' "IT'S PRETEND!" SAID JOSIE SMITH' *OR* 'IT IS CHILDREN WHO GIVE US LIFE'

The Discourse of the Play of Adulthood in Fantasy Fiction for Children

> 'It's pretend!' said Josie Smith. Eileen wasn't so good at pretending and you always had to tell her what to say.
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> Magdalen Nabb: *Josie Smith at the Market* (p.21)

> 'I am shut away in a box. Away from children, and it is children who give us life,' said the wax doll.
>
> Rumer Godden: *The Dolls' House* (p.60)

Let me just for once venture upon a generalisation about children, though before I do so I should note that there is nothing more lethal in this world than a generalisation about children; but with that caveat, my generalisation is this: that what children most want in the world is to grow up. And to that end, whenever they have the opportunity, they will play at being grown up. For an example one needs to go no further than the episode in *Josie Smith at the Market* that I have quoted from, above. Those of you who have read my chapter on naughty children[1] will have already come across my analysis of that episode, in which the children dress up in Eileen's mother's clothes, put on her jewellery, apply her lipstick, and have a tea party; and indeed pretend to be their mums: 'I know, let's have a talk like our mums do.'(p.21); with, in that particular case, disastrous results, but that is by the by. And for my purposes here I just want to emphasise that the children are *playing* at being grown up.

With that as a starting point what I propose to discuss in this chapter is what I like to think of as the 'status' of the characters in fantasy fiction for children, specifically that in which non-human characters masquerade as human characters, and in many cases as adult human characters to boot. The insight that informs my discussion, for insight I believe it to be, arose when I was reading my husband, Garth Green, a bit of A.A Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, a book that he had never encountered as a child, and he commented that the characters sounded like adults[2]. It set me thinking. When I first started out on this, my journey into writing about children's literature in the 1970's, the received wisdom was that you should treat those assorted railway engines, rabbits, dolls, toys, etc. that turn up in fantasy fiction, as if they were children. In some inchoate way I didn't feel happy with this, but Green's comment led me to ask what, if they are children, are they doing?, and it struck me that the first thing that they are doing is pretending to be adults. They are masquerading as adults. This may look a bit convoluted, and in order to explicate it I need a spot of theory.

I have kept as clear of theory as possible in this book so far, but here I do need a bit of theory in order to make my point. I will keep it as brief as possible. Drawing first of all on the work of Susanne Langer, I would suggest that narrative fiction presents us with a virtual world, and when we open a book we are invited into that virtual world in order to engage with the characters, with

[1] Sarland *Storming the Castle of the Enemy: Discourses of the Carnivalesque in Children's Literature* (2015)
[2] Garth Green, in private conversation, though doubtless by now others must surely have had the same insight.

their actions, and with the emotions that their behaviour engenders. And from a reader's point of view that virtual world is a 'third area', to use James Britton's term, which is an area of play which allows us to suspend the rules, the constraints, the behaviours of the everyday world and leaves us free to let our imaginations loose, to try things out, to speculate, to dream, to explore the potentialities of life rather than its realities. Piaget refers to such play as symbolic play[3]; it is play which involves the use of artefacts to represent the realities of the world around us. Toys, where similarity is the whole point of the design, most obviously fulfil this function: dolls represent real people, model cars represent a real cars; but in the absence of such toys, such is the reach of a child's imagination, two bits of stick can represent a sword, a cracked cup can represent a golden goblet[4] etc. And of course cuddly toys, teddy bears and such like, can be anthropomorphised and given life as real people too.

When it comes to reading narrative fiction, we are clearly in the same neck of the woods. We have only words, but these words, with their associated meanings, are put together in such a way as to create a simulacrum of the real, and characters and their doings emerge from the text just as if they were real people. Having got to this point one might think that all is left for the reader to do is just to passively absorb the story, but in fact, it is argued, reading is a much more active process than that. When a reader meets a text he or she, generally subconsciously, brings their experience of the world to bear upon it, they bring to bear their knowledge of how the world works, they bring to bear their knowledge of how the people in it behave, and they bring to bear their feelings about and judgements of that behaviour. The aesthetic theorist, Wolfgang Iser, suggests that at the technical level there are 'gaps' in the text that allow, or even encourage readers to do just that, and in the process actually increase their involvement with the characters and their doings, and I would add that the fact that that that process is more often than not subconscious, actually increases their involvement. *Josie Smith*, offers us nice examples. In the aforementioned episode where the children try on Eileen's mother's clothes, we find that the text is riddled with gaps, gaps which the reader has to fill in his or her own way. Does the reader, for instance, recognise that Eileen is being naughty? The word never appears in the text. If the reader does recognise that Eileen is being naughty does the reader think that Eileen knows that she is being naughty? Does the reader decide that Eileen is deliberately asking her dozing dad if she can dress up in her mother's clothes in the full knowledge that he is dozing too deeply to actually register what she is asking? Does the reader fear that the two children will get into trouble? Does the reader look forward to the drama of a denouement in which the children do get into trouble? Does the reader read enough into the scenario to understand why it is that it is not the children that get into trouble but their dozing father who was supposed to be keeping an eye on them? None of these questions are directly answered in the text and different readers will come to different conclusions; but they will come to such conclusions by bringing their own life experiences to bear upon the text, finding entry into the situation the text describes through the gaps of the unspoken or the unwritten. And of course to state that an adult reader has a much wider experience of the world than do children is only to state the obvious, but that also means

[3] In his book *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* Piaget identifies three forms of play. There is practice play, where we try things out to see how they work, which, as we grow up, turns into scientific investigation etc. There are games with rules, which in our adult lives are manifested most obviously in sport, but more generally in activities such as for instance the appropriate behaviour in a law court, or in parliament, or indeed in classrooms; and there is symbolic play.

[4] *Elidor* passim

that adults will get very different things from, and will read very different meanings into, the text than will children.

One odd question remains, a small but quite illuminating one I think. If the reader has entered the text in the manner described above, then *where* is he or she. The traditional assumption is that the reader in some way 'identifies' with the characters, and the question that is generally asked is, do I 'identify' with, for instance, Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet or with Charles Dickens' David Copperfield[5], the implication being that the reader in some sort of way *becomes* the character. The psychologist D. W. Harding offers us a different model, suggesting that the reader enters the text in the role of a spectator, an onlooker, a follower[6] who becomes absorbed to a greater or lesser extent in the story, but at the same time evaluates what is going on 'whether (the reader's) attitude is one of faint liking or disliking, hardly above indifference, or strong, perhaps intensely emotional, and perhaps differentiated into pity, horror, contempt, respect, amusement, or any other of the shades and kinds of evaluation' (p.59)

To sum up, the argument is that narrative fiction offers readers virtual worlds within which they are invited to play, thus becoming involved with the characters and their behaviours in the situations that they find themselves in, empathising, evaluating, responding emotionally to them; and the fact that readers subconsciously use their experience of the world to actively enter the text through the gaps of the unspoken or unwritten, increases their involvement with the story. With this as a conceptual framework, I can reformulate my thesis, and suggest that fantasy fiction for children offers children a very specific extra gap in the text, a gap that allows the *playing* child, specifically the child that plays at being other people, and grown up people at that, to insert themselves into the text, and to recognise the playing child within the non-human fictional characters, a playing child playing at being people, and where those other people are adults, as they generally are, they offer the child reader, in the deepest sense of the word, the play of adulthood.

And lest you should think that such theorising is overdone, A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* offers us what I can only describe as an extraordinary account of the whole process. For those of you who don't know the book, it contains a series of adventures of a group of animals, in reality the stuffed toys of the English middle class nursery. The central character, Pooh, is a teddy bear, and the other characters are simply named after the animals they represent – Piglet, Rabbit, Owl, etc. There is, however, a framing device to the book in which we gather that the stories of these adventures are being told to Christopher Robin, the child to whom the stuffed toys belong. We meet both him and Pooh, at this point called Edward Bear, in the very first couple of sentences.

> Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for the moment and think of it. (p.1.)

[5] *Pride and Prejudice* and *David Copperfield* respectively, just in case you aren't with me.
[6] The terms onlooker and follower where terms used by 12 yr. olds I interviewed when I was researching these questions for a master's degree. Another boy told me 'you feel that you're behind them, watching as they do it.'

Two things are established here: 1, that Pooh is Christopher Robin's creature; but 2, that he is already sentient, though as yet he doesn't have the autonomy needed to determine his own actions. Next we find Christopher Robin and Pooh sat down in front of the fire, with Christopher Robin demanding a story from the author[7], but appointing Pooh as the recipient of the story, though of course, as Pooh gets to hear the story Christopher Robin does too – they become co-recipients:

> "What about a story?" said Christopher Robin.
> "*What* about a story?"
> "Could you very sweetly tell Winnie the Pooh one?"
> "I suppose I could," I said. "What sort of stories does he like?"
> "About himself. Because he's *that* sort of Bear."(p.2)

And as co-recipient Pooh is thus constituted as another child, sitting down on the hearth rug next to Christopher Robin; but he has also been appointed as Christopher Robin's proxy, as his alter ego. And Pooh's status as a child begins to change as soon as the author starts telling the story,

> Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday, Winnie-the-Pooh lived in a forest all by himself under the name of Sanders.(p.3)

Shepard's accompanying illustration – and Shepard's illustrations are always an integral part of the text – shows Pooh, now an independent character in his own right, sitting in front of his own front door with a proprietorial air. He has entered the story as a child, but already he is beginning to assume the mantle of adulthood. In terms of my theoretical model, above, one might argue that having Christopher Robin's alter ego enter the story gives Christopher Robin as reader an entry into the story, and that is all we need.[8] But the book also makes that entry totally explicit by having Christopher Robin himself appear in the stories too, on some occasions a co-participant in the stories, on others an observer commenting on the action. In the first chapter this double role is emphasised by the fact that he is referred to in the second person as 'you'. In the chapter Pooh has found a bees' nest up a tree which he wants to raid in order to get the honey contained therein. He's tried climbing the tree but has fallen down into a gorse-bush. He decides he needs help.

> And the first person he thought of was Christopher Robin.
> (*"Was that me? Said Christopher Robin in an awed voice, hardly daring to believe it.*
> *"That was you."*) (pp 7/8)

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[7] More than with almost any other book, the line between narrator and implied author, never mind actual author, is extremely permeable, and the temptation to call the implied author 'Milne' is considerable. However since, as elsewhere in this book, I wish only to talk of texts, not authors, 'implied author' would the correct term, but it is such a pedantic and tedious phrase that I am settling for the simple 'author', which I shall use to include both the implied author and the third person anonymous narrator who replaces him for much of the book.

[8] I always skipped this introductory bit, it was boring. I didn't need to be told how to get into a text, I already knew, and thus I knew that the 'real' story began when we got to 'Once upon a time'.

At this point Christopher Robin is still the reader, but in the very next paragraph he has become a character within the story, though still referred to as 'you' and still in an evaluator role, raising questions and making judgements. Pooh has asked him for a balloon: ' "What do you want a balloon for?" *you* said.' (p.10, my emphasis): and a bit later, when Pooh asks for an umbrella, Christopher Robin, still as 'you' offers an evaluation: '.. *you* laughed to yourself, "Silly old bear!" (p.13, my emphasis). But by the time we get to Ch. II Christopher Robin is now a fully-fledged independent character in the stories, now referred to in the third person as 'he', though still commenting on Pooh's status '..he said "Silly old Bear," in such a loving voice that everybody felt quite hopeful again.' (p.27). And in Ch. III he's the classic silent observer, up a tree watching Pooh and Piglet tramping round in circles in the snow, leaving foot prints as they go, but under the impression that they are tracking an accumulating number of Woozles. Only at the end does Christopher Robin reveal himself , explaining to them that they have been tracking their own footprints. We have, then, a three stage process, with Christopher Robin cast first in the role of recipient of the story, then in the dual role of character within the story, yet still retaining elements of his earlier role as recipient, but then finally as a fully-fledged character in his own right, who still, none the less, retains some of the evaluative role of the onlooker. A finer account of the insertion of a reader into a text and of his or her role when he or she gets there you couldn't hope to find.

As for Pooh's own status, the following exchange illustrates its complexity – we are now in the fourth chapter where Eeyore, introduced to us as 'the Old Grey Donkey', has lost his tail and Pooh goes to see if Owl can help find it.

> Owl lived at The Chestnuts, an old world residence of great charm . . . . "Hallo Pooh," he said. "How's things?"
> "Terrible and sad," said Pooh, "because Eeyore, who is a friend of mine, has lost his tail. And he's Moping about it. So could you very kindly tell me how to find it for him?"
> "Well" said Owl, "the customary procedure in such cases is as follows."
> "What does Crustimoney Proceedcake mean?" said Pooh "for I am a Bear of Very Little Brain, and long words Bother me."
> (p.47/48),

Owl, with his 'old world residence of great charm' and his pompous and patronising use of language, is clearly an adult, a status further established by the fact that Pooh goes to him for help. But Pooh himself oscillates, at one point having command of adult language, using words like 'moping' and adult circumlocutions like 'could you very kindly tell me', but in the next sentence demonstrating the more limited linguistic knowledge of the child, translating 'customary procedure' as 'crustimoney proseedcake' in order to try to make sense of it. And Owl himself is not fully adult either, still having only a young child's grasp of reading and writing, spelling his own name as 'WOL' – a joke I never got as a child reader of course. For a more fully-fledged adult we have to turn to Rabbit. We meet him first of all in the second chapter when Pooh goes to visit him, and Shepard's illustration shows him thoroughly domesticated, on his hind legs in a kitchen with a kitchen table and a dresser with cups hanging from hooks and a can of condensed milk and a jar of honey stacked on the shelves. And when

Pooh gets stuck trying to get out again – he has consumed all the condensed milk and honey – Rabbit finds a domestic use for his legs:

> "I say, old fellow, you're taking up a good deal of room in my house – *do* you mind if I use you back legs as a towel horse?"
>
> (p.28)

But perhaps the most clearly adult figure in the whole book is Kanga, the only female in this otherwise all male world, who is immediately rendered as an adult since she has a baby of her own, Baby Roo, and who comes in fully fledged parental role:

> Baby Roo was practicing very small jumps in the sand, and falling down mouse-holes and climbing out of them, and Kanga was fidgeting about and saying, "Just one more jump dear, and then we must go home."

Just to clinch the argument, let me turn, finally, to Piglet, whom we find in Ch. IX entirely surrounded by water.

> It rained and it rained and it rained. Piglet told himself that never in his life, and *he* was goodness knows *how* old – three, was it, or four? – never had he seen so much rain. (p.127)

Three or four he may be, but earlier in the book (p.32) we are told that 'Piglet lived in a very grand house in the middle of a beech tree' and in Ch. V we find him and Pooh chatting away using all the stock phrases of adult conversation.

> .. they began to talk in a friendly way about this and that, and Piglet said, "If you see what I mean, Pooh", and Pooh said "It's just what I think myself, Piglet," and Piglet said, "But, on the other hand, Pooh, we must remember," and Pooh said "Quite true, Piglet, although I had forgotten it for the moment." (p.55)

It should be clear by now that, with the exception of Baby Roo who remains very firmly a child, the characterisation in the book is to say the least ambiguous. and indeed that very ambiguity serves to reveal the child within the adult. Pooh doesn't understand Owl's circumlocutions, Piglet confesses to being, at the most, four years old, Owl only has a young child's grasp of the written language. Yet all three have their own homes, all three have, upon occasion, a firm grasp of the uses and assumptions of adult language, all three are effectively masquerading as adults. We see even less of the child in the characters of Rabbit and Kanga, or indeed of Eeyore, defined as old and grey from our very first encounter with him, but they are clearly constituted in the same way and have exactly the same status as the other three. The trick, of course, is that, unlike Josie Smith, these are not children playing at being adults, they are anthropomorphised stuffed animals playing at being adults, and in the process inviting the child reader, in this case actually embodied in the form of Christopher Robin, to enter the text and play alongside them while at the same time retaining his or her reader status, observing, empathising, evaluating, etc.

Let me move on, briefly, to the next book in this particular strand of animal stories, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. Here we have no equivalent of Christopher Robin, no explicit reader in the text, and the characters may be animals but basically they are people, and adults at that. Here's the very first line:

> The Mole had been working very hard all morning, spring-cleaning his little home.(p.1)

…but then he feels the call of spring and flings his brooms and dusters and brushes and pails of whitewash aside.

> Something up above was calling him imperiously, and he made for the steep little tunnel which answered in his case to the gravelled carriage-drive owned by animals whose residences are nearer to the sun and air.(p,2)

We are in the world of anthropomorphised animals from the get go, animals who have homes, some grand, some not so grand, and some of whom even have jobs to do: here for example is the very first other animal he meets, a rabbit guarding a gap in the hedge demanding a toll from the Mole.

> "Hold up!" said an elderly rabbit at the gap. "Sixpence for the privilege of passing by the private road."

It is not long before Mole gets to the river where he is to meet the Water Rat, Ratty; the two animals have an instant rapport, and Ratty then tells him about the other denizens of the Riverbank, and incidentally of the Wild Wood, three of whom we are to catch a glimpse of in this first chapter – Otter, Toad, and Badger – all of whom are to have a role in the succeeding chapters. In the illustrations, E. H. Shepard again[9], all the animals are dressed in human clothes, Mole in a 'black velvet smoking suit' identified as such by Rat (p.11); Rat himself in a shirt with a cravat, trousers, shoes; Toad in a blazer, tie, and boater; Badger, when we meet him in a later chapter, answering the door in a dressing gown. And of course it is Toad who owns one of those aforementioned residences with a gravelled carriage-drive, Toad Hall. As with *Winnie-the-Pooh* we are in an all-male world and, so far as our main characters are concerned, it's the all-male world of the gentleman's club in a rural setting, much given to calling each other old fellow,

> 'Now then, old fellow! Trot up and down the towing-path as hard as you can, till you're warm and dry again,'(p.23)[10]

– this after Mole has fallen in. It is indeed the all-male world of the leisured classes who maybe did something in the city a couple of days a week [11], but who otherwise enjoyed total freedom to

[9] There is also an edition with sumptuous colour plates by Arthur Rackham which is well worth getting a look at if you ever have the chance.
[10] And see also the conversation between Rabbit and Pooh quoted above.

do anything they wanted, an idyllic existence. The Wild Wooders – the stoats, the weasels and the ferrets – are a different matter, representing, one might argue, the revolutionary proletariat as they rise up and take over Toad Hall while Toad is in prison (for various misdemeanours: stealing a motor car, dangerous driving, and cheeking the police, the latter being by far the most serious offence!)[12]. Here are the Wild Wooders mounting their attack:

> One dark night … a band of weasels, armed to the teeth, crept silently up the carriage drive to the front entrance. Simultaneously a body of desperate ferrets, advancing through the kitchen garden, possessed themselves of the back-yard and offices; while a company of skirmishing stoats who stuck at nothing occupied the conservatory and the billiard room.. (p.264)

At the adult level insurrection and class war is serious enough stuff in all conscience, though here the tone is humorous, and at one level one could argue that what is being described is nothing more nor less than a bunch of kids playing war games. And in one sense playing at being adults is what all the characters temselves are doing, they are after all, all animals, but they are behaving like people, assuming the mantle of the human, and of the adult human at that, and the child reader (boys more than girls?) is invited to come along and join in the game.

By way of contrast I would like to look next at Enid Blyton's Noddy, a character who has his feet much more firmly on the ground. The first book in the series, *Noddy Goes to Toyland*[13], tells of Noddy's arrival in Toyland as a little naked wooden doll, carved out of a cherry tree branch[14], and with his head on a spring which causes it to nod all the time, hence his name, who has run away from his maker, Old Man Carver, a birth narrative if ever there was one. He's discovered lying in the forest by Big Ears, who proceeds to buy some clothes for him and a box of toy bricks to build a house with, and with the help of neighbour Mr. Tubby the teddy bear, they house him in his 'House-for-One'. Noddy can pay Big Ears back when he has the money. The second book, *Hurrah for Little Noddy*, which I want to look at in more detail, starts on the very next day, as the milkman calls on Mr Tubby and asks about his new neighbour. Mr Tubby suggests he should call on Noddy.

> '. . you'd better call at the house next door – the little new one, called House-for-One. Mr. Noddy lives there.' (p.7)

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[11] In some later editions of the book A.A. Milne informs us in an introduction that 'In his spare time (Grahame) was secretary of the Bank of England.'

[12] And indeed Jan Needle takes just such a view in his reworking of the tale from the perspective of the Wild Wooders themselves, *Wild Wood*.

[13] When I started to write this chapter I had only a 1986 Macdonald Purnell edition. Luckily I was later able to get hold of an original edition and was staggered by the differences. It's not just the Golliwogs who have disappeared, other characters have gone too (gollywogs have disappeared from later editions and reprints of because of what was seen as the inherent racism of their portrayal). It's been substantially cut, whole episodes have disappeared, and hardly a single sentence of the original has remained unchanged, and all for no discernible purpose as far as I can see.

[14] Those of you who know *Pinocchio* may be struck by the similarity of the story of *his* origin, carved out of a piece of wood that carpenter Master Cherry was intending to turn into a chair leg. (David Rudd picks up on the similarities between the two stories in his book on Blyton.)

And note that the teddy bear is Mr. Tubby not just plain Tubby, and for all that Noddy still looks like a small boy in the Beek illustrations, he is also already Mr. Noddy, the pre-nominal in both cases indicating adult status. The milkman gives Noddy a bottle of milk, for which he wants paying, and Noddy is immediately confronted with the realities of economic life:

> He gave Noddy a bottle of milk. "One penny, please," he said.
> "Oh goodness – I forgot. I haven't any money," said Noddy, in dismay. (p.10)

Never mind says the milkman, who has been very taken by Noddy's sprung head and has tapped it smartly to set it nodding, and he offers to let him have free milk if he can be allowed to do that again every morning. Noddy's next problem is that he has no furniture.

> Dear, dear – he really must get a job and earn some money! Then he could buy a jug for his milk, a bed to sleep in at night, a carpet for the floor – and lots of other things too.(p.11)

So off he goes looking for work, which he finds at Toyland's equivalent of the big house down the road, which comes complete with a domestic staff and a tradesman's entrance around the back. Can he help with the spring-cleaning?

> "Perhaps the mistress will say you can help."
> The mistress was a very beautiful doll with curly golden hair and bright blue eyes. She looked at Noddy and he bowed, his head nodding all the time.
> "The sweep hasn't come," she said. "I suppose you don't know how to sweep chimneys, do you?"(p.14)

Noddy next must scrub the kitchen floor, and is then given some rubbish to burn, including some broken furniture which he decides he can repair and use himself, and a patched carpet which he can also put to good use; and when he explains to the mistress of the house why he wants them, she gives him more stuff and he ends up with some old cutlery, a cracked wash basin, etc; and he takes them all back to his house and tells Mr Tubby 'I'm the happiest fellow in the world.'(p.18) The class system is most decidedly alive and well in Toyland, and, unlike Ratty and Mole and Badger and Mr. Toad, Noddy is decidedly at the bottom end, a member the thrifty, industrious, but suitably subservient working classes, a.k.a the deserving poor, going cap in hand to his betters in the hope of getting a job, and utilising their cast offs: as nice an account of the political and economic realities of the British class system you couldn't hope to find. With the money that he has earned he can now put some food on the table, and start to think about repaying Big Ears what he owes him for his clothes and his house, borrowed from him in the previous book. With his next job, cleaning cars at the local garage run by the gollywog, Mr Golly, the genre of the book changes and moves from what you might call the genre of social realism to that of crime thriller. Noddy, returning to the garage one evening to retrieve his hat, which he has forgotten, finds goblins stealing the cars. He gives chase in another car but crashes. Big Ears rescues him and encourages him to go and spy out the land, which he does, finding the cars hidden in a rabbit hole. Returning to Toy Village, Noddy is accused by Mr. Golly of being part

of the gang that stole them – Mr. Golly had found his hat in the garage, damning proof – and he is thrown into prison without even being allowed to tell his side of the story. Of course Big Ears turns up, puts it all right, Mr. Golly apologises, and gives Noddy a little car of his own as a reward for his bravery. Noddy immediately realises the economic potential of his new acquisition. ' "I'll be a taxi driver!" said Noddy.'(p.60). We have come full circle thematically: Noddy is now self-employed and has achieved financial independence.

Hurrah for Little Noddy may be a story written for and read by young children, Noddy may be a little wooden toy and portrayed by Beek as a little boy, but in the course of the story Noddy has been incorporated into two decidedly adult discourses. The first discourse is an economic discourse predicated upon the necessity to feed, clothe, and house himself, capitalising in the first instance on one of his own bodily attributes, his nodding head, in order to pay for his milk[15], then of hiring himself out as a labourer and odd job man, and at the end of the story finally achieving independent financial status by becoming his own boss. The second discourse is the discourse of justice and the rule of law, or rather in this case, injustice and the failure of the rule of law, as, despite the fact that he has been behaving as a good citizen should, fighting crime and defending property, Noddy is falsely accused and wrongfully imprisoned without trial, and only the search for truth conducted on his behalf by Big Ears, a campaigning lawyer ever there was one, will serve to release him. Of course to suggest that the quest for justice is solely an adult discourse is not to suggest that children themselves don't have a keen sense of justice because they do, but in this case the context is decidedly an adult one.

Let me turn finally to Rumer Godden's *The Dolls House*. Like *Winnie-the-Pooh*, though in other respects it could not be more different, it explores the symbiotic relationship between the children, plural in this case, and the non-human fictional characters – in this case they are dolls – with whom they play; and we discover the dolls' dual nature as both dolls and people in the very opening sentences of the book:

> This is a novel written about dolls in a dolls' house. The chief person in it is Tottie Plantaganet, a small Dutch doll. (p.1)

So already, as well as being a small Dutch doll, she is also a person, and within a sentence or two we will discover that she is a sentient person at that. Currently she lives in the nursery of two children called Emily and Charlotte but she had originally belonged to the girls' Great-Great-Aunt and, for all that she had been cheap at the time – a 'farthing doll', she is clearly very long lived. This is attributed to the fact that, like her predecessor, Pinocchio, and her near exact contemporary, Noddy, she is made of wood.

> Tottie was made of wood and it was good wood. She liked to think sometimes of the tree of whose wood he was made . . . "A little, a very little of that tree is in me," said Tottie.(p.2)

[15] Put like that it doesn't bear thinking about! And it's not as if this is the only time that Noddy pays for his milk in this way, he does so in at least two further books to my knowledge, *Noddy Has an Adventure* and *Noddy at the Seaside*.

She can think, she can reflect for herself, she can talk, but at the same time she is still a doll, and as such, except indirectly as we shall see later, she cannot determine what is going to happen to her, that is down to Emily and Charlotte.

> Dolls cannot choose; they can only be chosen; they cannot "do"; they can only be done by . . (p.3)

Emily and Charlotte give her a father, Mr. Plantaganet, who previously had been left to moulder in a toy cupboard and is very nervous, fearful that he might end up back there, to the extent that Tottie herself has to assume the parental role. 'Really you might have thought that Tottie was the father and he was the child; but there are real fathers like that.'(p.5) The girls also give her a mother, Mrs. Plantaganet, known as known as Birdie, who had come out of a cracker, who is made of celluloid and who is described (p.5) as 'not quite right in the head'. In addition there is Apple, a little velvet doll, much given to getting into mischief; and a dog, Darner, so called because he has a backbone made from a darning needle. Like Tottie, the other three 'human' dolls can think for themselves, can talk, can communicate with each other, and Darner, true to his nature, can bark at signs of danger, going 'Prr-ickkk!' when he does so. And since Emily and Charlotte are 'right minded' and play with them happily, they are a happy family:

> . . if you have ever played at Fathers and Mothers, and of course you have played at Fathers and Mothers, you will remember what a good feeling it is; that was exactly the feeling between Tottie and Mr. and Mrs. Plantaganet – Birdie – and little brother, Apple and Darner the dog.
>
> On the whole they were very happy because, on the whole, Emily and Charlotte were right-minded children; it is very important to dolls that children should be right minded. (p.3)

The problem is that they need a dolls' house to live in, currently they live in a couple of shoe boxes. But dolls' houses are expensive. The dolls discuss their present plight and, interchangeably, so do Emily and Charlotte. We slip seamlessly between the two perspectives:

> At the moment the Plantaganets were as uncomfortable as anyone in London; they had to live crowded together in two shoe boxes that were cramped and cold and could not shut; when they hung their washing out to dry, even the smallest pattern duster, it made the cardboard sodden and damp. "You can't play with them properly," wailed Charlotte.
>
> "It doesn't feel like home," said Mr. Plantaganet. "Though of course it is ever so much nicer than the toy cupboard," he added hastily. "But I am too heavy for it, and so is Apple. It doesn't feel safe."(p.10)

Eventually a dolls' house does arrive, and it is the very one that that had belonged to the children's Great-Great-Aunt, and that Tottie had lived in all those years ago. Tottie had already described it to the other dolls, telling them how wonderfully furnished it was, how beautiful it

was, but it had been neglected over the years and by the time Emily and Charlotte inherited it, it was in a parlous state. The dolls are very disappointed. They must wish, and hope that by wishing they can get the girls to do what they want.

> "Oh dear! Oh dear!" said Mr. Plantaganet.
> "Stop saying 'Oh dear!' " said Tottie sharply. .
> "But what shall we do? What can we do?"
> "We can wish," said Tottie still sharply because, truth to tell, she was feeling worried and anxious herself. Could the children, would the children, be able to put it in order? That was the question in Tottie's mind.
> "It's dusty. It's dirty. It's horrible!" cried little Apple. . .
> "Wish! Wish! Wish!" said Tottie, and every knot and grain of her seemed to harden. She came from a tree.
> "What shall we do? What can we?" said Mr. Plantaganet.
> "Don't bleat. Wish," said Tottie hardly, and her hard voice made the word seem so hard and firm that even Mr. Plantaganet took heart and they all began to wish. "Wish that Emily and Charlotte can put our house in order and make it good again. Go on. All of you. Wish. Wish. Wish," said Tottie. (p.29)

And they had no sooner done wishing than Emily and Charlotte do clean up the dolls' house and start refurbishing it. The dolls may not be able to "do", but they can get the children to do what they want them to do by wishing. They wish for curtains, they wish for furniture, they wish for a cot for Apple, they wish for a feather bed for Birdie, all of which duly turn up, and there is even a lamp with a real candle in it that the children can light for real. And later in the story, when Tottie hears Emily and Charlotte talking about Christmas, she gets the idea that Mr. Plantaganet would love to have a post office:

> "I wish they would think about getting him a toy post office," thought Tottie. "Then he could go to business; if he went to business every day he would be very happy. I wish and wish they would get him a toy post office." (pp 79,80)

And lo and behold come Christmas day one arrives. There is, however, one further doll in the story whom I have not discussed so far, and she is Marchpane. She had shared the dolls' house with Tottie when it still belonged to Great-Great-Aunt Laura, and it is clear that Tottie had not liked her. When the other dolls ask her what she was like, Tottie has a one word answer: "She was valuable."(p.17) She tells them that she was made of china and kid leather, that she had eyes that could open and shut, she had real hair that you could plait, and wore a beautiful wedding dress with tiny buttons and lace edgings that you could take on and off. She was clearly a superior doll. But when the dolls' house arrived in the children's nursery Marchpane was not in it, she had been sent to the cleaners. We discover what sort of person she is when we are informed that the attention goes to her head.

> "I am beautiful little creature, really I am," thought Marchpane. "I must be worth a fabulous amount of money."(p.26)

Finally she arrives in the nursery. Emily is immediately taken with her and decides that the doll's house is hers, not the Plantaganets'. Charlotte is not so keen:

> "She goes with the dolls' house you see."
> "Does she?" asked Charlotte doubtfully. She looked at Marchpane and then at the Plantaganets so happily settled in the dolls' house. Emily had no eyes for anyone but Marchpane. (p.91)

Marchpane herself has no qualms. All those years ago the house was hers, so now, so far as she is concerned, it still is. So when she meets Mr. Plantaganet in the sitting room, she tells him he should not be sitting there, he should only stand in the hall or sit in the kitchen: is he not the butler?

> "I don't know what a butler is," said Mr. Plantaganet. "But I do know I am not one. I am a postmaster, and, besides, I am master of this house . . . and Birdie is the mistress.
> "That she certainly is not," said Marchpane.
> "Oh yes, she is," said Mr. Plantaganet positively.
> "She isn't. I am," said Marchpane. (p.95)

And she decides that she should have the main bedroom, the one currently occupied by Mr. Plantaganet and Birdie.

> "I do wish Emily and Charlotte, or whatever their names are, would come and put me in my own room."(p.67)

Her wish communicates itself to Emily,

> "Charlotte," said Emily, "we must take Birdie and Mr. Plantaganet out of the pink bedroom. We need it for Marchpane.
> (p.102)

Things go from bad to worse. Emily decides the Plantaganets should become Marchpane's servants, should sleep in the attic and be otherwise restricted to the kitchen. Tottie and her father wish as hard as they can for the happy times to return,

> But the wishing showed no signs of changing anything, or perhaps Marchpane was wishing harder.(p.104)

And Marchpane's wishes prevail. Finally Emily decides that Apple should be Marchpane's little boy, not Birdie's, and when Charlotte protests, Emily overrules her,

> "But he isn't Marchpane's little boy. He's a Plantaganet. You can't change him now."
> "Why can't I?"
> "You can't. I won't have it."
> "Charlotte, who is the eldest?"(p.112)

And from then on Apple spends all his time with the disdainful Marchpane. Birdie cannot reconcile herself to her loss, and keeps following Apple into Marchpane's room. The other dolls try to warn her,

> "Birdie, do try to remember. Remember that your room is her room. Remember that Apple is her little boy."(p.113)

It is to take a final dramatic turn of events to resolve the conflict, not just between the dolls, but between Emily and Charlotte. Emily has lighted the candle in the lamp in the sitting room and Apple is in there with an unconcerned Marchpane. Birdie is outside the door. Darner starts barking, there is danger. Birdie, sensing something is wrong, goes in and sees that that Apple is leaning too close to the lamp and is beginning to singe.

> 'She had but one thought, and she threw herself between Apple and the lamp . . . . There was a flash, a bright light, a white flame, and where Birdie had been there was no more Birdie . . . . . Marchpane smiled.[16] (pp.117/118)

In the same moment the children had smelt the burning and had flung the front of the dolls' house open, their action coinciding with Birdie's self-sacrifice, for such it is in Charlotte's mind: 'She gave her life for Apple.'(p.120). Finally Emily comes to her senses.

> "Suddenly," said Emily, "I don't like Marchpane very much."
> "Nor do I," said Charlotte decidedly.(p.121)

The children are back in harmony, they decide that Marchpane should be sent to a museum and she duly is, installed in a glass case to be admired by visitors which, such is her vanity and conceit, pleases her no end; the two girls cease being at odds and return to playing together happily, and the Plantaganets are returned to their rightful places in the dolls' house.

There are a number of things to be noted in this complex tale. The dolls are the central focus of the book, and for most of the time we see the story from their perspective, and to all intents and purposes they are people – they are sentient, they can think for themselves, they can talk, they have human emotions, they can decide what they want to happen. Within the household Mr. Plantaganet is an adult by definition, he is after all Tottie's father. And Birdie is her mother and, for all her flightiness, is thus also an adult. And at the deepest level it is her maternal instinct that causes her to sacrifice her own life to save the life of her child. But in day to day matters it is Tottie who must take control – she is 'the chief person' in the story, she has to assume the

[16] 'Marchpane smiled' – read in context it is assuredly one of the most chilling lines in all of children's literature.

parental role with both her parents. Only Apple behaves as a child. When Marchpane arrives, she too is an adult, and she brings with her another decidedly adult discourse, class distinction. She must be the mistress of the house, the family are to be her servants. The only thing that distinguishes the dolls from real people is that they cannot "do", they lack agency, and can only regain it by wishing, which means that, upon occasion, the perspective does shift to that of the girls as they grant the dolls' wishes, working on the dolls' house, cleaning it up, furnishing it, providing a post office for Mr. Plantaganet, etc. It is a symbiotic relationship. In one way, and at a perhaps more theoretical level, you could argue that the dolls are given life by the girls as readers of the text of their own play. So long as both of the girls read the text the same way then the dolls are able to lead contented and harmonious lives, but when Marchpane arrives the girls start to differ in their respective readings, bringing disharmony and discord to the doll's lives, and because Emily is the older, and thereby the stronger, it is her reading that dominates.

(I cannot bring myself to leave this discussion of *The Dolls' House* without mentioning Francesca Lia Block's *House of Dolls* which re-works the earlier book in all sorts of ways. It too concerns the relationship between dolls and children, one child in this case, Madison Blackberry, who is at odds with the world and thus at odds with her dolls. There are clear echoes of the Godden, there is for instance a celluloid doll in it, though it is she that is old and valuable; and most crucially the dolls can make things happen by wishing, though in their case they wish for a new dress for Madison Blackberry in order to improve her mood, which she duly gets and which has the desired result. And just to clinch the argument, at the end of the book Madison Blackberry's mother reads her a book called *The Dolls' House*.)

In this chapter I have examined four examples of fantasy fiction for children in which non-human characters masquerade as human characters, and adult human characters at that. And thus such fantasy fiction invites the child reader into the text by offering her or him the play of adulthood. Each of the texts I have examined has had anthropomorphised non-human characters as protagonists. Pooh and his friends are stuffed toys, Ratty and Mole and their riverbank friends are animals, Noddy and his friends and neighbours are toys, and Tottie and her family are dolls. But all of them are anthropomorphised into sentient, and to a large extent self-determining people, most of whom are essentially adult, with homes of their own, and with the control over their own lives that only adults have. Pooh and his friends are the most ambiguous of my examples, switching between being children of Christopher Robin's age and being adults in their own right; but there is no ambiguity about Ratty and Mole. As for Noddy, he has to bear the full burden of adult responsibility for his own life; and one might argue that the Plantaganets constitute an even more realistic portrayal of family life, for while at one level they are self-determining, they, like many families in the real world, have to wage a continuous battle with forces that *are* beyond their control. And, as in much British fiction, imposition of class distinction is never very far away. Ratty and Mole are members of the wealthy leisured classes threatened by the rumblings of a discontented proletariat; Noddy has to deal with the realities of economic class as he seeks to earn his living; and Marchpane is a representative of the property owning upper classes, exercising her droit de seigneur to reconstitute the Plantaganets as members of the servant class. At a more theoretical level two of my examples actually embody the engagement of the reader with the fantasy world. *Winnie-the-Pooh* describes the very process of Christopher Robin's gradual engagement with the world of his stuffed animals, as his role changes from that of a reader *of* the stories to that of a character *within* them; and Emily and

Charlotte have a similar double role, as readers of their own play, and as co-protagonists of the novel itself.

In this chapter I have concentrated on fantasy fiction in which the characters are non-human, and as such are engaged in a masquerade of the human. So I have not considered books like Tolkien's *The Hobbit* or Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*, or indeed Garner's *Elidor*. Bilbo Baggins, for instance, may technically be a hobbit but he is to all intents and purposes a person from the very beginning, even if he does have the aura of a somewhat childlike innocence in his apprehension of the world. Pod, Arrietty and Homily in Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* may be tiny, but they too are people from the very beginning, and so are Roland, Helen, Nicholas and David in Garner's *Elidor*. But Pooh is a stuffed toy, Ratty is an animal, Noddy is a toy, and Tottie is a doll, and all of them are *playing* at being human adults, which, I am arguing, is what gives such fantasy fiction its particular appeal.