Re-memorying:

A new phenomenological methodology in children's literature studies

Alison Waller

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This chapter starts from the premise that the act of reading a children's book is not confined to childhood, but is a process embedded in time that can be active at different points across a lifespan. In light of this suggestion, it is possible to turn to adult memory as a viable source of knowledge about the lifelong reading acts that start with childhood books. In this chapter I will introduce an interpretative phenomenological method of enquiry that acknowledges the lived experience of childhood reading as a continuum, not ending with an initial textual encounter but enduring as the reader ages. Common aspects of this experience can be uncovered through what I call 're-memory work' with adult rememberers and rereaders. In the following, I shall explain this approach and demonstrate how it can add a new dimension to children's literature studies, enhancing insights already provided by researchers working directly with young readers (for example, Wolf and Heath 1992, Lowe 2006, Maynard *et al* 2007).

The prevailing sense for many children's literature critics has been that, for grown-ups, childhood reading is an inaccessible realm of experience, located in the past, in the cultural unconscious, or in the adult imagination (Tucker 1981, Lesnik-Oberstein 2004, Nodelman 2008). The methodology laid out in this chapter acknowledges the reconstructive power of memories of the past, but aims to refine the idea that early reading is lost forever and instead offer a way of accessing early encounters with texts. I propose that 're-memorying' – and the resulting dialogue between later and earlier reading selves that emerges from it – addresses important questions: what makes books read in childhood meaningful? Can the divide between child and adult reading selves be bridged? And how is the category of children's literature expanded and enriched by the on-going life of texts in memory? To establish this method I bring together two underpinning assumptions: the centrality of the lifespan and reading as diachronic process. From these foundations my discussion will turn to methodology and will outline the basis for re-memory work in interpretative phenomenology, which recognises that individuals understand the world around them through their subjective, sensed experiences. This approach takes as its philosophical grounding the work of Edmund Husserl and his student, Roman Ingarden, who argued that awareness is an intentional state –

that is, it is always conscious of something – and thus there is a relationship between any cognitive process and its object of attention (Husserl 1973); all the more so if that object happens to be an aesthetic artefact like a book, created by the efforts of another conscious being (Ingarden 1973). For phenomenologists, the way to understand any experience is to return to the content of consciousness itself by looking inwards and adopting what Husserl describes as a 'phenomenological attitude' (1983: 112-14). It is this attitude that is at the core of re-memory work, along with a common notion drawn from reader-response theory that although reading as a set of physical and cognitive processes 'may end when the book is closed', the reading act 'may continue long after' (Johnson 2011: 138). This method is shaped by elements of more recent interpretative phenomenological practice and empirical research in reading studies, recognising the value of seeking out a fresh perspective by moving beyond a purely self-reflexive investigation of encounters with childhood books and instead gathering data from other persons who have experienced this phenomenon. It is also necessarily engaged with questions of how knowledge can be gained from subjective and reconstructed memories.

Lifespan theory

Discussions about the lifespan and the life course emerged in fields of developmental psychology, healthcare and sociology in the late twentieth century as changing population demographics licensed discrete research into aging (see for example Baltes 1987, Giddens 1991, Elder 1998; see also Joosen's chapter in this volume). Studies informed by this movement acknowledge that human behaviour encompasses constancy and change 'from conception to death' (Baltes 1987: 211), and that to fully understand many conscious and unconscious activities it is necessary to extend research beyond specialist knowledge bounded by fixed stages of development. Thus, instead of focusing solely on infant learning or memory deterioration in old age, researchers consider the interconnectedness of experience across a life. Within this paradigm, development is not always viewed as a linear progression. Instead, attention is paid to 'diverse outcomes, reversals, returns and reinventions' as well as the 'unpredictability and precariousness of lives' (Horschelman 2011: 379). Work across disciplines has suggested that losses, gains, and innovative processes may feature variously at different points of the life course; showing, for instance, how new forms of intelligence emerge as individuals age, compensating for deficiencies in mental processing through better insight or abstract understanding (Neugarten and Neugarten 1986). One body of researchers

situates literary reading within the lifespan through experimental work – as a force for changing aspects of personality (Djikic *et al* 2009) or as promoting cognitive health (Stine-Morrow, Hussey and Ng 2015). Such investigations demonstrate how research into literacy and reading experience is not just a matter for researchers interested in the early years of life, but also as part of lifelong learning and aging (Meyer and Pollard 2006). Other researchers examine life transitions, often with an eye to opening up new perspectives on traditional developmental stages. Thus while psychologists Susan Bluck and Tilmann Habermas do employ the terms of conventional structured developmental stages, they stress the importance of context as well as biological chronology, noting that different human activities can be interpreted as functioning within or across what they term 'biological and cultural ecolog[ies]' (2001: 137). Henry Blatterer's sociological work goes further and explicitly questions 'well-cemented psychological edifice' of 'adulthood' that was established in the twentieth century, suggesting that a new 'benchmark for actions and practices' relating to adulthood is required in late modernity and into the modern age, one that accepts a greater fluidity between categories (2007: 786-7; see also Giddens 1991).

The notion of porous age boundaries has important implications for children's literature studies, speaking to what Clémentine Beauvais has called 'aetocriticism', or the study of relationships between generations (2015: 18). Marah Gubar articulates the importance of recognising a shared world for these generations in her writings about children's literature criticism and her theory of kinship. She writes that '[t]here is no one moment when we suddenly flip over from being a child to being an adult. Our younger and older selves are multiple and interlinked, akin to one another rather than wholly distinct' (2013:454). Although she makes no mention of lifespan theory, she stresses the 'gradual, erratic, and variable nature of the developmental process' (ibid.). However, despite such calls to blend the conventionally discrete ecologies of childhood, youth, adult and old age, little attempt has been made to build a theory of lifelong reading that has childhood reading as its initiating impulse. J. A. Appleyard's seminal work on becoming a reader acknowledged something of this continuum in the tradition of lifespan models, positing reading as behaviour that changes over time in ways that are sometimes irregular, and arguing that adult reading 'combines and reconstellates all the ways of reading that have mattered to an individual across a lifetime of responding to stories' (1991: 164). Hugh Crago's project to 'trace the evolution of story making from infancy through to late adolescence ... all the way to old age' (2016: 14) updates and expands this work, but further efforts are required to examine how reading acts work across these ecologies of age and experience.

To demonstrate why this move might be of critical value for children's literature scholars I draw on the temporal core of lifespan philosophy and its central tenet that past life, life as currently lived, and life projected into the future all contribute to the self (Brannen and Nilsen 2002; Rathbone, Conway and Moulin 2011). By finding parallels with phenomenological insights into the temporal nature of reading, I will now consider how the reading self exists across time, allowing theoretical access to childhood reading experiences from the past.

Reading in the time-flow

To understand reading is to understand it within the 'time-flow', as Wolfgang Iser explains (1978: 109). Ingarden agrees that 'cognitive acts performed during the aesthetic experience' are valuable because of their immediacy and their insights into the reader's 'direct and intuitive relationship with the object' (1973: 400) and that this aesthetic experience is bound to the temporal, since a text is perceived and understood in separate parts, which emerge, are encountered by the reader in a present moment, and then sink 'slowly into the horizon of the past' (1973: 98). Ingarden's 'moment of reading' (1973: xxii) requires unpacking in light of the complexities of temporality and the ways that a child (rather than a student of literature) might encounter texts. Rhythms of regular segmentation, anticipation, and rumination are a crucial part of most reading experiences, and any single moment of engagement with a book might therefore be considered as a point in a rather scattered system. Moreover, a childhood book might be read over an extended period of time - often on a nightly basis for an infant being read to by a caring adult, or on a weekly basis in a school classroom. Even in the case of long stretches with a book in one sitting, children's reading activity is interspersed with instances of diversion or reflection. Marcel Proust's famous account of embodied childhood reading from 1906 lists the many ways in which its imaginative delights are interrupted by sensations related to the material reality the young reader finds himself in, from a 'bothersome bee' distracting him, or the temptations of a boisterous outdoor game or a dinner waiting at home (1971: 4). Text-based encounters can also bleed into other forms of imaginative life for children, such as fantasy role-play inspired by the literary text. In fact, those apparently supplementary activities are forms of reading in themselves, as are all other types of cognitive and emotional extensions connected with the text. If, as Iser argues, reading is a 'dynamic process' of setting a text in motion (1974: 276), time spent transforming words and sentences into meaningful content is only part of the picture and will be completed by time spent

remembering earlier sections of the text, browsing illustrations throughout the book, imagining oneself into the story, making connections with other texts or real life contexts, and a range of other personally experienced activities. It is the case, as Ingarden notes, that 'we always experience our present moment as a phase integrated with the unified whole of time' (1973: 105); in other words, a reader's sense of time – like an individual's sense of self – relates to the present moment they are in, but also to this moment's relationship to knowledge of earlier time and expectation of future time.

Mark Currie has more recently stressed the role of the future in this temporal act of reading, noting that the process identified by Ingarden and Iser actually engenders a somewhat paradoxical movement, from 'the passage of events from a world of future possibilities into the actuality of the reader's present, and onwards into the reader's memory' (2006: 16). Drawing in part on Husserl's philosophical discourses on time, Currie argues that narrative fiction and the reading of it provides a model that can help tackle bigger questions about temporality, because it allows for a 'dynamic relation' (ibid.) between a 'tensed' conception of time and, simultaneously, an 'untensed' or 'block' conception of time. Where tensed time is conceived in the relationships between past, present and future, untensed time posits experience as a sequence of events that exist together within a network of before and after conditions (2006: 17). Currie's thinking adds a valuable philosophical dimension to reader-response theories. Although he does not address issues of age or generation, his exploration of the complex workings of time allows for a decoupling of the common categories of childhood (past) and adulthood (present), and presents an alternative model of temporal stepping stones (before and after and before and after). This template also supports the notion that a reading act might be stretched across time, featuring in a variety of ways across different ecologies in the life course. Indeed, reading a book can be formulated as an infinite activity within the scope of an individual lifespan. A reading act may be initiated by a child, but the reader of a children's book does not stay young forever. The act continues into adulthood, and even an aging individual who never again picks up that book remains its reader by virtue of their transaction with the original text. It is for this reason I describe the full reading act as a diachronic process, by which I mean that it exists across untensed time rather than as being bounded by a single moment or even a single period of life.

While pure Husserlian phenomenology would not distinguish between reading and other forms of human consciousness in lived experience, Ingarden and later reader-response theorists have noted the peculiar intensity of intentionality of works of art such as imaginative literature, in which authorial and readerly meaning-making intersect. Phenomenology's

concern with 'presentness' also does not preclude the study of other temporal dimensions. Thus, I would argue that at least three temporal planes are in play: the present moment of interaction with a text; the consecutive phases of reading in which these present moments fit with the time-flow of the reading act (what Husserl calls the 'primary remembrance' or 'retentional consciousness', which is joined like a 'comet's tail' to actual perception; 2002: 112); and the cognitive action of 'secondary remembrance' or recalling the experience in the unified whole of time through memory. It is my contention that by recognising these temporal nuances, and understanding the relationship between the presentness, the time-flow and the unified whole of time, it is possible to reach an enhanced understanding of childhood reading in phenomenological terms.

The model can be expanded in the context of lifelong reading that encompasses *rereading* as a natural extension of the reading act. Conceptualising a childhood reading of Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* (1930), for instance, would involve three steps: first, an examination of a child's original phenomenological encounter with the novel, including affective and embodied responses as well as moments of mental cross-referencing to other stories; second, a consideration of subsequent imaginative engagements with the novel, including rereadings, creative play inspired by the story, and continued before-and-after responses to the text; and third, an investigation of the interplay between memories of, and continuing imaginative engagement with, *Swallows and Amazons* for that reader at the age of twenty-one, fifty, or ninety-nine (see Maine and Waller 2011 for a study of these phases of response to Ransome's novel). Closing down the investigation at any point works to deny that rereadings are valid extensions of the reading act, or that responses to a text may continue for many years after an initial encounter. Continuing the inquiry beyond conventional boundaries of childhood recognises the insights offered by lifespan theory and opens up new ways of understanding reading acts as they are situated in phenomenological time. In the next section I set out how phenomenological methodology can be employed to build on these theoretical foundations towards a process of re-memorying.

Re-memorying: a phenomenological method

For adults thinking about childhood reading in its full temporal context, memory is the most useful – if not always the most straightforward – tool. A number of writers have turned to their own memories to interrogate childhood reading as a diachronic act, returning to the objects of this past experience through the practice of rereading in a form of autoethnography.

Francis Spufford's *The Child that Books Built* (2002), Patricia Spacks' *On Rereading* (2011), and Margaret Mackey's *One Child Reading* (2016), as well as scholarly enquiries by critics such as Hugh Crago (1990) and Rachel Falconer (2008: 174-185), all engage to some degree with autoethnography's aim to 'systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural structures or narratives' (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 273). For instance, Spufford claims to tell not only his own early story, but the story 'of the reading my whole generation of bookworms did' (2002: 21). At the same time, these writers also deal in 're-memorying', attempting to examine the 'interpretative partnership' between text and reader in a structured manner, as Mackey puts it (2013: 88), often taking into account the effects of changing ecologies in the lifespan. Re-memorying is a term I have adapted from the critic Lynne Pearce, who deploys rereading as part of a feminist project to explore the '*processes* of reading' (1997: 2). Expanding her usage, I put forward re-memorying as a phenomenological method that pays close attention to the specific lived experience of childhood reading and to the forms of perception, cognition and emotional response that can be remembered and re-experienced through new encounters with the object of the book in adulthood.

Phenomenology is a practical method for understanding the world as it is perceived and experienced by humans: 'an attempt to describe human consciousness in its lived immediacy, before it is subject to theoretical elaboration or conceptual systematizing' (Jackson 1996: 2). Husserl's original phenomenological philosophy called for reflective and intuitive study of 'inner evidence' (1973: 18) in order to reach an understanding of the essence or '*eidos*' of a phenomenon, rejecting the predominant empiricism and scientism of the nineteenth century that sought to measure and categorise external reality. His approach required a 'bracketing' of all knowledge outside of immediate experience to better focus on 'the world as given in consciousness (perceived, remembered, judged, thought, valued, etc.)' (Husserl 1999: 1). Something of this method can be observed in Spufford's reading memoir, although he does not use the term 'phenomenology' to describe his approach. Through the use of autobiographical memory Spufford isolates specific qualities of a youthful experience of reading. His is a poetic form of bracketing to reach the essence or *eidos* of this event. He begins: 'As my concentration on the story in my hands took hold, all sounds faded away. My ears closed' (2002: 1). By splitting off certain sensory responses to observe them closely, Spufford demonstrates a key principle of phenomenological thought: the relationship between consciousness and an intentional object. His autobiographical memory also illustrates Husserl's sense that secondary remembrance resembles perception – even if it is not quite the same (Husserl 2002). In recollection, the story in the young Spufford's hands acutely

demands his attention and seemingly shuts down some aspects of the conscious and perceptive self in order to focus experience wholly on the transmission of literary content to the imagination, a process he describes through the metaphor of an airlock 'seal[ing] to the outside so that it could open to the inside' (Spufford 2002: 1). The result is aesthetic readerly pleasure of a sort no doubt familiar to all adults who remember being enthusiastic consumers of books in their youth - the dissolution of the embodied self to the life of the narrative within, indicated through the young Spufford entranced by his book, 'curled in a chair like a prawn . . . gone' (2).

Phenomenology is a method that has proven to be influential in literary studies, predominantly in its role in shaping reader-response theory; but Husserl's thinking has also been critiqued, most vigorously by Terry Eagleton, for evoking a private sphere of experience that 'is in fact a fiction, since all experience involves language and language is ineradicably social' (2011: 52). Phenomenological methods do indeed stress the subjective nature of experience and employ first-person reflection to investigate the significance of objects and events; yet for Husserl, such enquiry allows researchers to go beyond psychology through the implementation of logic and a focused study of the relationship between individual mind and the intentional object (1973). New forms of phenomenological methodology seek to reconcile the personal and the social. Clark Moustakas (1994) laid the ground for research in which data is collected from individuals or communities who share an experience of a particular phenomenon. Researcher and participants (or 'co-researchers') can work together to move away from 'the distraction and misdirection of their own assumptions and preconceptions' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009: 14) and distil the essence of the activity. The method can also be applied to the study of readers' engagement with canonical texts, articulating verbal descriptions of an often hidden practice (Sikora, Kuiken and Miall 2011).

Children's literature researchers can benefit from taking on board aspects of this methodology, by adding to the body of autobibliographical knowledge of childhood reading through their own memories and by examining existing reading histories. They can also extend the field along the lines of interpretative phenomenology to take into consideration the experiences of other readers – participants or 'co-researchers' – and to elicit new data. Collaborative re-memorying can thus be shaped as a three-phase method for the systematic gathering of narratives about childhood reading from remembering adults. Firstly, 'accounts of remembering' are created by participants working together with the researcher (through interview or written responses to a series of questions), building a rich picture of the original encounter with a significant childhood book. Participants are encouraged to attempt to access

the presentness of the first-time reading and actively recall as much as possible about the book's content, the reasons and contexts for reading it and the emotions and responses provoked by it. The following questions provide a framework for creating this account of remembering: why did you originally pick up this book as a child? When did you read this book? Where did you read this book? Who did you read this book with? What can you remember about the story and characters, the language used, the cover, any illustrations, the smell and feel of the book? What were the most important bits of the book for you? How did the book make you feel? Did the book remind you of any other books or of anything else? How do you remember this book – through words, illustrations, own images, stories from parents or friends?

In the second phase, participants reread their remembered books, and at the same time create 'accounts of rereading' by noting details of engagement with the text in the present time. This phase foregrounds reading in the time-flow, both in terms of the interplay of present moment, anticipation and retrospection familiar from reader-response theory, and through the interlacing of present reading and recollection of previous reading(s). To encourage a phenomenological attitude, participants can be asked to make notes about their responses at set points (at the cover, at the end of the first chapter, halfway through the book, at especially striking passages, pages, episodes or illustrations, and so on). They may consider the same questions they answered during the creation of the account of remembering, at the same time paying attention to any shifts in attitude or response that may reflect the biological or cultural ecologies of their current status.

The final step attempts to plot the experience within the unified whole of time, by constructing a relationship between remembering and rereading. The researcher asks participating adults to reflect on similarities and differences in their accounts, any gaps or mismatches, and the degree of satisfaction the process has brought. In this stage, participants can be encouraged to focus on what Husserl calls the 'presentification' (2002: 113) of the original experience by reproducing this event in the form of a reflexive third-person narrative. The following questions can be used as prompts during the process of rereading, or in interview afterwards, to add detail to the narrative: Which details from the book did you recognise in your rereading? Which had you not remembered? Were there any moments when your rereading felt completely different? What feelings did the rereading evoke? Were you satisfied with the rereading experience? Do you think the book has influenced your life?

It is useful to add a few notes on practicalities here. Since it is the detail of individual response that forms the data for analysis in this interpretative approach, a representative

sample is not necessary (as it often is in sociological methodologies) and it is more important to work with participants who share the common experience under scrutiny: in this case, reading in childhood. Homogeneity on this level provides points of connection and in turn enables some description of the essence of that phenomenon: the intention is to 'think in terms of theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability' (Smith *et al* 2009: 51). Working with adults who have been readers in their youth, and who can recall to a greater or lesser degree books they encountered as children, allows researchers to focus on questions of the significance of children's literature across the lifespan, the embodied context of reading moments, and the effects of memory on relationships with books over time.

Data produced by this method include interview transcripts, written accounts, and researcher notes on the remembered books and on the co-constructed narratives. The researcher should become familiar with these accounts, and interrogate them according to their own central research concerns, identifying major themes and unexpected elements and examining these for meaning. This is a process of transforming naïve descriptions into more technical terminology in order to understand the *eidos* of the phenomenon. It is a process that can be creative as well as critical: a 'hesitant' method, as Amedeo Giorgi puts it (1989: 50), which takes into account the flow of meaning from the individual to the bigger pattern that emerges. Analysis of this material thus acknowledges that a double hermeneutic is at play, requiring the researcher to make sense of their own sense-making, and that of other participants in the study.

Re-memorying sits alongside other forms of autobiographical remembering and rereading as a form of re-memory work in which reaching for experiences in the past can be laborious and can require systematic strategies of recollection. A note of caution needs to be sounded since 'memory work', as a recognised methodological practice, is firmly embedded in ethical forms of historical and sociological research that seek to expose hidden realities through the reconstruction of communal narratives about the past (Kuhn 1995) and has been particularly fruitful for those examining traumatic experience (Felman and Laub 1992), or those with interests in identity politics and new history-making, particularly from a feminist perspective ('memory work was developed with and for the feminist movement', according to Frigga Haug 2000: 2; see also Onyx and Small, 2001). The term '*re*-memorying' indicates the phenomenological approach that encompasses remembering, rereading, and bracketing out of assumptions about reading, but which shifts the focus of attention away from the social and political meanings of shared pasts and group research to the specific functioning of individual reading acts. This is not to say that remembering childhood books or rereading them does not

reveal alternative social histories of reading, as my work on gendered memories of canonical children's literature has demonstrated (Waller 2017). It is also true that the process of re-memorying can sometimes be a highly political act that can turn up challenging, traumatic or revisionary material for an individual or community (it is worth noting that the term 're-memory' originates in Toni Morrison's fictional slave narrative *Beloved* (1988), where it is deployed to explain the tangible re-construction of the past through a conscious return to a conceptual space or place). However, these aspects of the work are not the primary focus in the method I have established here. Nevertheless, where memory is at the heart of research, common questions can be raised about how exactly it functions in relation to reading and how past experience might accurately be retrieved through the act of remembering. I will turn now to some of the implications of this method, specifically its reliance on remembering adults.

Implications – reconstructive memory

The term 're-memorying' signals my interest in *remembering* as an act rather than *memory* as a cognitive faculty or a repository, and the methodological importance of this distinction. Although certain involuntary memories will emerge unbidden from unlikely prompts, most accounts of remembering and rereading deal in material that has been consciously recollected or is recognised as familiar from initial perception when encountered on a subsequent occasion. Remembered items might be autobiographical details about how, when and where a book was read or semantic facts about the book's appearance or content; they may form part of a generic sense of the past ('I used to read under the bed covers') or a more specific personal knowledge ('I read *Swallows and Amazons* on a sailing holiday and liked the character of Titty'). Re-memory work also functions as a method of testing memories and identifying usable images that make sense of reading experiences throughout the lifespan. Remembering, misremembering or forgetting can all be ways of noticing and acknowledging meaningful details about a book, a reading stance, or an affective response in childhood and beyond. An interpretative phenomenological approach allows these details into the critical repertoire, adding a fresh range of insights to existing interpretations and scholarly work. The term re-memory also highlights my understanding of memory acts as inherently creative in nature, as much processes of schemata-building as accurate representations of past experience. Ulrich Neisser explains that '[r]ecall is almost always constructive' (1986: 78), whilst Antonio Damasio notes that it produces not 'an exact reproduction but rather an

interpretation, a newly reconstructed version of the original' (1994: 100. See also Conway 1995, Schacter 2003, Fernyhough 2012 for a range of approaches to this topic).

With these claims in mind, queries might be raised about any empirical study making use of adult memory work. Children's literature critic Perry Nodelman argues that 'the child I remember or imagine still being with me, viewed through inevitable lapses of memory and the filter of later knowledge and experience, is not the child I was. It is ... not, therefore, likely to provide accurate insights into real childhood experiences' (2008: 84). Nodelman's status as a professional reader of children's literature comes into play in creating this problematic, but for him reimagining past experience is epistemologically flawed for all adults, because memory both contains gaps and adds erroneous detail; there is also the problem of nostalgia bringing in affective influences and thus shading the 'reality' of the past. Maria Nikolajeva makes a similar point in relation to literary authors' supposed privileged access to childhood through memory, arguing that the 'so-called childhood memories described by authors, whether idyllic or traumatic, are complete confabulations' (2014: 11).

There is, in fact, some evidence that autobiographical information about the past can be reliably recalled (Brewer 1996). The method of re-memorying aims to uncover 'good data' through phenomenological strategies, encouraging participants to bracket out - as far as possible - their adult assumptions and experiences, as well as any knowledge they have about the book in question outside of the memory of first reading. This form of disciplined introspection is facilitated through the use of specific prompts and interview techniques of probing (see Yow 2015: 162-164), while the untensed theory of time helps formulate a model where childhood is not past (and gone) but merely prior (and retrievable). Moreover, for the phenomenological method I am building here, the veracity of reality is somewhat less important than the lived experience of the individual, even when that reality is a version of the self in the past. Phenomenology recognises that human knowledge of the world comes through conscious, sensory and emotional channels and thus gives credence to personal observations about the past. When Spufford describes his childhood memory of a book's 'soundtrack poking through the fabric of the house's real murmur' (1), the detail is useful not because it relates to externally observable facts or because it is an accurate reproduction of the young Francis's perception at the time of reading, but precisely because it can provide those insights into childhood experience (that Nodelman refutes) through its bracketed focus on the phenomenon.

For children's literature studies, suspicion has often fallen upon adults who dare to make claims for the texts and reading practices of young people because they have mistaken

their own Romantic construction of the child for real children and child readers (Rose 1984). I maintain a questioning stance regarding the transparency of adult knowledge about childhood, but suggest that initial scepticism can be countered by recourse to strategies from the study of autobiographical works and from the memory work of oral history. Stanley Fish has pointed out that '[a]utobiographies cannot lie because anything they say, however mendacious, is the truth about themselves, whether they know it or not' (1999: n.p.), and similarly, remembered accounts are the truth *about themselves*. For oral historians, veracity is also carefully defined, so that according to Lynne Abrams, ultimately what the researcher is interested in is 'whether a respondent can remember events and experiences that are significant to him or her, not whether they have a good memory per se' (2016: 103).

Published memoirs or life stories will not have precisely the same quality as accounts of remembering or rereading produced through empirical re-memory work, but all might be understood in terms of narrative or discourse; that is, the material produced through phenomenological enquiry - whether that is a written autobiography or the transcript of an interview - is open to analysis as a consciously constructed text. Although a study grounded in interpretative phenomenology does not aim to tell a life story for social, political or personal purposes, it will tell a narrative, nevertheless. Where re-memorying differs from purely autobiographical work is in its move to go beyond individual truths.

The Lifelong Reading Act

Re-memory work sits within wider lifespan studies. It recognises the scale on which reading histories are built and understands that childhood reading is a diachronic act, incorporating the presentness of the present moment of reading, the consecutive phases of reading in the time-flow and within biological and cultural ecologies, and recollection of reading in the unified whole of time. Taking phenomenological observation as a starting point, these three aspects provide useful practical prompts for re-memory work, helping researchers and co-researchers to focus on specific types of remembering in their accounts of experiences with childhood books.

Researchers need not be wary of taking a phenomenological attitude towards their subject. Contemporary scholars are trained to theorise, historicise, and contextualise; but it is also reasonable to aim at the *eidos* of a phenomenon through self-reflection or the close observation of perceptions, memories, judgements, thoughts and values provided by others, as long as the methods employed are sound and disciplined. Re-memorying should thus always

attempt bracketing of *a priori* considerations through careful and attentive reconstruction of reading experiences (including affective and bodily response), as well as through structured rereading and reflection by co-researchers of significant books from childhood. Researchers may turn to the new cognitive poetics to describe some of these responses in their analysis of data gathered. They may also be interested in investigating the role of phenomenology in cognitive science; for example in Daniel Dennett's concept of 'heterophenomenology' (1991: 72-9; 2007).

Re-memory work also functions as a method for testing memories. Remembering, misremembering or forgetting can all be ways of noticing and acknowledging meaningful details about a book, a reading stance, or an affective response in childhood and beyond, and provide some starting points for understanding why particular texts are and remain meaningful to readers. An interpretative phenomenological approach allows these details into the critical repertoire, potentially adding a new range of insights to existing interpretations and scholarly work, as well as adding knowledge to the processes of diachronic reading itself. By recognising the initial impulse for certain reading acts in childhood and paying attention to early responses as well as on-going connections, it is possible to break down common notions of the divide between child and adult reading selves. The shared perceptions, sensations and emotions attached to re-memorying accounts can thus offer powerful narratives about the essence of childhood reading from a new and engaged perspective, bringing to light the diachronic nature of this phenomenon and giving voice to those engaged in the lifelong reading act.

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