WHAT DO WE MEAN BY *LITERARY JUVENILIA*?

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SINCE I am an editor of *The Journal of Juvenilia Studies*, published by the International Society of Literary Juvenilia, I should be expected to consider *literary juvenilia* a meaningful term, capable of being defined. Yet every child who grows into a literate adult must, from time to time, both read and write. Does every composition on the topic of "What I Did on My Summer Vacation"—however reluctantly it may have been written, however reluctantly it may even have been read by the one who required it to be written—count as literary juvenilia? *No* would be easy to say. Even *Well, no, of course not!* But our training as academics would have us be suspicious of such unqualified assertions. So let's see where a generous dose of suspicion might lead us. Academia thrives, I think, on a judicious mixture of generosity and suspicion.

We could make ourselves extraordinarily anxious, even to the point of paralysis, were we to try to develop firm criteria for distinguishing between, on the one hand, writing produced by children that (merely) records their journey towards literacy and, on the other hand, writing produced by children that deserves to be treated as literature. What does, or ought to, count as literary juvenilia? To play it safe (but who among us likes to play it safe?), we could accept only youthful writing that is retroactively authorised by the writer's success as an adult. But what of writers whose only publishing success comes from their youthful writings? Daisy Ashford. Anne Frank. Thomas Dermody. Thomas Chatterton. We could accept only writing that is produced away from the schoolroom, undirected by an adult, preferably in secret. But that rule would exclude most of Ruskin's juvenilia and some of Margaret Atwood's, exclusions for which our field would be much poorer. What of writers who never found the mentoring and support that's essential to publication success?

Thanks to such scholars as Victoria Ford Smith, Rachel Conrad, Amy Fish, and Kathryn Sutherland, I would now say that instead of seeking youthful writing that is innocent of influence, we should be acknowledging the inevitability of influence—whether it comes from enforced instruction, from the encouragement of an elder sibling, from the direction and support of a mentor, or from books and periodicals. And as many writers who spend time with children discover, the child writer can

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influence the adult writer, too: influence can be a two-way street. Acknowledging such realities opens the door to observing, analysing, and theorising influence and collaboration in ways that enrich our insights and our methodologies.

What do we value in writing by children? Are we looking only for the outliers, the precocious, the exceptional? Some of us are working right now, or have worked in the past, on young authors who seem to qualify as such. What can we learn from them about some of the ways in which writing can be *great*? Some of us value writing by children for its representative qualities: what can we learn from it about child development, about how children learn, or about a particular culture, era, or community? Can these two groups of scholars have anything to say to each other, or to learn from each other? What I see when I consider the field is a diverse scholarly community. Perhaps it is better described as the intersection of distinct scholarly communities. But what I do not see are warring factions.

As an editor, I'm a magpie. I'll pick up anything shiny and add it to my hoard. My background and training are those of a literary scholar, but I'm also a fan of the audacious, the eccentric, and the obscure. I understand that canonisation is political and that posterity cannot be trusted to separate the enduring greats from the deservedly overlooked. Many years ago, in a class wrestling with the problem of poetics, one of my professors suggested that, at the end of the day, a poem is anything we decide to read as one reads a poem. Maybe *literary juvenilia* are any child-written texts that we decide to read as one reads literature. Does this text reward close reading? Does it respond to a post-structuralist analysis? Post-colonial? Marxist-feminist-New Historicist? If you can do any of the kinds of things to it that literary scholars do with texts, then it's literature. If it challenges the limits of our approaches and expands our theories, all the better.

I like to think that the term *literary juvenilia* is a reminder of possibility. Perhaps, instead of asking us to be suspicious about what doesn't qualify, it asks us to be generous; open; and, more than anything, attentive.