

Toward an Imaginology of Dr. Seuss¹

Introduction

Around the middle of the twentieth century a quantitatively minor but nonetheless momentous trend can be detected in US children's literature. There are not, perhaps, a very large number of books that could be said to belong to this trend; yet it consists of books by some of the most famous children's (picture) book authors: Dr. Seuss, Crockett Johnson, Maurice Sendak. This trend, very simply, involved the portrayal of children's mental lives, specifically their fantasies. The distinctiveness of this can be discerned by a comparison with earlier children's literature. Since children's book authors had begun to move away from rigorous didacticism in the mid-nineteenth century, stories for children related mainly folk or fairy tales or adventures set in contemporary times.² By the turn of the century, stories that took the characters and readers to fantastic places (places that were purported to be of the author's individual imagination rather than from myth, history, or the contemporary world) also became popular: for example, L. Frank Baum's Oz books (which began publication in 1900). But in almost all cases, the adventures of the children in these books were, within their fictional contexts, real. In Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), for example, Oz is, despite its unusual qualities, a real place that Dorothy visits, not a fantasy or illusion.³ However, in many of the books of Seuss, Crockett, and Sendak,

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² This shift and some of the reasons for it are noted by Mintz (2004: 185), Saler (2004: 141), and Whalley (2004: 322).

³ This is in contradistinction to the famous film version, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), in which Oz, at least as usually interpreted, is a dream. This transformation of Oz's status, coming as it does after three decades of Freudian influence, is a useful cultural barometer.

the adventures that children have, the fantastic sights they see, are portrayed as being *products of their minds* rather than as a material reality "out there" that they experience.

In the following I provide the beginnings of an imaginology of Dr. Seuss (pen name of Theodor Seuss Geisel, 1904–1991). The term and concept of "imaginology" I borrow from Jungian psychoanalyst Michael Vannoy Adams (2004: 7). The potential scope of a "science of the imagination" in the cultural realm alone is vast; here I merely propose to remark on some aspects of the representation of imagination in the children's literature of Dr. Seuss (and mainly from a socio-historical perspective, rather than a psychological one). Seuss is indeed an appropriate starting point for a literary imaginology: Among the first of American writers to portray the child's imagination, it appeared consistently as a driving force in his stories over the first twenty years of his career.

Why was Seuss so invested in portraying acts of imagining in children's literature? The ground was well-prepared as he established his career as an author of children's books. Numerous developments and preoccupations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were spun into the fabric of Seuss's thought and work in varying degrees of mediation and with such density as to be extraordinarily difficult to unravel and clarify individually. These impacted both his thematic/narrative choices and the beliefs that lay behind these; collectively they provided an impetus for expressing certain ideas in certain ways. Among the important cultural antecedents were the Romantic preoccupation with imagination (as the integral counterpart to Reason) and with childhood (e.g., the "cult of the child"); the American Transcendentalist continuation of the same, motivated by local sociopolitical concerns; the late-nineteenth-century development of child psychology and psychoanalysis, stemming from and reinforcing a growing (middle- and upper-class) interest in children's mental lives; the ever-present tension in children's literature

between pedagogy and entertainment, the latter only becoming acceptable as an overt component around the middle of the nineteenth century; the early-twentieth-century avant-garde movements, particularly Expressionism and Surrealism, which worked out psychoanalytic ideas artistically, and which posited a connection between art and sociopolitical transformation (to be assumed by Seuss as well); the leftist newspaper *PM* of the early 1940s, which, through employing Dr. Seuss (as well as Crockett Johnson and soon-to-be “permissive parenting” guru Dr. Benjamin Spock), facilitated the development of his social-political-artistic perspective;⁴ the cumulative effects of two World Wars and a Great Depression, which for many Americans weakened faith in the established order and cast doubt on the abilities of supposedly rational adults to navigate contemporary political and economic complexities—and which led to the sense that the adults of the future (i.e., today’s children) needed to be smarter and more creative than today’s adults; the Cold War emphasis on developing American ingenuity (Ogata 2008–9: 137) and, at the same time, the relocation by leftists of socially transforming praxis to the micro-level of the family under the public threat of anti-communist hysteria (Jenkins 2002: 189); the (implicitly Freudian) “permissive parenting” movement; the isolation of children as work opportunities for women expanded and as “private time” became more culturally valued.

The outcome of much of this was that childhood, for progressives such as Dr. Seuss, “was imagined as a utopian space through which America might reinvent itself” (Jenkins 2002: 189). Or as Seuss himself proclaimed in a 1960 essay: “Children’s reading and children’s thinking are the rock bottom base upon which the future of this country will rise. Or not rise.” And Seuss set about showing children what their minds could do (the *thinks* they could *think*, to paraphrase a later Seuss title [1975]).

⁴ *PM* was associated with the Popular Front, a loose collection of anti-fascist leftists (communists and social democrats)—generally conversant, it might be added, with psychoanalytic theory.

By the time Seuss began writing for children there was already a growing literature portraying children's dream-lives⁵—inspired no doubt by the widespread, new-found interest in children's psychological well-being, and intensified by the spread of psychoanalytical ideas and concerns after Freud's visit to the US in 1909. Yet Seuss was concerned not with *dreamed* but exclusively with *imagined* fantasies. Why? I believe that to Seuss dreams would have appeared both as a passive mental activity over which one could exert little creative control and as an activity that was not very unique to children per se. Indeed, the Seussian fantasy would be difficult to classify even as a daydream (as commonly understood): it is energetic, rambunctious, loud. In general, this kind of active, waking imagination was thought to be particularly vivid and engrossing in childhood; it was something that was repressed by and in adults, but also something that Seuss believed important for the future development of the country. It was not unconscious or idle *dreaming* that would lead the nation away from war and economic instability; rather, we needed to *imagine* new possibilities and solutions, to *imagine* other perspectives. The child's innate creativity needed to be nurtured and challenged, rather than repressed or diluted, and children's literature was a tool for this. In 1960 he happily observed that the children's literature of the pre-War years that was, in his words, "concocted out of inept, condescending, nature-faking treacle," was on the wane. "In these days of tension and confusion," he continued, "writers are beginning to realize that books for children have a greater potential for good, or evil, than any other form of literature on earth" (Seuss 1960b).

⁵ One famous example is the Winsor McCay comic strip, *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905–11 and 1924–27; continued under the title *In the Land of Wonderful Dreams* from 1911–14), which strongly influenced Maurice Sendak (see Sendak's "foreword" to Canemaker 2005).

The Seussian Imagination in Practice

Seuss's first children's book was written and published in 1937, in the wake of some of the developments previously mentioned and on the verge of others. This book, *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, tells the tale of a boy imagining, but it contains an ambivalence over this mental activity that is instructive. The story of *Mulberry Street* involves a boy, Marco, walking to and from school. The boy's father instructs him to recall accurately what he has seen along the way without exaggerating ("Stop telling such outlandish tales. / Stop turning minnows into whales."). Marco, however, cannot resist, and when he sees "a horse and a wagon" it is imaginatively transformed into an increasingly extravagant spectacle. But when he excitedly returns home ("I HAD A STORY THAT NO ONE COULD BEAT!"), he meets his father, frowning "sternly ... in his seat." To his father's query of what he saw on the way home, Marco, suddenly abashed, replies, "Nothing ... / But a plain horse and wagon on Mulberry Street." A peculiarly downbeat ending for a children's picture book, perhaps betraying Seuss's own lack of confidence in his first book (Nel 2004: 121), perhaps an admittance of the dominance of adultist scientific rationality, perhaps Seuss remembering his own stern father.⁶ Seuss once remarked that imagination "gets knocked out of you by the time you grow up"⁷ and *Mulberry Street* appears to bear that out. The father, never pictured, is portrayed as the coldly rational adult, suppressing his son's imagination as he guides Marco into a mature, "objective" view of the world.

Consider in this context an observation by Freud: He observed children fantasizing in play freely, heedless of adult presence, but upon entering adulthood they were to become "ashamed of [their] phantasies and [hide] them from others" ([1907] 1989: 438). The expression of fantasy was, to an extent, tolerable in early childhood but was to be suppressed as a condition

⁶ Years later Seuss remarked that *Mulberry Street* "was written from the point of view of my mind, not the mind of a child" (quoted in Nel 2004: 22).

⁷ "The Logical Insanity of Dr. Seuss," *Time*, 11 August 1967: 58–59.

for "normal" adulthood; this seems to have been the position of Seuss's own father, the likely model for Marco's father (see Pease 2011).⁸ Post-WWII, "progressive" views on the matter would be rather different. Dr. Spock, for example, would likely see Marco's urge to verbalize his fantasy precisely as a sign of maturation (as an imitation of adult "storytelling") and would advise Marco's father, "All [you need] to say is something like, 'You made up a wonderful story'" (Spock 2001: 191). The conditions for a fully positive evaluation of childhood imagination were in still too nascent a stage in 1937 (at least in Seuss's experience), and the child's fantasy was still subject to an adult ambivalence that would greatly dissipate (for those of Seuss's politics) only in the aftermath of World War II.

A similar ambivalence can be found in *The 500 Hat of Bartholomew Cubbins* published the following year. Neither this book nor the *The King's Stilts*, which followed it, deal explicitly with imagination; rather they approach it metaphorically through powerful, almost fetishistic external objects. Each book continues to explore the relationship between father-figure, child, and imagination/play; they also suggest, at odds with their feudal settings, something about the role of art and leisure under capitalism. In *500 Hats*, set in a fairy-tale-like kingdom, the magically multiplying hats of the child Bartholomew (colored red in an otherwise black-and-white book) first earn the opprobrium of King Derwin and nearly cost Bartholomew his life. However, the King is won over when the hats become increasingly resplendent; he purchases Bartholomew's final hat for five hundred pieces of gold, and wears it proudly before keeping it "forever in a great crystal case by the side of his throne." Bartholomew is the unwitting (innocent) owner of an apparently uncontrollable creative force, a threat to established order; the

⁸ Of course, some pre-War psychologists such as Carl Jung would disagree with the negative valuation of adult fantasy.

kingly father-figure, unable to quell this force, belatedly accepts it when it finally produces something to his liking, and he rewards the child (read: artist?) financially.⁹

In *The King's Stilts*, the eponymous stilts (also colored red) are the only source of the hardworking King Birtram's joy; at five o'clock each day he leaps onto his stilts and races about the castle yards. But the killjoy Lord Droon ("Laughing spoils the shape of the face") thinks this play improper and orders the King's faithful page boy, Eric, to bury the stilts. Without his moment of play to look forward to, King Birtram, now shown moping about the halls, cannot focus on his duties and the kingdom begins to fall apart.¹⁰ Eric has to find a way to return the King's stilts and save the kingdom, which he does. The child restores the joy of play to the adult. Rather than compensating the page boy with money (as in *500 Hats*), King Birtram has a pair of stilts made for Eric, and the two are shown racing together down the hillside. King Birtram is portrayed as the psychically harmonized adult (an adult-child?), having reconciled his acquisition and effective dispensation of adult responsibilities with his child-like sense of play ("When he worked, he really worked ... but when he played, he really PLAYED!"). Lord Droon (the anti-child) throws the King out of harmony (which also throws the kingdom out of harmony); it takes a child to restore the King to harmony (and thus to restore the kingdom to harmony). Note, however, the reinforcement of the American middle-class work ethic, in which play, or the exercise of one's imagination undirected toward profit (or other "adult" ends), should occur only after the serious business of the day. The King, through the giving of the stilts, inducts Eric into

⁹ Bartholomew and King Derwin reappear in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* (1949), with Bartholomew now as the King's page boy. "Oobleck" is again a kind of imaginative substance (marked again by its color).

¹⁰ The situation is reminiscent of Freud's comment on the excision of child-like play as a condition of adulthood: "hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which he has once experienced" ([1907] 1989: 438).

this version of adulthood: a hard day's work followed by a circumscribed period of leisure ("And when they played, they really PLAYED. And when they worked, they really WORKED.")¹¹

Seuss would publish two more children's books before turning his attention to the war beginning to rage in Europe. At this time he would work as a political cartoonist for the progressive newspaper *PM* for nearly two years, before joining the U.S. Army's film division. His first book published following the war, which he had in fact begun in 1941 (Nel 2004: 39), was *McElligot's Pool* (1947). It was, notably, published the year after the first edition of Spock's *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946), which developed from columns Spock had written for *PM*, and which preached the toleration and even nurturing of children's creativity. *McElligot's Pool* would be Seuss's first book to deal directly with imagination as not only socially acceptable but as a socially transformative force. Significantly, it also features Marco, the timid boy from *Mulberry Street*. Seuss, in a sense, rewrites that earlier story in a way that valorizes the imagination and subtly grants adult approval.

Marco is shown fishing in a small pool. A farmer, noticing him, considers Marco "sort of a fool" for trying to catch fish in the small, junk-filled pool. Marco acknowledges him ("It *may* be you're right") but then goes on to spin a tale of possibility: "'Cause you never can tell / What goes on down below! / This pool *might* be bigger / Than you or I know!" At the end of Marco's tale of underground streams and fantastic fishes, the farmer is depicted wide-eyed and thoughtful, reconsidering the prospects for fishing in *McElligot's Pool*. Marco, it seems, has become bolder; rather than letting his imaginings remain inside his head for fear of adult disapproval, he is able to convey them with such persuasiveness that his adult interlocutor begins to reassess his own beliefs. This is more than "You made up a wonderful story"; it is the

¹¹ A later variation on the father-figure/child/imagination theme occurs in the famous *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960a), in which an ostensibly younger creature wins over an irritable and skeptical older creature after finally convincing him/her to try "green eggs and ham"—the imaginative object of the day (see Wolf 1995 on this issue).

validation of imagination as constructive/deconstructive, as unsettling commonsense through the elaboration of hidden or overlooked possibilities, as effecting change in others.

After a return of Bartholomew Cubbins and King Derwin (in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* [1949]), Seuss's strategy of imagination elaboration underwent a decisive shift, just as the Seuss visual and verbal style that readers are most familiar with reached maturity. *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953), *On Beyond Zebra!* (1955), and *If I Ran the Circus* (1956) are all to an extent boyish adventure tales and also fully in Seuss's "bestiary book" mode (inaugurated by *McElligot's Pool*; see Nel 2004: 22). Notably, the agency of adult characters in determining the narrative or tone of the stories is greatly diminished; where adults appear they are mainly props or actors under the direction of the child imaginer. *Zoo* and *Circus* appear to consist of the entirely internal imaginings of the young protagonists (although the old storekeeper in *Circus* seems to be finally affected by young Morris McGurk's fantasy); *Scrambled Eggs* and *Zebra*, however, feature one child spinning a tale for the entertainment or edification of another. Each of these books highlights a dissatisfaction with the conventional world, in a metaphorically/allegorically whimsical fashion: dissatisfaction with the standard zoo, dissatisfaction with the everyday omelet. *On Beyond Zebra!* (Seuss's *Finnegans Wake*, as Philip Nel has it [2004: 27]), however, though on one level equally whimsical, effects one of Seuss's more radical—and perhaps most characteristic and fundamental—critiques via imaginative activity: a deconstruction of that basic building-block of written language, the alphabet. This is an absurdist parody of the common children's alphabet book, or perhaps its much-needed counterpart.

Zebra begins with the young Conrad Cornelius o'Donald o'Dell before a blackboard claiming to have mastered the alphabet, from A to Z: "So now I know everything anyone

knows / From beginning to end. From the start to the close. / Because Z is as far as the alphabet goes." His older friend, however, draws "one letter more" and begins to initiate Conrad Cornelius into the expanded alphabet of the imagination: "In the places I go there are things that I see / That I *never* could spell if I stopped with the Z. / I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends. / *My* alphabet starts where *your* alphabet ends!" The older boy, a sort of midwife of the imagination, takes Conrad Cornelius on a journey, introducing him to the fantastic creatures that necessitate new letters (or is it the new letters that necessitate the fantastic creatures?); the younger boy is transformed in the process:

I took him past Zebra. As far as I could.
 And I think, perhaps, maybe I did him some good ...
 Because, finally, he said:
 "This is really great stuff!
 "And I guess the old alphabet
 "ISN'T enough!"
 NOW the letters he uses are something to see!
 Most people *still* stop at the Z ...
 But not *HE!*

Here a child bequeaths the joys and creative-transformative powers of imaginative play not to a disenchanted or prejudiced adult, but to another child who is already caught within the bounds of convention. The narrator enables Conrad Cornelius to dramatically imagine, to "try on," a new worldview which he ultimately accepts. The narrator here can be seen as analogous to how Seuss views his role as an author: As one who, through a work of fiction, allows readers to imagine other possible ways of thinking and being which they are free to try out or not in "real life." *Zebra* teaches two important lessons: that conventional symbols are inadequate to do justice to all that we might wish to express (i.e., that convention, while enabling certain kinds of expression, stymies others); and that, where convention has become inadequate we have the prerogative to change it. Seuss's focus on the limitations of conventional symbols may seem like

old news several decades after the "linguistic turn" in the humanities; yet it is surprising enough to find this so explicitly thematized in a children's book of the 1950s, and Seuss's energetic, sensibly nonsensical take on it remains engaging. This is, of course, a book intended for children, and thus naïve in eschewing the consequences or complications that could follow from this course of action.¹²

A yet further development takes place in the "Cat in the Hat" books. In previous Seuss books, stories were either set in already fanciful worlds where magic was an accepted part of life (e.g., *500 Hats*), or there was a clear delimitation between a represented "real world" and the flights of imagination of the protagonists (e.g., *If I Ran the Zoo*)—even if there were sometimes small hints that the "fantasy" had affected or even bled over into "reality" (as in *McElligot's Pool*, *On Beyond Zebra!*, *If I Ran the Circus*, and the film *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T*). With *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) and its sequel *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* (1958) we enter a somewhat more ambiguous realm, a chaotic kind of domestic fantasy.¹³ Although the Cat only appears when adults are absent and thus, at least from the adult reader's perspective, may seem to be imaginary, it must also be remembered that, as Philip Nel points out, "both the Cat and the children's mother enter and exit through the same door" (1999: 166). For all his improbability, for the children in the stories the Cat gives rise to very real anxieties and dilemmas.

The Cat in the Hat begins with two children left alone on a rainy day with nothing to do. Staring out the window into the rain, they suddenly hear a "bump" and in walks the Cat in the Hat. The Cat begins to try to entertain the children, generally creating havoc to their worryment. Indeed, the family fish is so perturbed it begins to talk, telling the Cat, "You SHOULD NOT be

¹² This point will be taken up in the following section. Also cf. Nel's commentary on this book (2004: 27–8).

¹³ Louisa Smith says of "domestic fantasy" that it involves "magic that appears in a realistic setting within a realistic family" (2006: 447). In one category of domestic fantasy, which the "Cat in the Hat" books play with, "children discover a magic being or thing which has the power to change their lives but which parents fail to notice" (448).

here / When our mother is not. / You get out of this house!" The Cat's activities become increasingly uncontrollable and destructive until the mother is seen approaching the house; at the exhortation of the fish, the children finally convince the Cat to leave. Upon his first exit he leaves behind a huge mess, but he soon returns with a cleaning machine: "I always pick up all my playthings," he says. After the Cat leaves, the boy narrates:

Then our mother came in
And she said to us two,
"Did you have any fun?
Tell me. What did you do?"

And Sally and I did not know
What to say.
Should we tell her
The things that went on there that day?

Should we tell her about it?
Now, what SHOULD we do?
Well ...
What would YOU do
If your mother asked YOU?

The children are caught in a dilemma, with both parallels to and divergences from that of Marco in *Mulberry Street*. Marco, it may be recalled, willfully imagined the fantastic procession on Mulberry Street, but his knowledge of his father's realist expectations kept him from sharing his fantasy. Nevertheless, we readers know that Marco has imagined what he saw, and we know that Marco knows it. But do we know what the children in *The Cat in the Hat* know? They are not portrayed as consciously bringing forth the Cat in the Hat, and indeed we do not have enough information to determine whether he is in fact a material or imagined entity—before leaving he conveniently erases all traces of his presence. The narrator's final questions are pregnant with ambiguity; we find ourselves in the realm of Todorov's "fantastic," forced "to hesitate between a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described" (Todorov 1973: 33). The children

are not themselves portrayed as having any confusion about what happened, yet the persistent reader-directed questioning leads us (the readers) to wonder: What is the cause of their indecision? Did the event “really” occur (in a kind of Seussian domestic fantasy), making the story a tale of the “supernatural”; were they play-acting, exorcising the destructive element of their psyches through fantasy; or were they perhaps merely suffering from some sort of collective, boredom-wrought delusion? Do they fear that their mother—whom they must presume to be the rational adult—will reproach them for having “made up” an event they believe or know to have been real? Or, like *Mulberry Street*’s Marco, do they fear their parent’s reaction to their (frivolous? dangerous?) exercise of imagination? Or are they intentionally, as Henry Jenkins suggests, raising the possibility of “claim[ing] a secret (and unpoliced) space for their imaginative play” (188–9)? Seuss provides no answer, leaving us with the question of what kind of world the story took place in, what kind of experience the children had—and, of course, what they should tell their mother about it.¹⁴

Whether we interpret the Cat as real or not, the story harkens back to the notion that “reality” for children is more unfettered from conventional laws—that the real and imagined for children are of the same fabric, the one seamlessly blending into the other; that ordinary objects, through the operation of the imagination, are imbued with possibilities unsuspected by adults. Like the Marco of *Mulberry Street*, the children here seem to be in a transitional stage, with the presence of the adult restraining their reality (regardless of the Cat’s ontological status); even in her absence, the mother’s Superego-instilling aspect lingers on in the form of the nagging, albeit

¹⁴ Philip Nel sums up the children’s predicament this way: “Should the children describe an actual experience that their mother will think they imagined, or an imagined experience that she will accept as actual? In other words, should they lie or tell the truth?” (1999: 165). I take this to be just one of the quandaries to be pondered by the reader.

relatively powerless, fish (who is always in danger, we fear, of being swallowed up by the Id-like Cat)—and in the fact that the children only start smiling when the Cat starts cleaning.

Conclusion: Imagination and Reform

Seuss, it is clear, was a reformer, not a revolutionary. (Had he been the latter, he would likely not have been so successful.) He sought improvement, progress, change within and through existing institutions. *On Beyond Zebra!*, for example, though one of Seuss's more radical books, begins and ends in a traditional classroom: One of the characters has gained a new freedom of thought, certainly, but he continues to "work" in an existing institution. Power relations generally remain unchanged, even if the powerful learn a lesson in the end. Even the anarchic Cat in the Hat does not really threaten parental authority—he always picks up his toys—and even as he opens up a world of possibility, it is one that the stories' children participate in only as anxious onlookers (they do not themselves create the household messes).

Seuss struggled throughout much of his career with the relationship between children, adults, and imagination. The imagination was for him, I believe, a neutral (i.e., neither inherently good nor inherently bad) but very powerful force. While, like others of his time, he saw its potential for bringing about democratic progress, he also occasionally demonstrated its dangers when left unchecked or used improperly (e.g., *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, "The Glunk That Got Thunk" [in Seuss 1969]). Furthermore, while the trend of his work was to liberate children from adult control—whereas his pre-War books portray children as manipulated by adults, his post-War books portray the children, at least in fantasy, as doing the manipulating (think of poor Mr. Sneelock)—this was in keeping with the child-care advice of the time. Spock's *Baby and Child Care* advocated for the importance of children's adult-independent play, either solitarily or

in groups (1946), as did Margaret Mead, writing for the U.S. Children's Bureau: "Children need ... privacy even when they are not doing anything that seems a bit creative—when they are growing or just wondering about what they have learned. Children need a place to be alone in" (1962; quoted in Ogata 2008–9: 139). Thus what might seem to be the claim of Seuss's child characters for "a secret (and unpoliced) space" of the imagination had in fact already been sanctioned by adults.

The mass media continue to remake and revive Dr. Seuss, endeavoring to keep the legitimizing and money-making power of his name alive, though the person is long-deceased. Unfortunately, he is often transformed into what he preached against: treacle, pure entertainment, bald-faced moralizing.¹⁵ The critical edge of his reformist project is in danger of being lost. As one part of this critical heritage it should finally be remembered that, although Seuss's books were written at a time of increased child-directed product manufacturing and marketing, and though his books are of course themselves products marketed to and for children, the content is strikingly non-materialistic. Capitalist imagery abounds, of course—Seuss's stories take place in the US after all. Yet you will not find children playing with toys in Dr. Seuss books, nor will you find depictions of purchasing; though his children may imagine themselves doing great things, it is never for profit. The Seussian child sees what is there—"a plain horse and wagon," a polluted pond, "a big vacant lot"—and on that basis builds a new world, experiences incredible adventures.

¹⁵ Nel has commented on this issue extensively (see 2004: chs. 5 and 6).

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