literature. Its argument also builds on Robin Bernstein's notion of performed childhood innocence as a racial category excluding African-Americans; I describe the way Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling use the different expectations for children of different cultures, classes, and genders—such as the expectations for Kim's roles as both British spy and eastern Buddhist disciple in Kipling's *Kim*—to generate multiple possibilities for childhood roles.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AW* Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)
- BLJ* Lord Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (1973-1982)
- CHP* Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1818)
- CPW* Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (1980-1993)
- LG* Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871)
- TS* Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)

INTRODUCTION | “THE LITTLE ACTOR CONS ANOTHER PART”:
A Turn in the Performance of Childhood

1. The Little Actor

In “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (1807), William Wordsworth laments the child’s maturation as mere “endless imitation” (line 107). Childhood begins with play and performance—the child’s wondrous “dream of human life” (the adult life of “wedding,” “funeral,” and “business”) converted to the performance of “song,” shaped “with newly-learned art” (lines 91-94, 96, 98). Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode is sometimes described as being at the heart of the Romantic notion of artless, culturally untouched childhood,¹ but Wordsworth here describes an artful childlike performance in positive terms. His criticism of the “endless imitation” of adulthood (line 108) is not a critique of artful performance as such, but a critique of the kind of performance. Firstly, Wordsworth critiques adults’ model, the new part they play: “the little Actor cons another part” (line 102). That is, adults imitate the real world, whereas child’s play imitates the heavenly “dream of human life” (lines 91, 107). Secondly, Wordsworth criticizes the permanence of adults’ transformation: their imitation is “endless” (line 108). That is, maturation is a transition from the non-binding play and performance of childhood (in which the child may play at a wedding without really becoming a

¹ Gubar points to Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode as a “glorification of a static state of innocence” iconic of the Romantic celebration of the Child of Nature, although she acknowledges that even Wordsworth was “more nuanced” in other poems (14). Certainly the Child of Nature dominates the poem, but it is odd that Gubar specifically refers to the “artless ‘little Actor’” (11), in light of Wordsworth’s explicit reference to the acculturation of the “little Actor” in “newly-learned art” (lines 92, 102).

spouse) to the transformative performance of adult roles which must be both imitated and inhabited (an enactment of a wedding really does make the mature person a spouse). Although he treats as tragic their maturation/transformation into adults that permanently inhabit those social roles, William Wordsworth acknowledges children's capacity to perform social roles.

Why, even at the heart of the Romantic notion of culturally untouched childhood, is childhood conceived of as an artful performance? Wordsworth's poem unexpectedly casts childhood in terms of performance because it responds to a didactic literary tradition (coming from John Newbery, Mary Wollstonecraft, Isaac Watts, John and Charles Wesley, and Hannah More) that painted childhood as the performance of prescribed and modeled social roles. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as the first chapter will show, authors of didactic children's literature such as Newbery and Wollstonecraft, and in particular of religious didactic literature for children (such as Watts, the Wesleys, and More), presented children with scripts and models for behavior, assuming that children performed childhood following those scripts and models—that is, that children performed the social roles expected of children, which would prepare them for the social roles expected of adults. In fact, such performances were supposed to transform the child into the right kind of adult.²

It is often assumed that any connection between performance and the self is postmodern and antithetical to older traditions like didacticism, but I will argue that authors of didactic works for children actually stressed the importance of performance in shaping identity. Nicole Frey Büchel identifies two contrasting models of the self: the Platonic “metaphysical self” and the “performative self” of such theorists as J.L. Austin and Judith Butler (9). According to Büchel,

² Here I am building in part upon Gubar's suggestion that authors employing child narrators “frequently represented identity itself as collaborative: children develop a sense of self not in a vacuum but in reaction to the directives of the society they inhabit and the texts they read” (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 7). I agree that many authors see children's response to literature as a way of *forming* social identity, but I would add that for many authors, *performing* social identity comes first.

the metaphysical self is understood as being “essential” and “unalterable” (9), and this conception of selfhood is older than the performative “postmodern ideas of selfhood” in which “self as a lasting, unified essence is *no longer* assumed or striven for” (1, emphasis mine). Judith Butler’s own formulation of the performative self is that a social identity may be composed of “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (*Gender Trouble* 43)—in my terms, gender and childhood are both scripted (by the “regulatory” society of a particular era) and performed. In contrast to the belief in an essential “metaphysical self,” Butler rejects the idea that there is an identity distinct from the actions of performativity: “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (*Gender Trouble* 33). I will argue that eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century didactic authors hold a position between the “metaphysical” and the “performative” models of the self: they believe that performance (actions associated with a scripted social role) can alter an inner self. Such an inner self is understood to be distinct from the temporary performances that shape it (thus “lasting” and “essential” rather than “performative”), but it is not considered “unalterable,” nor is it assumed that the self is always the cause and outward expression always the “results”; the whole point of didactic literature is that the inner self is permanently changed by performance.

For example, Isaac Watts, in his two poems, “Against Idleness and Mischief” and “The Sluggard” (*Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children*, 1715), makes it clear that children have the option of transforming themselves into either of two scripted identities, the sluggard or the busy bee. He says of the sluggard, “This man’s but a picture of what I might be,” and adds that particular actions can shape the identity one way or the other: “But thanks to my friends for their care in my breeding, / Who taught me betimes to love

working and reading.” Similarly, after presenting the bee as a model of hard work, he points to the actions—an imitation of the bee that performs its desirable qualities—which will transform the child into a “busy bee”: “In books, or work, or healthful play / Let my first years be passed.” Similarly (as described in the first chapter) the Wesleys promise that imitating Christ will make a child Christlike, Wollstonecraft promises that imitating a competent and caring mother will make a child competent and caring, and each didactic author gives similar assurances of transformation through performance.

Didactic authors conceived of selfhood in terms of performed social roles, but each recommended a particular role—one version of childhood, one expectation for child behavior. They offered only a single script for child performance not from narrow-mindedness about children but out of the idea that adulthood (for the middle-class audience) was uniform. That is, children’s literature, like conduct books for adults, assumed that middle-class adults followed a single code of literacy, manners, and morals (all three being, as Neil Postman has observed, closely connected [45-50]). Assuming uniform adulthood, didactic writers presented a singular script for successful maturation into that singular adulthood. This scripting was intended for *social preparation*, and the didactic works promised that the performance of this social script would result in *social transformation*—if you acted like a well-off adult, you would become one. Though the particulars changed over the course of the century, writers agreed in the assurance of transformation and reward. John Newbery, in *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765) famously promised his child readers that by following the example of the heroine (literacy, manners, and morals) they could secure a fortune and “gallop in a Coach and Six.” Horatio Alger’s *Ragged Dick* (1867) more moderately presented as a model a street boy who (by literacy, manners, and morals) worked his way up to a middle-class job. Charles Dickens compromised

between Newbery and Alger when dabbling in didacticism in “The Magic Fishbone” (1868). The protagonist is a girl who plays the part of mother and cook and solves her family’s difficulties with good housekeeping, only calling for a fairy’s help when they have “tried all ways” of helping themselves. As in Alger, she is rewarded with middle-class income (her father’s salary comes early) but (as in Newbery or a fairy tale) she also receives a ride in the fairy’s “carriage and four (Peacocks)” to her marriage to a “Prince Certainpersonio” whom the fairy transforms for the occasion. By 1907, Hilaire Belloc’s *Cautionary Tales for Children* was able to parody both disproportionate punishment for misbehavior and disproportionate rewards for studying and “simply doing right”: as Belloc drily notes in his prefatory poem, “And is it true? It is not true.”

Wordsworth lamented the didactic model of child performance, and Belloc parodied it, but four nineteenth-century authors demonstrate the changes in the model of child performance over the course of the period by challenging and stretching the model. Where late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century didactic literature imagined a single scripted social role, Lord Byron and Lewis Carroll responded by representing children who were aware of multiple role models and social scripts, who could choose between them. The later Henry James and Rudyard Kipling built on the multiplicity of Byron and Carroll and went a step further, depicting children who used their performance of social roles to influence adults and pursue their own goals. This project will focus on Byron’s “To Ianthe” (1814), Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), James’s *Turn of the Screw* (1898), and Kipling’s *Kim* (1901), and analyze them in the context of adult “scripting” of children’s behavior in children’s literature, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. This approach builds on the work of scholars who study the cultural construction of childhood in nineteenth-century literature (Claudia Nelson, Robin Bernstein) and of scholars who analyze adult power and child agency in

children's literature of the long nineteenth century (Jacqueline Rose, James Kincaid, Marah Gubar). The analysis in the succeeding chapters of children in literature performing childhood provides a previously unexplored configuration of power, agency, and identity formation.

In the last few years, scholars of nineteenth-century literature have pointed to the distinction between being a child and acting like one. Claudia Nelson (*Precocious Children & Childish Adults*, 2012) has pointed to the recurring Victorian tropes of adultlike children and childlike adults, and Robin Bernstein (*Racial Innocence*, 2011) has pointed to the scripting of human behavior by the artifacts of material culture surrounding Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the ways historical children responded by performing childhood. Over the last thirty years, scholars of children's literature—notably Jacqueline Rose (*The Case of Peter Pan*, 1984), James Kincaid (*Child-Loving*, 1992), and Marah Gubar (*Artful Dodgers*, 2009)—have debated the place of children's agency in children's literature (as opposed to children's passive vulnerability to adult influence). My aim is to bring these discourses together by reading the works of four nineteenth-century British authors (Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling) as a portrayal of children taking agency by performing childhood and maturation.

I argue not only that multiple models of the child which scholars have identified—including but not limited to Rose's nostalgic innocent, Kincaid's eroticized innocent, and Gubar's competent collaborator—*coexist* in the same works of nineteenth-century British literature (as Gubar acknowledges [*Artful Dodgers* 9]), but that nineteenth-century authors with an interest in multicultural contexts and theater (Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling) present these different models of childhood to the reader as options, as different scripts or roles which the child reader may select to perform.³ My notion of children adapting adult scripts in

³ Like Rose, Gubar describes authors offering children models of childhood to imitate. Unlike Rose, Gubar observes that the same author may use multiple models of childhood (*Artful Dodgers* 9). But Gubar does not make the

performance rather than slavishly following them draws on Bernstein's idea that, although material objects can invite or "script" behavior from users, such scripting has the flexibility of a playscript: "the term *script* denotes not a rigid dictation of performed action but rather a set of invitations that necessarily remain open to resistance, interpretation, and improvisation" (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 11-12; cf. Bernstein, "Children's Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race" 165). Unlike Bernstein (and Gubar in her work outside of *Artful Dodgers*), I will focus neither on drama as an actual literary genre, nor (for the most part) on historical children, but rather on the use of scripting and performance as a metaphor for adult-child interaction in prose and verse.

Applying this flexible model of the performance of childhood to child characters in literature reveals a previously unexplored way to reconfigure power, agency, and identity formation. Gubar illustrated how authors assign children the power and agency to form their own identities by showing how children actively reshape stories. But does this mean that authors who do not depict children reshaping stories think of children as powerless and passive? On the contrary, a wide range of literature, from the children's literature of Carroll and Kipling to Byron's lyric verse and James's gothic prose, depicts children actively directing their own development, and their relationships with adults, not through storytelling, but through their selection, interpretation, and performance of existing, adult-authored scripts.

What is more, I will expand beyond Bernstein's emphasis on childhood-as-innocence and make the case that adult authors—as they depict life at the boundaries of cultures (especially in the works of Carroll and Kipling), of gender and class (emphasized by James), and of age (particularly in Byron's case)—offer a far wider range of child-roles to be played than that of

connection I emphasize, that some authors offer children multiple models of childhood *as options for the child*. Instead she focuses on authors who are specifically promoting the model of child as competent collaborator.

innocence. Indeed, for every sphere of life an author addresses—romance, family, literacy, education, profession, moral responsibility—there is an opportunity for children to take agency by choosing from a range of roles. In contrast to children performing a singular form of childhood (as in Bernstein), child characters in these authors’ works are agents *because they can choose their roles*. The variety of roles is fitting because, as Gubar notes, many authors see children’s response to literature as a way of forming identity, but I would add that, for many authors, *performing* identity is an intermediate step. By choosing and performing roles, the child characters in the works of Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling can shape their social roles in the future and take greater agency in the present.

2. Selection of Authors and Works Based on Historical, Biographical, and Literary Context

The four authors Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling were selected because their works respond to the didactic tradition’s conception of children performing scripted social roles, but also challenge the didactic tradition’s assumptions. Mostly obviously, these authors emphasize the metaphor of the child performer: Byron envisions a child inhabiting multiple roles and playing the “lyre” (“To Ianthe” 42), Carroll depicts a child who enjoys role playing⁴ and is constantly reciting poetry, James’s child characters are especially extravagant performers, capable of recitation, “disguises,” role-playing, and “acting... charades” (*TS* 167; ch. 9), and Kipling’s child hero treats social roles as flexible “performance[s]” employing “costume[s]” and stage “properties” (*Kim* 3, 129; ch. 1, 9).

Metaphors of performance come naturally to these authors, all of whom took an interest in literal theater. Kipling took a particular interest in children’s toy theaters. He and his younger

⁴ “This curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people” (*AW* 18; ch. 1), “Let’s pretend we’re kings and queens... Do let’s pretend that I’m a hungry hyaena, and you’re a bone” (*LG* 141; ch. 1).

sister had one when they were children (Ricketts 31), and as an adult he purchased “a child’s toy theater from Schwartz for practicing” a play he was writing (Cabot, 19 Jan. 1894). The toy inspired a visual metaphor in his novel *Captains Courageous* (1897): “on another swell came up an entirely new line of characters like paper figures in a toy theatre” (ch. 9). Kipling also co-authored a one-act play with his teenaged daughter Elsie (produced by the Royalty Theatre in 1913), showing he recognized drama as a sphere where young people could take creative initiative (Ricketts 296). Henry James wrote a dozen plays of his own, wrote extensively about theater, and even gave advice to actresses (Worthen 140-141). Most suggestively, James applied the analogy of theater even to his non-dramatic works, exhorting himself to “Dramatise it, dramatise it!” (“Preface,” *Novels and Tales*, vol. 16, ix), prompting some critics to call him the inventor of the “dramatic novel” (Álvarez Amorós 23). Lewis Carroll worked with Savile Clarke on the operetta adaptation of his Alice books (Gardner 187n) and took an interest in more than seventy child actors, coaching at least one on her technique (Varty 7, 13-14). Byron not only wrote plays but threw himself into the management of London’s Drury Lane Theatre (Büchel 7). In his personal life, too, he “was fond of playing a role” and displayed an “obsession with theatrical self-dramatisation” (Büchel 4, 8). For each of these authors, literary portrayal of children as metaphorical performers was informed by a historical and biographical connection to literal performance.

If literal drama provided the metaphor of performance, cultural clashes grounded in the authors’ historical and biographical context helped to give a sense of how many scripts children could choose from. Carroll and Kipling (though portraying different foreign cultures at different times) actually portray children assessing and performing scripts for child behavior from both Britain and foreign cultures. Byron and James (though their perspectives come from different

nations and periods) instead use their experience of multiple cultures to question the uniqueness and authority of British cultural scripts for child behavior. Even within Britain, as they observe, there are multiple scripts children can choose from. Although the child roles put forward in Byron's "To Ianthe" are largely compatible with social roles in Britain, the poem clearly grows out of Byron's observation of other cultures. The Romantic interest in Eastern culture ("Introduction" 13), which helped to fuel the popularity of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, also informed Byron's prefatory poem to *Childe Harold*, "To Ianthe." Byron opens the poem with a comparison between Ianthe's beauty and beauty in "those climes where I have late been straying" and casts his largely Western expectations for Ianthe in Eastern terms, calling her "Young Peri of the West" (an allusion to Persian mythology),⁵ and paying her the 'Oriental' compliment of comparing her eyes to those of a "Gazelle" (1, 19, 28).⁶

Carroll's portrayal of the foreign culture of Wonderland is similarly shaped by the British response to recent conflicts with France including the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815): "Britons... defined themselves against the French as they imagined them to be" (Colley 5). The British accordingly revised their view of the Norman Conquest during this period: rather than envisioning the Normans as a civilizing influence (as eighteenth-century British historians did), by Carroll's day British histories tended to portray the French Normans as having little effect on English identity despite villainously oppressing the truly English Anglo-Saxons (Niles 341-2). British dislike of Napoleon III and his Second French Empire (1852-1870) (Simmons 195) would only reinforce such contrasts at the time of *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). As Chapter 2 will

⁵ From "Persian *parī* fairy, jinn, angel," originally meaning, in "Iranian (esp. Zoroastrian) mythology: a member of a race of superhuman beings, originally represented as evil female demons, subsequently also as benevolent, graceful spirits," and "In extended use: a beautiful or graceful person; a fairy" ("peri, *n.*," *OED*).

⁶ As a late nineteenth-century *Cyclopaedia* observes, for "the Oriental genius" describing "an Oriental woman," "to say 'she has the eyes of a gazelle' is the most flattering compliment that can be paid to beauty" (McClintock and Strong 60).

show, Carroll portrays Wonderland as the ultimate ‘French’ Other, from the repeated allusions to William the Conqueror (including a long quotation from a history that denounces his oppression of the English) to the French-Revolution-esque threat of decapitation, and Alice finds their foreign scripts for child behavior incomprehensible at first. Nevertheless, Alice recognizes the arbitrariness of the scripts—what is acceptable in one culture is unacceptable in another—and is able to learn and perform new roles as an adaptation to her foreign surroundings. In Looking-Glass Land, with its “Anglo-Saxon” poem, Jabberwocky,⁷ and its “Anglo-Saxon messengers,” Alice is better able to remember and perform her British culture’s scripts for child behavior.

James’s American outsider perspective on British culture informs his depiction of British social roles as arbitrary constructions which are performed rather than essential. A similar American perspective informs the class role-playing in the works of James’s contemporary, Mark Twain: *The Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* [1889], in which King Arthur disguises himself as a peasant, and *The Prince and the Pauper* [1882], in which a poor child and the crown prince of England trade places. Like Twain, James depicts adults and children alike treating social roles as performable parts. In James’s “The Real Thing” (1892), for instance, Major and Mrs. Monarch believe in their essential class as a gentleman and lady—they are “the real thing”—but the illustrator who tries to use them as models for fictional gentlemen and ladies finds that his lower-class models are far better at posing for upper-class roles. Class proves to be not essential, but performable. In *Turn of the Screw*, the same proves to be true of different ideas about childhood: innocence, boyish naughtiness, and devilish evil are not inherent to a child, but describe actions the child *does*, and even a role a child can *perform*.

⁷ Gardner 148-149, n. 16.

Finally, Kipling's *Kim* grows out of the British Raj, engages with the confrontation of British and Indian (and neighboring nations') cultures, and draws on Kipling's own experience growing up both in India and Britain. Kim's performance of both British and Indian social roles reflects and responds to contemporary concerns about empire and British identity. All four authors thus write about child performance from distinctive positions, each from different but related historical and biographic contexts. At the same time, these four authors share several things in common which many other nineteenth-century authors do not: an interest in theater, a close attention to multicultural environments, and a suspicion of the assumption that social roles are essential.

3. Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling transform the idea of child performance

Didactic authors who prescribed child performances made three implicit assumptions. First, didactic authors assumed that a child seeking to become a successful adult would be best served by performing a single role, predetermined by the standards of a religion (More and the Wesleys), a socioeconomic class (Newbery), or a household (Wollstonecraft). There was therefore one preferred script to follow and one kind of model to imitate. Second, they assumed that the purpose of performance was always transformation—a child would perform a script or follow a model in order to be eventually transformed into the role they were performing, or if they went off-script and performed otherwise, they would be transformed into something worse. Third, they assumed that identity was distinct from the outward performance of roles, that there was an inner essential identity which could be transformed by the outward performance. Challenges to these assumptions developed over the course of the long nineteenth century. Byron and Carroll challenged the first assumption (multiple scripts for child performers instead of one),

James challenged the first and second assumptions (child performance for influence on others instead of for transforming the child), and Kipling questioned all three (performative rather than essential identity).

Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling all challenge the first didactic assumption (that there is one script to follow) by presenting child characters who are aware of multiple conflicting scripts for children's social roles. As the first of the four authors, Byron is a fitting author to disrupt ideas of performance and identity. Many Byronists treat Byron's works as self-representations of his own identity—noting that his poems reimagine his life, with varying degrees of alteration,⁸ and that his work (as Jerome McGann and Peter Manning have both observed) is “self-dramatizing.”⁹ Büchel goes a step further to say that Byron presents identity as being based upon performance, and she thus treats “fictional Byronic figures... as representations of Byronic *attitudes* towards the self” (Büchel 15). Although my focus is not on the full-fledged “performative self” Büchel identifies in Byron's later work, I will examine the connections Byron makes between performance and the development of the self in “To Ianthe.”

Byron's distinctive sense of “self-dramatizing,” combined with his theatrical and cross-cultural experience, set him apart not only from didactic authors but from his Romantic contemporaries (with rare exceptions, such as Jane Austen's brief portrayal of Annemarie, discussed in the first chapter). These personal and cultural influences enabled Byron, in “To Ianthe,” to offer a child, not a single script to perform, but many scripts, and—more

⁸ “Most of Byron's compelling works are fictions of the self, in a manner sometimes more oblique, sometimes more direct” (Manning 12). Byron's “fiction-making... braids or weaves two or more realities into a whole that resists reduction into any one of its component strands” (Graham, *Don Juan* 27–28). Byron used poetry to “exact from life itself the qualities of great poetry. ...Byron needed to mythologize fact” (Barton 12). Byron's “*Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*... provided Byron's contemporaries with many a cultural myth—but of all the figures perhaps the one most attractive and satisfying for Byron to cut was that of the mythmaker, whose mystifications blur or blend life and art... so that distinguishing one from the other becomes impossible” (Graham, “Mythmaking” 30).

⁹ “All of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is self-dramatizing” (McGann, *Fiery Dust* 280). “Byron's self-dramatizing imagination is the basis of his art... through the multiple roles Byron assumes” (Manning 17).

importantly—to depict the child choosing among them. Not only can his Ianthe choose the identity she wishes to perform and adopt, but the speaker of the poem does not claim (as Newbery, More, or Wollstonecraft did) that one script is the sure path to success for her—only that he *wishes* her to follow one script.¹⁰

Despite differences of historical period and form,¹¹ Carroll, James, and Kipling draw on the theatrical and cross-cultural interests they share with Byron to make the same point: there is more than one cultural script for children to perform. Lewis Carroll similarly shows Alice (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865) comparing Victorian scripts for child behavior (eating birds' eggs and praising pets for catching mice) to Wonderland's scripts for child behavior (courtesy to sentient mice and birds). What is more, Alice, preparing for a future social role as mother (playing mother to a baby/pig in Wonderland and to a kitten before visiting Looking-Glass Land), compares protective models of motherhood to predatory models of motherhood. Alice finds she can perform scripts from either Britain's culture or Wonderland's, and practices the imitation of different models as she considers what kind of adult she will become. In Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* (1898), Miles and Flora are aware of the governess's multiple contradictory scripts for child behavior—angelic child, mischievous boy, miniature gentry—and perform one after another. In Kipling's *Kim* (1901), Kim performs a dizzying range of scripts from multiple nations, cultures, religions, and organizations. The single adult-recommended

¹⁰ On the other hand, the speaker's jealousy prompts him to warn that one script he does not want her to follow—that of a lover to younger men—will lead to pain, at least for those younger men if not for Ianthe: "all younger hearts shall bleed" and there are "pangs to Love's even loveliest hours decreed."

¹¹ Carroll, for example, is writing from a different historical position than Byron is. The instances I give here of cultural scripts are also examples of choices between kindness and cruelty to animals and are doubtless colored by the contemporary animal rights movement, from the formation of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824 to Carroll's own prominent role in the fight against vivisection in the 1870s (Linzey), a context which does not inform Byron's "To Ianthe." On the other hand, Carroll and Byron share many interests in common: theater, cross-cultural encounters, and young girls to whom they dedicate their literary works. They even shared an interest in boating with their young muses.

didactic script of the moral, well-mannered, well-educated, future-middle-class-adult child is left far behind; for these authors, the child has the power of choice.

The second didactic assumption is that performance is for transformation. If Byron and Carroll departed from the tradition of a single transformational script (challenging the first didactic assumption) by depicting children's performed social roles as *options*, their child heroines are nevertheless still seeking to be transformed by their performances, trying out roles to see which one they want to grow up and become (consistent with the second didactic assumption). Thus, "To Ianthe" repeatedly shifts between its heroine's past and present roles as a child and her future roles as an adult: what she will "ever be," what she will be in "future years," what she will be "once" the speaker's days are numbered (10, 17, 41). Similarly, Alice evaluates a model of adulthood (the Duchess) in connection with what she will do herself with a household of her own: "When *I'm* a Duchess... I wo'n't have any pepper in my kitchen *at all*" (*AW* 90, ch. 9). Performance in the present is still oriented towards transformation in the future.

James and Kipling go a step further than Byron or Carroll do, and challenge the idea that performance's purpose is to transform the child into an adult in the correct social role. In this way, James and Kipling alter what child performance is *for*—it can be used to exert influence over adults. James's Miles and Flora (as Chapter 3 argues) do want to be transformed and to inhabit adult roles (Miles insists upon the education that will make him a gentleman), but that is not the only purpose for which they use performance—they also use performance to manage their governess. Kipling's Kim (as I will show in Chapter 4) is also in search of his identity ("Who is Kim?"), but in addition to performing roles to try out identities, he also performs roles to manage and even hoodwink the adults around him, whether in service of espionage, or to

acquire material or social benefits for his friends and himself. He is called, truly enough, the “Friend of All the World,” but he is at the same time a trickster of all the world.

The third didactic assumption is about the nature of identity. If the didactic authors conceived of an internal, essential identity that could be transformed by performance, the opposing idea, in the words of Nicole Frey Büchel, “anticipates... postmodern ideas of selfhood... a more dynamic and creative concept of identity” (Büchel 1). In contrast to the “definition of self as a lasting unified essence... the ideal represented by the authentic, metaphysical self,” the opposing position (which at the end of the century will be applied to child performance) “proposes a self-concept in terms of performance... a performative self” (Büchel 1, 10). The performative self is not merely shaped by performance (as per the didactic model), it cannot be distinguished from performance: as Judith Butler writes, “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (*Gender Trouble* 33).

Büchel finds such a “self-concept in terms of performance” as early in the century as Byron’s *Don Juan* (1819-1824), but not in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-1818), to which “To Ianthe” serves as an opening dedication (1). A close reading of “To Ianthe” supports the assessment that Byron’s association between identity and performance in this poem is more akin to the didactic model than to full-fledged performativity (appropriate to the earliest of the four authors developing a response to didactic ideas of child performance). Ianthe’s identity may be transformed by performance, but it is not quite a performative identity constituted by performance alone, without an essential inner self—the speaker of the poem describes who she essentially *is* and *will be* or *could be* (“may’st thou ever be what now thou art”).

In less than a century, the self-determined identity of Byron’s Ianthe is followed by the truly performative identity of Kipling’s Kim (*Kim*, 1901), discussed in chapter 4. Kipling, unlike

the other three authors, approaches selfhood from the perspective of an Anglo-Indian who lived in British India during what has been called the “Imperial Heyday” (qtd. Randall 159). At worst, Kim’s (and Kipling’s) ability to constitute multiple cultural identities through performance may be read as an attempt to appropriate Indian identity and justify imperialism, as Judith Plotz argues (116-117). Though Kipling’s love for India cannot be extricated from his unsettling conviction of the rightness of British rule in India (cf. Montefiore 86, 88, 90), Kipling’s formulation of child identity may also be read sympathetically as an attempt to make sense of his own perceived lack of an essential identity and the need to perform his supposed native culture and language as a scripted part, as Kipling recalls from his childhood: “we were sent... with the caution ‘Speak English now to Papa and Mamma.’ So one spoke ‘English,’ haltingly translated out of the vernacular idiom that one thought and dreamed in” (Kipling, *Something of Myself* 4; ch. 1). As Don Randall suggests, Kim and Kipling are alike in that each is “Anglo-Indian, a divided subject” (Randall 156). Like Kipling, Kim is between two cultures and thus has no singular essential identity, but a multitudinous performative identity, flexible but unstable.

Kim explicitly questions the supposed essential identity behind his numerous performances, but those performances become hard to distinguish from what he comes to recognize as his far-from-unified self-image: “‘What is Kim?’” In the end, he answers his own question not by defining some inward, unchanging self, but by identifying scripted behaviors he can perform in order to connect himself to people and things. Kim *is* only insofar as he *performs*.¹²

¹² Of the works of the four authors whom I have made my focus, Kipling’s *Kim* comes closest to painting identity in Butlerian terms. Like Butler, Kipling’s hero, Kim, calls internal identity into question (as I will show in Chapter 4). On the other hand, the child Kim’s external actions do not define him, either—at least, they do not make him what he appears to be. Kim’s social roles (including whether he identifies as Indian or British) are undecided and exceedingly ambiguous. When he performs the role of a good British citizen it does not constitute him as a good British citizen. Instead, if we accept Butler’s doctrine of the unity of identity and action, the child Kim’s

Over the course of the long nineteenth century, Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling begin by challenging the uniqueness of scripts for child roles, depicting children who choose from many scripts. At the very end of the Victorian era, two culturally hybrid authors, the American-born naturalized British subject James and the Anglo-Indian Kipling, go on to challenge the idea that child performance is only for transformation, depicting children who use performance to manipulate others. Finally, Kipling questions whether there is even an essential identity to be transformed at all.

These authors who make a point of stressing children's choice in performance are commenting on the authors who do not. To imagine a singular childhood, they imply, is limited—doomed to sorrow, according to Byron; culturally narrow, according to Carroll; destructive to children, according to James; and underestimating great capabilities, according to Kipling. To imagine childhood as an array of choices which a child may select and perform at any time is instead, they imply, a way to grant children the agency to avoid the dangers of any single version of childhood which an adult might offer. For these authors, children partake of the same shift adults of their time faced: a shift away from a single culture, a single predetermined social role, a single prescribed identity, and towards a multicultural society, multiple options for social roles, and many choices for individuals determining their own identities.

From a twenty-first-century postmodernist perspective, this might sound like a good change, but these four authors paint child agency in an ambivalent or even pessimistic light.

performance of the role of a good British citizen constitutes him as a *performer*. A performer, Kipling suggests, is what a child—or at least this child—is.

Meanwhile, the adults around Kim expect Kim's performances to shape, not his present identity, but his future identity. That is, some of them (for example) expect him to be eventually constituted as a genuine, good British citizen in adulthood. His performances are supposed to prepare him (if he should so choose in later life) to later enact the same behavior not as a temporary experiment but with the intent to commit and enact his established self-image. The performance may either be a temporary courtesy or deception (and thus remain a mere performance), or it may serve as a means of gradually changing the self—as it were, constituting the child's future identity as an adult.

These are children who cannot be assured of success—indeed, some of them are doomed to failure—because their many options are uncertain. These are children who take on the burden of fashioning themselves because they are surrounded by adults whom (whether because of the adults’ selfishness or incompetence) they cannot trust. Ianthe, Alice, Miles, Flora, and Kim are great performers, but only because they have to be: they are in danger and alone.

4. Other Authors

Many authors draw on the idea that childhood is a scripted performance, but few authors challenge the didactic authors’ assumptions. For instance, Dickens’s Pip in *Great Expectations* (1861) performs the role of unrequited lover at Miss Havisham’s command, giving a secondary meaning to her opening imperative ““play, play, play!”” and Pip’s feeling that he is “unequal to the performance” (ch. 8). Likewise, Pip plays the part of gentleman, a class role he has not yet inhabited and has to learn. But these roles are thrust upon Pip; the emphasis here is certainly not on the variety of options and the child’s ability to choose. Estella observes that their drama is so fully scripted by Miss Havisham that they have no creative control as performers: it is really a puppet play, and Estella’s tone implies that “we were mere puppets” (ch. 33). Despite the challenges Pip faces in learning his class role, Magwitch understandably considers the performance (and its resulting transformation) to have been his own doing: “I’ve made a gentleman on you!”” (ch. 39). Moreover, to the extent that Pip chooses these two roles, it is heavily implied that he is rejecting the single script that would have led to success. His choices are binary and are evaluated morally rather than as neutral choices between valid options¹³—he

¹³ My argument is that Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling present different roles as equally valid, although their speakers/narrators may not. Kipling is the clearest case, treating all of Kim’s roles as morally neutral, pragmatic choices. James’s governess, of course, evaluates Miles and Flora’s performances in terms of whether they are on the right path or the wrong path, but James (I argue) does not. Without morally endorsing the children’s self-seeking

is foolish to pursue Estella, wrong to distance himself from those who love him in pursuit of a different class. As Patrick Fleming has observed, Pip follows Joe as a model of virtue: “Pip’s vices, it would seem, are innate, while his virtues come to him through others” (174). In fact, Fleming argues that *Great Expectations* is a didactic work, albeit in the more nuanced tradition of Maria Edgeworth (173-4). In its treatment of child performance, *Great Expectations* is more like the didactic works of Watts, which contrast one script for success (e.g., the busy bee), and an opposite script for failure (e.g., the sluggard), than like the works of the Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling.

Pip is not the only one who suffers disappointment for following the wrong script. George Eliot’s Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) tries to find an alternate identity by running away “to the gypsies.” Her expectations are somewhat confused but clearly based on cultural scripts she has heard and read: “It was just like a story,” something “she had rehearsed in a dream,” she thinks when things are going well; “It was... just what Maggie had expected.” She sees herself as one of them because “she had been so often told she was like a gypsy”; she has heard that there is a “queen of the gypsies” and wants to fill that role herself: ““If I was a queen, I’d be a very good queen.”” In the end, however, she finds that she does not have the influence, or the food, that she expected, becomes “terrified” of one of the men (who means her no harm), and returns to her father in tears (ch. 11). Another culture (albeit misunderstood from the outside) appears to offer an alternative script and social role, but these prove not to be

management of the governess, James presents their performances, according to my argument, as reasonable strategies in pursuit of reasonable goals—not abominations. Carroll’s Alice ultimately chooses one role (protective mother) over another (predatory mother), but (unlike in didactic stories) the narrative does not punish Alice’s experiments with predatory attitudes, nor does it reward her adoption of a more protective role, since her brief queenship in Looking-Glass Land is more frustrating than rewarding. As for Byron, the speaker of his poem sounds didactic enough when he argues that “Friendship... require[s]” Ianthe fulfil a certain role, while playing another role will lead to negative consequences (lovers feel “pangs”). On the other hand, the speaker admits that the role he endorses is only what “my Memory may desire” and he has no right to demand it: it is “more than Hope can claim.” The right to choose a role rests with Ianthe.

available to Maggie. Eliot is, of course, criticizing the culture that leaves a single path available to Maggie—a path that later limits her educational opportunities on the basis of her gender, and punishes her well-intended refusal to marry a man with whom she only appeared to have had an affair. But a key element of Eliot’s call for reform is the blunt depiction of the harsh consequences for a solitary woman, and especially a solitary girl, attempting to make a change without support from anyone else.

Dickens and Eliot, in addition to pursuing different goals from Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling, do not combine theatrical and multicultural emphases. Dickens’s robust theatrical background informs *Great Expectations*, but (apart from Magwitch’s transportation to Australia), Dickens focuses the story on his native Britain. Eliot’s depiction of Maggie’s encounter with the gypsies is multicultural and draws on the idea of cultural scripting but does not stress the metaphor of performance as such. Both Eliot and Dickens critique adult influence over children, but (unlike Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling) neither presents the morally neutral choosing and performing of multiple roles as an available option by which children can take agency.

5. The Child and the Critics

In focusing on childhood performance, my study exposes an avenue for children’s agency that other critics have overlooked. Some literary works (such as Byron’s “To Ianthe,” Carroll’s Alice books, James’s *Turn of the Screw*, and Kipling’s *Kim*) present social and literary constructions of childhood as adult-authored scripts for child actors—received scripts which nevertheless, they suggest, do not rob these children of agency. Actors, after all, enjoy certain advantages over authors: they are able to choose their roles, and choose how to deliver or even alter lines. Children-as-performers arrive on the scene with an array of adult expectations laid out

for them, and can choose which “role” to perform, which elements of the script to perform, and put a personal spin on them, all for their own purposes. Thus Byron lays out for the child he calls “Ianthe” the culturally prescribed roles of the innocent, the lover, the devoted daughter, and the reader, but rather than try in vain to force her to pick the role he prefers, he must *appeal* to her to play the part of admiring reader.¹⁴ When the child’s competence¹⁵ is devoted to performance, they are placed in the advantaged position.

As performers, children can adapt the scripts they are offered for better or (as in Bernstein’s examples) for worse: “children’s play performances revise rather than only reify narratives” (Bernstein, “Children’s Books” 163). I apply Bernstein’s idea, however, not to “scriptive things” (objects in material culture) but the scripting of childhood roles found in nineteenth-century British literature and in the expectations of adult characters in that century’s literature. In contrast to Bernstein’s “scriptive things,” the four authors I examine emphasize children’s agency in response to adult expectations by depicting children choosing between multiple adult-authored scripts for childhood. Bernstein’s focus is on one definition of childhood and its exclusion of black children: “childhood innocence—itsself raced white” (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 8).¹⁶ Like Bernstein, I intend to examine the flexibility and inventiveness of children’s

¹⁴ Likewise the children in James’s *Turn of the Screw* are offered several alternative roles for children: angels, spirited youngsters, and hellions. They deliberately play each part by turn, to their own advantage (until, unfortunately, the governess becomes too convinced of their corruption to be persuaded otherwise by anything they do).

¹⁵ Gubar opposes the idea of children as culturally literate and “competent” to the idea of children as “innocent” in the sense of being uncultured and “incompetent” (*Artful Dodgers* 9, 11, *passim*).

¹⁶ This phrase indicates two major differences in focus between Bernstein’s study and my own. The first is Bernstein’s singular definition of childhood. She describes the idea of “original sin,” one of original innocence’s chief competitors—an idea I still see coexisting with childhood innocence in our culture today—as having “receded” and being “replaced” by the idea of original innocence (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 4), and refers to the “ideals of childhood” as a singular “imagined original” (Bernstein, “Childhood as Performance” 206). The second difference between my study and Bernstein’s is her emphasis on the intersection of childhood and race. Unlike *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the material culture surrounding it, the works I study tend to treat racial definitions of childhood only as they coincide with cultural, ethnic, and national definitions of childhood, along divisions such as British vs. Indian (Kipling’s *Kim*) or West vs. East (Byron’s “To Ianthe,” e.g., the paradoxical “Peri [Persian fairy] of the West”).

performance of adult-authored scripts, but unlike Bernstein, I would like to look at adult expectations for child roles beyond innocence.

When I speak of multiple versions of adult expectations for children, I am building upon Gubar's observation that the same adult author often puts forward more than one set of expectations. Gubar notes two contrasting models of childhood: the "obsession with the primitive" (i.e., uncultured innocence) and "resistance" to this primitivist view, and observes that "these two impulses often coexist in the work of the same author" (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 9). That is, Gubar observes that multiple models of childhood are options for the adult authors. My argument, however, is that the authors also describe multiple models as options for the child characters. This choice is what makes performance an opportunity for child agency. It is not only that authors can portray children as either innocent or knowing, but that child characters can perform the part of either the innocent child or the knowing child—or, indeed, other social roles such as student, citizen, or lover.

Given my emphasis on performance, my approach is closest to Gubar's when she is considering drama as a genre. Here she is concerned not with child characters, but historical children—real Victorian child actors. In the first place, she argues, different models of childhood coexist in the same real children—that is, the same child can act innocent or experienced at different times, so that children seem to "vacillate between innocence and experience, blurring the line between child and adult" (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 178). In the second place, there is an important difference between a child actor really being a "primitive, unselfconsciousness innocent" and being able to "*perform* purity" (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 174). Here Gubar touches on the idea of children performing adult expectations, which I will explore more fully than she does. Like Gubar, who is studying drama as a genre, Bernstein is studying "performance, both on

stage and, especially, in everyday life” (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 4). Unlike Gubar and Bernstein, I will focus neither on drama as an actual literary genre, nor, for the most part, on real children,¹⁷ but rather the use of scripting and performance as a metaphor for adult-child interaction in prose and verse. What is more, I will make the case that, for every sphere of life an author addresses—romance, family, literacy, education, profession, moral responsibility—there is an opportunity for children to take agency by choosing from a range of roles. When literature offers child characters with possible models to follow, Gubar’s model of child as competent co-author is itself one of the possible social/artistic roles to be played, as is the child lover (Byron’s “To Ianthe”). In the sphere of moral responsibility and development, there are a full range of moral roles as well—angels, boys-will-be-boys, and hellions (James’s *Turn of the Screw*). When education and/or the selection of a future career take place in a cross-cultural context, there are multiple cultural identities, multiple roles to take in the process of cultural exchange and education (teacher or student, and if a student, choice of which culture’s education), and choice of profession (Carroll’s Alice, Kipling’s *Kim*).

One way of understanding how children perform childhood is to draw comparisons to adults performing childhood, a theme which Bernstein, Gubar, and Claudia Nelson all briefly touch on (Bernstein, “Childhood as Performance” 204-205). Gubar observes that “the idea that ‘child’ and ‘adult’ are roles that anyone can play pervades *Peter Pan*” (Gubar, “*Peter Pan* as Children’s Theatre”). Though few scholars stress the metaphor of performance Gubar puts forward in a few tantalizingly insightful sentences, others apply similar ideas not only to other children’s literature but to nineteenth-century literature more broadly. Claudia Nelson observes that nineteenth-century literature decades older than *Peter Pan* also treats culturally defined

¹⁷ Of the characters I study, the addressee of “To Ianthe” is the closest thing to a real child, but only Byron blurs the line between the historical child he addresses, and his description of her as the character “Ianthe.”

attributes of age as independent of biological age, and has devoted a whole book to *Precocious Children & Childish Adults* in Victorian literature. Nelson observes a few examples of age performance, such as Lady Audley, who is “like an actress” and is “counterfeiting... innocence” (Nelson 83). However, Nelson chiefly treats cases where authors represent “age inversion” (as her subtitle terms it) not as a performance but as a condition, an inherent quality of the character. Even Lady Audley is “oriented toward being rather than doing” and “retrac[es] her steps to girlhood and choos[es] a... husband who will permit her to remain a girl indefinitely... to preserve the existence that is already hers” (Nelson 86). The words “remain,” “existence,” and “being” all emphasize girlhood as pure presence, an interiority of motives and morals, something that Lady Audley *is*, not something she performs. Similarly, although Harold Skimpole’s supposed childlikeness is a calculated deception—“Skimpole claims child status as a way of refusing to provide for his wife and daughters”—Nelson emphasizes the intrinsically “childish” quality of Skimpole’s “selfishness” (suggesting that he actually remains immature, his morality developmentally stalled) rather than his intentional performing of childhood (Nelson 53). In contrast to Nelson, I will focus on characters’ self-aware performance of age, which may shape the characters’ future social identities but does not necessarily reflect an intrinsic internal character. Nelson’s emphasis usefully connects adult performers of childhood to the larger pattern of age inversion, but if we explore this pattern through the lens of age performance suggested by Bernstein and Gubar, we will not only better understand the performances of obvious actors like Lady Audley and Skimpole, but also find that some child characters are “playing” childhood and maturation in a similarly self-aware way.

6. Critical History

One of the central concerns of this study is the choosing and performing of roles as an opportunity for children to take agency. My argument builds a history of critics assessing the dynamics of power and agency in children's literature. Scholarship on children's literature and the literary portrayal of children reached a turning point in 1984 with the publication of Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. Rose's great contribution was to direct attention to adult desire in relation to children's fiction: portrayals of child characters, she argues, construct a nostalgic innocence which is meant to satisfy the desires of adults rather than to benefit children. "Suppose, therefore," Rose writes, "that Peter Pan is a little boy who does not grow up, not because he doesn't want to, but because someone else prefers that he shouldn't. Suppose, therefore, that what is at stake in *Peter Pan* is the adult's desire for the child" (3). Adults desire the child because it seems to restore them to their own childhood (re-imagined nostalgically as a life of "innocence" in an "unmediated" version of the world and of language/culture); that is, Rose argues that some children's fiction conceives of "a primitive or lost state to which the child has special access. The child is, if you like, something of a pioneer who restores these worlds to us" (9). In her view, children's literature defines childhood in a way that feeds adults' desire to resolve, in David Rudd's paraphrase of Rose, adults' "lack of completeness" (Rudd 290).

Rose goes one further step, raising concerns about children's agency. In her analysis, the adult author of children's literature not only describes a certain identity for children, but attempts to coerce the child reader into fulfilling that identity: the innocent role portrayed by the child character. The adult-child relationship, Rose emphasizes, is necessarily unequal, with the child in the role of passive recipient: the "adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes

after (reader, product, receiver)” (2). In this setting of unequal power, children’s fiction takes on violent overtones as “something of a soliciting, a chase, or even a seduction” (2). Analysis of childhood and children’s writing, according to Rose, repeatedly points to “this idea of mastery, which means by implication securing the child’s rationality, its control of sexuality or of language (or both)” (9-10). Rose herself always returns to the idea of “securing” the child: “If children’s fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp” (2). Rose’s idea that children’s literature is defined by adult desire for children and adult coercion of children are what succeeding scholars have responded to again and again. She opened a conversation about children’s literature and children’s agency by pointing out threats to children’s agency (threats which she presented as insurmountable) in a genre meant to influence children.

James Kincaid extends Rose’s analysis of adult desire, arguing that the adult desire for the child expressed in children’s literature eroticizes the supposed innocence of the child. His point is that what we call pedophilia is merely the extreme form of what our culture and our literature do all the time (*Child-Loving* 4-5). Although Kincaid is quite blunt in his assessment of children’s ability to seize power even when apparently most subject to adult power (*Child-Loving* 24-25, 262-263), his chief concern is about adults’ abuse of power over children (e.g., *Child-Loving* 261, 263), and the conflation of desire/sex with power (*Child-Loving* 20, 28, 32). Although he admits that power can be used to protect victims (*Child-Loving* 28), his central assumption is that “power... knows only how to hurt” (*Child-Loving* 27). If anything, despite his nod to some agency for children, Kincaid’s emphasis on adult desire and coercion are even more striking than Rose’s.

As important as Rose and Kincaid have been to the field, scholars such as David Rudd and Marah Gubar have argued that their approach overstates adult control, a central critique that motivates my project as well. On the one hand, Rose has “draw[n] attention to the problems” of what had previously seemed an unproblematic field (Rudd 303),¹⁸ and in fact “no one was more instrumental in alerting us” to the dangers of emphasizing the “otherness” of children (Gubar, “Risky Business” 451). On the other hand, by claiming that children lack the power and agency adults possess, Rose herself suggests that children are essentially Other and different from adults. In Gubar’s words, Rose “drift[s] back” to the same othering “difference model of childhood” which Rose meant to critique (Gubar, “Risky Business” 451-2). Rudd has suggested that Rose’s idea of the receptive, coerced, colonized child does not account for the child’s opportunity to enter into dialogue with the adult-authored text. Drawing on Bakhtin and others, Rudd suggests that children’s literature, because it is composed of words, *cannot* prohibit dialogue: “adults simply do not have this control” (Rudd 294). Similarly, Gubar objects to Kincaid’s tendency to describe children’s literature as othering children—treating them as “an embodiment of difference”—regardless of how the literary works portray those children. As she renders his argument, “there is no way out; authors *must* be constructing the child as an embodiment of difference whether they portray young people as obedient or resistant, naïve or sophisticated, mature or childish” (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 35). That is, Gubar implies what is central to my study: how the very range of possibilities limits adults’ ability to limit children to a singular othered position.

¹⁸ In particular, Rudd writes, “I agree with much of her thinking—namely, that the child of children’s fiction is a construct; that it is presented as innocent, pure, and asexual, as a fetish allowing adults to disavow their own lack of completeness; that it is also seen as standing outside the general slipperiness of language and problems of identity; and, consequently, that it is impossible for any children’s book to speak to and for children as a group” (290).

In response to the earlier approach of Rose and Kincaid, and as groundwork for new strategies of reading children's literature, Gubar proposes a "kinship model of childhood" in which "children and adults are separated by differences of degree, not of kind" (Gubar, "Risky Business" 453-4). Like adults, children are not voiceless, not mere "passive receiver[s] of adult-produced cultural artifacts" but are "artistic agents, participants in the production of culture" (Gubar, "Risky Business" 452-3). That is, Gubar makes the case that many portrayals of children in children's literature ascribe agency to children, describing them as akin to adults rather than othering them. Gubar's "kinship model" informs my reading of Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling: their portrayal of children as performers of social roles not only grants those children agency over their own lives but reflects the idea that humans of every age are performers of social roles, rather than such social roles being intrinsic or essential identities (hence the parallels, for instance, between children performing moral character in James's *Turn of the Screw* and adults performing class in James's "The Real Thing").

Gubar not only argues for the agency of real children (as child readers) through her kinship model of childhood, but also (in her book *Artful Dodgers*) argues that children's literature presents child characters as models of children's power and agency enacted through engagement with literature and identity formation (4-7, 29). Gubar centrally suggests that many works of literature portray children as "capable of reshaping stories" rather than merely being shaped by them (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 6): children as competent agents rather than as helpless objects of coercion. The chief difference between her approach and mine, however, is in how it handles the problem that the child is in the disadvantaged position of latecomer, as Rose has defined the temporal hierarchy she finds in literature supposedly "for" children that insidiously privileges adult over child: the "adult comes first... and the child comes after" (Rose 2). Gubar

only sees belatedness as a disadvantage, while I see it as a very source of strength—child performers can take a prior script and repurpose by playing it in the right way in the right situation. On the one hand, Gubar argues that coming second does not mean total helplessness: while children’s stories “acknowledged the *belated* nature of the child’s subjectivity” they also “suggest that young people have enough resourcefulness or recalcitrance to deal with (and even profit from) worldly influences” such as the influence of adult-authored children’s literature (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 6). On the other hand, Gubar observes that belatedness (as in the case of the child arriving on the cultural scene after the adult) typically implies an unequal, imperfect relationship, less positive than the usual connotations of “collaboration”:

My use of the term “collaboration” ...need not (and rarely does) refer to a perfectly reciprocal bond between equals. Given how attuned these authors are to the child’s belatedness, a phrase like “collaborator-after-the-fact” might better capture how they represent young people: less like founding partners than like Hollywood script doctors who arrive midway through the creative process and struggle to transform preexisting narratives. (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 8)

I agree with Gubar that some children’s literature does portray children as co-authors, and also that as belated co-authors, children are necessarily limited or disadvantaged as collaborators. But essential to my reading is the recognition that belatedness can be an asset as much as a liability.

Other literary works (such as Byron’s “To Ianthe,” Carroll’s Alice books, James’s *Turn of the Screw*, and Kipling’s *Kim*) transform belatedness into an asset because these works focus on the vitality of performance. Such literary works present social and literary constructions of childhood as adult-authored scripts for child actors.¹⁹ Children-as-performers have the advantage *because* of their belatedness: they arrive on the scene with an array of adult expectations laid out

¹⁹ Bearing in mind Gubar’s “kinship” model (Gubar, “Risky Business” 453-4), we might reflect that adults also arrive belatedly after cultural expectations are established and scripted, and adults are also in the position of choosing and performing pre-scribed roles. However, many writers of literature for children and young adults stress the child’s unique flexibility in performing identity, suggesting that adult identity has already been chosen (see “Performance vs. Performativity” below).

for them, and can choose which “role” to perform, which elements of the script to perform, and put a personal spin on them, all for their own purposes.

7. Performance, Sincerity, and Contradiction

Didactic authors distinguish between social identity (who someone is) and the performance of a social role (how someone behaves) using time: one’s present behavior is supposed to shape one’s future identity (or, as in Watts’s “The Sluggard,” one’s past behavior has shaped one’s present identity). The authors who respond to the didactic tradition (including Carroll and James) use another tool to distinguish between social identity and the performance of a social role: they portray insincere performance (whether courtesy or deception), implying a contrast between the child’s genuine interior and insincere exterior. Thus Alice plays her part as a polite student of Wonderland culture by suppressing the remarks that come to her naturally (regarding the cooking of fish, for instance) which would offend the sentient animals of Wonderland. Similarly, Miles and Flora in James’s *Turn of the Screw* perform the role of angelic children, not because they are cherubic on the inside but because if one of them entertains the governess, the other can slip away unsupervised. Alice’s courtesy and Miles and Flora’s manipulation equally indicate that the authors who described them conceive of their performances, not as constituting their identity as children in the present, but as being distinct from an internal identity.

At other times, however, children’s performances are portrayed, not as insincere, but as *combining* sincerity and diplomacy. Miles and Flora find it expedient to emphasize their affection for their governess, so they “play up” (a phrase the *OED* cites as early as 1814) that affection in their performance of the part of doting, devoted pupils. As the governess observes,

there is certainly an element of “diplomacy” in the children’s management of her (*TS* 168; ch. 9). On the other hand, it would be cynical to conclude that every child who uses displays of affection to wheedle some free time out of an authority figure has no sincere affection for the teachers or parents they seek to influence. On the contrary, Miles really is fond of the governess, though exasperated with her reluctance to send him back to school. When the governess turns to emotional blackmail to try to forestall his demand to return to school (“Don’t you then *love* our sweet Flora?”), Miles sputters: “If I didn’t—and you too; if I didn’t—! ... Well, you know what!” (*TS* 192; ch. 14). More eloquent in diplomacy than in an unplanned expression of his feelings, Miles’s effort to express affection leaves him inarticulate. His love for the governess is as real and unspeakable as his love for his sister, but that does not prevent him from also using the performance of that love to pursue another goal. Performance, then, can be more diplomatic than deceptive, and may not be at odds with a child performer’s self-image and emotional attachments.

8. Why We Need to Read This Way

To attend to the child in the text, I draw on many tools. At times, close attention to authorial allusions and their source texts provides a new angle on critical problems, as with Carroll’s allusions to educational and didactic texts (see Chapter 2). In other cases, the child’s perspective is all but invisible until (following Sharon Marcus), by “just reading,” we focus not on what is repressed but on “the givens of a text” (Marcus 75), what the children actually say about themselves, as in *The Turn of the Screw* (see Chapter 3). In still other cases, older critical texts provide new insight when viewed through the lens of current theoretical approaches like Bernstein’s idea of “scriptive things,” as in the case of *Kim* (see Chapter 4).

Using these tools enables greater attention to child characters' performance of social roles in nineteenth-century British literature, which in turn enriches our understanding of the history of conceptions of selfhood, not only for children but for adults who define themselves in relation to children. The belief in children's self-determination—that practicing performing social roles can transform them for adulthood, or that they can use their performances to influence adults—endures in literature and popular culture (at least in some circles) to this day, and in academic circles, the idea of performative identity continues to exert considerable influence. Tracing these ideas to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors reveals the complex development of these influential ideas. On the one hand, our modern views of childhood and selfhood are (counterintuitively) deeply indebted to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century didactic literature for children which emphasizes the authority of parents, God, and socioeconomic class expectations, but also stresses that individuals can shape themselves through performance. On the other hand, those ideas have come to us filtered through authors (Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling) who critique didactic literature from a position of multicultural pluralism and suspicion of a single essential identity determined by authority. To fully understand our own conception of childhood and selfhood, we must recognize that it comes not from one tradition, but two contrary traditions that shared the metaphor of child performance.

CHAPTER 1 | “ATTRACT THY FAIRY FINGERS NEAR THE LYRE”:
Scripting and Performing Childhood in Byron’s “To Ianthe”

Lord Byron is a fitting author to disrupt ideas of performance and identity. Many Byronists have connected Byron’s own identity to his self-representation—noting that his poems reimagine his life, with varying degrees of alteration,²⁰ and that his work (as Jerome McGann and Peter Manning have both observed) is “self-dramatizing.”²¹ Nicole Frey Büchel goes a step further to say that Byron presents identity as being based upon performance, and she thus treats “fictional Byronic figures... as representations of Byronic *attitudes* towards the self” (Büchel 15).

Byron’s “To Ianthe” responds to a didactic literary tradition that painted childhood as the performance of prescribed and modeled social roles. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, authors of didactic children’s literature (John Newbery, Mary Wollstonecraft) and in particular of religious didactic literature for children (Isaac Watts, John and Charles Wesley, and Hannah More), presented children with scripts and models for behavior, assuming that children performed childhood following those scripts and models—that is, that children performed the

²⁰ “Most of Byron’s compelling works are fictions of the self, in a manner sometimes more oblique, sometimes more direct” (Manning 12). Byron’s “fiction-making... braids or weaves two or more realities into a whole that resists reduction into any one of its component strands” (Graham, *Don Juan* 27–28). Byron used poetry to “exact from life itself the qualities of great poetry. ...Byron needed to mythologize fact” (Barton 12). Byron’s “*Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*... provided Byron’s contemporaries with many a cultural myth—but of all the figures perhaps the one most attractive and satisfying for Byron to cut was that of the mythmaker, whose mystifications blur or blend life and art... so that distinguishing one from the other becomes impossible” (Graham, “Mythmaking” 30).

²¹ “All of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* is self-dramatizing” (McGann, *Fiery Dust* 280). “Byron’s self-dramatizing imagination is the basis of his art... through the multiple roles Byron assumes” (Manning 17).

social roles expected of children, which would prepare them for the social roles expected of adults.

Didactic authors offered only a single script—a single version of childhood—not from narrow-mindedness about children but out of the idea that adulthood (for the middle-class audience) was uniform. That is, children’s literature, like conduct books for adults, assumed that middle-class adults followed a single code of literacy, manners, and morals (all three being, as Neil Postman has observed, closely connected [45-50]). Assuming uniform adulthood, didactic writers presented a singular script for successful maturation into that singular adulthood. This scripting was intended for *social preparation*, and the didactic works promised that the performance of this social script would result in *social transformation*—if you acted like the right kind of adult (whether moral or well-off), you would become one.

Unlike the work of his contemporaries, Byron’s “To Ianthe” offered a child, not a single script to perform, but many scripts, and—more importantly—depicted the child choosing among them. Not only can his Ianthe choose the identity she wishes to perform and adopt, but the speaker of the poem does not claim (as didactic authors did) that one script is the sure path to success for her—only that he *wishes* her to follow one script. The range of performances this poem offers comes, ironically, from the speaker’s desperate attempt to mold the child to suit his desires. But by acknowledging that “Ianthe” has the ability to choose from his recommendations, the speaker has already lost control. Byron is different from other authors in recognizing (despite his own wishes) that performance is not simply imitation but requires autonomy and self-determination.

1. Modeling, Scripting, and Performing Childhood in 18th-Century and Romantic Literature

As Alan Richardson has observed, there were quite a number of ways people understood and represented childhood in the Romantic era. Some works (such as Wordsworth's "Immortality" ode) celebrated a transcendental child "informed by a divine or quasi-divine nature." Some works (including, I would argue, parts of Wollstonecraft's "Lessons") featured "maternal" depictions of childhood marked by "attentiveness to the infant's body... and the trouble in nurturing it."²² Other authors, such as Wesley, More, and Watts, put forward moral education intended to combat children's original sin.²³ These and other conventions often included depictions of children performing social roles that were scripted or modelled for them—children imitating their parents, practicing the habits of middle class adults, emulating Christ, or playing at being adults with weddings and funerals. Some literary and educational traditions were built entirely around this idea of performance.

As discussed in the introduction, William Wordsworth acknowledges children's capacity to perform social roles, although he treats as tragic their maturation/transformation into adults that permanently inhabit those social roles. In "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807) childhood begins with play and performance—the child's wondrous "dream of human life" (the adult life of "wedding," "funeral," and "business") converted to the performance of "song," shaped "with newly-learned art" (lines 91-94, 96, 98). Maturation is a transition from the play and performance of childhood (in which the child may play at a wedding without really becoming a spouse) to the transformative performance of adult

²² Richardson 11-12, cf. 15-16. I would suggest that Wollstonecraft's frankness about the pain of breastfeeding a teething child (181) places her "Lessons" in this category, but as I will discuss below, this attentiveness to the infant stage does not prevent Wollstonecraft from attending to the child's maturation.

²³ Richardson 11-12, 14-16, 19-20.

roles which must be both imitated and inhabited (an enactment of a wedding really does make the mature person a spouse): “the little Actor cons another part” (line 102).

A good example of children performing social roles by imitating adults—in particular, their parents—is Mary Wollstonecraft’s posthumously published “Lessons: The first book of a series which I intended to have written for my unfortunate girl” (1798). The mother/speaker encourages the daughter/reader to recognize her place on the continuum between helpless infant and competent adult. Over and over, she directs the child to compare herself to her baby brother or even a dog (both as helpless as her past self) and to her mother, who serves as a role model for the child as she gradually acquires adult competence. Modeling is thus binary—the baby, who is not to be imitated, and the mother, who is to be imitated.²⁴ Thus, when the speaker of the lessons instructs the child not to put pins in her mouth, she uses both positive and negative modeling:

I never put pins in my mouth, but I am older than you, and know how to take care of myself. . . . When you were a baby, with no more sense than William, you put every thing in your mouth to gnaw, to help your teeth to cut through the skin. Look at the puppy, how he bites that piece of wood. William presses his gums against my finger. Poor boy! he is so young, he does not know what he is doing. (185-186)

Wollstonecraft’s speaker makes the same point about crying: “You will not cry, not you; the baby cries” (179), “Still I did not cry, because I am not a child” (181). But the speaker does not stop at merely presenting models, but encourages the child to *perform* her model’s maternal role on a smaller scale: “You are wiser than the dog, you must help him. The dog will love you for it, and run after you. I feed you and take care of you: you love me and follow me for it” (193).

²⁴ What is striking about Wollstonecraft’s presentation of maturation is that despite the inferiority of the baby and the dog and the superiority of the mother she invites the child to empathize with both greater and lesser: “you used to bite me. Poor mamma!” (181), “When the book fell down on your foot, it gave you great pain. The poor dog felt the same pain just now” (193). The emphasis is on continuity: the mother was once a child, and the child was once a baby (185-186). Although Wollstonecraft is like other didactic authors in using positive and negative modeling, her emphasis on empathy is exceptionally striking. I am inclined to agree with William Godwin that “the author has struck out a path of her own” (172); Wollstonecraft’s “Lessons” is more compelling than any other primer I have read.

Imitating the mother is presented as a path to being transformed into her image—caring and competent—gaining the skill to care for oneself (186-187), the wisdom to avoid cutting oneself (187-188) or getting a stomach ache (190), and even the ability to think independently (195-196). All the child needs to do to find happiness, Wollstonecraft implies, is to imitate her mother rather than revert to acting like a baby.

If Wollstonecraft endorsed the value of children performing roles modeled by (some) parents,²⁵ her Methodist and Evangelical contemporaries believed that some of the best models for child and adult alike to emulate are those they might never have met in person. On the one hand, there was a fairly wide range of models. Isaac Watts's *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715) famously presented children with the positive model of the "busy bee" and the negative model of the sluggard (in the poems "Against Idleness and Mischief" and "The Sluggard"). In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) and *An Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of Saint Paul* (1815), Hannah More puts forward the apostle Paul as a "model" for educators of children and for Christians of all ages (*Strictures* 233, *Paul* 231, 418-419).

On the other hand, Methodist and Evangelical authors considered all such models to be mere proxies for the ultimate models for the Christian child or adult: God and, in particular, Jesus Christ. With a divine model to imitate, there is hope even for humans born with original sin. By imitating the model (Christ), the child can (with God's help) be transformed to *be* like the model (Christ-like).²⁶ John Wesley wrote in "Thoughts on the Manner of educating Children"

²⁵ Of course, Wollstonecraft was quite vociferous in her doubts about parents unworthy of imitation serving as models for children: "nor will the important task of education ever be properly begun till the person of a woman is no longer preferred to her mind. For it would be as wise to expect corn from tares, or figs from thistles, as that a foolish ignorant woman should be a good mother" (*Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 283).

²⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the use of "Christ-like" ("like Christ, or like that of Christ; exhibiting the spirit of Christ") back to the late 17th century.

(1783) that religious education only improves children if “Religion be described as consisting... in the image of God, in the mind that was in Christ” (336). With God and Christ as the child’s models, there is hope (“by the grace of God”) that the “bias of nature” be turned “from self-will, pride, anger, revenge, and the love of the world, to resignation, lowliness, meekness, and the love of God” (337). This suggestion that the imitation of divine models can lead to inner transformation is even more explicit in the *Hymns for Children* (1763) Wesley co-authored with his brother, Charles Wesley. Several hymns explicitly name Christ as a “pattern” or “example” for the child’s imitation. The hymn “Lamb of God, I look to Thee” opens with this premise—“Lamb of God, I look to Thee, / Thou shalt my example be” (lines 1-2)—then goes on to give specific actions by which the child can follow Christ’s example—“Let me to my betters bow, / Subject to Thy parents Thou” (lines 11-12)—and ends with the promise that *performing* the same actions as Christ will (with God’s help) lead to being *transformed* into Christ’s likeness: “Make me, Saviour, what Thou art... / Then the world shall always see / Christ, the holy Child, in me” (lines 23, 27-28). Similarly, in “Holy Child, of heavenly birth,” Christ is the “pattern” for the child to follow (line 7), so the child endeavors to “live in everything like Thee” (line 4), detailed in a string of imitative actions to perform, including “obey,” “love,” and “strive” (lines 9, 11, 16). Again, with divine assistance, *acting* like the model leads to being transformed to *be* like the model. If Christ will act upon the child—“teach,” “let,” “impart,” “give,” “keep” (lines 9, 13, 17, 18, 21)—the child imitator can change internally (“mind”) to match the model: “find / Fairly copied out on me / All the mind which was in Thee” (lines 22-24). Hannah More makes much the same point in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. She writes that “women... when very young” should be taught gentleness, but “not... merely on the low ground of its being... feminine” but “on the practical ground of labouring after conformity” to Christ,

the “perfect pattern of imitation” (142-143). Again, with Christ as the “pattern” or model, a child’s enacted “imitation” can work towards transformation into “conformity” with the model. In this regard Christian children are like all Christians, as More makes clear in *Practical Piety* (1811): “The Christian, like the painter, does not draw his lines at random, he has a model to imitate... Every touch conforms him more and more to the great original” (98). That is, the Christian is simultaneously the painter doing the drawing and the painting receiving the painter’s touches—both acting to replicate the model, and transformed by those actions. Like all Christians, Christian children can be transformed (“conform[ed]”) when they “imitate” a “model.”

Some works promised earthly rather than spiritual benefits to children who would imitate models and follow social scripts. *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), published by John Newbery, is a landmark example. Newbery was the first publisher to create a distinct line of publications targeting children, and *Little Goody Two-Shoes* was his most popular children’s book (Maxted). The eponymous heroine of the story plays the adult role of teacher to her fellow children at a tender age (24-27, ch. 4), and teaches not only literacy but moral and prudential “Lessons”—that is, performable scripts—“For the Conduct of LIFE” (39-43, ch. 6). The opening couplet of these lessons is typical in prescribing actions and promising social or economic rewards: “He that will thrive, / Must rise by Five” (39, ch. 6). Within the story, then, Goody Two-Shoes plays a social role (teacher) and scripts social roles for others (such as the successful person whose behavior includes rising early). Outside of the story, Newbery presents Goody Two-Shoes as a model to the child reader, and her story as a script to follow for social and economic success. The extended subtitle of the book makes this point explicit:

The Means by which [Little Goody Two-Shoes] acquired her Learning and Wisdom, and in consequence thereof her Estate; set forth at large for the Benefit of those,
*Who from a State of Rags and Care,
And having Shoes but half a Pair;
Their Fortune and their Fame would fix,
And gallop in a Coach and Six.* (title page)

In parallel to the moral performance and transformation of More and Wesley, Newbery promised that social performance could lead to economic and social transformation: if you imitated the literacy, manners, and morals of a well-off adult, you would become one. For all the authors in this didactic tradition, the purpose of child performance was this transformation.

Wollstonecraft, More, Wesley, Watts, and Newbery are all forthright and explicit about the fact that they offer scripts and models for children. It is true, of course, that Wesley and Watts do not present their works as appeals to the child in second person, as arguments to be accepted or rejected. Instead, their verses are written in the first person for the child to recite or sing, apparently with the assumption that the child already agrees with the author and the verses. In other words, Wesley and Watts do not draw the child's attention to their pedagogical methods. On the other hand, even those first-person songs make no secret of the models they propose for imitation, and (along with More), Wesley and Watts were certainly frank about their aims when addressing parents and other adults. Wollstonecraft and Newbery actually do appeal directly to the child to perform social roles (to play "mother," to be a student and a teacher), promising benefits for doing so (the ability to care for oneself, prosperity).

The significance of these authors' frankness about scripting children's performance of childhood is that it makes them exceptions to the critique of children's literature offered by

Jacqueline Rose.²⁷ Rose objects to children's literature which attempts to offer fictional children as a model for the child reader to imitate while obscuring the fact that it is doing so:

If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp. ...None of this appears explicitly inside the book itself, and works precisely to the extent that any question of who is talking to whom, and why, is totally erased. (Rose 2)

Marah Gubar and David Rudd have made compelling critiques of Rose's argument,²⁸ but here Rose raises a very good point: a literary work may serve as a social script for children to perform even if it does not declare itself as such. When major Romantic authors like Wordsworth and Coleridge sometimes expressed ideas in line with Locke and Rousseau (Richardson 12-14), they may have intended to describe children as they were, but according to Jacqueline Rose, such descriptions may have the effect of prescribing what children should be like. Description becomes prescription, a cultural script the child can perform.

The particular irony is that what these works (according to Rose) ask children to imitate is the "innocent" child of Locke and Rousseau, untouched by language and culture (Rose 8-9). For Locke, as he wrote in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), a child was not an active performer of roles but passive "white Paper, or Wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases" (261), and according to Rousseau, as he wrote in *Emile* (1762), a child did not choose a social role either, but was like a plant either growing in one direction by nature, or in another direction when "interfered with" (39). Locke and Rousseau saw that children could be affected by adults, but attempted to describe an innocent, languageless, cultureless state that preceded such adult influence. But this description could, according to Rose's argument, become a

²⁷ Curiously, Rose specifically names Watts and Newbery in her critique, although in this part of her argument her point is that Watts and Newbery adopt Locke and Rousseau's ideas of children's relationship to language and sexuality, not that Watts and Newbery hide an attempt to influence their readers (Rose 8).

²⁸ Gubar, "Risky Business" 451-2; Rudd 294.

prescription, scripted in literary works. However, such literary works prescribing uncultured innocence are themselves linguistic and cultural artifacts. That is, the child's supposed unculturedness is itself culturally constructed—and to imitate culturally constructed unculturedness is to be cultured, to be aware of the cultural script.

Like her contemporaries, Jane Austen recognized children's ability to perform social roles, but she was one of only a few who both recognized that "innocence" was such a social role, and to express suspicion of a child's motives in performing it. That is, Austen gives her child characters credit as independent thinkers, although their independent thoughts do not always do them credit. Three-year-old Annamaria from *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is of particular interest in this regard.

Austen's narrator connects Annamaria's behavior to two opposed ideas about childrearing. Wollstonecraft or More would recommend that a child imitate a "pattern" or model of good behavior, but Lady Middleton considers her daughter Annamaria herself to be a "pattern" worthy of imitation, and therefore feels no need to ask her child to improve her behavior by emulating any other model of gentleness. Austen's narrator pokes fun at Lady Middleton's assessment of her three-year-old: though the doting mother declares Annamaria to be "always so gentle and quiet," a slight scratch "produced from this pattern of gentleness such violent screams, as could hardly be outdone by any creature professedly noisy" (88, vol. 1, ch. 21). To defend Annamaria and Lady Middleton, the sycophantic Lucy Steele expresses a view directly opposed to encouraging children to imitate a model, a quasi-Rousseauian love of "life and spirits" that deplores any attempt to "tame" the child's natural wildness: "I love to see children full of life and spirits; I cannot bear them if they are tame and quiet" (89, vol. 1, ch. 21).

There is some dry humor in Lucy's attempt to cast screaming children in a good light, but Austen's critique goes a step further: the child's supposedly natural wildness is not natural at all. Annamaria's foolish mother and the sycophantic Miss Steeles attempt to soothe Annamaria with "kisses" and "sugar plums," so that "with such a reward for her tears the child was too wise to cease crying" (88-89, vol. 1, ch. 21). The "crying" that presumably began naturally enough as a sincere response to pain is sustained as a calculated—even "wise"—performance. In fact, Annamaria adjusts her performance to cue her mother to offer the particular treat she wants:

all their united soothings were ineffectual till Lady Middleton luckily remembering that in a scene of similar distress last week, some apricot marmalade had been successfully applied for a bruised temple, the same remedy was eagerly proposed for this unfortunate scratch, and a slight intermission of screams in the young lady on hearing it, gave them reason to hope that it would not be rejected.— She was carried out of the room therefore in her mother's arms, in quest of this medicine (89, vol. 1, ch. 21).

Annamaria's performance may be shamelessly self-seeking, but it is also instructive about an insight some Romantics put forward: that a child could choose an adult-authored script (such as "innocence") even when that script was not *recommended* to the child, and that the child could choose a role for its own purposes rather than to suit the adult's desires. What Austen observes in a few words ("too wise to cease crying"), Byron explores more fully in "To Ianthe."

2. Scripting and Performing Childhood in Byron's "To Ianthe"

For the last thirty years, scholars of children's literature have debated how authors portray child characters and what authors expect of child readers. Jacqueline Rose has argued that portrayals of child characters attempt to coerce the child reader into nostalgic innocence to satisfy the desires of adults. James Kincaid goes a step further, arguing that the adult desire for the child, expressed in children's literature, eroticizes the supposed innocence of the child. Marah Gubar explicitly differs from both and instead describes children's literature portraying

child characters (and child readers) as culturally literate and competent to collaborate with authors and storytellers. I will argue not only that these three models (innocence, eroticization, and cultured competence) coexist in the same works of children's literature (as Gubar acknowledges), but that some authors present these different models of childhood to the reader as options, as different scripts or roles which the child may select to perform.

Byron's "To Ianthe" (1814), the prefatory poem to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, provides a striking example of the child's selection from multiple roles. This poem is not ordinarily studied as children's literature, since *Childe Harold* as a whole was read largely by adults.²⁹ Nevertheless, "To Ianthe" is addressed to a child: the addressee, Lady Charlotte Harley (the daughter of Byron's lover, Lady Oxford), was twelve when the poem was published, and only eleven when Byron was actually spending time with her.³⁰ In light of the connection critics of children's literature make between the child character and the child reader, either that the child reader is invited to emulate the child character or that the child character is meant to convey something true about the child reader (Rose 2, Gubar *Artful Dodgers* 4-5), the poem is also a particularly interesting case of a connection between child character and child reader. Although Byron reimagines the reader Charlotte as the character "Ianthe," the two are so closely associated

²⁹ The Duchess of Devonshire blends together the readership of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* with the jealous horde of adult "men" and "women" who idolized Byron socially: "'*Childe Harold*'... is on every table, and [Byron] himself courted, visited, flattered, and praised whenever he appears. He... is really the only topic of almost every conversation—the men jealous of him, the women of each other" (Foster 376-6). Samuel Rogers similarly remarks on an adult (largely female) readership, including "two old maids... who used to cry over" *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and the poem's popularity leading to "noble ladies" seeking Byron's acquaintance (Dyce 231-2). A number of women also copied passages from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (and shorter poems in the same volume) into their commonplace books (St Clair 227-8).

³⁰ Charlotte was born 12 Dec. 1801 (*Debrett's Peerage*) and was thus ten and eleven while Byron knew her in late 1812 and early 1813 (cf. Letter to Lady Melbourne, 5 Apr. 1813; *BLJ* 3: 36), and just over twelve in early 1814, when "To Ianthe" was published in the seventh edition of *Childe Harold* (*CPW* 2: 268).

that early drafts of the poem were titled “To the Lady Charlotte Harley”³¹ rather than “To Ianthe”—the child character and the child reader are addressed together in second person.

As Anne Barton has observed, Byron used his poetry to reimagine his own life, to “mythologize fact” (Barton 12). Even his letters, she says, read like crafted fiction.³² Both “To Ianthe” and Byron’s letters about Charlotte imagine their future and even script it like a play. In “To Ianthe,” Byron presents four different roles to Charlotte, some of which he describes in his letters as well:³³ the eternal innocent child, the lover, the daughter, and the artist. The last role blurs into Charlotte’s power as a performer who can choose to enact any or all or none of the roles offered her. The speaker of the poem ultimately recognizes that he can only appeal to the child; he has no power to make her choose to perform any of the roles he suggests. The agency of performing and determining her identity lies with her as the performer.

The first role, that of the eternal innocent child, consists not only of literal sexual inexperience—Ianthe is a “maid” (“To Ianthe” 34)—but of mental innocence, being “pure in heart” and “guileless” (“To Ianthe” 12, 14). The role of the innocent child is a moral and mental blank “white Paper” in Locke’s phrase (Locke 261), white as the “matchless lily” which represents her “name” (“To Ianthe” 36-37). Jacqueline Rose argues that it is always the adult author (in this case, Byron) who wants the child to play the part of innocence—that is not the child’s desire. Rose depicts this relationship as one in which the adult author successfully

³¹ *CPW* 2: 6n.

³² Writing of a series of letters Byron wrote September to October of 1813, Barton says that if one compares Byron’s letters to epistolary novels, “we are being presented on the one hand with a factual record and on the other with the constructions of the imagination, but... effectively there is no way of telling them apart. Unplanned, unretouched as they were, the Byron letters confront us like a formal work of art” (Barton 14).

³³ As I argued in a paper at the Byron Society conference, each of these roles play off of the name “Ianthe.” The lover and the eternal child are respectively the roles of Persephone and her friend Ianthe in the Hymn to Demeter, the daughter warms her mother’s heart (the meaning of the name Ianthe, suggested by the end of the Hymn to Demeter), and the artist’s connection to Byron’s poetry is underscored by her name (Ianthe) entwined in his verse.

coerces the child reader into playing the part, but both Gubar and Byron, for different reasons, suggest the child is not so susceptible to control (Rose 2, 9-10; Gubar 31).

The role of child innocence is the role that most of Byron's biographers emphasize in their treatment of "To Ianthe" and Byron's relationship to Charlotte,³⁴ especially the connection between Charlotte's age and Byron's feelings about his own youth. Leslie Marchand writes that Charlotte was at an age "that excited his romantic sentiments most profoundly. . . . No one could have had more poignant sentiments of the beauty of youthful innocence than the disillusioned young lord who had known too early the disappointments of love fading into satiety" (Marchand 135). Benita Eisler drives the point further: because of "Byron's painful obsession with his own youth. . . he longed to reclaim this fleeting moment, to become once more the child by possessing her" (Eisler 385). Marchand and Eisler could almost be channeling Jacqueline Rose, who argues that some children's fiction conceives of "a primitive or lost state to which the child has special access. The child is, if you like, something of a pioneer who restores these worlds to us" (Rose 9).

If Byron hoped that Charlotte could help him return to childhood, he succeeded in some measure—or presented himself as having succeeded. He was at his most boyishly playful with Lady Oxford's children, Charlotte and her siblings. In November of 1812 he wrote that he was "reading, laughing, & playing at Blindman's buff with ye. children" (*BLJ* 2: 249).³⁵ By April, he wrote that he was "scrambling and splashing about with the children" "on the water & in the

³⁴ Fiona MacCarthy compares Byron's relationship with the eleven-year-old Charlotte to his relationship with his even younger seven-year-old cousin Eliza, and says he describes Charlotte as a "fragile flower" (MacCarthy 195).* Eisler similarly writes that at eleven, Charlotte was "as unconscious of her own perfection as a flower" (Eisler 385).

* MacCarthy repeats E. H. Coleridge's translation of the name "Ianthe," but adds the adjective "fragile": he says "Flower o' the Narcissus" (Coleridge 13, n. 2); she says the "fragile flower of the narcissus" (MacCarthy 195).

³⁵ Letter to Lady Melbourne, 18 Nov. 1812.

woods” (*BLJ* 3: 36).³⁶ The phrase “scrambling and splashing” illustrates the way Byron casts himself as entering into the activity with the same abandon as the children did. By contrast, F.T. Palgrave’s paraphrase of Charlotte’s later reminiscences makes the same activity sound sedately adult: “Ld Byron... used to take her out for a walk or a row” (Pafford). Byron’s portrayal of Charlotte/Ianthe in the role of the innocent child in “To Ianthe” is tied to the implication in his letters that her innocent childlikeness is contagious and rejuvenated Byron himself.

If Byron presented himself as rejuvenated, he also expressed a preoccupation with the innocence of Charlotte’s tender age in his letters as well as his poem. In an April 1813 letter he gushes to Lady Melbourne about “Charlotte Harley whom I should love forever if she could always be only eleven years old—& whom I shall probably marry when she is old enough & bad enough to be made into a modern wife” (*BLJ* 3: 36).³⁷ Being “old,” “bad,” and sexually knowing as a “wife” are all connected, and Charlotte is (in this role) the opposite of all three: young and sexually and morally innocent. Moreover, Byron expresses the wish that she could be frozen at the age of eleven in the role of eternal child, a wish he reiterates in “To Ianthe”: “Ah! may’st thou ever be what now thou art” (“To Ianthe” 10). But even as he expresses this vain hope, he evokes the possibility that she will lose her beauty and charm as she matures, that she will “unbeseem the promise of [her] spring” (“To Ianthe” 11). In fact he admits that it is inevitable that Charlotte will lose her youth, and he is “happy” he will never see her beauty “in decline” (“To Ianthe” 23). The script for the role of innocent child can only end in tragedy when she grows up.

³⁶ Letter to Lady Melbourne, 5 Apr. 1813.

³⁷ Letter to Lady Melbourne, 5 Apr. 1813.

At first it may seem strange that the same poem which describes the child as an ideal innocent should also describe her as a lover, but it does.³⁸ Charlotte is, Byron implies, a flexible performer with the power of choice. She can take up either role at will: her eye is alternately “brightly bold or beautifully shy” (“To Ianthe” 29). In contrast to the shyness of innocence is the bold, knowing gaze which commands and compels love.³⁹

In “To Ianthe,” Byron speaks of love not as an emotion which active lovers express to a passive Charlotte, but as something radiating from Charlotte like light: he writes of her “charms which varied as they beam’d” and how her “ripening beauties shine.” Her eyes are “brightly bold” and they “dazzle” the viewer because they do not take in light, but rather emanate light (“To Ianthe” 7, 22, 29-30). This light is not only marvelous, but dangerous. In an early draft, when her eye dazzles a man, it “wounds as it wins” (*CPW* 2: 7, note 30). That is, the light from her eyes penetrates a man’s heart like an arrow: “all younger hearts shall bleed” (“To Ianthe” 24). Thus, her shining eyes compel men to love her; this is “the doom [her] eyes assign” (“To Ianthe” 25). In the poem, Charlotte is not the yin—dark and passive—but the yang—bright and active.⁴⁰ Byron is describing this child in the role of an active and powerful lover, whose “bold” gaze “wins” hearts in the present tense, while she is still a child (“To Ianthe” 29-30).

³⁸ Benita Eisler is the biographer whose reading of “To Ianthe” squarely faces the fact of Byron’s erotic interest in Charlotte. In “To Ianthe,” she says, “the poet sublimates his yearning for the carnal child” (Eisler 385). In light of Byron’s description of his relationship with Charlotte outside of the poem, Eisler’s interpretation of “To Ianthe” as growing from Byron’s erotic desire for Charlotte makes perfect sense.

³⁹ Child-as-lover is exactly what we might expect from James Kincaid’s account of authors of children’s literature eroticizing childhood, except that Kincaid believes they eroticize innocence. Gubar has instead argued that authors who did eroticize childhood were actually attracted to children’s precocity.

⁴⁰ Byron’s imaginary description of Charlotte as more active than passive may have had some basis in fact. If Charlotte’s adult life is any indication of her childhood, she was not only attractive but had a forceful personality. She was celebrated for her beauty and married a cavalry officer years before her siblings were married.* She used to ride around with her husband and his men when he served in the Portuguese civil war, and she laughed when fired upon by the enemy (Tolmer I: 27-28). When she grew old and stout, those who had admired her beauty still admired her laughter and amiable, vivacious conversation (Tolmer II: 281; “Art and Literary Gossip”), though she shocked some respectable matrons with her use of strong language (Macaulay 307-308). All in all, she was a woman to be reckoned with. As a child she would have had less independence and fewer opportunities to show her boldness, but

Understandably, Byron attempts to deny his erotic interest in Charlotte in the poem. He prophesies that when Charlotte's "ripening beauties shine... all younger hearts shall bleed"—that is, when she grows into a woman, men will love her ("To Ianthe" 22, 24). By associating Charlotte's ability to attract lovers to her maturation ("ripening"), Byron implies that she is not attracting lovers as a child. Similarly, when he claims that his own age makes him "safe[]"⁴¹ from the "doom" of "Love" ("To Ianthe" 22, 25, 27), Byron denies the possibility of his attraction to a child. However, his denial is not only inconsistent with his letters, but also with the poem's extravagant praise of Charlotte's beauty. Byron's claim that he *would* "vainly sigh, / Could I to thee be ever more than friend" ("To Ianthe" 32-33), and his request that Charlotte not "question why" he would address "one so young" ("To Ianthe" 34-35), are equally suspicious. In reality, of course, he was attracted to Charlotte even while she was a child. The extraordinary power he ascribes to Charlotte's role as lover thus applies just as much to Charlotte in childhood as in adulthood. This is yet another option for the child performer to select, another tool in her arsenal—and a social role which childhood is often defined *against*. Byron's implication would seem to be that a child can play almost any part at all.

The downside of this role is that a lover's power leads only to "doom" and "pangs" which Byron is "happ[y]" to escape ("To Ianthe" 24-25, 27).⁴² Even requited love brings pain ("To

an attentive companion would be unlikely to miss it. Byron's image of her radiant power shows that he knew her active character well.

* Charlotte married Anthony Bacon in 1823 (Glegg 81). Her elder brother Edward never married, and her younger brother Alfred married in 1831 (Cokayne et al. X: 270). Her sisters Jane and Frances were married in 1835 (Hardy 444, "Obituary Notices"), and her sister Anne was married in 1836 (Manzini 279). Her remaining siblings had died in infancy (*Debrett's Peerage* 566).

⁴¹ The speaker can "safely view thy ripening beauties shine" (22).

⁴² Byron's account of his relationship to Charlotte, in his letters and elsewhere, make it clear he did have a romantic or erotic interest in the child but perceived that his pursuit of her could only end badly. In the letter already quoted he writes of "Charlotte Harley whom I should love forever if she could always be only eleven years old—& whom I shall probably marry when she is old enough & bad enough to be made into a modern wife" (Letter to Lady Melbourne, 5 Apr. 1813; *BLJ* 3: 36). In these brief lines Byron captures the paradox which (in the future he

Ianthe” 25-7), and Byron recognized that their difference in ages did not bode well for the possibility Charlotte would return his affection: he cannot “be ever more than friend” to her (“To Ianthe” 33). Alluding to his alleged plan of marrying Charlotte, he wrote Lady Melbourne later in April, “I am very busy educating my future wife—& look upon the epistle of another’s spouse with a prophetic twinge that makes me feel like Moody in the Country Girl” (*BLJ* 3:42). In Garrick’s play, *The Country Girl*, Moody is a 50-year-old man who wants to marry his 19-year-old ward, but the girl outsmarts him and marries a younger man (*BLJ* 3:42n, MacCarthy 196).⁴³ Byron assigns himself and Charlotte roles in this fictional drama: Charlotte’s role is of a young but clever and active lover, while Byron’s role as a disappointed aging swain has an unhappy ending—he is to remain unloved while Charlotte pursues men who possess the youth he envies.

Byron introduces the ultimate unhappy ending to his relationship with Charlotte, not in his letters but in a shocking story he later told his wife. Lady Byron claimed that “He told me that at the time of his connexion with Lady O[xford] she detected him one day in an attempt upon her daughter, then a Child... & was enraged with him to the greatest degree” (qtd. Elwin 163, MacCarthy 196). Whether or not this “attempt” on Charlotte took place in historical fact—and Byron’s biographers disagree on this point⁴⁴—it existed in Byron’s imagination, just like his

imagines) dooms their relationship to an unhappy ending. His love for Charlotte is contingent on her remaining a child forever (Kincaid’s notion of eroticized childhood), but he knows she will grow up. If he marries her “when she is old enough,” the very thing he loves her for will have passed away.

⁴³ Such schemes were not exclusively the realm of fiction. In the late eighteenth century, Thomas Day famously attempted to raise foundling girls according to Rousseau’s methods to prepare an ideal wife for himself (Rowland).

⁴⁴ Some of Byron’s biographers, Fiona MacCarthy and Leslie Marchand, question the reliability of the source and the plausibility of the accusation, but Eisler contends that such an act would not be out of character for Byron (Eisler 384-385; Marchand, *Portrait* 140; MacCarthy 196). * Whether or not the “attempt” on Charlotte took place in historical fact, however, it existed in Byron’s imagination, just like his marriage to her and her scheme of fleeing his affections in the arms of a younger man.

* In Byron’s defense, he refrained from sleeping with another beloved child, the Maid of Athens, when offered the opportunity. According to Hobhouse’s diary (Mar. 3rd, 1810): “Theresa 12 [years old] brought here to be deflower’d, but B would not” (qtd. in MacCarthy 114). More significantly, Lady Oxford did not act “enraged with him to the greatest degree.” She never threw Byron out of her house, as she might be expected to do after such an incident. In fact, she remained friendly with him until the final days before she left England, defending Byron’s presence to her

marriage to her and her scheme of fleeing his affections in the arms of a younger man. For the role of lover, every ending is tragic—the pain of requited love, the pain of unrequited love, or the pain of violence.

Decrying the evils of the two options of the eternal innocent and the lover, Byron presents a third, more optimistic role for Charlotte’s consideration: that of a devoted daughter. Charlotte was not only Byron’s favorite among Lady Oxford’s children, she was (according to Lord Glenbervie) her mother’s favorite as well.⁴⁵ In this role, Byron reimagines Charlotte the young beloved child growing into an adult beloved child, saying she will give her mother joy. The dazzling light which makes others love her may be dangerous to men—and to Byron—but for her mother it is a brightening rainbow that takes all sorrow away:

And surely she who now so fondly rears
Thy youth, in thee, thus hourly brightening,
Beholds the rainbow of her future years,
Before whose heavenly hues all sorrow disappears. (“To Ianthe” 15-18)

Byron seems to be trying to make amends to both mother and daughter by taking himself out of the picture, proposing a role for Charlotte that has nothing to do with himself. At the same time, this role still stresses an adult’s perspective and an adult’s desire—Lady Oxford’s “fond[ness]”

husband when Byron followed her and her children to the port (Marchand, *Portrait* 143-144; *BLJ* 3: 59, 65, 69). The lack of reaction on Lady Oxford’s part makes it probable, as MacCarthy says, “that the ‘attempt’ on Lady Charlotte went no further than an unwisely ardent embrace” (MacCarthy 196). Charlotte herself remembered Byron fondly to the end of her life (Pafford).

⁴⁵ “The child Lady ---- [sic] is... openly and indecently the favourite of the mother” (Glenbervie II: 81). “The child Lady ----” is described in the same passage as “the very picture of Sir Francis” Burdett, so the child in question is almost certainly Charlotte—Count D’Orsay, who knew Charlotte, and Gordon Glegg, who has studied her portrait, remark on Charlotte’s resemblance to Burdett (Orton 98, Glegg 80). Archer Clive, a close friend to Charlotte’s sister Frances and executor of Frances’s will, says that Charlotte was Burdett’s daughter (Clive 108). Even Burdett’s daughter, Angela Burdett Coutts, who refused to believe that Charlotte was Burdett’s child, admitted that he supported Charlotte’s family financially (Orton 99).

for her daughter, the relief of Lady Oxford's "sorrow" through her daughter—rather than the child's own desires.⁴⁶

Charlotte's final option, among the roles proposed by Byron, allows her greater self-determination based on her desires, although of course it is motivated by Byron's own desire to maintain a connection with her. The final role he proposes she play focuses on his poem as a medium which connects him to her. The connection takes several forms, but all are contingent (Byron says) on her taking the initiative. If she will "bid" him to include her name ("To Ianthe" 36-37), she will be his subject matter: thus her "name" is "entwin'd" in his "verse" ("To Ianthe" 37).⁴⁷ If she deigns to read his poem, she can be his reader, addressing her lover's gaze to his poem instead of to himself:

let that eye...
Glance o'er this page; nor to my verse deny
That smile for which my breast might vainly sigh,
Could I to thee be ever more than friend ("To Ianthe" 28, 31-33).

Charlotte as Byron's subject matter or as his reader fits neatly into Rose's description of the necessarily unequal relationship between the adult author and the child: the "adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver)" (Rose 2). Byron

⁴⁶ Eisler reads this "equivocal homage" to Lady Oxford suspiciously (Eisler 385). After all, Eisler sees Byron's "seducing" of Charlotte as "a double act of revenge against" Lady Oxford in her own dual capacity as "mistress and mother" (Eisler 385). Eisler asks "whether Byron's consoling message—that Ianthe's radiant womanhood would comfort his forty-year-old mistress's old age—was a welcome promise" (Eisler 386). She is certainly right to question how Lady Oxford read a poem in which she beholds her daughter's beauty rather than being radiant herself, but I am inclined to think that Byron is merely being thoughtless (as when he praised Lady Oxford's "autumnal charms"*).

* Lady Blessington only refers to the lady of "autumnal charms" as "Lady -----." Perhaps because this description resembles the description of Lady Oxford in Medwin, Rowland Prothero opined that Byron was "probably" describing Lady Oxford in this passage from Lady Blessington (Prothero 164, n. 3). Marchand likewise quotes the phrase "autumnal charms" in connection with Lady Oxford (*Portrait* 129, *BLJ* 2: 286). Lady Blessington gives the lady's age as 46—which is closer to Lady Oxford's age when Lady Blessington spoke to Byron (49, in 1823) than it is to Lady Oxford's age at the time of her affair with Byron (38-39, in 1812-1813). However, if Byron told Lady Blessington what he told Medwin, that Lady Oxford was "double my own age" (Medwin 67), and if Lady Blessington thought he was 23 in 1812, instead of 24, she may have reconstructed 46 from Byron's age.

⁴⁷ Eisler picks up on this "plea that she will act as muse" (Eisler 385).

hints, however, at a far more potent role Charlotte can take on in connection with his poem—he hopes to “Attract thy fairy fingers near the lyre / Of him who hailed thee” (“To Ianthe” 42-43). What does it mean that Byron should “desire” (“To Ianthe” 44) that Charlotte’s “fingers” reach for his “lyre”? To some degree, the desire for her touch, like the desire for her gaze, is displaced from the man to the poem. But if Charlotte is the one playing the strings, she is the one in control of the song or the poem, not Byron—the metaphor does not emphasize Byron’s influence or even his personal presence. Compare Byron’s description of his daughter Ada reading his poem, taken from *Childe Harold* book 3: “My voice shall with thy future visions blend, / And reach into thy heart” (*CHP* 3.1073-4). The metaphor of the “voice” highlights Byron’s influence, his ability to “reach into [the] heart.”

The metaphor of the lyre in “To Ianthe” indicates a very different emphasis: other uses of the lyre metaphor in *Childe Harold* connect it to the female poet and performer. Most notably, Byron uses the “lyre” to speak about the celebrated ancient poet “Sappho” and her “Verse immortal” (*CHP* canto 2, stanza 39).⁴⁸ If Charlotte holds the lyre rather than merely listening to a voice, she is like Sappho, as much an artist as Byron himself. Charlotte’s artful capabilities align her not with Rose’s notion of the ever-passive, ever-victimized child character and reader, but with Gubar’s paradigm of the competent, culturally literate child who is artful enough to collaborate with adults in the shaping of stories, like the precocious Sara in Burnett’s *A Little Princess*, an empowered character who reworks adult-authored narratives in her storytelling (*Artful Dodgers* 6-7, 35-38).

⁴⁸ As a passage later in canto 2 shows, even a disadvantaged woman, like the woman captured and separated from her “mother” and “Sire,” exerts a soothing influence over her captors through the power of verse and performance: “her music shall soothe; / Let her bring from the chamber her many-toned lyre, / And sing us a song” (*CHP* canto 2, interlude: warrior’s song, stanzas 6-7).

Byron portrays Charlotte as more than a collaborator—she is a performer. She is an artist, but her art is not the composition of poetry—it is the performance of poetry, choosing a passage and becoming its voice, choosing a role and putting it into action. Once again (as with her role as lover), the poem indicates that Charlotte’s role (performer) gives her more agency than Byron’s role (poet). When Byron expresses his hope to “attract” her “fingers” to his “lyre,” he suggests that his poetry, like an unplayed instrument, will be silent and inert until she performs it. It is up to Charlotte to perform—or not—the roles he scripts for her in “To Ianthe.” As performer, she can choose whether or not to even read his poem—as poet, he can only make his appeal to her to do so.

The idea of child as performer makes sense given that Byron wrote he was “busy educating” Charlotte⁴⁹—the recitation of poetry was of course a key part of children’s education.⁵⁰ We have every reason to believe that Charlotte was a spectacular performer of poetry as a child; throughout her adulthood she was celebrated for her expressive playing of music and her extraordinary dramatic readings.⁵¹ Most memorable is the journalist Henry Reeve’s account of her reading from Shakespeare:

After dinner we made Lady Charlotte read *Lady Macbeth* to us, Greville doing *Macbeth* with two paper-knives for daggers. It began in a joke; but such was the

⁴⁹ I am following MacCarthy in interpreting this to mean that Byron actually tutored Charlotte (MacCarthy 196). Lady Oxford personally oversaw her children’s education (Farington diary, 13 October 1806; Farington IV: 31) but also provided her daughters with tutors in music (Manzini 279, Hare I: 479) and Italian (Scotti 161).

⁵⁰ Catherine Robson has traced the rising dominance of poetry recitation in education in the eighteenth century, leading to its nineteenth-century heyday (43-46). Charlotte’s own sister, Lady Jane Harley, claimed she could recite “all Shakespeare by heart” (Broughton I: 45).

⁵¹ When she was nearly twenty (1821), Count Giuseppe Pecchio found her pianoforte playing so expressive that he wrote she had a “soul of fire” (Count Giuseppe Pecchio to [Lady Jane Harley], 5 July 1821; Pecchio 48).* In her thirties (1839) Charlotte privately gave the readings from Shakespeare described below (Laughton 102). In her sixties (1867), Charlotte was one of the performers at an “entertainment [that] consisted of music, readings and recitations” (“Lyndoch”). In her seventies (1872), she was one of three performers who gave readings at a program which “was a marked success” (“Mount Barker”).

* The Italian and French editions name Pecchio’s correspondent “G.O.” or “J.O.” (Jane or Giannina Oxford), and Scotti notes that Jane is the recipient (Scotti 91n).

power of her art that it well-nigh ended in tears. I never heard finer touches of pathos. Then she healed this grisly tragic terror by the love of Juliet, and the naïve devotedness of Imogen; and we—band of bold talkers—sat listening as if we heard it all for the first time.... (Laughton 102).

If Charlotte had such power to render such different parts—“pathos,” “naïve[té],” and “love”—it is no wonder that Byron should present her with such different options in his poem. Her position as performer gives her, as Byron recognizes, an agency that rises above his efforts to direct her choice. Childhood can be whatever she makes of it—such is “the power of her art.”

CHAPTER 2 | “PRETENDING TO BE TWO PEOPLE”:
Cultural and Imperial Scripts for Childhood and Adulthood in the Alice Books

1. Scripts and Performance

The commentary on and parodies of didactic children’s literature in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) have suggested to critics that Carroll is critiquing the whole genre of moralistic texts for child, and this critique is often taken to be universally damning. According to Catherine Golden, Carroll finds fault with cautionary tales in which the “terrifying outcomes of disobedience” are “intended to frighten young children into perfect obedience,” and so Alice enters Wonderland in order “to resist the kind of literature... she has been spoon-fed” (Golden 191-2). Marah Gubar similarly writes that Carroll rejects the “cruel” didactic tradition that requires “slavish” parroting from children (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 114).

I will argue that the critique of the demand for slavish repetition and obedience is only one side of Carroll’s response to didactic literature. On the one hand, Carroll’s Alice comes to question the manipulative use of didacticism by adults with selfish motives (represented by the Duchess⁵²). On the other hand, Alice maintains an interest in the didactic idea of transformative performance: she wants to grow up to fill a social role, and she prepares for that role by experimentally performing different social roles as a child. Once she feels safe from abusive

⁵² “How fond she is of finding morals in things!” Alice observes, and she points out the lack of consistency in the Duchess’s morals, that the Duchess previously said that “everybody minding their own business” made the world go around, but now says that “love... makes the world go around” (*AW* 92; ch. 9).

adult control, she even follows the scripts of a didactic poem for her performance. Early in the story, the narrator Alice's performance of both parts in the drama of an adult instructing a child:

“Come, there's no use in crying like that!” said Alice to herself rather sharply. “I advise you to leave off this minute!” She generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people. (*AW* 18; ch. 1)

Alice performs the part of the child in need of instruction—needing an adult's good advice but usually ignoring it, misbehaving (cheating) and being scolded or receiving corporal punishment. But Alice also plays the part of the adult—a fond but authoritative parent who plays games with the child but also provides the child with the necessary advice, rebukes, or discipline. Alice later performs the role of mother to both a baby/pig and a kitten (*AW* ch. 6, *LG* ch. 1), but also performs the role of a childlike pawn in place of the White Queen's daughter, who is “too young to play” (*LG* 163-4; ch. 2). Alice's ability to perform either the learning child or the authoritative adult is key to understanding her interactions with other characters, and it is also key to understanding the relationship of her story to didactic children's literature.⁵³

Didactic moralists, after all, expected the child performer to be open to instruction, but also expected the child's performance to be a preparation for adulthood. (In fact, performing adulthood—that is *playing* at being an adult—is itself a scripted behavior for children.) Alice's forward-looking performance of adulthood shows her investment in the didactic model: she performs the scripted roles of a child specifically in order to perform the authoritative adult position in the future, in exactly the same way that, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, she performs

⁵³ Nina Auerbach suggests that Alice's roles and the characters in Wonderland are one and the same, that “Alice dissolves into her component parts to become Wonderland” (34), but my argument is instead that there are scripted roles and models outside of Alice, which she chooses to perform, and she learns something about those scripts and models in Wonderland.

the part of a pawn expressly for the purpose of later being transformed into a queen herself. Not only does Alice want to grow up, as U.C. Knoepfmacher (206, 226) and Marah Gubar (*Artful Dodgers* 120-1) have stressed—she specifically wants the authoritative, adult social role of a parent, and (as I will show) she performs cultural scripts, including didactic children’s literature, in pursuit of transformation into the adult she wants to be.

Alice is invested not only in the transformation that didactic literature promises, but also in the literal performance of that didactic literature for an adult audience. As Catherine Robson has shown, nineteenth-century British education was a key site of child performance—specifically, the performance of poetry (including didactic verse).⁵⁴ Alice reveals early on that she defines herself by her ability to perform for adults in such an educational context. Asking herself “Who in the world am I?” she attempts to prove to herself that she is not the ill-informed Mabel, not by silently remembering what she knows, but reciting it aloud “as if she were saying lessons” for an adult audience: the multiplication table, capital cities, and Isaac Watts’s “Against Idleness and Mischief” (*AW* 23; ch. 2). The inhabitants of Wonderland reinforce this view by repeatedly commanding performances from Alice, which as Alice observes is a way of taking the adult teacher’s power position: “‘How the creatures order one about, and make one repeat lessons!’ thought Alice. ‘I might just as well be at school at once’” (*AW* 106; ch. 10). But Alice does more than perform adult scripts by reciting them aloud; she actually enacts those scripts in her life. When first deciding whether to drink the bottle labeled “drink me,” she remembers the “nice little stories” she has read about the consequences of not following adults’ “simple rules” of self-preservation regarding knives and hot poker, and decides to follow the “simple rule” of

⁵⁴ In the early to mid-nineteenth century, didactic poems such as Isaac Watts’s *Divine and Moral Songs* and Robert Southey’s “Father William” were included in British schoolbooks with the recommendation to instructors that students memorize and recite them (Robson 47, 49). After the Revised Code of 1861-62, pupil-teachers were required to memorize and repeat poetry (58-9), and beginning in 1870, government inspectors required students to memorize and recite poetry (61-2).

drinking nothing labeled “poison” (*AW* 17; ch. 1). That is, Alice accepts the binary script of cautionary tales—children who perform adult-unapproved actions receive negative consequences, children who perform adult-approved actions receive positive consequences—and she performs the scripted part of the child who does what adults approve of. In these opening pages, Carroll evokes the didactic paradigm of the adult-directed child performance based on a single script with binary (positive/negative) models.

Carroll complicates the didactic single script for child performance with a multicultural encounter between Alice’s British culture and the foreign culture of Wonderland. As I will show, Carroll signals Wonderland’s status as a foreign country with a series of allusions to France and the Norman Invasion—this at a time (only a generation after the Napoleonic Wars) in which Britain defined itself against the French and even against the French Normans, by associating Britain with the Anglo-Saxons (Colley 5, Simmons 195, Niles 341-2). By contrast with Wonderland, Looking-Glass Land (I will further argue) is presented as being Anglo-Saxon and English. The foreign (French/Norman) Wonderland presents cross-cultural challenges to the didactic model (and difficulties to Alice the performer), whereas the performance of cultural scripts—poetry and the social roles it prescribes—comes more easily to Alice in the more culturally familiar (English/Anglo-Saxon) Looking-Glass Land.

The significance of the culture clash between Alice and the “foreign” culture of Wonderland is twofold: both *imperialism* and *options*. In the first place, Carroll uses the metaphor of cultures to critique some uses of adult authority and didactic literature as *imperialist* and oppressive. That is, the inhabitants of Wonderland insist that Alice take the role of a child learner who performs (foreign and unfamiliar) adult expectations. In this way, Carroll implies that self-serving British adults who force unwanted cultural roles on children are analogous to

the Wonderlanders—and to the Normans oppressing the Anglo-Saxons, to Napoleon dominating Europe, and to the Duchess (a foreigner from Wonderland) mistreating her baby.

Daniel Bivona observes the “confrontation of cultures” between the English Alice and the foreign country around her, but concludes that Alice is the imperialist, imposing her interpretations onto Wonderland (143, 161). I would argue that however well Bivona’s interpretation might fit Alice when she is playing the adult/teacher, it does not fit her when she is playing the child/student, a role the denizens of Wonderland often insist that she must perform. As Mary Louise Pratt suggests, travelers encountering a foreign culture may occupy either the “infantile” position of learning that culture, or the “patriarchal position” of imposing their own culture on the foreigners (*Imperial Eyes* 160)—in my terms, in the child role one learns culture, and in the adult role one teaches culture. As a child, Alice is pressed into learning a foreign culture although, as both a performer of adulthood and (as Bivona might say) as a subject of the British empire, she may be tempted to teach foreigners her own culture.

The parallels between imperialism and indoctrinating children are not lost on scholars of children’s literature. Jacqueline Rose writes that “literature for children is... a way of colonising... the child” (Rose 26), and Perry Nodelman concurs—“child psychology and children’s literature are imperialist activities” (Nodelman 33). Lewis Carroll presents a child who resists being “colonis[ed]” by adults by looking at her options for cultural scripts and choosing which roles to perform—in this way, Carroll resists classification as a child-colonizing author himself, while indicting those who abuse their didactic position to extend “imperialist” influence over children.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ In “The Occidental Alice,” Nancy Armstrong has similarly observed parallels between the control exerted over the empire and the control exerted over little girls—in both cases, appetite can make the Other “bad,” and therefore appetites must be regulated.

Alice's multiple *options* for cultural scripts—her means of resistance to adult control—are the second consequence of the cultural clash in which Carroll places her. Carroll uses the metaphor of cultures to offer a solution to adult imperialism—a child unhappy with the role prescribed for children in one culture can make a comparison with another culture's scripted performances for children, recognize the arbitrariness of such scripts, and choose which one to perform. In this second significance of foreignness, France/Wonderland offers children an opportunity to resist the control of adults, to show their skill and flexibility as performers, and (by choosing their performances in the present) to direct their own future transformations into the adult social roles they desire.

What scripts does Alice have the option of performing? She is in the habit of playing both child and adult, but she identifies two versions of each. As variants of her role as child, she can play (as I will argue) either Britain's animal-dominating (and animal-eating) child or Wonderland's animal-respecting (and potentially eaten-by-an-animal) child. Alice finds that it is in her best interests to perform respect for animals, as a courtesy to her interlocutors and their culture, and to avoid conflict. As variants of Alice's role as adult, she can play (as I will argue) either the imperialist adult—a metaphorical predator who uses her power over the child to sacrifice the child's best interests and serve the adult's desire—or the protective adult, who uses her power over the child to protect him. Alice finds models of both kinds of adults everywhere—Britain, Wonderland, and Looking-Glass Land. Didactic literature for children, as I will show by examining Carroll's sources and his use of them, can be abused by predatory adults like the Duchess, but Carroll has no objection to the cultural roles they prescribe. In fact, once Alice has tried out being both imperialist/predatory and protective, and feels assured that she can control her own performance and transformation, she follows Isaac Watts's model of the maternal busy

as she performs protective adulthood. That is, having resisted adult manipulation through the power of choosing between scripts, Alice willingly uses performance to transform herself according to the didactic model.

2. Norman/Adult Conquest

Carroll's repeated allusions to William the Conqueror and to France highlight his representation of Wonderland as a predatory and invading foreign power, like adults who exercise imperial control over children. In her first conversation with an inhabitant of Wonderland, Alice finds herself somewhat overprepared for linguistic differences, but underprepared for cultural differences. Recalling her brother's Latin grammar, she addresses her interlocutor, "O Mouse," which (unsurprisingly, given the archaic form of apostrophe here) causes the mouse to give her an inquisitive look (*AW* 25-26; ch. 2). Alice then reflects, "Perhaps it doesn't understand English. . . . I daresay it's a French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror." Note that she still believes herself to be in England, so that (contrary to the reality of her being surrounded by a foreign culture) she is the native and it is the mouse who is a foreigner who has "come over." Nevertheless, Alice wants to make contact with the "French" mouse and repeats from her French lesson-book, "Où est ma chatte?" She recalls the French perfectly, but (as she realizes from the mouse's horror) "quite forgot you didn't like cats" (*AW* 26; ch. 2). That is, in the English culture from which Alice's lesson-book comes,⁵⁶ speaking about cats is an accepted behavior for children, and is in fact a scripted behavior they are asked

⁵⁶ Hugh O'Brien (461) has identified the lesson-book as *La Bagatelle: Intended to introduce children of three or four years to some knowledge of the French language* (1804), which was published by John Marshall in London. That is, although it teaches the French language, it is an English book.

to perform. In the culture of Wonderland, however, this is *not* acceptable behavior for children (or anyone else), but instead is rude and shocking.

We might be tempted to conclude, when the mouse responds in English, to dismiss France and William the Conqueror entirely as Alice's mistake, but not only does the mouse understand French, he recites the history of William the Conqueror (whom Alice did not mention aloud) before narrating his own "history" (*AW* 30, 34; ch. 3). The passage the mouse recites casts William the Conqueror not as a king of England but as a foreign French imperialist bent on "usurpation and conquest," an oppressor of the "English" (a designation with which Alice would identify more than with "Anglo-Saxons") through "the insolence of his Normans":

"William the Conqueror... was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders, and had been of late much used to usurpation and conquest. ...William's conduct at first was moderate. But the insolence of his Normans—" (*AW* 30; ch. 3).

Carroll's source for this excerpt, Havilland Chepmell's *Short Course of History* (1862), continues to drive home the cruelty, foreignness, and anti-English imperialism of William the Conqueror:

But the insolence of his Normans gave rise to a series of rebellions which he mercilessly punished... he laid waste the whole country between the Humber and the Tees; so that by fire and sword, and cold and hunger, upwards of 100,000 people perished. ...[H]e enacted his cruel Forest Laws. ...[H]e managed to depose... most of the Saxon prelates, A.D. 1070: he also encouraged the use of the French tongue, and would allow no Englishman to hold any office of trust. Most of the land in England was confiscated, and granted to Normans to hold as *fiefs* (Chepmell 144-145).

Apart from general cruelty, William is indicted for excluding the English from positions of authority (as "prelates" in the church, in "office[s] of trust," and as owners of "land") and imposing foreign French culture in the form of language ("the French tongue").⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Carroll echoes Chepmell's resentment of linguistic conquest in the remarks of the Eaglet, immediately following the mouse's recitation of the conquest:

Alice experiences just such an imposition of a foreign cultural text when she first tries to make certain of her own identity in an unfamiliar place by reciting a cultural text from her own English culture, Isaac Watts's "Against Idleness and Mischief." Her own voice sounds "hoarse and strange"—foreign and not her own—and Watts's familiar poem about the English bee is replaced by an unfamiliar text about the exotic foreign crocodile (*AW* 23; ch. 2). Like William the Conqueror in Chepmell's history, the crocodile was also iconic of French imperialism, as Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge observe in their study of symbolic uses of the crocodile in the nineteenth century:

The crocodile emerged as a key nineteenth-century imperialist symbol with Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt... The crocodile's gaping jaws and huge teeth indicate Napoleon's appetite for power. In British representations of the Egyptian campaign, then, the crocodile represented both France and Egypt, colonizer and colonized, Napoleon's status as loathed aggressor conflating him with the predominant symbol of the Egyptian other (Leighton and Surridge 250-251).

In light of these opening hints at imperialism, it should come as no surprise that Daniel Bivona is able to make the case that *Alice in Wonderland* describes a "confrontation of cultures" (143) which raises the question, "what happens when one deposits a representative of English culture in a foreign land populated by beings who live by unfamiliar rules?" (144). Bivona's answer, in

"In that case," said the Dodo solemnly, rising to its feet, "I move that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies—"
"Speak English!" said the Eaglet. "I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!" (*AW* 30-31, ch. 3).

Of the Dodo's "long words" (over four letters), only one ("meeting") is of Old English origin. The others come from Greek ("energetic"), Latin ("immediate adoption"), and French ("adjourn," "remedies") (*OED*). The Eaglet's objection to these pretentious words as not being "English" expresses a resentment of loanwords from the languages of the Roman and Norman conquerors of England.

The Eaglet's implied self-identification as "English" despite living in Wonderland suggests that English and French are labels for oneself vs. an imperialist Other rather than geographical categories. Alice labels the mouse as a "French" imperialist Other, and the Eaglet treats the Dodo's pretentious French-influenced vocabulary as the non-"English" imperialism of the Other. As will be discussed below, imperialism actually goes both ways between Alice and the denizens of Wonderland; each side tries to play the part of a Norman-like imperialist upon the other.

Alice's case, is that she behaves as a "child-imperialist." That is, according to Bivona, she imposes the interpretive authority of her own culture on the citizens of Wonderland.⁵⁸

I would like to complicate Bivona's reading in light of a paradigm Mary Louise Pratt has suggested for understanding questions of authority in cultural confrontations like those Alice faces: the traveler experiencing a foreign culture can take either the "infantile" or the "patriarchal position" (*Imperial Eyes* 160). Travelers who take the adult role attempt to impose the authority of their own culture onto their hosts, whereas travelers who take the role of child adapt to the authority of the culture around them.

In my reading, which draws on Pratt's model, Alice certainly attempts to perform the role of the adult ("patriarchal") teacher, the British imperialist interpreter and instructor (as Bivona argues), but this is only one side of the story. However much Alice may endeavor to play the adult in Wonderland, the inhabitants of Wonderland see her as a child in need of instruction, and therefore try to colonize their "infantile" visitor. That is, they frequently insist that Alice take the role of a child learner who performs (foreign and unfamiliar) adult expectations. What is more, Alice decides to play along, to perform the new foreign script for childhood which they give her. In this way, Carroll can critique adults who impose unwanted cultural roles on children as oppressors like Napoleon or the Normans.

Alice hopes that her geography "lessons in the school-room" will prepare her for her journey to this new "country." She recites the "nice grand words," "Latitude" and "Longitude" (though uncertain of their meaning), and reflects that if she falls "*through* the earth," she will reach the Antipodes (mispronounced "antipathies"), "New Zealand" and "Australia." Her fear,

⁵⁸ "Alice seeks... to impose her own 'interpretive' precedence—the power of the interpreter to dominate her material... the right of Alice the child-imperialist to impose a meaning on the behavior of the illogical 'creatures'" (161). "Although Alice stands outside of the 'creatures' social system (or systems), she does not stand outside of her own, which she has instead elevated into a universal interpretive system called upon to explain all behavior everywhere" (159).

however, is that if she has to ask the name of the country, they will think her “an ignorant little girl”—linking the ignorance of cultural displacement to the ignorance of childhood (*AW* 13-14; ch. 1). Alice’s fears are well-founded—the denizens of Wonderland frequently treat her with contempt for her ignorance of anything (such as linguistic quirks) that would be unfamiliar to a visitor from another country. “You don’t know much, and that’s a fact,” says the Duchess, when Alice does not know that cats can grin (61; ch. 6). When Alice has difficulty grasping the idea of a treacle well, the Hatter calls her “stupid” (76; ch. 7). When Alice doesn’t recognize the word “uglify,” the Gryphon says, “if you don’t know what to uglify is, you *are* a simpleton” (98; ch. 9). When she doesn’t know that they called their teacher “Tortoise because he taught us,” her disgusted interlocutors are particularly insulting: “‘Really you are very dull!’ ‘You ought to be ashamed of yourself for asking such a simple question’” (96; ch. 9). Of course, Alice is actually fairly knowledgeable about her own culture.⁵⁹ Her ignorance of treacle wells and the like is not the ignorance of an untaught child, but an ignorance of Wonderland’s culture.

Although Alice is ignorant because she is foreign (not because she is young), the characters’ imperialistic attitude of superiority over her is framed by the roles of adult/teacher and child/pupil, reflecting the imperialist attitude which Nodelman and Rose observe adults taking towards children. Like a teacher, the Gryphon demands that Alice recite a poem, revealing that he shares the Mock Turtle’s assumption that as an adult he (the Gryphon) “had some kind of authority over Alice” (105-106; ch. 10). Alice immediately recognizes the paradigm of academic authority: “‘How the creatures order one about, and make one repeat lessons!’ thought Alice. ‘I

⁵⁹ It may be argued, of course, that the effect of Alice’s exposure to a different cultural perspective in Wonderland is to call into question her ‘knowledge’ altogether—what does it mean to ‘know’ that she is a girl, for example, if by the Pigeon’s definition she is a serpent? Part of my argument is, in fact, that Carroll is making the case for the arbitrariness of culture (as relates to expectations for social roles that children can perform). My point here is simply that Alice is familiar with her own culture (how subjective and arbitrary it may be) in a way that she is not familiar with a foreign culture.

might as well be at school at once.’ However, she got up, and began to repeat it” (106; ch. 10). Alice receives little reward for her compliance, since the Mock Turtle (feeling qualified to evaluate a child’s performance) is a harsh critic, dismissing her bungled recitation as “uncommon nonsense” (107; ch. 10). As a child, Alice is not expected to think. “I’ve a right to think,” Alice says, to which the Duchess answers, “Just about as much right as pigs have to fly” (93; ch. 9).

As a literal child, Alice is unempowered and often subjected to the same dismissive and reductive treatment that imperialists apply to supposedly “less advanced” cultures. Forced into the role of child by a foreign culture, a kind of educational imperialism, Alice provides an example to Carroll’s readers of the oppression children suffer under thoughtless or cruel adults—an oppression akin to the threat of foreign empires.

3. Alice’s Adaptive Cross-Cultural Performance of Childhood

For Alice to assume that her own culture is authoritative, or for the adults of Wonderland to assume authority over a foreign child, is hardly surprising. What is remarkable is that after initially taking the adult position to assert her culture’s authority, Alice begins to learn and adapt—eventually heeding the hints that eating animals is an unacceptable conversation topic, for instance—and plays the role of a child-pupil taking lessons in Wonderland’s culture, the role which Wonderland adults expect of her as both a literal child and a traveler in the “infantile position.” Learning to adapt to the new culture around her requires Alice to submit to the local inhabitants’ authority, but by foregoing imperialist adult power herself, Alice takes the first step towards discovering the agency of which a child is capable: choosing and performing scripts from the variety of options which a multicultural context provides.

The progress of Alice's changes in size illustrates both her initial misguided authority and her adaptive performance of "childhood." Elaine Ostry claims that "Alice's growth is associated with power and control rather than morality" (35). Likewise, Bivona argues that "making herself look larger" is Alice's "favorite form of aggression" (151). In my terms, taking the authoritative role of the adult by simple size and force is an aggressive form of Alice's performance of the role of adult teacher, the opposite of the role of child pupil. When performing the role of the large teacher, Alice is not open to learning like a child, and therefore (in Bivona's words), "Alice knows least when she is the largest" (152).

Ostry's and Bivona's assessment of Alice's physical growth ignores her development over the course of the novel,⁶⁰ but their observations about Alice's attempt to perform adult authority rather than being open to learning provide insight into her early self-induced growth in the White Rabbit's house. As Selwyn Goodacre observes, just before she goes to his house, Alice is much smaller than the White Rabbit and he consequently orders her about (21-22). Tired of taking orders as "such a tiny little thing," she drinks from a bottle to grow again (38; ch. 4). It is at this point of growth that she performs the greatest violence, snatching at the White Rabbit so that he falls on broken glass (41; ch. 4), and kicking Bill up the chimney (43; ch. 4). Alice hints at the paradox of her size—like an adult, she is "grown up" (has an adult's physical power) but if she can't grow up any more, she will remain a child in need of instruction, "always to have lessons to learn" (39-40; ch. 4). She has the power of an adult now, but she lacks an adult's

⁶⁰ Bivona argues that it applies to her final growth in the court, but both Alice's means and her motives are different in the court scene than they are in the earlier scene at the White Rabbit's house. The means are different because Alice does not induce her change of size in court. This is the only time she changes size spontaneously, without eating, drinking, or using the White Rabbit's fan—suggesting that her change in size is not a deliberate attempt to impose her cultural standards (her 'correct' size and her sense of entitlement to authority), but rather the 'natural' result of her maturation. Her motives are protective rather than aggressive this time: she is trying to protect the Knave of Hearts from receiving a "sentence first" and "verdict afterwards," which is not only "nonsense," as she says, but abuse (124, ch. 12).

knowledge and maturity. As long as she stays that size, she cannot perform the role of a child and will never finish learning Wonderland's culture.

However, once Alice shrinks back down to three inches, she meets the Caterpillar, and everything changes. Despite an initially antagonistic exchange, Alice ultimately acknowledges the Caterpillar's authority as a teacher, herself taking the role of a child pupil. Alice physically looks up to him on the mushroom, and he is the only character Alice addresses as "Sir" more than once. She becomes angry with him, but when he tells her to keep her temper, she obeys "as well as she could" (49; ch. 5). He is the first character to demand a recitation of poetry, like a teacher to a child, and Alice does not mentally object, as she does when the Gryphon makes the same demand. By the end of their interaction, Alice has learned to adapt to the Caterpillar's short remarks and long silences, relinquishing her entitlement to the quick responses she expects: "This time Alice waited patiently until it chose to speak again" (53; ch. 5). It is only then, after Alice has learned (to some degree) to adapt to Wonderland culturally by playing the part expected of her (the docile and dutiful student), that the Caterpillar teaches her how to adapt to Wonderland physically: "One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter" (53; ch. 5), a remark which might refer as much to the two sides of the cultural confrontation, or the two sides of Alice's performance of age, as to the physical sides "of the mushroom." That is, it is when Alice clings to English culture, or to her role as adult teacher, that she insists on her larger size. When she is willing to perform the role of a child learner, and adapts (culturally and physically) to her Wonderland interlocutors—who include small caterpillars and playing cards—she shrinks to a size that fits her role and her surroundings.

At first Alice returns to her "right size" (56; ch. 5)—that is, she returns to the size of other children in Victorian England. But immediately she happens upon a tiny house, and the

Caterpillar’s lesson of adaptation proves to have taken an effect: “‘Whoever lives here,’ thought Alice, ‘it’ll never do to come upon them *this* size: why, I should frighten them out of their wits!’” (56; ch. 5). For the three remaining changes of size which Alice induces in herself (not the expansion at the trial, which she does not cause), Alice fits herself to her Wonderland surroundings, not to her foreign expectations concerning her “right size.” That is, Alice recognizes that the ‘rightness’ of size is relative to the expectations of the people she interacts with—whether in Britain or Wonderland, she can shape herself to meet the expectations of others (and improve her interactions with them) using her own size-adjustable body as a prop in the performance. She finds that another land, another culture, affords *options* for self-performance and self-determination.

Alice’s sensitivity to Wonderland’s cultural perspective on predators is another good example of how (over time) she adapts her performance of childhood to fit to the local culture, and thus discovers options for roles to perform. She tweaks her performance based on lessons learned through her own experiences and through cultural confrontations with the denizens of Wonderland. When Alice first enters Wonderland, she repeatedly offends the local inhabitants by admiring what her culture calls “pets,” failing to recognize the perspective of her host culture, that cats and dogs are murderers of fellow animals. However, two experiences enable Alice to begin to see the Wonderland perspective. In the first place, by shrinking herself to the same size as the Wonderlanders—prey size—Alice is able for the first time to see cats and dogs as predators: when she sees an “enormous puppy,” she realizes that it “would be very likely to eat her up,” though she is still able to see it as a pet: “‘And yet what a dear little puppy it was!’” (45-6; ch. 4).⁶¹ Likewise, she sees the Cheshire Cat as a pet when it is in the Duchess’s house, but as

⁶¹ Martin Gardner notes that a number of critics find the episode with the dog “out of place,” and for understandable reasons (45, n. 9). However, to me it seems that the presence of the dog, like that of the Cheshire Cat, is the

a predator when she meets it alone: “it had *very* long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt that it ought to be treated with respect” (64). This perspective comes from performing her role (as a new inhabitant of Wonderland) with her whole body, shrinking to the size of those in her host culture to see things as they do.

Alice’s second eye-opening experience is when she is taller than a tree—the perfect predator size—and the Pigeon calls her a Serpent.⁶² At first Alice is “indignant” (she considers the Pigeon to be wrong), then as she listens she is “puzzled,” then is “beginning to see its meaning,” at which point she is able (tentatively, because of the “changes” she has gone through) to describe her own culture’s position on what she is: “a little girl” (54-55; ch. 5). The ensuing discussion of the two cultural perspectives reveals that “serpent” and “girl” are not inherent biological categories determined by birth, but instead culturally-described roles to be performed, played out in actions. In Wonderland culture, the defining action for the role of “serpent” is predation:

“But little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know.”
“I don’t believe it,” said the Pigeon, “but if they do, why, then they’re a kind of serpent: that’s all I can say.”
This was such a new idea to Alice, that she was quite silent for a minute or two.
(55-6; ch. 5)

Like Alice’s patient silence before the Caterpillar, Alice’s silence here is a sign that she has allowed herself to learn from the Pigeon. Admittedly, Alice spoils the effect by another unfeeling remark about eating eggs—after all, Alice is still predator size, and the Pigeon is less impressive than the Caterpillar—but the lesson eventually starts to sink in. Recognizing the culturally-

necessary counterpart to Alice’s thoughtless anecdotes about her predator pets—having performed the English child who approves of pets killing mice and birds, she now performs the Wonderland role of the prey (seeing predation from the opposite perspective).

⁶² Bivona here makes the odd choice (since he explains away all other “mistakes” Wonderlanders make) of deciding that the Pigeon has made a mistake, and that Alice fails to learn from it (155). Instead, I argue that the Pigeon is right, and that Alice does learn from her.

dependent nature of the roles she can perform, Alice learns both the options which two cultures (of England and Wonderland) offer and the consequences of each option in Wonderland. In Wonderland's terms, she can play either girl (fellow prey) or serpent (predator); if she plays prey, she is vulnerable to attack (e.g., from the puppy) but can interact more smoothly with other prey (e.g., the Caterpillar), and if she plays predator, she is less vulnerable to attack (when filling the White Rabbit's house, she easily foils his attacks) but alienates prey (driving away the Mouse and birds by talking about predation).

Alice learns from the Pigeon, in other words, that England and Wonderland script the role of child differently. In Wonderland, the role of a child is defined as excluding certain behaviors—namely, eating animals and their offspring (including eggs), or speaking about doing so. Alice does not lose her own Victorian definition of the role of “little girls,” which can include eating eggs. She shows no sense of guilt for having eating eggs, and makes no resolution to refrain from eating them again when she returns to England. That is, she retains both cultural scripts as options which she can perform at will. She recognizes the consequences of performing English scripts in Wonderland, however, so she proceeds (for the time being) to perform the part of a little girl (redefined as a non-predator) according to Wonderland's script. Thus, when the Mock Turtle describes the dances and professions of lobsters and whittings, Alice has the impulse to tell him she has eaten these creatures (appropriate in her culture's definition of the role of “child,” but not in Wonderland's definition of that role), but in both cases, she quickly catches herself and suppresses the comment (100, 103; ch. 10). Whereas Alice had earlier given offence by performing childhood incorrectly by Wonderland standards (talking about pets killing mice and birds), she has learned to adjust her performance of childhood so as not to give offence. She has found a practical use (ingratiating herself) for her performance, but more importantly, she has

learned from Wonderland's foreign culture that she has more options for performance than she thought, and can perform whichever she chooses.

On the occasion of Alice's studied performance of the part of a non-predatory Wonderland little girl—right between the two times she silences her own impulses to mention eating animals—the Mock Turtle sings the following:

“What matters it how far we go?” his scaly friend replied.
“There is another shore, you know; upon the other side.
The further off from England the nearer is to France—
Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the dance.” (103; ch. 10).

If France is the icon of foreignness, in this scene it evokes not foreign imperialism, but the reverse—that independent landmasses, nations, and cultures provide *alternatives* to one another. Alice was previously reluctant to leave the norms and roles of her own culture (“England”) behind, but foreign cultures need not make her fear (“turn... pale”). If she is willing to perform the steps prescribed by a new culture (“join the dance”), she has the option of performing different roles scripted by another culture (“France” or Wonderland). Whichever “side” (England or France) threatens a child like Alice with adult imperialism, all she has to do is broaden her horizons and consider her options on “another shore... the other side.” The child can escape adult imperialism through performance, by choosing among roles in different cultures.

4. Predatory Adults and Their Scripts for Children

Alice's flexibility—her recognition of different options in different cultures—is crucial. The child who recognizes only one culture and one script for childhood is, in Carroll's scheme, doomed to become whatever serves a selfish adult's interests.

Carroll's Duchess is a parody of moralists (“Every thing's got a moral, if only you can find it” [AW 91; ch. 9]) and has decided opinions about children. In fact, the Duchess's use of

language and violence to dominate her infant son epitomizes Perry Nodelman’s description of imperialism directed at children. As Nodelman observes, adults who claim to define “the truth” about children can “justify” domination of children, including “blatantly cruel punishments” (Nodelman 31). Rather than heed the counsel of a didactic poem directed at adults (“Speak gently to the little child!” from David Bates’s “Speak Gently”),⁶³ the Duchess’s reworking of that poem is part of a larger pattern of controlling children through language—taking the power position as interpreter of childhood and silencing the child. The Duchess’s own pseudo-moralistic poem sets forth an expectation for children’s behavior that culturally scripts both the child’s performance and the adult’s:

Speak roughly to your little boy,
And beat him when he sneezes:
He only does it to annoy,
Because he knows it teases.

I speak severely to my boy,
I beat him when he sneezes;
For he can thoroughly enjoy
The pepper when he pleases! (*AW* 62; ch. 6)

The Duchess claims to understand her child, and indeed all children, better than she possibly can. Although her infant cannot speak (apart from singing “Wow” along to his mother’s cruel song) and thus cannot give his own account of his actions, the Duchess claims that she knows his thoughts and motives, and the motives of everyone else’s child as well: “he only does it to annoy, / Because he knows it teases” (*AW* 62; ch. 6). The Duchess would be unlikely to listen to a child’s thoughts in any case: “‘I’ve a right to think,’ said Alice sharply... ‘Just about as much right,’ said the Duchess, ‘as pigs have to fly’” (*AW* 93; ch. 9). When she calls her son “Pig!” the Duchess disavows his right and ability to think for himself (*AW* 60-61; ch. 6). Indeed, the

⁶³ Gardner notes that, though some have attributed the poem to G. W. Langford, John M. Shaw “reports that he was unsuccessful in his search for Langford’s version; in fact he failed to find Langford himself” (63, n. 4).

Duchess has thus far trained her son to limit his verbal expression to joining in with her own assessment of him: his only vocalizations are howling and sneezing (as in her song), singing “Wow” along to the song in which she ascribes hostile motives to him, and grunting like the pig she considers him to be. As Nodelman observes, when “speaking for the other... we silence it” (Nodelman 30). In scripting one single role for her son to perform, the Duchess has robbed him of his agency and his voice.

By performing his mother’s script, the baby does in fact become what his mother has called him: a pig.⁶⁴ Alice’s preferred script for childhood (and aspiring adulthood) includes not only the “right to think” (*AW* 93; ch. 9) but “a proper way of expressing yourself” (*AW* 63; ch. 6)—not merely grunting, as she tells the baby-turned-pig. Perhaps the pig could become a child and eventually a man if he could follow such a script, but as a pig he has lost all chance of gaining the verbal abilities he needs. The Duchess’s baby lack Alice’s advantages: Alice has seen two cultures and knows her options, the multiple cultural scripts available to her to perform; the Duchess’s baby has never encountered more than one cultural script, and is thus doomed to perform it and be transformed by it.

The Duchess secures her power by raising a boy to be a pig, and is doing so in a kitchen with an angry cook who seasons the boy with pepper and hurls kitchen utensils at him. Alice certainly believes that “they’re sure to kill it in a day or two” (63; ch. 6)—perhaps they intend

⁶⁴ What is curious is that critics who emphasize Alice’s negative attributes tend to justify the Duchess’s view of her son—that he was always a pig and never human—and even justify her abusive treatment of her son. Kincaid calls the boy “a thing which turns out to be a pig” and decides that the Duchess’s “violence is mainly a burlesque of real violence” (“Alice’s Invasion” 94). Likewise, Bivona says that “the ‘baby’ really is a pig” and therefore Alice’s concern for it is “misplaced sympathy” (155). However, Carroll makes it clear that the Duchess’s son really is a human baby at first, and only becomes a pig later. Despite calling the child “Pig,” even the Duchess refers to him as “my boy” (62; ch. 6). The narrator describes the transition from baby to pig as a gradual process: “its eyes were getting very small for a baby” (63; ch. 6). Finally, the Cheshire Cat recognizes that the child was originally a baby and transformed into a pig:

“By-the-bye, what became of the baby?” said the Cat. “I’d nearly forgotten to ask.”

“It turned into a pig,” Alice answered....

“I thought it would,” said the Cat. (66; ch. 6)

the boy to go in the soup.⁶⁵ Didactic literature, as we have seen, promised that performance of a single script would transform a child into a successful adult; Carroll suggests that performance of a single script can transform a child into the prey of predatory imperialist adults.

5. Choosing Models: Predatory Adults

Alice is not content merely to have her choice of childhood scripts. As U.C. Knoepfelmacher⁶⁶ and Marah Gubar are fond of observing, Alice is very insistent about her ambition to grow up (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 120-121). She is thus at least as interested in performing adulthood as she is in performing childhood. After all, playing at being an adult is itself a scripted performance for children.⁶⁷ Consider the opening of *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which Alice plays at being the black kitten's mother, showering it with endearments and rebukes as though playing house with a live doll. Alice's play is simultaneously a performance of adulthood and of childhood. To add further complexity, Alice recognizes that, as the "adult," she should script her the kitten "child's" behavior by providing it with a female adult model to imitate through pretense/performance: "Let's pretend that you're the Red Queen, Kitty!' ... And Alice got the Red Queen off the table, and set it up before the kitten as a model for it to imitate"

⁶⁵ Rose Lovell-Smith has similarly observed that the "baby undergoes a disconcerting transformation into a pig—a very edible animal, as the chapter title ["Pig and Pepper"] (which might even be a recipe) implies" (40).

⁶⁶ Alluding to her ambition to become a queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*, Knoepfelmacher calls Alice "the girl who wants to be a woman" (206), and alludes to her "drive towards maturity" (226). She is in fact "impatient" to be a queen/adult and "wants no more delays in the progression to her crowning" (188).

⁶⁷ Bernstein's conception of *scriptive things* is instructive here—the dolls given to little girls in the nineteenth century scripted certain behaviors ("tender play," a performance of maternal care) which are simultaneously a performance of adulthood and of the version of childhood envisioned by the doll-maker, the doll-giver, and the author of children's literature describing play with dolls ("Children's Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race" 165).

(*LG* 141; ch. 1). Like the kitten, Alice is in the position of looking around herself for positive and negative scripts and models for adulthood.⁶⁸

Alice is particularly drawn to positions of adult authority. When she meets the Red Queen, she is “in awe” of her and performs the child behaviors the queen scripts for her—she “attend[s] to all [her] directions” and makes a mental note to attempt to try out another suggestion from the queen when she has returned home (*LG* 161; ch. 2). Alice wants a powerful adult role like the queen’s, and “shyly” tells her so: “I should *like* to be a Queen, best” (*LG* 161, 163; ch. 2). She even takes in an interest in the adult/aristocratic role of the less agreeable Duchess, though only to consider this Duchess as a negative model for housekeeping: “‘When *I’m* a Duchess,’ she said to herself (not in a very hopeful tone, though), ‘I won’t have any pepper in my kitchen *at all*’” (*AW* 90, ch. 9).

Not only does Alice want to occupy the adult positions of authority she sees modeled, but (rather unsettlingly) she even takes an interest in playing the part of adult predator. As Kincaid has observed,⁶⁹ perhaps the most obviously predatory instance of this inclination is when Alice tries to decide which she likes better, the Walrus or the Carpenter, rather than empathizing with the victimized “young Oysters” whom these adult predators have consumed (*LG* 185, 187-188; ch. 4). Later, herself playing mother to her kitten, she encourages it to play the role of the Walrus and the Carpenter and imagine itself devouring the sentient Oyster children: “‘All the time you’re eating your breakfast, I’ll repeat “The Walrus and the Carpenter” to you; and then you can make believe it’s oysters, dear!’” (*LG* 271; ch. 12). The Pigeon was right—Alice is perfectly capable of performing the role of the predatory “serpent.”

⁶⁸ Alice later tells Humpty Dumpty, “I never ask advice about growing” (*LG* 211; ch. 6) but clarifies that she means the question of *whether* to grow up. She does, in fact, evaluate models and advice about *how* she should grow up.

⁶⁹ Alice “ignores the victims of the poem, the oysters, and immediately searches for one of the power figures with whom to identify” (Kincaid, “Invasion” 95).

A less obviously predatory instance, which nevertheless demonstrates Alice's attraction to the emulation of abusive adult figures, concerns the Duchess. Despite defending the Duchess's baby before its transformation, Alice comes to consider the advantages of replicating the transformation with other children:

“If it had grown up,” she said to herself, “it would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes rather a handsome pig, I think.” And she began thinking over other children she knew, who might do very well as pigs, and... saying to herself “if one only knew the right way to change them—” (*AW* 64, ch. 6)

Like the Duchess's assumption that she knows her son's motives because she focuses on her own experience (the sneezes “annoy” her), Alice's decision that the ugly boy “might do very well” as a handsome pig is similarly self-serving: she wants to optimize her own aesthetic experience (looking at handsome pigs instead of ugly children) so much that she wants to know how “to change” other children into handsome pigs. The Duchess calls her son a pig and he becomes one; Alice desires the same power over children.

6. Choosing Models: Protective Adults

Having learned from her multicultural encounters that she has many options to choose from, Alice identifies two different scripts to choose from when performing adulthood: predatory adulthood and protective adulthood. Although she has learned the principle of multiple scripts from a foreign culture, in this case the options are independent of culture: she finds both predatory and protective models in every culture—England, Wonderland, and Looking-Glass Land. (As Byron observes in “To Ianthe,” multiple scripts are available within one culture.)

At the same time that she feels inclined to perform predatory adulthood, Alice has a competing inclination to perform protective adulthood. To some degree, Alice's maternal role—like many of her interactions—is a culturally scripted performance which does not always

correspond to her actual opinions or affections. When the Duchess's cook hurls "fire-irons... saucepans, plates, and dishes" at the baby, Alice's maternally protective response has an emotional motivation ("an agony of terror") but is worded according to cultural scripts expected of a Victorian girl presumed to be a future mother (*AW* 61, ch. 6). In particular, Alice later admits she considers the boy "dreadfully ugly" (*AW* 64; ch. 6) but she still refers to his nose by a positive aesthetic descriptor—"precious"—which is to be expected of a Victorian girl playing the scripted role of protective mother: "'Oh, *please* mind what you're doing! ...Oh, there goes his *precious* nose!', as an unusually large saucepan flew close by it, and very nearly carried it off" (*AW* 61; ch. 6).

On the one hand, she plays mother ("nursing" the baby) out of a real desire to protect the baby: "'If I don't take this child away with me,' thought Alice, 'they're sure to kill it in a day or two. Wouldn't it be murder to leave it behind?'" (*AW* 63; ch. 6). On the other hand, her concern for the baby is contingent on his appearance, and hence on her appearance as his "mother": when he begins to change shape, "Alice did not like the look of the thing at all," and after closer scrutiny she warns him, "'If you're going to turn into a pig, my dear, ...I'll have nothing more to do with you. Mind now!'" (*AW* 63; ch. 6). Finally she looks again and "this time there could be *no* mistake about it: it was neither more nor less than a pig, and she felt that it would be quite absurd for her to carry it any further" (*AW* 64; ch. 6). The baby's transformation into a creature of a different species mars Alice's performance of motherhood; it makes her actions incongruous ("it would be quite absurd for her to carry it") because the baby, and therefore the "mother," no longer look the part. Alice is measuring what is or is not "absurd" when performing motherhood by her scripts and models, each of whom are of the same species as their children.

Where does Alice get her models and her scripts for her performance of protective motherhood? To some degree, Alice may be playing the part of the Pigeon, a model of a mother sacrificially warding off predators (“I must be on the look-out for serpents, night and day! Why, I haven’t had a wink of sleep these three weeks!” [*AW* 55, ch. 5]), since Alice’s protection of the Duchess’s baby immediately follows Alice’s encounter with the Pigeon. Her primary models and scripts come from back home, however. Firstly, Alice obviously imitates the adults who raise her, as she makes clear in *Through the Looking-Glass* when she plays the role of affectionate but scolding mother to the black kitten.⁷⁰ ““You know I’m saving up all your punishments for Wednesday week—Suppose they had saved up all *my* punishments?”” (*LG* 140; ch. 1). By comparing her performance of parenthood to how “they” treat Alice herself, Alice reveals the model—or at least one of the models—for her performance of adulthood.

Secondly, Alice follows cultural scripts from her own world—namely, moralistic texts—which are present implicitly in Wonderland through their parodies. I will argue that Carroll positively portrays her choice to perform these scripts for protective adulthood (when she chooses them over predatory models).⁷¹ Many critics, responding to Carroll’s parody and especially his biting sarcasm about “nice little stories,” conclude that Carroll is alluding to didactic stories about outrageously disproportionate consequences. Catherine Golden suggests Carroll might have had in mind an episode from Mary Martha Sherwood’s *The History of the Fairchild Family* in which a vain and disobedient child burns to death from a candle she holds

⁷⁰ Why is it “absurd” for Alice to mother a pig, but not absurd to mother a kitten? This has more to do with scripts for childhood (within a particular class) than scripts for adult motherhood—the daughter of the Dean of Christ Church (or a fictionalized version of her) may play with kittens, but she does not play with pigs.

⁷¹ My aim here is not to contradict Gubar’s idea that Carroll presents literature as something to be “actively *engaged* with, not merely echoed back and obeyed” (*Artful Dodgers* 115). Alice does not mindlessly obey cultural scripts, but after considering her options, she does choose to perform some of them (at least temporarily), including roles scripted in didactic literature for children.

while admiring her reflection (Golden 192). Gubar compares Carroll's description of the "nice little stories" to stories in which (according to someone who grew up in the Victorian era) "the disobedient were gored by bulls, those who laughed at the infirm fell down wells and were crippled for life, busy mockers died in want" (M.V. Hughes, qtd. Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 114).

While Carroll criticizes the manipulateness of some storytellers—as Gubar has persuasively argued (*Artful Dodgers* 113-114)—a closer look reveals that he treats the stories' actual morals as commonsensical, the consequences as proportionate and inevitable:

she had read several nice little stories about children who had gotten burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them: such as, that a red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long; and that, if you cut your finger *very* deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds; and she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked "poison," it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later. (*AW* 17; ch. 1)

Carroll is not describing extravagant and brutal punishments like burning to death for one's vanity or being crippled for mocking the infirm; he is describing the natural consequences that every good parent warns a child of: hot pokers will burn you, sharp knives and poison can hurt you.⁷² In light of Carroll's emphasis on natural consequences, the most convincing suggestion for the kind of text Carroll may have had in mind might be the one proposed by Hugh Haughton in his annotation on this passage: the cautionary tales of Elizabeth Turner (1775-1846).

Excepting the rule about clearly labeled poison, Turner describes the scenarios Carroll lists: a boy accidentally burning himself on a poker ("Dangerous Sport") and a girl accidentally cutting herself with a knife ("Susan and Patty"). In both cases they have failed to follow the "simple rules" they have been given, but in both cases the children internalize the lesson without their

⁷² The only consequence not matched to a dangerous behavior is being "eaten up by wild beasts." The natural cause of this would be wandering into places where there are wild beasts—did Carroll have "Little Red Riding Hood" in mind? (Perrault's moral for that story, of course, is based on *metaphorical* wolves threatening those who *metaphorically* stray from the path.)

parents scolding them—Patty expects “to be chid” but is not (“Susan and Patty” 24). In fact, the children’s parents’ only response is to care for their temporarily hurt hands:

Now if Peter had minded his Mother’s command,
His fingers would not have been sore;
And he promised again, as she bound up his hand,
To play with hot pokers no more. (“Dangerous Sport” 9-12)

“My mother only yesterday,
I know, desired me not to play
With knives so sharp and keen;...
I’ll not touch knives again;”
[Her mother] kiss’d her darling girls, and put
A little plaster on each cut,
Which soon relieved the pain. (“Susan and Patty” 7-9, 27-30)

All of this is to say that all nineteenth-century didactic literature was not necessarily sadistic. The content of much didactic literature is the scripting of behaviors which are in the child’s best interest (such as basic safety), and some didactic literature scripted behavior for adults which was intended to protect children. When Carroll mocks or parodies moralistic literature, his venom is directed not at the content, but at the power position between adult teacher and child student—and even more specifically, at those who abuse that power position: self-serving imperialist adults like the Duchess who abuse the position of teacher as an opportunity to manipulate children.

The Duchess’s song, “Speak roughly to your little boy,” is a perfect example of the difference between the abuse of didactic literature and the helpful scripts didactic literature could offer. The Duchess’s song, taken with the rest of her behavior, shows her to be a hypocritical moralist who imposes morals and demands scripted behavior from children for her own selfish advantage, while refusing to accept guidance herself. This is a very damning critique of the abuse of moralism. On the other hand, though the Duchess’s song holds children to unfair standards, it is a parody of a real Victorian moralistic poem—“Speak gently”—a cultural script

for adults that demands they treat children gently. The Duchess's wrongdoing lies in embracing the sometimes-questionable methods of didactic moralism (adult manipulation of children) while rejecting the moralistic content of didactic literature—the actual morals she herself might be asked to live by.

Alice, by contrast, *does* heed the content of “Speak gently” when she performs its script for the role of protective adult: “It is better far / To rule by love than fear; / ... Speak gently to the little child!” (Bates, qtd. Gardner 63). Unlike the Duchess, Alice does not call the boy “Pig!”; when she warns him not to turn into a pig, she uses the word only to describe the species and not as an insult. Although she demands the baby's attention (“Mind now!”) and gives rules (“Don't grunt”), she calls it “my dear” and addresses it “seriously” rather than harshly (*AW* 63; ch. 6). Whereas the Duchess's parody of didacticism (“Speak roughly”) is an imperialist script she uses to define her child (“he only does it to annoy”) in a way that justifies her abuse (“I beat him”),⁷³ the original didactic poem, “Speak gently,” serves Alice as a script for a more generous, protective performance of motherhood.

Another model for the performance of protective or nurturing adulthood comes from Isaac Watts's “Against Idleness and Mischief,” which Alice refers to by its first line, “How doth the little busy bee” (*AW* 23; ch. 2). Watts's bee is not only hardworking but domestic, creating a “neat” home and “sweet food” for a household:

How skilfully she builds her cell!
How neat she spreads the wax!
And labours hard to store it well
With the sweet food she makes. (“Against Idleness” 5-8)

Lost in the unfamiliar and sometimes imperialist culture of Wonderland, Alice loses access to this British cultural script, and instead repeats a poem about the foreign and sinister crocodile.

⁷³ *AW* 62; ch. 6.

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
With gently smiling jaws! (*AW* 23; ch. 2)

Like Watts's bee, the crocodile also operates in a domestic setting (it "welcomes... in" its guests), but rather than providing food for the "little" ones, it turns them into food. As a social predator (like the imperialist adult), the crocodile uses social tools to catch its prey—principally that of deception. Whereas the traditional crocodilian hypocrite uses false tears to snare its prey (Leighton and Surridge 249-250, 250 n. 3), Carroll's crocodile uses a false smile: "How cheerfully he seems to grin." The little crocodile may not use words, but he uses communication to ensnare his prey, not to convey truth, a fact which reflects on the abuses of the moralistic genre Carroll is parodying. Like the Duchess, the crocodile uses social scripts to manipulate the little ones to their harm and his own benefit.

Carroll's parody signals not his doubts about the moral content of Watts's original—the value of hard work or domesticity—but his critique of the adult author ventriloquizing the child reader.⁷⁴ "Against Idleness and Mischief" consists of an adult's desires for a child thrust incongruously into the child's own mouth:

In works of labour or of skill
I would be busy too
...In books, or work, or healthful play
Let my first years be past (lines 9-10, 13-14).

⁷⁴ It may be objected that focusing on the moral content of Carroll's parody ignores its playfulness as a parody. On the contrary, I would argue that we are invited to delight in the formal nature of that parody—Watts's expository nature lesson has been replaced with an interesting story, complete with conflict and (from the perspective of its compelling predatory protagonist) resolution. Our delight in predation implicates us in Alice's interest in experimenting with predatory adulthood herself.

Such manipulation, Carroll suggests, could too easily be abused by a predator, and even when used with the best of intentions amounts to robbing the child of her voice: Alice's "voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come the same as they used to do" (*AW* 23; ch. 2).

Alice regains her voice, however, and she uses it to play the part of a protective rather than a predatory adult. Alice's cultural scripts give her power, so it is no surprise she is more self-assured in Looking-Glass Land than in Wonderland. If Wonderland is foreign and French/Norman, Looking-Glass Land is largely familiar and English/Anglo-Saxon. There are Anglo-Saxon Messengers posing in Anglo-Saxon attitudes (*LG* 223; ch. 7), a "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry" (Carroll's original title for the beginning of "Jabberwocky" [Gardner 148]), the Lion and the Unicorn from the British royal coat of arms (*LG* 225ff; ch. 7), and a number of characters lifted directly from English nursery rhymes.

In a familiar rather than a foreign cultural space, Alice, as U. C. Knoepfelmacher suggests, is at the height of her ability to utilize cultural scripts. As he observes: "If, as mentioned before, the *Wonderland* Alice's confusion was exacerbated when verses she had dutifully memorized did not come out quite 'right,' the *Looking-Glass* Alice's recollection of familiar rhymes has the opposite effect of giving her the self-assurance and predictive powers of a Sybil" (217). But Alice uses her power to care for and protect even the most antagonistic of her interlocutors. Although Humpty Dumpty belittles her—"Some people have no more sense than a baby!" (208; ch. 6)—and Alice considers him one of the most "unsatisfactory people [she] ever met" (*LG* 220; ch. 6), she feels "good-natured anxiety" for him (209; ch. 6) and uses her knowledge of his future to warn him about the danger of falling. Likewise, Tweedledum and Tweedledee make Alice cry by telling her she is "only a sort of thing in [the Red King's] dream" (189; ch. 4), but she tries to

prevent the battle she earlier foresaw by admonishing them, in a motherly way, “And all about a rattle!” and hoping that the crow of the poem will come soon enough to stop them, which it does (193; ch. 4). She also dresses them in protective clothing for the battle, “tying strings and fastening buttons” like a mother dressing her children, and makes herself into the opposite of the Queen of Hearts by “arrang[ing] a bolster round the neck of Tweedledee, ‘to keep his head from being cut off,’ as he said” (191; ch. 4).

Alice’s climactic moment as mother was excised from the book at Tenniel’s suggestion; a wasp in a wig, he declared, was “beyond the appliances of art” (Gardner 286).⁷⁵ When restored to its proper place, immediately before Alice becomes Queen, it emphasizes the contrast between Alice tempted by the role of predatory mother and Alice in the role of caring mother. At the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll replaced Watts’s image of a domestic provider with an image of a domestic devourer, the welcoming crocodile. At the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice delays her ascent to power by turning back to help an ailing, aged Wasp. There is still the reversal of power here—though she is a child, she is mothering an adult—but although the Wasp is anything but friendly (it says “There never was such a child!” in a “peevish tone” [“The Wasp in a Wig” 294]), Alice’s power is benevolent. She reads to him from a newspaper (294-295), and converses with him until “the Wasp had quite recovered his spirits, and was getting very talkative” (298). Alice ties herself to Watts’s “neat,” mothering bee when she tells the Wasp:

“You could make your wig much neater, if only you had a comb.”

⁷⁵ If, as I argue, the “Wasp in a Wig” scene is important to the narrative of Alice’s maturation, why should Carroll acquiesce to Tenniel’s proposal and remove it? U.C. Knoepfelmacher has argued persuasively that Carroll resents Alice’s maturation and at the end of the story deliberately subverts Alice’s maturation plot, just when it would be expected to climax—her translation from pawn to queen (223-226). Her “maternal stance” is turned against her (224) and the rising chaos drives her back to a “childish petulance” (226). A revision omitting this pivotal scene of maturation is consistent with Carroll’s regressive ending.

“What, you’re a Bee, are you?” the Wasp said, looking at her with more interest.
“And you’ve got a comb. Much honey?” (296).

Like the gigantic elephant-bees she sees at the beginning of her journey (*LG* 168-169; ch. 3), Alice can sweeten the life of the Wasp without giving up the power of someone grown larger than a bee or a child. Although she can, and sometimes does, choose at any time to play at the predation of a crocodile or a serpent, Alice climactic performance of adulthood draws on the English script—Watts’s poem—for a protective, caring bee.

CHAPTER 3 | “ACTING HER CHARADES”:
Children Performing Expectations in James’s *Turn of the Screw*

1. Desire and Performance

Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is a story of desire. To read it in terms of the governess’s desire is hardly new; when Edmund Wilson introduced the Freudian interpretation of the novella, he described it as the story of the governess’s frustrated erotic desire,⁷⁶ and if we read it according to Jacqueline Rose’s paradigm, we might say it is the story of the governess’s nostalgic desire for the children.⁷⁷ The text is susceptible to both these desire-centered readings, but I will argue that, first and foremost, *The Turn of the Screw* is the story of the *children’s* desires, how their desires are inhibited by the governess, and how the children perform childhood and adulthood in an effort to gain what they want.

When the governess decides that the children’s innocence is not genuine but performed, she is appalled:

‘Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It’s a game, ...it’s a policy and a fraud! ...They haven’t been good—they’ve only been

⁷⁶ “The story is primarily intended as a characterization of the governess: ...her inability to admit to herself her natural sexual impulses” (Wilson, “Ambiguity” 121).

⁷⁷ Rose’s great contribution was to direct attention to adult desire in relation to children’s fiction: portrayals of child characters, she argues, construct a nostalgic innocence which is meant to satisfy the desires of adults rather than to benefit children. “Suppose, therefore,” Rose writes, “that Peter Pan is a little boy who does not grow up, not because he doesn’t want to, but because someone else prefers that he shouldn’t. Suppose, therefore, that what is at stake in *Peter Pan* is the adult’s desire for the child” (3). Adults desire the child because it seems to restore them to their own childhood (re-imagined nostalgically as a life of “innocence” in an “unmediated” version of the world and of language/culture); that is, Rose argues that some children’s fiction conceives of “a primitive or lost state to which the child has special access. The child is, if you like, something of a pioneer who restores these worlds to us” (9).

absent... they're simply leading a life of their own. They're not mine—they're not ours. They're... Quint's and that woman's' (*TS* 181; ch. 12).

I will argue that this passage summarizes James's fuller account of the governess's script for childhood innocence, her motives for wanting to possess the children, the details of what the children do when they deviate from the governess's planned activities, and the way the children use the performance of innocence to fulfill the governess's desires in pursuit of their own.

In the first place, I will argue that the children's desires are all perfectly ordinary, and may be summed up by the desire to live for themselves rather than for the governess. In particular, I will show that they demonstrate the following desires: they want to amuse themselves (including, on occasion, amusing themselves alone), they want to avoid the less pleasant forms of schoolwork, they want the dignity belonging to their social class, and Miles in particular wants the socialization (school) that will enable him to mature into the social role associated with his gender and class.

The governess's desires, I will argue, are opposed to the children's desires. She craves the children's presence, not for their benefit, but for her own (they soothe her emotional pain), which leads her to monopolize their time beyond what her duties require of her—not allowing them time to amuse themselves alone. Her desire for Miles's company even prevents her from dealing with the question of his long-term education—preventing Miles from the path of maturation and socialization which he desires and which is, as even the governess admits, his right. Moreover, the governess is so anxious to prove her interpretation of events that she is sometimes quite insensitive and even rude to the children, wounding their dignity.

The children are very much in the governess's power and have to use performance to influence her in pursuit of their own desires. I will argue that the governess makes it clear that she has three separate sets of expectations for the children, three possible scripts they might

follow: “good” child, “spirited” (mildly naughty) boy, and miniature adults of their class (little lady or gentleman). The children, in my reading, play each of these roles in turn in an effort to get what they want. By playing the part of “good” children (“innocent” of evil but also affectionate companions and enthusiastic students), the children are able to satisfy the governess’s desire for their company so fully that she ignores the fact that one child will shirk schoolwork and get some time alone while the other child amuses the governess. By playing the part of a “spirited” boy, Miles attempts to convince the governess he belongs with other boys at school rather than under a governess with his cherubic baby sister. Finally, in desperation, the children play the part of a little lady and gentleman in an effort to assert the rights of their class. Unfortunately, the governess misreads their performances and concludes that both children adhere to a fourth script—the evil child—with fatal consequences.

2. Human, not Innocent; A Question of Collusion, not of Delusion

As Shoshana Felman outlined a generation ago in her groundbreaking deconstruction of the text, since Wilson first proposed “that the governess... is a neurotic case of sex repression, and that the ghosts are not real ghosts but hallucinations of the governess” (Wilson, “Ambiguity” 115), critics have fallen largely into three schools of thought: those who support Wilson’s “Freudian” interpretation (e.g., John Silver), those who argue that the ghosts are objectively real (e.g., Robert Heilman),⁷⁸ and those who believe that James deliberately maintains ambiguity between the two meanings because for James, “*The vulgar is the literal*, insofar as it is unambiguous,” as Felman summarizes this view (Felman 107).

⁷⁸ Heilman, “The Freudian Reading,” *passim*.

Ellis Hanson raises the concern that Felman's "hermeneutics of suspicion" implicate her in the very paranoia she critiques. Felman observes that *The Turn of the Screw* makes Freudian readers as suspicious of sexual desire as the governess, but when she declares that there is no "outside to the trap" of the ambiguous text, that "the very act of trying to escape the trap is the proof that one is caught in it" (Felman 199), Hanson finds her reading to be "even more paranoid than the governess" (Hanson 372). As an alternative to paranoid "symptomatic reading" focused on unacceptable sexual desires, I will approach the text using Sharon Marcus's "just reading" of unrepressed desires (Marcus 75).

The critical discussion of the governess's desire in *The Turn of the Screw* has been, from its inception in Edmund Wilson's essay, about desire that is socially unacceptable, *repressed* desire: "sex repression" (115). But the text is full of frankly admitted, unrepressed, socially acceptable desires as well: before she grows suspicious of ulterior motives, the governess herself sees nothing wrong in Miles's and Flora's desire to read or play alone and finds their occasional inclination to avoid schoolwork commonplace or even charming. Even after her suspicions take root, she acknowledges the social propriety of Miles's desire to return to a school suiting his rank and gender. Far from socially unacceptable, these desires are perfectly in keeping with social standards for children of the class to which Miles and Flora belong.

As Sharon Marcus observes, interpretations of what is socially acceptable and frankly admitted requires a very different kind of reading than interpretations of what is socially unacceptable and repressed. "Symptomatic reading" that seeks symptoms of repression in the text is suited to what cannot be admitted openly, but when studying unrepressed desires—in Marcus's argument, Victorian women's desire for female friendship—it does not make sense to produce symptomatic readings (Marcus 74-75). Such unrepressed desires may be studied,

Marcus argues, by “just reading,” by “attending to the givens of a text” (Marcus 75). Following Marcus, I will attend to what the children openly say they desire—the desires they have no need to hide—and argue that these unrepressed desires motivate and explain the children’s behavior. This approach enables a reassessment of *The Turn of the Screw*, and older literary criticism about it, from a new vantage point.

The ability to assess the children by what they themselves say they desire is of course limited by the fact that the account we receive of the children comes secondhand from the governess. James, however, provides some guidance in assessing the governess’s reliability. In the preface to the New York edition, James indicates that he “effectual[ly] deal[t]” with the “difficult[y]” of his governess narrator “keeping crystalline her record of so many intense anomalies and obscurities—by which I don’t of course mean her explanation of them, a different matter” (“Prefaces” li). James here distinguishes between the governess’s “record” of her observations and her “explanations.” Her observations are “credible,” James says a few sentences later: “she is able to make her particular credible statement of such strange matters” (lii), but her “explanation” or interpretation of those observations is “a different matter.” I will, therefore, take her reports of actual observations of the children’s words and behavior as accurate, but question her interpretations of those words and behavior.⁷⁹ Her interpretations are based on cultural scripts, assumptions she makes about what children are like.

In this debate framed by the question of the ghosts’ reality, both sides have frequently accepted the assumption behind the governess’s fear that the ghosts will “corrupt” the children: that children are naturally “innocent”—both guiltless and ignorant. Mark Spilka observes that Freudian and non-Freudian scholars share this “oddly Rousseauistic” idea of “Original

⁷⁹ Cf. Moran 637.

Innocence” (qtd. Pifer 58-59). Ellen Pifer, in fact, criticizes both sides of the debate for the assumption.

Pifer has argued that in *The Turn of the Screw*, James forces readers into interpretations based on their “own constructions of childhood” and that he does so at a “turning point” in a history of a “polarization of the child’s image into a demonic or angelic figure” (Pifer 15, 63, cf. 20, 23). The dehumanizing angel/devil dichotomy (the governess says the children are “almost impersonal... like... cherubs” [*TS* 140; ch. 3]) is of course common to many cultural assumptions about the Other.⁸⁰ Pifer’s point is that the notion that the children in *The Turn of the Screw* are two-dimensional angels or demons is not James’s idea but the reader’s. Pifer’s assessment of readers’ assumptions about children is based in part, of course, on an analysis of the existing criticism on the novella.

On the one hand, Pifer writes that some Freudian critics argue that the ghosts are hallucinations in order to defend the idea that Miles and Flora are “static images of innocence” (Pifer 57, 244-245n). On the other hand, she faults a critic who argues for the ghosts’ existence because the critic pathologizes James for portraying the children as being “*absolutely* ruined” by the ghosts, revealing an assumption that portraying children as innocent is the psychologically normal thing to do (Pifer 59). Both schools of thought, according to Pifer and Spilka, have misread Miles and Flora as innocents and therefore as “passive victims” (57, Spilka qtd. 59).

One sign of the common critical assumption of childhood innocence (the association, as Gubar observes, of guiltlessness with cultural illiteracy) is the idea that what could be seen as the children’s competence and performance are signs of corruption. Thus Heilman writes that for Miles and Flora to be “capable of strategic maneuvering,” “sophisticatedly evasive,” and able to

⁸⁰ I take my phrasing, in fact, from Cherrell Guilfoyle’s analysis of the “‘angel/devil’ dichotomy of woman” in *Hamlet* and other early modern literature (Guilfoyle 3).

distract the governess so a sibling can escape indicates “something unchildlike” and therefore “moral disorder” (440-441). In particular (according to Heilman) Flora’s “self-conscious acting” is characteristic of a “guilty person” (441). As Pifer observes, however, a comparison with James’s portrait of Maisie suggests that competence and performance need not necessarily indicate evil, and may indicate “diplomacy” rather than deceit (Pifer 43). Even the governess, when she observes that the children know how to manage her, calls what they do “diplomacy” before she comes to the conclusion that it is “fraud” (*TS* 168, 181; ch. 9, 12).

Building on Pifer’s critique of polarized interpretations, I argue that Miles and Flora are neither angels nor demons, but simply ordinary self-interested humans. What interpretation of the ghosts does this imply? Christopher Moran, although critical of the Freudian interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw*,⁸¹ offers a way of reframing the argument that might offer a middle ground between polarized interpretations. Moran suggests that James’s “original intention” was that for both the governess and the reader, “the fundamental mystery of Bly... was not whether the ghosts exist, but whether or not the children are colluding with them” (654). Half of Moran’s suggestion is obvious—it has always been clear that the governess believes in the ghosts but is trying to determine and confirm whether the children have seen them, spent time with them, and so on. The other half of Moran’s suggestion, that readers should ask the same question, opens up the possibility that scholars who disagree over the objective existence of the ghosts in the story might still be able to come to agreement about the children’s actions and culpability. That is, a scholar who reads the ghosts as objectively real and a scholar who reads the ghosts as hallucinations might agree that the children never cooperate with the ghosts. Just as importantly,

⁸¹ Moran argues that the governess is reliable in “her perception of events in their spatiotemporal setting,” including accurately observing the appearances of the ghosts, and only unreliable in her “inductions” about and “explanation” of those perceptions, such as the supposition that when Miles is out on the lawn at night he sees Quint on the tower (637, 658). His challenges to the Freudian interpretation include objections to John Silver’s suggestion that the governess has learned Quint’s appearance from people in the village (646-647).

Moran's phrasing eschews the notion that the children are passive victims who may be "corrupted" (thus his approach is consistent with Spilka and Pifer), and instead treats the children as moral agents, who may or may not have done something—"colluded."

Are Miles and Flora cooperating with the ghosts? When we "just read" the desires the children express, they name no desire the ghosts could fulfill. If (as I argue) the children's expressed desires adequately explain their observed behavior, there is no need to supply repressed desires to explain unobserved meetings with ghosts. The strongest argument in favor of either child colluding with the ghosts would be that Miles cooperated with Quint and Miss Jessel when the sinister pair were alive, to the extent of his "having lied and been impudent" to Mrs. Grose rather than separate himself from Quint and admit the amount of time he and Quint spent together (*TS* 165; ch. 8). To the degree that Miles's motives *vis a vis* the living Quint and the dead Quint are similar, Miles's behavior towards each would presumably be similar. Did Miles actually desire Quint's company? Mrs. Grose's remark—"It suited them all!"—sounds as though it might include Miles (*TS* 165; ch. 8), but when speaking of Miles in particular she makes it clear that it is Quint who actually desires to have Miles to himself. The governess prompts her:

'Miles would remember [Quint]... And you tell me they were "great friends".'
'Oh it wasn't *him!*' Mrs Grose with emphasis declared. 'It was Quint's own fancy. To play with him, I mean—to spoil him.' She paused a moment; then she added: 'Quint was much too free.' (*TS* 150; ch. 6)

The license Quint takes with Miles does not sound reciprocal or consensual—indeed, Pifer argues that Quint and Miss Jessel sexually abuse the children (Pifer 53-57).⁸² Whatever the

⁸² I am agnostic regarding this interpretation. For the purposes of my argument, the children's desires and ethical responsibility are what is relevant. Whether or not the interactions were sexual in nature, if the children's interactions with Quint and Miss Jessel were the adults' choices, then the children are not responsible, and if the motivating desire for those interactions was the adults' desire, and not reciprocated by desire on the children's part, then there is no reason to suppose the children would desire future interactions with the ghosts. If the worst Quint and Miss Jessel did was monopolize the children's time against their will (as the new governess eventually does),

nature of the interaction, Miles had no choice in the matter: unlike the governess, Quint had no scruples, and had an accomplice (Miss Jessel) to help him divide and conquer the children. The master had left Quint in charge of the household, including the children (“he had everything to say... even about *them*”), and Mrs. Grose lived in fear of “things that man could do” (*TS* 151; ch. 6).⁸³ Given that Miles had no choice, the housekeeper’s appeal to him to stop spending time with Quint would only add insult to injury. As in his interactions with the governess, Miles shows—in an area where he can control his circumstances—his desire for privacy (hence the lies about the time he has spent with Quint) and for the protection of the dignity to which his class is supposed to entitle him (hence the class-based insult aimed at an interfering servant). Miles’s desire for privacy and class-based dignity (which explains his secrecy and rudeness regarding his relationship with Quint) is consistent with his frankly expressed desires for time alone and for a gentleman’s education. Those same desires (for privacy and the dignity of class) do not suggest that Miles spent all his time with a servant of his own volition—they are far more consistent with Mrs. Grose’s implication that Quint forced his company on Miles regardless of what Miles wanted.

The question is, if there are ghosts, does Miles’s interaction with the living Quint constitute evidence that he or Flora would later willingly collude with such ghosts? On the contrary, one would expect the children’s response to the very names of the ghosts to be disgust and fear—which they are. When the governess names Miss Jessel to Flora, Flora gives a “quick smitten glare” and tells the governess she is “cruel” (*TS* 212, 215; ch. 20). When the governess

that would be adequate cause for the children to avoid the ghosts when they can (just as they seek time away from the new governess). A history of traumatic sexual encounters would only intensify the children’s distaste for the ghosts’ company.

⁸³ One can, of course, question Mrs. Grose’s honesty, or her susceptibility to the governess’s influence, but my aim here is to make sense of the story using the “givens of [the] text”: what Mrs. Grose says.

hints to Miles that “not Miss Jessel” but Quint is “at the window,” Miles becomes “frantic” and then responds “in a white rage,” ““It’s *he*? ... Peter Quint—you devil!”” (*TS* 236; ch. 24).

Whether the appellation “devil” describes Quint himself or the governess who demands that Miles say Quint’s name is ambiguous, but Miles’s fear and anger are clear enough. Fear of Quint (whether or not the ghost is real) may even be what kills Miles, whose heart stops when the governess says (or seems to say) that Quint is right ““There, *there!*”” (*TS* 236; ch. 24).

What the story tells us is that Quint and Miss Jessel (or even their names) can upset and frighten the children—so if the ghosts are real, they would have the means to drive the children away. The story also tells us that in life Quint and Miss Jessel kept the children close using the social pressure of the master’s authority, but that after their death the master’s authority has been transferred to the new governess. Finally, we might speculate that the living Quint and Miss Jessel used physical coercion to keep the children close, but (if the ghosts are real) the story gives no examples of the ghosts exerting any kind of physical force on the material world. Based on what the story tells us, the ghosts would seem only to be able to drive the children away, not keep them close as they did while living. Even if the ghosts were able to coerce the children, that would constitute abuse on the part of the ghosts, not wrongdoing that the children could “confess” in order to be “saved” (*TS* 223; ch. 21). Any reading in which the children voluntarily cooperate with the ghosts must supply a desire on the part of the children—a desire for the ghosts’ company, or for something the ghosts could offer the children—and the children express no such desire, although they are frank about many things they do want. All that the governess can tell us is that the ghosts (if they are real) do not seem to have gotten what they want from the children—they are still waiting “hungrily” (*TS* 178; ch. 11) with ““intention”” for the future (*TS* 158; ch. 7). In a “just reading” of the story, the children do not collude with them.

That the children do not collude with the ghosts does not make them innocent; on the contrary it may well be a sign of what Heilman and others have identified as original sin (“*Turn of the Screw* as Poem” 185): their wrongdoing comes from within. As the governess herself observes, Miles’s misbehavior is “the outbreak in him of the little natural man” (*TS* 165; ch. 8)—the children’s problems consist not in external tempters but “natural,” though selfish, internal desires—their sins are on a human rather than diabolical scale.⁸⁴

3. Performing Innocence to Gain a Life of Their Own

When the governess decides that the children’s innocence is not genuine but performed, she is appalled:

‘Their more than earthly beauty, their absolutely unnatural goodness. It’s a game, ...it’s a policy and a fraud! ...They haven’t been good—they’ve only been absent... they’re simply leading a life of their own. They’re not mine—they’re not ours. They’re... Quint’s and that woman’s’ (*TS* 181; ch. 12).

In this dense passage, the governess sums up the conflict between her desires and the children’s desires. First and foremost, the children want to be “leading a life of their own,” which sometimes includes being “absent.” The governess wants the children not to be their “own” but to belong to her, to be “mine.” In fact, the idea that they *could* have a life truly their own is so unthinkable that the governess revises her description to make the children, if not her own property, the property of other adults: “they’re... Quint’s and that woman’s.”⁸⁵ To gain time to

⁸⁴ The phrase “natural man” is an allusion to the spiritual blindness of human wisdom described in 1 Corinthians 2:14—“the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” The governess’s association of the phrase not with blindness but with sin, however, evokes the “old man” of Ephesians 4:22-24, who is not so much externally tempted as habitually sinful because of wrong desires, and redeemable through transformation by God into the “new man”: “put off... the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (KJV).

⁸⁵ As Pifer observes, the governess is “horrified... that children have complex, inner lives that remain largely hidden from adults” (43).

themselves, the children have resorted to the “policy” of managing the governess through a performance (what the governess calls a “fraud”) of “goodness.”

The governess arrives at Bly with a prepared script for childhood innocence. Although in their first interaction the governess can only actually observe that Flora is socially “charming” and physically “beautiful,” the governess supplies the notion that Flora is also morally and spiritually innocent: her beauty is “beatific... angelic beauty,” her serenity is like that of “Raphael’s holy infants” (*TS* 124-125; ch. 1). Similarly, upon her first meeting with Miles, all the governess can actually perceive are his external attributes, that he is “beautiful” and “stood wistfully looking out,” but she believes she has “seen him... without and within”—she supplies the idea of “something divine,” of his “innocence,” “purity,” and “air of knowing nothing in the world but love” (*TS* 132; ch. 3). The governess’s cultural script associates children’s beauty and goodness so powerfully that when disillusioned the governess calls their “beauty,” as well as their “goodness,” a “fraud” (*TS* 181; ch. 12). Nor is the governess the only one to believe in a cultural script of innocence for beautiful children: she and Mrs. Grose come early on to an understanding that it is only natural that the governess would “think well” of any child (such as Miles) who “look[s] like” Flora (*TS* 125; ch. 1). (Oddly enough, they say this in front of Flora but are convinced they have been so “round-about” she could not understand the power this gives her.) Soon after, Mrs. Grose dismisses the possibility that Miles’s expulsion is a sign of guilt by saying, “he’s scarce ten years old. ... See him, Miss, first. *Then* believe it!... You might as well believe it of the little lady. Bless her, ... *look* at her!” (*TS* 129; ch. 2). Tellingly, her appeal to the children’s beauty as a proof of innocence comes at a moment when they can see that Flora is disobediently shirking her schoolwork and have just heard that Miles has been expelled, and yet the governess and Mrs. Grose are convinced by the cultural script: the

governess says, “I needed nothing more than this... and... covered [Flora] with kisses” (*TS* 129; ch. 2). Not only are the adults convinced, but—what other critics have failed to notice—Flora *sees and hears* them convinced by the script of childhood innocence—she therefore has reason to believe performing the adult-authored script will effectively distract adults from her pursuit of her own goals.

Even if the governess has a script for childhood innocence, why should she crave to *possess* the performers of innocence, to claim them as “mine”? She admits that she should have asked questions about Miles’s “school” and the possibility that he “had been wicked”; her own explanation of her failure to question his innocence—and Flora’s⁸⁶—is a kind of willing self-delusion: “I was under the spell, and the wonderful part is that, even at the time, I perfectly knew I was” (*TS* 141; ch. 4). This self-delusion, in turn, is motivated by a desire to use the illusion of the children’s innocence as emotional anaesthetic,⁸⁷ treating Miles and Flora as a substitute supposedly-perfect family to take the place of a distant home beset by troubles:

I gave myself up to it; it was an antidote to any pain, and I had more pains than one. I was in receipt these days of disturbing letters from home, where things were not going well. But with this joy of my children what things in the world mattered? (*TS* 141; ch. 4)

For the governess, the “joy” of possessing “my children” is—she freely admits—an “antidote” for trouble at home. When this pseudo-family is threatened by Flora’s rejection and the potential rejection by the master, the governess uses a similar metaphor when she pins all her hopes on Miles: Miles’s “loyalty” is “my remedy” (*TS* 219; ch. 21). The governess’s desire for affection and emotional support is paramount: “[Miles’s] ‘my dear’ was constantly on his lips for me, and nothing could have expressed more the exact shade of the sentiment which I desired to

⁸⁶ “I was dazzled by *their* loveliness” (*TS* 141; ch. 4; emphasis mine).

⁸⁷ Pifer observes that the governess’s idea of innocence fits what Peter Coveney terms the “debased-romantic” idea of innocence as “‘withdrawal’ from life” and “moral and psychological ‘retreat’” (Pifer 46-47).

inspire my pupils than its fond familiarity” (*TS* 190; ch. 14). The address “my dear” combined with the word “familiarity” and its root word “family” underscore the governess’s attempt to create a family with “my children,” as “my remedy,” and “antidote.” The governess is using the children, acting in *her* private interests rather than with their best interests at heart.⁸⁸ Her selfish desire for their soothing company, combined with her suspicion of the children having a private “life of their own,” prompts her, as Pifer observes, to become “increasingly invasive of their privacy” (43). In fact, the governess eventually spends her days “in constant sight of my pupils” (*TS* 166; ch. 9), trying to monopolize their time.

In this way, the governess’s desires come into conflict with the desires of the children, who want more command of their time, including some time to themselves. Flora, for example, does not like to spend her time on the duller forms of schoolwork. Assigned the task of copying “nice ‘round O’s” in pencil, Flora complies for a few minutes but then leaves her task to seek out the governess, who remarks that Flora “expressed in her little way an extraordinary detachment from disagreeable duties” (*TS* 129; ch. 2). (The notion that there is anything “extraordinary” about disliking the “disagreeable” illustrates how little the governess contemplates the children’s perspective.) Flora smooths over any potential consequences from her small rebellion, however, by playing the part of the affectionate innocent, so innocent she does not realize she is disobeying: she “seemed to offer it as a mere result of the affection she had conceived for my person, which had rendered necessary that she should follow me” (*TS* 129; ch. 2). Faced with a choice between enforcing her education of Flora and accepting Flora’s

⁸⁸ One key symptom of the self-serving side of her interest, as I will show later, is that her desire for the pain-soothing effects of “innocent” affection is much greater than her desire to perform her actual duty of educating the children.

performance of innocent affection, the governess unhesitatingly chooses to believe in the performance that satisfies her own desires: “I... covered her with kisses” (*TS* 129; ch. 2).

Both children also like time to amuse themselves alone, either with the governess watching at a distance, or entirely absent. Miles, for example, wants some time to read by himself: “we had left Miles indoors... he had wished to finish a book” (*TS* 153; ch. 6). Flora accompanies the governess on this occasion, but in such a way as to almost be alone at the same time:

like her brother, [Flora] contrived—it was the charming thing in both children—to let me alone without appearing to drop me and to accompany me without appearing to oppress. ... My attention to them all really went to seeing them amuse themselves immensely without me: this was a spectacle they seemed actively to prepare and that employed me as an active admirer. (*TS* 153; ch. 6)

Even when they are with her, the children are able to enjoy a kind of solitude by converting their solitary play into a “spectacle” or performance for the governess. In fact, the children script the *governess*’s role in this game to prevent her interference:

I walked in a world of their invention—... my time was taken only with being for them some remarkable person or thing that the game of the moment required and that was merely... a... sinecure. I forget what I was on the present occasion; I only remember that I was something very important and very quiet and that Flora was playing very hard. (*TS* 154-155; ch. 6)

Nevertheless, the children want to spend some of their time actually alone and unwatched. When the increasingly alarmed governess becomes less amenable to their taking time alone, remaining “in constant sight of my pupils” (*TS* 166; ch. 9), the children increase the intensity of their performance of innocent, affectionate, “good” students in order to achieve their desired privacy. They perform (which does not mean they do not feel) affection: “They were at this period extravagantly and preternaturally fond of me... They had never, I think, wanted to do so many things for their poor protectress.” They perform devotion to their studies: “they got their lessons better and better, which was naturally what would please her most... They got their little tasks as

if they loved them; they indulged, from the mere exuberance of the gift, in the most unimposed little miracles of memory.” Most of all, their lavish performances are “diverting, entertaining, surprising” her to absorb her full attention:

reading [their protectress] passages, telling her stories, acting her charades, pouncing out at her, in disguises, as animals and historical characters, and above all astonishing her by the ‘pieces’ they had secretly got by heart and could interminably recite. ...They not only popped out at me as tigers and as Romans, but as Shakespeareans, astronomers, and navigators. (*TS* 167; ch. 9)

The purpose of all this performance is so that “sometimes... one of them should keep me occupied while the other slipped away” (*TS* 168; ch. 9). The governess is unconcerned at the time with such “diplomacy” managed with “the minimum of grossness” (*TS* 168; ch. 9). Again, although she recognizes that they use their soothing “childish grace” to influence her to let one of them leave, she is willing to “surrender” to that influence and sacrifice the education of one child as long as the other serves as an anesthetic, a “balm” to soothe her pain: “I have spoken of the surrender to their extraordinary childish grace as a thing I could actively promote in myself, and it may be imagined if I neglected now to apply at this source for whatever balm it would yield” (*TS* 166; ch. 9).

Later, however, the governess is alarmed when the children pull the same trick again: Miles performs for the governess on the piano while his sister disappears and goes to the lake. The governess concludes that Flora has deliberately returned to the site of Miss Jessel’s appearance in order to spend time with the ghost: “‘She’s with *her!* ...I’ve always been sure she wanted to go back alone. And now her brother has managed it for her’” (*TS* 207-208; ch. 18-19). The governess is, of course, supplying a desire Flora has never expressed. What the governess actually observes (if the ghosts are real) is that the ghost appears *after* Flora’s arrival and even after the governess’s (*TS* 212; ch. 20). That is, the governess sees the ghost come to Flora, but she never sees Flora go to the ghost. This is consistent with Mrs. Grose’s description of Quint’s

relationship with Miles—the sinister adult desires the child, and not the other way around. On this occasion, as on every other, the children want actual solitude, not the company of abusive ghosts.

4. Performing Boyish Naughtiness to Gain a Boy's Education

“Oh *you* know what a boy wants!” Miles tells the governess, and she should, because he has already asked for it: “when in the world, please, am I going back to school?” (*TS* 190, 202; ch. 14, 17).⁸⁹ His desire for school means a desire for knowledge (“you know almost as much? ... ‘Not half I want to!’”), a desire for experience (“I want to see more life”), a desire for opportunity (“I want a new field”), and especially a desire for the company of other people of his sex and class (“I want my own sort!”) (*TS* 191-192, 203; ch. 14, 17). Knowledge, experience, and opportunity suggest education, maturation, and (if one bears in mind Newbery's promise of a “coach and six” to those who follow the right social script, and the likelihood that Miles will be the master's heir if he is suited to the role) the rewards of education and maturation. Miles *wants* to perform his prescribed social role—the role of little gentleman—until he is transformed into a grown gentleman, but he needs models to imitate: he needs (he says) to be surrounded by grown gentlemen and little gentlemen. While insisting on his affection for the

⁸⁹ “What a boy wants” could, of course, encompass more than Miles's desire to return to school, but in the context of two conversations centered around Miles's returning to school, must refer primarily to that openly expressed desire; to supply other desires which Miles has not openly expressed (such as sexual desires) is considerably outside the scope of “just reading.” In the first conversation (beginning “when... am I going back to school?”), when the governess resists Miles's explicit request to be sent to school, Miles declares that he will go over the governess's head and “get [the master] to come down” (190-193; ch. 14). The governess understands Miles to mean that he expects her to “clear up with [his] guardian the mystery of the interruption of [his] studies” (194; ch. 15). In the second conversation (which turns upon “*you* know what a boy wants”) Miles reiterates that he wants “to get away,” reminds the governess that she has “let it all drop” (an allusion to sending him to school, which she acknowledges as a duty she has neglected), and insists again that “my uncle must come down and you must completely settle things.” The governess responds that even his uncle “can't send [Miles] back”—i.e., to the old school, but Miles responds, “I don't want to go back! ... I want a new field”—i.e., he wants to go to a new school (202-203; ch. 17).

governess and Flora, Miles also wishes to distinguish himself from them: ““for a fellow to be with a lady *always*—! ... You really compare me to a baby girl?”” (TS 190, 192; ch. 14). He is impatient to find his ““own sort”” because even at his tender age, he is beginning to grow up: he is a ““fellow... who’s—well, getting on”” (TS 190; ch. 14). In short, school is for Miles a path to maturation in the social role appropriate to his sex and class.

The governess, however, feels Miles’s desire to go to school as a personal betrayal and rejection, so much so that Miles is at last exasperated at her implication that he does not love her:

‘You know, my dear, that for a fellow to be with a lady *always*—!’ ...
‘And always with the same lady?’ I returned.... ‘Well then,’ I quavered, ‘if you’re just as happy here—!’
‘Ah but that isn’t everything! Of course *you* know a lot—’
‘But you hint that you know almost as much?... Don’t you then *love* our sweet Flora?’
‘If I didn’t—and you too; if I didn’t—! ... Well, you know what!’
(TS 190-192; ch. 14)

The governess feels rejected because the basis of her relationship with Miles is self-serving and self-centered: he soothes her pain. If she truly cared about Miles’s well-being, she would have arranged to send him to school as soon as possible—not only for the sake of his education, but to get him away from the ghosts. After all, she eventually adopts this solution for Flora (““You must take Flora... away from *them*”” [TS 218-219; ch. 21]), but only after Flora has already rejected her. After Miles confronts her, the governess realizes, “The boy... was immensely in the right” (TS 194; ch. 15).

To overcome the governess’s reluctance to give him his rights and desires, Miles plays a series of roles. His first strategy, apparently, is to gain her favor by playing the part of the “good” child. His performance of goodness is one of his first reasons he gives the governess when he finally makes his explicit appeal to be sent back to school: ““you can’t say I’ve not been awfully good, can you?”” (TS 191; ch. 14). But the performance of goodness, however effective for

gaining time alone, has no apparent effect regarding Miles's return to school. So Miles adopts a new strategy—a different script of expectations for childhood.

It happens that Mrs. Grose—whose views on children were surely no secret from Miles—shares with the governess the popular idea that moral expectations of children should differ between genders. The governess says to Mrs. Grose:

‘I take what you said to me at noon as a declaration that *you* ’ve never known [Miles] to be bad.’ ...
‘Oh never known him—I don’t pretend *that!*’ ...
‘Then you *have* known him—?’
‘Yes indeed, Miss, thank God!’
On reflexion I accepted this. ‘You mean that a boy who never is—?’
‘Is no boy for *me!*’ ...
‘You like them with the spirit to be naughty?’ Then, keeping pace with her answer, ‘So do I!’ I eagerly brought out. ‘But not to the degree to contaminate—’
‘To contaminate?’—my big word left her at a loss.
I explained it. ‘To corrupt.’ (*TS* 130; ch. 2)

Girls may be perfect angels, but boys (according to the governess and Mrs. Grose) should be mildly naughty to show “spirit”—provided their wrongdoing does not cross the line into the kind of evil than can “corrupt.”

To convince the governess that he belongs with other boys—that is, at school—Miles obligingly performs mild naughtiness. He goes out on the lawn at night and arranges for Flora to look out the window so the governess will also look out and see him (*TS* 180; ch. 11)—it’s not a performance without an audience. When the governess asks Miles why he did it, he wants to make sure she reads his performance correctly: “‘If I tell you why, will you understand? ... Well, ... just exactly in order that you should do this. ... Think me—for a change—*bad!*’” (*TS* 179; ch. 11). The performance is also carefully calibrated—essentially harmless and not dishonorable, but just “bad enough,” as Miles observes (*TS* 180; ch. 11).

Unfortunately, the governess does not accept Miles's frank explanation that he is performing badness for her to see. Instead, she interprets his actions based on something she did not see but presumes: "another person above me... on the tower"—that is, a ghost with whom she believes Miles was communicating from the lawn (*TS* 176; ch. 10). She becomes convinced that Miles adheres to a different script—the corrupted child. Sure that Miles is colluding with Quint, the governess believes him to be not boyishly naughty but touched by the kind of evil that can "corrupt."

5. Performing High-Class Adulthood to Gain Authority

Miles recognizes the failure of both of his first two roles—goodness and boyish naughtiness—to get him sent back to school. When he explicitly asks to return to school, he reminds the governess of both roles:

‘And you can't say I've not been awfully good, can you? ... Except just that one night... when I went down—went out of the house.’

‘Oh yes. But I forgot what you did it for.’

‘You forget?’—he spoke with the sweet extravagance of childish reproach. ‘Why it was just to show you I could! ... Then when *am* I going back?’ (*TS* 191; ch. 14)

Fortunately, Miles and Flora know from Mrs. Grose of another culturally scripted role he and Flora can play to influence the governess. Mrs. Grose frequently refers to them and addresses them as ‘little/young lady’ and ‘little/young gentleman’ (*TS* 126, 129, 150, 164, 214, 221; chs. 1, 2, 6, 8, 20, 21), and even exhorts Miles in class-consciousness, saying “*she* liked to see young gentlemen not forget their station” (*TS* 163; ch. 8).

When all else fails, the children can resort to the authority of their class. This is evident when the governess asks Flora where her dead governess is, then accuses her of pretending not to see the ghost (212-213; chs. 19-20). Faced with the governess's open distrust, Flora abruptly assumes a mantle of authority and faces the governess with “an expression of hard still gravity,

an expression... that appeared to read and accuse and judge me.... a countenance of deeper and deeper, of indeed suddenly quite fixed reprobation” (213; ch. 20). The governess has the impression that such authority is incompatible with childhood: “she was not at these times a child, but an old, old woman... her incomparable childish beauty had suddenly failed” (213-4; ch. 20). The governess does connect Flora’s newfound authority with someone of high class, however: ““She resents, for all the world like some *high little personage*, the imputation on her truthfulness and, as it were, her respectability”” (217; ch. 21, emphasis mine). Both the governess and Mrs. Grose hint at the performed quality of Flora’s role: it is “her manner,” ““a grand manner,”” ““that manner... is practically what’s the matter with her now”” (213, 217; chs. 20-21). When the governess’s open distrust brings their cordial relationship to an end, Flora relies on her class as a last resort, but is so upset and hurt (““I think you’re cruel”” [215; ch. 20]) that she does not play her class role well. As Mrs. Grose observes, the ““appalling language”” Flora uses about the governess is ““beyond everything, for a young lady”” (221; ch. 21).

Miles plays “little gentleman” rather better, but he has the advantage that the governess respects his gender role as well as his class role (“sex and situation”), and he has the advantage of costume:

Turned out for Sunday by his uncle’s tailor, who had had a free hand and a notion of pretty waistcoats and of his grand little air, Miles’s whole title to independence, the rights of his sex and situation, were so stamped upon him that if he had suddenly struck for freedom I should have had nothing to say. (189; ch. 14)

Having failed in his other two roles, Miles adopts the diction of his sex and class at an older age, including gallantry to the fair sex but an insistence on his own separateness from it: ““Look here, my dear, you know... [you’re] a jolly “perfect” lady; but after all I’m a fellow, don’t you see? who’s—well, getting on”” (190; ch. 14). The governess finds this role more compelling than the others, treating his performance as an essential, ‘natural,’ identity. In response to his demand to

return to school, she accepts that it is his right as a member of his class: “the boy, to my deep discomposure, was immensely in the right” (194; ch. 15). In response to his hint that he needs male company, she accepts that raising him with only female company is “unnatural” (194; ch. 15). When, soon after, Miles goes for a stroll instead of coming to the schoolroom, the governess meekly accepts that he (not the master) now determines the nature of her job: “what [Miles] would now permit this office to consist of was yet to be settled” (224; ch. 22). She becomes acutely aware that the children’s performance has inverted the authority between them: wanting to “get away,” she imagines Miles and Flora “play[ing] at” wide-eyed wonder about her whereabouts, chiding her (“you naughty bad thing”) as though they were the adults and she the child (194; ch. 15).

6. A Script for Corrupted Children

Miles’s performance appears to get him some of what he wants—“he had at any rate his freedom now” (224; ch. 22)—but it ultimately fails because the governess is suspicious of his very competence to pursue what he wants. For her, an exceedingly competent child is only compatible with the cultural script of corruption. However “unnatural for a boy” it might be to violate the “little gentleman” script and educate him at home with a girl, what is even more “unnatural” is that boy’s “sudden revelation of a consciousness and a plan” (194; ch. 15). Such consciousness and plans must, the governess concludes, be the work of the sinister ghosts, who have “made [the children]... still cleverer even than nature did” (218; ch. 21). The knowledge and competence that make the children more akin to adults strike the governess as signs of evil.

Based on the heavy use of theological language, Robert Heilman reads the governess as an unproblematic savior figure attempting to save Miles through confession (Heilman, “*The Turn*

of the Screw as Poem” 184-185), but one of the central problems with Heilman’s interpretation is that he overlooks the governess’s confusion of ignorance with blamelessness and of knowledge with guilt. The trouble is that the governess, to the extent that she serves as a “priest,” is a very bad one: she wants Miles to do more than to confess what he has done wrong; she also wants him to “confess” what he knows about the ghosts. After he confesses the two things he has actually done—stealing her letter and having “said things” that got him expelled—the governess feels not the certainty of forgiveness for confessed sin but “the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent... if he *were* innocent what then on earth was I?” (*TS* 234; ch. 24). Is the governess imagining that greater *guilt* on Miles’s part would vindicate her? Perhaps if Miles had, say, robbed the school it would justify the governess’s failure to send him to another school, but it would not be enough to soothe her fear that she might be the siblings’ persecutor (“what then on earth was I?”)—only the confirmation that Miles has been threatened by the ghosts’ corruption can justify the governess’s behavior. Of final importance to the governess is not whether Miles is innocent or forgiven of wrongdoing, but whether or not he is “innocent” (ignorant) of any knowledge of the ghosts—his *knowledge* is what she wants him to confess. Nor is this only because it will vindicate her, but also because, as Pifer observes, it is the children’s knowledge (not their actions) that truly horrifies the governess (Pifer 43-44). Her cultural script for evil (or, put another way, the limitedness of all her other cultural scripts for the children) leads her to associate the children’s knowledge and competence with the influence of diabolical ghosts. Because of these assumptions, and because of her focus on her own desires instead of the desires the children express, the governess misreads the children’s performances according to a script for evil, corrupted children, and inadvertently leads Miles to his death rather than furthering his education. Far from gaining his desire of returning to school, Miles loses control of

his manipulative performance and meets a tragic end, thus also losing the chance for his performance to transform him into the gentleman he wants to become. Prevented from using performance to be transformed into an adult of the proper social role, Miles tries to use performance to influence the governess, but the communication breakdown between them is so great that even his remarkable performances lead to disaster.

7. Transformation vs. Diplomacy

In an attempt to circumvent the restraints placed on their desires (and even what they see as their rights), Miles and Flora turn to performance as a tool of “diplomacy,” a means to manage the governess. In portraying child performance as a tool for manipulation, James takes the notion of child performance a step further than any author I have yet considered. Child performance was quite an old idea, and children’s ability to choose among roles was at least as old as Byron, and (as Marah Gubar has observed) before the publication of *Turn of the Screw* nineteenth-century critics of child actors on stage even raised questions about the genuineness of performed innocence.⁹⁰ But for child characters to switch the roles they performed as a temporary expedient, merely to get a desired response from an adult—that was to alter what child performance was *for*. Didactic authors recommended a single script for transformative performance, Byron and Carroll portrayed multiple possible scripts for transformative performance, but James portrayed child performance that was not for transformation.

Lord Byron and Lewis Carroll are remarkable for depicting children’s performed social roles as *options*—showing children observing different expectations and selecting from them,

⁹⁰ In Gubar’s analysis, “The moment a child begins to *perform* purity, her status as a primitive, unselfconscious innocent comes into doubt” (Gubar, *Artful Dodgers* 174). She quotes a *Spectator* article from 1869 and William Archer’s positive comments on young Vera Beringer’s performance as Little Lord Fauntleroy in 1888—both well before the publication of *The Turn of the Screw* in 1898.

rather than following a singular script without comparison. This is how they depart from the older tradition of the single transformational script. But Byron and Carroll do not depart from the traditional idea of transformation: if Ianthe performs the part of a lover, and Alice performs the part of a mother, we are left to presume that they are trying the roles out to see if they like them, to decide whether they will grow up to become lovers or mothers. Carroll criticizes transformation based on a single hegemonic script, but he does not criticize transformation as such. Both he and Byron depict children who have time to experiment, but ultimately intend to fill social roles in order to integrate with society and eventually transform themselves. Though distinctive because of their portrayal of options, Byron and Carroll agree with the moralists and others on the basic premise that child performance is for integration, transformation, and maturation. Indeed, the governess of James's story has the same idea—that it is her responsibility to “‘form’ little Flora” (*TS* 125; ch. 1).

But Henry James's story is about children who use the social scripts for childhood and maturation in a different way. It is not that the children in *The Turn of the Screw* do not want to grow up, nor even that they do not want to grow up to fulfill scripted roles—in fact, young Miles absolutely insists that he be allowed to grow up into the social role suited to his sex and class.⁹¹ But Miles and Flora find a second use for the performance of childhood and maturation—they can use it to manipulate their governess.⁹²

⁹¹ He calls himself a “fellow” who is “getting on” in years (*TS* 190; ch. 14) and wants “his own sort” (*TS* 192; ch. 14) rather than education from a governess alongside his younger sister.

⁹² It might be objected that when Alice conceals her inclination to eat seafood, her performance of Wonderland-appropriate childhood is disingenuous. But this “very truthful child” (*AW* 55; ch. 5) is not trying to deceive; in fact she gains nothing from her insulting interlocutors by putting them at ease. She is merely being polite—inhabiting a social role rather than using it as a means to an end. Miles and Flora, on the other hand, deceive not out of courtesy but (as I will argue) in pursuit of their own desires.

As noted in chapter one, Jane Austen's Annamaria (*Sense and Sensibility* [1811]) is a rare literary instance of a child who is "wise" enough to manipulate adults with the performance of childhood. More often, nineteenth-century authors depict *adults* manipulating others by performing childhood. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley (*Lady Audley's Secret* [1862]) plays a "childish" role to gain "dominion" over her husband.⁹³ Charles Dickens's Harold Skimpole (*Bleak House* [1853]) plays the part of childish innocence to mask his greed and selfish irresponsibility.⁹⁴ The assumption appears to be that a person with an adult's competence, when only held to the standards expected of children, can get away with a great deal. To portray a child manipulating adults through performance is to recognize that children are more competent than adults often expect.

On the one hand, *The Turn of the Screw* celebrates the competence of children, whose versatile performances ("diverting, entertaining, surprising... astonishing" [TS 167; ch. 9]) demonstrate that they are culturally literate, not primitive Others but sharing "kinship" (in Gubar's terminology) with competent, culturally literate adults. On the other hand, Miles and Flora only resort to manipulative performance because the governess blocks the original didactic purpose of child performance—growing up and being transformed into one's proper social role

⁹³ Lady Audley is often described as a performer in critical analyses: she is "like an actress" (Nelson 83), she "performed her insanity" in a way that "tested the... limits of authenticity" (Voskuil 634), her "competing roles—angel, demon, Gothic villain, rational woman, Gothic victim—demand the creation of separate identities" (Tilley 199). She plays a childlike role partly to obscure her guilt—she is "counterfeiting... innocence" (Nelson 83)—but partly because the role of a child is a powerful one in Braddon's story. Alicia Audley, Sir Michael's grown daughter, has ruled him because she was a "spoiled child," but as Sir Michael's wife, Lady Audley usurps the child's throne: "that dear father, over whom [Alicia] had once reigned supreme with the boundless authority of a spoiled child, had accepted another ruler and submitted to a new dynasty" (*Lady Audley's Secret* 306; vol. 2, ch. 13). It is specifically the "childish" role Lady Audley plays that grants her this power: "so complete was the dominion which Lady Audley had, in her own childish, unthinking way, obtained over her devoted husband" (92-93; vol. 1, ch. 12).

⁹⁴ The detective, Mr. Bucket, observes of Skimpole, "Whenever a person says to you that they are as innocent as can be in all concerning money, look well after your own money, for they are dead certain to collar it, if they can. Whenever a person proclaims to you 'In worldly matters I'm a child,' you consider that that person is only crying off from being held accountable, and that you have got that person's number, and it's Number One'" (*Bleak House* 810; ch. 57).

(Miles's education). Miles and Flora use their abilities to compensate for a failure in trust—first, the governess does not recognize their “kinship” as fellow humans, but finds their alterity pleasing (hence a disinterest in Miles's growing up); second, they cannot trust the governess to work in their best interests, since she is using them to soothe her pain and ignores their openly stated desires; and third, the governess does not trust them because she assumes they want (sinister) things they have never asked for. Only because of this lack of trust do the children resort to performing roles to influence the governess into fulfilling the needs and desires which she should have given freely. The communication breakdown is so great that the governess ultimately misreads even the performances that the children attempt to tailor to her, leading to Miles's death, the ultimate breakdown in trust, communication, and care between generations.

CHAPTER 4 | “EXTRAORDINARY... PERFORMANCE”: The Many Roles of Kipling’s Kim

1. A Child’s Identity in Terms of Performance, Relationships, and Things

In Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901), the eponymous hero is capable of ““extraordinary and effecient performance,”” as Hurree Chunder Mookerjee observes (129; ch. 9). Negotiating, like Carroll’s Alice, the scripting of behavior from multiple cultures,⁹⁵ Kim finds many scripts from which to choose: British boy, Indian boy, schoolboy, professional spy, and disciple of a Buddhist lama on a quest, to name only his long-term roles. Kipling (like Byron, Carroll, and James) portrays his child protagonist choosing between multiple roles, but (like James) Kipling goes a step further than Byron and Carroll, expanding child agency and revising the idea of selfhood. In the first place, Kipling’s Kim uses his performances not principally to transform himself into the kind of adult he wishes to become, but rather as a form of diplomacy (or, for his brief disguises, outright deception) to influence adults and pursue his own goals. In the second place, Kim wonders (““Who is Kim?””) whether there even is a real internal identity (distinct from external performances) which could be transformed by those performances. While other critics have recognized the flexibility of Kim’s performances, no other study has made the connection to the

⁹⁵ Byron and James do not so much portray children negotiating cross-cultural expectations as negotiate such cultural scripts themselves. Byron opens “To Ianthe” with a comparison between Ianthe’s beauty and beauty in “those climes where I have late been straying,” and casts his largely Western expectations for Ianthe in “Oriental” terms, calling her “Young Peri of the West” and comparing her eyes to those of a “gazelle.” James’s twist on British gothic conventions similarly comes from the perspective of a foreigner (from the United States).

literary history of changing definitions of childhood and identity at the end of the nineteenth century.

Part of my task has been to connect Judith Plotz's observations about childhood and identity in *Kim* (including concerns about imperialist appropriation of Indian identity, and the need to commit and choose an identity to grow up) to *Kim*'s literary history—the didactic tradition of child performance, and the revision of that model by Byron, Carroll, and James. I have also expanded on Judith Plotz's analysis of identity by connecting it to John Plotz's and Elaine Freedgood's recent application of “thing theory” to the work of Kipling's contemporaries. Robin Bernstein's idea that material objects can invite or “script” behavior from children (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 11-12) serves as a bridge between Judith Plotz's child-centered criticism and the thing-centered criticism of Freedgood and John Plotz. In my terms, Kim defines himself by performing the scripts that come both from people and from things.

Freedgood and John Plotz both comment on the complex relationship between “things” and human identity. John Plotz makes an explicit connection between “things” and human identities or roles in the early twentieth century. To those who believed in an essential “coherent inner self,” Rorschach blots were nonhuman objects (things) that could reveal inner human identity (114-115). To those who enacted “modern selfhood,” a diamond necklace was a thing that can shape what sounds like a scripted and performed human identity: we “model ourselves” upon our “adornment” and “conform to” it (115). Kim, I will argue, belongs to the latter category, tailoring (“conform[ing]”) his performance and selfhood to external “model[s],” whether they are humans or things.

Freedgood analyzes the genre of the Victorian “it-narrative” (a story narrated by a nonhuman object) from the perspective of human “hybridity with the nonhuman world” (98),

perceiving a “parable” about the “objecthood” (99) of the human “dispossessed,” who include “children” and “the colonized” (84). As a child who identifies with the colonized as often as he does with colonists, Kim fits Freedgood’s paradigm of the human “thing” whom others believe they own, suggesting a certain kinship between Kim’s social identity or role and the roles played by things. Moreover, the thing-like status of the colonized people around Kim blurs the boundary between the colonized people who offer him scripts, the things that offer him scripts, and the nonhuman land which also offers him scripts. The narrator, describing Kim’s perspective, unites the human and nonhuman by playing off of the biblical creation of man from earth: people, objects, and land are all “clay of [Kim’s] clay” (229; ch. 15). Kim’s identity extends beyond any essential inner self and is defined by performative relationships with the world outside.

It is “inviting,” writes Judith Plotz, “to read *Kim* as a cross-cultural bildungsroman in which the adolescent’s long-sought identity is achieved by a purposeful journey” (116). Although, as Plotz argues, Kim’s identification “with the wholeness of India” raises concerns about imperialist appropriation, this “inviting” formulation illuminates the novel’s relationship with the traditional understanding of maturation. Kim’s “Indian and British father substitutes” serve as models for him to emulate through performance—they offer “many modes of being” (Judith Plotz 116). Each of these role models, as I will argue, expects Kim to follow his example and be transformed by that performance. But Kim does not commit exclusively to any script, even as adulthood approaches—he continues to switch between them. This prompts the question of whether Kim’s “long-sought identity” (singular and stable) really is eventually “achieved,” or whether the book actually challenges the notion of fixed and essential identity.

All of this is not to say that Kim’s performed roles are never sincere, but this “Friend of all the World” does not measure his identities in relation to governments, religions, and ideals—

categories to which the adults around him have devoted themselves, and by which they define their own more stable selfhood: the lama is a lama by virtue of a relationship with Buddhism, Mahbub is a spy by virtue of a relationship with the British government, and so on. Rather than commit to such stable identities, Kim instead defines himself in relation to people, things, and land (categories which he sometimes blurs), each of which may require a different role from him at a different time. When he asks himself ““Who is Kim?”” he has no answer (96, 151; chs. 7, 11), but when asked ““who are thy people, Friend of all the World?”” he immediately replies, ““This great and beautiful land... and, further, I would see my lama again”” (110; ch. 8). On the one hand, insofar as Kim’s identity may be understood in terms of his love for others (and their love for him), his story is a more hopeful one than those of Ianthe or of Miles and Flora, stories overshadowed by adults (Byron’s speaker and James’s governess) whose relationships with the child heroes are more self-seeking than generous. On the other hand, Kim’s multiple identities are ideologically at odds, according to the very people to whom Kim is devoted, and his adult father figures do not live lives of such contradictions. Kim’s refusal to choose one life path—and the story’s refusal to continue into an adulthood that would demand such a choice of Kim—may also be read as a tacit admission that the story can offer hope only through denial.

2. Kim, Performer of Multiple Identities

Kim’s father, O’Hara, has endeavored to script—with literal writing as well as a spoken injunction—Kim’s maturation. He prophesies that Kim will be taken care of by O’Hara’s Irish regiment under their crest of the red bull on a green field (2, 65; chs. 1, 5), and to that end gives Kim his own Freemason documents and Kim’s birth certificate, saying that ““those things... would yet make little Kimball a man”” (1-2; ch. 1). Kim does not take his father’s script very

seriously, deciding to pursue his father's red bull only on a whim when hearing of the lama's very different quest: "boylike, if an acquaintance had a scheme, Kim was quite ready with one of his own; and, boylike, he had really thought for as much as twenty minutes at a time of his father's prophecy" (14; ch. 1). The narrator also expresses doubt about Kim's father's "confused" scripting: on Kim's birth certificate, "O'Hara—with some confused idea that he was doing wonders for his son—had scrawled scores of times: '*Look after the boy. Please look after the boy*'" (70; ch. 5). But O'Hara's regiment—his fellow adults—*do* take the script seriously, and indeed assume that Kim is attempting to use his father as a model and perform the same social role—though they themselves have doubts about whether the drunken O'Hara is a good model:

'It would be different, Kim, if you were not a soldier's son. Tell him that the regiment will take care of you and make you as good a man as your—as good a man as can be. ... Kimball, I suppose you'd like to be a soldier?' (73, 76; ch. 5)

When Kim refuses to be a soldier,⁹⁶ the less sympathetic of the two men insists upon the right of adults to script the transformation of children: "'You will be what you're told to be'" (76; ch. 5). Kim's father's script does in fact change Kim's life, but Kim's relationship with the lama and his talent for performance alter the anticipated path—he receives, not an inexpensive education paid for by his father's Freemason associates, but an expensive education paid for the lama, and he serves the British government not as a soldier, but as a spy.

We learn from the opening pages of the novel that Kim has already performed a full range of roles: secret agent, holy man's companion, British boy, and Indian boy—all before he is schooled in British culture, before he meets the lama, and before his "intrigue" (16; ch. 1) with

⁹⁶ The opening scene, in which Kim sits on the great "gun," presents a child who does not play at being a soldier (he does not pretend to fire the gun), but who takes pride in his inheritance of the political power the English soldiers have won. This is typical for Kim—making the most of any advantage he has, but not committing permanently to any role.

Mahbub blossoms into full-blown espionage. Kim already knows plenty of spy-like “intrigue” because he has “executed commissions by night” for “young men of fashion,” one of whom supplies Kim with disguises before dying under mysterious circumstances (2-3; ch. 1). Kim has already (as he later does with the lama) shared the begging bowls of “holy men... eating from the same dish” (3, ch. 1). At his caretaker’s insistence, Kim sometimes wears “European clothes” to suit his ancestry, but “when engaged in certain businesses... business or frolic”—that is, for goals of his own—Kim wears “Hindu or Mohammedan garb,” described as a “costume” and as “properties”—stage props (3; ch. 1). Kim is introduced to us as a child who is a full-fledged performer of multiple social roles, and who performs those roles, not so much to be transformed as for pleasure, “the game for its own sake” (2; ch. 1). In fact, the pleasure of performance remains Kim’s motivation through his adventures: “a demon in Kim woke up and sang with joy as he put on the changing dresses, and changed speech and gesture therewith” (129; ch. 9).⁹⁷

Kipling’s early introduction of Kim’s “costumes” and “properties” as an element of performing social roles is the first of many, prompting critics to detect Kipling’s deployment of a metaphor of performable roles and identities as changeable as clothing. Sue Walsh writes that Kim treats his “‘Sahib’ ...identity as a set of clothes he can put on or take off” (Walsh 20). Judith Plotz ties what Kim can essentially “be,” as well as his internal state, to his costume: “Kim is set up as the boy who could be virtually anything... he seems to don a new consciousness with each set of new clothes” (Plotz 113). Jan Montefiore makes the connection to identity explicit, referring to “Kim’s chameleon ability to slip between different costumes, adopt different identities” (Montefiore 99). For Don Randall as well, Kim’s “‘props’” serve him as “bits of

⁹⁷ “Adventure and intrigue for their own sakes” serves as a motivation throughout the story for a boy who does not care about politics (Montefiore 86); he serves the empire not for the sake of empire, but hedonistically for his own pleasure (Randall 124-126).

identity” (Randall 156). No one prop, costume, or script defines and transforms Kim, but together these objects (‘things’) help to script Kim’s multiple roles, his plural self-definitions in relation to the outside world.

Critics tend to agree that Kim’s performances constitute multiple contingent identities rather than one fixed, inherent identity. Thus Sue Walsh observes that Kim’s mimicry of “languages and behaviours” shows they are not “exclusively inherent” (Walsh 21). Indeed, a whole national or racial identity is a part to be played and thus may be learned or unlearned. On the one hand, “‘a white man’ is acknowledged by the Catholic Chaplain as something Kim will have to be made into” (Walsh 19, *Kim* 95; ch. 7) and Kim’s “*role* of ‘Sahib’” is an “identity... to learn or become” (Walsh 20). On the other hand, after learning his British role, Kim must *relearn* his Indian role: “‘this half-year of leave is to make you de-Englishised’” (150; ch. 10). As Don Randall observes, Kim’s identity is not singular and stable; his “identity vacillates between contradictory assertions: ‘I am a sahib’; ‘I am not a sahib’” (Randall 156).

Randall goes on to point out that the very idea of personal identity is questioned by the narrator when Kim asks “‘Who is Kim?’”: “The narrator... cast[s] doubt upon the concept of stable, definable selfhood—‘*what is called* personal identity’” (Randall 157). Similarly, the “liminal selfhood” of Kim’s mentor, the spy and master role-player Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, challenges the idea of “individualized identity” (Randall 156). Randall is not alone in perceiving Kim’s unstable, multiple identities. Judith Plotz notes Kim apparently “is” more than one racial identity: “In some ways he is deeply Indian... but, of course, he is not Indian... Nor is he exactly English either” (Judith Plotz 112). Montefiore similarly writes of Kim’s “dual identity”: his “Indian self which... reverences a holy man” and “English (or rather Irish) self which delights in duplicity and... spying” (Montefiore 85). I would render Montefiore’s two identities as four (and

indeed they branch even further), with Kim's roles of disciple and spy independent from his national/ethnic/racial roles—Kim delights in duplicity and spying long before he knows any British culture to speak of, and although the narrator often observes that Kim forgets his own status as a Sahib when honoring the lama, Kim encounters and even mimics Indians who are not terribly respectful to holy men, including some holy men's own "lewd disciples."⁹⁸ Kim's multiple identities are expanded further when one considers that Kim's "'native' identity" is actually multiple "identities rather than one identity" (Walsh 21). In fact, Sue Walsh suggests that the "core of Kim" lies in multiple "identities," between nationalities rather than within them: the "common ground between being Irish and being Indian" (both Other from the English perspective) is Kim's identity "more than Englishness" (Walsh 18). With such a wealth of roles to play, what wonder that "Kim... can slip in and out of identities as he chooses" (Montefiore 99)?

The critical insights of Walsh, Randall, Judith Plotz, and Montefiore about Kim's identity make more sense in the context of the didactic convention of the single-script transformative performance and the revision of that model by Byron, Carroll, and James. Like the child characters of Byron, Carroll, and James, Kim pushes past any single script an adult might offer because of his multicultural environment. He can perform more than one "identity" simply because he has access to more than one cultural script. Moreover (like James's Miles and Flora), Kim has uses for his many social roles besides preparing to inhabit one permanently as an adult,

⁹⁸ Kim encounters a highly self-serving priest who later tries to drug the lama with opium and rob him. When this unscrupulous priest praises Kim's "'cunning,'" the "cautious" Kim chooses to mirror the priest's greed by pretending to be using the lama, saying that begging for the lama "'serves me while I learn the road at least.'" The narrator tells us that Kim's interlocutor is not Kim's only model for this attitude and mode of speech: "He knew what the *faquirs* of the Taksali Gate were like when they talked among themselves, and copied the very inflection of their lewd disciples" (40; ch. 3).

and (unlike James's Miles and Flora), Kim does not particularly want to choose one role to permanently inhabit as an adult.

3. Roles: Adults' Singular Fixity and Children's Fluid Multiplicity

As several critics have suggested, Kipling assumes that, in general, adults are tied to fixed social roles, including a particular nationality, ethnicity, and culture. Kim's ability to perform more than one nationality/ethnicity/culture is, on this understanding, tied to his status as a child or adolescent. Children may choose to perform any social role, the logic goes; adults have already chosen and transformed themselves.

Recalling his childhood in India, Kipling opens his memoir with a description of a younger self "below the age of caste" and at the nexus of many nationalities and religions: a child with British parents and Portuguese and Indian caretakers, who visits Catholic crosses and Hindu temples as the older, narrating Kipling invokes Allah (*Something of Myself* 3). Judith Plotz suggests that Kim may be read as a stand-in for Kipling's younger self, a child who in Kipling's imagination was not restricted to any one "caste" and was thus free to be truly Indian as "no actual individual Indian—bound by caste, bound by religion—could ever be" (Judith Plotz 116-117).⁹⁹ For Don Randall, the connection between child and culture in *Kim* is more generalized: "the figure of the boy is intimately linked with representations of the colonial subject" (Randall 154). In particular, the adolescent (Kim) on the border between childhood and adulthood is like the Anglo-Indian (Kim, but also his mentor Hurree) "whose identity vacillates between contradictory assertions"—identification with colonizer or with colonized (Randall 155-

⁹⁹ Plotz draws here on Arnold Kettle and John McClure.

156). Thus, *Kim*'s narrator associates "the liminal identities of the adolescent and the colonial subject" (Randall 156).

Hurree is, in fact, the curious exception that proves the rule—an adult performer with no fixed identity. The awkwardness of his instability is highlighted—he is alternately represented as admirable for his ability to play any role and as ridiculous for his identity poised between two cultures (Montefiore 91-95). Despite the advantages Hurree's liminality affords him as a performer, the novel's mockery of his unstable, undecided identity reinforces the problematic nature of an adult who does not commit to one fixed identity, and makes Hurree far from a tempting model for Kim as he stands on the verge of adulthood himself. The novel's close instead highlights the respective fixity of Kim's foremost father figures, Mahbub Ali and the lama—a fixity typical of all the novel's adults (Hurree excepted). Mahbub Ali serves the British government in India, but (unlike Hurree) Mahbub shows no desire to participate in British culture. He is an "Afghan" (15; ch. 1) and not only Muslim but a "Hajji" (pilgrim to Mecca, 17; ch. 1). The lama is Tibetan, an ethnic identity which as he says excludes other ethnic identities: when someone suggests that he is "Khitai (a Chinaman)" he responds, "I am no Khitai, but a Bhotiya (Tibetan)" (5; ch. 1). He is Buddhist and even more specifically of the "Red Hat" order, a designation Mahbub applies to the lama in place of a name, repeatedly marking their religious difference (90, 143-144, 147, 229-232; chs. 6, 10, 15). Mahbub considers the lama, as a Buddhist, to be "an unbeliever and an idolater" (230; ch. 15). It is thus something of an understatement when Mahbub tells the lama, "I am not altogether of thy faith." When the lama suggests that Mahbub "follow the Way" of Buddhism, "Mahbub stared stupefied at the magnificent insolence of the demand, which across the Border he would have paid with more than a blow" (231; ch. 15). Similarly devoted to his own religion, the lama understands

Mahbub's difference from himself in distinctly Buddhist terms: "That person... is deceived by the shadow of appearances" (232; ch. 15).¹⁰⁰ These two men have chosen their identities and life paths, and do not turn from them.

This portrait of ethnic and religious distinctions is scarcely surprising; the curious thing is that, for all their own fixity, these two different father figures believe that Kim (an adolescent between childhood and adulthood, between one culture and another) can function in both of their domains simultaneously, performing any and all of the parts set before him. On the one hand, the lama expects Kim to follow him as a model—believing that he has himself been cleansed by the sacred river, the lama expects Kim to follow him to the river for cleansing, telling Mahbub, "My *chela* aided me to the River. It is his right to be cleansed from sin—with me," and telling Kim, "It is behind the mango-tope here—even here! ...Son of my Soul, I have wrenched my Soul back from the Threshold of Freedom to free thee from all sin—as I am free, and sinless. ... Come!" (230, 234; ch. 15). On the other hand, Mahbub also expects Kim to follow him as a model: as "something of a player of the Game" (231; ch. 15)—again, an understatement—Mahbub is largely responsible for inducting Kim into the Great Game of espionage for the British Government, and using the euphemism of "scribe," insists that Kim continue to follow in his footsteps in this service to the government: "He is somewhat urgently needed as a scribe by the State" (230; ch. 15).

Each of these father figures expects what any reader of didactic children's literature would expect: modeling and cultural scripts for children, who imitate their models and perform their cultural roles until transformed into the likeness of their models. What is remarkable is the

¹⁰⁰ The lama's Buddhist idea of the "shadow of appearances," which its implicit distinction between the visible, external "appearance" and invisible, internal essence, is in some ways the reverse of Kim's ultimate self-definition in terms of external, visible performance. (On the other hand, as a spy and a master of disguise, Kim does recognize and exploit a distinction between sincere and deceptive "appearances.")

suggestion that Kim can take on two models continuously: as Mahbub expresses the understanding he comes to with the lama, “the boy, sure of Paradise, can yet enter Government service” (231; ch. 15). Judith Plotz cites this passage in her analysis of how the novel “joins [the] conflicting realms” of “politics” and “love” (Judith Plotz 124). According to Plotz, only a certain idea of childhood—not merely Kim as a child but the imagined child audience for his story—makes the simultaneous performance of contradictory roles possible: “Only the generic inscription of the work as a children’s book allows the coexistence” (Judith Plotz 124-125). I would frame Kim’s contradictory roles not so much in terms of genre as in terms of tradition—eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century didactic authors envisioned a child in terms of a *potential* adult role, and given the multiple roles envisioned by Byron, Carroll, and James, the child had almost infinite *potential* adult roles. Kim is a child who refuses to choose one role and grow up into it, maintaining the infinite potential of contradictory roles at the cost of a life story abruptly halted when he is offered such a choice, what may be read as an arrested development.

4. The Sincerity of Kim’s Role-Playing

Some of Kim’s role-playing consists specifically in the challenge “to enter another’s soul” rather than portray or convey an aspect of his own soul (129; ch. 9). But even when he plays a part with which he identifies himself, Kim often uses his role, one of his own identities, as a tool to accomplish a momentary goal (such as getting money or food, winning someone’s favor, completing a spy mission, etc.). If Kim performs his own identity, not to be transformed into that identity or even to express his own self-image, but to pursue some other purpose, does that utilitarian approach render Kim’s identity false?

Take, for instance, the episode when Lurgan Sahib tests Kim by attempting to hypnotize him into believing that a broken jar is whole again. Kim has “been thinking in Hindi,” and initially comes under Lurgan’s spell, but is able to resist the hypnotism by mentally repeating “the multiplication-table in English” (125; ch. 9). Obviously the idea that Kim’s playing the part of an “English”-speaking British boy renders him impervious to mental control where playing a “Hindi”-speaking Indian boy leaves him vulnerable to control involves certain imperialist assumptions. But Kim is switching not only national roles but educational roles. As Lurgan’s apprentice his greatest skill is empathy, the performative ability “to enter another’s soul” (129; ch. 9)—and he has been entering largely Hindi-speaking souls. But to empathize with a hypnotist—to internalize the hypnotist’s view of the world—is to be under the hypnotist’s control. Kim must, for the moment, cease to be Lurgan’s apprentice and become the schoolboy from St. Xavier’s, from whom a very different performance—the recitation of the multiplication table—is required. The objectivity of mathematics, rather than the subjectivity of empathy, enables Kim to separate his view of the jar from the view which is being suggested to him. Kim has, at any time, access to these attributes associated with different roles and can perform whichever roles will help him to, in this case, pass a test.

Kim, then, *uses* his identity as a British boy and a schoolboy, not (as his father would expect) as an exclusive identity, a preparation for becoming a British man, but only to get something he needs in the moment, until the needs of the next moment require him to switch roles again. Treating these identities as tools does not cause Kim to cease treating them as identities, however. When Lurgan asks Kim how he resisted his hypnotism, Kim responds, “*I knew that it was broken, and so, I think, that was what I thought*” (125; ch. 9, emphasis

mine).¹⁰¹ Kim does not describe his transition from performing one role to performing another as if those roles were distinct from himself. Rather, Kim the British schoolboy is as much “I” as Kim the Indian street urchin or any of his other roles. He considers all of these long-term roles to really be part of himself—although (as in the contradictory assertions observed by Randall) he does not perform them all at the same time.

On another occasion, Kim plays on his roles of orphan and disciple (with which he sincerely identifies) by bursting into tears and appealing to charity to save money on a ticket: “Kim... had no notion of spending Mahbub Ali’s money on anything so crude as a paid ride to Umballa. ... ‘are we Rajahs to throw away good silver when the world is so charitable?’” (22, 25; ch. 2). The tears are clearly strategic rather than the product of emotion, since Kim deliberately chooses not to buy the ticket he needs, but at the same time, in his performance of sadness Kim says only what is true about himself and his social roles: “Kim lifted up his voice and wept outside the carriage window. ‘I am very poor. My father is dead—my mother is dead. Oh, charitable ones, if I am left here, who shall tend that old man?’” (25; ch. 2). Kim *is* a poor orphan, and the lama *would* be completely at a loss without him. What is more, the woman who pays for the ticket is not presented as being defrauded. The lama and the woman agree that she has gained something through her charity: “‘Ask [the holy man] for a blessing,’” the woman tells Kim, and the lama says “‘She has acquired merit’” (25-26, ch. 2).¹⁰² As when James’s Miles and

¹⁰¹ Kim’s reticence about the specifics is self-defense: he cannot afford to reveal his methods lest Lurgan learn to overcome them. Lurgan himself says, “‘I wish I knew what it was that... But you are right. You should not tell that—not even to me’” (126; ch. 9). But Kim’s statement is only unspecific, not untrue: in addition to reciting the multiplication tables, Kim also repeats (in English) what he knows to be true—that the jar is broken.

¹⁰² It might be argued that the lama’s assessment is invalidated because he does not perceive Kim’s ploy. We are certainly invited to smile at the lama’s lack of perceptiveness in this very scene when he fails to recognize the woman’s profession (“courtesan,” 23; ch. 2). But Kim’s strategies for begging are never treated as incompatible with the validity and value of charity to both giver and receiver—even by those who recognize Kim’s strategies. Consider the vegetable-seller who “knew Kim of old,” who complains about the amount of rice and curry he asks for, and who hints that Kim is a “‘bold beggarman’” like the sacred bull that eats her onions. She nevertheless gives Kim what he asks for the lama, saying “‘It is good to give to the poor,’” and asking for the lama’s blessing (12-13; ch. 1).

Flora perform affection for their governess, performance may be more diplomatic than deceptive, and may not be at odds with a child performer's self-image and emotional attachments. Kim is able to perform the role of the lama's *chela* (disciple) to achieve a goal (in this case, saving money), but at the same time inhabit the role of *chela* as part of his own self-identification.

Can Kim truly be said to be the lama's *chela*? "I am his disciple," Kim tells the Rajah's widow, but she scoffs that he is not a "lawful *chela*" to a Buddhist lama:

'Thou art a casteless Hindu—a bold and unblushing beggar, attached, belike, to the Holy One for the sake of gain.'
'Do we not all work for gain?' Kim changed his tone promptly to match that altered voice. (55-56; ch. 4)

Kim does not deny that he is self-seeking—after all, he shares the food he begs for the lama and even exacts a small "commission" ("keeping only one anna in each rupee") when making a purchase for the lama with the lama's money (23; ch. 2). Nor does Kim deny that he is a beggar who does not share the lama's religion (cf. Montefiore 88), but he nevertheless insists that he is the lama's disciple: "I am even what the Great Queen says I am; but none the less is my master holy. ...I am but the Holy One's disciple" (56-57; ch. 4). What is stranger still, the Rajah's widow accepts Kim's paradoxical role, however 'unlawful': "The old lady recognized that, as the eyes and ears of the lama, he was to be propitiated" (56; ch. 4). As is characteristic of Kim, his own role is defined not by his devotion to an ideal (Buddhism) but his devotion to a person ("none the less is my master holy"). That is, Kim is the lama's disciple inasmuch as he loves the lama. "My heart went out to thee" the lama tells Kim, who replies, "And mine to thee" (74; ch. 5). Though the adults around him associate a 'lawful' social role or identity with commitment to an ideal, and although an 'authentic' identity might be understood as incompatible with self-seeking use of roles, Kim rejects both such standards. For Kim, love for

people, things, and land, as expressed in scripted performance, is the only measure of selfhood that matters.

5. Contradictory Roles: the Problem of Violence

While Kim's love for the lama may make him, in some sense, the lama's disciple, it certainly does not prompt Kim to follow the lama's script for Kim's maturation. When Kim expresses an idle interest in becoming a king, the lama promises, "I will teach thee other and better desires," indicating that he expects Kim to share his own quest for purification and enlightenment (15; ch. 1). But by the end of the book, Kim still shares none of the lama's spiritual desires or beliefs—when the lama says he has found enlightenment in the sacred river, Kim responds with a phrase taken from another religion ("Allah Kerim!") and assumes that the river is no more than water: "Wast thou very wet?" (234; ch. 15). Even the often-oblivious lama perceives that Kim has not internalized the lama's pacifism. After foreign spies strike the lama, Kim attacks one and the lama barely restrains their companions from shooting the spies. When Kim insists that both violence and killing were justified against those who attacked the lama, the lama is concerned that there is "evil in thy soul" and gently chides him, "The lesson is not well learnt, *chela*" (204-205; ch. 14).

On this occasion when Kim's difference of belief with the lama moves from thought to action, the compatibility of his role as disciple and his role as spy come into question. Mahbub suggests that Kim can take on the two roles continuously, "the boy, sure of Paradise, can yet enter Government service" (231; ch. 15), but Judith Plotz responds to Mahbub's assessment in her analysis of how the novel

joins conflicting realms, the imperial realm of power and the idyllic realm of love... power here is imagined to coexist with states contrary to power. Thus

politics coexist with love, true discipleship with betrayal, Caesar with God (Judith Plotz 124).

Plotz's idea that politics and love are (at least sometimes) "contrary" (Judith Plotz 124) is a concern that Kipling has carefully circumscribed so that it does not directly appear in the novel. Why should the British government care whether Kim follows a Buddhist lama, any more than they should care that Mahbub is Muslim? And why should the lama, believing the world to be an illusion,¹⁰³ care at all about illusory governments and professions? As the lama says to Mahbub, "Let him be a teacher; let him be a scribe—what matter? He will have attained Freedom at the end. The rest is illusion" (231; ch. 15). Even Plotz's allusion ("Caesar and God") suggests the compatibility of religious devotion and obedience to an imperial government: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17, KJV).

Kipling's deliberate push for the compatibility of Kim's roles must work around a serious contradiction between these particular forms of "Caesar and God": an empire that requires violence and a faith that forbids it. Kim does far more than "give tribute" to an empire (Mark 12:14). He is an agent of empire, and though he chiefly gathers intelligence, he also carries a weapon. Mahbub gives Kim a revolver that "takes Government bullets" in the hopes that "please God, thou shalt some day kill a man with it" (139; ch. 10). This is a 'thing' that scripts a violent role. Surely it is not over-reading to consider Kim's small "gun" (139; ch. 10) an icon on a small scale of the British government's threat of force. Elsewhere in the novel, larger "guns" certainly carry this meaning. The novel opens with Kim sitting on the huge bronze "gun Zam-Zammah" and the declaration that "who hold Zam-Zammah... hold the Punjab... the

¹⁰³ Even in his praise of Buddhist cultural artifacts—indeed, *because* of his praise—Kipling questions this key tenet of Buddhist belief: "And Buddha said that a man must look upon everything as illusion—even light and colour... To overcome desire and covetousness of mere gold, which is often very vilely designed, that is conceivable; but why must a man give up the delight of the eye, colour that rejoices, light that cheers, and line that satisfies the innermost depths of the heart? Ah, if the Bodhisat had only seen his own image" ("The Edge of the East," qtd. *Kim* 259-260).

English held the Punjab and Kim was English” (1; ch. 1). Soon afterward Kim hears the British Commander-in-Chief calls forth armies and “guns” (Kim’s paraphrase for “artillery”) to enforce British rule against “confederated Kings” as a form of “punishment—not war” (18, 31-32; chs. 1, 2). Even if, like Kipling, one were to assume that the British government only used force for the good of India, the use of guns (for a government or for any entity) is certainly not compatible with the lama’s Buddhism. The lama opposes killing, including the killing of violent enemies and venomous snakes (36, 198; ch. 3, 13), and even regrets using non-lethal force (231; ch. 15).¹⁰⁴ If Kim (like Mahbub or the lama) were to commit himself to one of these opposed ideals (for or against the use of force), it would seem that he could not continue to perform both of his roles (armed spy and disciple).

Nevertheless, Kipling circumscribes (rather than describes) the contradiction between Kim the gun-bearing government spy and Kim the follower of a lama opposed to violence. In the first place, Kipling does not show Kim fulfilling Mahbub’s ambition of killing a man. Kim fires the gun only once in combat, after he is himself fired upon—as he says, “*I think it is self-defence*”—and he only wounds his target: “*I can hardly walk,*’ groaned Kim’s victim” (197, 202; ch. 13). In the second place, Kipling distinctly separates the gun’s violence from the British empire’s relationship to its Indian subjects. Kim’s target is a foreigner, a European spy rather than an Indian, and when Mahbub first proposes that Kim use the gun to kill, Kim remembers that murder is forbidden by the British government: “*If a Sahib kills a man he is hung in the jail*”; only “*beyond the Border*” and outside of British law is such violence possible (139; ch.

¹⁰⁴ He did a man harm “once—with a pence—before I was wise” (231; ch. 15). It is unclear whether the lama is referring to the occasion long ago when, to determine “which abbot shall bear rule in the valley... we fought a day... with our long pences” (210; ch. 14), or more recently when a Russian spy tore his chart of the Wheel of Life, a sacred treasure equivalent to “the holy vessels of a cathedral,” and the lama’s “hand went to the heavy iron pence that is the priest’s weapon” (196; ch. 13). In neither case is the lama the first aggressor—indeed in both cases he is the one to receive a severe blow to the head.

10). In short, as much as Kim's "gun" echoes the "guns" of the British military, Kipling nevertheless treats this gift from Mahbub as more an artifact of Mahbub's culture "beyond the Border" than the weapon of a British spy.

What does this mean for Kim's simultaneous roles as spy and disciple? Kipling's idea that Kim does not use the gun (which is unapproved by the lama) in his capacity as a government agent bolsters the compatibility of his two roles, sustaining Kim's lived contradiction. After all, attacking the foreign spy is no part of Kim's mission as a British spy, which requires him only to steal their papers. On the other hand, even used in self-defense and not on behalf of the British government, violence is not in accord with the lama's teaching. Still, it is (paradoxically) *as* the lama's disciple that Kim goes against the lama's teaching: Kim (first with his hands, then with a gun when fired upon) attacks the man who struck the lama. Kim is acting, not from obedience to the lama's teaching, but from devotion to the lama as an honored friend and a largely helpless and naïve old man who must be cared for and protected. As an old soldier tells the lama, "if evil men were not now and then slain it would not be a good world for weaponless dreamers" (43; ch. 3).¹⁰⁵ As Jan Montefiore observes, the lama and Kim have a "Don Quixote / Sancho Panza relationship" in which—despite or perhaps because of their different beliefs—the spiritual lama depends on Kim's of-this-world protection (Montefiore 88).¹⁰⁶

Edmund Wilson objects that Kipling never portrays Kim's role in government service as "a betrayal of the lama" (Wilson, "Kipling" 31).¹⁰⁷ Montefiore, describing Kipling's belief in the

¹⁰⁵ As Montefiore observes, the context of this passage specifically relates to the British suppression of an Indian revolt (Montefiore 86-87), so although Kipling never portrays Kim killing anyone, and certainly not the people of India, the government's use of lethal force within India was neither invisible nor unjustifiable to Kipling.

¹⁰⁶ In addition to her own analysis, Montefiore cites Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, 132.

¹⁰⁷ Edmund Wilson's objection includes concerns of both imperialism—the government will "exploit" Kim's knowledge to suppress "native resistance"—and a choice of government over spirituality: as a spy Kim "dissociat[es] himself from the hierarchy" of lama-disciple and "commits" to the hierarchy of a government that will

compatibility of Kim's service to the empire and his love of the people of India ("the two halves of Kim's identity do not produce... conflict... they harmonize," Montefiore 86) acknowledges the fact that Kipling's idea of compatibility depends upon imperialist assumptions (Montefiore 86-88). Nevertheless, Montefiore stresses that for Kipling the logic of compatibility is based on real love—Kim's love for the lama and his love for India (Montefiore 88). Whatever elements of Kim's performances are mere disguises, his performance of love is sincere.

6. Scriptive Things, Identity Through Love, Love vs. Commitment

Don Randall, analyzing the moment just before Kim asks himself "Who is Kim?" when Kim feels for his possessions (the end of chapter 10 and the beginning of chapter 11), argues that these possessions are part of Kim's search for identity:

Kim's process of self-seeking immediately returns him to his 'props'; he can recover himself only by taking stock of his personal possessions—his weapons, cultural curios, scientific tools, money—the little bits of identity that others have given him. Kim is the product of an eclectic *bricolage*; his identity, it seems, can never be more than contingent. (Randall 156)

Randall's notion of "props" as "bits of identity" makes sense in light of Robin Bernstein's idea that material objects can invite or "script" behavior from users (Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* 11-12). In John Plotz's terms, Kim "conform[s]" his performance of self to the "things" he has been given (115). Kim's "props" named in this episode include the "amulet" containing the documents from his father, which scripted Kim's entry into British culture and education; the "revolver" Mahbub gave Kim, explicitly with the hope that Kim would be capable of killing a man when the time was right; the "medicine" given him by Hurree to cure himself and the poor people he

(Wilson, "Kipling" 31). With regards to the latter concern, it seems to me that Kim does *not* choose government service to the exclusion of his role as disciple—we never see him make a choice at all. Kim has never been the lama's disciple in the sense of being Buddhist, but after his spy mission he is no less the lama's disciple in the sense of protecting him than he was before.

would meet; the “rosary” and “paint-box” for his government survey work (both an element of and cover for his espionage); a “begging-gourd” reminiscent of his begging food for the lama (150; ch. 10). All of his possessions script actions that are part of the performance of roles: schoolboy, fighter, healer, government agent, disciple. These are identities which others have scripted for Kim, identities which are “contingent” (to use Randall’s word) on Kim’s props, his relationships to their givers, and his own ends for which he performs and transforms others’ scripts. As in Bernstein’s model, scripting is not coercion but can be resisted or reshaped by the person responding to the scriptive thing—the things which script Kim’s roles cannot control him any more than the adults who give him those things can control him. Nevertheless, these objects enjoy a certain agency in scripting social roles and constituting part of Kim’s human identity. As in Freedgood’s analysis of the story of an inanimate thing as a “parable” for “children” and “the colonized” (84, 99), the agency of things in Kim’s story also serves to confirm his agency, despite the disadvantaged position of a child. No one script defines and transforms Kim, but all of the scripts which things and relationships offer can connect him to his roles in the world.

The scripting of things and of relationships returns at the end of the book to give what is apparently the final answer to Kim’s search for identity. ““What is Kim?”” he asks himself again, and suddenly sees “things” in “proper proportion”: “Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true... clay of his clay” (229; ch. 15). Kim begins with the recognition of his kinship (““What is Kim?””—not “who,” as before) with nonhuman “things,” lumping together objects (“roads,” “houses”), animals (“cattle”), land (“fields”), and his fellow humans (“men and women”). All of these are of one substance with the earth from which mankind was made: “clay of his clay.” This universal equalization (not only children and the colonized but all

people, beasts, and land are also things) is the foundation for scripted interactions, so that Kim may even more truly be said to be “Friend of All the World,” human and nonhuman alike. He realizes that things, land, and people all script certain behaviors for him, certain roles for him to play. Kim finds himself not by looking inside himself (for an inherent identity) but by looking out at acts he can perform to connect him with the land and with people. Having felt like a “cog-wheel” (another thing) that is “out of gear with its surroundings,” he now “felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without” (228-229; ch. 15). The end of Kim’s quest for identity, in which he connects with the “wheels” of “things,” proves to be the exact opposite of the end of the lama’s quest to gain, as the lama says only a page later, “Freedom from the Wheel of Things” (230; ch. 15). As much as Kim loves the lama, he also loves the land and its people—and indeed defines himself by that love.

The novel closes with the lama’s invitation to Kim to be cleansed in the river, to be freed from sin and from the Wheel of Things—that is, the novel ends before we hear Kim’s response. Will he finally accept the lama’s Buddhism and follow the lama in the belief that the world is an illusion? To do so would be to give up everything Kim has gained in his own quest for an identity defined by a relationship to the world. Will Kim refuse to be washed in the river? That would be an explicit rejection of Kim’s role as the lama’s disciple. Will Kim, then, accept the outward sign of cleansing while continuing to disbelieve in that cleansing? That would be a grave betrayal. Kim has hitherto defined his role as disciple by his love for the lama, and his outward acts (caring for and protecting the lama) have all expressed that love, rather than expressing a belief in Buddhism. But this cleansing in the river would be a performative, transformative act: to perform it insincerely would be akin to going through a marriage ceremony

insincerely, turning true love into false commitment. Thus, the novel ends—before Kim must commit.

What does it mean to define oneself by love without defining oneself by commitment? As Judith Plotz incisively points out, the novel is guilty of an “evasion of definitive adult commitment to... love” (Judith Plotz 125), “love” referring not only to “sexuality” but to Kim’s devotion to his “beloved” lama (Judith Plotz 125-126). Both Plotz and Randall suggest that Kim’s illness at the end of the story is a breakdown resulting from adolescent indecision between conflicting roles (Judith Plotz 126, Randall 157).¹⁰⁸ “If he is to be a man he must choose,” Plotz declares, but “there is no such maturing choice demanded by the narrative” (Judith Plotz 126, 128). The novel ends when it does because Kim’s adulthood, Plotz and Randall agree, is “unimaginable” (Randall 157, Judith Plotz 127). In fact, the closest thing Kipling does to imagining Kim’s future is the grim generalization that St. Xavier’s students like Kim—British students growing up in India—often have a “quickness” like Kim’s but face a “half-collapse... at twenty-two or twenty-three” (101; ch. 7). Kim’s adolescent power of performing every social role may, in adulthood, become a failure to commit, a failure to be transformed, a failure to grow up.

Whether the refusal to commit rests with Kim the character or with *Kim* the novel, which excludes the moment of choice that must follow its final words, that lack of commitment is tied to Kipling’s revision of the didactic model of transformation of the self through performance. *Kim* replaces the (didactic) transformative with the (self-determined) performative. Where earlier didactic literature envisioned adult guidance of the child into adulthood using scripts, *Kim* depicts a child, and then a young man, continuously constituting his selfhood in each new

¹⁰⁸ Randall also draws on Suleri, *Rhetoric of English India* (1992), and Moss, *Fiction of Adolescence* (1982).

performance. Self-determination sounds positive from the perspective of contemporary postmodernism, so why are its consequences so unspeakable that the end of the novel cuts off before Kim responds to the lama's invitation?

Kim's self-determination is not liberty, it is a burden. Kim does not *want* to determine his own selfhood; he can think of his selfhood only in relation to other people and things, as his response to his own question (““What is Kim?””) reveals. The problem is that those other people and things are sometimes in conflict with one another—one day, Mahbub will ask Kim to shoot a man, the lama will ask Kim not to, and Kim will have to choose. Commitment would not require Kim to believe in essential identity, but it would require him to choose to define himself by some relationships (people, things, lands) and not others. The reason he cannot choose, cannot commit, is that he cannot rely on any one adult. The lama would never betray Kim, but he is so oblivious to danger and to basic necessities that he could never take care of Kim; Kim is always in the position of caring for the lama. The players of the Great Game of espionage, though some are fond of Kim, “use” Kim as a human tool.¹⁰⁹ Kim has never known an adult on whom he could rely—his drunken, opium-addicted father provided him with nothing but a confused hope that that Freemasons would find and care for him (1-2; ch. 1). Kim's selfhood is self-determined only because he has always had to rely on himself, only because of the burden that unreliable adults have left on his shoulders. The didactic authors' vision was of a reliable adult guiding a child's transformation into an adult's social role. One of the key reasons that the portrayal of child performance and identity in *Kim* differs from the didactic model is that Kim lacks an adult who can be relied on to guide Kim's transformation with Kim's best interests in mind. On the one

¹⁰⁹ Kim realizes, without rancor, that the Colonel in charge of the espionage wants to “use” him: ““the Colonel... will use me as Mahbub Ali employed me, I think”” (97; ch. 7). Mahbub confirms the suspicion that the Colonel's payments for Kim's room, board, and education are a means of honing him as a tool rather than a sign of affection: ““He spends [rupees] for a purpose, not in any way for love of thee”” (107; ch. 8).

hand, Kim's performative selfhood is a sign of his cultural competence and thus his kinship with adults and all of humanity—not to mention his connection, through scriptive things, to the nonhuman world. On the other hand, his need to switch roles to influence adults, and his refusal to commit to any one role he has been offered, stem from the unreliability of adults and reflect Kim's isolation. In the world which Kipling imagines and deliberately cuts off at the novel's end, self-determined selfhood through performance grants agency at the cost of trust.

CONCLUSION | “THE BEST YOU CAN DO”:
Speculative Fiction and Our Inheritance of the Child Performance Tradition

1. Pessimism and Suspicion of Adults in Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling

Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling build on the didactic notion of child performance, but over the course of the nineteenth century, these four authors assign the child greater and greater agency and self-determination. Instead of the didactic single script to perform, the child has multiple scripts to choose from (all four authors). Instead of the didactic single purpose for performance (transformation into a particular role in adulthood), the child can choose multiple purposes for performance, including influencing adults in pursuit of the child’s short-term goals (James and Kipling). Instead of the didactic essential self which is distinct from outer performance although it can be shaped by it, the child has a performative self that is continuously available for self-determination through performance (Kipling). According to these authors, the child can be whatever it wants.

Despite (because of?) the confidence Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling express in children’s abilities and agency as performers, they are notably less optimistic about children’s prospects, and more suspicious of adults, than the single-script works of didactic literature. The suspicion of adults is, in fact, intimately connected with the pessimism about children’s futures. The speaker of Byron’s poem fears that his desires for the child and the child’s own desires are in conflict (his “desire” is “more than Hope can claim” [“To Ianthe” 44-45]), which is not surprising since his desires include arresting her growth (10) and that he could “be ever more

than friend” to someone so inappropriately young for him (32-33). Performing the speaker’s self-serving scripts would hardly be in Ianthe’s best interests, but he paints the alternatives as even more disastrous: if she grows older, she will become ugly (10-11, 22-23), if she loves men younger than himself, she will face the “doom” and “pangs” of love (25, 27). Ianthe’s ability to choose between scripts to perform is a sign of her skill, but also a necessary form of self-defense because she cannot trust the adult writing the scripts.

Carroll’s Alice similarly encounters adults like the Duchess who abuse their script-writing power as an imperialistic and predatory tool against children—the Duchess’s self-serving didactic script for her son silences him, arrests his maturation, and transforms him into an edible pig. Only by choosing and performing a script that prepares her for a more empowered adulthood can Alice escape the baby/pig’s grim fate. James’s Miles and Flora are largely in the power of a governess who monopolizes their time and puts Miles’s education on hold, all so that she can self-servingly use the children as an emotional balm. The children’s extravagant performances are a desperate attempt to get what a less self-serving adult would have provided anyway; they achieve some time alone, but Miles never resumes his education, and eventually loses his life.

Kipling’s Kim at least has the affection of the adult lama, but (however generous the lama is) the lama lacks the practical competence of a caretaker, so that Kim cannot rely on the lama for guidance about maturation in a world of danger and hunger—Kim must instead protect and feed the lama. In his work as a spy, Kim is similarly relied on by adults who use him to serve the interests of the empire, and therefore cannot unreservedly rely on those adults to seek his (Kim’s) best interests. It is little wonder that Kim might hesitate to commit to scripts offered by adults on whom he cannot rely, but his refusal to pursue transformation into a particular adult

role makes his story even more pessimistic than the other three—choosing a future path is so unthinkable that the novel must end at the moment he is asked to choose.

The didactic offer of hope for children's futures is predicated on the idea that the adult who offers the script is trustworthy. Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling question the adults' reliability and thus cannot offer the same hope. To those of us who have inherited the idea that our selfhood is a performance scripted by other people, the problem of trusting the script-writers continues to be an important one, so it should be encouraging that there is another literary tradition that combines optimism and agency to offer a measured degree of hope. That is, some works of speculative fiction combine the optimism of the didactic authors (some adult-authored scripts can be trusted to help children succeed) with the child agency envisioned by Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling (that children are capable performers who can choose the script they perform). By viewing Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling in the context of this tradition continuing into the twentieth century, we can see what our contemporary literature inherits from them.

2. Options and Optimism in Speculative Fiction

In competition with didactic literature, works of speculative fiction claimed a superior influence on young minds and adapted the notion of scripting to their genre. The child heroes and heroines in such works are often themselves readers of speculative fiction or other imaginative literature, and (in their fantastical adventures) these works serve them as scripts that are not only social preparation but predictive preparation for life. Performing those scripts enables the protagonists to accomplish not only social but physical transformation. As U.C. Knoepfelmacher has argued, Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1870) is (apart from its

regressive ending [Knoepfmacher 223-226]) more optimistic about maturation than *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In Looking-Glass Land, Alice meets characters from nursery rhymes and—because she knows the nursery rhymes—is able to predict their future and use her foresight to act as a protective maternal figure. Her maternal and predictive power enables her to “mature” and transform from pawn to queen.¹¹⁰ In Charles Dickens’s “The Magic Fishbone” (1868), a girl who understands fairies and talks to her doll is more grounded in common sense than her father; her good work ethic wins a fairy’s approval, and she is transformed into a princess and marries a prince. The unnamed boy in Kenneth Grahame’s “The Reluctant Dragon” (1898) is similarly prepared by his fantasy reading for the arrival of a (literate, polite, and moral) dragon, and is able to predict and respond to the behavior of dragons and dragonslayers. In C. S. Lewis’s *Prince Caspian* (1951), the children can find water because they have read Robinsonades and can understand their sudden transportation to Narnia by analogy with the *Arabian Nights* and stories of King Arthur. They are thus able to resume their roles as kings and queens. In the sequel, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), the rude and selfish Eustace has read only nonfiction and is consequently unprepared for an encounter with a dragon, consequently himself becoming transformed into a dragon (whose morals he shares and has been performing).

These authors of speculative fiction present their own genre and similar fantastical works (including old legends and nursery rhymes) as alternatives to more “realistic” didactic works. In addition to imitating positive models in Watts and Southey’s didactic verse, Carroll’s Alice has the option of acting out nursery rhymes with Tweedledum, Tweedledee, Humpty Dumpty, and the Lion and the Unicorn. When Grahame’s young protagonist who finds himself socializing with the reluctant dragon, his conventionally didactic education in manners and his reading of

¹¹⁰ Alice’s transformation to queen is not only social by physical because of the *ex nihilo* acquisition of the physical trappings of her new social rank (a crown).

legends about dragons prove to be equally useful options for scripts to perform—he does not have to interpret the world using only science and history. Lewis’s Pevensie children make use of performing multiple scripts (non-magical Robinsonades and fantastical legends), and are not obligated to rely on the sort of dull educational texts Eustace prefers (about “drains” and “Swedish exercises”). These children have options for their performances, but they are not threatened with sinister futures—on the contrary, they are able to perform adult roles very well even as children: Carroll’s Alice mothers Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Dickens’s young heroine is a perfect housekeeper and caretaker for her siblings, and Lewis’s Pevensie children, having once been adult kings and queens saving Narnia, are able to resume those adult capabilities and responsibilities on future adventures even after reverting to physical childhood: “Once a king or queen in Narnia, always a king or queen.”

The combination in speculative fiction of options with optimism stems in part from the assumption that child’s play offers many options for experimenting with performance, and that child’s play is the origin of a more stable adulthood freely chosen by the child. C. S. Lewis articulates this assumption explicitly: “Very often the only way to get a quality in reality is to start behaving as if you had it already. That is why children’s games are so important. They are always pretending to be grown-ups—playing soldiers, playing shop. But all the time, they are hardening their muscles and sharpening their wits, so that the pretence of being grown-up helps them to grow up in earnest” (152). In this view, children’s performance of social roles begins as “pretence” (the child is at present not really a soldier or shopkeeper, but a performer), but serve as practice to enable identity transformation (so they can “grow up in earnest”).

Perhaps the most vivid portrait of children’s performance altering their identity comes from Phillip Pullman, a children’s author who shares Lewis’s view of transformative maturation

despite sharing very few of Lewis's ideological assumptions.¹¹¹ In *The Golden Compass* (1995), Pullman imagines a world where human souls live outside the body in the form of animals: children's souls can take the form of any animal, but when they grow up the soul chooses the form of a single animal and retains it permanently. The child's shape-changing soul suggests a playful, performance-based experimentation with identity, with adulthood marked by a more established identity drawn from earlier experimentation. Again, the final stable identity is shaped by, but distinct from, the child's temporary play and performance.¹¹²

3. Trust in *Ender's Game*

The work of speculative fiction that best addresses the concern of Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling—that the adults who offer scripts for child performance are not trustworthy or reliable—is Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985), a science-fiction novel that celebrates children's ability to perform any social role, and acknowledges that the adults who script those social roles can be self-interested, but which offers hope that some of the people who offer scripts for social roles are trustworthy. *Ender's Game* describes three children, siblings named Peter, Valentine, and Ender. While they are still children, Peter and Valentine become world-changing politicians, and Ender becomes the military commander who defeats an alien enemy that nearly destroyed the human race. Much of the novel centers on the children's extraordinary ability to choose and play these adult roles (reflecting the tradition that celebrates children's

¹¹¹ Not only is Pullman an outspoken critic of Lewis, but Pullman's fantasy series, *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000), is an atheistic allegory formulated in direct opposition to and protest of the Christian allegory in C. S. Lewis's fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956).

¹¹² It might be argued that Pullman's shape-changing external souls are a case of performativity constituting identity—i.e., that there is no difference between the soul's shifting shape and the child's shifting identity. But as with Kipling's Kim, performance does not always correspond to self-image or intentions: the souls can use their changing shape as a tool of deception. For instance, when Lyra and her soul Pantalaimon need to deceive Mrs. Coulter, Lyra pretends to still think she is her friend, and Pantalaimon turns into a "timid" mouse as part of the "same game" to "fool" Mrs. Coulter (chapter 17).

choice and performance), but also on the dangers of performing the roles. The adults who assign Ender to his task fear that they are cruel to do so, and the children themselves fear that politics and war will make them heartless. As one of the children reflects, “Perhaps it’s impossible to wear an identity without becoming what you pretend to be.” This is the dark side of the hope in didactic literature that you can become the role you perform—what if you don’t want to become the role you perform?

On the other hand, the conclusion of the novel sounds a measured note of hope. Although Ender has come to believe that the adults who train him are his enemies—reflecting the suspicion of adults evident in Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling—the narrator reveals that, flawed as they are, the adults who trained Ender love him and try to do the best for him. More importantly, Ender’s sister Valentine offers him a way out of the military life with which he has grown disillusioned. Realizing that by offering him another career (as a colonist on another planet) she is herself presenting Ender with a script to perform, she suggests on the one hand that performance of offered scripts is inevitable, but on the other hand that not all scripts are offered out of self-interested manipulation: “The best you can do is choose to fill the roles given you by good people, by people who love you.” In this way, the novel affirms the hope expressed in didactic and speculative literature, that children’s performance of scripts they receive from others can lead to good things.

Ender’s Game exemplifies contemporary children’s literature’s inheritance from the nineteenth-century British works of Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling. Like these earlier authors, Card celebrates children’s versatile performance as a site of agency and experimentation toward development of adult social roles. Also like these authors, Card represents child characters who have good reason to be suspicious of the adults who offer them scripts to

perform. Ultimately, however, *Ender's Game* balances the suspicion of Byron, Carroll, James, and Kipling with the didactic/fantastic tradition's trust of (some) adult-authored scripts for children. Card thus adds a hope of trust between children and adults to the tradition he inherits, a Romantic and Victorian vision of children as flexible, capable, self-determined performers.

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