

system. *Confronting Jim Crow* is an important work of social, intellectual, and educational history that places a spotlight on the unrelenting afterlife of Jim Crow in educational institutions.

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Elizabeth Massa Hoiem

*The Education of Things: Mechanical Literacy in British Children's Literature, 1762–1860*

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University of Massachusetts Press, 2024. 328 pp.

In their influential *Practical Education* (1798), daughter-and-father author-educators Maria and Richard Edgeworth speculated about the existence of an idealised rational toy-shop. Its shelves teeming with anything from carpenter's tools, to chemical equipment, mineralogical cabinets, or even microscopes, such an establishment would bring together a juvenile audience, a suitable selection of appropriate objects for embodied learning in the sciences, arts and crafts, and purchasing adults. Part of a manifesto for reorienting instruction along both empirical and rational grounds, and arising from the Edgeworths' own experiences, this concept was a hopeful anticipation of a world where there would be a more central role for the education of things.

In this combination of childish objects, haptic didactics, and educational aspiration, the rational toy-shop is therefore a fitting embodiment of the efforts to encourage what Elizabeth Massa Hoiem terms “mechanical literacy” in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain. This important new analytic category is a welcome addition to recent frameworks for understanding children's literatures and cultures in this period. Though not an actors' term, its attention to the “mechanical” aligns with contemporary preoccupations, and in particular foregrounds class dynamics and bodily activity, even when conducted through a mediating text. Indeed, both “literacy” and “literature” receive a broad interpretation in this interdisciplinary account, with Hoiem interweaving explorations of childhood objects alongside readings of books throughout *The Education of Things*.

An introduction sketches out the interplay between learning things and learning *through* things, which provides the focus of Hoiem's work, as well as emphasising how she has sought to recover the “forgotten politics of experiential and haptic” education (4). Chapter 1 literalises—as did many of her contemporary authors—the metaphor of “grasping” knowledge, providing a thoughtful account of the “interlocutor gesture” (39 and elsewhere) and embodied processes of child development as identified through interactions with books, toys, and educators. The second chapter refreshes our understandings of some of the most well-known introductory mechanical and natural philosophical texts including *The Newtonian System of Philosophy* and *Philosophy in Sport Made Science in Earnest*, by emphasising class dynamics and the

multifaceted relationship and loaded differentiations between the practical and the rational in these works. “Production stories” are critiqued in the third chapter, which narrates how the numerous tales of everyday things from around the world were related to childish audiences, as they were enculturated into understanding the importance of global trade, interconnection, and manufactures. The next chapter switches format slightly to become a more traditional literary analysis of Maria Edgeworth’s fiction and childly autonomy and automata, making a convincing argument for how her characters’ engagement with the material world demonstrates how acquiring mechanical literacy fosters personal agency and the capacity for rational thought. The final full chapter analyses the languages of class politics in “radical grammars” in relation to models of cooperative ownership, as well as a redefinition of embodied education rooted in working class emancipation. A concluding case study looks at critiques of this kind of sensory instruction, as well as reflecting more generally on the relationships between work and play, then and now.

A noteworthy contribution of *Education of Things* is the substantial bibliographic scholarship by which it is underpinned. Hoiem has marshalled a large quantity of primary material to support her arguments, which she references and engages with in detail; and the book includes many images that illustrate her text and enable her reader to foreground these sources. Connecting Hoiem’s analyses more closely with recent histories of childhood and education, which provide ways of bringing in young people’s own perspectives and voices, would provide an opportunity to say more about how historical children *themselves* interacted with these texts to resist (or embrace) these educational opportunities, beyond the fictional presentation of exemplary youths—perhaps drawing on child-authored manuscripts, or in relation to playful opportunities unconnected to a purchased book or toy. Alongside the emphasis on published books, it would also be interesting to consider how the nascent juvenile periodical press factors into the story told here, as well as how training in the foundational disciplines of mechanical literacy relates to the development of more formal educational systems later in the century.

Another key insight from Hoiem’s work is the politics and “privilege” (7 and elsewhere) of play. She reveals the fraught implications for some groups of recasting industrial processes of work as playful—a reliance on practical means to intellectual education being potentially challenging for groups who had been deemed “mechanical” by default, “or perceived as lacking rational thought because of their class, race, nationality, gender, [disability] or age” (188). The relationship between sensory and empirical experiences and thoughtful reflection or cognition was therefore contingent. Developments of Hoiem’s category of mechanical literacy might fruitfully be extended in connection with the hardening definition of “childhood” across the nineteenth century, as well as with comparative global narratives of imperial development which were analogised to child growth and development, as a move from sensory to cerebral knowledge.

*The Education of Things* will be read with interest across a range of scholarly disciplines. It expounds a useful new category for historians of education, class, and literacy; it demonstrates to historians of science the insights gleaned from close

readings of fictional works as well as the importance of bringing scientific texts into closer comparison and conversation with works on grammar or on making; to librarians and archivists the significance of maintaining access to the full and diverse range of primary sources and connecting books with other toys and artefacts; and to children's literature scholars the need to broaden out from canonical texts and approaches towards a wider understanding of genre and literary style which encompasses elementary instructional works. *The Education of Things* is therefore a most welcome addition to the shelves of the academic bookshop, and—if only in an idealised world—to the rational toy-shop as well.

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Bernard M. Levinson and Robert P. Ericksen, eds.

*The Betrayal of the Humanities: The University during the Third Reich*

Indiana University Press, 2022. 624 pp.

The coming to power of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers' Party in late January 1933 not only ended the life of the largely discredited Weimar Republic, but also gave the Nazis the opportunity to bring pressures to bear on German academic life in order to achieve ideological and political conformity, and, more tragically, to implement their lethal racial principles. Universities, like the whole German society, were quickly confronted by the necessity of making a truly existential decision—whether or not to lend their support and embrace the Nazi worldview. Many of their administrators and faculty either chose to remain passive or actively colluded with the Nazi regime. Such choices drastically deprived Germany's institutions of higher learning of Jews in their student bodies and on their faculties, undermined their autonomy, and distorted normal faculty appointment procedures. Furthermore, by aligning themselves with the agenda of the state and by legitimating its actions, scholars inevitably undermined the integrity of multiple disciplines and betrayed the humanistic ideals of the modern university—free inquiry, freedom of expression, critical thought, objectivity, and ethical research. *The Betrayal of the Humanities* is an edited collection of fifteen well-written essays, which describes the nature and extent of the impact of Nazi rule on the humanities in Germany.

This massive tome is divided into three parts of unequal lengths. Part I—“Nazi Germany and the Historical Humanities”—illustrates the betrayal of humanistic values under the Nazis with some telling examples. Alan E. Steinweis reminds readers that, given the conservative nationalist orientation of many influential professors in virtually all the disciplines, open-mindedness, tolerance, and democratic values did not characterize the academic study of the humanities in pre-1933 Germany. He then follows with an analysis of how history and folklore developed during the Nazi era and concludes with a brief outline of the controversial legacies of Martin