

## INTRODUCTION

# WHY STUDY THE CHILD AFTER A “CENTURY OF THE CHILD”?

THE TITLE of this introductory chapter borrows from the title of Ellen Key’s (1909) classic text, *The Century of the Child*. Writing around the turn of the 19th century, Key argued that children’s rights ought to become central to the ethical organization of the century ahead.<sup>1</sup> Her focus on children’s well-being and progressive development was central to the invention of childhood as a modern concept. Indeed, her ideas may be thought of as the precursor to the now commonplace metaphor of the child in need of care on the way to adulthood. Key’s text epitomizes the dominant view of childhood that took hold in early modern Europe, during which time children were increasingly portrayed in terms of purity and innocence (Ariès, 1962; Koops & Zuckerman, 2012). In the zeitgeist of the new century, with its emphasis on progress and civilization, the idea of childhood held great social and emotional utility. Particularly in this time of great change, the notion of childhood innocence soothed anxieties and affirmed adulthood as an achievement of reason (Burman, 2017a). Still today, this adult/child binary predominates, often without question. From this perspective, the child springs forth as if “solitary and timeless,” enmeshed in something called “nature” (Reimer & Peters, 2011, p. 91). However, this construction may be more appropriately read as a “myth,” born of historical conditions, social contexts, and emotional investments (Scott, 2001, p. 288).<sup>2</sup> As a myth, childhood is neither a natural stage of development, nor a neutral category, but rather a placeholder for political struggles, philosophical ideals, and

social anxieties that reflect the preoccupations of adults (Ariès, 1962; Gelman, 2003; Koops, 2012).

The myth of childhood continues to drive ideals about what it means to be human and what we ought to strive for in humanity's name (Wall, 2010). As Mavis Reimer and Charlie Peters (2011) observe, "children represent or should represent the *best* of what it means to be human" (p. 89, emphasis added). And yet, idealizations tend to forget the particularities of history and the elusive qualities of meaning. On this point, David Buckingham (2000) reminds us: "Childhood is historically, culturally and socially variable. Children have been regarded—and have regarded themselves—in very different ways in different historical periods, in different cultures and in different social groups" (p. 6). The issue is not just that children live in varying ways in different times and places, but that "culturally and historically changing images of children" symbolize social norms and ideals that masquerade as universal and natural (Koops, 2012, p. 5; Taylor, 2013).<sup>3</sup> For Diana Gittens (1998), social norms authorizing a seemingly universal experience of childhood white out "the very different life chances that exist between children born of different genders, classes, ethnic groups, family-households, religions and nations" (p. 3). Working against universalism, Gittens (1998) reminds us that there is no "*one* child," but rather particular children who are mediated through the lens of the unequal social world, making the concept "more complicated than it seems" (p. 3, original emphasis).

*Childhood beyond Pathology* begins with the idea that there is still much to be said about the figure of the child, but not with a view to uphold cultural myths and universalized assumptions that flatten differences and fabricate a more powerful position of adulthood. Rather, childhood and adulthood are shifting signifiers that converge in more ways than one. Just as children regularly articulate good reasons for what they do (Matthews, 1996), and just as they navigate complex personal, social, and economic contexts (Koops, 2012), adults are also subject to the vulnerability of not knowing, mistaken ideas, infantile theories, and unreasonable courses of action (Britzman, 2009). In this book, childhood is a relational concept that makes the very thought of adulthood possible, even while exposing the blurry lines between these two ideas. "Development," as psychoanalyst Margot Waddell (2002) writes, "runs unevenly" (p. 4). Because the unconscious "knows neither time nor space," the adult and child self can be difficult to hold apart (Burman, 2013,

pp. 62–63). Just as adulthood becomes a site for the child’s projections of a future, adults can be telegraphed back to old scenes of childhood as if no time has passed.

Despite the overlap between child and adulthood, I also maintain, with Deborah Britzman (2015a), that “childhood looks different to those who are ‘children-no-longer’” (p. 143). From this perspective, adulthood signifies a vantage point from which to reflect on the historical, social, and emotional forces that shape the meaning of childhood as both a category and an experience. This is hard reflective work, in large part, because of the adult’s overfamiliarity of children and childhood. As Anna Davin (1999) reminds us, we can feel *too sure* about what it means to be a child because “[w]e have all been children; we all know children; some of us have had children, brought them up or taught them” (p. 15).<sup>4</sup> This is why Sandra Chang-Kredl and Gala Wilkie (2016) position early years teachers “in the difficult-to-access spaces between the conscious and the unconscious, between the adult self and the child self, and between the symbolic child and the actual child” (p. 318). For these theorists, the question is how to disentangle teachers’ “inner experiences of childhood” from the children they teach “in order to detect and perhaps interrupt unconscious links with our pasts” (p. 318). The hope is that such disentanglements can transform teacher memories from sources of “bias” and “distraction” into points of “guidance” and “insight” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, p. 5). *Childhood beyond Pathology* maintains that the capacity to look behind the scenes of seemingly neutral experiences and self-evident realities is a worthwhile challenge that marks the beginning of thought, charging all of those who theorize, work with, and/or teach children to continually examine the meaning of childhood in relationship to history, to social context, and to ourselves.

I came to this project in the context of my work with new and experienced teachers in the Faculty of Education at York University where I teach courses on child development, the history of education, and childhood studies. Invariably, both graduate and undergraduate students come to my classes with concerns about children who depart from the image of the idealized child. Our conversations focus on the meanings and possibilities of access, justice, and equity amid institutional demands that push for the standardization of learning and development. These discussions challenge the tendency of education to flatten the social and political factors shaping children’s lived experiences as well as the emphasis of psychology on the “individual,” when, my

students rightly argue, it is society that needs to change. In this context, our discussions stall on a paradox; on the one hand, students identify and critique the limits of psychological discourse. Drawing from their experiences in schools, they note how psychological categories open a floodgate of procedures and practices that unjustly construct the individual child as a problem or deficit to correct. It is this heavy hand of categorization that my students, and I, reject. On the other hand, they also note of school contexts a fear of emotional life producing a dearth of vocabulary with which to represent its complexities beyond pathology. It is this vocabulary that they crave, that we try to create together over the course of study, and that I seek to extend further in the pages of this book.

*Childhood beyond Pathology* examines five child figures from the perspective of those who are children-no-longer—theorists of childhood, authors of young adult and adult fiction, clinicians, and teachers—to speculate about the inner work of growth as impacted by the social and historical world. Through each figure, I lift up for examination the metaphors, social categories, and cultural myths impacting how childhood is constructed, what it means to be a child, and who gets to have a childhood at all. I read each figure as an archive of arguments, with a focus on how debates over children affect major categories of development and diagnosis, and at times break these categories down. This book is not about children’s experiences per se but about how adults affect conceptualizations of childhood in arguments over how to theorize, teach, and treat their development. Focusing on historical and contemporary debates, my aim is to open new conceptualizations of the child who oversteps or is cast outside of dominant trajectories circumscribing growth, learning, language, and being itself.

Conceptually, the book is organized around a central tension between psychology and history: two fields that, with Erica Burman (2017a), I read as linked. As a product of history, psychology is inextricably bound to prevailing cultural values, social anxieties, and material conditions of a given time and place. *Childhood beyond Pathology* therefore offers a theory of childhood as constituted by histories of debate and contextual relations that disrupts largely Western claims about development purporting to “operat[e] outside the confines of time and space” (Walkerline, 1993, p. 465). Here, I stay close to Julia Kristeva’s (1995) call “to include *social history* as one of the elements of organization and permanency that constitute psychical life” (p. 28, original emphasis).

As an element of psychical life, I further speculate about how the meanings of social and historical contexts are resisted, revised, and ever remade by the inner work of growth. My view of internal life is therefore populated by history *and* the “creative struggles” of people to act on and affect the social experiences we undergo (Lifton, 1974, p. 33). Putting psychology into history, and history inside the psyche, *Childhood beyond Pathology* examines the child figure as a cultural artifact that can help us understand the normative logics produced through discourses of development and diagnosis. But also, a study of the child—along with the debates over the meanings of this figure—can help us trace the influx of new vocabularies symbolizing the multiple ways we may create a meaningful existence in light of the histories we inherit.

My turn to the inner world is supported by a parallel turn to psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework. This pairing is intuitive, but also historically situated. The century of the child, as Key imagined it, is also the century of psychoanalysis (Benzaquén, 2004; Kidd, 2011; Rose, 1992; Steedman, 1995). This was a time when the child came to personify, in miniature, the mysteries of the modern adult self (Rose, 1999). As Adriana S. Benzaquén (2004) explains,

The modern concept of self—which took shape throughout the nineteenth century and was formalized in early twentieth-century psychoanalysis—is grounded in a distinctive view of childhood as the depths of historicity within individuals. Childhood is entangled with the adult’s present identity because the interiorized self, the sense of self within, is perceived as internalized memory of the past, the outcome of a personal history. (p. 36)

A symbol of “the interiorized self,” the twentieth-century child figure stood as evidence of linear temporality and so became an “antidote” to the anxieties of modern existence (Benzaquén, 2004, p. 46). Because of the fact of the unconscious, however, the child figure also symbolizes a kernel of the unknown. It is this last idea that drives my inquiry, for as much as the child offers a security blanket for adult uncertainties, the child figure is also symbolic of all that is elusive about being and becoming, particularly if we admit the unconscious at the core of inner life. The interiorized self that the psychoanalytic child surfaces is conflictive, recursive, at times regressive, and comprised of imaginative leaps. It is not determined by social discourse, but rather comprised of surprising tensions, agencies, and relations at work in particular contexts.

The psychoanalytic child is an archive of the “[u]nmeant events,” representing something more complicated about existence than can be settled in the language of linear time undergirding categories of development and diagnosis (Britzman, 2015a, p. 129).

Taking conflict as my starting point, I ask, drawing from Avery Gordon (1997), what it can mean to grant a “complex personhood” to adults and children in their efforts to make sense of what life is for and what it can mean to live well together and alone (p. 4). Complex personhood takes as axiomatic that, as Gordon (1997) writes, “life is complicated” (p. 4). This means that people’s lives, including those we don’t understand or agree with, are both ordinary and packed with “subtle meaning” (p. 5). Complex personhood therefore means, citing Gordon (1997),

that all people (albeit specifically and specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others. . . . that people suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves . . . that even those called “Other” are never never that. (p. 4)

From the vantage point of complex personhood, the experience of being is socially situated, open to contradiction, and interpretive: catchable by speculation, inference, and effect. Complex personhood means that race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability moor identities even while people, including the person who is a child, embody intersections that exceed any singular expression. Complex personhood grants every subject a capacity for conflict, divergence, and multiplicity as the ground of human existence, and not its exception.

Such complexities concern this book, and orient my pursuit of two related questions: How can we theorize psychical complexity through a study of childhood representation? And how can we represent psychical life, annexed as it is by both pleasure and pain, without pathologizing emotional experience? These questions encapsulate one of the major contributions of this book, which is to examine ruptures of the inner world as the ordinary ground of growth “not targeted by pharmacology” (Kristeva, 1995, p. 40). In relation to this last claim, John Forrester (2017) offers a helpful distinction between psychoanalysis and its “sister discipline” of scientific psychology that is important to my approach

in this book (p. 4). While both are products of modernity, scientific psychology builds normative claims based on what is deemed statistically significant for “a *number of individuals*” (p. 4, original emphasis), and so equates all that is uncommon with abnormality, deviance, and deficiency. Psychoanalysis, by contrast, works the other way around, in Forrester’s (2017) words, by “giv[ing] an account of the divergences, the detours, [and] the idiosyncrasies” of the mind as *primary* and as lived in varying degrees by each one of us (p. 11).<sup>5</sup>

Britzman (1998) finds something ethical about the psychoanalytic regard for idiosyncrasy, particularly in the historical context of dictatorship in which Sigmund Freud carried out much of his work. As Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany exploited science to install its racist program of genocide, Freud took the side of humanity. “In its refusal to ground the study of human suffering in the eugenics of science,” Britzman (1998) argues, “psychoanalysis can be considered one of the first antiracist sciences in Europe” (p. 101). That is, Freud dared to show us what is ordinary about mental pain in his study of the “psychopathology of everyday life,” beyond its attribution to others under the rubric of mental illness, strangeness, or sickness (Britzman, 2015a, p. 139).<sup>6</sup> Psychoanalytically, suffering “is not foreign to any of us”; rather, it takes as foundational that we live with significant losses that are uniquely felt and historically endowed (Taubman, 2017, p. 99). From a psychoanalytic point of view, the problem is not suffering itself, but the disavowal of this quality of experience in statistical measures used to justify, in the name of science, oppressive practices leading to the most devastating social exclusions.

The child figures of this book confront readers with idiosyncrasies of growth that animate “the return of that which has been repressed” in the language of development and diagnosis (Boldt, Salvio, & Taubman, 2006, p. 3). They travel detours and open divergent corridors of growth, inviting readers to confront “*another form of knowledge*” that encodes desire, fantasy, conflicts of love and hate, ambiguity, and ambivalence (Kristeva, 2001, p. 40, original emphasis). With Steven Bruhm and Nat Hurley (2004), I show how psychoanalytic knowledge, “with its emphasis on the unconscious, on the play of fantasy, and on the vicissitudes of desire—can help to complicate the stories that circulate as ‘truth’ in the therapeutic enterprise” (p. xxi). The child figures under investigation in this book bring into view a complicated story of existence that progressive constructions of development might rather forget: that we are born radically susceptible to the other; that we “learn before we

understand” (Britzman, 2010, p. 47), that meaning exceeds our capacities to represent it; and that we are subject to injury, and to injure others by virtue of relationships that bind us together and that are continually open to breakdown (Butler, 2004a). A key argument of this book is that the child figure may return us to precisely these vulnerabilities, particularly as they emerge in encounters with representations of childhood disrupting the expectable metronome of linear time. Through psychoanalysis, *Childhood beyond Pathology* offers an exegesis of growth that is alloyed with the disturbing vicissitudes of conflict and desire too often constructed as something to correct, treat, or prevent.<sup>7</sup>

As it signifies in this book, childhood is a tumbleweed concept.<sup>8</sup> The children featured arrive with surprising questions and ideas; they show up in unexpected places and pick up all kinds of matter along the way. Never static, the children populating the pages to come wander, take action, bump up against obstacles, and find new direction, just as do adults’ ideas about them. My use of the tumbleweed metaphor unmoors hardened assumptions of childhood as a fixed stage, and instead examines shifting ideas at work in debates over how children should be treated, what they might know, and who they should become. Across a range of sites, I show how childhood is constituted by the stories adults tell, and in turn, how these narratives impact the lived lives of children. As Valerie Walkerdine (1993) argued almost two decades ago, the language we use to describe, theorize, and represent childhood has material effects and shapes lives. “Something real,” Walkerdine writes, “is produced out of a fiction” (p. 454). Because we cannot get outside of discourse, the implication is not, however, that we ought to replace bad fictions with good truths about the “real” child. The implication is that we examine the stories we tell for what they can and cannot say, with attention to the ways in which both told and untold stories impact how children are represented and received.<sup>9</sup>

The particular brand of psychoanalysis that concerns this book is not, then, the “‘normative’ side” (Kristeva, 1995, p. 34) that aims “to guide patients toward social success” or, alternatively, to blame those who somehow fail to follow the course (Kristeva, 1995, p. 29). *Childhood beyond Pathology* is rather an inquiry into the ways psychoanalysis counterbalances the “authority” of expert knowledge with the communicative value of the “transgression[s]” of inner life (Kristeva, 1995, p. 35).<sup>10</sup> In light of this tension, I begin with the assumption that there is still much to be said about the inner life of childhood outside of the frame that can only understand its normative figurations or



failures. Indeed, I am not alone in this effort. Scholars of critical psychology, childhood studies, early childhood education, and queer and feminist theory have a long history of regarding divergences of growth as symbolic of a wide repertoire of human experiences that are otherwise repressed inside social norms. It is to their work that I turn next in order to contextualize my effort to examine and expand the emotional, social, and historical conditions delimiting the meaning of childhood. By bringing together these fields, my study positions childhood as a problem of entering into a world that is older and earlier than one's own existence while also representing the creative processes needed to embody a meaningful sense of the self in relation to inherited legacies.

#### CRITICAL, RECONCEPTUALIST, AND QUEER THEORIES OF CHILDHOOD

The field of childhood studies may itself be read as a tumbleweed concept, born of intersecting fields including history, critical psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, the humanities, and educational theory (Burman, 2017a; Koops, 2012). Its beginnings are critical, emerging from the poststructural turn that reads the child against the grain of modern psychology's insistence on "nature," focusing instead on the discursive effects of social and political formations (Burman, 2017a; Koops, 2012; Steedman, 1995; Walkerdine, 1993). Both Walkerdine (1993) and Burman (2017a) show how the rise of scientific psychology took the child as a miniature specimen to confirm its enlightenment project purporting to track the progressive nature of development toward reason. As a resource for the modern project, where democratic states required self-governing subjects, "the developing child" became "an object of study and intervention" through which power came to be secured through expert knowledge (Walkerdine, 1993, p. 453).<sup>11</sup> Even the liberated scenes of child-centered education of 1960s and '70s North America should be understood for their implication in the reproduction of unequal power. In this context, the teacher became an expert by proxy (Harwood, 2006; Langford, 2010). As Walkerdine (1993) writes, "the teacher's gaze was a calculating and classificatory gaze which . . . produced the very object it claimed to describe" (p. 454). Walkerdine further shows how, in the name of nature, the developmental ideal of progress secured the power of the European middle class, which became split off from—even as it leaned on—conditions of unfreedom experienced by racialized and poor children. The costs of these constructions

are steep, and persist today, for they justify social exclusions that cast “the periphery in terms of the abnormal” and that collapse “difference as deficiency” (Walkerdine, 1993, p. 455).

The reconceptualist movement of early childhood education takes its cue from the aforementioned ideas to challenge the overreliance on developmental psychology in early learning contexts. Drawing from poststructural, posthuman, and postcolonial theories, reconceptualist scholarship has been central to the critical examination of normative frames of development as they cut up and shape notions of childhood, but also, as they cut out particular narratives from the reality they construct. As Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Affrica Taylor (2015) argue, reconceptualist scholarship seeks to “unsettle early childhood education,” exposing the ways in which the field “is neither culturally neutral nor politically innocent” (p. 2). In contemporary scenes of policy, pedagogy, and practice, reconceptualist theorists examine how seemingly universal stages of development, measurable learning outcomes, and developmentally appropriate practices naturalize the mythical norm of the white, male, middle-class, able-bodied, settler child that bars out of bounds divergence and relationality as the ground of learning and living a meaningful life (Blaise, 2005; 2014; Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Boldt & Salvio, 2006; Silin, 1995; Taylor, 2013; Tobin, 1997). Reconceptualist scholars decenter the child as the heart of early childhood education insofar as this little figure has come to signify modern ideals built on colonial legacies of violence exploiting people, land, and relationships. They rather underscore the relational qualities of becoming in world that is “bigger than us (humans) and about more than our (human) concerns” (Taylor, Blaise, & Giugni, 2013, p. 48). In this context, Mindy Blaise (2005) offers the term “*postdevelopmentalism*,” which she uses to denote and ultimately encourage “alternative theoretical perspectives that question modernist assumptions of truth, universality, and certainty” (p. 3, original emphasis). From the perspective of postdevelopmentalism, education is not about measuring an individual child’s “progress,” but about working with children to question social norms, disturb conventional ideas, engage multiple relations, and secure social justice across intersecting differences (Blaise, 2005, p. 3).

Reconceptualist scholars therefore point to the ethical limits and social exclusions wrought by “theories about the ‘natural’ development of the assumed-to-be universal child” in early childhood contexts (Pacini-Ketchabaw

& Taylor, 2015, p. 2). Jonathan Silin (1995) further links developmental theories to the pervasive aim of Western scientific knowledge to abstract meaning from messy uncertainties. For Silin, however, this lure of abstraction is defensive. In the image of the child moving toward objective outcomes, writes Silin (1995), “we seek relief for ourselves” from all that is uncertain about knowledge (p. 51). Silin (1995) suggests that the discourse of development may actually protect adults from all they do not know and do not want to know about the world, bolstering a fantasy of self-mastery that keeps out of bounds the anxieties that pulsate on the other side of this ideal. From the vantage of development, “the accomplishment of adulthood appears to be ever more complex and far from the haunts of early childhood” (Silin, 1995, p. 104). By casting the child in the shadows of the unknown, adulthood is fastened in the seat of autonomy and reason. For Claudia Castañeda (2002), too, the implied notion of the child as “not yet fully formed” installs an overly powerful theory of the adult in charge (p. 3), which is particularly captivating in uncertain economic, social, and political times (Pugh, 2009). If children are incomplete, they are “also malleable—and so can *be made*” in the image of adult desire (Castañeda, 2002, p. 3, emphasis added).<sup>12</sup>

In the contemporary scene of education, Debbie Sonu and Jeremy Benson (2016) further suggest that the trope of the incomplete child, who they describe as “quasi-human,” fuels the making of a neoliberal subject (p. 231). This is a “high-speed” subject who, in Britzman’s (2009) words, “must rush, become adept, flexible, and able to judge instant knowledge in terms of its use value, its applicability to real life concerns, and its prestige” (p. 42). Insofar as incompleteness signals such traits as flexibility, agility, and adaptability, the quasi-human child figure props up “neoliberal policies and practices” aiming to press the incalculable dimensions of human existence into neat and tidy units to be quantified and measured (Sonu & Benson, 2016, p. 243). While the idea of efficient learning may not itself seem like a problem, Sonu and Benson (2016) point to the ways that neoliberal practices “work *on*” rather than “*with*” the student, functioning to school humanity out of the child, and out of education itself (p. 231, original emphasis). Excluded from this neoliberal picture of education is any consideration of the “strengths and competence of *the child in the present*,” that is, “beyond preparing the child to be ‘ready’ for the future” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015, p. xiv, original emphasis). In this context, where “skills supplant ideas,” and where knowledge

is collapsed with an “avalanche of information,” education loses its sense of the child as a site of epistemological, ontological, and ethical complexity (Britzman, 2009, p. 42).

All these theorists give us good reason to be skeptical of claims about child development, exposing how this idea has been used to reproduce unequal power relationships that subject children who depart from normative tracks of growth to peripheral categories collapsing difference with pathology. Together, they challenge the discourse of development for the way it fails to account for dynamics of power and privilege that position children unequally in relation to adults, to each other, and to the very category of childhood itself. In different ways, they explode purportedly universal laws of “nature” epitomized by the empirical child of developmental psychology, and rather read this very construction as a projection of modernity, colonialism, racism, neoliberalism, anxiety, and maleness (Boldt & Salvio, 2006; Britzman, 2009; Buck-Morss, 1975; Burman, 2017a; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Farley & Garlen, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Langford, 2010; O’Loughlin & Johnson, 2010; Silin, 1995; Sonu & Benson, 2016; Walkerdine, 1993).

Notwithstanding these social and political functions, the notion of the child also serves emotional purposes and investments. As Helen Penn (2014) writes, the child is both “symbolically central to our culture *and* psychologically crucial to our sense of self” (p. 2, emphasis added). That is, childhood is an adult construction and placeholder for lost wishes and regrets, which, while never fully recoverable, presents a second chance (Britzman, 2009). In their study of early childhood educators, for instance, Chang-Kredl and Wilkie (2016) find that teachers project personal memories onto children in the hope of securing “a positive continuation of the remembered child” that wards off the return of painful experiences (p. 314). As they write, the teacher “who felt alone and disconnected as a child, wants to now be the adult who provides connections with children” (pp. 315–316). For Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003), these “generational echoes are double-edged” insofar as they can enhance empathy and understanding, while “at other times force an abrupt breakdown and impasse” when they presume too much (p. 5). Thinking psychoanalytically about these dynamics, Britzman (2009) reads the adult’s investment in the child as a “curious insistence,” because, at the level of the unconscious, “it suggests that our second chance *does not belong to us*” (p. 55, emphasis added). The adult’s projection onto the child carries a tacit sense that “we are also

responsible for making room for the new” (Britzman, 2009, p. 37). Such room for the new is, however, dependent on the adult’s capacity to be open to the child they do not already have in mind.

In light of this last claim, scholars of childhood find good company in the humanities, where literary figures offer a means for thinking about childhood unleashed from the seemingly universal law of lockstep development. In literature, children leap off ladders and into queer places: rabbit holes, islands of misfits, and secret portals (Strong-Wilson, Yoder, & Phipps, 2014). Literary children may be read as fictional irritants to the normative frames of development that reconceptualist scholars deconstruct (Cocks, 2014; Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Gilbert, 2014; Hurley, 2011; Kidd, 2011; Kincaid, 1998; 2004; Sedgwick, 1991; Stearns, 2015; Stockton, 2009). Kenneth Kidd (2011), for instance, argues that fictional work is oriented by the author’s empathy for the nuances of the inner world, which is qualitatively distinct from the presumed expertise of psychological discourse. Literary children invite readers to sit with unconscious meanings that, when it comes to actual children, tend to usher in psychological interventions aiming to diagnose and resolve conflict (Stearns, 2015). This is why, for Clio Stearns (2015), fiction can be “educative for adults finding ways to respond to children,” particularly in relationship to those who carry labels of “badness” (p. 421). Readers who tuck themselves inside the minds of literary children are opened to the psychological deep, including both badness and strangeness, not as a peripheral quality of the “other,” but as a feature of the humanity of the child and themselves. Hurley (2011) takes this line of thought, drawing from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, when she positions literary children as queerly “universalizing,” rather than normatively “minoritizing” (p. 119). Literary children embody what is misfit, unusual, and unfamiliar inside the norm, and not the exceptional or discarded opposite. Even the most normative qualities of childhood harbor “the very thing to which it seems opposed” (Hurley, 2011, p. 119). In literature, the normative is strange and strangeness is the norm.

Both James Kincaid (2004) and Lee Edelman (2004) make precisely this claim in relation to the pervasive norm of childhood innocence. For Kincaid, the “empty figure” of the innocent child “allows the admirer to read just about anything he likes into that vacancy, including a flattering image of his very self” (p. 10). Precisely because “children are defined, and longed for, according to what *they* do not have,” they may also be read as signifying all that the adult

admirer wants but cannot admit about their own desire (Kincaid, 2004, p. 10, original emphasis). As Kincaid argues, the anxious claim to protect the child's innocence permits *access* to desire, albeit in the form of negation. Ironically, claims of innocence are carried on the very dynamic of desire they consciously oppose. Thinking with Kincaid, Jen Gilbert (2014) explains that so long as the child is constructed as innocent, the adult's desire can be held simultaneously "in play and at bay" (p. 11). For both Gilbert and Kincaid, the concept of innocence is not itself innocent, but rather a projection of the adult's repressed desire, its pitch revealed in heated pleas for the child's protection.

Edelman (2004) adds the "privileged emblem" of the child "as future" to highlight another paradox (p. 57). In the promise of newness held in the child's future resides the adult's stalwart wish for no change at all. Edelman's (2004) language is cautionary: The emblem of the child as future has the effect of "ensnaring us" into stagnant terms of existence that "coagulate around its ritual reproduction" (p. 30). The child figure is an effect and embodiment of reproduction, and on this ground, Edelman recommends that we abandon the "privileged emblem" altogether (p. 57). He rather encourages the embrace of the oppositional status of "negativity"—all that is antisocial about desire—as the best chance we have to pierce "the screen of futurity" that keeps in place political engines churning out normative temporality, culture, and sexuality (p. 31).<sup>13</sup> Kincaid and Edelman challenge us to notice how constructions of innocence and futurity harbor the very dynamics that they seem to oppose. Just as Kincaid unearths the adult's repressed desire in discourses of childhood innocence, Edelman finds Freud's controversial death drive in claims of futurity. These arguments position Kincaid and Edelman as allies to reconceptualist theorists who challenge neutral ideas of childhood, with a view to reclaim the disruptive potential of queer politics, theory, and futurity.

However, because the child figure of Edelman's critique is not queer, and may even be, as Gilbert (2014) observes, "an antonym to queerness," he overlooks how the nonconformity of children may topple the normative narrative he builds around their presumed futurity (p. 13). Adding another layer of critique, Hannah Dyer (2017) challenges Edelman's argument for the way it presumes a privileged child already endowed with futurity, an assumption that, in Dyer's view, disavows entrenched colonial legacies that continue to deny minoritized children access to this scripted promise. Such critiques raise a question about the meanings of childhood falling outside of Edelman's

march to reproductive futurism. In relation to this last point, Kathryn Bond Stockton's (2009) seminal work engages precisely this question in her examination of child figures that disturb the emblem of Edelman's critique. "There are ways of growing," Stockton (2009) writes, "that are not growing *up*" (p. 11, emphasis added). Her analysis centers on the queer child to expose, "the elegant, unruly contours of growing that don't bespeak continuance" (p. 13) to the "ultimate goal" of reproductive futurity (p. 25). Stockton focuses on how the queer child figure unmoors normative conceptions of growth, symbolizing, in her words, "extension, vigor, and volume" (2009, p. 11).<sup>14</sup> The queer figure embodies disturbance, and not reproduction, as the ground of childhood and being itself.

Before Stockton, of course, Carolyn Steedman's (1995) *Strange Dislocations* unearthed one of the first queer child figures in Goethe's *Mignon*. Steedman's study of "Mignon's progress" is a story of mutations—what Stockton calls sideways growth—that does not easily fit into motifs that would render her development recognizable (p. 21). Steedman (1995) highlights the significance of Mignon's ambiguous age, unexplained physical ailments, and difficulties with language, described by one translator as "possible autism" (p. 40). At times appearing as a young child and at other times as an adolescent, Steedman (1995) notes that, "[t]here is something wrong with Mignon" (p. 24). This child's ambiguity also troubles the borders of the male/female binary while her bodily contortions represent a forbidden sexuality. All this adds up to mystery that does not coincide with linear time. As Steedman (1995) puts it, Mignon "has no past story to explain her abnormal development" (p. 40). This child rather embodies the elusive qualities of being that cannot be tied to a certain or known point of origin. In many ways, Mignon's "no past" dovetails with queer theory insofar as it disrupts the fantasy of an expectable future unfolding seamlessly from an identifiable beginning (p. 40). Mignon's elusive qualities—in age, language, health, gender, and sexuality—dislocate the predictable direction of reproductive futurity, and rather dance alongside uncertainty, the unknown, and death.<sup>15</sup> All these qualities suggest that if childhood may herald the future, the future is that which cannot be known in advance of its arrival.<sup>16</sup>

*Childhood beyond Pathology* follows the lead of critical, reconceptualist, and queer scholars to examine the child as symbolic of complex social and subjective worlds. If the reconceptualist movement tends to focus on

classroom life to challenge the predominance of developmental psychology, and if queer theory attends to the disruptive plots of growth represented by literary children, *Childhood beyond Pathology* can be located somewhere in between. That is, I read fictional texts as revealing emotional truths about children, and in turn, cases involving actual children as harboring symbolic meanings that are deeper than any curriculum or diagnosis can represent. I begin with the assumption that scholars of childhood, education, and psychology have a lot to learn from reading multiple genres, including clinical case studies, history, novels, and the news. Here, I am thinking with Britzman (2015a) who reads both “literature” and “clinical descriptions” as “genres” that share in common “their interest in affecting narrative” (p. 140). The child figures of this book can be read as affecting narratives that represent particular historical and social conditions, but that also symbolize, in Britzman’s (2010) words, “ephemeral worlds of internal objects, agencies, fantasies, and trains of thought that, while simultaneous with external reality, do not coincide” (p. 2). Throughout, I therefore read childhood as saying less about the external reality of individual children, and more about the “figurative force of their existence” as affected by social, political, and emotional worlds (Steedman, 1995, p. 5).

#### A CAST OF CHARACTERS: OUTLINING THE CHAPTERS

The child figures of each chapter find themselves pulled into debates about the meaning of development, belonging, relationality, and existence as such. They show up in literary, clinical, theoretical, and historical narratives, bumping up against ideas about what it is like to be a child, and what a child should be like. They confront readers with tangles of history that resurface in unexpected ways and that return us to the surprising vulnerability of being born into the world. Each figure simultaneously disturbs normative claims of development and tumbles into an archive of debates involving concerned adults and caring professionals who argue about how to represent and receive the child’s inner world.<sup>17</sup> The debates that emerge are far-reaching, touching on questions about the agony of loss, the problem of language, the subject of violence, the pain of misrecognition, and the complications that emerge when adults try to help children confront these difficulties.



In chapter 1, the replacement child brings into view the psychological conflicts associated with the inheritance of traumatic history (Schwab, 2010).<sup>18</sup> Against a backdrop of debates over Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia, I introduce the figure of the replacement child to trace the ways in which history repeats across generations. At the same time, I suggest how the replacement child symbolizes the creative processes through which we may represent a relationship to history in new and meaningful ways. I take as my object of analysis Ann-Marie MacDonald's (2014) novel, *Adult Onset*, which features a replacement child struggling to work through a history of familial and cultural loss. The novel, I suggest, paints a portrait of the child as a haunted house symbolizing the abject return of loss repressed inside narratives of nation and normative growth. For scholars of childhood studies, education, and psychology, I read MacDonald's novel as an allegory of the emotional work of these fields. Beyond developmental stages that purport to chart growth, and beyond diagnostic categories that aim to capture children who fall outside normative scripts, this chapter theorizes and ultimately encourages the emotional labor of mourning false certainties as a generative mode of entering into the fields of childhood studies, education, and psychology.

Chapter 2 examines historical and contemporary debates over the meaning and treatment of neurodiversities in children, with a focus on psychoanalytic theories of autism. The chapter begins by acknowledging the implication of psychoanalysis in the construction of problematic theories of psychosis and cold or distant parenting (McGuire, 2016).<sup>19</sup> Recognizing that psychoanalysis remains a highly contested discourse, I trace shifts in analytic understandings of attachment and treatment that emerged in response to a growing diversity of patients affecting psychoanalytic discourse after the Second World War (Dockar-Drysdale, 1953; 1958; 1966; 1990; A. Freud, 1954; Jacobson, 1954; Stone, 1954; Tustin, 1972; 1981). My focus is on times when analysts admit mistakes and change their minds as symbolic of the ethical capacity to question, challenge, and revise the assumptions of their field (Alvarez, 1997; 2012; Ogden, 1997; Tustin, 1994). In particular, I trace the psychoanalytic turn away from the language of deficit toward strength-based theories focusing on the child's experiences of self-potency and privacy. To examine the significance of these shifts, I offer an analysis of Winnicott's (1971a) therapeutic consultation with a six-year-old patient named Bob, published in 1965.<sup>20</sup> Winnicott

does not give us any evidence to settle on a diagnosis of the child, nor is this the aim of my chapter. Rather, I use this historical case to show how analytic interpretation is affected by the child's communication and not simply a mechanism designed to change the patient's mind.

Chapter 3 analyzes how colonial legacies of racism—specifically anti-Black racism—set unequal terms and conditions delimiting which children are included within the category of innocence and childhood itself (Bernstein, 2011; Faulkner, 2011; Ferguson, 2001; Levander, 2006; Walcott, 2017). I borrow Steven Bruhm's (2012) concept of the counterfeit child to examine the split logic that constructs Black children as non-children who are always already deserving of punishment, incarceration, and death. Building on Bruhm's counterfeit child figure, my discussion also examines the adjacent category of adolescence. In particular, I show how the privileged category of childhood innocence denied to Black children graduates to an unmarked masculinity that is denied to Black teenagers. The focus of my analysis is on Ken Corbett's (2015) account of the case of Leticia King, a fifteen-year-old Black transgender adolescent who, in 2008, was murdered by a white classmate, fourteen-year-old Brandon McInerney. My discussion highlights how race and gender impact the courtroom construction of Leticia's adolescent embodiment as counterfeit to her murderer's purportedly benign masculinity. More broadly, the case of Leticia opens questions about how the racist logic that protects white privilege also condones the murder of Black children and youth.

Chapter 4 examines the literary representation of colonial legacies of violence intended for a young adult readership. Against a backdrop of censorship debates, I focus on the controversies surrounding Sherman Alexie's (2007) National Book Award winner and *New York Times* bestseller, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*. At issue in arguments over Alexie's novel is a question of whether it counts as anticolonial Indigenous literature, defined as work that challenges the violent conditions upheld by colonial legacies. Also at issue is the question of whether schools and libraries should stock or censor the book on the grounds that its themes of violence, death, addiction, poverty, and sexuality are too difficult for its intended young readership. In this chapter, I read censorship debates as rooted in colonial discourses of protection and innocence that presume a settler child reader not already implicated in or impacted by colonial legacies of violence. Turning inside the pages of Alexie's novel, I unearth an avatar of childhood not predicated on either the

protection or loss of innocence, but rather on the creative work of survivance that both predates and disrupts colonial scripts. Alexie's novel shows us what it can mean to have a good fight with history, and why claims of childhood innocence should themselves be a thing of the past.

Chapter 5 speculates about the meaning of gender embodiment through a discussion of trans and nonconforming childhood. My discussion traces debates about the status of gender diagnosis as rendered in the fourth and fifth editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychological Disorders (DSM)*. Despite shifts in language, I show how diagnosis functions to pathologize gender diversity, and ultimately valorize the adult's presumed expertise over the child's self-knowledge. Taking the side of the child, I turn to Winnicott's (1953) discussion of transitional phenomena to posit a theory of transgender as a creative process of embodying multiplicity otherwise collapsed in cisgender norms. I bring these insights to a clinical case involving a five-year-old child. My discussion focuses on the need for new metaphors to represent the psychic life of gender as inherently conflictive and not solely a problem to cure in trans and gender nonconforming children. Winnicott's notion of transitional phenomena offers one such metaphor through which to posit a theory of transgender as an integrative capacity that, in his words, "makes the individual feel that life is worth living" (1971b, p. 65).

Two frames of interpretation undergird my study throughout. The first highlights the symbolic use of child figures to uphold normative terms of existence that, in the name of education or happy and bright futures, can evacuate the complexities of inner life—particularly for children who challenge "previously established parental, therapeutic, or academic templates" (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, pp. xx-xxi). Through this first lens, I bring into view what John Wall (2010) calls, "the inherited languages and mores" that no child chooses, and yet, that "already shape the structures of their lives and thinking from birth" (p. 13). The second frame focuses on "work done with children" (Winnicott, 1971a, p. 8) to suggest something about how adults and children may interpret these inherited conditions "in new ways for themselves and in relation to their own open and unfolding futures" (Wall, 2010, p. 13). As it signifies in this book, work done with children refers to the analytic work that adults and children do together, but also to the analytic work that adults do with their own childhoods to resignify inherited legacies and meanings.<sup>21</sup> In Judith Butler's (2004b) words, this effort may be described as a "practice

of improvisation within a scene of constraint” (p. 1). When we can return child figures to the debates undergirding their construction, and when we can engage meanings that emerge at their discursive limits, then we may dislodge the constraints of hardened categories and welcome contradictory and elusive meanings as the complex ground of childhood beyond pathology. Returning, engaging, dislodging, improvising, and welcoming new meaning is the work of this book.