Introduction

Children's literature is in many ways the creation of the long nineteenth century. Although debates as to what counts as the earliest children's texts will always be with us, the creation of children's literature as a distinct market and a recognized genre (or set of genres) dates from the mid-eighteenth century. Indeed, children's literature might be said to be the love-child of the Enlightenment and the Romantic movements, and much of its history over the succeeding century and a half is that of a tug-of-love child whose parents have quite different ambitions for it. Is children's literature aimed primarily at educating children in the principles of reason and morality? Or is it rather a celebration of the Rousseauesque child's lack of acculturation, and (as far as child readers are concerned) primarily a source of pleasure and entertainment rather than a didactic tool?

Thirty five years ago, Patricia Demers' *From Instruction to Delight* (1982) implied through its title that the course of children's literature over the first half of the nineteenth century was one of a gradual transition from a functional view of literature as a means of instructing children in their social and religious duties and imparting such education as was appropriate to their station, to one in which children's own perspectives and desires were foregrounded. In such a narrative, a mid-century text such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) stands as a huge waymark, not only embracing literary nonsense but satirising the moralistic poetic models by writers such as Isaac Watts and Robert Southey that populated mid-Victorian nurseries. In this view, Carroll's work marks an epistemic shift, as great within the world of children's books as Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) was to prove in the biological sciences.

Of course, this is hugely simplistic. *Alice* was not the *coup de grace* for didacticism, nor was earlier children's literature devoid either of subversion or of entertainment. Rather, the relationship between these aspects of children's literature is in dynamic negotiation throughout the long nineteenth century. The relative critical neglect of early nineteenth-century children's literature to which Jane Stafford alludes at the start of her article in this volume has perhaps served to disguise the variety of subject matter and approach that characterizes the children's texts of this period. This volume addresses that neglect squarely, with an emphasis on the productions of the decades either side of the turn of the nineteenth century.

Women writers, being particularly likely to be involved at an intimate and daily level with the raising of children, and to feel the weight of societal expectation in that regard, recognised early and often very explicitly the multiple capacities of literature to provide entertainment, useful information, moral education and social training, and the sometimes conflicting nature of these functions. The 'preceptive fictions' of the Comtesse de Genlis's *Adèle et Théodore* (1782), discussed here by Donelle Ruwe, formed part of an elaborate, matricentric model for the education of children that explicitly set out to correct what Genlis considered defects in Rousseau. Genlis' religious and socially conservative outlook contrasts with the educative journey described in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788), the subject of Somi Ahn's essay, but shares its explicitly didactic intent. Ahn's article on Wollstonecraft's less well-known work, carefully maps the education of girls from their initial upbringing in the heart of a family and rural community, to their 'finishing off' in the metropolis, where they are taught to restrict their consumerism in favour of their charitable duties. Quite apart from being sheltered, these young women (as they become through the narrative) are morally bound to philanthropy as they look into the 'swollen eyes' of the

shopkeeper who tells them her story of hardship. The young women and, by proxy their readers, are taught to stand out from the other 'indifferent wealthy', and to resist a bargain that might take from any profits from the poor. As such the text, Ahn suggests, sets out to educate its readers to become compassionate and socially responsible citizens.

The didacticism of Genlis and Wollstonecraft contrasts with the apparent ephemerality of Catherine Ann Dorset's 1807 papillonades, *The Peacock's "At Home"* and *The Lion's Masquerade*, poems in the tradition of William Roscoe's highly popular *The Butterfly's Ball* (1805). As Dan Froid shows, however, while Dorset's poems satirize the social customs and anxieties of the moneyed adult world by transferring them to a setting populated by insects and animals, in doing so they also subtly reinforce the values of that world. Jane Stafford's article turns attention to the prolific Strickland sisters, whose children's literature, often composed in order to make quick cash, has been largely ignored by those more interested in their work on slavery narratives. Their children's literature, Stafford argues, is worthy of further critical attention, for although it carries with it the didacticism prevalent in the period, it encourages the combination of education and entertainment as it champions reading (and writing) as worthy activities facilitated largely through the mother. The Stricklands' children's literature, Stafford suggests, is complemented by their concerns with slavery, as 'the slave narrative has a simplicity and didactic awareness that shares tonal qualities with children's literature'. While Stafford, considers how the anti-slavery rhetoric of the Stricklands' writing influenced their children's literature, Bahar Gursel considers Catherine Sedgwick's construction of the Greeks and Turks from her nineteenth-century American perspective. Here, Gursel analyses a little-known story, 'Marietza', which tells of the plight of a girl who witnessed the Greek uprising in Scio in 1822, and was captured by the Turks before being bought by a compassionate Englishman. The interrogation of this story, not only considers where Sedgwick obtained her source material, but questions the ideological impact of a tale which demonises the Turks, constructing them as 'other' while romanticizing the 'cultured' Greeks, emphasizing that children's literature is always culturally and ideologically weighted.

Deanna Stover and Terri Doughty's essays both explore the ways in which texts from the later-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries explored the social possibilities for girls and young women, in a world in which feminist ideas were becoming increasingly current. The title of Louisa May Alcott's *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870) suggests a book that sets its face firmly against modern notions of appropriate female behaviour, contrasting its eponymous heroine's commitment to traditional American values with the fashionably frivolous Girl of the Period; but, as Stover shows, Alcott's book also promotes "a rhizomatic female community" of mutual support and individual agency. Doughty, in discussing the World War I girls' fiction of Bessie Marchant (once hailed as 'the girls' "Henty"'), considers some of the ways in which the traditional adventure story – marked by physical danger and endurance, and numerous opportunities for daring rescues of potential heterosexual love interests – was repurposed for female heroines and a female readership, and the extent to which this reorientation intersected with the dislocation of traditional gender roles attendant on the war.

The breadth and variety of these essays, which all focus on lesser known works of children's literature, is at once powerful, entertaining and though-provoking. From Ruwe and Ahn's discussion of texts in the 1780s, through to Froid, Stafford, and Gursel's focus from early 1800s to 1830s, to Stover in 1870 and concluding with Doughty's discussion of World War I into the twentieth century, these essays begin to show just the tip of mass of material that the women in this long nineteenth century produced. The women writers, were, of course,

products of the ideologies that surrounded them, testimony to the resounding narratives about the Turks for example, in Sedgwick's case, or reinforcing (consciously or otherwise) the values they may have been attempting to deconstruct, as in Dorset's papillonades. And yet included in this collection are women writers who were powerful enough to question the status quo that allowed slavery, the poor to go hungry and the rich to be deaf to such plights. The children's literature discussed in this volume often testifies to a desire, not just to educate and encourage children to read, but to invoke change and to challenge. It is in children's literature that the moral framework of a society, its customs, prejudices and wrongs are illuminated for all to see.