AN ADVENTURE TO BE ENJOYED: SOME DISCOURSES OF (AND IN) CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

BY

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In sending Alice down the rabbit hole her author demanded the recognition of childhood as an adventure to be enjoyed..

Cadogan and Craig

This book is dedicated to Aidan Chambers and to
the memory of Margaret Meek Spencer

For Garth

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NOT YET NINE *or* TOM CRIED

Some Discourses of Childhood

> Edmund was not yet nine, but he was a stout-grown healthy boy, and well disposed to work. He had been used to bring home turf from the bog on his back, to lead carthorses, and often to go on errands for gentlemen's families, who paid him sixpence or a shilling, according to the distance which he went, so that Edmund, by some or other of these little employments, was, as he said, likely enough to earn his bread.
>
> Maria Edgeworth: *The Orphans*

> (Tom) cried when he had to climb the dark flues, rubbing his poor knees and elbows raw and when the soot got into his eyes, which it did every day of the week and when his master beat him, which he did every day of the week, and when he had not enough to eat which happened every day of the week.
>
> Charles Kingsley: The Water Babies

As its title suggests, in this book I wish to explore some of the discourses to be found operating in children's fiction: how children are represented in the fiction that is written for and read by them. The account will be substantially descriptive, I am not seeking to develop, or further develop a theory of children's literature, that job is already being very ably done by others.[1] The discourses I am interested in can perhaps most usefully thought of in terms of thematic constituents of the narrative, and of the characters that are at one and the same time both products of, and constituted within those narratives. In that sense it will address a simpler question, which is what sort of representations of childhood are we presented with in children's fiction. Note the plurals: I shall most decidedly *not* be suggesting that there is a single discourse of childhood that can be found in all children's literature. In my book (which is of course this book) that would be patently absurd. And if you want to know what discourses I am interested in, a glance at the contents page will tell you. I also however need to briefly set the discourses I discuss against some of the discourses of childhood as they are handed down to us by history and as they are currently constructed, which is what this, the first of two introductory chapters, is all about. (I shall be briefly looking at the problematics of the notion of children's literature itself in the second one.)

So far as childhood is concerned we could ask: 'What *are* children?' We could ask: 'When and where does childhood end?' We could ask: 'What differentiates children from adults?' We could ask: 'What do children *do*?' We could ask: 'What do children *know*?' There are doubtless others. Plus there are all the 'should' questions: 'What *should* children be, know, do?' etc.

[1] See for instance: Nikolajeva (1996) & (2000); Rudd (2000) & (2013); Hollindale (1997); Lesnik-Oberstein (1994); Nodelman (2008); to name but several

As will already be clear, when it comes to answering this question, I find the notion of discourse very useful, discourse in its modern sense in which it means the ways of thinking about and understanding the world, as encapsulated in the very language we use to describe it[1]. So our questions become: firstly, what are the discourses, both historical and current, that dictate our current understandings of how we think of children and childhood – the subject of this first chapter; and secondly and by contrast, what discourses are found within children's literature that offer possibly alternative ways of thinking about children and childhood – the subject of the rest of the book.

Before we go any further, however, it also needs to be noted that the answers to these questions will depend on who is asking them, on who is doing the answering. Clearly in the case of the book you are holding in your hand it is me who is asking the questions, me who is answering them. It is therefore important to note that my focus is that of an adult white Western (English) male living at the beginning of the 21st century. My own history is that of a teacher in school and subsequently as an academic involved both in teacher education and more generally in educational research, and with a lifelong enjoyment of and interest in children's literature. I shall thus bring with me all the limitations, presumptions, understandings and, hopefully, insights that such perspectives imply. While I shall do my best to draw attention to these limitations as I go through, there will doubtless be some that I miss and some that I am not even aware of. But otherwise I offer no definitive answers: apart from anything else I don't believe in definitive answers.

Nowadays in our Western societies and cultures we expect to find children in standard two up two down nuclear families and, apart from high-days and holidays, we also expect to find them in school. We do not expect to find them working for a living. We expect them to be concerned with 'childish' things. We attach characteristics to our representations of them that serve to differentiate them from adults, that serve to accentuate the discontinuities rather than the continuities between childhood and adulthood. In some sort of general undefined way we expect them to *be* how a child is supposed to *be*. Brief glances at the history and geography of childhood have taught us that this modern discourse of childhood is both recent, and culturally and geographically specific, that the very notion of childhood is unstable, that childhood is far from being a fixed discourse at all. Thus when Philippe Ariès, that first historian of childhood, made the much quoted assertion that 'in mediaeval times the idea of childhood did not exist,'(125), he is effectively arguing that the present discourse of childhood is so radically different from that of our forebears that we might as well be talking about two quite different things. And the differences are about what children are expected to be and what children are expected to do[2].

The Discourse of Biology 1: Age

Historically two biological turning points have always been recognised, the end of infancy, at somewhere around the age of seven, infancy being seen as period of dependence on adult support; the other turning point being puberty. In between there was childhood proper, and after

[1] Others, of course, were there before me: Rudd (2000); Heywood (2001); James & Prout (Eds) (1990)

[2] In what follows I have drawn on Aries (1960), Heywood (2001), Lawson & Silver (1973) and my argument very much reflects those put forward by the various contributors to Hoyles (Ed) (1979), and James & Prout (Eds) (1990)

puberty came adolescence. By way of example Heywood quotes a medieval 11th century Latin source which talks of 'infantia', 'pueritia', and 'adolescentia'(13). We still recognise these distinctions; chronological age thus giving us a fairly stable base in the discourse. Adolescence itself was (and still is!) more problematic. There was no clear agreement about where it ended. The late teens? Twenty one? One source even has it not ending until the age of thirty five![1] And while biology was recognised, in some contexts adolescents continue to this day to be referred to as children, or even as infants.

The Discourse of Labour 1: Victimhood

Before the middle of the nineteenth century in the UK you would expect to find the majority of seven year olds, the children of the poorer classes that is, at work: in the fields, in domestic service, in agricultural gangs, or as street traders in the towns and cities, and, with the rise of industrialisation, in the factories. Conditions of work were harsh, and could be cruel, with children working for long hours in damaging and unhealthy working environments, and they could be subjected to brutal abuse, and in the towns and cities prostitution was rife. Some children could even be sold to their masters, and, as in the case of Kingsley's Tom, the orphanages were a continuous source of child labour. It should be noted, however, that children shared those harsh conditions with their elders, the only difference being those of size and strength. Children could only do the lighter jobs, and, by virtue of their size get into smaller spaces than the adults, spaces of greater danger it needs to be added, working under machinery, up chimneys, and into the narrow fissures of the coal mines. But in other respects children were not seen as a special case. Then, from about the middle of the 19th century onwards, increasing mechanisation meant that many of the smaller tasks were eliminated, the demand for child workers declined, and there was a growing demand for a workforce that had had some basic schooling. And so the discourse began to change. It was no longer seen as appropriate or desirable that younger children should be at work, and legislation was introduced that gradually raised the age below which children were allowed to work until by the end of the 19th century it was twelve. The labour of younger children was now represented in an entirely negative light, they were 'exploited', they were subject to cruelty, they were in need of 'protection', they needed to be 'rescued' from those harsh and unhealthy conditions and, from the perspective of some of the reformers, from the moral laxity of the workplace. It was, in short, a discourse of victimhood. And, since child labour still exists in many parts of the third world, even today the first world continues to use the discourse of the child as a helpless victim of dire economic circumstances; and even though much of this labour is being undertaken by young teenagers, no distinction is made between them and the younger children that are also involved, all are included as 'children', and the term 'child labour' has lost its descriptive function and has simply become a pejorative term in its own right, often used in combination with such trigger phrases as 'some as young as nine' or some such. Thus are young teenagers and children proper again promptly placed back into the discourse of victimhood.

The Discourse of Labour 2: Self-determination and Responsibility

Edgeworth's orphans, there are four of them, found themselves at the ages of six, seven, nine, and twelve having to fend for themselves. Mary, the oldest, can spin, and well at that, having

[1] See Ariès pp.23 & 24; Heywood p.17

learned to do so at her mother's knee, and sells her wares to the folk in the area. Edmund, as noted, fetches and carries hefty loads of turf, and runs messages for the local gentry, and the two youngest children sort rags at the local paper mill. Nowhere does Edgeworth suggest that this is an undesirable scenario, particularly from the point of view of the children, and one could suspect that Edgeworth's agenda is to present the children's behaviour as an exemplary model of how children ought to conduct themselves.

Lest you should think this was a one off, similar accounts can be found elsewhere in fiction. Arnold Bennett for instance, in *Clayhanger*, gives us a similarly positive account of the young Darius Clayhanger in 1835 setting off to work at the age of seven, with an equally positive outcome: his job was to get his master's fire lit before he got to work, and he 'was too excited to feel fatigue . . . By six o' clock on Saturday night Darius had earned a shilling for his week's work.' and when he has to go to the public house to get paid, it is crowded and warm and Darius gets to eat a cheese roll: 'Never had he tasted anything so luscious.'(38-40)

Edgeworth was writing at the end of the eighteenth century, but presumably the account of the work the children might find themselves doing in Ireland at that time is based in fact. Both Edgeworth's and Bennett's accounts are fictional of course but there is non-fictional evidence too. Reynolds, for example (18), quotes Mayhew's account from the 1840s of the 8yr old watercress seller whom he interviewed, and who told him how she had worked since she was five, helping her mother to sew furs, looking after younger siblings, and now selling watercress on the street. Mayhew comments that '"she had entirely lost all childish ways, and was, indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman"'. It is clear from his account that the girl thinks it is entirely natural that she should be thus employed, and there is certainly no evidence that she sees herself as a 'victim' of her economic circumstances or those of her family. Another example comes from Bailey, who offers first-hand accounts from miners who, as children, gazed longingly down the mineshaft, longing for the time when they too could follow in their father's footsteps and join the adult world of work (55 et seq). In addition there is plenty of evidence that, even if the work was arduous and hard, the socialisation of the workplace gave children the opportunities for meeting other children, for playing games, going swimming in the local river, etc. Even Kingsley's Tom, who, even if 'he cried half his time', 'laughed the other half'(4) – the other half being the time he got to play with other children, possibly in the same predicament as he was. From a financial standpoint, then, in the past in the UK, and in the present in many parts of the world, child labour was and is an economic necessity. Families depended, and still depend, on their children's contribution to the family budget. They 'worked to feed their little brothers and sisters'(Kingsley: 252), and were to be commended for doing so. In such circumstances children and young teenagers expect to work and since children want nothing more than to grow up and become adult, they will, as the Bailey quote above suggests, be more than pleased when they get to do so. Whatever else, they will not see themselves as victims, victimhood is a condition laid on them by others who, whatever their admirable motives may be, don't think they should be doing what they are doing and want to stop them from doing it. So Bennett's Darius is indeed a man, with the responsibilities of a man, bringing home his wages to support his family just like any other man. The raising of the age below which a child is not allowed to work can thus be seen in two ways. From one perspective it releases children from the dire conditions under which they have to work, but at the same time it denies children the right to work, it effectively raises the 'child leaving age' if I may put it that way.

The Discourse of Education: Teaching, and Learning

I have called it the discourse of teaching and learning rather than the discourse of education for reasons that will become clear later in the book. The legislation about the age below which children were not allowed to work was also, by default, the same legislation that introduced compulsory schooling for all, with an inbuilt school leaving age, the child leaving age as I have so characterised it, which was initially ten[1] and which has risen progressively over the years until today, when in the UK it is currently seventeen. Opening up educational opportunities for children and young people is thoroughly desirable, but the legislation that opens up such opportunities also makes that education, though schooling might be a better word, compulsory. Children and young people may have gained the right to go to school, but they had lost the right *not* to go to school. It has also, as it happens, deprived them the right to go on to higher education before what is deemed to be the 'appropriate' age: in 1564 Sir Francis Bacon went to university at the age of 13 and the practice continued well into the 19th century. No young teenager, no matter how bright, could do that today.[2] Looked at negatively you could argue that the modern overarching discourse of childhood now includes everyone under the age of seventeen. The discourse excludes the right to earn a wage, and includes instead the practices of compulsory education and training. Not only that, these same 'children' have little or no control over what they are to learn. The teaching and learning that goes on is highly regulated and subject to compulsory curricula and prescribed content.

The Discourse of Violence 1: Victimisation

Child soldiers are an emotive subject, perhaps the most emotive subject when it comes to the discourses of childhood, and these days we are rightly appalled by the use of child soldiers, but that said, it tends to be a discourse more driven by emotion than by analysis. Since Roman times young teenagers have been found in battle, whether it was the twelve year old squires supporting their knights in medieval times, powder monkeys in the navy from the 16th century onwards, drummer boys in the Napoleonic wars or in the American civil war; there are many examples. As I say it is mostly young teenagers that are being referred to, though there is no lack of evidence of younger children being caught up in conflict and bloodshed too. Many of them were press-ganged or forcibly conscripted in other ways, or drawn from the orphanages, or even sold into military service, for life it should be added, by their parents. They almost certainly didn't want to be there, but they had no option. The situation is no better today. The use of child soldiers continues in many parts of the world. In the 1990's child soldiers, some as young as eight[3], were involved in the Interamwe in Rwanda and in the civil war in Sierra Leone, to quote but two examples.[4] The discourse by which these children are defined by all who condemn the practice is yet again a discourse of victimhood. Children as a category are seen as being entirely powerless, victims of unscrupulous regimes and or rebel guerrilla armies, forced to join at the point of a gun. Whatever else, they need to be 'rescued' and 'protected'. It also needs to be noted that in this discourse of victimhood again no distinction is made between children proper

[1] The 1870 Elementary Education Act was the act that started it all.

[2] In the UK that is. Some American universities do have fast-track provision, and there it is still possible for very bright young teenagers to gain admission to them.

[3] This time, of course, I am using that same trigger phrase (see above in my discussion of child labour) designed to increase the sense of outrage about the issue.

[4] Meredith 2005 pp. 514 & 563

and teenagers, they all become 'children', and having all become 'children' find themselves in a category in which child and victim are mutually defining terms. A final up to date example precisely illustrates this usage. The UK is currently criticised because it 'persists in recruiting children into their armed services'[1]: these 'children' are in fact sixteen and seventeen year olds, but the use of the term 'children' to describe them again functions to turn them into victims, in this case of unscrupulous recruitment campaigns, but who are thus also in need of rescue and protection.

The Discourse of Violence 2: Self Determination

Power grows out of the barrel of a gun, as the saying goes[2], and while, as I have suggested, it may be assumed that the discourse of child soldiers is an entirely negative one, there are alternative discourses. One of these is praise: Napoleon praised his young recruits for their heroism and bravery; an eleven year old drummer boy was awarded the Medal of Honor for his part in one of the battles in the American civil war; the children and young teenagers who took part in Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 are described as heroic, (in distinction, it should be noted, from their counterparts who rushed to join the Hitler Youth and who thus were the 'victims' of brainwashing.) As for the children and young teenagers themselves, there are plenty of pictures of them wearing their uniform with pride, or carrying their weapons with pride, and even the worst of circumstances left many of these children and young teenagers with a good deal of self-determination. Here for instance is Ishmael Beah writing about his experiences as a young teenage soldier in Sierra Leone and demonstrating both sides of the argument. On the one hand he recognises that he had no control over his longer term future: '..but I knew my chances of coming back to the village were slim, as we had no control over our future' (87); on the other hand, in his immediate task of getting through the jungle in search of his lost family he writes, 'Every morning I made my own fate by deciding which way I was going to go.'(46) As for power growing out of the barrel of a gun, here is his graphic, if horrendous, account of one incident:

> We opened fire until the last living being in the other group fell to the ground. We walked toward the dead bodies, giving each other high fives. The group had also consisted of young boys like us, but we didn't care about them. We took their ammunition, sat on their bodies, and started eating the cooked food they had been carrying. (19)

As he makes clear, at the time he and his comrades felt entirely positive about the attack. When he and his fellows were 'rescued' by UNICEF – he was by this time 15, and leader of a squad – he is furious. Instead of being treated as an adult soldier by the army, in command of his own destiny – 'I had learned to survive and take care of myself' (153) – he is back to being a 'child'. His gun is taken from him and he no longer has any say in what is going to happen to him; even the army had given him the option of joining or not joining, but now he is met with compulsory schooling. Even the more sympathetic psychiatric social worker infantilises him, telling him he should not feel responsible for what he did. ' "You were just a little boy"' yet he

[1] Rachel Taylor of Child Soldiers International, quoted in a Guardian article of Oct 28th 2012 by Chris Atkins, headlined 'Young British army recruits at higher risk of PTSD and suicide, says report.'

[2] Wikipedia informs me that it was Mao Zedong who said it, though what he said was, 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,' but it amounts to the same thing.

was 12 going on 13 when he was recruited. Hardly a 'little boy'. As he writes, 'I hated the "it's not your fault" line that all the staff members said every time anyone spoke about the war.' (160) There could be no clearer example of how the discourse of victimhood, whatever else it did, took away the power of self-determination from the individual young person.[1]

The Discourse of Biology 2: The Body, and Sex

By and large sex doesn't feature in children's literature proper, though from the 1970's onwards it has featured in what is currently called 'young adult' – universally shortened to YA – literature. In the discourses of the world at large, particularly in white western Anglo-Saxon countries, any association between sex and childhood has become a forbidden area, and even any association between sex and early adolescence is problematic. It was not always so. Plumb, writing about the 17th century in France, describes the Dauphin at the 17th century court 'playing with his naked sister to the ribald amusement of the court'[2] In 1457 Margaret Beaufort gave birth to Henry VII when she was 13, which means that she must have been only twelve when he was conceived. His father, Edmund Tudor, was twenty six at the time. Today the child would have been taken from her, she would have been taken into care, and he would have got at least ten years. Yet the direct descendant of that union sits on the throne of England today. Age of consent laws only changed in the mid nineteenth century, before then it been twelve, but it was then raised to the current sixteen. Across the world even today the age of consent is still twelve in a number of countries. While the increase of the age of consent was seen as very necessary to curb child prostitution and child trafficking, it at the same time takes away the right of persons under sixteen to take control over their own bodies or their own sexual lives.

Turning from sex to the body more generally, in 1886 the photographer Thomas Sutcliffe took a famous picture of naked children, all boys, bathing, which he entitled 'Water Rats'. Today he would have been arrested for paedophilia, and the children themselves would not have been naked in the first place. Today, in a bizarre and contradictory mix, totally naked children are seen as a threat, while at the same time modern teenage fashion has lots of bare midriff for the girls, and jeans set so low on the hips for the boys that you wonder what is keeping them up, which costume is then aped by young children, with the encouragement of their parents it may be added, in child beauty pageants for instance. And what can only be called the fear of nakedness does not include continental Europe more generally, in Germany for instance, where families are more than happy to bathe naked at the drop of a towel. As for paedophilia itself, Jenny Kitzinger argues cogently that the constitution of the children in the dominant discourse of victimhood actually reduces their power to cope with it, and with the psychological aftermath.

Another bodily pleasure that is these days under constant surveillance is food, and this does have more relevance to children's literature. The newspapers are full of advice, often contradictory, about what is good for you to eat what is bad for you to eat, and obesity is a

[1] As a footnote to this section, it is hard for the mind not to boggle at the contradiction between Western condemnation of the arming of child soldiers in West Africa and the fact that in some states in the USA it is also thought to be perfectly acceptable for 9 yr. olds (here we go again: 'some as young as 9') to be taught to shoot automatic weapons, a practice defended by the gun lobby even when one of the instructors is accidently killed by a nine year old girl with an Uzi in the course of such instruction on a shooting range in Arizona. (A report in the UK Guardian newspaper, Sept 2nd 2014)

[2] Quoted in Hoyles 1979, p.8

current obsession. Whatever else this discourse isn't about, it is certainly about the surveillance and regimentation of the body.

The Discourse of Childhood in the Media

I have already talked about the way that the media reports on child labour and child soldiers, so I only need here to make the general point that when children are represented in either the print or the electronic media, it is almost always within the discourse of powerless victimhood. Reports of famine or disaster always feature photographs of suffering children. Stories about the murder of children run for weeks if not months. Children are included in that universal noun of victimhood, 'womenandchildren' – when people are killed in civil wars for instance the reports invariably tell us that such and such a number of people were killed, 'including women and children'. The use of the portmanteau word brings with it added value connotations of victimhood which the more neutral term 'people' doesn't have. And let us not forget that other trigger phrase 'some as young as nine'. By now it should be clear that I am suggesting that the noun 'child' has ceased to be merely descriptive and comes instead with the added meaning of victimhood. In the media discourse of childhood, to be a child is to be a victim and, as I have noted, more often than not no distinction is made between children and teenagers. If the latter are to be perceived as victims they too must become children. Lest you think I am exaggerating here are ten stories involving children I culled from just one edition the UK Guardian newspaper[1]: – there is a story reporting on a development in the investigation of the suspected deaths of two children in Portugal; there is a story about a stampede at a Hindu Temple – 'Women and children were among the dead'; there's a story about 'prison babies', children who are born in prison in Gaza; there's a story about a cyclone in India describing 'terrified children' clinging to their mothers as they sought shelter; children are victims of 'an ideological experiment' in a report from the UK parliament; in another report we are told that 'A quarter of adults have maths skills no better that a ten year old' – so much for ten year olds; there is a story about recruiting boys from deprived areas of the inner cities into the boy scouts in order to 'have discipline instilled, and learn new skills'; there is even an absurd story about conker swinging being dangerous! Only two stories have more positive representations of childhood in them. One is a little feature item about fashionista Gok Wan talking about his close relationship with his brother, it was 'me and my brother against the world from the start' They called themselves the bad boys. 'We'd always be there causing havoc'. Interesting to note the appropriation of the negative adjective 'bad' by the boys, turning it instead into a much more positive signifier of resistance.[2] Finally there is a story about Pakistani Malala Yousafzai being interviewed on a television current affairs program. We are told that 'the 16 year old was shot by a member of the group at her school for campaigning for girls' right to education.' She is called 'a campaigner' and we are told that it is easy to forget that 'she is still a teenager'. The two terms, 'teenager' and 'campaigner' seemingly being mutually exclusive terms. In fact the way in which her story has been handled since it first broke in 2012 makes for an interesting case. That she first came to the attention of the western media within the discourse of victimhood – she had after all been

[1] The Guardian Oct 14th 2013

[2] In the same story Gok talks about how the fact that he was gay was never an issue for his into martial arts straight brother. Gok is the older of the two: 'I'll always be his big brother,' he says, 'so I'll always be protective of him', thus neatly reversing several gay stereotypes along the way.

shot – is undeniable, but in all other respects the reporting of the case has gone out of its way not to represent her as a victim. She started publically campaigning when she was just eleven, but never once in all the reporting either in the press or on television was she called a child. Instead she was called a campaigner, an activist, a schoolgirl, very much the heroine of her own narrative, responsible for her own actions. It is even argued that she was partially responsible for a change in the law in Pakistan. Her father is also an active campaigner, but it has never been suggested, (except of course, by the Taliban, who claimed responsibility for the attack on her in the first place) that she has been brainwashed, or even unduly influenced by him. Whatever else, as I say, she has not once been referred to as a child. 'Children' cannot be the heroines of their own stories, responsible for their own actions and making an impact on the world. Malala Yousafzai's story is an exception, though the picture is not quite so bleak if you turn to the local press. There you do find more positive representations, celebrating the victory of a local school football team or the achievement of an individual child winning a prize in some field of personal endeavour, etc. Only occasionally do more positive stories make the national press, one of the commonest of which is the story of the child who has made a miraculous recovery from some sort of dire medical condition – but even then they must have been a victim in the first place, otherwise they couldn't have recovered from their victimhood.

To sum up so far: I am arguing that much public discourse frames children in a negative light, as powerless, as victims, as exploited, as in need of rescuing from deprivation and exploitation, as in need of being rescued from disease and famine, the list is very nearly endless. There are two glaring omissions from the above, and they are the discourses of parenting, and of education, but the former does not tend to get a look in in the more public contexts of the press and the media, unless something has gone wrong, and though I have touched on schooling, above, there is a much more positive way of thinking about children within the educational discourse, and that I shall be dealing with more fully in chapter 5. Before moving on to discuss children's literature itself let me just finish this section by taking quick look at some of the other discourses of childhood that there are that do have a bearing on the case, what I am calling the discourses of 'the essential child'.

The Discourse of the 'Essential' Child

With the raising of the child leaving age that started in the 19th century, and which I have sketched in above, the concept of childhood itself started to become a separate independent category. No longer could children be regarded as mini adults, now they needed to be defined in some way that distinguished them from adults. They had to be conceptualised as having some essential nature of their own. I shall briefly outline five such conceptualisations.

1. The child as innocent. At its most extreme the innocent child lives in some sort of prelapsarian state of grace. He/she is the child of nature, the child of feeling, inherently good, closer to God: 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'[1] The idea was very much taken up by the romantic poets at the beginning of the 19th century, and finds its most extreme and mawkish expression in the childhood deaths of the melodramas of the second half of the century where it is better for a child to retain his innocence and die rather than to grow up and to lose it – here's Mrs Henry Wood for example: '

[1] The Gospel According to St. Matthew: 18:3

"It's nothing to die when God loves us," the child declares." '[1] The romantics themselves did not so much want to separate children off into some sort of idyllic enclave, they saw instead the processes of maturation, socialisation and education as building on the innate goodness that was already in the child. It should be added that the innocent child has remains an informing idea in the discourse right up until the present day. Condemnation of child labour and the use of child soldiers is often expressed in terms of a 'lost' or 'stolen' childhood, (c.f. the quote from Mayhew, above), and the same applies to sexual knowledge if it is acquired 'too soon'.

2. The child as the embodiment of evil. At the other extreme is the idea of the child as the embodiment of evil, very much a tenet of the puritan reformers of the 19th century, and the only way to get rid of that evil was to beat it out of him, or indeed her, and 'spare the rod and spoil the child' was the prevailing principle of child rearing; corporal punishment was a fact of life in the stricter puritan homes, even for the most trivial of offences, and it was certainly a feature of school life too, all the way from Dickens' Dotheboys Hall to Thomas Hughes' Rugby. As with the innocent child, the evil child is very much still with us, Golding's *Lord of the Flies* or John Wyndham's *Midwich Cuckoos* being prime examples, never mind horror movies such as *The Exorcist* and *The Omen*.[2]

3. The 'blank slate' child. The blank slate, or 'tabular rasa' child, to use philosopher John Locke's coinage, is neither good nor evil. Whether children become one or the other depends entirely upon their upbringing and education. Yes, it is necessary to curb and channel their natural instincts by the use of reason, but otherwise there is no 'essential' child in this conceptualisation. It follows from this reasoning, of course, that the principles and the manner of parenting must be directed in the right path, and in school care must be taken over the design of a curriculum that will constitute a good education, and those views are also most decidedly still with us. Modern schooling functions both to socialise children into the values and mores of society at large, and to choose what knowledges, as enshrined in state curricula of one sort and another and controlled by systems of examination, should either be imposed upon or withheld from children.

4. The 'developmental child'. The developmental child – Piaget is a leading proponent of the notion – has certain inbuilt, biologically determined age related capacities. In this discourse it is not until they are over eleven that children are fully capable of abstract decontextualized reasoning. Before that they have somewhat more limited capacities. Without necessarily sticking strictly to Piaget's stages, modern school curricula have a built-in structure of progression, which may be helpful from one perspective, but from another can be seen as limiting and constraining. Crucial is a notion of 'readiness', as often used *against* the child, as in 'you're not yet ready for this knowledge', as it is used for his or her benefit.

5. The enquiring child. The enquiring or learning child is not much found in the modern discourses of childhood. 'Progressive' educational institutions, which take the view that child

[1] Mrs. Henry Wood, *East Lynne*, 1861, quoted in Coveney 1967 p.183

[2] William Golding *Lord of the Flies* (1954); John Wyndham *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957); William Friedkin *The Exorcist* (1973); Richard Donner *The Omen* (1976)

him or herself should take control of their own learning, struggle to survive, and initiatives in the state system in the UK that emerged in the 1970s have since been very firmly sat upon.[1]

The five conceptualisations that I have identified above by no means exhaust the possible discourses of the essential child, and all, as you can see, have an educational and or socialisation bent. I have, for instance, not discussed the medical child, or the legal child, or the Freudian child, or the Lacanian child[2]. Apart from the fact that I lack the expertise for any useful exposition of such discourses, such an approach would not have been germane to my purpose, which is that of offering more a descriptive than a theorised account of the discourses with which I am concerned the main body of the work.

To sum up, I am suggesting that, in the public discourses, references to children are almost entirely negative, with victimhood being the dominant motif. The 'working child' is the victim of the exploitation of 19th century industrial practices or of modern third world economies. The 'child soldier' is the victim of unscrupulous recruitment practices which are themselves the product of the civil wars going on around them. The 'unschooled child' is not seen as having the capacity to work and earn a living, rather he or she, and initially it was just he, is seen to have a lack, to be in need of schooling. The fascist / communist child is seen as the victim of brainwashing. In addition, modern discourses of child rearing, of child development, of schooling provision, and of education and learning, sometimes incidentally, as in the case of a too strict adherence to Piagetian 'stages of development', but mostly by design, require that certain knowledges, the most salient in our Anglo American culture[3] being sexual knowledge be withheld from children;[4] and what all these negative discourses do is deny children agency and power, a feature which is exacerbated by the fact that, as I have argued, since the middle of the 19th century what I have called 'the child leaving age' has been steadily raised, resulting in the disempowerment of more and more young people.

To conclude, let me just return to my use of the word discourse. Much modern intellectual inquiry involves what is known as discourse analysis: the interrogation of text, in the widest sense of the term, to reveal its underlying conceptualisations of the world and of the individuals in it, and of the relationships of the one to the other. I am interested in what I think of as thematic constituents of the narrative, for which the word discourse seems appropriate, but I shall not be subjecting them to the sorts of in depth investigation implied by the term discourse analysis. My interest is the somewhat less ambitious task of identifying some of those discourses, and demonstrating how they operate in children's literature. To provide a context for this investigation I have in this chapter explored some of the discourses of childhood to be found in the world at large and I have argued that many of these discourses are pretty negative. It will, however, not perhaps be surprising that in the bulk of the book I shall be arguing that if you look

[1] For an example of one such initiative see Medway 1980

[2] Exposition and analysis of these last two psychological discourses and their application to children's literature are about: see for instance Rudd 2013 or Rose 1984.

[3] I emphasise Anglo-American – European cultures are somewhat different – in Sweden for instance children as young as 9 (here we go again!) are taught about masturbation and the pleasures that go with it.

[4] Though one might also argue here that political knowledge is also withheld from children – political in the widest sense of the term, i.e. knowledge about the articulation and imposition of power within society - but that, I suspect would be the subject of another book.

within children's literature rather than at it, the sun finally emerges from behind the clouds, and a whole number of more positive discourses of childhood come tumbling out, and it only takes a glance at the contents page to tell you which discourses I shall be considering. As for the discourses I may have missed, I am tempted to say that I do hope I have. I would hate to think that this book constituted the last word on the subject. And given that that is the last word of this introductory chapter, let's get on with it.

2

WE'LL WRITE IT ALL DOWN IN A BOOK

A Note About 'Children's Literature'

> "How did you find out all this?" said the sergeant.
> "It's too long to tell you now!" said Dick. "We'll write it all down in a book and send you a copy."
>
> Enid Blyton: *Five Have Plenty of Fun*

In the light of the previous chapter it is important to note that the discourse of children's literature itself, as a socio-economic phenomenon, ipso facto also constitutes yet another discourse of childhood and the child. At the most basic material level children's literature is a product in and of the marketplace, and as such it has a target consumer, a target audience. That audience emerged with the growth of the middle class in the 19th century, and the accompanying raising of the child leaving age which in its turn led to the emergence of a swathe of young people with some leisure time on their hands, and publishers were not slow to recognise that those young readers constituted a potential new market for their product, and so started producing lists of what came to be called juvenile fiction ('juvenile' being for my money a very usefully flexible categorisation which has now disappeared, but I digress). Once that market is identified, you of course promptly need writers, and modes of distribution, predominantly booksellers and librarians. And so the apparently simple, but in point of fact pretty complex, field of children's literature was born. Here's Jack Zipes:

> The field of children's literature must include the interrelationships between children, teachers, librarians, parents, publishers, bookstore owners, vendors, business corporations, the mass media, and their various practices of producing and consuming books intended for the young as commodities.[1]

Virtually all these players, of course, are adults, and there needs to be a consensus amongst them about what a child *is*, or rather *should be*, otherwise the whole system breaks down. And that child is of course the very same child who is framed by the discourses of childhood that are found elsewhere in society at large, some of which I have noted in my first chapter.

An anecdote illustrates my point perfectly: my husband tells me how, as a child, he was not allowed to take books out of the adult library because he was still only 'a child', and as such was only allowed to read children's books, books that constituted him as a reader who was a child rather the books that allowed him to be constituted as a reader who was an adult. He even remembers the book, it was Hester Chapman's 1962 biography of Lady Jane Grey – he was interested in the book because he had read about her in the weekly educational magazine, *Look*

[1] *The Value of Evaluating the Value of Children's Literature*, Zipes 2002, pp 71,72, quoted in Nodelman 2008, p.118

and Learn – and visiting the library with his aunt had seen the book on the shelf, but when he actually wanted to take it out and read it he was told he couldn't, he could only take books out of the children's library[1]. Look, yes; but learn, no. His very childness was being policed, and the instrument of that policing was the books themselves.

Moving on from a consideration of children's literature as a commodity in the market place, it is then necessary to look inside the book and at the text itself and ask if we can define children's literature as a thing in and of itself, a distinct genre with its own specific characteristics. This question has received a lot of attention over the years, in particular more recently from Perry Nodelman, who argues, to reduce his substantial book to a couple of lines, that the child characters of children's fiction are denied knowledges of the adult world, both specific knowledges such as that of sex, or more widely, knowledges of the general duplicities and hypocrisies of that adult world.[2] Nodelman also argues that those adult knowledges are held by the anonymous third person narrators and/or implied authors who then provide the standards, moral and otherwise, by which we, the readers, are invited to judge the behaviour of the characters, but without letting on that they are doing it, hence the subtitle of his book, 'The Hidden Adult'. If the child characters in children's books are denied adult knowledges, then, by implication the child readers are too, and Nodelman offers detailed analysis of a number of texts to show that this is so. As to whether he successfully then makes the jump to the assertion that thus he has managed to define children's literature as a separate genre, I must confess I have my doubts, and I am not alone in this[3], but I do accept his basic thesis that one of the surer ways of identifying a children's book is to examine it to see if the implied reader is denied adult knowledges of the sort that he has outlined. For my purposes, however, I am not centrally concerned with the issue, but I will just offer my threepence worth to the debate, not least in order to clarify, or perhaps hopefully fail to clarify, how *I* came to choose the texts I chose to discuss. So to start with, I find it interesting that, when it comes to defining children's literature, it is what I might call the 'boundary' books that receive the closest attention. *Peter Pan* is the 'book', though phenomenon would be a better term, that comes under the closest scrutiny[4], because, I would suggest, it is such an unstable (set of) text(s). Is it a story told to, or more accurately *for* a child within the context of a novel for adults, *The Little White Bird*? Is it a play first produced in 1904 for a 'family' audience who came to the matinées, or for an adult audience who came to the evening shows, in the case of the latter an audience to take delight in a play *about* children, rather than for them?[5] Or is it the subsequent novelisation, *Peter and Wendy* whose implied reader, so far as I am concerned, shifts so wildly and completely unpredictably from sentence to sentence that it is difficult to know, as a reader, who or where you are from moment to moment? Because Peter Pan is such an unstable (set of) text(s) it is very useful to those who want to question where children's literature ends and adult literature begins, and

[1] Garth Green: personal communication

[2] I cannot resist recommending a book that I came across recently which I very much enjoyed and which provides an excellent contrasting example, and that's Yvonne Roberts' *A History of Insects* (2000), a novel for adults, but with a child protagonist who does end up knowing a good deal about the duplicities and hypocrisies of the adult world.

[3] See e.g. David Rudd (2003)

[4] Jaqueline Rose 1984 and David Rudd 2013 give it particularly detailed attention.

[5] Or even for other reasons entirely, given that all the boy parts were played by young women, given licence, by virtue of their characters, and as photos of the first production testify, to wear costumes that revealed a lot of shapely female leg for the delectation, presumably, of the heterosexual male gaze.

indeed to challenge the idea that there is any such thing as children's literature. Another boundary text, often discussed for the same purpose,[1] is Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows* which also seems to shift its implied reader as one moves from chapter to chapter. If, however, one turns one's attention away from these two problematic and unstable texts, the problem, so far as I can see, becomes simpler. It would, I venture suggest, be difficult to assert that Enid Blyton's *Five Have Plenty of Fun* is a book for adults, though it shares many genre features of an adult detective story / thriller, with the collection of clues, the following of leads and the daring rescue of one of the principle characters from the clutches of the bad guys etc., but the fact that all this is done by 4 children and a dog in their summer holidays pretty much indicates that it is a book for children. A perhaps more interesting example is Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*, a book about two children coming to understand, and learning how to cope with adult behaviour; and an instructive comparison might be Henry James' *What Maisie Knew*, in which a child once again has to struggle to understand and learn to cope with adult behaviour. I would challenge anyone to argue that *What Maisie Knew* is a book for children, but I am quite prepared to accept that *Carrie's War* is. I will put it like this: the nature of the protagonists, the themes, the content, the language and style, and the sorts of understandings that are required to read the books, all suggest that it is appropriate that *Carrie's War* and *Five Have Plenty of Fun* are marketed as children's books, and that *What Maisie Knew* isn't. As for what is in between, nowadays it has variously been called adolescent fiction, books for teenagers, and the currently p.c. formulation, books for 'young adults'. (And I might note in parenthesis that, as I have argued above, when teenagers are found fighting in civil wars in west Africa they are called *child* soldiers, or when they are found working across the world to support their families they are seen as *child* labour, but when we want to sell books to them, they promptly become young *adults*. So much for the hypocrisy of the West.) The very fact that there are these 'in between' books, marketed at teenagers, already suggests that there is going to be a continuum between children's literature and adult literature, with Blyton's *Noddy* at one end, and Henry James at the other, and Judy Blume's *Forever*, or Aidan Chambers' *Breaktime*, or Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat* books, or Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* somewhere in the middle. As for how this all affects what I am looking at here, as I say, I am not particularly bothered. If I want to write about it, I'll write about it, and if I don't I won't; and as for my choice of texts, how about 'old ones, new ones, loved ones, neglected ones'?

There remains one thing to be added, so far as the term children's literature is concerned, and it concerns the word literature itself. In the good old bad old Leavisite days, books for children were divided into two types. There were the books that counted as 'literature', and there were the rest. At the bottom end came the likes of, you've guessed it, Enid Blyton herself, and she, along with a lot of other stuff, was classified as 'rubbish'. We were told by some not to worry about the rubbish, but others were convinced that it rotted children's brains. Perhaps the most thoroughly argued through of this point of view is Brian Inglis' *The Promise of Happiness* whose subtitle, *Value and Meaning in Children's Fiction* best sums up his approach, but the attitude lingers. Nikolajeva (1996) for instance, makes it plain that she is interested in books in which:

> We see a depiction of human relations. We see how the authors use the riches of the language and stylistic devices, how they create the time and space of the novel, how they penetrate into their characters. (6)

[1] See for instance Hunt 1994 who offers a comprehensive account of the book from a number of perspectives.

If a book has all this, she continues, it can be seen as 'a living piece of art'. And even Nodelman, who is not centrally concerned with those old battles about what constitutes a children's book of quality, lets his guard slip momentarily when he is writing about the *Goosebumps* books, suggesting that they 'differ from those that achieve literary distinction' (313) It is of course impossible to read books without coming to some conclusions as to which ones one likes and which ones one doesn't; we all have our personal canons and I am no exception. And I think I can give an account of why I like the books I like. But that is not the point. If postmodernism has taught us nothing else, it has taught us that no two people's canons will be the same, and I think that's great. In all intellectual enquiry the most important thing is to destabilise the received wisdom, and so far as literature, whether it be adult literature or children's literature, is concerned, one of the most effective ways to do this is to get people to fire their canons at each other. That way new discoveries are made and new pleasures discovered. In this book, however, I am not going even to be entering that debate – and I shall thus not be giving an account of the books I have chosen to discuss by way of justifying those choices. As I have said, what I am interested in is the representations of children in those books, and I shall be investigating that by means of examining the various discourses out of which books are built, in the process also pursuing my other interest, which is that of examining texts to see how they actually work. What are their building blocks and how are they put together?

Finally a technical note. I have used the term 'implied reader' above, and for my purposes I shall be making four distinctions. In the act of reading[1] there are four personages; two of them are real, the real author and the real reader, and neither of these can be known unless you actually meet them, but two of them, the implied author and the implied reader are entirely the products of the text. When we read a text we are inevitably, though often subconsciously, aware of what we might call in common parlance the authorial perspective, and we spontaneously apply this to our concept of the real author, but in point of fact that 'real author' is only the author that we extrapolate from the text, he or she is the product of the text, the construct of the text, the *implied* author. In the same way the text also carries within it assumptions and presumptions about the identity of the reader, assumptions and presumptions which imply a reader, an *implied* reader, but they are assumptions and presumptions that may or may not apply to real readers. As adults reading children's books we will probably be aware from all sorts of cues in the text that they are essentially books 'for' children, that children, in other words, are the implied readers. We – and by using that term I am myself implying an adult readership who are at least as interested in reading *about* children's literature as a subject in its own right as they are in reading the actual books themselves – will probably read the books differently, certainly to the extent that we will recognise that we are not the primary audience for them. In terms of my own purposes in this book I am to the best of my ability confining my attentions to the texts themselves and leaving any speculations about the real authors and their real intentions and purposes out of it. Otherwise all I can offer is my own readings of the texts, and all I can tell you about myself is that, as I have already indicated, I am a seventy something year old retired school teacher/academic with a long-standing interest in and enjoyment of children's books behind me. For the rest I am just another implied author.

[1] c.f. Iser 1976.

3

BIG ENOUGH TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELVES

Discourses of the Idyll

> "Well, this time Daddy wants me to go to Scotland with him," said Mother. "All by ourselves! And as you are really getting big enough to look after yourselves now, we thought it would be rather fun for you to have a holiday on your own too."
>
> Enid Blyton: *Five on a Treasure Island*

Autobiographical

As I noted above, one of the discourses that informs our view of childhood is the child as an innocent being, unsullied by adulthood, not concerned with adult concerns, not beset by adult worries, a being indeed who *should* be not concerned with adult concerns. Childhood is seen as being an idyllic time, forever lost but forever yearned for. And when that version of childhood is exemplified in adult literature it is very much a case of look back in nostalgia. Kenneth Grahame's *The Golden Age* provides a good illustration of this. In a series of self-contained little stories the anonymous first person narrator, often identified as Grahame himself, paints a picture of childhood where he and his brothers and sisters roam free and wild, always engaged in make believe play: as soldiers in battle – the English versus the French; as Cavaliers and Roundheads; as Arthurian knights; as acting out the adventures of Ulysses, as whatever takes their fancy. Two aspects of the book, two discourses if you like, are relevant to my purposes here. Firstly, and most pertinently, the childhood he describes is free of adult control and surveillance. Yes, aunts and governesses lurk in the background[1], but we only ever get to meet them very briefly. Amongst other things this is because, from the narrator's point of view, so far as adults are concerned: ' . . it is in the higher gift of imagination that they are so sadly lacking.'(45) When we get to meet adults in any more detailed way it is because they *do* share the children's gift of imagination. In the chapter entitled 'The Roman Road'(110) for instance, the narrator meets the Artist (original capitalisation), a landscape painter, and the child talks to him about his ideal city. The artist more than happily enters into the child's imaginative world and entirely shares his vision: the adult, in other words, enters into the child's world rather than the other way around.

The second feature of Grahame's idyll is its sense of timelessness. Nothing changes in the world of these children. Theirs is a life of the continuous present, 'the absorbing pursuit of the moment'(169). Change does come, of course, and here it is when the oldest, Edward, has to leave the world of governesses and tutors and go away to school. And at the beginning of the book the narrator acknowledges that he himself is now an Olympian – his term for adults – and that, 'Somehow the sun does not seem to shine so brightly as it used; the trackless meadows of old time and shrunk and dwindled away to a few poor acres.'(11,12) But looking back it was Arcadian: 'I certainly did once inhabit Arcady.'(12)

[1] We are, as will be clear enough, in the world of the Victorian English upper middle classes.

Another childhood memoir, Alison Uttley's *The Country Child*, evokes a similar sense of timelessness. The protagonist, Susan, seen by many as Uttley's fictionalised version of herself, is a farmer's daughter. Her world is not untrammelled by the real world of adults, and Uttley describes the work of the farm and Susan's engagement with it in considerable detail. We are not spared the horrors, as here where a cow has fallen into a ditch: '… the cow's legs were twisted, and it moaned very softly.' It dies before they can pull it out and the knacker comes to collect it: 'it went down the hill with its legs sticking out, tragic and unreal…(156,157) Susan is not indifferent to these things: when a foal is lamed, 'Susan's heart burst with sorrow'(157), but still there was an unbreachable gap between the life of the child and that of the adult: '… between herself and the grown-ups existed a barrier she could never cross,'(157) the telling word in that quote being of course the word 'never'. Susan becomes the universal child – the book, note, is called *The* Country Child not *A* Country Child – who will never cross the boundary to adulthood. Uttley's discourse of childhood is not simplistic. She recognises that childhood has its own perceptions, its own feelings, its own unpleasantnesses, its own guilts, its own fears and terrors and, unlike Grahame, she describes them, whether it is long remembered guilt about once stealing from the village shop, or the unpleasantness of Susan's first day at school, or the terrors of coming home through the woods in the dark. But it is *Susan's* world rather than that of the adults around her, and it is, note, a rural world, as indeed is Grahame's: the natural world is omnipresent, the only changes are the changing seasons; and despite the terrors it remains an idyllic world, in which 'Every day was more beautiful than the last.'(163) The kitchen table is always replete with good food, and there is always a warm fire to sit beside, 'What more could they want?'(217) It is also, and crucially, an unchanging world: for all that the seasons change – Uttley takes us through all four – and for all that Susan goes to school for the first time, we have no sense that she is getting older. And even for the adults the world is timeless and unchanging. Here is Susan's father, Tom Garland, gazing at the stars: 'His father, his great-grandfather had stood there thinking the same thoughts…'(66) It is perhaps that sense that the world was once a stable place with the child as a stable presence within that stable world, a doubled stability if you will, that accounts for the, for some readers, almost unbearable nostalgia of the book.

From these adult memoires there emerge three discourses that interest me. The first discourse is that of self-sufficiency. These children live in their own worlds, separate from those of the adults around them. The adults may supply food and shelter, but for the rest of the time these children are on their own, living and feeling their own lives, separated by Uttley's 'barrier that can never be crossed'. The second discourse is the one of timelessness. Time may pass, even the seasons may pass, but the children never grow any older. They live, rather, in a continuous present. The third and perhaps more minor discourse is what I might call the picture postcard tourist brochure discourse. In the two above examples the children inhabit a rural world with an omnipresent and generally benign nature, a world where the sun always shines and every day is more beautiful than the last. In our modern world we can perhaps only expect to find lovely scenery when we go on holiday. It doesn't necessarily need to be rural England, but we want to go 'somewhere nice', whatever our own particular definition of 'nice' might be.

The Discourse Self-Sufficiency and Freedom from Adult Surveillance and Control.

The discourse of the idyll in children's fiction, when it occurs – and note as ever that I am emphatically not suggesting that it occurs in all children's literature – shares two of the

discourses identified above, and they are the discourses of timelessness and of self-sufficiency. The picture postcard discourse is there, but comes a distant third. Let me start with the discourse of self-sufficiency, the discourse in which the child is free from adult surveillance and control. Most children's books have child protagonists, and the action of the books tends to be focused through the child characters rather than the adult characters, which means that, to a greater or lesser extent, they pursue their lives outside of adult control or surveillance, or at the very least manage to slip through the meshes of that adult control and surveillance. It is in fact surprisingly rare for children to be entirely independent, and even more rare for them to be independent for the entire story. In most case there is some interaction with the adult world. Parents may be absent in the middle class worlds of Blyton or Ransome, but there are always cooks or housekeepers or farmer's wives out there in support, the difference being that those characters have much less authority over the children than do the parents proper and can be overruled if necessary. To illustrate my thesis I am going to look at three books where the children are entirely self-supporting and do generally survive with the minimum of adult intervention,

To start, then, with Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, one of the earliest examples. In it three boys, Jack, Ralph and Peterkin, 18, 15, & 13 respectively, are the sole survivors of a shipwreck in the South Seas. Their ship has been driven onto a reef then blown back off it again to sink in open water, so there is no conveniently surviving wreck filled with tools and provisions as there is in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the archetypal model for such stories. All they have is a telescope, an axe, conveniently buried in the oar that had floated to the shore carrying them with it, and a small penknife with a broken blade. Ralph, the first person narrator reflects on their predicament (he's obviously been reading Robinson Crusoe!)

> "Oh," thought I, 'if the ship had only stuck on the rocks, we might have done pretty well, for we could have obtained provisions from her, and tools to enable us to build a shelter; but now – alas! alas! we are lost!"(28,29)

He has said the last few words aloud, but the others respond much more positively. Here's Peterkin:

> "I have made up my mind that it's capital – first-rate – the best thing that ever happened to us, and the most splendid prospect that ever lay before three jolly young tars. We've got an island all to ourselves."(29)

Later, of course, they are to be visited by savages and cannibals[1], as are the requirements of the genre, and there is to be a long episode with pirates, but to start off with they do indeed have the island to themselves, and they proceed to make the most of it. They find shelter and discover how to make a fire They find breadfruit and coconuts and yams and plums, they fish, they construct bows and arrows and use them to kill the hogs that inhabit the island, plus the

[1] From a modern perspective we now recognise the inherent racism of such terms, but here, as elsewhere in the book, I shall use such terms as and when they appear in my source material, not least because they constitute in themselves evidence of the attitudes of earlier times, evidence that serves to give us a purchase on the history of racism in our culture.

occasional passing pigeon, and they are thus provided with meat: in the words of one of the chapter heading summaries[1] they 'luxuriate on the fat of the land'(112). Peterkin is much given to dancing with glee, and they strip off their clothes and plunge into the sea at every opportunity and generally have a great time.

Deserted islands are particularly useful when it comes to getting away from adult surveillance, so turning next to Enid Blyton, getting away from adults is exactly what the Famous Five do, and in *Five Run Away Together* they do it deliberately, and it is a central part of the plot. The Famous Five, for those of you who have never met them, are Julian, Dick and Anne, and their cousin George, who's a girl, and with whom in this particular book they are staying, plus George's dog Timmy. In this book the adults in question are the Stick family, Mrs Stick, her son Edgar, and her husband who turns up a little later in the story. The children have been left in their charge by George's parents when her mother is taken ill. (Since the Stick family are so clearly members of the criminal underclass one wonders why they have been employed by her parents in the first place, the real answer of course being that if they hadn't been employed by them there wouldn't have been a story, since they, of course, turn out to be the bad guys.) The children fall out with the Sticks and they decide to camp out on Kirrin Island, a little off-shore island with a ruined castle which George regards as being hers. The decision is made when George goes off on her own in the middle of the night leaving a note for the others..

> "I've gone to live by myself on our island till Mother and Father come back. (68)

..and is confirmed when Julian catches up with her before she has got very far, and tells her that they will all come.

> "Tomorrow we'll *all* go to the island with you."(69)

There are detailed descriptions of the preparations the children make in order to become self-sufficient, and of their life on the island once they get there. Here's Julian,

> "We shall be out of the reach of those horrible Sticks. We shall enjoy ourselves and have a marvellous time." (71)

First of all they raid the larder and George's mother's store of canned food:

> "That's the biggest problem solved – food," said Julian.'(75)

They take tins of water for drinking. They take bedding and a little spirit stove for cooking on, and last but not least, the tin opener, and off they set. Says Julian:

> "I feel like a prisoner escaping to freedom!"(77)

And once they get to the island they set up house in a convenient cave and are basically totally self-sufficient.

[1] Each chapter has a little summary at the start of it, previewing what is to happen in the chapter itself.

> The children all felt very happy. *They were on their own*.'(81, my emphasis.)

The message couldn't be plainer.

The two examples I have discussed so far fit fairly clearly into the 'childhood as an enchanted place' discourse. Ballantyne's boys take one look at the coral island and are promptly delighted with the independence and freedom, the 'splendid prospect' that it promises; and the Five set off for Kirrin Island with the sure foreknowledge of their independence and freedom, the 'marvellous time' that it will provide. In other respects both islands also meet the requirements of that other, more conventional conception of the idyllic, what one might call the tourist brochure idyllic, the sea, the sun, the beautiful scenery. So let me turn next to a context that couldn't be further from tourist brochure idyllic if it tried, a storm in the North Sea. Such is the setting for Arthur Ransome's *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea*. The story involves the four Walker children, John, Susan, Titty and Roger, whom those familiar with Ransome's oeuvre will have already met in *Swallows and Amazons* and other earlier books in the series. So far as the ages of the children are concerned, from the available evidence we may guess that John, the oldest, is about fourteen. The only thing we know for certain is that Roger, the youngest, is nine.[1]

They are on their own on a small cutter, 'a sailing vessel . . . a small single-masted boat, fore-and-aft rigged, with two or more headsails and often a bowsprit' (Wikipedia is ever so helpful on these occasions![2]) and the plot initially finds them adrift in fog in the North Sea, having lost their moorings in Harwich. For a while they drift helplessly but after a near miss with a buoy John decides that they need to be able to control the boat.

> John made up his mind.
> "We can't go on like this," he said . . . . "I've got to get some sail on her."(132)

So they get the sails hoisted and the boat under way and carefully manoeuvre it out to sea, but no sooner have they done that when a storm blows up, and the bulk of the rest of the book consists of an account of their first struggling to, and then succeeding in controlling the boat and weathering the storm, during which time they actually cross the North Sea and end up safely in Flushing in Holland. And as he gets control of the boat John finds that his mood is decidedly upbeat – first of all in the fog:

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[1] In *Swallows and Amazons* (Ransome 1930 p.11) we are told that Roger is seven. We are never told the ages of the other children, though we may guess that there's about a year or so between each of the them, which would put John at twelve or thereabouts. In *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea* we find John remembering an adventure in the earlier book and reflecting that 'the wild night in the dark on the lake had been a whole two years ago,' (pp 154/155)

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cutter_(boat) And if you want to know what one looks like, go to Wikipedia, and in Lewis Carroll's words, 'look at the picture'.

> John, in spite of being able to see nothing but fog, …. in spite of the awful mess they were in, was surprised to find that a lot of his worry had left him. The decision had been made. He was dead sure it was the right decision. … in spite of all his troubles, (he) was for the moment almost happy.(143,144)

.. then later in the night in the storm when again he has got the boat under control and he takes a quick glance into the cabin to check that all is well:

> He could just see Roger's feet rolled in a blanket, and a lump of red-tanned sail that Susan had used to stop him from sliding about in his bunk. Titty was out of sight in the fore-cabin. And here was poor old Susan asleep in the corner of the cockpit. All three of them were asleep. He was back at the tiller, leaning on it again. He took another look at the compass card under the dim yellow glow, wedged himself against the cockpit coaming with a foot against the opposite seat, looked up at the part of the sky that was full of stars, and a little ashamedly admitted to himself that he was happy.(199,200)

All is indeed well, the other three children are sleeping, John is master of all he surveys with nary an adult in sight.

Home Building: Establishing the Domestic.

In the discourse of self-sufficiency, being away from the adults, however, is not the whole story. The other aspect of the discourse is the necessity it brings with it to establish an alternative place to live, and this leads to what Rudd, in reference to Blyton, calls 'home building activities'(184). These home building activities often constitute a substantial part of the narrative, and are perhaps more important than might initially appear to be the case since, as I shall argue, they have a bearing on the establishment of an alternative identity for the characters, an alternative identity whose dominant characteristic is the assertion of independence, whether it be from a previous life that they want to get away from, or merely from the adult defined life of their normal existence.

An early example can be found in Captain Marryat's *The Children of the New Forest*[1], the children in question being Edward, Humphrey, Alice and Edith, aged 13, 12, 11 & 8 respectively. The book starts in the month of November in 1647 – the date is specific – and we are thus in the English civil war, a little before the execution of the king in 1649 – and we follow the fortunes of the children for three or four years, at which point the narrative then speeds through to the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Before the story starts the children's father, Colonel Beverley, has been killed fighting on the royalist side and their mother has died of the resultant grief she feels at his loss, as females are wont to do in such novels; and in the first pages of the novel their home, Arnwood, is burnt to the ground by the Parliamentarians. There is a maiden aunt who is also disposed of early in the narrative and the children end up in the care of Jacob Armitage, an old family retainer who, fulfilling a promise made to their father, has taken

[1] All quotes in this section are from Ch.III, pp.21-29

the them to the safety of his cottage in the forest – 'embosomed in the lofty trees' – a replacement home for them that will come to provide them with all the succour and sustenance implied by the verb, and where for their own protection they will have to change their name to Armitage so that they can be passed off as part of Jacob's family. Edward is initially reluctant to change his name, still identifying with his real home and wanting to stay and fight those who have taken his it from him,

> "It is *my* house that those Roundheads have burned down," said Edward, shaking his fist. (my emphasis)

Jacob helps them settle in, recognising the need to 'teach them to be useful' but also that 'they must learn to provide for themselves', very necessary as it turns out since Jacob himself is to die a bit further into the novel. And once in the cottage they set about turning it into their home, establishing the domestic in the process as, with Jacob's encouragement, they set about preparing their first meal. Alice volunteers to be cook, 'if you will show me how,' and the rest of the children help. It is a collaborative enterprise. There are vegetables, some venison, and there is water in a nearby spring. Edward . . .

> . . . took up a pail and went out to the spring.
> The potatoes were peeled and washed by the children – Jacob and Edward cut the venison into pieces – the iron pot was cleaned – and then the meat and potatoes put with water into the pot and placed on the fire.

Humphrey peels the onions, they are thrown into the pot, and the whole lot is set to boil. Then says Jacob,

> "Now, you see you have cooked your own dinner; ain't that pleasant?
> "Yes," cried they all; "and we will eat our own dinners as soon as it is ready."

They find plates on the dresser, knives in the drawer, Edith gets the salt from the cupboard,

> . . . and Humphrey cried out, as he very often did, "Now this is jolly!"

Remembering of course that, since these are the children of the wealthy, these domestic tasks are well beyond their ken: Jacob has to teach them the basics:

> While the dinner was cooking Jacob amused the children by showing them how to put things in order; the floor was swept, the hearth was made tidy. He showed Alice how to wash out a cloth and Humphrey how to dust the chairs. They all worked merrily while little Edith stood and clapped her hands.

As for the cottage itself:

> It contained a large sitting room, or kitchen, in which were a spacious hearth and chimney, tables, stools, cupboards, and dressers; the two bedrooms which adjoined it were now appropriated, one for Jacob and the other for the two boys; the third, or inner bedroom, was arranged for the two girls.

Outside there are outhouses of one sort and another, and a garden. They are thus now established in their new home, complete with its own furniture, where they can be sheltered, safe and warm; and they have learned to keep the place clean and have cooked their first meal. Once settled, Edward will learn to hunt, they will acquire a cow which will keep them supplied with milk, they will acquire chickens to keep them supplied with eggs, and they will grow vegetables in the cottage garden. Though Jacob is supporting them at this stage, in due course they will indeed be entirely self-sufficient and able, in Jacob's words, 'to provide for themselves'; and 'jolly' though it may be, at the wider metaphorical level their home in the forest will become their very identity, they will indeed be 'The Children of the New Forest'.

It may seem a far cry from surviving in hidden in the New Forest while the English civil war is raging around you to playing detective in the cosy domestic world of the 1950's, but the discourse of home building occurs in Enid Blyton too. Examples abound in the Secret Seven series, and in one such, *Secret Seven Fireworks*, home building becomes a whole little dramatic narrative of its own, and as the story unfolds there are some striking structural parallels between the two texts. The seven children who constitute 'The Secret Seven' always meet in the shed at the bottom of the garden belonging to two of them, brother and sister Peter and Janet, and the shed essentially constitutes the home of the Seven. The other major characters in this little narrative are Jack from next door, another member of the gang, and Jack's sister Suzie who is excluded from it. In this book we discover that there is a problem, their shed has been occupied, by onions, and there follows what I cannot resist thinking of as the Battle of the Onions.[1] It is Suzie who gleefully reveals the occupation,

> "I know you can't use Peter's shed for meeting places.. … "I saw your shed full of onions! *Onions!*" … "It'll be a pretty smelly meeting, sitting on top of all those onions."

… and she recognises that their loss of a home threatens their very existence, all that's left is the initials on the door.

> The Secret Seven's falling to bits.
> It doesn't meet any more.
> The only thing that's left of it
> Is the silly S.S on the door!

[1] The quotes that follow come from the first couple of chapters of the book, pp. 7, 7, 9, 10, 11, 11, 14 & 21 respectively.

The Beverley children in the Marryat have to establish a new home since theirs has been burnt out, but the Seven still have the option of expelling the enemy onions and re-occupying their old one. The Beverley children have to change their name in line with their change of home, the Seven can reclaim their name by reclaiming their home. The onions, the proletarian ground troops, if you will, have to be thrown out.

> ". . . we'll have to turn all those onions out and put them somewhere else" . . .

… and lest I should be accused of anthropomorphism, Peter got there first when he addressed the onions directly when they roll out of the door:

> "You wait till Saturday!" he said. "You'll have to get out of here, and make room for the Secret Seven."

Victory is not yet theirs, however, since it turns out that the onions have their own Cromwell, in the form of the gardener, who now intervenes. He doesn't want 'his precious onions' moved. But, echoing Edward Beverley's claim to ownership, 'it's my house', Peter points out that he has prior territorial claims:

> ".. this really is *our* shed. We meet here. You know we do." (my emphasis)

The gardener counters with the argument that such claims are merely historical,

> "Not for weeks you haven't"

But Peter has invoked a higher authority, his father, the ipso facto ruling monarch of this little domain, who has said that the onions can go into the summer house, and the gardener, routed, 'walked off, his rake over his shoulder', doubtless muttering imprecations about what he'd like to do to those little perishers given half a chance! One might say that the only difference between the two books is that the re-establishment of the power of the monarch took 11 years in the 17th century but only took a few minutes in Peter's back garden. Once the occupying onions are out the home-building proper can start and they can hold their first meeting.

> "Now we'll go back to the shed and hold our meeting," said Peter. "We'll get a few boxes to sit on, and after the meeting we'll clear up the shed and make it neat and tidy again."

Collectively they get the boxes and an old table. They clean the place out and finally they have their home.

> The shed looked very neat and tidy now, swept out, and with sand sprinkled all over the floor by Peter, except where an old rug lay, given by Pam's mother.. Two shelves were up, and on them stood

> some plastic cups[1] and a plate or two. There was also a tin of toffees and a second tin in which were home-made biscuits made by Peter's mother.[2]

In both books, then, the domestic has been established, neatness and tidiness, cleanliness, furniture, food, cutlery and crockery, shelter, in a word all the accoutrements of home, and as I have said, with home comes confirmation of identity; but in both books, note, that achievement, that identity has had to be fought for. And though clearly Peter's fight is trivial, and the fight of the Beverley children is deadly serious, the latter also turn it into a game, or have it turned into a game for them by Jacob who '*amused the children* by showing them how to put things in order' (my emphasis); and Peter and his gang could just as easily have come to the conclusion that the whole thing was 'jolly' as did Humphrey Beverley.

One example from the 1840's, one from the 1950's, so let me conclude with one from 2012. Cory Doctorow's young adult novel, *Pirate Cinema*, where home building is again important in establishing a sense of identity for the main characters. The story, briefly, is that Trent McCauley, the sixteen year old first person narrator of the book, has effectively left home when his compulsive habit of illegally downloading material from the internet in order to create his own mash-ups of the work of a film star / director of yesteryear, gets the internet access of the whole family cut off for a year, which means that his dad can't run his phone answering service, his virtually housebound mum can't claim her disability benefit, and his sister, Cora, can't study for her A levels. In the exposition of the novel Trent, with the collective help of new found friends, will establish for himself a new home which, as in the previous two examples, will provide him with shelter, warmth, comfort, food, security, and most importantly a new sense of belonging, effectively a new identity. Arriving at Victoria coach station and finding himself on his own he is picked up by one Jem Dodger, as artful as his Dickensian namesake, and a member of a self-identified little gang who call themselves the Jammie Dodgers, c.f. of course the little gang that call themselves The Secret Seven above. Together they start to establish a squat in an empty pub in Bow in London's East End. Trent's first sighting of the pub, the last remaining building still standing amongst the surrounding demolition, its only neighbours being the local drug dealers, does not fill him with any sort of enthusiasm, but Jem is considerably more up-beat.

> "Beautiful, innit? Wait'll you see inside. An absolute tip, but it will scrub up lovely."(44)

Jem explains about squatters' rights, that you can't be thrown out if you can establish residency, so the first thing they do is change the locks. Then they have to tackle the smell – not onions in this case but . . .

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[1] I don't have an original edition, my copy is a Hodder & Stoughton paperback reprint, though re-write would be a better term, dating from 1972, and I'll lay odds that it was mugs in the original rather than plastic cups, in which case it would be one of the many disgraceful examples in which successive editions have quite arbitrarily changed Blyton's original texts in all sorts of ways (See Rudd 2000 for many further examples).

[2] This passage is almost identical to the one that Rudd found in *Look Out Secret Seven* Blyton 1962 and is characteristic of the series.

> . . . old piss and booze and smoke and shite. It was not a good smell. I gagged a bit, then switched to breathing through my mouth.(44)

. . . and which they will deal with by scattering coffee grounds all over the place. Meanwhile Jem lays out a timetable and establishes an agenda.

> "I'm going to clean out this place . . . move in some beds and that, get the electricity and gas working, and I am going to live here for as long as I can.
> . . .
> We'll get big comfy sofas, clean up the kitchen and get the water going, stick up a Freeview antenna, find some Wi-Fi to nick, it'll be a bloody palace."(47,48)

. . . which is basically what they proceed to do, Jem bringing in some of his mates, several of whom will end up living there. They coin a name for the place, 'Zeroday', and refurbish it 'from roof to cellar'(62) One of them turns out to be a great cook, and within a fortnight or so:

> It was all brilliant, sitting in our cozy candlelit pub room . . . we had all the food we could eat and we were getting on well with our neighbours . . . a utopian palace in Bow.(76,79)

The home-building continues and in the meanwhile Trent has a girlfriend, known as 26, and in an extended sequence at the beginning of Chapter 3 he waxes lyrical. He has indeed found a new home, which he describes in loving detail, and with it a new family and thus essentially a new identity as a member of the Jammie Dodgers. Here, to finish this section, is a sample:

> One morning, I woke up and realised that I was *home* (his emphasis) . . . Jem was a pretty fair artist, and he'd taken to decorating the walls with gigantic, detailed charcoal murals . . . we sanded and painted the floor a royal blue and it was as smooth as tile under my bare feet. The dishes were drying in the clean rack beside the sink . . . the fridge was full . . . the sofa had a Cecil shaped dent in it that I settled into with a sigh, and the room still smelled faintly of oregano and garlic from the epic spaghetti sauce we'd all made the night before . . .

. . .and when his girlfriend comes downstairs and snuggles up next to him on the sofa

> . . . there and then, cuddling the woman I loved, in the pub I'd made over with my own hands and with the help of mates who were the best friends I'd ever had, I realized that this was the family I'd always dreamed of finding. This was the home I'd always dreamed of living in.(123,124)

<u>Timelessness</u>

Next let me examine the discourse of timelessness. It is, remember, a discourse in which the characters never seem to get any older no matter how much time has passed. Perhaps the most obvious place to look for examples of this is series fiction, fiction where from book to book the characters must remain the same. Again Enid Blyton comes most immediately to mind. In the first of the 'Famous Five' series, *Five on a Treasure Island*, we are informed that Julian is 12, George and Dick are 11, and Anne is the youngest, at 10. The problem for series children's fiction, of course, is that for the series to work, the children have to have the same relationship with the adult world in each book. This means that essentially their ages *have* to remain the same, the entire premise of the books being that the children solve the crimes and avert the disasters that are threatening the adults around them, but which they, the adults, are unable to solve, and remain the same they do, for all that in the first couple of books in the series concessions are made to the realities of time passing: *Five Run Away Together*, the third in the series, is set, as is the first, in the summer holidays, and logic of course suggests that the children must be a year older, and this is conceded: Julian yells, ' "Golly you've grown." ' at George when they first meet at the station; and the narrator continues, 'They all had. They were all a year older and a year bigger..' (10,15). By the time we get to *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, the sixth book, set in yet another summer holidays, the characters still discuss with each other how much they've grown, but there is no mention of age per se, and by the time we get to *Five Fall into Adventure*, the ninth book, there is no discussion at all of how much they each might have grown, let alone of being any older than last time.

Richmal Crompton's William books provide another example. I can do no better than to quote the Wikipedia article on the series[1]:

> Published over a period of almost fifty years, between 1921 and 1970, the series is notable for the fact that the protagonist remains at the same eleven years of age, despite each book being set in the era it was written in.

We first discover that William is 11 in the story entitled *William and the White Satin*, which is to be found in the first book to be published, *Just William*, and, as the Wikipedia article suggests, he never ages. It follows, of necessity, that his gang, known as The Outlaws, must also stay the same ages, and so indeed must his older brother and sister, Robert and Ethel, both somewhere in their late teens, early 20s, (their age varies a bit from story to story). Ethel has an infinite set of admirers, and Robert is always about to go to college or is falling in love with ' "..the most beautiful girl I've ever seen" '(34)

This sort of series fiction can however, as the Wikipedia article suggests, depict a changing world, but it is only a superficially changing world. *William and the Evacuees* for example, is clearly set during the Second World War: in one of the stories the village children want to be ''vacuees' so that they can have presents and a party like the evacuees themselves have had; and in another story in the same book William inadvertently discovers a spy drawing up plans of an airfield.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Just_William_(series)

So far so straightforward, but in the Famous Five series, on more than one occasion, Blyton takes it one stage further, and makes change, or rather the threat of change and the thwarting of that threat, a major factor in the motivating structure of the plot. In *Five on Finniston Farm*, we find the Five staying on the titular farm. The Philpots, who own the farm, are taking in boarders because they are short of money. Here's Mrs Philpot:

> "I expect your aunt told you the farm's not doing too well, and she kindly said she'd send you here for two weeks. I've some other boarders too – an American and his son…"(23)

The American lodger[1] has already been buying some of the valuable antiques that are about the farm, and has cast covetous eyes over a warming-pan and bed warming bricks. Great Grand-dad, the spokesman for continuity, explodes, but Mrs. Philpot remonstrates with him, reminding him of the pressing financial constraints that the farm is struggling under.

> "You thought you could buy 'em, I suppose!" suddenly shouted old Great-Grand-dad . . . "I don't like this selling of things that have been in our family for donkeys' years! That I don't! And . . ."
> "Now, now Grand-dad, don't excite yourself," said Mrs. Philpot, in her gentle voice. "Surely it's better to sell old things that we shall never use, in order to buy a new set of tools, or wood to mend the barns?"(94,95)

The argument in a nutshell. The problem is resolved when, as genre dictates, the children discover hidden gold in the dungeon of a ruined castle conveniently situated on the farm, and timeless continuity emerges triumphant, Great Grand-dad is jubilant and, in words that echo Tom Garland's in in *The Country Child*, sends the American packing.

> "This farm belongs to ME, and my GRANDSON, and it'll go to my GREAT GRANDSON sitting yonder. A finer farm there never was, and my family's had it for hundreds of years. . ." (177, capitals in the original)[2]

As a footnote I will add that not all series fiction adheres to the non-changing character formula. In Blyton's *Mallory Towers* series, for instance, which consists of just 6 books, the protagonist grows from being a cheerful 12 yr. old into a no less cheerful but much more responsible 18 yr. old, head of the school. And similarly Rowling's Harry Potter, again in six books, grows from being a nervous if excited new boy of eleven years old in *Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone* who has, by the end of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, become a

[1] Always a favourite nationality for Blyton's bad guys

[2] And at a more serious level that is exactly what is at issue. When Blyton was writing in 1960 the rural economy was changing. The big corporations were beginning to take over and the small family farm was indeed under threat. The family may have owned their farm for 'hundreds of years', but they would not own it for very much longer, not unless they bought up the next farm, and the farm after that, and within 10 years put the whole lot down to oil seed rape and become Philpots O.S.R. Inc.

very confident seventeen year old, the decision maker, the leader, and well aware of his own authority.

The Tourist Brochure

Finally a brief look at examples of the more conventional notion of the idyll, what I have called the tourist brochure idyll of sun, sea and sandwiches. It too is to be found in children's literature, whether it is on a desert island, in the rolling Dorset countryside, or in a cityscape at night. Here are three examples from, respectively, *Masterman Ready*, *Five on Finniston Farm*, and *Pirate Cinema*, in the case of the latter an extract where Trent and his sister are driving through London at night in the back of a taxi.

> Perhaps a more lovely scene could scarcely be imagined …. dazzling white sand … the water was a deep blue …. the reefs, which extended for miles from the beach … crowds of gannets and man-of-war birds … which rippled the water or bounded clear of it in their gambols … The line of the horizon, far out at sea, was clear and unbroken.(68,69)

> Below them spread the Dorset country-side, shimmering in the heat of the day, the distance almost lost in a blue haze . . . Dick, gazing down into the valley, where cornfields waved in the little breeze . . . They all went up the little winding lane, where red poppy heads jigged about in the breeze . . . (11,13,21)

> It seemed she knew the city better than I did, and she excitedly called out the name of each bridge as we passed it . . . and I found myself sharing in her excitement. Something about all that steel and fairy archways, lit up in the night, over the lapping black water, everything prismed by the rain spattering the windows.(197)

In Conclusion

The two non-fiction autobiographical examples I have discussed differ from the fiction examples in that, in the 'real' childhood lives of Kenneth Grahame and Alison Utley, the children are far from needing to be totally self-supporting. They go home at night to supper and a warm bed, and all their bodily needs are catered for by the adults around them. But for the rest their world is entirely separate from the adult world; it is self-contained, and between the two worlds is 'a barrier (they) could never cross'. True, in *The Country Child* there are unpleasantnesses, but it is essentially idyllic: 'Every day was more beautiful than the last'; and as for the first person narrator of *The Golden Age*, he did indeed 'once inhabit Arcady'.

When we turn to fiction however, the characters have to be totally self-sufficient. They can inadvertently find themselves in circumstances that are beyond their control, or they may indeed have deliberately created them, but in either case they have to look after themselves, and they tend to be very pleased with themselves once they have achieved their goal. *The Coral Island* presents us with an example of the former: the characters have not arrived on the island voluntarily, but, once there, they delight in the freedom from adult surveillance that it offers,

'We've got an island all to ourselves,' and a lot of the early action of the book describes their search for and discovery of sources of food and sustenance to the point at which they are able to 'luxuriate on the fat of the land'. Similarly the children in *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea* find themselves in the middle of the North Sea involuntarily, but once there they are there John makes a conscious decision to carry on and gets the boat under control – 'The decision had been made. He was dead sure it was the right decision,' and he: 'a little ashamedly admitted to himself that he was happy.' The children in *Five Run Away Together* also make a conscious decision, this time to run away in the first place, and, once on their island, echo the delight of the boys in *The Coral Island*: 'The children all felt very happy. They were on their own.', and even cast the adults as prison guards, 'I feel like a prisoner escaping to freedom!' It is clear too that home building and the re-creation of the domestic plays a crucial role in the establishment of that independence. Food of course is a priority: the boys in *The Coral Island* have to forage for it, and so, to a lesser extent do the children in the New Forest, supplementing their diet with milk from their own cow, eggs from their own chickens, and home grown vegetables; and the Famous Five raid the larder. Food first, followed rapidly by the need for shelter and the re-creation of the domestic, cleaning the place out, finding furniture, and settling down to do the cooking. The children in the New Forest clean out the cottage, Trent and his friends clean out the old pub, the Five take bedding and a spirit stove for cooking and settle into a convenient cave, Peter and his friends in the Secret Seven clean out the shed. All have, in the process, (re)established their identity, either pre-existing ones: the Famous Five or the Secret Seven; or new ones: the change of name from Beverley to Armitage, the creation of a new name, the Jammie Dodgers. And all of them have in the process established their independence from adult interference and control. Add the discourse of timelessness which we find in particular in series fiction, plus a touch of tourist brochure, be it the deep blue sea of a tropical island, a winding Devon lane, or a cityscape at night, and the result as Trent suggests is positively utopian. From Arcady to Utopia – we have come full circle.

4

IT'S A FEARFUL HANDICAP BEING A CHILD

Discourses of the Relationships between Children and Adults

> "I wish I was grown up," Albert said. "It's a fearful *handicap* being a child. You have to stand there and watch, you can never make anything happen."
>
> Nina Bawden: *Carrie's War*

Clearly this chapter has close links with the previous one. There I identified the absent adult as one of the features of what I called the discourse of the idyll in children's literature, so I shall not be examining the absent adult again here in any detail, except to note that there is a continuum that runs all the way from books where inconvenient adults are disposed of in the first page or two, to, at the other extreme, books where coping with adults is the very substance of the story. So in Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War* the children have to struggle with the fact that they 'can never make anything happen'; but the whole point of Blyton's *Famous Five* books is that they *can* make things happen, indeed that they can make things happen that the adults can't make happen, or at the very least don't make happen.

There are several species of adult to be found in children's books. There are first of all parents. They can be there or not there. They can be a positive element in the lives of the child characters, or neutral one, or a negative one, or they can be mixed. They can be supportive and collaborative, or they can leave the children to get on with their own doings. Then there are uncles and aunts and other relatives – an interesting subspecies – but they too can be a positive element in the lives of the child characters, or neutral one, or a negative one, or a mixed one. Then there are the non-related adults, who again can range all the way from the very benevolent to the very malevolent, and who can be closely involved in the children's doings, or less closely, or only tangentially. It should immediately be obvious that you can have a horrible parent but a nice uncle, or a nice parent and a horrible uncle; or a nice other adult or a horrible other adult. It is those sorts of categorisations that I am interested in here.

The Adult as Enemy

At one end of the scale you have the discourse of the adult as enemy. The adults are antagonistic to the children or do not have their interests at heart, or in other ways want to stop them from doing what they are doing and make them do what *they* want them to do. The children in their turn are faced with the choice of challenging adults directly or having to work their way around adult agendas in order to find their own spaces and establish their own spheres of action. Blyton's *Five on a Treasure Island*, the book we've already had a glance at, provides us with a nice example. The scenario: the book opens on a family discussion about where the children, Julian, Dick and Anne, are to spend their summer holidays. Their father suggests they might stay at Kirrin Cottage with their Uncle Quentin and Aunt Fanny and their cousin, Georgina, aka George – Uncle Quentin is a scientist who writes books which don't make very much money, so paying guests are always welcome. So far as the children's response to their uncle is concerned, straightaway there is a hint of what is to come.

> They had only seen him once, and had been rather frightened of him.(2)

Their impression is confirmed the moment they meet him, and his attitude to his own daughter is none too sympathetic either. The only upside is that he works in another part of the house and does not like to be disturbed:

> Their Uncle looked at the three children, and nodded to them. The frown didn't come off his face, and they all felt a little scared, and were glad he was to work in another part of the house.
> "Where's George?" he said, in a deep voice.
> "Gone off somewhere again," said Aunt Fanny, vexed. "I told her to stay here and meet her cousins.
> "She wants a good talking to," said Uncle Quentin.(11,12)

.. and his attitude to children generally is pretty negative:

> He had never had much liking or admiration for any children – he always thought they were noisy, tiresome and silly.(175)

The children learn that George has a dog. Timothy, but there is no sign of him in the house, she has to get a local fisher-boy to look after him. She explains that she'd found him as a puppy on the moors, and brought him home, but as he had grown he had started barking..

> "I liked his bark, but Father didn't. He said it nearly drove him mad. He hit Timothy and that made me angry . . .
> . . . but the worst part of all was when Father said I couldn't keep Timothy any more, and Mother backed father up and said Tim must go."(26,27)

The plot develops. The family own an off-shore island, Kirrin Island, with a ruined castle on it, which George has always been given to understand is hers and which the children visit. While they are there a storm blows up and an old sunken wreck is blown ashore. In it is an old wooden box which initially they can't open, so they take it home and drop it from an upstairs window in the hope that it will burst open, which it does, and it proves to have a waterproof tin lining. Dick is just about to examine the contents when Uncle Quentin comes storming out, demanding to know what is going on.

> "I said, what's this on the ground?" shouted his uncle, and moved towards him.
> "It's – it's something that belongs to us," said Dick, going red.
> "Well, I shall take it away from you," said his uncle. (88)

They tell him they got it off the old wreck.

> "Well this box may contain something important," he said, and he took it from Dick's hands. "You've no right to go prying about in that old wreck. You might have taken something that mattered.
> "Well it's my wreck," said George, in a defiant tone. (89)

.. but her father will have none of it. Julian, however, manages to sneak into his study while he is having an afternoon nap, and gets the box which contains a secret map showing that there are gold ingots hidden in the castle dungeon, which they proceed to copy before they sneak the box back into the study. Uncle Quentin then proceeds to sell the box which he himself, we must presume, has not re-opened, to an antique dealer, who gets together with a couple of chums and they make an offer to Uncle Quentin to buy the island off him, and it's a good offer, and Uncle Quentin needs the money so he accepts it. George is incandescent, the island is supposed to be hers.

> "So you only gave me the island when you thought it wasn't worth anything," said George, her face white and angry. "As soon as it is worth money you take it away again. I think that's horrid. It – it isn't honourable."
> "That's enough, Georgina," said her father, angrily. "Your mother is guided by me. You're only a child."(104)

But the children still have a copy of the map, so row back to the island, determined to find the treasure before the sale is finalised, which they do, but then the bad guys in the form of the new owners turn up. George confronts them.

> "This gold is mine," said George in a fury. "This island and the castle belong to my mother – and so does anything found here"
> . . . .
> The men listened in silence to George's angry voice. One of them laughed. "You're only a child," he said. You surely don't think you can keep us from getting our way. We're going to buy this island – and everything in it."

And when the children tell them that they will tell their parents when they get back home they kidnap them and hold them prisoner. The children escape, and head on back home, though not before George has destroyed their motor boat.

> The three men ran to their motor-boat. Then they stopped in the greatest dismay – for George had completely ruined it! She had chopped wildly with her axe at all the machinery she could see – and now the boat could not possibly be started. It was damaged beyond any repair.(170)

The children return home with their story, and Uncle Quentin finally has to eat his words.

> "I'm very proud of you all. No wonder you didn't want me to sell the island, George, when you knew about the ingots! But why didn't you tell me?"
> The four children stared at him and didn't answer. They couldn't very well say, "Well firstly, you wouldn't have believed us. Secondly, you are bad tempered and unjust and we're frightened of you. Thirdly we don't trust you enough to do the right thing." (175)

And they are now rich. Here's George,

> "Oh, Father – shall we be rich now?"
> "Yes," said her father. "We shall. Rich enough to give you and your mother all the things I've longed to give you for so many years and couldn't. . . . . Now you shall have everything you want!"

And of course the only thing that George wants is her dog,

> "We could afford to give him a proper kennel to sleep in now, and I'd see that he didn't disturb you, I really would."
> "Well of course you can have him!" said her father.(179)

There is no getting around it, George's father is a nasty piece of work, domineering, authoritarian, arbitrary, unjust, bad tempered, with no respect for the children as people (and little enough for his wife it may be added); and he hits dogs. The biggest problem for the children is that they cannot challenge him directly because his power is legitimated by the fact that he *is* George's father. Instead they have to get him to change his mind by demonstrating to him that the bad guys who want to buy the island are indeed the bad guys, which they do by way of the genre plot in which the gold is discovered and the island is saved. This genre plot itself involves a secondary adult child conflict where the bad guys *are* the out and out villains, and George's initially unwinnable conflict with her father is displaced by the winnable conflict with the villains, the winning of which enables the primary conflict with her father to be resolved. And in the process of the plot the children have won on four counts. They have successfully circumvented Uncle Quentin's prohibitions, and by their actions the have also effectively challenged his authority. They have taken on the bad guys, with George again asserting her ownership of the island and even taking it a step further by destroying their property, the boat. And in the process they have also solved the family's money problems; and they have achieved all of this by establishing their own sphere of action in which they can do things that the adults can't do, or won't do, and in Uncle Quentin's case, doing things that he has positively forbidden them to do. And in all of this perhaps the most telling exchange of all is that between George and her father when she challenges him about selling the island, the whole exchange being as powerful an exposé of adult hypocrisy, never mind of patriarchal power, as one might hope to find in children's fiction anywhere.[1] And the icing on the cake is that George has also won her battle with her father over keeping her dog. Though just a word of warning, the children's silent characterisation of Uncle Quentin as bad tempered, untrustworthy, unjust, dismissive of the

[1] YA literature is a very different matter of course. There, adult hypocrisy is often a central element in the narrative.

children's ideas, is a characterisation that will remain with him as book succeeds book and which will make him in many ways the most frightening character throughout the series.[1]

The Benevolent Adult

While the adult as enemy can provide a very useful strategy for the generation of conflict in children's books, adults do not necessarily have to fill that role. Here's a brief example from Beverley Cleary's *Henry Huggins*. The book is episodic in structure and charts Henry's everyday adventures in six self-contained chapters. In all of them he benefits from the support of his parents and of other friendly adults. To start with a striking example, in the very first chapter Henry is adopted by a stray dog, (it is clearly the dog who does the adopting, not the other way around!) who knows he's on to a good thing when Henry feeds him his ice-cream. Henry immediately christens him Ribsy on account of his ribs showing because he is so thin, but can he keep him?

> If only he knew what his mother and father would say![2]

So he rings them and gets his mother.

> "Mother, I've found a dog. I sure wish I could keep him. He's a good dog and I'd feed him and wash him and everything. Please, Mom."
> "I don't know dear," his mother said. You'll have to ask your father."
> "Mom!" Henry wailed. "That's what you always say."

Perhaps sensing her uncertainty Henry puts the pressure on.

> "Mom, please say yes and I'll never ask for another thing as long as I live!"
> "Well alright, Henry. I guess there isn't any reason you shouldn't have a dog. But you'll have to bring him home on the bus."

That proves to be somewhat problematic and Henry ends up being brought home by a couple of friendly policemen and, along with Ribsy, is welcomed with open arms by his father.

> "Well," said his father after the policeman had gone. "It's about time you came home. So this is Ribsy! I've heard about you, fellow, and there's a big bone and a can of Feeley's Flea Flakes waiting for you."(27/28)

[1] Which is, just to introduce some real readers into the equation for once, a view that is confirmed by some of children that David Rudd interviewed who told him that they always found Uncle Quentin the most frightening character in the series (see Rudd 2000), and I remember feeling the same thing when I read them as a child.
[2] This, and the following quotes: pp 6 – 9

The tone is set, and it becomes clear that thereafter Henry will be able to turn to his parents for help and support whenever he needs it, and in subsequent chapters he finds other adults who are equally helpful.

From a parent to an uncle: Uncle Jim, aka Captain Flint, in Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series. We first meet him in *Swallows and Amazons* itself, and he turns up in several subsequent books. For various plot reasons he lurks rather helplessly in the background for most of the time in *Swallowdale*; he takes the children sailing across the Atlantic in search of buried treasure in *Peter Duck*; he turns up first as what one might call a benign absence in the middle of *Winter Holiday* and then as a benign presence at the end of it; he takes them sailing in the China Seas in *Missee Lee*; and he takes them sailing in the Western Isles of Scotland in *Great Northern*. Let me look at *Winter Holiday* in more detail. It is, as one might guess from the title, the winter holidays. Dick and Dorothea Callum, generically known as the D's, are staying in the lake district. They meet and become rapidly friendly with two other families of children, familiar from earlier books in the series, who are also staying there, the Walkers, whom we have already met when I discussed *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea* in Ch.3, and Nancy and Peggy Blackett, aka the Amazons. Uncle Jim / Captain Flint is the Blacketts' uncle, who, when he is in the Lake District, lives on board a houseboat anchored in the lake. The children are hoping against hope that the lake will freeze over completely so that they can sledge and skate up to its northernmost point, which they have dubbed the North Pole, and which turns out to be a currently empty little house at the top of the lake. A hitch comes in their plans when Nancy, who is very much in charge, gets the mumps, and has to issue orders from her quarantined bed, and sends a note to Peggy enclosing the key to the houseboat, with the clear implication that they should get on board and open it up.

> "But are you sure Captain Flint would like us going into his cabin?" said Susan. "He might not mind us just on deck."
> "He'd be jolly pleased," said Peggy.
> . . . . .
> "It's awfully like burgling," said Titty.
> "He's our uncle," said Peggy.(178,180)

No more need be said, so they do indeed occupy it, Uncle Jim being thus defined as a benevolent adult even when he is not there. Since it is already frozen in the ice they name the boat *Fram*[1], and proceed to use it as a base for their exploration of the lake; and continue to do so until later in the story, when Captain Flint himself unexpectedly turns up and finds Dick and Dorothea, neither of whom he knows, on board. Dorothea, who has a fanciful turn of mind, has seen him coming across the ice and has already cast him as a 'tall Dutchman' in one of her oft planned romantic novels, and he remains in her mind thus characterised even as he arrives alongside. In their initial exchanges Uncle Jim is more puzzled than antagonistic,

[1] Named after Norwegian Arctic explorer, Nansen's boat; he wanted to confirm the theory of Arctic drift – the idea that the ice was in continuous motion across the North Pole. He built a boat strong enough to withstand the pressure of the ice, which he named *Fram*, kitted it out with enough supplies to last 5 years, and in 1893 off he set. The ship did indeed drift with the polar ice cap, and got a good way north, whereupon Nansen set out to ski to the pole itself, though he never got there. He and his fellow explorers set off back to Norway, getting back only a matter of days before the ship itself re-emerged from the ice. The whole expedition had taken three years. (Thankyou *Wikipedia*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fram)

> "Well, I'm jiggered!" he said again. "And, may I ask, who are you?"
> "Dorothea Callum," said Dorothea.
> "Never heard of her," said the tall Dutchman. "But she seems to be very much at home. Don't you find it rather cold standing about on the deck of a boat when it's freezing as hard as this?"[1]

He is still not phased when Dorothea only agrees to let him on board his own boat when she has established who he is, but even then he treats her with the greatest courtesy – albeit touched with a tinge of irony.

> "Perhaps you *are* their uncle," she said. "Of course, that explains everything."
> "He shook hands with her. "I'm glad it does," he said.
> . . . . .
> "Well, may I go into my own cabin?"

And before long he is helping Dick with making star charts, being shown the log of the expedition that the children have been keeping, accepting tea from them, and having his bed made up for him by Dorothea, so that:

> It would have been hard to say who was at home and who was the visitor at tea in the cabin of the *Fram*.

Once established he then enters whole-heartedly into the children's half imaginative world of re-constituting the north end of the lake as the North Pole, the world that they have created in order to give shape and purpose to their plans beyond that of simply skating up the lake. Thus, no sooner has he bundled the D's back to the farm house where they are staying, than, in preparation for the arrival of Peggy and the Walkers next morning and in 'Captain Flint' mode, he puts up a notice: 'TRESPASSERS WILL BE HANGED, LIKE THE LAST'; and when they do arrive, teases them by telling them that he had thrown the D's out in earnest. When the D's arrive back to give him the lie, Peggy turns on her uncle.

> "Why did you pretend you were such a beast?" said Peggy furiously, turning to her uncle.
> Dorothea listened with grave interest. This seemed a queer[2] way of talking to an uncle.

But of course Peggy's queer way of talking to her uncle neatly defines the relationship between Uncle Jim and the children. Thereafter he is an integral part of their plans, as the chapter

[1] This, and the following few exchanges all come from Ch XXI, pp.247-260

[2] Yes, yes, I know! But given that the gay community, of whom I am one, defiantly reclaimed the word and turned it into part of their own identity, and given that in its older usage it had connotations of being different and in many ways intriguing, I am more than happy to incorporate its older usage into my history, and I really resent it when others want to take it away from me by removing the word from books for kids.

heading 'The Uses of an Uncle' demonstrates. They have, for instance, consumed all the tins of food that he kept on board, so he cheerfully goes off to replenish them. He carries messages from the still quarantined Nancy to the other children; he gets the key to the little house, cleans the Jackdaw nests out of its chimney, stocks it up with a welcoming box of groceries, plus coal for a fire. And when, at the climax of the novel, the D's are thought to be lost in a blizzard and the book has moved out of the let's pretend mode and into real life-threatening danger mode, he it is that organises search parties to try to find them. And he's there at the all's well that ends well conclusion, with Peggy and Nancy's mother even holding him half to blame for the whole thing and in doing so tacitly admitting that he belongs to the children's world rather than that of the adults.

> "And I dare say if I knew the truth it would turn out to be your Uncle Jim's fault as much as anybody's."(357)

Henry Huggins is surrounded by nice and helpful adults, including his parents; Uncle Jim is specifically an uncle, but both examples are in a long line of benevolent adults in children's literature that extends all the way from faithful retainer Jacob Armitage in Marryat's *Children of the New Forest* to Dumbledore in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, (which series, of course, also offers us a nice example of the malevolent adult in the form of Professor Snape who can neither be directly challenged nor outwitted, but who can, most of the time, be evaded).

It's a Bit More Complicated Than That.

So far I have looked at clear cut cases, the adult as enemy, or the adult as friend. But of course in real life[1] it is often a good deal more complicated than that. I shall look at three examples, Michael Morpurgo's *Farm Boy*, Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War* and Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*. In *Farm Boy* the unnamed first person narrator starts as a young child but by the end of the story he's a full grown adult, and in that process the major influence on his life has been his grandfather. His grandfather is a Devon farmer and the farm has been in the family for generations, until the boy's mother had broken the tradition when she had left to train as a teacher and ended up in London where she met the boy's father, who in his turn has made no secret of his dislike for the country in general, and for his father-in-law's farm in particular.

> "All right in pictures, I suppose," he'd say," just as long as you don't have to smell it or walk in it."(9)

The boy, however, has loved visiting his grandfather in the school holidays and when he was young had liked nothing better than to sit on the seat of an old tractor with a missing wheel at the back of the barn, pretending he was driving it all over the farm. 'Up there on my tractor, I was a farmer, like my Grandpa..'(8) His grandfather is very contented with his lot, and has never had any desire to leave farming and do anything else with his life. And…

[1] If I was being strict with myself I should say the *discourse* of real life because 'real life' is nothing if not a discourse that varies mightily from one situation and social milieu to another.

> Best of all he never pretends to be someone he isn't, and what's more he doesn't want me to be anyone I'm not. I like that in him, I always have.(11)

So the visits continue, the boy gets older, leaves school, and spends yet more time down at the farm helping his grandfather with work around the farm. And they get on better than ever,

> And he's good at listening, and that makes me want to talk. . . . We just get on. We always have.(32)

Furthermore:

> Grandpa loved to tell his stories, and when he does, I love to listen.(31)

Then one day the old man confesses to the boy that he can barely read or write. As a lad he'd always much preferred helping around the farm to going to school, and had in any case missed a year when he'd had scarlet fever. Then when he got married, his wife, the boy's grandmother, did all the reading and writing that was necessary, and had always intended to teach him, but had died before she ever got round to it. So now he wants his grandson to do it.

> "So? Will you do it? Will you teach me like she did? Will you? I want to learn so as I can write just like I can speak, so as I can read an Agatha Christie book from cover to cover. Well? Proper wages. I'll pay you proper wages."(44,45)

The boy, by now essentially grown up – a young lad in his grandfather's eyes – is dubious about his own abilities to do so, and had in any case been intending to go to Australia after Christmas, but his grandfather persists, and bets him that he will be a good learner.

> "I'm betting you one hundred pounds that if you teach me…let's say three hours a day till Christmas, I'll be able to read an Agatha Christie book all on my own, cover to cover; what's more I'll write you down a bit of a story of my own, too. You see if I won't. . . . . So you'll have a hundred pounds more to take with you to Australia. Well, what do you say?"(46)

So the boy agrees and indeed on Christmas Eve his grandad gets him to sit down beside him,

> He took a book from his coat pocket. "I've got a surprise for you," he said. Then he began. "*Death on the Nile* by Agatha Christie. Chapter One."(52)

And when it comes to leaving, the boy isn't nearly so keen as he had been.

> I had been a farm boy for only a few months. And had loved every smelly, backbreaking moment of it.(53)

And sure enough at the end of the book, in the narrational 'present' as it were, he has essentially inherited the farm from his grandfather and has completely taken over the running of it. That, however, is not the end of it since there is a story within a story in the book. As we have seen, the old man has also promised that when he's learned to write: 'I'll write you down a bit of a story of my own, too,' and indeed he has – the boy finds it in his rucksack when he leaves – and it is the story of another child / adult relationship, that between his grandfather and *his* father – the boy's great grandfather. The story itself concerns a bet made between his father and a another farmer, Harry Medlicott, who had the biggest farm in the parish.

> 'He was a puffed up sort of chap a bit full of himself. Had the first car in the parish the first tractor too.(63)[1]

Both men had had a drink or two, it being the day of the May Day fair, and Medlicott is taunting his father about his old fashioned ways, still using his two dearly beloved horses, Zoey and Joey, to do his ploughing, why doesn't he get a tractor?; and his father gets riled up enough to rather inadvisedly bet Medlicott that his horses can plough more furrows in a day than can Medlicott and his tractor,

> "If I win I drive away the tractor. If you win there's a hundred bales of my best meadow hay for you."(67)

All are agreed that it's a foolish bet and matters are made worse by the fact that he has a debilitating leg wound from his time at the front in the first world war. The day arrives for the competition, the village arrives to cheer him on, his father being the more popular man, but it is soon clear that Medlicott is winning.

> 'The crowd were on Father's side most of them anyways. Everyone loves a loser I thought and there was tears coming in my eyes and I couldn't stop them neither.'(78)

And by lunchtime the match was a good as over, but his father won't give up and ploughs steadily on.

> 'I can mind how I stood there and watched him my heart full of pride for him..'(84)

And the gods smile on him, because Medlicott's tractor won't start and he catches up and then actually gets ahead. His war wound is hurting though and he starts to stumble, and eventually he can manage no more. So he looks at his son,

> '"You finish it for me says he. Let the horses do the work. You just keep em straight. You seen me doing it times havent you. You can do it. That's how I found myself following the plough that afternoon behind Joey and Zoey . . . . . I never thought I would manage the

[1] All the quotes from the story come with Grandpa's spelling, grammar and punctuation.

> turns but like father said the horses did it all. I just did what I had seen him do and followed the horses.'(92)

And just to finish the story, Medlicott gets his tractor going and has nearly caught up again when he lands in the ditch, and our heroes win by a furrow, and win the tractor into the bargain; which is of course the old tractor that was sitting in the barn at the beginning of the book. As can be seen, the relationship between the boy and his grandfather is a very supportive one, and mutually supportive at that. Reading between the lines one may presume that it will certainly not meet with the boy's father's approval if he ends up working the farm, but his grandfather, 'doesn't want me to be anyone I'm not', and of course the boy repays the old man by teaching him to read. And in the story within the story, there is clearly a mutually supportive relationship between his grandad and *his* father, and the result is that the farm is passed down the generations and stays in the family[1]

Moving on, then, to Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*, we find twelve year old Carrie and her ten year old brother Nick, a pair of second world war evacuees (children sent to the country in order to be safe from the bombing in London, and lodged with whoever will take them). Carrie and Nick end up in Wales with Mr. Evans and his meek younger sister Louise, whom they rapidly learn to call Auntie Lou. In the course of the book Auntie Lou will be courted by an American officer from the nearby American base, and will leave home to marry him without telling her brother because she is too scared to, doing so on the very day that Carrie and Nick are due to return home; and Mr Evans's very much older sister, Mrs Gotobed, whom Carrie gets to meet, will die. Carrie becomes much more directly involved in the latter story, meeting the old lady, and carrying deathbed messages from her to her brother about her will, which proves to be non-existent, though Carrie thinks Mr. Evans has stolen and destroyed it. When the children first arrive at the Evans household Mr. Evans is not there, and we learn of his power indirectly through Auntie Lou's behaviour. First of all she informs them that he's a Councillor, with a capital C, 'a very important man,' and then proceeds to hustle them into bed before he should get back from his council meeting. The children 'were more than glad to escape from the kitchen where the Very Important Councillor Evans might appear any minute.'(23) When he does return, the children, now safely ensconced in their bedroom, listen to the ensuing exchanges between him and his sister as he berates her for, presumably, taking the children in,

> "Lou," a man's voice shouted. "Lou! What are you up to?"
> "Coming, Samuel," Miss Evans called from the landing. "Just a minute,"
> "What are you doing up there? I might have known, I suppose. Up and down the stairs, soon as my back's turned, wearing out the stair carpet …"
> . . . . .
> The loud hectoring voice went on. … They lay quite still in the darkness listening to the roar of Mr Evans's voice.(25,26)

Nick, frightened, cuddles up to his sister.

[1] An echo here, of course, of iidentical tropes in *The Country Child* and *Five on Finniston Farm*.

> "He must be an Ogre, Carrie. A horrible, disgusting, real-life OGRE."(26)

Thus is Mr. Evans introduced, and then further characterised on the next page,

> Councillor Samuel Isaac Evans was a bully. He bullied his sister. He even bullied the women who came into his shop, selling them things they didn't want to buy and refusing to stock things they did.(27)

Initially it certainly looks as if Mr Evans is simply going to be the enemy, an ogre to be resisted and overcome, but that view is promptly moderated when Nick actually meets him in the flesh the next morning and discovers that he has false teeth.

> "You can't really be scared of someone whose teeth might fall out," he told Carrie.(28)

And thereafter he isn't fazed by Mr Evans at all. Thus when Mr. Evans hopes that Nick won't wet the bed, Nick already has the measure of him.

> "That's a rude thing to mention," he said in a clear icy voice that made Carrie tremble. But Mr Evans didn't fly into the rage she'd expected. He simply looked startled – as if a worm had just lifted its head and answered him back, Carrie thought.(28)

And later in the same conversation, when Mr. Evans warns them that he won't tolerate bad language, Nick, with an intuitive understanding of the English class system, answers him with what amounts to a very successful put down:

> "We don't swear. Even my father doesn't swear. And he's a naval officer."(29)

Nick may have rapidly learned how to cope with Mr. Evans, but so far as he is concerned Mr Evans remains an implacable enemy, to the extent that, when Auntie Lou is planning to leave home in order to marry the American officer, Nick becomes her co-conspirator. We only learn of this indirectly, since the action of the book is almost entirely seen from Carrie's perspective, and indeed at one level it could be argued that the developing relationship between Carrie and Mr Evans is a central focus of the book, as she struggles to understand him and see things from his point of view. In the process Mr Evans softens in his attitude towards the children, even to the extent of shutting up the shop and taking them on a picnic on their last full day before they go home and paying Carrie a rare compliment.

> "I'm going to miss my assistant," he said more than once. "You've been a real help to me, Carrie."(117)

And when, on the last morning, as Carrie discovers that he hadn't stolen and destroyed the crucial will and wasn't a bad man, she finds herself grinning with relief.

> "What are you grinning for?"
> "I'm just glad," Carrie said, and she was. Glad to know that he wasn't a bad man, not a thief, after all.(132)

And, finally, as he tries to fix them breakfast with Auntie Lou gone and it is clear that he doesn't quite know how to go about it, Carrie does it for him.

> "Porridge, then." He looked around rather helplessly.
> "I can do that," Carrie said. She took the double saucepan from the rack and the packet of oats from the cupboard and busied herself, not looking at him.(130)

Once again things are resolved in the domestic sphere, and as the children are pulling away in the train after Mr Evans has finally said goodbye to them, Carrie discovers that she actually has something positive to say about him, much to Nick's outraged response.

> "He was quite nice at the end."
> "*Nice*?" Nick rolled his eyes upwards.(132)

Carrie's War, tracing, as it does, the growing and changing understanding of a child as she discovers the complexity of the adult world around her, is an example of what gets variously called 'psychological realism' or 'literary realism' or 'expressive realism' or 'classic realism'.[1] Mr Evans may have started as an ogre in the children's minds, certainly as an enemy to be withstood and avoided wherever possible, but by the end of the book, in Carrie's eyes at least, he has become a more rounded and morally complex human being. In the old ways of thinking this would mark the book out as 'quality literature' as opposed to what often gets dismissed as genre fiction, but, as the genre theorists have taught us, psychological realism is a genre in and of itself too, and if it offers us, as is claimed, psychological insight and moral complexity, then other genres offer us different insights and other pleasures and are none the worse for that. But I digress.

Turning to Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* we find another example of a more complex relationship between a child and, in this case, her parents. For those of you who have never met the Borrowers, they are little people who live under the floors and behind the wainscoting of big old houses. They survive by 'borrowing' food and other stuff from the 'human beans' who live in the same said big houses, and their presence accounts for the disappearance of various small objects around the house, the odd cotton reel, missing chess pieces, a mustard pot, never mind safety pins and other smaller and more useful items that can be turned into tools etc.[2] The greatest risk is to be 'seen' by one of the humans in the house, because while some can be

[1] The latter two terms are Catherine Belsey's (Belsey 1980) – the novel as an artistic expression of the writer's own creativity / view of the world / understanding of human motivation and psychology.
[2] Indeed it might well be argued that they are still with us today – how else can you account, for instance, for the fact that no matter how many paperclips you buy, you are always short of them!

friendly others aren't, and being seen can lead to dire consequences. The family we are particularly concerned with is the Clock family[1], Homily, Pod and their fourteen year old daughter Arrietty, who are the last surviving family in this particular house, the others having at one stage or another been 'seen' and have had to leave, to 'emigrate'. The result has been that Arrietty has grown up without playmates, and as a virtual prisoner in their apartment under the kitchen floor because of her parents' fears for her safety. Her only view of the outside world has been via a grating in the outside wall of the house through which she can see a bit of the garden, and she longs for the opportunity to get outside, and to meet other Borrowers of her own age. Then Pod is 'seen' by a boy who has come to live in the house, and they realise that they need to tell Arrietty more about the histories of the other Borrower families who used to live there. In particular they tell her about how Uncle Hendreary and his family had had to emigrate and go and live in a badger's set after his daughter Eggletina went out, never to return, and they came to the conclusion that she had been eaten by the cat.[2] Such, however, are Arrietty's longings that she doesn't see the possibility of emigration in quite such a negative light as do her parents, Homily in particular.[3]

> "Couldn't we emigrate?" she ventured at last, very softly.
>
> Homily gasped and clasped her hands and swung away towards the wall. "You don't know what you're talking about," she cried, addressing a frying pan which hung there. "Worms and weasels and cold and damp and – "
>
> "But supposing," said Arrietty, "that *I* went out, like Eggletina did and the cat ate *me*. Then you and Papa would emigrate. Wouldn't you?"
>
> "Homily swung round again, this time towards Arrietty; her face looked very angry. "I shall smack you, Arrietty Clock, if you don't behave yourself this minute!"

But Arrietty persists,

> "I bet the cat didn't eat Eggletina. I bet she just ran away because she hated being cooped up . . . day after day . . . week after week . . . year after year. . . . Like I do!" she added with a sob.
>
> "Cooped up!" repeated Homily, astounded.

Arrietty continues for the next paragraph or two, focussing particularly on her longing for company of her own age, and Homily, despite her need to cling to the security of the known and her own fears of the outside, understands the force of Arrietty's feelings.

> "The child is right," she announced firmly. . . .
>
> "You see, Pod," went on Homily, "it was different for you and me. There was other families, other children . . . the Sinks in the scullery,

[1] So called because the entrance to their home is a mouse-hole under the grandfather clock in the hall. As will be seen later, other Borrower families are also named in accordance with the same principles.

[2] Fear not dear reader, she did survive and turns up in the second book in the series, *The Borrowers Afield*.

[3] The whole episode takes several pages, pp. 45-49

> you remember? And those people who lived behind the knife machine – I forget their names now. And the Broom-Cupboard boys. And there was that underground passage from the stables – you know, that the Rain-Pipes used. We had more, as you might say, freedom.'

And much to Arrietty's surprise Homily suggests that the next time Pod goes borrowing he should take her with him. It's now Pod who is cautious, but Homily overrules him.

> "Suppose anything happened to you or me, where would Arrietty be – if she hadn't learned to borrow?"
> Pod stared down at his knees. "Yes," he said after a moment. "I see what you mean."
> "And it will give her a bit of interest like, and stop her hankering."
> "Hankering for what?"
> "For blue sky and grass and suchlike."

So Arrietty does go borrowing with him the next time he goes out, but unbeknownst to Pod, is 'seen' by the boy and gets into conversation with him. Not only that, but she makes an arrangement with him to take a letter to the badger's set to see if she can get in touch with Uncle Hendreary, which he does, and Arrietty is on tenterhooks while she waits for on opportunity to visit the boy again to see if there has been a reply. Homily notices, but again is not unsympathetic.

> "I don't know what's come over you lately. Always idle. You don't feel seedy do you?"
> "Oh," exclaimed Arrietty, "let me be!" And Homily for once was silent. "It's the spring," she told herself. "Used to take me like that sometimes, at her age."(90)

Finally an opportunity does arise, she manages to get upstairs to the night nursery to find out from the boy if there's any answer from Uncle Hendreary. This time Pod does catch her, and orders her home. Once there he tells Homily what has happened and when they question her, the whole story about the letter spills out, and she explains how desperately she wanted to get in touch with other Borrowers, at the very least just to reassure herself that she and her parents weren't the only Borrowers left in the whole world

> "…please understand. I'm trying to save the race!"
> "The expressions she uses!" said Homily to Pod under her breath, not without pride.(100)

And the exchanges that follow are a mixture of reproach, understanding, even sympathy, and then fairly rapidly move on to more pragmatic considerations of the implications of what has happened and questions about what they are going to do.

> "We're in very grave danger, Arrietty, and you've put us there. And that's a fact."
> "Oh Pod," whimpered Homily, "don't frighten the child."
> "Nay Homily," said Pod more gently, "my poor old girl! I don't want to frighten no one, but this is serious. Suppose I said to you pack up tonight, all our bits and pieces, where would you go?"(101)

Arrietty, by her actions may have put the family in peril, may have 'done wrong', but she never loses the sympathy and understanding of her parents, Homily in particular, who understands where she's coming from and her yearnings for a different life; and for the rest of the story, as things escalate and finally get out of hand, they never lay another word of blame on her head even as the final disaster approaches in which they are discovered and chased out of the house by rat catchers with smoke and gamekeepers' boys with ferrets. Instead it is a question of the family pulling together in order to survive.

In all three books, *Farm Boy*, *Carrie's War* and *The Borrowers* the discourse of the relationships between adults and children is a central element in the plot. In the case of *Farm Boy* it *is* the plot, since it is about how the boy's Grandfather enables him to become himself and helps him to make what will perhaps be the most important decision in his life, and in *Carrie's War*, one could again argue that it *is* the plot, for all that the ostensible plot involves lost wills and skulls being thrown into ponds and broken promises. In *The Borrowers* the plot is centrally about Arrietty's meeting with the boy and the disastrous consequences that follow from that meeting, but her parents are understanding and supportive, for all that she has brought disaster and upheaval raining down upon the family's heads.

Riding to the Rescue

Finally in this chapter I want to consider child adult discourse structures in which the intervention of the adult plays a climactic role in the plot. Two examples, superficially about as far apart as you could possibly imagine, Enid Blyton's *Third Year at Malory Towers* and Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother*. One of the story strands in *Third Year* features Bill – real name Wilhelmina – another of Blyton's characters who refuses to conform with socially constructed gender roles. She arrives at school on her horse, Thunder, which she is able to keep there, and immediately makes it clear where her priorities lie.

> "I wouldn't have come if they hadn't let me bring Thunder. I shall have to look after him too, even if it means missing some of my lessons."(32)

The problem is that her mind is so dreamily pre-occupied with the animal that she fails to concentrate in class and soon runs into conflict with her teachers, the strict Miss Peters in particular, who as well as being their class teacher is also the riding mistress. When, on the first Monday of term, Miss Peters catches Bill not paying attention she sets about her in no uncertain terms.

> "Wilhelmina!" said Miss Peters at last. "Did you hear a word of *any*thing of what I have just said?"(40)

. . . and continues in like vein for a couple of pages. The already somewhat antagonistic relationship between Bill and Miss Peters having thus been established, it is picked up in a later chapter headed 'Bill and Miss Peters'(61)[1] where the conflict escalates and 'Miss Peters began to punish Bill in the way that she resented and hated most.'(68), keeping her in to catch up with her lessons and, when she argues back, forbidding her to visit Thunder. It is a prohibition which Bill starts to ignore. Things build to a climax when Bill begins to get worried that the horse is not well. Finally, when she is absent from lessons, Miss Peters catches her with the horse, and tells her that the horse will be sent home, a scene which is overheard by Darrell, Blyton's main protagonist in the series. What Darrell also overhears, however, is Miss Peters comforting the horse after Bill has gone. Then it is confirmed that the horse really is ill and has colic, which can be fatal. The climax occurs when Bill, now desperate, sneaks out at night with Darrell to find the horse in pain and really ill; if it lies down it will die so they have to keep it walking. Darrell herself can't ride well enough to go for the vet, so she will have to wake up Miss Peters regardless of the consequences. The teacher realises the seriousness of the situation and far from scolding the girls, rides off into the pouring rain to get the vet, which she duly does, and the horse is saved. She sends the girls to bed and stays up all night herself with the horse to make sure it is all right. And of course in the same moment the rift between teacher and girl is healed, and Bill herself is, by implication, forgiven.

> (Bill) took Miss Peters' hand in hers and held it tightly. "Miss Peters – I can never repay you. Never. But I'll never forget tonight and all you did."
>
> Miss Peters patted Bill on the back. "That's all right. I'm not asking for any repayment! I'm fond of Thunder too, and I knew how you felt. I'm not sending him home, Bill. You shall keep him."(116)

And, as in *Five on a Treasure Island* analysed above, the new relationship is signalled by the change in the name that Miss Peters calls her by, this time from the much despised Wilhelmina to the much preferred Bill.

Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* also features an 'adult riding to the rescue' structure not dissimilar to the one in the Blyton. The novel is set in present day San Francisco and features a scenario in which terrorists blow up the Bay Bridge[2] and, immediately afterwards, the tunnel that takes the BART, the Bay Area Rapid Transport system, beneath the bay itself. The casualties run into the thousands. First person narrator, Marcus, a computer geek, and his friends, Van (Vanessa), Jolu, and Darryl, get caught up in the panicking crowds and Darryl gets stabbed. They struggle back onto the bridge itself where they are picked up by the Department of Homeland Security (the DHS) on suspicion of terrorism. They are held separately on what they

[1] 61 (My cheapskate Dragon edition doesn't have chapter numbers – it doesn't even start each new chapter on a new page. It's a shame that such publishers have such disrespect both for Ms. Blyton's work and for her readers.)
[2] As the narrator is at pains to point out, this is not the famous Golden Gate Bridge, but the bridge that crosses the bay at a lower level, connecting the two halves of the city together.

later discover is Treasure Island[1] without access to a lawyer, unable to contact their parents and subjected to pretty 'severe' interrogation. When Marcus asks about the wounded Darryl he's told he doesn't exist. After six days he, Van, and Jolu are released, enjoined to keep silent, and threatened with the death penalty if they don't.

> "You will never speak of what happened here to anyone, ever. This is a matter of national security. Do you know that the death penalty still holds for treason in the time of war?"(57)

Of the 'non-existent' wounded Darryl there is no sign – Darryl's dad, an ex-military man, goes to pieces completely. Darryl himself is to remain missing until the dénouement. The other three, unable to tell anyone in the adult population who might be able to do something about it, not even their parents, (and anyway '"No one will believe us and no one will care."'{65}) are on their own. Hiding behind an impenetrable code name, M1k3y, which only he, Van and Jolu know, Marcus proceeds to wage a cyber war on the authorities. He gathers internet followers. Between them they are able to totally screw up the large number of daily transactions requiring electronic confirmation of ID, the use of cash machines and credit cards amongst them. In addition they plant false tracking information on unsuspecting passers-by, thus totally disrupting the surveillance of the authorities, until stop and search escalates to the point at which the entire city comes to a standstill; and they organise an impromptu technically illegal but otherwise peaceful concert in one of the city parks to which the authorities respond with substantial amounts of pepper spray and the liberal use of truncheons. They are by now getting substantial press coverage, and of course everyone wants to know who M1k3y is. Throughout all of this the tension builds and builds, as does the increasing need to tell someone in the world of adults whom they can trust and who will actually believe them. In the meantime Marcus finds the burden of secrecy about his incarceration, about the 'disappearance' of Darryl, and about his M1k3y internet name, more and more difficult to handle. The climate of fear that pervades the novel is established right from the beginning, when Marcus is still being interrogated.

> I had never, ever felt this bad or this scared before.(46)

This is followed by the threat on his life, quoted above, that the Department makes when he is released. It is not long before his friends feel the pressure. Here's Van,

> "I want you to stop putting yourself at risk, M1k3y" . . .
> "Don't use that name in public anymore," I snapped
> Van shook her head. "That's just what I'm talking about. You could end up going to jail for this, Marcus, and not just you. Lots of people. After what happened to Darryl –"
> "I'm doing this for Darryl!" . . . .
> "You think you're going to stop them? You're out of your mind. They're the government."(106)

Then a bit later Jolu abandons him,

[1] Yes indeed, another one, and nothing to do with Blyton! – or Stevenson for that matter. It is in fact an artificial island in San Francisco bay, a one-time naval base – not to be confused with Alcatraz.

> "I can't live my life in perpetual terror." . . . . "You can't declare war on the government of the USA. It's not a fight you're going to win."(151)

Finally, at a party of his most trusted internet allies, Marcus at last starts to unburden himself and tell others about what happened, about his incarceration, about Darryl's disappearance, and about the threats made against them all. But still the threat remains.

> "They say that if we ever tell anyone about this, they'll arrest us and make us disappear. Forever."(157)

Even so, at least Marcus no longer has to carry the burden of secrecy on his own.

> "I'm glad I finally told people. Any longer and I might have started to doubt my own sanity."(159)

They need to tell *someone*, but who? Certainly not the older generation,

> "I know who *not* to trust: old people. Our parents. Grown-ups." . . . . . "Don't trust any bastard over 25!"(158)

And 'Don't trust anyone over 25' becomes a slogan for the whole group. Marcus already knows he can't go to his dad, who has told him earlier,

> ".. the occasional road stop is a small price to pay. This isn't the time to be playing lawyer about the Bill of Rights. This is the time to make some sacrifices to make the city safe.(129)

Eventually somebody turns up with a photo of them on the bridge just after the attack and the photo includes Darryl which proves that he was there, and finally he gets a message from Darryl himself, via another prisoner who has been released. Darryl *is* still alive. Marcus finds himself sobbing with relief, and at last tells his mother about his own incarceration and about his friend's 'disappearance'.

> Mom took me in her arms, the way she used to when I was a little boy, and she stroked my hair, and she murmured in my ear, and rocked me, and gradually, slowly, the sobs dissipated.
>
> I took a deep breath and Mom got me a glass of water. I sat on the edge of my bed and she sat in my desk chair and I told her everything.(242)

It is as if Marcus has to become a child again to finally be able to cross the adult child divide. His mom turns out to know a crusading journalist, one Barbara Stratford, and it is to her, in one tiny sentence, that he reveals biggest secret of all, the secret that has made him the most wanted person in San Francisco, "I'm M1k3y."(254) Marcus is re-arrested and is being water-boarded

when the State Troopers arrive – Barbara's revelations have brought them in. The DHS is routed and they finally find Darryl curled up defensively in the corner of his cell in a dreadful state.

Both novels, then, feature adult child discourses each of which constitute a strong structural element in each of the plots. Despite the fact that the two novels couldn't be further apart if you tried, the adult child discourse functions structurally in exactly the same way. In each case the situation that the protagonists find themselves in, whether they be the seventeen year olds of the Doctorow or the thirteen year olds of the Blyton, and whether their implied audiences are 'young adults' or children proper, requires adult intervention to resolve it.

In this chapter I have looked at four varieties of child adult discourses, and all of them play an important structural role in the texts. In *Five on a Treasure Island*, while the actual plot concerns the discovery of the treasure and the routing of the more obvious bad guys, the central thrust of the plot involves challenging the power of George's father, who can in many ways be seen as an even badder guy, particularly since his power cannot be opposed directly at all. By contrast both Henry Huggins' parents and the Blackett's uncle Jim are thoroughly benevolent, more than content to welcome flea bitten stray dogs into the family or to join in with the children's games as they plan to skate to the north end of the lake; and in fact Uncle Jim also fulfils a 'riding to the rescue' function when at the end of *Winter Holiday* he organises the search for the two 'D's who are lost in the blizzard. These examples are straightforward enough; and our un-named first person's grandfather in *Farm Boy* is also thoroughly benevolent, though in his case the benevolence is reciprocated as the boy teaches him to read; and for all that Arrietty's actions in *The Borrowers* have pretty disastrous consequences, her parents are surprisingly understanding. In *Little Brother* the benevolent adult is a long time coming, particularly given the 'never trust anyone over 25' mantra of Marcus and his friends; and in *Third Year at Malory Towers*, we have an initially antagonistic character who changes her tune when she has to intervene in the crisis with the ill horse, and in so doing changes the children's perception of her; and interestingly enough that too is what happens in *Carrie's War* as Carrie's perceptions of Mr. Evans change as she gets to know him a bit better and to start to understand him in the process.

5
EVERYBODY'S GOT TO LEARN
Discourses of Teaching and of Learning

> "The chimney was the worst," said Susan. Masses of snow fell through and put the fire out."
> "Some of the snow fell bang into Susan's saucepan," said Roger.
> "It won't do it again," said Nancy, "not now we've got a proper stovepipe. Jib-booms and bobstays! Everybody's got to learn."
> Arthur Ransome: *Winter Holiday*

The human being is a learning animal, and none are more assiduous learners than children, and perhaps not surprisingly we can find plenty of examples of learning going on in children's books. That teaching and learning goes on in classrooms in schools seems like a starting point, but a moment's reflection tells us that that is only part, and pretty small part at that, of the totality of learning that goes on in a child's life, both before they ever get to school, and while they are of school age. Outside school a lot of learning also requires a teacher of some sort or another, but only in the widest sense of the term, and learning can also occur without any teachers at all – we call it learning from experience, as in the example quoted above from *Winter Holiday*. It is also part of my case that even when there is a teacher involved, learning is an as active a process as is teaching

Classrooms and Curriculum Content

Two things can happen in classrooms in children's books. The actual curriculum content can sometimes play a role in the narrative, but classrooms also function as sites where character is established and relationships developed. Classrooms are of course found in schools so school stories would be an obvious starting point. An early example might be Talbot Baines Reed's *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*[1], but for all that a major plot strand involves the taking of a scholarship – the scholarship carries a substantial financial reward, and two of the characters are highly motivated to win it, the one to fund his going to university, the other to pay off his gambling debts – we learn little or nothing about the contents of that scholarship – the issue is, rather, a question of whether the hero was cheating. Otherwise curriculum content itself is only touched on briefly at a couple of points – it should perhaps be noted that we are in a Victorian English public school,[2] which goes some way to explain the nature of that content. So when 11 year old Stephen Greenfield first arrives in the school as a new boy, the Doctor (the Headmaster) quizzes him on his knowledge of arithmetic in order to decide which form he is to be put into. Once in the school, we are told he struggles with fractions, with Latin, with French, even with his spelling(65); and later, when he is caught cribbing his Latin, his form teacher upbraids him

[1] *The Fifth Form and St Dominic's* being a Victorian children's book was, thank goodness, published long before the days that there were such things as young adults, instead there was just juvenile fiction so it didn't matter how old or young you were when you read it.

[2] For the benefit of those readers not familiar with the English education system, public schools are far from being 'public' in the sense of being funded by the state. They are, rather, fee paying schools, where most of the pupils are boarders, and back in the time that Reed was writing, they were predominantly schools for boys.

for not working. Stephen responds to the reprimand, pulls himself together, and goes on to win the Latin prize. On a couple of other occasions we find the Doctor himself in the classroom, the first time being when he sorts out the junior fourth – who have been on strike, no less, refusing to fag for the older boys[1] – and there, finally, we have more detail as he takes them through Gray's *Elegy*. He asks them the meanings of lines, which they stumble over to farcical result, and when he asks them to read the poem they make even more farcical mistakes. He turns his attention to the boy at the bottom of the class, one Bramble, who seemingly knew little or nothing about anything,

> He mixed up William the Conquer and William of Orange; he subtracted what ought to be multiplied, and floundered about between conjunctions and prepositions in a sickening way.(128)

The second time we find the Doctor in the classroom it is with the senior forms, teaching them about 'the comparative beauties of Horace and Virgil and Ovid' and going into 'the minutest detail about their metres.'(262) Otherwise in the book, reference to curriculum content is oblique rather than direct, as in a spoof paper that another of the boys, Pembury, gives to Stephen when he first arrives, asking him 'the gender of the following substantives: "and", "look", "here",' or whose daughter Stephen the Second was, and similar such nonsense.(20,21) On another occasion the same Pembury has almost single-handedly launched a fifth form newspaper, in one edition of which he ridicules items in the sixth form's equivalent publication: an article on the character of Julius Caesar and a verse translation from Horace.(86,87)

There couldn't be a bigger contrast than that between Reed's English public school and Beverly Cleary's kindergarten as portrayed in *Ramona the Pest*, but it is to the latter we must turn if we wish to find narratives that are actually about classroom learning itself. The book consists of a series of self-contained chapters each with a little story about five year old Ramona Quimby and her life at school, in the third of which we find Ramona learning to write. Miss Binney, their teacher, has printed out their names on cards and is requiring them to copy them. Ramona immediately notices that her name is longer that some of the other children's names and will thus require more work, but that does not dampen her enthusiasm: 'Not that Ramona minded having to work harder – she was eager to learn to read and write,'[2] and the chapter continues with a detailed account of the work.

> Carefully Ramona printed *R* the way Miss Binney had printed it. *A* was easy… Miss Binney said *A* was pointed like a witch's hat… *O* was also easy. It was a round balloon…
> "I like the way Ramona's *O's* are fat balloons full of air," Miss Binney said to the class, and Ramona's heart was full of joy.

Miss Binney moves around the class giving help and assistance where required,

> "No, Davy. *D* faces the *other* way."

[1] The fagging system in public schools was a system whereby younger boys acted as what basically amounted to personal servants to the older boys.
[2] This, and the following quotes, p.71 et. seq.

> Once more Ramona bent over her paper. The hardest part of her name, she soon discovered, was getting the right number of points on the *M* and *N* Sometimes her name came out RANOMA… "Good work Ramona," said Miss Binney, the first time Ramona printed her name correctly.

When Ramona sees that some of the other children's names also include the first letter of their surname followed by a dot, she asks Miss Binney if she can do the same.

> "Of course you may. This is the way to make a *Q*. A nice round *O* with a little tale like a cat. And there is your little dot which is called a period."

The account of the teaching, and learning, continues the next day.

> Ramona practiced her *Q* while Miss Binney walked around helping those with *S* in their names. All the *S's* were having trouble. "No Susan," said Miss Binney. "*S* stands up straight. It does not lie down as if it were a little worm crawling along the ground."

And Davy is still having problems with his *D*. 'A *D* does not have four corners' she advises him, it has two, and one side is curved 'like a Robin redbreast', at which point Ramona herself decides to play a role in Davy's education by getting him to draw feathers on his *D*. Miss Binney is not amused! Miss Binney herself, note, is always seeking to find ways of encouraging the children at their level, with her comparisons with witches' hats, fat balloons, cats' tails, little worms and robin redbreasts. And otherwise within this account of learning and teaching there are the seeds of two other narratives that will inform the book as a whole, the one being Ramona's developing relationship with Miss Binney, and the other being Ramona's interest in Davy's work, which is part of a wider narrative about her relationship with Davy himself that I shall be looking at in a future chapter.

In other respects this is the most detailed account of classroom content that appears in the book, though in the first chapter which deals with Ramona's very first day in school much humour is derived from Ramona's misunderstandings of words and the meanings of words. They start when Miss Binney shows her to her place.

> "Sit here for the present," she said with a smile.
> A present! thought Ramona, and knew at once she was going to like Miss Binney. . . . Nobody had told her she was going to get a present on the very first day.[1]

None of the other children had been told to sit there for the present so Ramona thinks she's been singled out, and remains resolutely glued to her seat when Miss Binney takes the other children through to the cloakroom to find their hooks, and when Miss Binney tells them to stand up like

[1] This, and the following exchanges, p.17 et. seq

good Americans while they sing *The Star Spangled Banner*, Ramona decides she will have to be a good American sitting down. Finally when all is explained,

> Miss Binney's face turned red and she looked so embarrassed that Ramona felt completely confused. Teachers were not supposed to look that way.
> Miss Binney spoke gently. "Ramona, I'm afraid we've had a misunderstanding."
> Ramona was blunt. "You mean I don't get a present?"

And Miss Binney finally explains that 'for the present' meant 'for now'. It is a learning moment for Ramona,

> Words were so puzzling. *Present* should mean a present just as attack should mean to stick tacks into people.

Ramona's misunderstanding about the meaning of 'for the present' is echoed when she has problems with the first line of *The Star Spangled Banner* itself, 'Oh say can you see at the dawn's early light,'

> Next Miss Binney taught the class the words of a puzzling song about 'the dawnzer lee light,' which Ramona did not understand because she didn't know what a dawnzer was.

She comes to the conclusion that it is a lamp, and that little confusion becomes a tiny little narrative strand of its own which goes into hiding, as it were, until the final chapter of the book when she uses this newly discovered word to actually refer to a lamp, much to the amusement of her older sister, Beezus, and of her mother. Finally, in the same first chapter, Ramona and the other children learn yet another lesson, which is that not all learning happens in the classroom: Miss Binney reads them *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*[1] and Ramona asks her how Mike Mulligan went to the bathroom while he was digging the basement to the town hall. Once asked, the same question occurs to the other children in the class. With a smile that 'seemed to last longer than smiles usually last', Miss Binney evades the issue by telling them that it's not an important part of the story. The children of course know that going to the bathroom *is* important and 'Ramona could see that there were some things she was not going to learn in school.'(25) Quite so.

In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* actual lesson content is of peripheral interest, as indeed are lessons themselves. The characterisation and the central relationships of the story are established outside the classroom entirely, and the main dramas of the book unfold outside the classroom. In *Ramona the Pest*, by contrast, at least two of the chapters are focused almost entirely upon what is going on *in* the classroom, and though character relationships are an important element in that, what is actually being learnt and the very process of learning itself is a major narrative strand. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* provides an example that sits somewhere between these two alternatives. The description of classroom lessons almost always

[1] Virginia Lee Burton (1939)

serves to further characterisation, but curriculum content is also important in the furtherance of the story. And just in case there is anyone out there who has not collided with the Harry Potter phenomenon, a couple of sentences by way of introduction. The bulk of the action of the book, and indeed of the series as a whole, takes place in a magical world populated by wizards and witches and by magical beasts and other magical artefacts: dragons, three headed dogs, broomsticks and etc., with the odd ghost and talking portrait thrown in; and the characters have to operate within that magical world in accordance with its rules. The action takes place in and around Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and the major team sport in this magical world is Quidditch, played on broomsticks. The Philosopher's Stone of the title is the McGuffin of the piece, 'a legendary substance with astonishing powers'(161), and our protagonists, Harry, Hermione and Ron, have to find it before the evil wizard Voldemort does. The first thing Harry learns is how the curriculum itself is organised into subject areas, which he does when Hagrid, Hogwarts' gamekeeper, arrives in the human world on Harry's eleventh birthday to take him to the school for the first time, and gives him a reading list which includes books about the following: *Herbology*; *The History of Magic*; *Charms*; *Defence Against the Dark Arts*; *Transfiguration*; and *Potions*. Once arrived in school the characters get to meet the teachers of those same said subjects.(99 et. seq) *Herbology* is taught by 'a dumpy little witch called Professor Sprout' who teaches them about the care of, and uses of, the strange plants and fungi to be found in the greenhouse. *History of Magic*, 'easily the most boring lesson' is taught them by a ghost; and they learn *Charms* with Professor Flitwick, 'a tiny little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to see over his desk', and who, at the mention of Harry's name 'gave a tiny little squeak and toppled out of sight'. Professor McGonagall, they discover, is 'strict and clever', that she isn't a teacher to cross. She teaches them *Transfiguration*: 'Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned.' Professor McGonagall turns her desk into a pig, and has the pupils try to turn matches into needles. Only Hermione succeeds. Next there is *Defence Against the Dark Arts* with Professor Quirrell, whose lessons are described as 'a bit of a joke'. He claims to have once fought off a troublesome zombie for an African Prince, but when Seamus Finnegan, one of the students, asks him how he did it, he 'went pink and started talking about the weather'.

So far there have only been fairly brief accounts of the lessons, but when it comes to *Potions* with Professor Snape, there is considerably more detail (102,105):

> Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the register, and like Flitwick, he paused at Harry's name.
>
> "Ah yes," he said softly, "Harry Potter. Our new – *celebrity*."
>
> Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered behind their hands.

Snape then uses the ostensible lesson content to belittle Harry.

> "Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"
>
> *Powdered root of what to an infusion of what?* Harry glanced at Ron, who looked as stumped as he was; Hermione's hand had shot into the air.

> "I don't know, sir," said Harry.
> Snape's lips curled into a sneer.
> "Tut, tut – fame clearly isn't everything."
> He ignored Hermione's hand.

The lesson continues in like vein, with Snape asking Harry similar questions to which he, Snape, knows that Harry will not have the answer, while Hermione continues to raise her hand, even standing up in her enthusiasm. Finally, when Snape asks him what the difference is between monkshood and wolfsbane Harry plucks up courage and answers back.

> "I don't know," said Harry quietly. "I think Hermione does, though, why don't you try her?"
> A few people laughed; Harry caught Seamus's eye and Seamus winked. Snape, however, was not pleased.
> "Sit down," he snapped at Hermione.

At the end of the lesson they learn that asphodel and wormwood when mixed produce a powerful sleeping potion, and that monkshood and wolfsbane are different names for the same plant, aconite[1]. The account of the lesson continues. They have to work in pairs and mix a potion to cure boils using dried nettles, crushed snake fangs, stewed horned slugs, and porcupine quills. Neville Longbottom manages to melt Seamus's cauldron and thus release the unfinished potion with disastrous results, covering himself in boils in the process.

The account of these lessons serves both to further the characterisation of the characters we have already met, and to establish new relationships with those that we haven't. A couple of teachers have an immediate response to Harry, Flitwick topples off his pile of books, Snape sneers at his fame, and Quirrell is established as something of a charlatan – an important plot point since at the end of the book his body will have been colonised by Voldemort himself. The account of Snape's lesson also serves to establish character: Malfoy's attitude and that of his cronies is something of a major feature in the succeeding narrative, and Hermione's status as the brainy one is also confirmed. By this stage in the story Ron has already been established as Harry's friend so Harry's glance merely confirms the fact, and Harry himself already demonstrates his growing strength of character by refusing to be browbeaten by Snape and answering back. Seamus is to remain a friendly minor character, and though Neville is been established as a bit incompetent and inept and accident prone, later in the book and indeed in the series as a whole he is to prove to be a courageous and staunch ally.

As far as the specific lesson content is concerned, none of it will have any role to play in the narrative overall. Nowhere in the story will the ability to turn desks into pigs or matchsticks into needles, nor the ability to create sleeping potions or cure boils prove to be of any use. Nor will knowledge of alternative names for aconite. Later in the story, however, both more general knowledge of the subject areas and even on one occasion specific lesson content does have an important role to play. Here's the specific example. It is a lesson where Professor Flitwick is teaching them charms to make objects fly.(126,127).

[1] As indeed they are – nothing magical about that little piece of knowledge!

> "Now don't forget that nice wrist movement we've been practicing," . . . "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick. And saying the magic words properly is very important too."

To Ron's chagrin he has been paired with Hermione. He is practicing, without much success.

> "*Wingardium Leviosa!*" he shouted, waving his long arms like a windmill.
> "You're saying it wrong," Harry heard Hermione snap. "It's Wing-*gar*-dium Levi-*o*-sa, make the *gar* nice and long."

Within a couple of pages the spell has to be used by Ron himself when Hermione finds herself trapped in the girls' toilets with a troll and the boys have to rescue her. It turns on them and is just about to bash Harry on the head with its club when Ron,

> . . . heard himself cry the first spell that came into his head: "*Wingardium Leviosa*!"
> The club flew suddenly out of the troll's hand, rose high, high up into the air, turned slowly over – and dropped with a sickening crack, on to its owner's head.(130)

Otherwise when curricular knowledge is needed, it will be provided by Hermione, who will have recalled it from previous lessons which have not actually have been described, or who will have discovered it in her reading, and who, in the process, becomes teacher by proxy. Thus when they have to find out more about the Philosopher's Stone itself, Hermione, because of her knowledge of The History of Magic, knows where to look it up. And when spells of one sort and another are needed it is Hermione who will know which spells are required and has learned how to do them. The leg-locker curse and its counter curse provides a slightly more extended example. It is needed when Neville tumbles into the common room having had his legs stuck together by Malfoy. Immediately Hermione 'leapt up and performed the counter curse.'(159) Within a couple of pages, realising that the curse itself could be useful to them, she tries to teach it to Ron, '"Now don't forget, it's *Locomotor Mortis*". . . "I know", Ron snapped. "Don't nag."'(162,163) It doesn't get used again however, though later in the narrative when Neville is bound by a stronger curse when he tries to follow them and thus inadvertently jeopardise their mission, it is Hermione who knows the full Body-Bind curse, '*Petrificus Totalis*'.(198) And in the final phase of the action, as they are trying to get to the Stone before Voldemort does, they are met with a series of obstacles, the first of which is a magical plant, Devils Snare, which catches them up in its tendrils, and it is Hermione who recalls being taught about its properties by Professor Sprout.

> "Stop moving!" Hermione ordered them. "I know what it is – it's Devil's Snare.
> "Oh, I'm so glad we know what it's called, that's a great help," snarled Ron, leaning back, trying to stop the plant curling around his neck.
> "Shut up. I'm trying to remember how to kill it!" said Hermione.

> "Well hurry up, I can't breathe," Harry gasped, wrestling with it as it curled around his chest.
> "Devil's Snare, Devil's Snare.. What did Professor Sprout say? It likes the dark and the damp – "
> "So light a fire!" Harry choked.(201,202)

.. at which Hermione points her wand at the plant and burns it up. My point here is that Hermione is able to bring knowledge directly acquired in lessons to bear upon the problem, and indeed to take charge, telling the others what to do, and is able to deal with the plant and release the two boys: '"Lucky you pay attention in Herbology, Hermione," said Harry'(202). Yes indeed. And when they press on, having to negotiate further obstacles, it is Hermione who recognises that each obstacle is related to a curriculum subject area.

> "We've had Sprout's, that was the Devil's Snare – Flitwick must have put charms on the keys – McGonagall transfigured the chessmen to make them alive – that leaves Quirrell's spell, and Snape's…"(206)

Finally, be it noted, there is never any explanation as to how it is that Hermione is always so successful in the practice of her spells, so the only conclusion that can be drawn is that it is as a result of her greater concentration and the force of her personality that she can turn matches into needles when the rest of the class can't. Notice in my example above that it is only when Ron has to muster and focus his energies to disable the troll that he too becomes successful at using the *Wingardium Leviosa* spell. In lessons he can't do it, presumably because he's not trying hard enough or concentrating properly.

Learning Outside the Classroom

Moving outside the classroom we also find a lot of teaching and learning going on, but it is rare that teachers per se have anything very much to do with it. Instead it tends to be characters who are closer to the protagonists and who themselves have a role to play in the unfolding narrative, either other children, or friendly and supportive adults. As previously noted, in *Farm Boy* the roles are reversed when the narrator teaches his Grandad to read. Here are some of the highlights: (47,48)

> To begin with he learnt all his reading from newspapers. He liked the large print, and the photographs helped him guess a word sometimes when he couldn't quite make it out. Any new word he came across he'd write down in his book.
> That way, I thought, he could practise his reading and writing at the same time. He found the writing harder. He said his fingers wouldn't do what he told them.

Things go well for a bit but then, 'After a while I could see that the newspapers weren't helping.' His grandfather starts to become distressed by the content of what he was reading, specifically mentioned:

> ..a piece about another savagery in Bosnia . . . "What's the good in reading if that's all there is to read about?" . . . I tried *Farmer's Weekly* on him for a while, but the print was small. And besides, he said, he'd done farming all his life, he didn't want to read about it too.

Finally his young teacher finds copies of *Animal Farm* and *Travel's with a Donkey* and a dozen *Tintin* books[1],

> After that his reading seemed to come on in leaps and bounds. His writing was slower though. He couldn't seem to manage. He couldn't seem to manage joined up very well . . . .
> But he never let up, not for a single day. Some nights he'd stay up till midnight and he would still be at it.

Teaching and learning in this example is a decidedly collaborative enterprise, with the young teacher struggling to find the right material to motivate his older student, and his older student, in his turn burning the midnight oil in his determination to succeed, and I might add that whole process is a very nice example of best educational practice in and of itself, whether it be in or out of the classroom.

I have already noted that we learn little or nothing about the learning process in the classroom in the *Harry Potter* but outside the classroom it is a different matter. We have already seen that Hermione is much inclined to be the little teacher in the text when needed, bringing academic knowledge to bear where necessary, but other things need more thoroughgoing teaching, Quidditch for one – Quidditch being the school sport – and Harry is to play a leading role in the forthcoming inter-house match. The game is played on broomsticks and the very first time Harry rides one it turns out to be an activity at which he naturally excels without having to be taught it. He flies into the air 'and in a rush of fierce joy he realised he'd found something he could do without being taught'(111). More pertinently, so far as his skills at Quidditch are concerned, even on that same very first ride, he discovers the ability to ride both very fast and very accurately. The circumstances are these: Malfoy has stolen Neville's Remembrall (a glass ball that glows red whenever its owner has forgotten something) and soared up into the air with it. When Harry chases him he drops it, and Harry swoops down at incredible speed and catches it just before it hits the ground. Harry's house mistress, Professor McGonagall, sees him and marches him off to meet Oliver Wood, the captain of Quidditch for Gryffindor house, Harry's house and tells him, Wood, that they have found their Seeker. Wood must teach him about the game.[2]

> "I'm just going to teach you the rules this evening, then you'll be joining team practice three times a week." . . .
> "There are seven players one each side. Three of them are called chasers"

[1] Orwell, 1945, Stevenson 1879, & Hergé 1929-1976 respectively
[2] This, and the following few quotes, p.124 et. seq.

> "Three chasers," Harry repeated, as Wood took out a bright red ball about the size of a football.
> "This ball's called a Quaffle," said Wood

The account goes on for a little while in like vein with Wood producing balls of one sort and another, and describing how to play the game, and Harry repeating what he's been told in order to get it into his head. Finally there is a tiny walnut sized gold ball, with little wings.

> "This," said Wood, "is the Golden Snitch, and it's the most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast an difficult to see. It's the Seeker's job to find it."

Whoever catches it will most probably win the game for their side. Harry finds something to compare it with, (an extremely effective learning strategy I may add): '"it's sort of like basketball on broomsticks,"' and at Wood's bidding and in order to get it into his head, Harry rehearses the information.

> "Three chasers to try and score with the Quaffle; the Keeper guards the goalposts; the Beaters keep the Bludgers away from their team," Harry reeled off.

Again the whole exchange is as an exemplary account of teaching and learning as you could hope to find.

Finally let me return to *The Children of the New Forest*. I have already noted, in Chapter 3, faithful retainer Jacob Armitage's self defined role as a teacher, 'I will teach them to be useful; they must learn to provide for themselves'(138988)[1], and we have seen how he helped them with their domestic skills. Here he is teaching Edward, the oldest, how to stalk a stag.

> "Edward is the oldest, and he must go out with me in the forest, and I must teach him to kill deer and other game for our support . . . then Humphrey shall come out and learn how to shoot."
> "Yes," said Humphrey, "I'll soon learn."[2]

The first time they run out of venison Jacob makes of the opportunity to teach Edward how to stalk a deer.

> "Recollect that you must always be hid, for his sight is very quick; never be heard, for his ear is sharp; and never come down to him in the wind, for his scent is very fine . . . . we must keep more to the left, for the wind is in the eastward, and we must walk up against it."

Jacob carries in in like vein until they actually do find a stag, but it is startled and gets away from them, and then the teaching becomes incorporated into the action itself.

[1] The numbers here are all the location numbers from the Kindle edition.
[2] This, and the following examples, loc 139135 et. seq.

> "You see, Edward, that it requires patience to stalk a deer. . . . now we must go through the woods till we come to the lee of him on the other side of the dell."
> . . . .
> "What startled him, do you think?" said Edward.
> "I think, when you were crawling through the fern after me, you broke a piece of rotten stick that was under you, did you not?"
> "Yes, but that made but little noise."
> "Quite enough to startle a deer . . . "

They work their way around and do finally get to kill it. 'Edward started up on his legs with a shout of exultation,' but Jacob reprimands him, and when Edward asks him why, tells him there could have been another nearby.

> "How do you know but what there may be another lying down in the fern close to us?" . . . .
> "I see," replied Edward, "I was wrong; but I shall know better another time."

Once they have the deer Jacob teaches Edward how to decide how old it is.

> "I thought that he was a hart royal, and so he is."
> "What is a hart royal, Jacob?"
> "Why, a stag is called a brocket until he is three years old; at four years he is a staggart; at five years a warrantable stag; and after 5 years he becomes a hart royal."
> "And how do you know his age?"
> "By his antlers: you see this stag has nine antlers . . . "

Etc. Notice how Edward takes a role in his own education. Jacob may tell him a lot but Edward also asks questions to which Jacob responds. Later in the story when they are once again short of venison Jacob teaches him how to recognise the age of a deer from its trail.

> … they came upon the slot or track of a deer, but Jacob's practiced eye pointed out to Edward that it was the slot of a young one . . . He explained to Edward the difference in the hoof-marks and other signs by which this knowledge was gained.(139316)

They find the slot of a stag and trace it to a thicket

> They walked around the thicket, and could not find any slot or track by which the stag had left the covert.(139325)

Edward himself shoots the animal and, 'Remembering the advice of Jacob, Edward remained where he was, in silence and re-loading his piece.'(139332) Sure enough there is one nearby

which Edward spots, and when Jacob wonders how to get near him Edward takes charge, again putting into action the lessons he has learned, even echoing Jacob's words.

> "We cannot get at him from this spot," replied Edward; "but if we were to fall back to leeward, and gain the forest again . . . so as to get a shot at him. . . . It will require care and patience to manage that; but I think it might be done."(139340)

He has learned.

Book Learning

I have already touched on Hermione's reading, and there are other examples in other books where learning from books has a larger role to play. Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events Book the First: The Bad Beginning* is one such example. In the story the Baudelaire children, Violet, 14, Klaus, 12, and infant Sunny are, when their parents die in a fire, sent to live with Count Olaf, a distant relative who will be their legal guardian, acting in loco parentis until the children come of age. The Count is another example of adult as arch enemy, he is the dastardliest of dastardly villains and lives in filthiest of houses; the children have to sleep on the floor, have only a cardboard box to keep their clothes in, and are treated as skivvies from the moment they arrive. In addition the Count is seeking to get his hands on the Baudelaire inheritance, and lays plans which Klaus, by means of his reading, and Violet by means of her quick wittedness are able to thwart. We learn early on that Klaus is a keen reader, and makes extensive use of the books in his parents' large library. Though only twelve, '…. he had read a great many of them and had retained a lot of information from his readings.'(4) Count Olaf does not have a library but it turns out that his kindly next door neighbour, Justice Strauss, does; and when they express their enthusiasm for reading she tells them, '"..you are welcome to use any of my books, at any time,"'(38). Count Olaf's problem is that Violet is only 14, and he cannot lay his hands on her fortune until she comes of age. But he can get round this by marrying her, which he plans to do by means of a ruse which involves getting her to say the necessary words in front of a judge, who will be Justice Strauss herself, who is to read the real words of the wedding ceremony from the appropriate law book, all within the context of a play he has written in which Violet is to play a leading role. Olaf himself will play the lead, and, as he explains to Violet, she is to play the young woman that he marries.

> "It's a *very* important role," he continued … though you have no other lines than 'I do,' which you will say when Justice Strauss asks if you will have me."
> "Justice Strauss?" Violet said. "What does she have to do with it?"
> "She has agreed to play the part of the judge," Count Olaf said.(77)

Both children are suspicious:

> "I wish we knew something more about inheritance law," Klaus said. "I bet Count Olaf has cooked up some plan to get our money, but I don't know what it could be."(79)

.. and it doesn't take them long to think of turning to their next door neighbour's library for help, 'Surely Justice Strauss would have a book on inheritance law.' And he does indeed find just such a book entitled *Nuptial Law,* and he spends most of the night reading it and by dawn 'Klaus, had found out all he needed to know.'[1] He confronts Count Olaf with his findings.

> 'The laws of marriage in this community are very simple,' he read out loud. 'The requirements are as follows: the presence of a judge, a statement of "I do" by both the bride and the groom, and the signing of an explanatory document in the bride's own hand.'

Olaf argues that that couldn't possibly be his aim because Violet isn't old enough to get married, but Klaus has found out the answer to that too.

> "She can get married if she has the permission of her legal guardian, acting in loco parentis," Klaus said. "I read that too."

And when Count Olaf asks Klaus why on earth he would want to marry Violet, Klaus has found out the answer to that as well.

> Klaus turned to a different section of *Nuptial Law*. 'A legal husband,' he read out loud, 'has the right to control any money in the possession of his legal wife.' Klaus gazed at Count Olaf in triumph. "You're going to marry my sister to gain control of the Baudelaire fortune!"

Count Olaf is not yet beaten: he gets hold of their baby sister, Sunny, puts her in a cage and dangles her from the tower, threatening to drop her if Violet doesn't go through with it. As he explains to Klaus,

> "You may have read more books than I have, but it didn't help you gain the upper hand in this situation. Now, give me that book which gave you such grand ideas, and do the chores assigned to you."(110)

The children are stymied, but Violet is to get a last minute idea. She is coming downstairs ..

> … she reached out with her right hand to grasp the banister, for balance. She looked at her right hand for a second, and began to think. All the way down the stairs, and out the door, and the short walk down the block to the theatre, Violet thought and thought and thought, harder than she had in her entire life.(132)

And we are to discover what that idea is once we get into the account of the play itself. We get to the marriage itself and Violet has already said 'I do' after Justice Strauss asks her if she will marry the count. Klaus has been watching from the wings.

[1] This, and the following couple of quotes: pp. 95 et. seq.

> Klaus clenched his fists. His sister had said "I do" in the presence of a judge. Once she signed the official document, the wedding was legally valid.
> . . .
> .. he watched Violet take a long quill pen from Count Olaf. Violet's eyes were wide as she looked down at the document, and her face was pale, and her left hand was trembling as she signed her name.(143,144)

The count is victorious, and when Justice Strauss has looked at the evidence she has to reluctantly agree that he and Violet are indeed married. The Count sends a message to get Sunny released and once she is safe Violet reveals her plan.

> "I did not sign the document in my own hand, as the law states . . . Like most people I am right handed. But I signed the document with my left hand."[1]

They consult Justice Strauss once again, and she finds for the children.

> "If Violet is indeed right handed," she said carefully, "and she signed the document with her left hand, then it follows that the signature does not fulfil the requirements of the nuptial laws. The law clearly states that the document must be signed in the bride's *own hand*. Therefore we can conclude that this marriage is invalid."

The important role that book learning has played in the evolving plot is clear enough. If the children hadn't read the law books they would not have discovered what Count Olaf was up to, and it is Violet's close attention to the detail of the text that gives her the idea that will save the day.

<u>The Didactic Text</u>

Finally in this chapter I want to look at a couple of examples which would seem to have a directly didactic purpose, though when talking of didactic purpose it is all too easy to fall into the intentionalist fallacy. Did the actual author intend to directly teach the reader, or does it just seem that way? Since the line that I have continuously taken in this book is that we can never know the author's intentions without having her or him in front of us, then all we have is the implied author, the one who seems to be implied by the text. In the case of anonymous third person narrators the implied author can often seem to be the same person as the narrator, in the case of first person narrators the implied author, paradoxically, is already partly hidden. For my purposes here I am going to stick to narrators, and let the implied authors take care of themselves. That said, the didacticism can take two forms. In the first we have a sense of the narrator teaching the reader indirectly by having one character teach another character directly, within the story. In the second the teaching is not mediated in this way, and instead seems to be addressed directly to the reader by the narrator. And of course, no sooner have I said that than Captain Marryat comes forward to confound me! Here is his preface to *Masterman Ready*. He

[1] This, and the following few quotes: p. 150 et. seq.

tells how he had been asked by his children to write a book for them along the lines of *Swiss Family Robinson*, which he proceeded to read for himself, only to discover it to be full of the wildest factual inaccuracies and misinformation. 'Fiction,' he argues, 'when written for young people, should, at all events, be *based* upon truth,' and he continues,

> My idea is to show the practical man in Ready, and the theoretical in the father of the family; and, as the work advances, to enter more deeply into questions which may induce children to think, or, by raising their curiosity, stimulate them to seek for information.(xii)

I am more than happy to take him at his word, but nonetheless shall carry on undaunted, though the specific example I want to look at in the book would certainly seem to fit his avowed purposes of inducing children to think and stimulating them to seek for further information, in this case about the formation of coral reefs. Our young protagonist has taken his father across to the leeward side of the island, upon which they have been wrecked, to show him where he and Ready have discovered a source of fresh water and in the process have also discovered a lagoon protected by reefs. When he and his father get there William comments on the beauty of the lagoon.

> "Is not this beautiful, father?" said William.
> "Yes, indeed it is, my dear boy," replied Mr. Seagrave.[1]

Mr Seagrave now makes the most of his opportunity to explain to William how coral islands are formed.

> "Who would have ever imagined, William," said Mr. Seagrave, "that this island, and so many more which abound in the Pacific Ocean, could have been raised by the work of little insects not bigger than a pin's head."

Having piqued William's curiosity Mr Seagrave picks up a piece of coral, and shows him the hundreds of little holes that once held the insects that were responsible for producing it and William then wants to know more.

> "Yes I understand that; but how do you make out that this island was made by them? that's what I want to know."
> "The coral grows at first at the bottom of the sea, where it is not disturbed by the winds or waves: by degrees, as it increases, it advances higher and higher to the surface, till at last it comes near to the top of the water…."

And he explains how, once it has reached the top of the water it becomes a reef. William prompts again:

> "Then how does it become an island?"

[1] This, and subsequent quotes in this section: pp. 85-87

> "By very slow degrees; the time, perhaps, much depending upon chance: for instance a log of wood floating about, and covered with barnacles, may ground upon the coral reefs; that would be a sufficient commencement, for it would remain above water, and then shelter the coral to the leeward of it, until a flat rock had formed, level with the edge of the water. The seabirds are always looking for a place to rest upon, and they would soon find it, and then their droppings would, in the course of time, form a little patch above water, and other floating substances would be thrown upon it; and land birds, which are blown out to sea, might rest themselves on it, and the seeds from their stomachs, when dropped, would grow into trees and bushes."
>
> "I understand that."
>
> "Well then, William, you observe there is an island commenced as it were, and, once commenced, it soon increases, for the coral would then be protected to leeward, and grow up fast…."

And so on and so forth, as Mr Seagrave adds leaf mould and a passing coconut or two until you have an island. It is to be noted that the explanation is driven by William's questioning and he is clearly a young person of curiosity who is 'stimulated to enter more deeply into questions in order to seek for information', and it could well be argued that William asks the questions that an interested reader would also want to ask.[1]

For my final example let return to Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother*, in which the didacticism is in one way so obvious that it passes you by, concealed, as it is, within Marcus's first person narration. As noted, Marcus is a computer whizz kid, and a good deal of the text is taken up with accounts of what he is doing on his computer or on his Xbox, which means that he has to explain it, which he does a lot of the time by means of direct address to the implied reader, thus effectively putting him in teaching mode and the implied reader in learning mode, most of the time by implication, though quite often by the use of the generic 'you' and 'your', or even by direct address.[2] A couple of examples taken at random of the generic 'you' that I've italicized to make my point:

> Gait-recognition software takes pictures of *your* motion, tries to isolate *you* in the pics as a silhouette, then tries to match the silhouette to a database to see if it knows who *you* are.

[1] I myself have a sense that I have 'always known', as the saying is, how coral islands were formed, and I'm pretty certain that I got the knowledge from reading the book when I was young, so Marryat certainly got through to one interested reader. As for his further stated aim that fiction for young people should be based upon the truth, it should be noted that he was a member of the Royal Society, of which Darwin was also a member, and the formation of coral islands was very much a matter of current interest, Darwin himself having delivered a paper to the society on the subject some two years before the publication of the novel, and Marryat's explanation was one of several that were current at the time.

[2] The book was published in 2008 and I am writing this is 2020, and given the pace of change in information technology at the moment, what he is explaining is presumably so out of date as to be positively antediluvian!, but no matter, I shall press on regardless.

Or:

> To build *your* own laptop, you start by ordering a "bare-book" – a machine with just a little hardware in it and all the right slots.

And as I say from time to time he even uses direct address:

> Let's just leave it at that, okay?

And clearly he enjoys explaining things:

> Teaching people how to use technology is always exciting.[1]

One of the major themes of the book concerns the surveillance of people's everyday lives by the authorities; it is a theme that is established in the very first sentence of the book.

> I'm a senior at Cesar Chavez High in San Francisco's sunny Mission district, and that makes me one of the most surveilled people in the world.(74)

And, as already noted, in the course of the story Marcus has to find a way of communicating with his friends and supporters that circumvents the DHS's surveillance, to which end he will have to create an unbreakable code complete with its own cyphers, the operation of which he proceeds to illustrate by going back to World War II, offering the implied reader a little history lesson:

> The Nazi cypher was called Enigma, and they used a little mechanical computer called an Enigma Machine to scramble and unscramble the messages they got. Every sub and boat and station needed one of these, so it was inevitable that eventually the Allies would get their hands on one.
>
> When they did, they cracked it. That work was led by my all-time personal hero, a guy named Alan Turing, who pretty much invented computers as we know them today. Unfortunately for him, he was gay, so after the war ended the stupid British government forced him to get shot up with hormones to "cure" his homosexuality and he killed himself.(1235)

As the narrative progresses things get a great deal more complicated, but the lessons learned from the breaking of the Enigma code are never far from Marcus's mind, and are continuously brought to bear on the developing story.

Teaching and learning, then, in a number of forms, serving a number of different purposes and having a number of different functions, functions which can be either within the plot, or ostensibly directed at the implied reader, or indeed both, as is the case, I would argue, with *Little*

[1] Again it's the Kindle edition so again it's location numbers rather than page numbers. Here, they are 196, 1015, 185, & 3399 respectively.

Brother. In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* specific curriculum knowledge itself is only really important when it comes to young Stephen's lack of it and his decision to improve his knowledge of Latin. And at various points in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, curriculum knowledge, generally mediated by Hermione, is an important element in the developing story. Still in the classroom, we find a very different example in *Ramona the Pest* where the actual process of Ramona's learning as she struggles with forming her letters becomes a little story in and of itself, and there are striking echoes between her efforts to form her letters and Grandpa's efforts, this time outside the classroom, to do the same in *Farm Boy*, and both Miss Binney and the young narrator in *Farm Boy* each have to devise, albeit very different, strategies for motivating their pupils. Other examples of direct teaching, also outside the classroom, of one character by another, are found in the Rowling and the Marryat, as Wood teaches Harry about Quidditch and Jacob Armitage teaches Edward how to stalk deer. And book learning itself stands Hermione and Klaus in good stead in their respective stories. Finally a touch of didacticism in *Little Brother* as first person narrator Marcus explains all the technicalities of what he is doing, as well as launching into a little history lesson about Alan Turing; and another touch of didacticism in *Masterman Ready* as Mr Seagrave explains to William how coral islands are formed. Also, be it noted, there are eager and highly motivated learners a-plenty too: Ramona, Grandpa, Harry, Hermione, Klaus, William, even, it might be argued, Stephen Greenfield, as he decides to start working and to improve his performance in Latin. As for learning through experience, which I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, I shall postpone that until discussion of Robinsonades in the next chapter, where it is, it seems to me, of particular relevance.

6
WE MUST MAKE A PROPER WELL
The Discourse of Engagement with the Physical World

> "But first, Master William, we must make a proper well at the spring, so as to have plenty of fresh water."
>
> Captain Marryat: *Masterman Ready*

This chapter is about science and technology. To oversimplify, the former is about understanding how things work, all the way from tsunamis to sub-atomic particles via motor car engines and butterfly's wings, and the latter is about how to turn that knowledge to our own ends. Each comes with its own discourse, but as you can see from the chapter heading I have combined them to call it the discourse of engagement with the physical world; and thus, in the examples I shall be looking at here, we will find children understanding things, exploring things, making things, and doing things. The examples involve detailed accounts of process, and in each case the events described have a bearing on the development of the narrative as a whole. The context that most lends itself to such activity is the desert island, for if there is a setting where the control and mastery of the physical world is essential for the survival of the characters, then abandonment on a desert island is it. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* of course provides the template for such stories, and in it we find a central character on his own on a deserted island with no means at hand to get away; and what follows are accounts of what he has to do to survive. So we have detailed descriptions of the making of rafts and canoes, of the building of palisades, of the digging out of caves and the domestication of wild goats and etc. As an adjunct to this, Crusoe also needs to find out what the island has to offer, to which end he surveys the entire island bit by bit. (The genre brings other elements with it, notably an invasion by savages[1] and of course the final rescue, neither of which, however, are my central concern here.) Various of these features are very obviously evident in nineteenth century children's books modelled on the original, and several Robinsonades, as the genre came to be called, were published for the juvenile market, Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson*, Marryat's *Masterman Ready* and Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* to name but three.

Let me start with *Masterman Ready* which, as well as providing a nice example of the didactic text which I discussed in the previous chapter, also offers plenty of examples of the discourse of engagement with the physical world. The one I want to look at here is the search for water and the building of the well that I mentioned earlier. The family have managed to rescue several kegs of water from the wreck but it will soon run out and there is none where they have landed, and the narrative about the need to find water is soon established. Here is Ready identifying the first problem, the size and topography of the island,

> "I expect a little difficulty with regard to water, for the island is low – very low, and small;"(38)

And a bit later on he re-iterates the need.

[1] c.f. my note in Ch 3 about the use of the word..

> "… we have not yet found any water, and that is the first necessity of life. If there is no water on this side of the island, we must pitch our tents somewhere else.(55)

They must explore, and Ready, taking William with him, plus Romulus and Remus, two of the dogs that they have also rescued from the wreck, sets off to do exactly that. They take with them a spade, and when William asks why, Ready explains that, '"…very often, there will be water if you dig for it."'(65) When William asks him how he knows all this he tells him that other seamen in similar circumstances have worked it out for themselves, and in a sentence that very neatly sums up my theme in this chapter, tells him,

> "Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention; and it's very true, Master William, for it sharpens man's wits; and it is very curious what people do contrive when they are compelled to do so.(65)

They proceed, and find to Ready's relief that the island is not as flat as he had at first feared.

> "I am very glad to find the island is not so flat here, Master Willy; we have a better chance of finding water."(67)

And when they do finally get to the other side of the island,

> Ready turned his eyes inland to see if he could discover any little ravine or hollow that might be likely to contain fresh water. "There are one or two places there," observed Ready, pointing to them with his finger, "where the water has run down in the rainy season: we must examine them carefully .."(69,70)

There is then a more detailed account of the pros and cons of digging for water.

> "I don't expect water above ground, but there may be some below it. This beach is hardly is hardly far enough from the water's edge, or I should try in the sand for it."
> "In the sand! – but would it not be salt?" replied William.
> "No; not if at a good distance from the sea beach, for you see, William, the sand by degrees filters the sea water fresh, and very often when the sand runs in a long way from the high water mark, if you dig down you will find good fresh water, at other times it is a little brackish, but still fit for use.[1]

All this time Ready has denied the dogs water because by so doing he hopes the dogs will smell out water for themselves, and so lead them to a naturally occurring source, and there is then a detailed account of the dogs doing just that as they move from promising dell to promising hollow.

[1] This, and the following detailed accounts are from pp.72-76

> They soon came to the dell and the dogs put their noses to the ground, and sniffed about. . . . at last they lay down panting.
>
> "Let us go on, sir," said Ready thoughtfully; they went on to where the run of water appeared to have been – the dogs sniffed about more eagerly than before. . . . "Look, Ready, at Romulus and Remus – how hard they are digging with their paws there in the hollow. . . . why do they dig?"
>
> "Because there is water there, poor animals." . . . . Ready walked quickly to where the dogs continued digging: they had already got down to the moist earth, and were so eagerly at work that it was with difficulty he could get them out of his way to use his spade. He had not dug two feet before the water trickled down, and in four or five minutes the dogs had sufficient to plunge their noses in, and to drink copiously.

They leave the hole to clear, and then return to ensure that the water is drinkable.

> They found the hole that Ready had dug quite full of water, and, tasting it, it proved very sweet and good.

And having found water, '"Now we have everything we could wish for on this island,"' says Ready; and they have also thus found the location for their more permanent settlement, '"Where we are now will be a capital spot to build our house on."' (It will not have escaped the reader's notice that there is plenty of teaching and learning going on here, and in many ways this whole sequence could have been discussed just as easily in the previous chapter as in this one.)

So far, then, in the search for water narrative, the discourse of engagement with the physical world has taken a number forms. We have first of all established the need to find water and the narrative urgency of doing so. The first question to be answered is whether the topography and size of the island will be conducive to finding it, and when they discover that it is not as flat as they had feared then the chances improve. Next we have an account of the process of digging down to find it, and the problems that may be encountered in doing so; and finally we see how they are able to use the naturally occurring needs of the dogs to help them. Not only that, but the finding of a source of water also determines where they are going to live. In narrative terms the finding of water couldn't be more important. We are however not done yet, hence the title of this chapter with regard to building a well. To start the process Ready explains that.

> "We must clear it out further up among the trees, where the sun cannot reach it, and then it will be cool, and not be dried up,"

Mr. Seagrave and William are given the job.(99 et seq.)

> "You observe, Mr. Seagrave, we must follow up the spring till we get among the coco-nut trees, where it will be shaded from the sun; that is easily done by digging towards them, and watching how the

> water flows. Then, if you will dig out a hole large enough to sink down in the earth one of the water casks which lie on the beach . . . then, when it is fixed in the earth that way, we shall always have the cask full of water for use, and the spring filling it as fast as we can empty it.

This they proceed to do, but discover that sinking the cask comes with its own problems. William articulates them, and his father encourages him to think them through to find a solution.

> "Oh dear," said William, "we shall have to throw all the water out to get the cask down."
> "Think a little, William," said Mr. Seagrave, "for the spring runs so fast that it will not be an easy task. Cannot we do something else?"
> "Why father, the cask will float, you know," replied William.
> "To be sure it will as it is; but is there no way of making it sink?"
> "Oh yes. I know – we must bore some holes in the bottom, and then it will fill and sink down of itself."

Luckily Ready has a gimlet to hand – conveniently rescued from the wreck. (Wrecks are terribly useful things in Robinsonades!)

> Ready bored three or four holes in the bottom of the cask, and as it floated the water ran into it, and by degrees it gradually sunk down. As soon as the top of the cask was level with the surface, they filled it all round with the spade and shovel, and the well was completed.
> "Tomorrow, when the water is settled, it will be as pure and clear as crystal, and remain so, if not disturbed," observed Ready.

At every stage, then, there is a detailed account of process, which in itself then becomes an exemplary example of the discourse of engagement with, and mastery of, the physical world. (It might also be noted that the positioning of the well has an important bearing on the denouement of the novel, where it ends up outside the stockade that they have built to keep the savages out, and when the necessity arises for Ready to go and get water because they have run out, he gets fatally wounded.)

For my next example I am going to return to Beverly Cleary's *Henry Huggins*, a book that couldn't be further away from a Robinsonade if it tried. The example is on a much smaller scale than the previous one, but it is nonetheless still very much an account of engagement with the physical world in order to solve a problem. In Ch. 2 Henry has used his savings, a whole dollar, to buy a couple of guppies, plus the bowl to keep them in, from the local pet store.[1] The first question is how does he look after them. Here the pet shop man is very helpful. He tells Henry that they are tropical fish that 'came from jungle rivers where the water was warm' and that thus the water in the bowl must not get too cold.

[1] All quotes in this section from pp 29-58

> "Now be sure to put the bowl near a heater in cold weather so the fish won't get chilled and catch ick."
> "Ick?" said Henry.
> "Yes, ick. It's short for *ichthyophthirius*. When the fish get chilled, they catch ick and are covered with tiny white spots."

Changing the water, how often, when, and why, is the next question.

> "You shouldn't have to change the water. The snails help to keep it clean. . . . It's only when the fish don't eat all their food or when you have too many fish in a bowl that the water gets dirty."

(As may be gathered the bowl came complete with snails.) However a further problem immediately arises since when Henry gets them home he, and his parents, somewhat to their dismay, discover that he has inadvertently bought a number of baby guppies in the same bowl – Henry counts thirty-eight of them. What is to be done? Henry goes to the library to see if he can find the answer, and gets a book out of the adult section which his father has to read.

> "According to this book you can't keep so many fish in one bowl . . . you're going to need some more fish bowls."

They go hunting in the basement to find some, and the process continues.

> Henry and his father rummaged through the basement until they found a gallon jar Mrs. Huggins used for making dill pickles. . . . They carried it upstairs and washed it. Mr Huggins filled it with hot water and carried it into Henry's room. "Now when the water cools we can move some of the little guppies. They can't live in cold water right out of the faucet. They need water that has stood, or hot water than has cooled. While it's cooling, we can make a net." He found a piece of wire and bent it into a circle. Mrs. Huggins took an old stocking and sewed it to the wire to make a little fish net.
> Henry and his father took turns catching the tiny fish with the net and moving them into the pickle jar.

The guppies multiply, using up more and more jars from the basement and Henry is faced with the task of looking after them. He runs out of pickle jars, and has to use quart jars instead, but 'He couldn't keep many fish in a quart of water.' He has to re-organise his bedroom to cope with them all.

> He had jars on his dresser. He had them on the table by his bed. He put jars on the floor all the way around the edge of the room. When he had one row of jars all the way around the floor, he started another row.

Feeding the guppies requires careful judgement and becomes very time consuming.

> It took Henry the rest of the morning to feed his fish. He had to put the tiniest pinch of the finest fish food into each jar.

He has to adjust his habits to look after them all.

> … he no longer had time to play with the other children on Klickitat Street. He spent all his allowance on fish food, snails, and plants for his jars. He slept with his windows shut if he thought the night were going to be cold.

Finally his mother needs the jars and Henry has to face the fact that the guppies' days are numbered, and he puts them all into a single jar and takes them back to the pet shop man who, it turns out, is pleased to have them, and compliments Henry on the way that he has kept them. '"Nice heathy ones too. You must have taken good care of them."' he tells him, and even offers to pay for them in kind: seven dollars' worth of goods. In this account we have seen Henry engaging with the physical world at a number of levels. First of all he has to understand the nature of guppies and the specifics of keeping them, that they like warm water, that he needs snails to keep their bowls clean, that they need the tiniest pinch of fish food every morning, and that they breed! Very rapidly! All of this impacts on his actions: the collection of jars, the organising of his room, the consumption of his free time, the changing of his sleeping habits, all of which actions are described in some detail, and constitute a fair bit of the narrative, and all which can certainly be construed as engagement with the physical world; and his success is reflected by the fact that in the process he not only has kept the fish nice and healthy, he has also gets to make a very considerable profit. By comparison with building wells on desert islands upon which your whole survival depends, keeping guppies on the dresser in the bedroom may seem like small potatoes. But the discourse of engagement with the physical world remains the same. In each case the characters meet with physical problems and have to work out ways of overcoming them, and in each case we have a detailed account of what they did. And in each case, as it happens, the characters make use of the natural capacities of the animals to hand. The dogs can be used find water, the snails can be used to keep the fishbowl clean. And in both cases the discourse has considerable narrative importance.

So finally let me turn my attention to Arthur Ransome's *Secret Water*, a novel where the entire narrative is dominated by and indeed built around the discourse of engagement with the physical world, this time in the form of the exploration and mapping of terrain. In the book we once again meet the Walker children, John, Susan, Titty, and Roger, plus their small sister, Bridget. Their father has given them the task of exploring and mapping what is effectively a little inland sea consisting mostly of saltmarsh and mud (in reality Hamford Water just south of Harwich on the Essex coast at Walton on the Naze), named 'Secret Water' by the children. He gives them the vaguest of charts, telling them '"It's the sort of map people might have of a place that had never been explored . . . You'll just be a wee bit better off than Columbus . . . you'll be marooned fair and square."'(17 & 30) From the children's perspective it will be '"Unexplored until we've explored it . . . This is the real thing."'(43) By the time they get to the end of the book they will have named every creek, gully and island. Their father's chart just shows vague land masses, and their task is to discover the extent to which those land masses are separated into

islands by creeks, and to map their findings. John takes on overall responsibility for the task, aided by Titty, whose job it is to produce the final definitive map of the islands, and who sums it up nicely.

> "Our map's going to show all of them separately," said Titty. "We're going to put in all the channels we can sail through when the tide's up."(68)

The children have two obstacles to overcome, one naturally occurring, the tide, and one unpredictable, time. The tide, because they can only map the channels definitively at high tide; and time, because they have to get it all done before their parents come to pick them up and they don't quite know when that will be. Much of the narrative is given over to a detailed account of the processes of exploring, of surveying, and of mapping. I will analyse one such detailed account of process from early on in the book as the children start their mapping by surveying the island they have camped on.(pp.71 et seq.) You will note that they have with them all the paraphernalia they need for the job, a compass, bamboo surveying poles, a set of parallel rulers, etc. To start with they need working maps on which to record their findings. John proceeds to trace them off the original that their father has given them.

> John, putting a piece of paper on the top of Daddy's blank map and then holding it up to the light, was making a careful tracing . . . . Then for the purpose of the survey, he made on a larger scale a copy of the big blob that on Daddy's map showed the island on which they had landed. In the corner of it he made a copy of the compass rose that Daddy had drawn, using the parallel rulers to make sure it was pointing in the same direction.

There follows an account of the surveying itself as they use triangulation to determine the position of the nearby farm, 'the kraal' as they have named it.

> Roger was sent off to plant one of the bamboo surveying poles at the corner of the dyke to the south of the camp, while John and Titty went off with the map, the compass, a notebook and another bamboo to the corner north of the camp where the dyke turned sharply eastwards . . . Titty planted the post, and John took a bearing from one post to the other, which was easily seen with Roger standing beside it.
>
> "This bit of the dyke's about north by north east. It will do for the kraal." He turned and faced inland towards the clump of trees and the farm chimneys. "South-east. Got the parallel rulers?"
>
> Kneeling on the ground, he ruled a line between the two posts, and then ruled another across the middle of the island from the dot on the map that marked the northern post.
>
> "It's somewhere on that line," he said. "Come on. Now we'll take a bearing of it from the other post."

> The two surveyors hurried along the dyke to join Roger, who was getting a little tired of holding up his post, because he had not been able to drive it far enough in to make it stand by itself.
>
> John jammed it in, and then, compass in hand, looked across at the distant chimney of the farmhouse. "Bit south of east," he said.
>
> "Let me try," said Roger, put the compass on the ground for steadiness and straddled above it. "Jolly nearly east-south-east."
>
> Titty tried. "It looks to me just between the two."
>
> John looked carefully across the compass at the farm, agreed . . . He made a mark on the compass rose half way between east and east-south-east, and putting one edge of the rulers on the centre of the rose, and on this mark, he used the other edge to draw a line east by south through the dot that marked the position of the southern post.
>
> "It's all right," he said. Look."
>
> The two lines crossed each other just about in the middle of the blob where Daddy had put a little square to mark the farm

In both passages the technical aspects are emphasised, with John copying the compass rose onto his working map, 'using the parallel rulers to make sure it was pointing in the same direction', then taking a bearing 'from one post to the other' and concluding, '"This bit of the dyke's about north by north east,"' then ruling his first lines and concluding, '"It's somewhere on that line,"', then finally using the parallel rulers to align the third line with the correct compass bearing, and arriving at his conclusion, 'The two lines crossed each other just about in the middle of the blob.' This sort of technical account is then embedded in other details about what they had to do in order to get the task done, which in their way are just as much accounts of process – the enumeration of the things that John and Titty are carrying for instance, or Roger not being able to drive the post into the ground, and a bit later placing the compass on the ground so that it will remain steady in order to get a more accurate reading than John, who was holding it in his hand, managed to do. The children continue surveying the rest of the island that they are camped on, and end up with an initial map covered with a criss-cross of lines which can be seen in one of Ransome's own illustrations inserted into the text at this point. The maps recur in the text throughout, with the final completed map being reproduced inside the front cover of the book, and are an integral part of the narrative serving to demonstrate the progress of the exploration. The novel moves to its end and they are running out of time. One last task remains, to discover whether one final piece of mud is permanently attached to the mainland, in which case it is coast, which they've tentatively named 'Blackberry Coast, or if there is a way through behind it at high tide, a 'North West Passage', in which case it is an island.

> "We won't put 'Coast' in till we're sure it isn't an island," said John. "Just look over there. All that mud and water. Nearly as big as the Red Sea. Either it's a lake or it comes into this creek. And if there's a way through further up Secret Water, a North West Passage, that'll be a sort of Arctic Sea and Blackberry's an island, not a coast.(208)

It falls to Titty and Roger to get up early on the last morning in order to complete the task and find out if there really is a way through, and it is as detailed an account of the process of engagement with the physical world as you could wish for. It is a substantial account that goes on for a number of pages, and in the middle of it there is the following passage. The two children have managed to get quite a way through when they come upon a stretch of mud that finally looks impassable.

> It was true that there was mud in front of them. It was as if they had run aground in a sort of bay. The mud stretched right and left to the low green line of the land. But straight ahead, on the other side of the mud, there was water again, another bay cutting into the mud on the opposite side. Titty watched it carefully.
>
> "I say, Roger, could you go up the mast? The boat's sitting firm. She won't turn over. And I'll sit in the bottom."
>
> "Of course I can," said Roger.
>
> "Go up then and have a look at the water the other side of the mud."
>
> Roger was up the mast in a minute and hung on there looking out.
>
> "Just water," he said.
>
> "Isn't it nearer that it was?"
>
> Roger watched. "Of course it is," he said at last. Tide's rising."
>
> "Then there must be another way out," said Titty. "Or how does the tide get at it? Where does the water come from?"
>
> There was no answer to that. From the masthead it was easy to see that there were two sheets of water creeping towards each other over the mudflats. One was the water that had brought them so far. The other was coming to meet it.
>
> "How soon'll they meet?" said Roger. "Look here, I can't hang on for ever, I'm coming down."
>
> "We're going to get through," said Titty.
>
> Inch by inch the waters came nearer to each other. The *Wizard* stirred, floated, moved on and stopped again. Titty, busy with her map, sketched in as well as she could as much of the coastline as she could see. . . . . "Roger," said Titty. "That's the way we'll have to go. Towards the place that other water's coming from. About North-east."
>
> "She's moving. No, stuck again. She's Moving." . . . . Every few minutes the boat stopped, moved on and stopped again. Suddenly she was off, moving steadily, faster and faster.(262/263)

The whole scientific process: – observing, thinking, applying previous knowledge, speculating, questioning, theory building, coming to conclusions, deciding to act on them in practice, results, recording their findings:

Observing:– 'Titty watched it carefully', and sending Roger up the mast, 'Go up then and have a look at the water the other side of the mud.' We learn what he observes, 'Tide's rising,' and

'From the masthead it was easy to see that there were two sheets of water creeping towards each other over the mudflats.'
Thinking and applying previous knowledge:– Titty knowing that she must sit in the bottom of the boat to keep it more stable when Roger goes up the mast, and by implication understanding that Roger will get a better view if he gets a bit higher; and at a more obvious and general level knowing that if the tide keeps rising then it will be possible to get through.
Speculating and questioning: – of the water on the other side of the mud: 'Isn't it nearer than it was?'; and '.. how does the tide get at it? Where does the water come from?'
Theory building and coming to conclusions:– 'Then there must be another way out,' and the climactic 'We're going to get through.'
Deciding to act on them in practice:– 'Roger," said Titty. "That's the way we'll have to go. Towards the place that other water's coming from.'
Results:– 'Every few minutes the boat stopped, moved on and stopped again. Suddenly she was off, moving steadily, faster and faster,'

Three books, then, all involving the solving of what are in all three cases technological problems, problems that the natural / physical world has presented them with, and using basic scientific procedure to solve them – observation, speculation, application of previous knowledge, theory building, etc. in short, understanding how things work, and once you have come to a conclusion, acting on it. Even Henry Huggins and his dad working out how to deal with the multiplying guppies, starting with their discovery of the babies in the very first instance, acting on previous knowledge gained from the pet shop man about water temperature and feeding routines and etc, plus referring to the existing literature to find out how many guppies you can keep in any one bowl, go through the same processes. In other respects, of course, the three stories couldn't be more different. In the Marryat the characters are faced with the very real task of needing to find water, for their very survival depends upon their finding it. But for all that in both *Secret Water* and *Henry Huggins* the tasks are self-imposed, they are nonetheless real enough at that. And just to add a final point, what links the previous chapter with this one is that this too is about learning, in this case learning by and through experience. In the process of engagement with the physical world the characters are identifying problems and working out ways of solving them as they go along, and working out ways to solve problems is most decidedly a learning process.

7

SHE DECIDED SHE WOULD LIKE TO KISS HIM

Discourses of Sex and Romance

> She found two members of the morning kindergarten especially interesting. One was a boy named Davy, who was small, thin, and eager. He was the only boy in the class in short pants, and Ramona liked him at once. She liked him so much she decided she would like to kiss him. Beverly Cleary: *Ramona the Pest*

It might be thought that sex and romance would be confined to YA books, and these days there is of course stacks of it there, but surprisingly it turns up in one form or another and in perhaps the most unexpected places in children's books proper too. How about starting in kindergarten! As can be seen in the quote from *Ramona the Pest* above, on her first day in kindergarten, five year old Ramona has set her sights on Davy, and she pursues him, you might say relentlessly, for most of the rest of the book. Her passion is spelt out in more detail when Davy comes to school wearing a cape. She watches him crossing the street:

> The more Ramona saw of Davy the better she liked him. He was such a nice shy boy with blue eyes and soft brown hair. Ramona always tried to choose Davy for her partner in folk dancing, and when the class played Grey Duck Ramona always tagged Davy unless he was already in the mush pot.

(Grey Duck[1] requires that the person tagged has to chase the tagger around a circle formed by the other children, which means that tagging Davy requires that he now has to chase Ramona around the same said circle.) On the cape day Ramona wants to know who Davy is pretending to be. Is he Superman, or Batman? No, Davy delightedly tells her, he's Mighty Mouse.

> "I'm going to kiss you, Mighty Mouse!" shrieked Ramona

Davy runs off with Ramona hot on his heels and:

> Every morning afterwards when Ramona reached the playground she tried to catch Davy so that she could kiss him. . . . Once Ramona came near enough to grab Davy's clothes, but he jerked away popping the buttons off his shirt. For once Davy stopped running. "Now see what you did!" he accused. "My mother is going to be mad at you."(64-66)

[1] Grey Duck is explained in more detail earlier in the book (p.28): the children have to stand in a circle and whoever is tagged has to chase the person who tagged them around the circle – the loser ends up in the mush pot in the middle.

As can be seen, Ramona is nothing if not determined! Davy may try to keep as far away from her as he can in the playground, but in class he is always interested in what she is doing and they find ways to get together. He comments on her Santa Claus picture(70), and as we saw earlier, he takes her advice about how to form his *D*'s, and even in the playground he keeps a weather eye on what she's doing, spotting a worm that she's picked up and absentmindedly wound round her finger.

> "Look!" yelled Davy …. "Ramona's wearing a ring made out of a *worm*!"

When questioned by her teacher she says it's her engagement ring.

> "Who are you engaged to?" asked Ann.
> "I haven't decided," answered Ramona.
> "Not me," Davy piped up.
> "Not me," said Howie.
> "Not me," said Eric.(103,104)

Ramona is clearly keeping her options open! Later when her new boots have got stuck in the mud and Henry Huggins, whom we have also already met, retrieves them, she finds another worm, again winds it around her finger, and turns her attentions to Henry,

> "I've got an engagement ring, and I'm going to marry you!" yelled Ramona after Henry, as the morning kindergarten laughed and cheered.(122-123)

But her first love remains Davy, and finally Halloween gives her the license she needs. Hiding behind the anonymity of her rubber witch's mask 'she pounced and kissed him'.(134) She suddenly discovers that there's a problem, however. Given that a number of children are wearing witch's masks, will Davy have known it was her? Seemingly he doesn't, for when she asks him he tells her she's 'just another old witch' and Ramona becomes frightened by her own loss of identity and takes off her mask, but in the process becomes somewhat subdued. Now it's Davy who takes the initiative and Ramona, now playing hard to get, rebuffs him.

> Davy raced up to her and yelled. "Yah! You can't catch me!"
> "I don't want to catch you," Ramona informed him.
> Davy looked surprised and a little disappointed.(139)

As I noted above, Davy is not entirely un-flattered by her attentions, but alas, as they say, the course of true love never did run smooth!

Rampant Ramona may be something of an exception, but romance is no new discourse in children's literature, and for my next example I shall skip back some sixty years to L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, another example from the time that 'children's books' didn't exist and there was only 'juvenile literature', and also from a time when the 'child

'leaving age' as I have dubbed it, was a good deal younger than it is now. The book charts the progress of the romance between Anne and Gilbert Blythe, who is a couple of years older than her. Anne first encounters him on her second day at school, when she is still only eleven.[1] His reputation precedes him – here's Anne's best friend, Diana, telling her all about him.

> "He's *awf'ly* handsome, Anne. And he teases the girls something terrible. He just torments our lives out."

The truth of the latter comment is demonstrated when the first thing he does when he arrives next day is pin the hair of the girl in front of him to her seat. After the expected shriek when she tries to stand up Gilbert unpins the girl's hair and winks at Anne.

> "I think your Gilbert Blythe *is* handsome," confided Anne to Diana, "but I think he's very bold. It isn't good manners to wink at a strange girl."

Having thus made contact with Anne, he is piqued when she doesn't look at him:

> Gilbert Blythe wasn't used to putting himself out to make a girl look at him and meeting with failure.

And so to get her attention he pulls *her* hair.

> Gilbert reached across the aisle, picked up the end of Anne's long red braid, held it out at arm's length, and said in a piercing whisper: "Carrots! Carrots!"

To suggest that Anne is not pleased would be a considerable understatement. She springs to her feet.

> "You mean hateful boy!" she exclaimed passionately. "How dare you!"
>
> And then – Thwack! Anne had brought her slate down on Gilbert's head and cracked it – slate not head – clear across.

Having her hair pulled would have been bad enough, but Anne, who has red hair, hates to have attention drawn to it, so it is a double humiliation. (It is also to be noted that Gilbert himself also has red hair which, it is suggested later in the book, perhaps accounts for his interest in her.) Anne is made to stand in front to the class for the rest of the afternoon even though Gilbert confesses that it was his fault. By the end of the day she has sworn that,

> She would *never* look at him again! She would never speak to him!!

And when, after school, he tries to apologise to her, it is unsurprisingly to no avail

[1] The encounter plays out over several pages – pp.130-135

> "I'm awfully sorry I made fun of your hair, Anne," he whispered contritely. "Honest I am. Don't be mad for keeps, now."
> Anne swept by disdainfully, without look or sign of hearing.

It is clear, however, that Gilbert is not deterred, and the next day, when Anne, to her utter humiliation, has been made to sit next to him as a punishment for failing to be back in into class as soon as she should have been after lunch break, he passes a little pink candy heart across to her with 'You are sweet' written on it.

> Whereupon Anne arose, took the pink heart gingerly between the tips of her fingers, dropped it on the floor, ground it to powder beneath her heel, and resumed her position without deigning to bestow a glance on Gilbert.(138)

The conflict thus established then informs the rest of the book. Initially it takes the form of a competition between the two of them to outdo each other in their school work. Despite the difference in their ages they end up in the same class[1] doing the same work, and each wants to be top of the class. Gilbert himself remains good-natured about it but Anne …

> …. flung herself into her studies heart and soul, determined not to be out-done in any class by Gilbert Blythe. . . . .
> She was as intense in her hatreds as in her loves. She would not stoop to admit that she meant to rival Gilbert in school work, because that would have been to acknowledge his existence.
> (163,164)

Of course there is little that Anne is more aware of than his existence, since in order to compete with him she has to watch him like a hawk, and many a time when she is telling Marilla about her school work she will start talking about what he has done, only to hastily switch to making 'the other children' the subject of her observations. Time passes and other things happen in the book, but Gilbert remains constant, and even two years later he is still sweet on her, as she learns from her friend, Diana. The occasion is the school concert in which both Anne and Gilbert have distinguished themselves.

> "Wasn't the boys' dialogue fine?" said Diana. "Gilbert Blythe was just splendid. Anne, I do think it's awful mean the way you treat Gil. Wait till I tell you. When you ran off the platform after the fairy dialogue one of your roses fell out of your hair. I saw Gil pick it up and put it in his breast pocket."(245)

But Anne's attitude hasn't changed, she still feigns indifference.

[1] As in 'academic' class rather than age related class, i.e. a group of children doing work at the same academic level irrespective of age. Though having once got them into the same academic group, the term then becomes subject related – 'spelling class', 'arithmetic class', etc.

> "It's nothing to me what that person does," said Anne loftily. "I simply never waste a thought on him, Diana."(246)

The next encounter occurs when Anne and her friends are down by a local pool with a bridge over it, named by Anne in her younger fanciful days as the Lake of the Shining Waters, re-enacting the story of Elaine and her unrequited love for Lancelot – they had studied Tennyson's poem in school.[1] The re-enactment requires that Anne should lie in the bottom of a dory, a little flat bottomed fishing boat, clutching a lily to her breast and looking as if she is dying tragically of a broken heart. To her dismay the boat is holed and, as she drifts downstream, begins to fill with water, and she finds herself clutching one of the bridge piles as the boat sinks beneath her. To her immense chagrin her rescuer turns out to be, you've guessed it, Gilbert Blythe, who appears rowing another dory.

> There was no help for it; Anne, clinging to Gilbert Blythe's hand, scrambled down into the dory, where she sat, drabbled and furious, in the stern with her arms full of dripping shawl . . .

Despite her rescue Anne remains haughty, but Gilbert makes one further attempt to make amends.

> "Anne," he said hurriedly, "look here. Can't we be good friends? I'm awfully sorry I made fun of your hair that time. I didn't mean to vex you and I only meant it as a joke. Besides, it's so long ago. I think you hair is awfully pretty now – honest I do. Let's be friends."[2]

His appeal almost finally softens Anne's heart.

> For a moment Anne hesitated, She had an odd, newly awakened consciousness under all her outraged dignity that the half-shy, half-eager expression in Gilbert's hazel eyes was something that was very good to see.

But still she can't bring herself to relent, and Gilbert, tired of being spurned, responds with spirit.

> "No," she said coldly, "I shall never be friends with you, Gilbert Blythe; and I don't want to be."
> "All right!" Gilbert sprang into his skiff with an angry colour in his cheeks. "I'll never ask you to be friends again, Anne Shirley. And I don't care either!"

And from this point onwards Gilbert himself starts taking the rivalry between the two of them seriously, even more so when they enter the 'Queen's class', designed to prepare them for the

[1] *Lancelot and Elaine*, one of the sequence of poems that make up Tennyson's reworking of the Arthur legend, *Idylls of the King*.
[2] This, and the following quotes from the same episode: pp.271,272

exam that will get them into Queen's Academy which will in its turn qualify them to be teachers. Furthermore he otherwise takes to ignoring Anne completely.

> . . . and Anne found out it was not pleasant to be ignored. It was in vain that she told herself with a toss of the head that she did not care. Deep down in her wayward, feminine little heart[1] she knew that she did care, and if she had that chance of the Lake of the Shining Waters again, she would answer very differently.(295)

He ignores her as they compete for the exam, though when they get to Queens itself she is pleased to find herself in the same class as Gilbert, 'the tall brown haired boy across the room', and discovers that she admires his 'splendid chin'.(333,334) He, however, befriends another girl, Ruby Gillis, though as Anne's new found friend, Jane, tells her,

> "I shouldn't think she was the sort of girl Gilbert would like."(339)

And Anne agrees,

> She could not help thinking, too, that it would very pleasant to have such a friend as Gilbert to jest and chatter with and exchange ideas about books and studies and ambitions.(340)

Her rivalry with Gilbert continues, 'but the bitterness had gone out of it' and she regards him rather as a 'worthy foeman'.(342) Finally, and at last, as the book draws to its close, they both find themselves as seventeen year olds employed as teachers in local schools. In fact Gilbert has been given the local school in Avonlea itself, and Anne one that involves travelling, but he sacrifices the post so that Anne may have it, and himself takes one further away. Despite everything, there can be no doubting his depth of feeling for her. And Anne herself cannot but thank him. She meets him in the lane and holds out her hand to him.

> "Gilbert," she said, with scarlet cheeks, "I want to thank you for giving up the school for me. It was very good of you – and I want you to know that I appreciate it."
>
> Gilbert took the offered hand eagerly.
>
> . . . "Are we going to be friends after this? Have you really forgiven me my old fault?
>
> Anne laughed, and tried unsuccessfully to withdraw her hand.
>
> "I forgave you that day by the pond landing, although I didn't know it. . . I've been sorry ever since."(368)

And so the book ends, with, to Marilla's wry amusement, them chatting at the gate for half an hour on end. The book is about many other things too, but the relationship between the two of them has been an integral part of the narrative throughout. It has been a spur to Anne to work hard in order to compete with Gilbert, and despite her many protestations he is never far from her

[1] An expression which most decidedly raises eyebrows today, but Montgomery was of writing in a different era, where it was perfectly acceptable to write of girls having wayward, feminine, little hearts.

mind, and from the first page to the last it is clear that she finds him attractive. The importance of the discourse in the structure of this book is further indicated by the fact that it is the focus of its very last pages. (Those of you who know the books will know that they do finally get married, but it is only at the end of the third book in the series, *Anne of the Island*, that he finally proposes and she finally accepts, and in the course of his proposal he even recalls the slate incident. '"I've loved you ever since that day you broke your slate over my head in school."'(12313)[1]

To sum up, in both the cases that I have examined here the discourse of romance is one of the discourses around which the structure of each of the books is built. Note that I say 'one of' for it is not the main discourse in either of them. *Ramona the Pest* is about Ramona's first term at school generally, and the developing relationship between her and Davy is only part of that overarching discourse. However it runs like a thread through the whole structural weave of the book, and is one of the threads that serves to unite the ostensibly episodic nature of the book into a more coherent whole. *Anne of Green Gables* is about all sorts of things, about the developing relationship between her and her adoptive parents and between her and the village at large, about her friendships, about her unfettered fantasising about the natural world around her, and about *her* first days at school; and the developing romance between her and Gilbert is only part of that latter discourse. But nonetheless it too has an important structural role in the development of the plot. I have discussed a couple of examples in detail, but they will not be the only ones I am sure. Immediately I can think of the relationship between Moomintroll and the Snork Maiden in Tove Jansson's *Moomintroll* books for instance; and Rumer Godden's *Listen to the Nightingale* has the same opposites attract trajectory as does *Anne of Green Gables*. And then there is the 14 year old Harry Potter and the putative romance between him and the Chinese girl, Cho in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, followed, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by the developing affair between the now 16 year old Harry and Ron's sister, Ginny, and between Ron himself and Hermione.[2] By the end of the final volume both couples are married and have children of their own setting out for their first term at Hogwarts. But again, as with some of the examples above, we are straying into the field of YA literature, though the Harry Potter series itself is gloriously defiant of such age determined categorisations of its potential readership.

Generally, though, as I say, in 'children's literature' romance is only ever going to be a part of developing plots with other focuses, and it is to YA literature you would have to turn if you wanted to find it playing a central role. So, for example, Beverley Cleary's 1956 *Fifteen* is an early example of a full blown romance aimed squarely at what, back then, was called the teenage market, and come 1975 Judy Blume broke new ground with the sexually explicit *Forever*. As far as homosexuality is concerned, 1982 saw the publication of David Rees's heartfelt coming out story, *The Milkman's On His Way*, and the same year saw the publication of Aidan Chambers' similarly themed *Dance on My Grave*. Now sexually explicit content is routinely to be found in YA literature, both gay and straight, and even splendidly omnisexual, as, for example, in Francesca Lia Block's *Dangerous Angels* (a.k.a *Weetzie Bat*) series and the ostensibly adult novel *Nymph*[3] But let me finish with a book from the 1950's when, in England at least,

[1] Back to the Kindle edition I fear.

[2] I'll give them a year! I mean, Ron may be an idiot, but Hermione certainly should have known better!

[3] *Nymph* is mot marketed as a YA book though it clearly should be, and it, along with Block's *Dangerous Angels* series and the films of Greg Araki, should be on the compulsory school syllabus across the English speaking world!

homosexuality was still illegal, but in which there is clearly a love affair between two boys, Rosemary Sutcliff's *Warrior Scarlet*.

The basic scenario:- Southern England, the South Downs; it is the bronze age, 900 BC. Two peoples, one subservient, one dominant, the first being the earliest settlers, with flint tools and weaponry, living off the land, sheep farmers; the second being a warrior nation, hunters, with bronze weaponry, against whom the earlier settlers have no defence. So the latter hold the former in thrall and set them to tend their herds while they rule the roost. The earlier peoples were short and dark – the Dark People; the second tall, red haired, fair of skin – the Sun People, the Golden People. The protagonist of the story is Drem, a member of one of the Sun People's tribes, but with a withered arm, which is a problem if he wants to become a warrior, entitled to wear the scarlet kilt. At the start of the story he is only 9, and his delight is to spend time with the shepherds, helping with the sheep, and staying out all night with them; and by the end of the story he has indeed become a New Spear, entitled to wear the Scarlet, a fully-fledged member of the Tribe, and the book charts his adventures, his trials and tribulations, on his journey from the one point to the other. The first great love of his life is his dog, Whitethroat, whom he has had since he was a puppy, but the second great love of his life is Vortrix, the chief's son, who is his contemporary at the Boys' House, where he goes at the age of 12 to train to become a warrior. On the very first day there all the boys find themselves waiting outside in the rain until, led by Vortrix, they daringly decide to enter. Drem notices that the fire has died down, and given courage by Vortrix's example, he throws on a couple of logs,

> Vortrix had led them in here, he, Drem, would be the one to wake the fire.(68)

They see a great heavy war shield, and one by one struggle to pick it up, holding the shield on one arm and grasping a war spear with their free hand. Drem manages to pick up the shield with his good arm, but has no hand left with which to grasp a spear. The others start to taunt him, led by Luga, who has long borne a grudge against him, and Drem realises that they are all getting ready to beat him up, so he hits back first, smashing his fist into Luga's face, and within a moment they are all onto him. Even though he knows he can't win, he fights for all his worth,

> And then, when he was all but done, somebody dived low through the flailing mass of arms and legs, and whirled about at his side.(72)

And after Kylan, their chief trainer, has entered and laid about him with a whip to separate the fighting boys, Drem looks to see who it was that was helping him.

> He saw that it was Vortrix . . . . They looked at each other gravely. almost warily, and then, as though making up their minds, broke into slow and rather wavering grins.(73)

Then, after the other boys had drifted away,

> Vortrix flung an arm of friendliness round Drem's neck. He had cut his knuckles on Urian's front teeth and a crimson trickle from the cut

> under Drem's eye splashed on to his hand where it was still bleeding. They both saw it, and looked at each other. Vortrix laughed, and then grew sober, for it was no laughing matter after all. "See, we have mingled our blood. Now we are brothers, you and I.(75)

From that moment on they are firm friends, clearly drawn to each other, and whenever they can, doing everything together. So, for example,

> Drem and Vortrix had hunted together since that first day in the Boys' House, the day that that they had become blood brothers whether they would or no; . . .(76)

Though, when they hunt, Whitethroat somehow senses it, and always turns up too. And at the end of every hunt Drem needs a moment on his own to say goodbye to the dog, and Vortrix is sensitive to his need,

> . . . Vortrix was never present at these partings. Drem was one to keep his loves in separate stalls; (77)

As the story progresses the bond between the two boys is continually reiterated, even to the extent that one can tell what the other is thinking. For example at the King Making – the old king has died and his son is to take his place – Drem is carried away by the playing of the blind harpist:

> Drem shut his eyes, hearing the winged notes fly upwards in the darkness, above the deep surf of voices round the fire. And when he opened his eyes again, the firelight seemed brighter than it had done before, and the flower petal shape of Whitethroat's pricked ears gave him an almost painful stab of pleasure,
>
> Vortrix, squatting at his shoulder, said, "I suppose it is fair enough. Anyone can be a warrior and see the sky and the way the shadows run, but only one in a host can make the Harp Magic.". It sometimes happened like that between him and Vortrix: they did not talk to each other much, but often they knew what the other was thinking.(91)

Finally Drem's training is complete, and it is coming up to the time when he must face the final test before he can graduate as a New Spear: he must slay a wolf single handed. It is a fight to the death, no-one may help him. Vortrix helps him get dressed in an account that is nothing if not intimate,

> Standing naked by the fire, with the others about him, and the whole of the boy's house awake and eager in the shadows as always when there was a wolf slaying in the wind, Drem tied back his hair with a thong, that it might not get in his way: and stood for Vortrix to bind

> the supple, sweat-darkened straps of pony hide about his belly and between his legs and around his left forearm.(106)

Finally there is the encounter with the wolf itself. Drem misses his footing and the wolf is upon him, about to tear out his throat when…

> There seemed to be another struggle rolling over him, and confusedly he knew that the Wolf had turned from his throat. He heard its snarl rise to a sudden yelping howl; he was aware of a great weight gone from him . . . . . And Vortrix's arm came down to him, helping him to his feet.(112)

By intervening, Vortrix has broken tribal custom, a custom that was 'stronger than all the men of the Tribe'(121), and he will be harshly punished, as indeed he is. As for Drem, he is banished from the tribe and must leave home, condemned to live with the Dark People for the rest of his life. But Vortrix has not yet gone through the initiation ceremony that will make him a full member of the tribe, and is thus able to visit him one last time. Here's Drem,

> "And so tomorrow I must stand to see you and all our company go away from me – and turn back alone, after you are gone."
> "My brother – oh my brother – we have hunted the same trails and eaten from the same bowl and slept in the same bed when the hunting was over. How shall I go on or you turn back alone?"
> "I do not know," Drem said. "It must be – it must be; but how, I do not know."
> They reached out their hands to each other, Vortrix's two hands. Drem's one, gropingly, as though they were blind. Their arms were round each other in a close hard embrace. They had been equally matched, a team that had neither leader nor follower; but now in their parting it was Drem who was the stronger of the two, and Vortrix who cried like a woman, with his head bent into the hollow of Drem's shoulder.(121)

And so Drem finds himself living with the Dark People and working as a shepherd and effectively condemned never to see Vortrix again, though he does hear rumour that he has met a girl.

By and large the two peoples never meet, but as autumn turns to winter and the first snows arrive and food starts to get short, the wolves start to gather, and the men of the Tribe must come to the aid of the Dark People to help them protect the flocks. And Vortrix is with them. At first Drem won't look at him, but finally they do get a moment together and Vortrix tells him,

> "I am – lonely without my brother …
> "One was telling me that there was a girl, … one was telling me that she grows very fair…"

> "If there were a girl under your cloak, though her hair were as bright as the sun and her arms as white as mare's milk, would she fill my place?" There was no more to be said.(146)

There is, however, in one sense, a happy ending when, at the final climax of the book, the sheep are attacked by the wolves and Drem fights them off virtually single handed, managing to kill one of them himself before help arrives, and it turns out to be the very wolf that he failed to kill in his initial conflict; and Vortrix is there to witness it. Drem has been badly mauled and, while he is slowly recovering, Vortrix has made the case first to his father, the chief, then to Midir, the high priest of the tribe who has the last word in these matters, that this slaying should still count, not least because it was the same wolf; and so Drem is indeed made a New Spear and initiated into the Tribe and gets to wear the Scarlet after all. As for girls.… Vortrix does go on to marry his girl, and Drem himself marries a girl who has been part of his own household, though generally pretty much ignored since she was one of the Dark People, the offspring of a passing bronze merchant, and whose mother died in childbirth, leaving her on the doorstep as it were. And it has been a sort of secondary romance that has been lurking in the background of the text, since she plainly adores Drem but he has never paid her the slightest bit of attention until now. But the development of that relationship only ever gets a passing mention in the text, it is the love between the two boys that that is the main focus. And it is a remarkable account. From the very start they are inseparable, hunting together, eating together, sleeping together, with a bond so close that each can sense what the other is thinking and, when it comes to it, Vortrix will save Drem's life rather than let the wolf kill him for all that it will mean that he himself will be severely punished. They think of each other as brothers: 'Now we are brothers, you and I', 'My brother – oh my brother', 'I am – lonely without my brother', but it goes further than that with Vortrix being named as one of Drem's loves, and at their final parting they fling their arms around each other and Vortrix weeps. Modern identity politics would demand to know if it was a 'gay' relationship, were they gay in the modern sense of the word?, but in many ways it strikes me as an irrelevant question. Yes, they shared the same bed, and were presumably naked when they did so – much mention is made of the nakedness or semi nakedness of all the boys at various points in the text – and they were secluded in an all-male society for 2½ years, and they were clearly two red-blooded young men, so it would be very surprising if they *didn't* engage in sexual activity. More to the point, Vortrix makes it clear that no girl could fill Drem's place in his affections, and their relationship is nothing if not reminiscent of that between the biblical David and Jonathan,[1] so if you want to count that as gay, that's up to you.

Three romances then, one set in a kindergarten of all unexpected places; one starting more conventionally in school between an 11yr old girl who catches the attention of a boy a couple of years older than her, which is initiated when she smacks a slate over his head!; and one between two boys in the Bronze age. All three romances have a considerable narrative importance within the stories; and all three books are books whose marketing, as it happens, was not aimed at one specific age group rather than another: the Montgomery dating from a time when such books were only marketed as 'juvenile literature', the Sutcliff being described on the cover only as a historical novel for children, and the Cleary having no specific recommendation at all, either on

[1] 2 Samuel 1:26: 'I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.'

the cover or inside it, as to the age of its potential readership, which is great, because that meant that I was allowed to read it too.

8
STORMING THE CASTLE OF THE ENEMY
Discourses of the Carnivalesque

> Cook's answer was to slam the door in his face and lock it. The thirty guests were slightly disconcerted, but not for long.
> "Come on!" shouted William excitedly. "She's the enemy. Let's storm her ole castle."
>
> Richmal Crompton: *Just William*

The carnivalistic discourse is one in which authority is overthrown, hierarchies are overturned, disorder triumphs over order, and all social convention is set at nought.[1] Such licence abounds in children's literature where there is often the added attraction that the order being challenged is adult order and constraint. Adults are the enemy, and their castles of propriety are ripe for storming. In the following discussion I have somewhat arbitrarily divided my examples into four categories: anarchic narratives, trickster narratives, naughty children narratives, and narratives where any attempt to find coherence of social expectation is doomed to failure and nothing makes any sense at all.

Anarchy

In this category I am including narratives where the discourse of the carnivalesque arises spontaneously out of the situation with little or no human agency. Henry Huggins' first encounter with Ribsy, the dog that has picked him up, and whom we met in the adults and children chapter, provides us with a nice example. The circumstances are these. Henry is innocently returning from swimming, eating an ice cream when he meets Ribsy. The dog is pretty clearly a stray, thin and underfed and clearly in need of a sympathetic owner; and when Henry shares his ice cream with him he knows that he has found one. That Ribsy is a force for disorder is already clear on their initial encounter. The dog watches Henry eating his ice-cream, and it is not long before he has broken the order of Henry's universe, in which ice creams are for boys not dogs,

> "Hello you old dog," Henry said. "You can't have my ice cream cone."
> Swish, swish, swish went the tail. "Just one bite," the dog's brown eyes seemed to say.
> "Go away," ordered Henry.

The dog doesn't, and . .

> The ice cream cone disappeared in one gulp.(5)

The next disruption occurs when Henry rings his mother to see if he can bring him home and Ribsy, who is in the phone booth with him, has a contribution of his own to add.

[1] I am drawing here on Bakhtin's analysis of carnival in his book *Rabelais and His World*

> Ribsy began to scratch. Thump, thump, thump. Inside the telephone booth the thumps sounded loud and hollow.
> "For goodness sake, Henry, what's that noise?" his mother demanded. Ribsy began to whimper then to howl. "Henry," Mrs. Huggins shouted, "are you all right?"(7)

When his mother acquiesces, Henry realises he will have to come home on the bus. Ribsy's genius for creating chaos is rapidly unleashed. It takes three tries to get Ribsy onto a bus in the first place. The driver of the first one won't let Ribsy on at all: '"No animal can ride on a bus unless it's inside a box."' On the second try, with Ribsy now in a box, Henry discovers that, with his hands full he can't get at the dime in his pocket to pay the fare. On the third go he does get on with Ribsy now in a shopping bag, from which he rapidly escapes – more chaos:

> "E-e-ek! A dog!" squealed the lady with the bag of apples. "Go away, doggie, go away!
> Ribsy was scared. He tried to run and crashed into the lady's bag of apples. The bag tipped over and the apples began to roll toward the back of the bus, which was grinding up a steep hill. The apples rolled around the feet of the people who were standing. Passengers began to slip and slide. They dropped their packages and grabbed one another.
> Crash! A high school girl dropped an armload of books.
> Rattle! Bang! Crash! A lady dropped a big paper bag. The bag broke open and pots and pans rolled out.
> Thud! A man dropped a coil of garden hose. The hose unrolled and the passengers found it wound round their legs.
> People were sitting on the floor. They were sitting on books and apples. They were even sitting on other people's laps. Some of them had their hats over their faces and their feet in the air.(20,21)

Unsurprisingly Henry (and Ribsy) get thrown off the bus, but by this time it is dark and his parents had got worried about where he was and contacted the police, who turn up to collect him.

> "Are you going to arrest me?" Henry asked timidly. . . . .
> "What do you think?" the officer asked his partner, who was driving the squad car.
> "We-e-ell, I think we might let him off this time," answered the driver.(25)

And off they go, all sirens blaring – obviously they've picked up a bit of the carnivalesque spirit too. Ribsy is as pure an example of the carnivalesque as you could ever wish to find. He invades Henry's routine world of ice cream after swimming. He complicates phoning home and turns getting onto a bus into a major undertaking, and finally brings escalating mayhem to the passengers within it returning from an afternoon's shopping. Every element of good order, first that of Henry himself, then that of the adults around him, destroyed at a stroke. And when the police arrive to restore order, a bit of the carnivalesque has rubbed off on them too. Chaos rules.

Tricksters

Henry Huggins himself is no trickster figure, indeed he is desperately trying to contain the chaos that is being wrought by Ribsy who is the trickster of the tale, albeit an inadvertent one. There is however nothing inadvertent about Richmal Crompton's William, though, like Ribsy, he's a force of nature if ever there was one. My example is taken from *Just William*, the first in the series. As will be seen, William's main aim in life is to use his wiles to circumvent and otherwise subvert, undermine, and even directly challenge any form of order that, from his point of view, restricts his freedom to do whatever he wants, '"The sort of things I want to do they don't want me to do an' the sort of things I don' want to do they want me to do."'(121) The forces of restraint in this case are his parents and his older brother and sister, Robert and Ethel. In Ch. VI, entitled *A Question of Grammar*[1], he subverts the very use of language itself to further his own agenda. It is raining, and we open as his family attempt to channel his energies into some peaceful indoor occupation.

> "What can I do? He demanded of his father for the tenth time.
> "*Nothing!*" said his father fiercely from behind his newspaper.

He asks his mother the same question, who suggests that he sits quietly, and when that won't suffice, that he read or draw: '"No, that's lessons. That's not doin' anything!"' Unwisely she offers to teach him to knit: 'With one crushing glance William left her.' He goes to the drawing room, interrupting a conversation between his sister and a friend, and discovers that, by following his father's instruction to the letter – to sit and do 'nothing' – sitting and doing 'nothing' can itself be used to disruptive effect.

> "What are you doing, William?" said the friend sweetly.
> "Nothin'," said William with a scowl.
> "Shut the door after you when you go out, won't you, William?"
> said Ethel, equally sweetly.

And when he interrupts his brother and a friend in the library Robert is blunt, "Oh, get out!" Returning to the kitchen he interrupts his mother to ask if he can have some friends in but she tells him it's too late, so he asks when he *can* have friends in and she tells him:

> "Any time, if you ask. . .
> "Can I have lots?"
> "Oh, go and ask your father."

Which he does:

> "Father, when you're all away on Saturday, can I have a party?"
> "No, of course not."

Finally the rain stops, and his father thankfully orders him out. Going out after recent rain has its own possibilities. Puddles can be splashed through, mud can be squelched through, full ditches

[1] All the quotes are taken from Ch VI, pp. 117 – 131.

can be jumped over and fallen into, all to generally deleterious effect. Coming home 'wet and cheerful', he reiterates his request about the party, trying to couch the question more circuitously,

> "Did you say I could have a party, Father?" he said casually.
> "*No,* I did *not*," said Mr Brown firmly.

However next day, in his English Grammar lesson, he learns from his teacher, Miss Jones, that two negatives make a positive, and she provides an example:

> "If you said 'There's not no money in the box' you mean there is."

. . and a light dawns in William's head as he recalls his father's double negatives from the previous day: '"*No,* of course *not*"' and '"*No,* I did *not*"'. They should, according to the rules of grammar vouchsafed to him by his teacher, be interpreted as positives, respectively meaning *Yes, of course* and *Yes, I did* and so, despite the prickings of his conscience, 'that curious organ', he invites the entire class to the aforementioned party, telling them that his father had given him permission, and telling his mother, as she departs with the rest of the family on Saturday morning, that he will only do things his parents have said 'yes' to. They leave the house in the charge of the cook whose peace is shattered when she sees William marching up the road with the rest of the class behind him.

> He was bringing them joyfully home with him. Clean and starched and prim they issued from their homes, but they had grown hilarious under William's benign influence. . . . They were happy crowd. William headed them with a trumpet.

Cook challenges them and William tells her they've come to tea. '"That they've *not*!"' is the cook's unsurprising repost, but William disingenuously tells her his father had said 'Yes'

> ". . 'cause of English grammar and wot Miss Jones said."
> Cook's answer was to slam the door in his face and lock it. The thirty guests were disconcerted, but not for long.
> "Come on!" shouted William excitedly. "She's the enemy. Let's storm her ole castle."
> The guests' spirits rose. This promised to be infinitely superior to the usual party.

There follows a gleeful description of the battle that ensues. Cook goes round the house shutting all the windows and locking all the doors, and the children mount their attack arming themselves with, amongst other things, the raspberry canes . .

> . . . whose careful placing was the result of a whole day's work of William's father. . . . The air was full of their defiant war-whoops. They filled the front garden, trampling on all the rose beds
> . . .

> The stone with which William broke the drawing room window fell upon a small occasional table, scattering Mrs. Brown's cherished silver far and wide.

Now 'drunk with the thrill of battle' they scramble through the window and William, 'with a loud yell of triumph' locks the cook in the coal cellar where she was closing a final window. They proceed to play hide and seek.

> At other parties they played "Hide and Seek" – with smiling but firm mothers and aunts and sisters stationed at intervals with damping effects upon one's spirits with, "not in the bedrooms, dear," and "mind the umbrella stand," and "certainly not in the drawing room," and "don't shout so loud, darling." But this was Hide and Seek from the realm of perfection. Up the stairs and down the stairs, in all the bedrooms, sliding down the balusters, in and out of the drawing room, leaving trails of muddied boots and shattered ornaments as they went!

By the time they have finished rampaging around the house, shouting and yelling as they go, there is mud in the beds, the dining room curtains have been pulled down, and the door handle has come off the drawing-room door. 'It was bliss undiluted.' Teatime arrives and they forage in the larder. A jar of cream, a gooseberry pie and a current cake are rapidly consumed:

> They ate two bowls of cold vegetables, a joint of cold beef, two pots of honey, three dozen oranges, three loaves and two pots of dripping. They experimented upon lard, onions, and raw sausages. They left the larder a place of gaping emptiness.

Finally, when the maid, Jane, who has been out all afternoon, returns, they pelt her with anything that comes to hand: lumps of lard, showers of onions, a ham bone, potatoes.[1] Things are only finally brought to a close when a cab containing his family turns in at the front gate. Unsurprisingly 'William grew pale.'

All the elements of the carnivalesque are there. The children are noisy, they shout and yell, they are messy and muddy, a direct disruption of adult requirements that they should play quietly and be 'clean and starched and prim'. But they go further, attacking property itself, smashing the drawing room window, destroying curtains, pulling doorknobs off, shattering ornaments, and both literally and metaphorically scattering the family silver. It is a battle, a war, accompanied by defiant war-whoops, by loud yells of triumph, involving the storming of castles and the imprisonment of the occupants and the attacking of any potential relief force, and in a final celebration consuming the contents of the larder in an orgy of greed. And over and above

[1] By way of a footnote it should, of course, be added that the book is set in the heart of the pre second world war middle class, generally the setting for children's literature of the time, in homes with drawing rooms and libraries and live-in cooks and maids. And class difference allows William to behave appallingly with the latter. He would never have dared to lock his parents in the cellar nor to pelt them with vegetables. But that, as they say, is another story.

everything, it is fun: the children are a 'happy crowd', 'joyful', 'they had grown hilarious under William's benign influence', they are 'drunk with the thrill of battle': all summed up in the two words, 'bliss undiluted'. And at the kernel of it all is William's taking one of the rules of grammar – that set of rules designed to keep the relationship between language and meaning under strict control – and finding a way to use that rule to destroy that very control, that very relationship.

In the William books William himself is the trickster, the agent of disruption, but a more thoroughgoing example can be found in R.L. Stine's horror story, *Let's Get Invisible*, one of Scholastic's 'Goosebumps' series. In it the trickster discourse and the discourse that is inherent in the horror genre itself, a discourse that is also about hidden forces that have the destructive power to shatter the seemingly unproblematic normalcy of everyday life, are inextricably intertwined. In this particular example five kids discover a mirror hidden behind a secret door in an attic which, when the light at the top of it is switched on, makes them invisible, and threatens to, and in one case succeeds in, turning them into their reflections, a reversal of their 'true' selves. The kids are first person narrator 12 yr. old Max, his best friend Zack, two girls, Erin and April, and Max's younger brother, Lefty – so called as much because he is always metaphorically coming out of left field as for the fact that he is left handed. The mirror aside, Lefty is the trickster figure, a disruptive force, challenging adult authority and all attempts by his older brother to control him. His role generally is to fool around, playing tricks on the other characters, jumping out at them whenever he has the opportunity to scare them, etc. As Max is to tell us, 'My brother was a joker. He's always been a joker.'(166)

We get a hint of the reversal theme on the very first page of the story when we learn that the black haired family dog is called Whitey, and other reversals of expectation rapidly occur as we move into the account of Max's birthday party that opens the book. Lefty plays true to form, telling the girls when they arrive that they've come on the wrong day, and his guests themselves bring presents that also, in one way or another defy expectation. Zack brings him a pack of used comics – one might have expected new ones; April brings a birthday present wrapped inappropriately in Christmas wrapping paper – '"Merry Christmas to you, too," I joked.'; and as for Erin,

> "I forgot your present," Erin said.
> "What is it?" I asked, following the girls into the living room.
> "I don't know. I haven't bought it yet."(146)

This last example of course acts at two levels. First of all she hasn't brought a present, which she should have done, then her use of the word 'forgot' implies that she already has one, which in fact she doesn't, thereby, like William, undermining the relationship between the conventions of language use and meaning. At the end of the party only Erin and April and Zack are left and they and Max go up to the attic where they discover the mirror, which starts as it means to go on when Max screams, having misinterpreted his reflection and taken it to be someone walking towards him in the gloom. They speculate about it and Lefty specifically invokes the carnival discourse,

> "Maybe it was a carnival mirror . . . You know. One of those funhouse mirrors that makes your body look as if it's shaped like an egg."(156)

And later both Zack and April severally introduce explicitly the notion that the mirror has some form of trickster function, Zack asking, '"Is this some kind of a trick mirror or something?"' and April suggesting, '"It's a trick mirror."'(186, 195) In this first encounter Max becomes invisible when he switches on a light, much to the surprise and alarm of the girls and of his brother, and thereafter the central narrative strand is focussed around the kids' successive encounters with it. They start to experiment with being invisible, intending to turn it to their own advantage and to play some tricks of their own. Lefty uses it to amplify his own powers of trickery on several occasions, coming down to the lunch table and moving the crockery around while invisible, and later getting into Max's bedroom and invisibly moving his clothes around; and an invisible Zack goes into the neighbour's garden and juggles with tomatoes, much to the alarm of the neighbour and to the amusement of the kids. In the meantime the game has become more dangerous as the kids dare each other to stay in for a longer and longer time, and in the process discover that the longer they stay in the longer it takes for them to become visible again; and none of them quite know what the consequences might be. 'What if I never came back?' Max wonders to himself,(189) and later he speculates even further,

> So what did the light do? Did it cover you up somehow? Did the light form some kind of blanket? A covering that hid you from yourself and everyone else? (210)

By this point the main theme of the novel is beginning to emerge, a theme which is about the nature of identity itself – and I say this in all seriousness too, despite the fact that the book is nothing if not a quota quickie in what can only be described as pulp horror for kids, but even pulp horror has to be about *something* otherwise it wouldn't work, nor incidentally would it sell, but I digress – and in this case the central instrument in the articulation of that theme is the mirror itself, raising the question of the ways in which one's reflection in a mirror confirms one's very existence.[1] Though a discussion of that theme could be very interesting, I do not intend to pursue it here. My focus is rather with the way that that theme is articulated through the carnivalesque discourse of trickery, and the way that the mirror itself is an agent in that discourse. As the story continues we discover that its major trick is to draw the characters completely into itself so that, if they stay in too long, passing a point where they are briefly out of contact with the others, it is not they who are returned into the 'real' world, it is their mirror reversed reflections. The first inkling we have of this is when Lefty stays in too long, and when he returns, 'Something about him looked different.'(241) When Erin tries it, staying in for 12 minutes, she too looks somehow different when she comes out; and when Zack does it suspicion turns to certainty. He has an idiosyncratic hair style, having shaved one side of his head and left his hair long on the other side, and when he re-emerges the side has changed.

[1] The followers of Lacan would doubtless have a field day with this, but I, alas, am no Lacanian so I am not in a position to pursue it. In any case it is not my purpose here.

> "Was your hair like that before? . . . Shaved really short on the right hand and then combed long on the left? Wasn't it the other way round?"(263)

Finally the others dare Max to go in even longer, which he does, and is pulled right into the mirror where he meets his own reflection and indeed has a conversation with it.

> "You!" I managed to scream.
> He stopped centimetres away from me.
> I stared at him in disbelief.
> I was staring at myself. . . .
> "Don't be afraid," he said. "I'm your reflection."(272)

He tells Max that he is his other side, his dark side (as I say the book is nothing if not thematically interesting) and that the Erin and the Zack in the 'real' world are not their 'real' selves either, they are their reflections. They smash the mirror, Max escapes, Erin's and Zack's reflections are drawn back in and their real selves are returned, but Lefty wasn't in the attic at the time and his reflection is not drawn back in, a fact which is revealed in a nice dot, dot, dot last line of the story when Max is playing catch with him later:

> I could only stare in horror.
> My brother was throwing *right-handed*.(283)

The mirror has played its final trick.

As we have seen, there are two strands to the trickster discourse in *Let's Get Invisible*, a human one and a para-normal one. Lefty is the major figure in the human one, always undermining and destabilising his older brother's world, though it is not just Lefty; in the juggling tomatoes incident it is Zack, and his target is the adult world. In the para-normal strand it is the carnivalesque mirror that is the agent, and here it is the very stability of identity itself that is undermined, a theme to which I shall return later.

Naughty Children

While at first glance it may not be thought that naughtiness is carnivalesque, a brief glimpse at the discourse of naughtiness will show that it too is about the destabilisation of the adult world. Let's face it, William himself is only one degree away from being naughty, but in my next example, Magdalen Nabb's *Josie Smith at the Market*, the naughtiness is overt, with the children well aware that what they are doing is naughty, and their naughtiness does nothing if not subvert adult order and control. There are three separate stories in the book, the first of which is *Josie Smith and Eileen's Baby*,[1] which is the one I want to look at. In it Josie, who is I guess five or six years old or so, goes to play with her friend Eileen next door when their respective mothers go shopping together. They are left in the charge of Eileen's dad who works nights, and consequently spends much of the day asleep in the chair in the front room. They are given plentiful instructions about how they are to behave and what they shouldn't do, but the constraint occurs even before Josie has got next door, when she asks her mother if she can wear lipstick

[1] pp.7-47 All the quotes come from these 20 pages

like she does: '"No," said Josie's mum.' Eileen tells Josie that they have to play upstairs for fear of waking the baby up, and as she leaves, Eileen's mum shouts her instructions up to them.

> "Now mind you behave yourselves, do you hear?"
> "We are behaving ourselves!" shouted Eileen, and she stuck her tongue out.
> "Well see that you do! And don't do anything – *anything* – without asking your dad first!"

Eileen's attitude to adult authority is already clear, and once their mothers are out of the way the mischief starts. They want to jump on the bed, so in line with their instructions Eileen calls down to her dad.

> "Dad? Can we jump on the bed?"
> Downstairs, Eileen's dad said. "Wah?" and did a little jump in his chair. "I'm not asleep." He said. Then he went "Hoink – hoink – hoink – Sssss." And he was.

.. and that is to be his response every time, a response that Eileen chooses to interpret as giving them permission to do whatever they want. They bounce on the bed and mess it up. Next they dress up in Eileen's mother's clothes and jewellery. Josie is pretty sure they're doing something wrong but Eileen is unstoppable, indeed one might even say that she is wilful.

> "A-aw!" whispered Josie Smith. "Those are not dressing up clothes. You'll get shouted at."
> "I never get shouted at," Eileen said, "and I can dress up in anything I want.
> . . . . .
> "That's a best frock!" Josie Smith said. "You can't!"
> "I can if I want," said Eileen.

Next it's the forbidden lipstick, and perfume, and nail varnish, some of which Josie spills on the green skirt she is wearing and some of which gets spilt on the dressing table. Then, despite Eileen's mother's instructions, they go downstairs to have a tea party. They make a pretend cake, pouring soap powder, scouring powder and washing up liquid into a bowl, Eileen's mum's best bowl at that, and set about it with a whisk. They whisk away with a will and a way until all the mixture has gone.

> "A lot of it splashed on us," said Josie Smith, "so perhaps a bit splashed somewhere else as well." She climbed off the chair and looked around.
> It *had* splashed somewhere else as well. It had splashed across the curtains and the kitchen window and then across the wallpaper. It had splashed across the dark red hood of Eileen's baby's pram and the back door and then across some more wallpaper and the fireplace. Then it went across Eileen's front and then the sink unit

> and a bit more wallpaper and then the window and all the way round again.
> "It's gone round in a big circle," said Josie Smith. "We'll get smacked."

They chase soap bubbles around the kitchen smashing the best bowl in the process, and have in addition woken the baby up. They feed him and sing to him, and in the end decide they will have to take him for a walk. Up to now Eileen has stoutly maintained that what they are doing is all perfectly ok, but she gives herself away when she tells Josie that they can't take him out the front way: '"If we take him out the front way my dad 'll see us."' They take the baby up the street, further damaging their dressing up clothes, but then see their mums coming.

> "Run for it!" shouted Eileen as their mums came up the slope from the main road. "Don't let her see you! That's her best frock you've got on!"

As we have seen, from the very beginning Josie has been pretty certain that they are doing something wrong, but has each time been overruled by Eileen's encouragement, but by the time we get to the end it is absolutely clear that Eileen herself has known all along that they are being naughty, as her response to the appearance of their Mums demonstrates. But in between, misrule has triumphed. They have destroyed or ruined that which is deemed valuable in the adult scheme of things – best bowls and best frocks, and made a glorious mess in the kitchen, gleefully chasing bubbles the while. And just as William 'has done no wrong' when he uses the strict rules of grammar to turn meaning to his own ends, so Eileen has followed to the letter her mother's strict instructions to ask her father's permission, but has deliberately asked him in such a way as to not get an answer. Naughtiness rules, carnival wins.

Nonsense

Finally I want to examine a text, or strictly speaking two texts, in which all normal expectations of how the world is and of how one should behave in it are overthrown; and indeed at various points the very functioning of the relationship between words and what they signify is challenged. I refer (I am a bit tempted to say of course) to the two *Alice* books by Lewis Carroll,[1] regarded by many as *the* breakthrough books that finally released children's literature from the constraints of the moral tale and allowed it to emerge as entertainment in its own right, a proposition with which I tend to agree, so I am going to assume, for once, that the reader is familiar with these seminal texts (so if you haven't read them, now's your chance!) The two books are not the same, *Alice in Wonderland* is the more anarchic, though both contain passages where all attempts to use words to make sense is impossible. Non/sense indeed. The attack upon sense works at a number of levels, the outermost being when the fantasy world first intrudes upon Alice's consciousness. Alice's first encounter with the world of *Wonderland* is when she sees the White Rabbit take a watch out of his waistcoat pocket to consult it and realises

[1] *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, Carroll 1865 & 1871 respectively. I should perhaps add that there is a myriad of interpretive readings of these texts, as many as there are readers I suspect, but I am no Carroll scholar and I make no claims for the originality of my reading here. I was just interested to see how they fitted in to my central interest in this chapter, that of the carnivalesque in children's literature.

'that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat pocket, or a watch to take out of it'(26). Already her sense of the way things should be is challenged. Next there is the disconcerting dream logic that structures the narrative of both books, and which we are first aware of the moment that Alice starts falling down the well in *Wonderland*, 'Either the well was very deep, or she fell very slowly, for she had plenty of time as she went down to look about her.(26) The next level in is the level at which the central narratives operate, and around which the central dramas of the books unfold, the drama of Alice's conflict with all the anarchic characters that she comes across and of her battle to control them. The problem for Alice is that all the characters she meets are very disputatious, always telling her what to do – effectively they are all adults trying to control her – and their main weapon is the play with language itself, tying Alice up in verbal puzzles, logical knots, conundrums and non-sequiturs until she has no idea where she is. She has to fight this linguistic disorder, becoming herself the adult and reducing the other characters to the role of unruly children in order to fight back. An early example can be found in *Wonderland* when Alice's first encounters the Cheshire Cat, an encounter which provides a neat example of Alice getting trapped in a logical non sequitur as he 'proves' that Alice is mad.

> ".. we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."
> "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
> "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."
> Alice didn't think that proved it at all. However, she went on: "And how do you know that you're mad?"
> "To begin with," said the Cat, "a dog's not mad. You grant that?"
> "I suppose so," said Alice
> "Well then," the Cat went on, "you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now *I* growl when I'm pleased and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad."(89)

And before Alice can challenge the Cat's logical inconsistency he changes the subject. She gets even more entangled and nonplussed when she meets the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse at the Mad Hatter's tea party. She finds them seated at a large table with a number of empty spaces. Taking charge for once, Alice promptly commandeers a place: "No room! No Room!" they cry; "There's *plenty* of room!", she replies, and down she sits.[1] Once she's settled the Hatter asks his 'Why is a Raven like a writing desk?' riddle, and when she responds the Hare and the Hatter immediately set upon her, tying her up in her use of language.

> "I believe I can guess that," . . .
> "Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.
> "Exactly so," said Alice.
> "Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
> "I do," Alice hastily replied, "at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing, you know."

[1] The following quotes all come from the chapter entitled 'A Mad Tea-Party' pp.93-104

> "Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"
> "You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same as 'I get what I like'!"

Logic again, though this time the logical analysis does hold water, and it is their relentless pursuit of it that floors Alice. As for the answer to the riddle, there isn't one, and Alice complains:

> "I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than waste it in asking riddles that have no answers."

There follows a discussion of time itself in which the pair personify it as 'Time', in order to explain why their failure to control it means that it is always tea time in their particular world. This too would merit close analysis, but with *Alice* you could go on unpeeling it for ever, so I will skip a bit and move on to a section where relentless punning is pushed to the point where what is said no longer makes any sense at all, as happens when they wake the Dormouse up and get him to tell them a story. He tells them of three sisters who lived at the bottom of a well. I shall just quote the bare bones of the exchange in order to make my point. Alice asks what they lived on.

> "They lived on treacle," said the Dormouse . . .
> "They couldn't have done that, you know," Alice gently remarked. "They'd have been ill."
> "So they were," said the Dormouse, "*very* ill."
> . . .
> "Why did they live at the bottom of a well?"
> The Dormouse again took a minute or two to think about it, and then said, "It was a treacle well."
> . . . .
> "And so these three little sisters – they were learning to draw, you know – "
> "What did they draw?"
> "Treacle."
> . . . .
> "But I don't understand. Where did they draw the treacle from?"
> "You can draw water out of a water well," said the Hatter; "so I should think you can draw treacle out of a treacle well – eh stupid."
> "But they were *in* the well." . . .
> "Of course they were," said the Dormouse: "well in."

The puns on 'draw' and 'well', which include changing the latter from a noun into an adverb, added to the Dormouse's improvisations to avoid having to answer any of Alice's interventions, have totally undermined any attempt to get coherent meaning out of the story, and Alice is beaten.

If we turn to *Looking Glass* we will find the White Knight further demonstrating the problems of attaching words to what they are supposed to signify. He is telling Alice about the song he is going to sing to her.

> "The name of the song is called '*Haddocks' Eyes*' "
> "Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice said, trying to feel interested.
> "No, you don't understand," the Knight said, looking a little vexed. "That's what the name is *called*. The name really *is 'The Aged Aged Man*.' "
> "Then I ought to have said 'That's what the *song* is called'?" Alice corrected herself.
> "No, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The *song* is called '*Ways and Means*': but that's only what it's *called* you know!"
> "Well, what *is* the song, then? Said Alice, who by this time was completely bewildered.
> "I was coming to that," the Knight said. "The song really *is 'A-sitting On A Gate'*. . . (306)

Again we find that the more Alice tries to tie down the relationship between a word and what it is referring to, between the name of an object and the object itself, the more it eludes her.[1] It is then but a small jump from the White Knight's exposition of the problem to the point at which questions of identity itself start to be raised.[2] There are a number of occasions in both books where Alice has problems with identity. '"Who in the world am I?"' she asks herself early on in *Wonderland* (37) and speculates that she might have become one of the girls that she knows in the real world. '"I'm sure I'm not Ada / I'm sure I can't be Mabel."', and a bit later when the Caterpillar asks her who she is she can't answer, '"I hardly know Sir, just at present"' and when the Caterpillar asks her to explain herself she can't.

> "I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."(67)

For the most profound example we must turn to the third chapter of *Looking Glass* where Alice finds herself in a wood where things have no names at all, and thus lose their identity entirely. The moment she steps into the wood she is unable to name it as a wood, nor is she able to name the trees as trees. Here she is talking to herself, pleased to get into the cool shade.

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[1] And before I go any further, is it worth pointing out that the very titles of the two *Alice* books are a further illustration of what the White Knight is talking about? They are universally known as *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, yet their 'real' titles are *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, and just to complicate matters even further, I have upon occasion referred to them simply as *Wonderland* and *Looking Glass,* or even collectively as *Alice*. It all adds to the fun!

[2] I am here, and in the following discussion, very much following in the footsteps of Martin Gardner who, in *The Annotated Alice*, which is the version I am working from, makes exactly the same points in his marginal note- (227)

> "Well at any rate it's a great comfort," she said as she stepped under the trees, "after being so hot, to get into the – into the – into *what*?"
> . . . (and) putting her hand on the trunk of the tree. "What does it call itself, I wonder? I do believe it's got no name – why to be sure it hasn't."[1]

Again she has problems with her name: "And now who am I?", and after a great deal of puzzling decides that it must begin with an L, "L. I *know* it begins with an L!" Then a Fawn appears. It asks Alice what she calls herself.

> "I wish I knew," thought poor Alice. She answered, rather sadly, "Nothing, just now."

She asks the Fawn what *it* calls *itself*, but it too can't remember what it's called, and they walk on with Alice lovingly clasping her arms around its neck. They emerge from the wood and their respective identities return.

> .. the Fawn gave a sudden bound into the air, and shook itself free from Alice's arm. "I'm a Fawn!" it cried out in a voice of delight. "And dear me you're a human child!" A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed.

Without names the Fawn does not know that human beings are a danger to it. It is only when he can actually name Alice as a human child that he becomes alarmed, and not only does he rediscover her identity as such, he also rediscovers the relationship between human beings and fawns. The post-modern followers of discourse theory would feel very much at home here: we only understand the world through the language that we use to describe it, and if we don't have the language for it, to all intents and purposes it doesn't exist.

The readings of the *Alice* books are legion, but here I am interested in their capacity to undermine our understandings and expectations of how the world is and how it should be. As I hope I have shown, *Alice* operates at a number of levels. Alice first of all has to cope with finding herself in a fantasy world where the normal assumptions of the 'real' world, a world that does not have talking animals etc, have to be set aside. And once the dream logic kicks in she is even more puzzled. But it is at the linguistic level that the biggest challenge to normality functions. Both the Cheshire Cat's non sequiturs, and the Hatter and Hare's chop logic, challenge the normal assumptions of shared understanding necessary for any coherent exchange of meaning; and the puns of the Dormouse's story turns meaning into pure nonsense. The White Knight's exposition goes to further explain the problems of attaching meaning to language, and Alice's encounter with the fawn demonstrates the implications of that for the notion of identity itself.

[1] This, and the following few quotes pp.225 – 227

By Way of Conclusion

As I suggest at the beginning of this chapter, my division of the carnivalistic discourse into the various categories I have chosen is pretty arbitrary and there is a lot of overlap between them. And my discussion of *Just William* and *Josie Smith at the Market*, could have fitted into the earlier chapter about relationships between adults and children just as easily as they fit into this one, particularly so far as naughtiness is concerned. It is after all, adults who decide what naughtiness *is*; William's behaviour is about as close to naughtiness as you can get, and Josie and her friend Eileen's behaviour is indisputably, and knowingly, naughty, and in both cases that naughtiness is a direct challenge to adult order and control. But in neither case can the characters resist the shear carnivalistic fun that can be got out of the situation. William is in addition a trickster figure, as is Lefty in *Let's Get Invisible*, both deliberately undermining the order of those around them, and Eileen, in *Josie Smith at the Market* uses trickster strategies to avoid waking her father up. The Mad Hatter and the March Hare are also to a degree trickster figures, deliberately destroying Alice's attempts to keep her linguistic world in order, and I am also suggesting that there are trickster *devices*, the mirror in *Let's Get Invisible* is one such, and the wood where things have no names in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* serves the same narrative function. William's target is adult order, as is Eileen's in *Josie Smith*, but in other examples it is the child's own order that is challenged; in *Henry Huggins* the disruptive element is Ribsy, whom Henry has to battle to control, though Ribsy himself also brings chaos into the lives of the adults who have the misfortune to end up on the bus with him. Alice's case is more complicated since her battle is with characters who are essentially adults in their own right and who attempt to exercise an absurd and arbitrary authority which Alice must struggle to understand and control, and again my account of that fraught relationship could also just as easily have fitted into my earlier chapter about the relationships between adults and children. Indeed it is perhaps, as many have suggested, the very condition of childhood itself that is being described in the *Alice* books, but that's another reading for another occasion. I have also suggested that the deliberate perversion of language use, both in terms of meaning itself, and in terms of the conventionally shared understandings of intentionality and context that underlie normal communication, also functions at a carnivalesque level to attack social convention, to turn sense into nonsense, and to generally create chaos. So William uses the strict application of the rules of prescriptive grammar to circumvent his father's prohibitions; in *Let's Get Invisible* Erin subverts the generally agreed conventions of language use when she tells Max that she has 'forgotten' his present when in fact she hasn't even bought one in the first place; and the *Alice* books are replete with characters who essentially also pull William's trick, dissecting Alice's use of language, demonstrating its logical inconsistencies or using non sequiturs and puns to attack the presumptions and understandings of normal conversational exchange until she is completely entangled in a world of nonsense, bewildered and stymied at every turn when she attempts normal communication, and with, as the White Knight demonstrates, all attempts to attach meanings to words doomed to failure. Finally, and perhaps at the deepest level of all, the carnivalistic discourse can serve to undermine the very notion of identity itself: in *Let's Get Invisible* when the characters are taken over by their reflections, and in Alice's case, perhaps at the deepest level of all philosophically speaking, when identity is shown to be an entirely linguistic concept, fortuitous and arbitrary, the product only of the play of language itself.

9
I CAME IN THROUGH A WARDROBE
Real World / Fantasy World Transitions

> "And how, pray, did you come to enter my dominions?
> "Please, your Majesty, I came in through a wardrobe."
> C. S. Lewis: *The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe*

This chapter is the first of two which are essentially concerned with fantasy fiction for children. In the next one I shall discuss the role of play and the assumption of adulthood in fantasy fiction, but in this one I am looking at transition narratives. Fantasy as a genre is about secondary worlds, distinguished from the ordinary world in terms of its own geography, or its own time scale, or its own beings, often in combination with each other. Some fantasy fiction plunges us straight into the secondary world from the start, but other fantasy fiction features a transition from the primary world into the secondary world, and those transitions come with their own narratives, some simple enough, but some more complex, containing a fair bit of exposition and serving to establish character; and it is they that will by my focus here; but first a couple of examples of being plunged straight in:

> Thomas was a tank engine who lived at a big station.

> The Mole had been working very hard all morning, spring cleaning his little home.

> In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.

> Once upon a time there were four little rabbits and their names were – Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter.

Yes indeed: The Rev. W. Awdry's *Thomas the Tank Engine*; Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*; J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*; and Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.

Moving on, then, to novels where there *are* transitions from primary everyday 'real' worlds to secondary fantasy ones, there is no lack of obvious examples: the two *Alice* books, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Coraline*, *Elidor*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*,[1] to name but six. Often known as portal fantasies, all involve portals of one sort and another from one world to the other: a rabbit hole, a mirror, a whirlwind blown farmhouse, a wardrobe, a bricked up door, a ruined church, a gap between two railway station platforms. The discovery of these portals and the passage through them is never totally decontextualised, and while some examples are simple enough, others are more complex.

[1] Carroll 1875 & 1871; Baum 1900; Lewis 1950; Gaiman 2002; Rowling 1997

Let me return to perhaps the most familiar example of all, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In the brief exposition in the first couple of paragraphs of the book we find Alice dozing away on a warm bank, bored, and wondering what to do with herself. Then the White Rabbit appears, talking to himself and taking a watch out of his waistcoat pocket and consulting it, at which point Alice gives chase, passes through the portal – the rabbit hole – and starts falling down the well – if you'll forgive me for re-quoting a bit that I've already quoted in the previous chapter but these discourses have a habit of overlapping and intertwining anyway:

> Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do . . . . . the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid . . . . . suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her . . . . . Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.
>
> In another moment down went Alice after it . . . . .
>
> The rabbit hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then suddenly dipped down, ... she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well.(11/12)

At which point we are well into Wonderland itself (to pinch a pun from the text) and well through the portal. Three things to note: Alice is bored, tired of having nothing to do. She is thus feeling very sleepy. But when the White Rabbit runs by she finds herself 'burning with curiosity', ripe for any adventure that might be on offer. The sleepiness trope is important, the novel is after all essentially a dream, with a dream logic that is established the moment Alice starts falling down the well, and that continues to inform it right up to the end of the story when she wakes up on the same bank to find her sister brushing dead leaves off her. The exposition has also established one of her defining character traits, curiosity, a curiosity that informs the forever questioning interactions with the denizens of Wonderland itself..

Through the Looking-Glass is also a dream, specifically acknowledged by Alice after she has woken up, telling the black kitten,

> "You woke me out of oh! such a nice dream!"(283)

And she has just as much curiosity as ever, speculative in this case, as she starts to tell the kitten what she imagines Looking-glass House might be like:

> "I'll tell you all my ideas about Looking-glass house. . . . . .
>
> I want so much to know if they've a fire in the winter: you never *can* tell, you know, unless our fire smokes, and then smoke comes up in that room too – but that may be only pretence. . . . . Oh Kitty, now we come to the passage … it's very like our passage as far as you can see, only you know it may be quite different on beyond. Oh, Kitty, how nice it would be if we could only get into Looking-glass

> House! I'm sure it's got oh! such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it, somehow, Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has gone all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why it's turning into a sort of mist now… (147-9)

… and through she goes. Like Wonderland in the first book, Looking-glass World is also full of adventure, and once again Alice's curiosity about all whom she meets is a defining feature of her interactions with them. It is also to be noted that Alice is into imaginative games '..beginning with her favourite phrase "Let's pretend."'(p.147) and indeed on this particular occasion she has exhorted the black kitten "Let's pretend you're the red queen, Kitty!"(p.147), which indeed she will turn out to be at the end of the book when Alice picks up the Red Queen and starts shaking her, discovering as she wakes up that she is shaking the black kitten.

The portal, and the circumstances of its discovery and use in *The Wizard of Oz* are also extremely familiar, but again there are couple of things to note. The initial description of the farmhouse emphasises its constricted size and the paucity of its contents:

> There were four walls, a floor, and a roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty-looking cooking stove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds.(9)

There is, as well, a cyclone cellar, accessed by a trapdoor in the floor. It is a world in which everything is grey.

> The sun had baked the ploughed land into a grey mass . . . . . Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same grey colour . . . . . the house was as dull and grey as everything else.
>
> When Aunt Em came there to live she was a young pretty wife. The sun and the wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober grey; . . . . her cheeks and lips .. were grey also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled. . . . . (Uncle Henry) worked hard from morning till night and did not know what joy was. He was grey also . . . . . It was Toto that made Dorothy laugh, and saved her from growing as grey as her other surroundings…Toto played all day long, and Dorothy played with him, and loved him dearly. (9/10)

It is, in short, a joyless house, a joylessness relieved only by Toto. No sooner has this initial scenario has been established than the cyclone arrives. Uncle Henry goes out to look out for the stock, Toto disappears under the bed, and Aunt Em, exhorting Dorothy to follow her, flings open the trap door and climbs down into the cyclone cellar; but Dorothy must first rescue Toto; and before she can follow Aunt Em into the cellar the cyclone hits,

> A strange thing then happened.

> The house whirled around two or three times and rose slowly through the air. (11)

She is on her way to Oz. Despite the buffeting she fairly rapidly relaxes, and, when it becomes clear that the journey is going to take some time, she ends up falling asleep:

> Dorothy found she was riding quite easily, … she felt is if she were being rocked gently, like a baby in a cradle… At last she crawled over the swaying floor to her bed, and lay down upon it; and Toto followed and lay down beside her.
> In spite of the swaying of the house and the wailing of the wind, Dorothy soon closed her eyes and fell fast asleep. (13)

She wakes up when the house hits the ground and she emerges into the bright sunlight of Oz.

> The cyclone had set the house down .. in the midst of a country of marvellous beauty.(14)

… and descriptions follow of gorgeous flowers, birds with beautiful plumage, rushing streams sparkling in the sun, etc. To make the link back to Alice, one might even suggest that if Alice has imagined that Looking-glass World will have 'such beautiful things in it', then Dorothy's first sight of Oz has realised that dream. What Dorothy also has in common with Alice is that she too falls to sleep before her arrival in Oz, raising the question as to whether the whole thing just might be a dream; and indeed her return at the end is nothing if not dreamlike as she puts on the silver shoes, whirls back to Kansas, and comes to as she rolls over on the grass, just as if, like Alice, she was emerging from a dream:

> Instantly she was whirling through the air, so swiftly that all she could see or feel was the wind whistling past her ears.
> The silver shoes took but three steps, and then she stopped so suddenly that she rolled over upon the grass several times before she knew where she was.
> At length, however, she sat up and looked about her. . . she was sitting on the broad Kansas prairie.(171)

Otherwise, though, Dorothy's time in Oz does seem to have been real time not dream time; she does not, for instance, wake up the next morning to discover things haven't changed. Instead she discovers that while she has been away Uncle Henry has built a whole new farmhouse. (Quite what her uncle and aunt have to say about her disappearance and reappearance we do not get to find out!)

The Wizard of Oz does, however, add a major factor, a factor that certainly bears upon the transition, and that is the oppressiveness of her family home – it feels loveless; it cannot but escape one's notice that Aunt Em does not ensure Dorothy's safety before she secures her own, in contrast to Dorothy, whose first consideration is Toto, the only character who shows her any affection or who brings her any joy, and it is *his* safety that is her priority. And it is her love for

Toto and the time that she takes to rescue him that results in her not climbing down into the cyclone cellar to safety and instead being whisked away to the beautiful land of Oz where she will use the same values that bind her to Toto to bring sweetness and light all round.

Dorothy's transition does not involve a portal as such, it is rather a journey, and I shall be considering other journeys later, but first let me turn to C. S Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* which does have a portal of course, the wardrobe itself. There are, again, some familiar features in the transition narrative, but others of which are new. In the first place the children – we have four of them, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy – are displaced. It is the Second World War and they have been sent out of London to escape the air raids, and find themselves in a large rambling house 'in the heart of the country' owned by an old professor, and inhabited by him, his housekeeper, and three servants, all of whom leave the children very much to their own devices; and by bed time on the first evening they are already excited by the possibilities of the place. Here's Peter, echoing Alice's enthusiastic speculation about what Looking-glass House might be like:

> I say, let's go and explore tomorrow. You might find anything in a place like this. . . . . There might be eagles. There might be stags. There'll be hawks.(10)

The next morning it is raining, but nothing deterred, they set about exploring the house, in the course of which they discover:

> …a room that was quite empty except for one big wardrobe; the sort that has a looking glass in the door. (11)

The three oldest children leave, leaving Lucy on her own, curious, like Alice, as to what might be in it.

> ..she thought it would be worthwhile trying the door of the wardrobe . . . . . She immediately stepped into the wardrobe and got in among the coats… It was almost quite dark in there and she kept her arms stretched out in front of her so as not to bump her face into the back of the wardrobe… Then she noticed that there was something crunching under her feet… She was standing in the middle of a wood at night time with snow under her feet and snowflakes falling through the air. (12/13)

… and she is through into the secondary world that is Narnia. Behind her she can still see the empty door to the wardrobe, but ahead of her there is a light which turns out to be a lamp-post, a lamp-post that will always serve as a marker for the way back through the wardrobe whenever the children want to get back. Narnia itself is far from welcoming, ruled over by the White Witch who has made it permanent winter, but luckily Lucy meets the faun, Mr. Tumnus, who invites her back to tea in his cosy cave and 'Lucy thought she had never been in a nicer place.'(19) Problems arise however, when she returns, because, for all that she has been in Narnia for a whole afternoon, no time at all has passed in the real world, so of course when she

tells the others all about it they don't believe her, and it is in their different responses that their characters begin to emerge; Susan is rational, and Peter sympathetic, though both think that she is being silly, but Edmund is spiteful; and attitudes harden in the days that follow, making Lucy very miserable.

> "Don't be silly, Lucy," said Susan. "We've only just come out of that room a moment ago, and you were there then."
> "She's not being silly at all," said Peter, "she's just making up a story for fun, aren't you Lu?"
> . . . . . .
> For the next few days she was very miserable. . . . The others who thought she was telling a lie, and a silly lie too, made her very unhappy. The two elder ones did this without meaning to do it, but Edmund could be spiteful and on this occasion he was spiteful. He sneered and jeered at Lucy and kept on asking her if she'd found any other new countries in other cupboards all over the house. (27-29)

The next time the portal is open the children are playing hide and seek and Lucy has to hide in a rush, so she goes back into the wardrobe, and Edmund, just catching a glimpse of her as she disappears, follows her in. They both end up in Narnia, but this time the narrative perspective stays with Edmund, who is to meet the White Queen, and she seduces him to her cause by feeding him Turkish delight. He and Lucy, who has been having lunch with Mr. Tumnus, meet up again preparatory to returning through the wardrobe, but when she tells Edmund how nasty the White Witch really is, and is also enthusiastic about telling the others all about it: "What fun it will be!" Edmund isn't so sure.

> Edmund secretly thought that it would not be as good fun for him as for her. He would have to admit that Lucy had been right, before all the others, and he felt sure the others would be on the side of the fauns and the animals; but he was already more than half on the side of the witch.(42)

So when they return through the wardrobe and Lucy rushes to tell the other two, Edmund turns on her and denies it all.

> "Peter! Susan! It's all true. Edmund has seen it too. There *is* a country you can get to through the wardrobe. Edmund and I both got in…
> And Edmund gave a very superior look…and then a little snigger and said, "Oh yes, Lucy and I have been playing – pretending that all her story about a country in the wardrobe is true. Just for fun, of course. There's nothing there really."(44)

Edmund's cover is finally blown when all four children end up hiding in the wardrobe to get away from visitors, and this time they all get through. Realising the mistake they have made in disbelieving Lucy, they respond according to their natures, Peter apologising, Susan being

practical, and Edmund saying nothing, but making the mistake of revealing that he had been there before. Here's Peter,

> "I apologize for not believing you," he said, "I'm sorry. Will you shake hands?" . . . .
> "And now," said Susan, "what do we do next?"
> . . . . . .
> "I say," began Edmund presently, "oughtn't we be bearing a bit more to the left, that is if we are aiming for the lamp-post?" . . . . . Peter whistled.
> "So you really were here . . . . . Well of all the poisonous little beasts!" . . . . . but Edmund was saying to himself, 'I'll pay you all out for this, you pack of stuck-up, self-satisfied prigs.'(54,55)

Some familiar features here, then. The children are ready to explore and ripe for adventure, and the fantasy world of Narnia offers plenty of opportunity for adventure denied them in the real world. So it has been with Alice, and Dorothy. In addition, Dorothy's Oz is a country of marvellous beauty; and in Narnia, once she meets Mr. Tumnus, 'Lucy thought she had never been in a nicer place', which is not to say that it doesn't have its downside, as indeed does Oz. In addition, the transition narrative(s) – plural, there are three of them – have again served to characterise the children, with Edmund's nasty streak coming out particularly strongly, so it is no surprise that he ends up on the side of the White Witch, with the others all on the 'good' side, working to dispose of the witch and to bring summer back to Narnia, which indeed they do, (and to be fair to Edmund, he does change sides in the end). Two other features are also to be noted. Firstly it is established that Lucy is an imaginative child, 'making up stories for fun', and the defensive Edmund offers the same explanation, that he and Lucy have been playing, only pretending the story about a country in the wardrobe is true, and the other two children are initially inclined to accept his version since it fits in with their view of Lucy too. Secondly it is to be noted that the children are displaced. They are away from home, away from their familiar surroundings; a factor that is certainly important in terms of their desire to go exploring, to discover the lay of the land and get a handle on their new surroundings.

My next example, Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, features a girl, the titular Coraline, who discovers an alternative secondary world peopled by sinister duplicates of her parents who, once they get her clutches on her, are determined not to let her go again. Like the children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Coraline is also displaced, in her case she has just moved house, as we are informed in the very first sentence,

> 'Coraline discovered the door a little while after they moved house.'(9)

…and, as can be seen, we are also introduced to the portal in that same first sentence. Coraline too wants to explore her new surroundings, curious, like both Alice and the four children in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, as to what she might find. In Coraline's case the family have moved into a first floor flat in an old house that comes complete with a big garden and extended grounds. Coraline goes exploring, and in the course of her explorations she meets a black cat,

and the neighbours, a couple of retired actresses and a crazy old man who is training a mouse circus. The neighbours consistently get her name wrong, calling her Caroline, not Coraline. Then it rains and she finds herself bored, wondering what to do with herself. Her parents are busy, and have no time for her:

> "What should I do?" asked Coraline.
> "Read a book," said her mother. "Watch a video. Play with your toys." . . . . . .
> Coraline had watched all the videos. She was bored with her toys, and she'd read all her books. . . . . It was time to talk to her father . .
> "… explore the flat," suggested her father. . . . Count all the doors and windows. List everything blue. Mount an expedition to discover the hot-water tank. And leave me alone to work."
> "Can I go into the drawing room?" The drawing room was where the Joneses kept the expensive (and uncomfortable) furniture that Coraline's grandmother had left them when she died. Coraline wasn't allowed in there. Nobody went in there. It was only for best.
> "If you don't make a mess. And you don't touch anything"
>
> (12-15)

So into the drawing room she goes, and discovers a 'big, carved, brown wooden door'(15), in one corner. Her mother tells her it used to be the way through to the next door flat but that it is now blocked, and she unlocks the door and shows her that it opens onto a brick wall. That night, however, Coraline is awoken by a strange noise.

> (She) was almost asleep when something went 't.t.t.t.t.t.' She sat up in bed.
> Something went 'kree..aaaak.' . . .
> Coraline wondered if she'd dreamed it, whatever it was.(17)

Coraline, now awake seemingly, follows a scuttling black shape into the drawing room where it disappears through the now slightly open door – but the brick wall is still there. The next day she meets the crazy old man from upstairs who has brought her a message from the mice: '"Don't go through the door."'(22) Nothing deterred, when she gets the opportunity she sneaks back into the drawing room and tries the door again, but still she can't get through. The retired actresses give her a strange stone with a hole in it and read her future in the tealeaves: "You are in terrible danger." they inform her, but far from being warned off, Coraline's interest is piqued:

> *In danger?* thought Coraline to herself. It sounded exiting. It didn't sound like a bad thing. Not really.(28)

She gets the opportunity to try the door for the fourth time when her mother pops down to the shops to get something for lunch and this time…

> ..It opened on to a dark hallway. The bricks had gone, as if they had never been there. (33)

And through she goes.

A number of familiar tropes are emerging. Firstly, like Alice, Coraline is bored and wanting something to do. Secondly, again like Alice, and like the children from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Coraline wants to explore, to meet the neighbours, to get to know her surroundings, and it is her desire to explore and the curiosity that goes with it, never mind the promise of excitement generated by the warnings of her neighbours, that leads her back to the door each time. Thirdly, and this time the comparison is with Dorothy's home life in *The Wizard of Oz*, her parents are too busy to show any real interest in what she is doing, pausing only to come up with suggestions of meaningless activities and exhorting her to not make a mess. And fourthly the indifference of her parents is compounded by the fact that the neighbours continuously get her name wrong. As the story develops we will discover that these linked factors all have a bearing on the psychic journey that she is about to undergo in the secondary world where she will meet the button eyed duplicates of her parents, who introduce themselves as her 'other' parents, and who get her name right and who seem to offer her all the attention that her real parents are denying her. Duplicates of her neighbours turn up too, as does the black cat: he can pass between the two worlds without a problem, though in the secondary world he can talk; and she will take the strange stone with the hole in it through into the secondary world with her and find a use for it there too. At the end of the story, when Coraline is seemingly trapped in the secondary world, the black cat will play a crucial role in helping her to escape.

Coraline will use the portal four times in all, for in the middle of the story she will return home, only to find that her real parents have disappeared. She goes looking for them and discovers that they are trapped in the other world when she sees them in a mirror that had originally come out of a wardrobe – sound familiar!, and returning to the other world she will find them trapped in a snow globe whence she has to rescue them and finally return to the primary world of her real home with them. The portal itself changes each time she uses it, becoming first a dark passage without doors at all, and finally a longer dark passage with a door at either end of it, one door leading out of the secondary world of her 'other' parents and the other finally taking her back into the primary world of her own flat. As I noted above, when she tries to leave for the final time her other mother tries to stop her, and it's at this point that the black cat is able to help her. Here's her other mother:

> "Now," she said, "you're going to stay here for ever and always."
> "No," said Coraline. "I'm not." And, hard as she could, she threw the black cat towards the other mother . . . .
> The cat made a deep ululating yowl and sank its teeth into the other mother's cheek. (141)

Sweeping the cat up into her arms she manages to get through the portal door in the other flat but cannot close it because her other mother is hanging onto it for dear life, and Coraline will have to resort to sheer force of imagination to get it closed.

> *Shut!* she thought. Then she said, out loud, "Come on, *please*."
> And she felt the door begin to move.(142)

Even then it is a major struggle to get up the corridor to the other door, the door that will let her back into the primary world of her own home:

> It was an uphill run, and it seemed to her that it went on for a longer distance that anything could possibly go.(144)

And she has to use all her will to get through, though she finally makes it,

> Panting for breath, she staggered through the door and slammed it behind her.. (145)

..and she is through.

At one level *Coraline* is clearly incorporates a dream, or even a couple of dreams, the first being when she hears the noise downstairs and goes to investigate, and the second starting when she finally gets through the door when her mother goes shopping, and ending when her mother returns and finds her asleep in the chair in the drawing room,

> Her mother shook her gently awake.
> "Coraline?' she said. "Darling, what a funny place to fall asleep …
> We looked all over the house for you.(147)

And, like Alice, Coraline is in any case a dreamer by nature, forever using her imagination to visit far off lands and distant places:

> Sometimes Coraline would forget who she was while she was daydreaming that she was exploring the Arctic, or the Amazon rainforest, or darkest Africa..(75)

Turning next to Alan Garner's *Elidor*, we find another example of a child using their imagination to make things happen. In this case we again have four children: in descending ages they are Nicholas, David, Helen, and Roland, who is the protagonist and who is the imaginative one. They too are displaced, having, like Coraline, just moved house and, like Coraline, feeling very much in the way and looking for something interesting to do, they decide to go exploring in central Manchester. There they find a street map on a roller in a big glass frame which can be driven by turning wheels on the side. Roland proceeds to spin the wheels arbitrarily and suggests that they go to wherever it ends up pointing at. Nicholas is somewhat scathing, '"I might have known you'd think of something daft"'(10), but nonetheless when the map stops at a street called Thursday Street off they go, discovering when they get there that it is in the middle of a slum clearance site with half demolished houses with only the front walls left standing and with the windows looking through to the sky. There's a church still standing in the centre of the site, well set to be demolished itself. Its door is locked. Strangely they hear music being played and see a fiddler on the corner of a street seemingly playing to no-one. Roland's suggestion that, against the better judgement of the others, they go where the map sends them, has established

him as the more adventurous one, and he is specifically identified, by his older brother, as the more imaginative one too.

> "I keep feeling we're being watched," said Roland . . . .
> "Oh, come off it, Roland," said Nicholas. "You're always imagining things." (13)

There's a plastic ball lying around, which Roland kicks, and which then takes on a life of its own, soaring high and with such force that it crashes through the central lancet of the west window of the church, and as it soars Roland hears the music more piercingly,

> "When I kicked the ball, the – the fiddle seemed to stick on a note. Didn't you hear it? It went right through my head. (17)

In turn, first Helen, then David, then Nicholas go to retrieve it, leaving Roland on his own; and at each disappearance Roland has heard the fiddle in the distance playing furiously. Finally he has to follow himself. The main door to the church is locked, but he finds a side door sagging open and gets into the church itself. There is no sign of the others, nor of the ball, but the fiddler appears at the top of some stairs, gets Roland to lead him down, then again starts to play furiously, urging Roland to go through the hitherto locked main door of the church. Roland plunges through,

> The outline of the church rippled in the air, and vanished. He was standing among boulders on a sea shore, and the music died into the crash of breakers, and the long fall of surf.(22)

… and he is through into Elidor, fairly immediately finding a ruined castle in the keep of which he finds the football lying at the foot of a lancet window with smashed glass. The portal itself is most easily identifiable as the door to the church, but getting through it has been a complicated process, with the ball's transit showing them the way – and indeed from the ball's perspective the lancet window has been the portal – and with the fiddler obviously playing a major role in getting them through. Like Narnia, Elidor is also dark; and in the course of the story the children acquire four treasures, a sword, a spear, a chalice, and a golden stone, which have to be held in safety in their own, real, world 'unless there is heard the song of Findhorn'(49), who will turn out to be a unicorn, at which point it will be time for the treasures to be returned and for light to return to Elidor. Roland learns all this when he meets the fiddler who is now in Elidor itself and whose name we discover is Malebron. Malebron tells Roland that his siblings are trapped in a nearby mound, as are the treasures, and that only he, Roland, can gain entry into the mound by imagining a doorway into it, which he does at Malebron's urging, picturing the front door to their new house to do so.

> "Make the door appear: think it: force it with your mind." . . . .
> Roland thought of the door at the new house. . . . . "Yes," said Roland. "It's there. The door. It's real."
> "Then look! Now!"

> Roland opened his eyes, and he saw the frame of the porch stamped in the turf . . . (39-41)

Once the children, carrying the treasures, are safely out of the mound, Malebron, again driving them with his fiddle playing, hassles them back through the portal from the castle keep in Elidor into the church in their world, which then comes crashing down behind them. Roland watches anxiously, relaxing only once he is assured that the portal is closed. '"It's alright. We'll be able to hide them now."'(54). The treasures themselves have been transformed into a length of railing, two laths nailed together, a broken cup, and a keystone to the church. They hide them, initially, in their old house. However they prove to be very difficult to hide, since it turns out that they generate a vast amount of static electricity, such that it is possible to identify their equivalent location in Elidor. And if the men of Elidor can find that location they will attempt to open up a new portal at that point and break through to retrieve them. Roland and his imagination will play a major role here – if he starts to picture the men breaking through then break through they will. He first discovers this when he goes to get the treasures from their old house – he sees the outline of two men on the attic wall, and the more he looks at them the more real they become. He manages to tear himself away just in time. Once the treasures are in their new home things are no better, since their electrical properties affect everything that is electrical in the house. The television won't work, nor the radio, and they set their dad's shaver going, never mind the food mixer and the washing machine. Even the car starts on its own. In despair the children put them in a dustbin and bury it in the garden. This seems to solve things for the time being, but then they start having problems with their front door, the door that Roland has pictured in his mind to get into the mound in Elidor. It buzzes and rattles away at all hours of the day and night; and when Roland creeps downstairs one night, he can clearly see Elidor through the letter box. He realises that by using the front door to imagine his way into the mound in Elidor he has made the door itself into a portal, and to close it he must imagine it being closed.

> It's my fault. I made it. I made it … I must unmake it . . . . .
> He closed his eyes and pictured the arch in his mind . . . he concentrated on the joints of the brickwork. Grey mortar. Loose. Dry. Crumbling . . . . . He forced his mind like a drill between the bricks . . . . Come on! Break! Come on! More! A brick fell, and another, and a crack ran up to the roof. . . If he could undermine the roof, the weight of the stone tiles would pull the whole thing down. . . . Roland gathered his energy and made one blind lunge. Everything of him poured out, and after that there was nothing; and into this nothing the porch began to fall. (113/114)

Time passes and their dad plants a rose garden over the buried treasures and Nicholas goes into denial about the whole adventure, suggesting that it was some form of mass hallucination. Then the rose garden itself starts to generate static and Roland once again sees the outlines of the men. Things come to a head when the unicorn breaks through – the children are walking back from a Christmas party on a cinder path that 'ran through a no-man's-land between two built up areas'(128) The other three try to assume that it must have been a horse that has escaped from a stables, but Roland has seen its horn. Again Nicholas is scathing, so to prove his point Roland takes him, and the other two, to look at the rose garden on one of the occasions that it is

generating static, and the shadows reappear. But this time they have got into the children's minds and they can't turn away, and the figures, becoming moment by moment more real, come rushing at them until they finally emerge, 'two men of Elidor, into the garden.'(137) The children now realise they must get rid of the treasures once and for all, and so take them back into Manchester riding on the busses until again they end up at Thursday Street, where the unicorn re-appears, being hunted down by the men, who kill it, but as it's dying it sings, fulfilling the prophecy, and the children can see life springing up in Elidor through the windows of the half demolished houses and, in the very last lines of the book, they fling the treasures through.

> .. for an instant the glories of stone, sword, spear, and cauldron hung in their true shapes, almost a trick of the splintering glass, the golden light.
>
> The song faded.
>
> The children were alone with the broken windows of a slum.
>
> (170)

As can be seen, the hunt for a portal by the men in Elidor, and the defence of it once it has been discovered, is a major structuring element of the book, and the associated transition narratives have a number interesting features. Two of the break through sites, the slum clearance site and the cinder path, are in deserted places, each an in-between no-man's-land, a place that doesn't really belong anywhere, places that Malebron has described as places that 'have been shaken loose in their worlds'(47). We must assume that the unicorn has broken through onto the cinder path of its own accord, but it has needed Malebron's fiddle playing to drive the children through the church/castle portal and back again. And of course the children themselves are in their own no-man's-land, caught between their old house and their new one, shaken loose from the familiar and confronted with the new and strange. (One might note, in passing, that Dorothy's flight to Oz also occurs when the land around the farmhouse is quaking with the destruction brought by the hurricane and as a result is shaken loose in *its* world.) But even more important is Roland's own imagination, a problem for the older children, particularly Nicholas who is desperately trying to find some sort of rational explanation for everything. It is Roland who dreams up the initial idea that first gets them to Thursday Street – 'I might have known you'd think of something daft' – and it is his imagination that comes into play when he has to create the doorway that will get him into the mound in Elidor. And he has to use his imagination to destroy that same imagined doorway when it is under attack. It is he that sees the unicorn for what it is when it breaks through on the cinder path; and when it comes to what is in effect the third breakthrough, it is his imaginative powers that will inadvertently summon the two men of Elidor through the outline shadows over the rose garden.

In the examples I have looked at, the transition narratives have grown in complexity. Those in the *Alice* books being simple enough, but those in *The Wizard of Oz, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Coraline,* and *Elidor* carrying larger amounts of exposition about situation and character. The transition narrative in my final example, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone,* takes up more than the first third of the book and contains even more exposition, since it has to establish the two worlds and the protagonist's very different role in each of them before he has even passed through the portal(s) from one to the other. We actually

learn that there is a secondary world in the first chapter when the denizens of that world, specifically Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall, and Hagrid, Hogwarts' giant gamekeeper, arrive in the normal world of the Dursleys, Harry's appalling Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, in order to deposit him, Harry, as a one year old baby, on their doorstep; with a letter explaining things tucked into his blankets. We learn that Harry is special, that he has survived an attack from ultimate evil wizard Voldemort, an attack in which his parents were killed; and he himself carries evidence of that attack in the form of a scar on his forehead. When, as he grows up, he asks about his parents and about the scar, the Dursleys lie to him, telling him that his parents were killed in a car crash and not to ask questions, and it rapidly becomes clear that whatever it is that is special about Harry is something that the obsessively conventional Dursleys find deeply disturbing.

In chapter two we find Harry approaching his eleventh birthday – 'He'd lived with the Dursleys almost ten years, ten miserable years'(27) – forced to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs, bullied by his atrociously spoilt monster of a cousin, Dudley, and treated by his uncle and aunt as if he didn't exist, or worse.

> The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn't there – or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug. (22)

But change is on the way. It starts when a letter arrives addressed to *'Mr H Potter, The Cupboard under the Stairs, 4 Privet Drive'*(30), at which point one may say that the transition narrative proper starts. Uncle Vernon snatches the letter from him before he can read it, and it clearly disturbs him.

> "Who'd be writing to you?" sneered Uncle Vernon, shaking the letter open with one hand and glancing at it. His face went from red to green faster than a set of traffic lights. And it didn't stop there. Within seconds it was the greyish white of old porridge.(31)

They do at least move him out of the cupboard into Dudley's second bedroom, full of Dudley's old broken toys, but more and more letters arrive, this time addressed to him in *The Smallest Bedroom*. In an effort to escape from the letters the family go on the run, first of all to a grotty hotel – the letters follow – then, on the day before Harry's actual eleventh birthday, to a hut on a rock out at sea. On the stroke of midnight, as Harry actually turns eleven, there's a huge knock on the door and it's Hagrid, who sets about the quivering Dursleys in no uncertain terms, totally outraged that they have never told Harry anything, and explaining to Harry what he's talking about.

> "About *our* world, I mean. *Your* world. *My* world. *Yer parents' world*."(41: original spelling)

This magical world clearly exists in parallel to the real one, but there's a Ministry of Magic whose job it is to prevent the latter finding out about the former.

> "Well, their main job is to keep it from the Muggles[1] that there's still witches an' wizards up an' down the country.(51)

Hagrid goes on to tell Harry what was in the letter tucked into his blanket when he was deposited on the Dursleys' door step when he was a baby, i.e. that he's a wizard, son of a wizard and a witch, that Voldemort killed them, but that when he tried to kill Harry he couldn't, that Harry's scar is the tangible evidence of that attack, and that Harry is thus famous as the only person ever to survive such an attack. As for the letters that have been arriving over the recent week or two, they were informing him that he has a place at Hogwarts, and that term starts in a month's time. It is Hagrid's job to get him kitted out, to which end they must go to London, which they do by largely conventional means, catching the train to Paddington and the underground into town where they find a tiny pub called the Leaky Cauldron which other passers-by don't seem to notice, and which is the first of series of portals that Harry will have to pass through. He's enthusiastically greeted by everyone in the pub, including a very nervous little man, Professor Quirrell who, as we know, is to prove to have an important role at the climax of the story. They go through the pub into a little walled courtyard where Hagrid opens up a second portal that takes them into Diagon Alley, which has a bank and various shops, and where Harry gets money, a cauldron, a wand, books, etc. plus an owl for delivering his post. The wand is the brother to Voldemort's, a fact that will have implications throughout the entire series. He also meets Malfoy for the first time. Leaving the way they came, Hagrid gives Harry his train ticket, the point of departure being platform nine and three quarters at King's Cross. The departure date is a month away but when it arrives he persuades his uncle to drive him to the train with his 'huge, heavy trunk'(68) loaded into the back, but once dropped off he is on his own, and totally mystified about how he is to find platform nine and three quarters. Luckily he overhears a family, the Weasley's, behind him talking about Muggles and platform nine and three quarters. Under their tutelage he makes a run for the barrier between platforms nine and ten:

> – leaning forward on his trolley he broke into a heavy run – the barrier was coming nearer and nearer – he wouldn't be able to stop – the trolley was out of control – he was a foot away – he closed his eyes ready for the crash –
>
> It didn't come … he kept on running … he opened his eyes.
>
> A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said *Hogwarts Express, 11 o'clock*.(70,71)

He's through. On the journey to Hogwarts he is befriended by Ron Weasley, who tells him a lot about the school, and also meets Hermione Granger, a bossy know-it-all girl whom neither of the two boys take to initially but whom they warm to, and, as we know, the three of them are to become lifelong friends.

Disembarked from the train they find Hagrid, who leads them the last bit of the way down a narrow path and to the first sight of the school.

> The narrow path had opened suddenly on to the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its

[1] Muggles being the name given to ordinary non magical people in the real world.

> windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers. (83)

They cross the lake in boats into a dark tunnel, then clamber up a passageway to find themselves on a green sward in front of a huge oak door.

> Hagrid raised a giant fist and knocked three times on the castle door.
> The door swung open at once… (84,85)

… and there is Professor McGonagall waiting to welcome them in. Harry has found his true home at last. As already noted, the transition narrative is pretty substantial, it is effectively the exposition of the whole novel, and it has served to introduce the magical world within which Harry, all unknowingly, has a major role to play; all of which is set within a narrative that, genre wise, is an adventure story. Structure wise there are a couple of portals, the first being the portal into Diagon Alley, with its antechamber in the form of the Leaky Cauldron, a sort of no-mans-land – another one – between the magical world of witches and wizards and the world of ordinary human beings. And the second being the barrier between platforms nine and ten at Kings Cross. Other features of the transition narrative are by now more familiar. Harry is nothing if not displaced, having been brought up since a baby in an extremely unloving family who deliberately lie to him about his origins and the fact that he is a wizard, never mind the fact that he is already famous. Harry's emotional and psychological displacement which might be more accurately described as total alienation is certainly more extreme than that of Dorothy or Coraline, but it echoes theirs. Like Coraline he enters a world where he can find himself, establish his true identity; and like the children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and like Dorothy, and like the children in *Elidor*, he has entered a world, a promised land indeed, where he can and will make a difference.

The Birth Narrative

At a symbolic level a number of transitions are often coded as birth narratives. Indeed it is an almost commonplace interpretation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to equate the pool of tears with the amniotic fluid within which Alice is nurtured before her entry into Wonderland itself, and the analogies can be expanded, for if the pool of tears is the amniotic fluid, then the 'long low hall'(p.15) within which the pool of tears is to be found must presumably be the womb. Extrapolating backwards some have noted that before she even gets to the hall she is expelled from the bottom of the well and then proceeds down a long passage which opens up into the hall itself, the egg being ejected from the ovaries and passing down the fallopian tubes into the uterus itself perhaps. (Once you get going you can make them up as you go along, and a quick search of the web will show that lots of people do!) Others have suggested that the little door that she finds in the hall is the entrance to the birth canal through which Alice can see 'the loveliest garden you ever saw'(p.16). Alice ruminates on the impossibility of even getting her head through at this stage, another birth reference, though later in the book she will come back to the hall, reduce herself to the right size and get through. The problem, of course is that by that time she has seen a good bit of Wonderland already, so the chronology would seem to be a little out of kilter. Others have noted that the insertion of the key into the lock of the little door is

clearly symbolic of coitus, but since that also happens halfway through the book, the chronology would again seem to be a little out of kilter!

The Wizard of Oz offers us another womb, the whirling farmhouse itself, within which Dorothy 'felt as if she were being rocked gently, like a baby in a cradle'(13), and finally being birthed into 'the midst of a country of marvellous beauty'(14) And we find yet another womb in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the wardrobe itself, and Lucy has to push her way out: 'pushing the soft folds of the coasts aside to make room for her'(13) All three examples, interestingly, offer us light at the end of the tunnel narratives. There is no light at the end of the tunnel for Coraline, but the drawing room, kept for special occasions – 'kept for best' as the text has it, could stand in for the womb, even if it's a rather uncomfortable one, and after she passes through the doorway she too proceeds down a corridor, albeit uneasily, but nonetheless a birth canal, which finally opens up into the lookalike kitchen occupied by her 'other', sinister mother. It is not difficult to posit another womb in *Elidor*, the church itself, but Roland is not anxious to leave, and his birth requires a good deal of pushing, having to be driven into Elidor by the furious playing of the fiddler,

> "Now! Open the door!"
> "I can't! It's locked!"
> "Open it! There is little time."
> "But – !
> "Now!"
> Roland stumbled to the door, grasped the iron handle, and pulled with all his weight. The door opened, and he ran out on to the cobbles of the street, driven by the noise.(22)

As for Harry Potter, the Leaky Cauldron certainly offers itself up as a candidate for a womb, from which he emerges into Diagon Alley, though only to withdraw back through the pub into the real world of his uncle and aunt. The next time he is on his own, and he has to penetrate the barrier between platforms nine and ten at King's Cross, breaking the hymen perhaps, which would then cast Harry as the representative of his own seed, and with Hogwarts Express itself standing in for the nurturing womb, reaching the amniotic fluid of the lake at the end of the journey, entering the birth passage of the final tunnel and upward leading passageway, until they get to the doors of the school itself which swing open to let Harry and the other first years in. Hagrid, be it noted, has acted as midwife on both occasions, shepherding him through the Leaky Cauldron in the first instance, and through the doors into the castle in the second. It may perhaps also be suggested that in Harry Potter's case Hogwarts itself is yet another nurturing womb from which he is only to emerge as a fully matured wizard some seven volumes later – but that, as they say, is another story.

Transition narratives elsewhere in children's fiction

When I was writing about *The Coral Island*, I came across this quote from Kutzer[1], 'the swift movement of the story from coastal England to exotic Pacific island is similar to the swift movement from the real world to the fantastic in children's fantasy', and one cannot but concur.

[1] Kutzer 2000, quoted in the Wikipedia article on *The Coral Island*.

In the first chapter of the book first person narrator, Ralph, tells us a little about his background, about working in the costal trade, and about the tales his shipmates told about their adventures in foreign lands:

> But, of all the places which they told me, none captivated and charmed my imagination so much as the Coral Islands of the South Seas.(14)

So in pursuit of such adventures he joins the crew of the *Arrow*, which is when he meets Jack and Peterkin, the two boys who are to share the adventure with him. Thereupon the journey proceeds very rapidly, 'I shall say very little about the first part of our voyage'(18) and before we know it they have rounded Cape Horn and within a sentence or two are amongst the aforementioned coral islands.

> I shall never forget the delight with which I gazed – when we chanced to pass one – at the pure, white, dazzling shores and verdant palm trees, which looked bright and beautiful in the sunshine. And often did we three long to be landed on one, imagining that we should certainly find perfect happiness there!(20)

They end up on one such island when their ship is caught in a storm and wrecked on the reef that encircles it. All bar one of the boats have been lost in the storm, which the crew now pile into. It is overturned.

> The last thing I saw was the boat whirling in the surf, and all the sailors tossed into the foaming waves.(23/24)

The three boys, however, have seen that there is quiet water inside the reef and at Jack's urging they have entrusted their lives to an oar,

> "...if we manage to cling to the oar till it is driven over the breakers, we may perhaps gain the shore."(21)

..which is indeed what happens. The description of the storm and the wreck has been dealt with very economically, and there is no account at all of the oar being carried over the reef. Ralph has been knocked unconscious before they ever get there, and he wakes up to find himself already on dry land.

> On recovering from my swoon, I found myself lying on a bank of soft grass, under the shelter of an overhanging rock.(23)

They have almost magically surmounted the reef and been washed ashore. So yes indeed, the links with the transition narratives in the fantasy novels are all too clear. And yet again we have a desirable destination, a destination that initially exists only in Ralph's imagination, but that is just as much desired once he has seen a coral island for real. And once they get onto their own

island after the shipwreck they do indeed find happiness there, as they bond and work together to survive and flourish.

Finally a transition narrative that may sound a tad more familiar. I refer to Enid Blyton's *First Term at Mallory Towers.* The transition narrative starts in the first couple of lines of the book, as our protagonist, Darrell, prepares for the first time to leave for boarding school – Mallory Towers itself. She is nothing if not keen to go.

> Darrell Rivers looked at herself in the glass. It was almost time to start for the train. . . . . Darrell felt excited. . . . . She looked forward to many years of fun and friendship, work and play.(7)

Like Harry Potter she has her obligatory trunk: 'Her trunk was packed full'(7) and, her mother with her, off she sets for the station in a taxi where they will find a special train to take them straight to the school. The platform is specified, platform 7, and when they get onto it 'A long train was drawn up there, labelled Malory Towers.' Her mother explains the house system to her, four houses – four towers – and telling her that she will be in North Tower. And once on the train, again like Harry P, she will meet other first years, characters who will play an important role in the ensuing narrative. Disembarking, they pile into coaches, anxiously looking for their first glimpse of the school.

> They rounded a corner. Alicia nudged her arm. "There you are, look! Over there on that hill." . . . . Darrell looked. She saw a big square-looking building of soft grey stone standing high up on a hill. . . . . It looked like an old time castle. . . . . it wasn't very long before all the coaches roared up to the flight of steps that that led to the great front door. (15/16)

After all of which one is almost tempted to say that the only thing that is missing is Darrell's owl! Of course trunks and train journeys and first glimpses are all part of the school story genre, but the similarities with the account of Harry Potter's journey to Hogwarts are striking. What implications one is to draw from those similarities is up to individual readers, but for myself I am very much tempted to read the account in the later book as being a tribute, an *homage* indeed, to the earlier one, the earlier text offering a cast iron structure upon which to build the detailed invention required to establish the magical world of the later text. But I am straying here into 'author's intention' country, never mind coming close to making value judgements, into both of which places I am loath to go. I only report on similarities of text; but they are striking.

In this chapter I have looked at some of the discourses of transition narratives in children's books, to be found predominantly in fantasy novels, but to be found elsewhere too. (I have generally referred to them as features, but discourses I would suggest they are.)
There is the discourse of curiosity, the desire to explore and discover:- *Alice*; the children in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Coraline in *Coraline*; Ralph in *The Coral Island*.
There is the discourse of the desire for fun and adventure, which I see as very much tied up with the desire to explore and discover:- *Alice*; the children in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Coraline; Ralph in *The Coral Island*; Darrell in the *Mallory Towers* books.

There is the discourse of the desirable destination:- Looking-Glass world; Oz; Narnia; the magical world of Hogwarts; the idyllic Pacific island; Mallory Towers.
There is the discourse of displacement:- the children in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Coraline; the children in *Elidor*; Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*; Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. In the first three examples the children are displaced by events that are beyond their control – they have moved house or they have been sent to the country to escape the bombing, and thus find themselves in situations where they feel in the way and temporarily unwanted. In Harry Potter's case his alienation is much more serious, his uncle and aunt having made it plain to him that he is unwanted from the very first day that he turns up on the doorstep as a baby. And Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* – another aunt and uncle – falls somewhere in between, having to fend for herself in a situation where, even if she is not actually unwanted, she certainly seems starved for love. The two real world novels, *The Coral Island* and *First Term at Mallory Towers*, can also be seen as being displacement narratives, and in the case of *The Coral Island* the displacement is also occasioned by an event that is beyond the children's control, though a desert island is, for Ralph, a highly desirable destination in the first place, but in the *Mallory Towers* example Darrell very much desires the new world of the school from the get go.
Along with displacement – feeling in the way – there is boredom, four candidates this time:- the Alice of *Wonderland*; the children in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Coraline; the children in *Elidor*.
There is the discourse of the imaginative child, the dreamer, whose imaginations or dreams have a role in driving the transitions in the first place:- Alice in both *Alice* books; Lucy in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Coraline in *Coraline*; Roland in *Elidor*; Ralph in *The Coral Island*; Darrell in *Mallory Towers*. In the case of the first two it is ostensibly a coincidence, though in reality no coincidence at all, that they are the ones who find the way through, but in the cases both of Coraline and Roland, they have to consciously use their imaginations to make things happen. And in the real world novels we are specifically told that Ralph has already visited the islands in his imagination, and there can be little doubt that Darrell's imagination is also working overtime as she imagines what fun Mallory Towers is going to be. By contrast Harry P., alas, does not strike me as being gifted with much of an imagination, but I may be doing the poor lad an injustice.
Finally there is the discourse of the no-man's-land between the two worlds, places that don't really belong in either world, that have, in Malebron's phrase, been shaken loose in their worlds. *Elidor* provides the most consistent examples of these, the ruined church and the cinder path, but, as noted, Dorothy's farmhouse is also shaken loose in *its* world; and the Leaky Cauldron feels like an in-between place too. The wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is in the corner of an otherwise empty room, and the doorway leading to the other flat in *Coraline* is in an unwanted room full of uncomfortable furniture: neither room having any real function in the real world. The only exceptions in the examples I have discussed are the *Alice* books. Certainly not the mirror in *Looking Glass* – the rabbit hole in *Wonderland* perhaps, but I think even that's pushing it.

In conclusion let me just say that I am making no claims that these are the defining discourses of transition narratives. I have, after all, only looked at eight books, and there is no specific discourse that is found in all of them. Perhaps it is more useful to think of them as a loosely connected family of discourses. But as for whether there are some cousins that I have missed, I should be very surprised if there weren't.

10

IT'S PRETEND / IT IS CHILDREN WHO GIVE US LIFE
The Discourse of the Play of Adulthood in Fantasy Fiction

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

> '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*

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. It's the episode which I examined in more detail in Chapter 8, the 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.'(21); with, in that particular case, disastrous results, but that is by the by. 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[1]. 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 novel we are invited into that virtual world in order to engage with the characters, with 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

[1] Garth Green, in private conversation, though doubtless by now others must surely have had the same insight.

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[1]; 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[2] 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 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 that adults will get very different things from, and will read very different meanings into, the text than will children.

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[1] 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, in which one item stands in for (symbolises) another.

[2] *Elidor* passim

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[1], 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[2] 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' (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 in which they find themselves, 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. (1)

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

[1] *Pride and Prejudice* and *David Copperfield* respectively, just in case you aren't with me.

[2] 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.'

actions. Next we find Christopher Robin and Pooh sat down in front of the fire, with Christopher Robin demanding a story from the author[1], 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."(2)

And as a 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.(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.[2] 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."*) (7/8)

[1] 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.

[2] As a child 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.' (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!" (13). 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 footprints 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."
> (47/48: capitals in the original),

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 proceedcake' 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). A more fully-fledged adult can be found in the character of Rabbit. In the second chapter 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?" (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."(97)

Just to clinch the argument, let me turn, finally, to Piglet, who, in Ch. IX, finds himself 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. (127)

Three or four he may be, but earlier in the book (32) there is the information that 'Piglet lived in a very grand house in the middle of a beech tree' and in Ch. V he and Pooh chat 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." (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 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 his very first appearnce, 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 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.(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.(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."(39)

It is not long before Mole gets to the river where he is to meet Ratty, the Water Rat; the two animals have an instant rapport, and Ratty then tells him about the other denizens of the Riverbank, three of whom appear briefly in this first chapter – Otter, Toad, and Badger – and he also mentions the Wild Wood, though Mole detects something in his tone which causes him to ask..

> "Aren't they – aren't they very *nice* people in there?" asked the Mole a trifle nervously,(13)

..and in answer Ratty talks about the squirrels and the rabbits and Badger and the weasels and stoats and foxes. Note that Mole has asked about the *people* who inhabit the Wild Wood and Ratty tells him about the animals. Animals *are* people, and adults at that. Their status as animals is never entirely lost, they all have paws not hands, shake paws when they meet, and are referred to in the text as *the* Rat, *the* Mole, *the* Otter, but when Otter turns up briefly in the first chapter. Ratty introduces Mole and '"my friend Mr. Mole."'(p.16) In chapter two Mole asks Ratty,

> "What I wanted to ask you was, won't you take me to meet *Mr*. Toad?"(29, my emphasis)

And when they get there, there's Toad Hall:

> Rounding a bend in the river, they came in sight of a handsome, dignified old house of mellowed red brick, with well-kept lawns reaching down the water's edge.(31)

Plainly Toad is a wealthy land owner. Similarly when they stumble into Badger's house in a later chapter, the sign on the door says 'Mr. Badger', and he has a spacious rambling underground dwelling.

A final example comes from the end of the book when Toad has been imprisoned (for various misdemeanours: stealing a motor car, dangerous driving, and cheeking the police, the latter being by far the most serious offence!) In his absence the Wild Wooders – the stoats, the weasels and the ferrets – representing, one might argue, the revolutionary proletariat[1] – have taken over Toad Hall. Here is Ratty describing the 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.. (264)

At the adult level insurrection and class war is serious enough stuff in all conscience, though here the tone is humorous; but 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 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 implied child reader is invited to come along and join in the game. (The child reader: boys more than girls? It is after all an all male world that is described, the all male world of the leisured classes who maybe did something in the City a couple of days a week [2], but who otherwise enjoyed total freedom to do anything they wanted, an idyllic existence.)

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*[3], tells of Noddy's arrival in Toyland as a little naked wooden doll, carved out of a cherry tree branch[4],

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[1] 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*.

[2] 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.'

[3] 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 because of what is seen as the inherent racism of their portrayal). The Macdonald Purnell edition had been substantially cut, whole episodes had disappeared, and hardly a single sentence of the original had remained unchanged, and all for no discernible purpose as far as I could see.

[4] 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 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.' (7)

And again note that, like the animals in *The Wind in the Willows*, 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[1], 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. (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.(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?"(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,

[1] I have been lucky enough to find an early copy of this book too, with the original text and illustrations, and complete with the now deemed racist Gollywogs, as will be seen a little further on in my analysis.

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.'(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: a nicer 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.'(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, 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 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. (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.(2)

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 . . (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.'(5) The girls also give her a mother, Mrs. Plantaganet, known as Birdie, who had come out of a cracker, who is made of celluloid and who is described (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. (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. The narration slips 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."(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. (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." (79,80)

And 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."(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."(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. (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. (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."(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. (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.(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?"(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."(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.[1] (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.'(120). Finally Emily comes to her senses.

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

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

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 the story is told 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 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 shifts 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. At one level the dolls are given life by the girls as they write the text of their own play, but at another, the wishes of the dolls force the girls to become readers of their own text too and 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.[1]

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 implied 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-

[1] 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*.

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, 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 relationship between reader and text, with *Winnie-the-Pooh* describing 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.

11

WE WERE GOING TO DISCUSS MONEY
Discourses of Politics, Economics, Gender, and Religion

"We were going to discuss money," said Peter.
Enid Blyton: *Fun for the Secret Seven*

This chapter looks like something of a ragbag, but I started with the idea that politics and economics are never very far away from each other, and in addition I wanted to take a brief look at some examples of female characters exerting power through, or rather in despite of, the traditional roles that they inhabit in much children's literature, in other words issues of the politics of gender. Which left religion, and any glance at the history of religion, never mind some of today's manifestations of religious belief, will tell you that the practice of religion is always to do with the articulation and operation of power. In other circumstances each of those headings could merit a chapter of its own, offering a deeper analysis than I am attempting here, but here, as elsewhere in this book, I am merely offering a descriptive account, and shall be restricting myself to a couple of examples in each category.

The Discourse of Politics

In its more technical sense, Politics is the study of institutional power in nation states, and it tends to be a more overt discourse in YA fiction than in fiction for younger children. Stories set in dystopian futures, such as Suzanne Collins' *Hunger Games* trilogy, are political from the start, with authoritarian governments exercising arbitrary power, but their politics are at one remove from the political of the everyday here and now. And of course it has been widely noted that the *Harry Potter* series also has a very political strand running through it, but that aspect of the series has received exhaustive cover already – enter 'Politics of Harry Potter'[1] into Wikipedia and you will see what I mean! – and I doubt that I can add anything very useful. So instead, here is another glance at Cory Doctorow's *Pirate Cinema* which I discussed at greater length in an earlier chapter, and in which we find a direct engagement with contemporary politics and how it currently operates in the UK[2]. You will recall that Trent McCauley's family's internet access has been shut down because of his, Trent's, on-line activities, leaving his dad jobless, his mum without her social security benefits, and his sister unable to study on line which she has to do since access to the local library is restricted due to budgetary cutbacks, all of which are nothing if not political issues. Later in the story we learn that his girlfriend, 26, is political herself, working part time at an anarchist bookshop run by one Anika, and Trent soon finds himself at a political meeting gathered to protest an upcoming bill to be presented to the British Parliament in the near future, 'The Theft of Intellectual Property Bill', which is all about policing the web, clearly a

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Harry_Potter
[2] The book was published in 2012, but what is described by way of the UK political process is pretty much unchanged as of 2020, which is when I am writing this.

subject close to his heart. Anika has a leaked draft of the proposed bill and is explaining it to the meeting.[1]

> "Look at this: Article 1(3) makes it a criminal offense to engage in 'commercial scale' infringement even if you're not making money. That means that anyone caught with more than five pirated films or twenty pirated songs can be sent to *prison*."(111)

She goes on to explain that sentencing guidelines will be determined by the Business Secretary, a non-elected official who in this particular case previously worked for Warner, and is 'on record as saying that she wished we still had the death penalty so it could be used on pirates.'(111). Quoting the legalese, Anika explains the powers that will be given to the police,

> "..there's a whole new set of police powers that go into effect, including the right to 'remotely search' your computer, with 'limitation of liability for incidental loss of data or access." (111)

26 translates for Trent.

> "It means that they have the right to hack your computer over the net, search your drive, and there's no penalty if they get it wrong, mess up your data, invade your privacy, whatever." (111)

Anika further argues that these powers are effectively being written into the bill because of the vested interests of the entertainment industry, who get their way by wining and dining members of parliament, introducing them to celebrities, getting them free tickets to concerts, etc. to the extent that …

> ".. parliament has been giving EMI and Warner and Sony and Universal so much power for so long . . . that they don't even think about it. They just get out the rubber stamp and vote for it." (112)

And she concludes with a peroration that precisely describes Trent's situation:

> "Everyone knows someone who's been disconnected because someone in their house was accused of file sharing. Some families are ruined by this – lose their jobs, kids fail at school – " (112)

[1] In fact, as serendipity would have it, there was indeed a real bill presented to Parliament in 2013 and passed into law a year later in 2014, just a couple of years after the publication of *Pirate Cinema,* entitled the 'Intellectual Property Act', the purpose of which was indeed to update copyright law, though it does not seem to have included the same powers for the invasion of the privacy, nor the same penalties for its contravention, as this fictional one does here.

She asks for comments and Trent suggests that every time someone in power quotes you, or even accidentally catches your graffiti in the background of a shot on television, you should sue *them* for breach of copyright, but Anika explains that the law is not written like that – you would have to show that whoever has used your stuff has used it for its 'meaningful commercial potential', and in any case the costs of suing for damages would be far beyond the capacity of the ordinary person.

> " . . They're evil, but they're not stupid: when they buy a law, they make damned sure that it can't be used against them. (114)

So, what is to be done? Annika's suggestion is that they should increase the pressure on their individual local MPs[1] by visiting them and urging them to vote against the bill, though even then they will not be assured of success, as a Green Party MP who is at the meeting explains,

> . . . he got up on his feet to say how much he appreciated all this, and how he knew that there were LibDem and Labour and Tory MPs who would love to vote against the whip, but they were too afraid of being thrown out of the party if they didn't co-operate. (114)

26 explains to Trent about 'whipping', that it meant that whatever their personal views might be on the matter, individual MPs had to vote along party lines, and Trent finds all this pretty weird:

> This was just too weird: I had thought that MPs got elected to represent the voters back home. How could they do that if someone else could tell them how to vote. (114)

After the meeting, 26 proceeds with Trent's political education, telling him about what she had learned working at the bookshop.

> "I'd literally never thought about how the system worked and that. It never occurred to me to wonder why some people had stuff and other people had nothing. Why there were bosses and people who got bossed."
>
> (116)

[1] For the benefit of readers who might not be familiar with the British system, I thought a quick glossary might be helpful. MP = member of parliament (not military police!), and the political parties mentioned are the real ones – the Tories are otherwise known as the Conservative Party, and are the party of the political right of British politics; the Labour Party is the party of the political left; and somewhere in middle are the Liberal Democrats, a.k.a the LibDems, and the Green Party – the Greens; the latter being particularly concerned with environmental issues. Once elected, the winning party becomes the government, and it is nearly always the government that introduces bills that they wish to be passed into law. It is possible for individual MPs to introduce private members' bills, as happens in this story, though it happens very infrequently. As for 'whipping', it's the term used to describe the process by which a political party puts pressure on individual MPs to vote in line with party policy, and if an individual MP does vote 'against the whip' as it is known, particularly if it is a 'three line whip', they can indeed face being thrown out of the party. And, just to be more confusing, the people who ensure that all this happens are called whips. See Wikipedia for more detail: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whip_(politics)

So the story progresses. 26 takes Trent when she goes to lobby her own MP, Letitia Clarke Gifford, but she tells them that, for all that she is very impressed by the support that they seem to have rallied, the vote will still not go their way ' "the sad fact is that this is going to a three whip vote." '(135). More detail is to follow about how many MPs actually voted, including in this case the Speaker of the House, 'the bloke who kept order and handed out the biscuits at teatime'(148), who had to use his casting vote because there was otherwise no clear majority on either side. As can be seen we are deep into political debate about the issues and the justice or injustice of the proposed legislation, and about democracy itself and the ways in which vested interests can effectively control legislation at the expense of the ordinary voter. But we are also into the minutiae of the political process, analysing the texts of bills going to Parliament to see exactly what the implications are of the actual wording, examining the processes by which the law is going to be put into practice by the officials, and explaining the process of 'whipping', and how parliamentary voting actually takes place.

The Theft of Intellectual Property Bill is passed into law, and the courts start handing out draconian sentences, the first being to a seventeen year old who had 'some kind of mental problems – autistic spectrum they said on the BBC'(149), who had collected 450,000 songs on his hard drive that he seemingly didn't even listen to, he just liked collecting them, but the prosecution argued that the collection was worth twenty million pounds, and he was sentenced to five years in prison where he got beaten up by his fellow prisoners and he hung himself after a couple of weeks, and who thereafter, unsurprisingly, became a cause célèbre. The story develops and focusses on Trent's film making activities, and on those of his mates, and on their escapades as they organise showings in 'unofficial' locations – cavernous underground vaults in the sewers, disused underground stations, empty warehouses, etc., and so successful are they that eventually the press and the media pick it up and want to interview Trent himself about it all. In the course of all this the political discourse is never entirely lost, since Trent often introduces the showings with a few words about the circumstances that brought him to London. And later, when his sister visits him, he discovers that she has been following his activities online and has become more political in the process, lobbying *her* MP back at home. And more generally, popular discontent with the bill has grown, not least because of the number of people that have been sent to prison, 'over two thousand …and most of them are minors'(253), and Clark-Gifford herself gathers enough support from her fellow parliamentarians to introduce a private members bill to repeal the act. She explains to them, again in considerable detail, that while most bills are introduced by the government, a private members bill can be introduced by an individual MP. If the government doesn't like it they simply 'talk it out' until there is no more time left for debate.(257) And given that there is an election coming up and given how unpopular the legislation is, she is hopeful that it can be passed. They decide to hold a public meeting to drum up support for the bill, renting a town hall for the purpose, inviting the press, etc. – there had been some debate about whether they should plan some underground secret meeting to plan some subversive activity to move things along, but Trent and 26 had argued against it.

> We were helping to pass a law. That wasn't illegal, that was *democracy*! We should be able to do it all nice and aboveboard, without sneaking about like spies. (282)

Their hopes are dashed, however, when the party bigwigs make it plain that the government will ensure that the bill gets thrown out: lobbyists from the entertainment industry have clearly used their influence to good effect. 26 has one final outburst.

> "Just forget it. . . This is a ridiculous waste of time. We'll never, ever change anything. Rich powerful people just run everything and the whole world is tilted in their favour. (341)

They may be down, but they are however not yet out, and they plan one last desperate measure. On the day of the vote they will project their movies onto the outside walls of the House of Commons itself, hoping that they will garner enough publicity on the day to sway the vote in parliament itself and to get the bill passed. Their movie making will effectively become a political act in and of itself. And at the same time they find a way of posting on line the details of which way every single individual MP votes so that the voters back home will see which way they have voted. MPs are thus faced with the threat that voting with the whip may lose them the chance of being re-elected in the forthcoming election. In so doing Trent and his friends have found a weak spot that allows them to break into the political process at the point at which they can exert some real pressure of their own. The day arrives and they go ahead with their plans, broadcasting the event on-line as they go, and it is not long before a huge crowd gathers on the ground to watch the show and to mob the official cars. And on-line their own film of the event rapidly goes viral, accumulating eighty million hits by the following morning. And they won – for all that it is a low turnout, the bill is passed.

The political is one of the major discourses of the novel, and as I have noted, that discourse has two interrelated strands, one of which is more directly political, with the characters going to political meetings, arguing their case, and inveighing against the ways in which the rich and powerful actually control things at the expense of the ordinary voters in the streets: about, in other words, the practice of democracy. The other strand describes the nuts and bolts of the political process itself, of how to lobby your MP, of how bills are presented in parliament itself, of how the party whip works to corral individual MPs to toe the party line, etc. And these two strands are intimately related and inextricably weave in and out of each other to the point at which it is impossible to really disentangle them. *Pirate Cinema* is clearly aimed at a YA market, (and, you might argue in parenthesis has a strong didactic strand lurking within it and I could have just as easily discussed the novel in the *Teaching and Learning* chapter) but, whatever else, you would not expect to find such content in a children's book per se. Fiction aimed at younger readers has to approach such matters more obliquely. So, for my next example I wish to look at Hugh Lofting's *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*, a book surely written with a much younger audience in mind.

A personal note: I first read *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (and I guess some of the subsequent books in the series) as a 10/11 yr. old I guess, and I loved it to bits. What impressed me then, as now, was the portrayal of this egalitarian family of animals that take over from the Doctor and basically run the show, and it is that aspect of the novel that I wish to concentrate on. I had, however, entirely forgotten the story, which, amongst other things takes us to Africa and to an encounter with a tribal king. Which is where, from today's perspective, the problems start to arise, and which I shall deal with when I get to them. At the beginning of the book we meet

Doctor Dolittle, a country doctor, much respected by his patients young and old, but he also likes animals, and has accumulated a large number of pets of one sort and another: goldfish in a goldfish pond, rabbits in the pantry, white mice in the piano, a squirrel, a hedgehog, a cow with a calf, an old lame horse, chickens, pigeons, a couple of lambs etc. and including his favourite pets who are to become the main characters in the story.

> But his favourite pets were Dab-Dab the duck, Jip the dog, Gub-Gub the baby pig, Polynesia the parrot, and the owl Too-Too. (22)

Eventually he accumulates so many animals that they begin to drive patients away – the crunch comes when an old lady with rheumatism inadvertently sits on the hedgehog, so she departs, never to return. Other patients follow until he has only one left, the Cat's-meat-Man, but by this time he has run out of money. So the Cat's-meat-Man suggests that he become an animal-doctor. Polynesia has been listening, encourages the doctor to take his advice, knowing that she can find a way to help him:

> "Did you know that animals can talk?"
> "I knew that parrots can talk," said the Doctor.
> "Oh, we parrots can talk in two languages – people's language and bird-language," said Polynesia proudly. (31)

And then and there she sets about teaching him bird language, followed, when Jip comes in and twitches his nose, by dog language:

> "That means, 'Can't you see it's stopped raining?' . . He is asking you a question. Dogs nearly always use their noses for asking questions." (33)

And it is not long before Polynesia has taught him the languages of all the other animals too, which, when it comes to animal doctoring, proves to be a great asset, since he can ask the animals directly what is wrong with them, which in turn gives him an edge over all the other vets in the district. So, for example, when a plough-horse is brought in, he tells the Doctor he needs spectacles,

> ".. that vet over the hill has been treating me six weeks now – for spavins[1]. What I need is *spectacles*. I am going blind in one eye." (34)

His fame spreads, not just amongst the people who brought their pets and their farm animals to see him, but also amongst the animal population itself, harvest mice, water voles, badgers, bats, you name it. And just as importantly his money worries are over. All goes well for a good while, the only problem being that some of the animals want to stay with him after they get better, so his menagerie grows. Amongst others, he acquires a monkey, Chee-Chee, whom he bought from an organ-grinder, and finally a crocodile with toothache who has escaped from a local circus. The crocodile promises not to eat any of the other animals, not even the fish in the fish pond, but his presence does become a problem – old ladies are frightened he will eat their lap-dogs and the farmers are afraid he will eat their sheep, and once again the Doctor begins to

[1] A sort of horse arthritis I gather.

lose patients. Eventually he again runs out of money, and his sister, who is also his housekeeper, warns him that if he doesn't get rid of the crocodile she will leave, but he won't get rid of it, so leave she does. But now there is no-one to keep house and the money keeps dwindling, and the animals themselves start to get worried.

> . . one evening when the doctor was asleep in his chair before the kitchen-fire they began talking it over among themselves in whispers. And the owl, Too-Too, who was good at arithmetic, figured it out that there was only money enough left to last another week – if they each had one meal a day and no more.
>
> Then the parrot said, "I think we all ought to do the housework ourselves. At least we can do that much. After all, it is for our sakes that the old man finds himself so lonely and so poor.
>
> So it was agreed that the monkey, Chee-Chee, was to do the cooking and the mending; the dog was to sweep the floors; the duck was to dust and make the beds; the owl, Too-Too, was to keep the accounts, and the pig was to do the gardening. They made Polynesia, the parrot, housekeeper and laundress, because she was the oldest. (49/50)

As for the finances:

> Then the animals made a vegetable and flower stall outside the garden gate and sold radishes and roses to the people that passed by along the road. (50)

At this point a message arrives by swallow for Chee-Chee from a cousin in Africa bearing news of a terrible sickness out there and that his relatives are dying in their hundreds, at which point the novel basically segues into an adventure story. They borrow a boat, and prepare to go to Africa, with Polynesia effectively taking charge of the preparations, drawing on her experience to tell the Doctor what he needs.

> So then the parrot, who had been on long sea-voyages before, began telling the Doctor all the things he would have to take with him on the ship.
>
> "You must have plenty of pilot-bread," she said – " 'hard tack' they call it. And you must have beef in cans – and an anchor. . . . . And you'll need a bell ..to tell the time by . . . . . And bring a whole lot of rope – it always comes in handy on voyages." (56/57)

Even the swallow has an important role to play when the Doctor realises he doesn't know the way to Africa:

> But the swallow said she had been to that country many times and would show them how to get there. (62)

On the way Dab-Dab is able to contribute to the larder by diving under the ship and catching herrings. Passing flying fishes bring them news of the monkeys and tell them how far they have still got to go, and porpoises turn up offering help, and when Polynesia tells them they are short

of onions off they go to a nearby island where wild onions grow, and bring some back, 'dragging the onions through the waves in big nets made of seaweed.' (65) They are shipwrecked, but manage to get ashore, only to be imprisoned by the local tribal king because they are white, and for reasons which are nothing if not political:

> "You may not travel through my lands," said the King. "Many years ago a white man came to the shores; and I was very kind to him. But after he had dug holes in the ground to get the gold, and killed all the elephants to get their ivory tusks, secretly in his ship – without as much as saying 'Thank you.' he went away." (73/74)

Again Polynesia comes to the rescue, sneaking through the bars of the prison, getting into the king's bedroom and, imitating Dolittle, threatens to give the king mumps if he doesn't let them go.

(At this point in the story it is certainly necessary to address the criticism that has been levelled against the book for what is seen as the inherent racism of the portrayal of the African characters within it[1], and though it would be easy enough to pass over the episodes involving the Africans, to do so would be nothing if not disingenuous, and I do need to deal with the issue. It is certainly true that the king is foolish and easily duped, but the fact that he is African adds racist overtones to the characterisation, a racism that is exacerbated by the fact that the Africans are referred to as 'darkies', 'niggers' and 'coons' at various points (77,102,134). The names don't help either: the king is the King of the Jolliginkis, and his son is Prince Bumpo, and Lofting's own line drawings add an element of grotesque caricature to their portrayal. And worse is to come, when, on the return journey, the Doctor and his friends are imprisoned once again. and this time it is the king's son who sets them free: he has been reading *Sleeping Beauty* and wants to be a white prince in shining armour so that he can find his own Sleeping Beauty and release her with a kiss, so Dolittle bleaches his face white, a narrative trope that, with its implication that only white is beautiful, is most decidedly racist.[2]

Having escaped from the palace, they continue on their way, with Chee-Chee and Polynesia using their local knowledge, Africa having been their previous home, to keep them fed and watered.

> They always had plenty to eat and drink, because Chee-Chee and Polynesia knew all the different kinds of fruit and vegetables that grow in the jungle, and where to find them .. (83)

[1] See, for example, Suhl 1979, Dixon 1978, and this paragraph very much summarises Dixon's analysis of the book, with which, I have to say, for all my love of the book, I don't particularly disagree.

[2] At another level that particular trope invites a perhaps more complex analysis, though that would be for another time and place, and in a different context, and any full discussion would require us to look at Lofting himself, at the time that he was writing, and at his agenda and declared purposes, and as readers will know, I am keeping authors out of my account and restricting myself to the texts themselves and to my readings of them.

They have almost reached the Land of the Monkeys when they discover that they are being chased by the King's men, and find themselves at the top of a steep cliff with a river flowing below. How are they to cross? More collaborative action is required, and the monkeys link hands to make a bridge,

> For while his back was turned, the monkeys – quick as a flash – had made themselves into a bridge, just by holding hands and feet.(93)

The Doctor cures the monkeys, and they hold a big meeting where everyone gets their say, from the Biggest Baboon to 'a little, tiny, red monkey who was sitting up in a tree' (108), to discuss how they are going to pay him, which, on advice from Chee-Chee, they do by offering to find that rarest of rare animals, a pushmi-pullyu – a deer like animal with a head at each end – and persuading it to accompany the Doctor back home (luckily it agrees!), and off the doctor and his companions go. On the way home they have various adventures, including one in which they encounter pirates whose ship they manage to steal, and which, incidentally, is full of stolen treasure, so that solves their money problems. They find a locked door and wonder if there is anyone locked behind it, and this time it is Too-Too, the Owl, whose skills are needed since he has such an acute sense of hearing.

> "I hear the sound of some one putting his hand in his pocket," said the Owl.
> "But that makes hardly any sound at all," said the Doctor. "You couldn't hear that out here."
> "Pardon me, but I can," said Too-Too. " I tell you there is some one on the other side of that door putting his hand in his pocket. Almost everything makes *some* noises – if your ears are only sharp enough to hear it. (175)

And behind the door they find a small boy who has been captured by the pirates, along with his uncle who is a fisherman. The last thing that the boy knows is that the pirates were threatening to throw his uncle overboard if he didn't join them. Can Doctor Dolittle and his animals help to find out if he is still alive? He recruits the porpoises, 'The Ocean Gossips'(185), to see if they know whether he has been drowned, but there are no rumours to that effect; he recruits the Eagles – 'No living thing can see better than an Eagle.'(187), but they too are unsuccessful,

> "Nowhere, on land or water, could we find any sign of this boy's uncle. And if *we* could not see him then he is not to be seen. (189)

Jip, the dog, however, is scornful. He will find him by smell. Luckily the boy has a handkerchief in his pocket which had belonged to his uncle.

> As soon as the boy pulled it out, Jip shouted:
> "*Snuff*, by Jingo – black Rappee snuff. Don't you smell it? . . . The man's as good as found." (193)

And when the wind blows from the West Jip can smell him. He rushes downstairs to wake the doctor,

> "The wind's from the West and it smells of nothing but snuff. Come upstairs and start the ship – quick! . . . Now I'll go up to the front and you watch my nose – whichever way I point it, you turn the ship the same way.(201)

And they do indeed find the uncle sheltering in a cave in the middle of a rocky island in the middle of the sea.

To sum up. In the course of the exposition of the book the animals have established what is effectively an egalitarian commune where everyone contributes whatever they are capable of doing, all for the greater good – 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs', to quote Marx in a slightly amended form[1]. And that political organisation, for political organisation it is, becomes a defining feature of the novel: Polynesia uses her knowledge to take charge of the preparations for the voyage; the swallow uses his knowledge to navigate them to Africa; Dab-Dab can go fishing for them; passing flying fishes and porpoises are able to offer help; Polynesia and Chee-Chee keep them fed once they get to Africa; the monkeys themselves work together to make the bridge that will get them to their destination, and later convene a council where everyone gets their say in order to discuss the payment due to Dolittle for his help; and on the way home Too-Too and Jip are able to use their skills first to find the little boy locked away in one of the rooms in the pirate ship, and then to discover his uncle in the cave in the rock in the sea, with the eagles and the porpoises lending a hand. This equality even extends to the Doctor's animal patients themselves, who are able to tell the doctor what is wrong with them rather than the other way around. And it is important to note that these political changes are brought about by economic necessity. It is when the Doctor runs out of money for the first time because he is losing human patients, that Polynesia intervenes and teaches him the skills that will enable him to make money as an animal doctor. And it is when he, or by this time it is they, run out of money for the second time because the crocodile has effectively chased all his animal patients away too, that the animals themselves take over and start running the household.

So far I have concentrated on the political, but have, I hope, already demonstrated that the political and the economic are always closely linked, and the African King's comment about the white man's exploitation of the continent for his own gain, taking the gold and the ivory without any offer of recompense, adds colonialism to the equation. Which brings us neatly to a passage in *Masterman Ready*. In the following passage William questions his father about colonialism itself, in response to which Mr. Seagrave offers him an exposition about the nature and function of colonialism, and how it operates in practice. Initially Mr. Seagrave offers him a history lesson, explaining to him that the English were not the first colonists, that they were preceded by the Spanish and the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch, and indeed that England gained a good few of their colonies by seizing them from the Portuguese and the Dutch.

> "Yes I understand perfectly, papa; but now tell me: why are England and other nations so anxious to have what you call colonies?" replied William

[1] Marx (amended), 1875. See Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critique_of_the_Gotha_Program

> "Because they tend so much to the prosperity of the mother country. In their infancy they generally are an expense to her, as they require her care; but as they advance, they are able to repay her by taking her manufactures, and returning for them their own produce; an exchange mutually advantageous, but more so to the mother country than to the colony, as the mother country, assuming to herself the right of supplying all the wants of the colony, has a market for the labour of her own people, without any competition." (115)

A more succinct account you couldn't hope to find. As can be seen, the considerations are entirely economic, about exploiting the natural resources of the colony, and in 'exchange', though certainly not in fair exchange, establishing a closed market for the export of the mother country's manufactured goods back to the colony itself, to the overall financial advantage, of course, of the mother country. And it seems that, in contrast to Lofting's tribal King, Mr. Seagrave finds nothing wrong with this state of affairs. He does, however, take it one stage further, seeing it as an entirely natural process which will lead eventually to the establishment of an entirely self-supporting independent country, a process akin to that of a child growing up to become an independent adult, as natural as a bird learning to fly and leaving its nest.

> "As soon as the colony has grown strong and powerful enough to take care of itself, it throws off the yoke of subjection and declares itself independent; just as a son, who has grown up to manhood, leaves his father's house, and takes up a business to gain his own livelihood. This is as certain to be the case, as it is that a bird as soon as it can fly will leave its parent's nest." (116)

The Discourse of Economics

Both *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* and *Masterman Ready* offer us accounts of the ways in which politics and economics are intertwined, so now I want to move on now to an example where the economic is dominant, Beverly Cleary's *Henry Huggins*. Chapter 3 finds Henry wanting to buy a football, but where is the money to come from? He must review his finances, which means taking into account his expenditure in the previous couple of chapters in the book, in the first of which he had acquired a dog, Ribsy, whom we met in the carnival chapter, and had had to meet the costs associated with him; and in the second chapter he bought a pair of guppies, whom we met in the Robinsonade chapter, and a fish bowl etc to keep them in, for just 79¢, but they bred and bred until he had hundreds and had to take them back to the pet shop man who then gave him $7 worth of credit which he used to buy a tank for a catfish – his father bought the catfish. So now, back at the beginning of chapter 3 he is checking out his capital assets, reviewing his expenses, and factoring in his current income.

> . . . he shook all his nickels and dimes and pennies out of a marble sack onto his bedspread. His expenses had been heavy and he knew he did not have much money left. The first thing he had done after finding Ribsy was to pay for his licence and buy him a collar . . . he had spent sixty-nine cents for a red plastic dish with D O G printed on it. This nearly exhausted his savings. He had spent his silver dollar on the guppies and all his allowance

> to take care of them. Then he had sold the guppies for seven dollars and spent all seven for the tank and thermostat for the catfish.
>
> At breakfast this morning his father had given him his weekly twenty-five cents. Besides that he had six cents saved from last week's allowance. He also had a nickel he had found in the park. And then there was the Canadian dime . . . with the Canadian Dime he had forty-six cents, not counting nine cents he could get for three old milk bottles he had found in a vacant lot on the way home from school.
>
> It was not enough.
>
> Henry needed thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents plus forty-one cents for tax. (60/61)

Then his friend, Scooter McCarthy turns up, and he already has a brand new football. They start playing with it, throwing it back and forth between them, but then Henry loses his concentration for a minute and loses his aim; the ball sails in through the back window of a passing car and is gone. Now he has got to buy Scooter a replacement – he is effectively in debt, and his creditor demands repayment, even threating him with dire consequences if he doesn't meet his, Scooter's, time limit.

> "You'll have to buy me a new football before next Saturday or I'll tell my dad and he'll tell your dad and then you'll really get it." (68)

There is only one thing for it, he has to earn the money. He rehearses various options; he could collect tinfoil or old newspapers but that would take too long, and besides the junk men wouldn't pay enough. He could set up a lemonade stand by the park but that wouldn't bring enough money in either.

> He could charge fifty cents for mowing lawns. That would be a dollar for two lawns. He would have to mow twenty-eight lawns to earn thirteen dollars and ninety-five cents. Even if he could get twenty eight lawns to mow, he didn't see how he could find time after school. (70/71)

He sits on his porch and thinks. Then just as it's beginning to grow dark he sees his next door neighbour, Mr. Grumbie, catching night crawlers, large worms that he uses to catch fish, and that only come out at night when the ground is wet. When he has to stop to go down to the store to get some bread he recruits Henry to help him,

> "How would you like to earn some money?"
>
> "Catching worms? I'll say I would!"
>
> "I'll pay you a penny apiece for every night crawler you catch."
>
> "Golly," said Henry. "A penny apiece! How many do you want?"
>
> "As many as you can catch. If I can't use them some of the other men can."
>
> . . . .

> A penny apiece! There were one hundred pennies in a dollar, so it would take one thousand three hundred and ninety-five worms to pay for the football. And forty one worms for the tax. (75/76)

Henry sets to work and by the time Mr. Grumbie gets back he has caught sixty-two worms and Mr Grumbie, being a good customer, promptly pays him.

> Mr. Grumbie reached into his pants pocket and brought out a handful of change. He picked out a fifty cent piece, a dime, and two pennies and gave them to Henry. (78)

Luckily for Henry demand is high: Mr Grumbie tells him that he is going fishing with some friends come Sunday and that he can use all the night crawlers he can catch.

> "Tomorrow night you get someone to help you and catch enough for all of us." (79)

Henry, however, cannot afford to share the profits.

> Because he needed so much money, he knew he would have to catch all the worms himself. (79)

Still and all 1,395 pennies plus tax was a lot of worms. As for where he's going to find them, he'll have to go down to the local park. He would have to get permission from his mother of course, so has to tell her the whole story, but then off he goes. It is a big job, and hard work – he has to pounce rapidly in order to catch the worms – and somewhere around the 430th worm 'Henry was tired of pouncing. Henry was tired of worms.' (83), but he persists. It gets late, and still he hasn't caught enough, but luckily some free labour turns up in the form of his father and mother, and they help him finish the job. Now he does have enough worms.

> He took his jars of worms to Mr Grumbie, who paid him thirteen dollars and thirty-one cents . . . He felt the money in his pocket. "I guess this ought to take care of old Scooter," he said and, wishing he could spend it on a football for himself, he went home to bed. (84/85)

(And just in case you're wondering, the story has a happy ending: the car driver turns up, gives Scooter's ball back to Henry, who can return it to Scooter, and of course Henry now has enough money to buy a ball for himself after all.) Much of the chapter is given over to accounts of finding and digging up the night crawlers, and in that sense that is what the chapter is *about*. But there is no doubt that it is also about money, which is certainly a major discourse in this little story, and in this particular case, you could argue, money, or rather the raising of it, is also a theme of the story, and at that level it has been money, money, money all the way. In the first instance it should be noted that Henry has the basic numerical skills needed to do all the necessary calculations, which include understanding the tax scenario. And though by using terms like, for instance, 'capital assets' it might be argued that I am taking this material altogether too seriously, in point of fact that is what his savings are: his capital assets. And his

weekly allowance from his father is indeed his income, and he has to decide how he is going to spend it. Finally he finds himself in debt, and with a creditor is demanding money with menaces. So faced with the, indeed, very serious problem of finding the necessary money to pay off his creditor, he has to work out what he can do to raise the money to do so. To put it another way he has to review his marketable skills, and check out the market, and though his skills include collecting tinfoil and waste paper, the market is not strong enough to repay his efforts in time. Luckily he is flexible enough to be able respond when a market opportunity *does* arise in the form of his next door neighbour's requirement for a gatherer of night crawlers. Then it is a question of the necessary hard work to make the money that he needs, though in good capitalist tradition, he is ready to exploit free labour when some is offered. In none of this does he deviate one iota from a real entrepreneurial adult looking for a gap in the market and using their skills to develop the product to exploit that market. Writ small it may be, but it is indeed the discourse of economics from top to toe.

The Discourse of Gender: A Couple of Countervailing Examples

As with racism, sexism in children's books came under scrutiny in the later 1970's, and gender role stereotyping continues to be an issue in comment on children's literature. I have come across comment,[1] for instance, that Hermione in the *Harry Potter* books is sex role stereotyped because she is a bookworm, and it is certainly true that Harry is action, and Hermione is books and thought. But if you return to the chapter on teaching and learning you will see how much power Hermione has. Time and time again she is able to use her book learning to keep the more impulsive boys on the right track. And there is a long tradition of very proactive girls in children's literature, we have met a couple in other chapters already. Beverly Cleary's *Ramona* leaves the boys standing, and Carrie, in Bawden's *Carrie's War*, drives the narrative, and helps Mr. Evans in the shop rather than helping his sister in the kitchen, though she does have a sort of mothering role when it comes to looking after her younger brother, Nick – but the bookworm character in the book is a boy, Albert. One might even note that Polynesia, the parrot whom we met earlier, is a female who basically runs things, all the way from organising the household to sorting out the ship for the journey to Africa. In Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* books the problem is ostensibly solved by reversing the stereotypes. So when we meet Violet for the first time in *Book the First: The Bad Beginning* she is described thus:

> Violet had a real knack for inventing and building strange devices, so her brain was often filled with images of pulleys, levers, and gears, and she never wanted to be distracted by something as trivial as her hair. (3)

It is however generally true in children's literature, particularly in earlier children's literature, that where there are domestic roles to be assigned, it is the girls who get them. But the girls are often able to exercise a good deal of power and influence *through* those roles. To start with, a brief example from one of the *Famous Five* series, *Five Run Away Together*. You will recall that George herself is a girl who certainly breaks the stereotypes, but here I want to concentrate on Anne, the youngest, who always has a domestic role and who is also generally regarded as the

[1] I can't reference this I'm afraid – it falls, rather, into the category of hearsay!

weakest character by the other children[1], in need of care and protection. Her elder brother, Julian, can be particularly patronising, but the others are not far behind, and she herself does not have a particularly strong self-image. My examples come from a point in the story in which the children have found a cave on the island that they have run away to, and which they have decided to make their home. As well as the main entrance there is a hole in the roof, plus a large rock pool outside that they go swimming in. Here is Anne being domestic:

> "Let's arrange everything very nicely in the cave," said Anne, who was the tidiest of the four, and always liked to play 'houses' if she could. (105)

> Anne had a very happy morning. She arranged everything beautifully on the shelf – crockery and knives and forks and spoons in one place – saucepan and kettle in another – tins of meat next, tins of soup together, tins of fruit neatly piled on top of one another. It really was a splendid larder and dresser! (108)

> Then the little girl set to work to make the beds . . . "I shall want lots more heather. Oh, is that you, Dick? You're just in time! I want more heather." (108)

As can be seen, in her domestic role, she does have some power, she can for instance send Dick off to get more heather without a problem. On the downside here is the patronising Julian:

> He looked around admiringly. My word, Anne – the cave does look fine! Everything in order and looking so tidy. You are a good little girl." (108)

And here is the self-deprecating Anne herself:

> "George can do anything in the water," said Anne. "I wish I could dive and swim like George. But I never shall." (104)

However, look at this little incident, and I shall need to quote a bit more extensively to get the drift of it. It is night time, and they decide to light a candle, but Anne would like a fire.

> At once queer shadows jumped all around the cave. And it became a rather exiting place, not at all like the cave they knew by daylight.
> "I wish we could have a fire," said Anne.
> "We'd be far too hot," said Julian. "And it would smoke us out. You can't have a fire in a cave like this. There's no chimney."
> "Yes there is," said Anne, pointing to the hole in the roof. "If we light a fire just under that hole, it would act as a chimney, wouldn't it?"

[1] And it isn't just the other characters who see her in this way, David Rudd quotes readers who had similar views, suggesting that she was ' really wet', 'a wimp', 'feeble', and 'namby-pamby' ' (p.100) Other readers, however, empathised with her, precisely because of her domestic role.

> "It might," said Dick, thoughtfully. "But I don't think so. We'd simply get the cave full of stifling smoke, and we wouldn't be able to sleep for choking."
> "Well couldn't we light a fire at the cave entrance then?" said Anne, who felt that a real home ought to have a fire somewhere. "Just to keep away wild beasts. That's what the people of old times did. It says so in my history book. They lighted fires at the cave entrance at night to keep away any wild animal that might be prowling around."
> "Well, what wild beasts do you think are likely to come and peep into this cave?" asked Julian lazily, finishing up a cup of cocoa. "Lions? Tigers? Or perhaps you are afraid of an elephant or two."

Furthermore:

> "I don't think we ought to have a fire," said Julian, "because it might be seen out at sea and give a warning to anyone thinking of coming to the island to do a bit of smuggling."
> "Oh no, Julian – the entrance to this cave is so well-hidden that I'm sure no-one could see a fire out to sea," said George, at once. . . . "I think it wold be rather fun to have a fire. It would light up the cave so queerly and excitingly."
> "Oh good, George!" said Anne, delighted to find someone agreeing with her.
> "Well we couldn't possibly fag out and get sticks for it now," said Dick, who was far too comfortable to move.
> "You don't need to," said Anne eagerly. "I got plenty myself today, and stored them in the back of the cave, in case we wanted a fire."
> "Isn't she a good little housewife!" said Julian, in great admiration. .. "All right, Anne – we'll make a fire for you." (110/111)

As I say, Anne wants a fire – it is not quite clear whether it is for reasons of security, or. as suggested in the text, that it would help to make the cave a 'real home'. She meets opposition, initially from Julian – there's no chimney – but she has her first counter-argument prepared – there's a hole in the roof. But Dick is still against it, the smoke will still swirl around – so she produces her second counter-argument – make it in the entrance – and she backs it up with her knowledge of history. She is not even deterred by Julian's put down, though he seems to have a stronger case in terms of the need to keep them hidden from prying eyes. By this time, however, she has won George over, and now she is on the home straight, and the final coup de grace is the revelation that she has already gathered the sticks, so Dick's objection won't stand either; and even though Julian's capitulation may come across as condescending, capitulate he does. Anne has won and, for all that there has been no previous mention of her gathering firewood, plainly she had it all planned from the start. And it is in pursing her domestic role that she has been able to gain ascendancy over all of them.

Susan, in Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazon* series is also cast in the domestic role: in all the books in which she appears she is the mother figure, responsible for cooking, both

planning it and doing it, responsible for organising the domestic chores, responsible for seeing that the younger children get to bed on time, and so on. But she is far from meek, and her decisions can have a major impact on the plot. We met both the Walkers (the Swallows) and the Blacketts (the Amazons) in earlier chapters, when I was looking at *We Didn't Mean to go to Sea* and *Winter Holiday*, and they come together again in *Peter Duck*, the book I want to have a look at now. Throughout the series John and Nancy are Captain John and Captain Nancy, the commanders of their respective sailing dinghies, and Susan and Peggy are the mates, each with a domestic role. 'Able seaman' Titty is the dreamer, given to quoting poetry and inventing scenarios for their role play games, and 'ship's boy' Roger is into all things mechanical. As can be seen, for all that Nancy is Captain Nancy, as far as the other children are concerned traditional gender roles are well established from the start. In *Peter Duck* we find them all in Lowestoft with the Blacketts' Uncle Jim, a.k.a Captain Flint, planning to go to sea. Accompanying them is old timer Peter Duck. The roles of the girls are established in a trial run up and down the English channel,

> "We've got a gorgeous galley to do the cooking in," Mate Peggy called to Mate Susan (20)
>
> Susan had taken her tin box, black, with a red cross on it, full of iodine and things for colds and stomach-aches and sticking plaster to put on people's knees. (24)
>
> Peggy and Susan were going through the stores and getting things into working order in the little galley at the forward end of the deckhouse, where they were to cook. (33)
>
> Everybody aboard the *Wild Cat* was very hungry when Susan and Peggy, after coming back laden from the market and trying what they could do with the galley stove, decided that the potatoes had been boiled long enough and that the mutton chops would be burnt if they tried to give them another minute's cooking. When Peggy banged the big bell just inside the galley door there was a cheerful rush from all parts of the ship. (40)
>
> It was just about Roger's bedtime, and a late bedtime at that, when they had the North Foreland[1] abeam. Roger wanted to be allowed to stay up, but Susan and Captain Flint would have none of it. (107)
>
> . . . when John and Roger had dressed and cleaned their teeth (Susan had put her head out of the galley to remind Roger to clean his).. (124)

As we can see, within their own sphere, which Susan certainly seems to have embraced enthusiastically, they have considerable power, they are responsible for the stores and for shopping. They decide on the menus and are responsible for planning and organising the meals, and thus the meal times. And Susan in her little mother role with her first aid box has made herself responsible for the health and wellbeing of them all, and has also assumed responsibility

[1] It's a lighthouse.

for Roger's bedtime and teeth cleaning. The story proper begins when Peter Duck spins them a yarn about having, as a cabin boy, witnessed two pirates burying a square shaped box under a tree on a deserted Caribbean island. Once back in Lowestoft he had told his story, which then got retold and retold again, and as the yarn spread so the supposed size of the treasure grew in people's imaginations until it was 'cases of gold dollars and casks of silver ingots'(86). Peter Duck himself remains phlegmatic about the whole business. Nonetheless when Black Drake witnesses Peter Duck leaving with the Wild Cat he is convinced that he is off to retrieve it at last, and gives chase, and in so doing piques Captain Flint's own curiosity, which grows into a desire to go and hunt for himself, which means sailing across the Atlantic to the Caribbean. But the final decision is not down to him. When he tells the children what's on his mind they respond variously, and finally agree that it would be nice to go, but, as Susan suggests, perhaps at a later time,

> "Yes, let's go," said Susan. "some time or other, when we've had a bit more practice. Let's go next year. It's the sort of thing that wants a lot of planning."
> "I suppose you're right," said Captain Flint (137)

But he has now sown the idea in the children's heads, and as Black Jake's pursuit becomes more relentless it is clear that the mood on the ship is changing. And perhaps Susan has picked this up. Anyhow here she is a few pages later; the Viper (Black Jake's boat) has been following them closely, and they have been dodging about trying to evade him when a sudden squall sends the boat reeling, and Susan and Peggy come up from the saloon to find out what's happening.

> "What are you two doing down there?" Nancy asked, hanging on to the windward shrouds as the startled mates put their heads out of the companion-way,
> "Counting up stores," said Susan.
> "Good for you," said Nancy. "I'd been hoping you would." (144)

Things come to a climax when they have a close encounter with the Viper in the fog, and in the process pick up his ship's boy, Bill, whom Black Jake has cast afloat in a dinghy with a foghorn to lure the Wild Cat to its fate, telling him that if he doesn't manage to do it they, the pirates, will leave him to drown. Bill tells them of Black Jake's plan to board them and kidnap Peter Duck, threatening to kill the crew of the Wild Cat itself if they don't give him up. So finally Peter Duck sides with Captain Flint about going on and finding the treasure. But …. ,

> But it was Susan who, in the end, gave the deciding vote.
> "Whatever it is," she said, Black Jake ought not to have it. And Peggy and I were counting things all yesterday, because of what you said at Cowes. We've got enough for a very long time."
> "Six months' stores," said Captain Flint. "And if there's anything short we could fill up in Madeira.
> "I think we ought to go," said Susan. "Black Jake's almost a murderer. He oughtn't to be allowed to get it after this." (173)

Susan has the deciding vote. And it is because of her domestic role in the situation that she has it. Everyone else in the boat wants to go, the two captains, John and Nancy, the two adults, Captain Flint and Peter Duck, never mind the two younger children, Titty and Roger. But it is Susan – with, we must presume, the support of Peggy – who decides. She outranks them all.

The Discourse of Religion

When children's books first started to emerge as category in publisher's lists they tended always to contain a strong religious message. Things started to change with the publication of John Newbury's 1744 *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*. Here is a quote from M. F. Thwaite's introduction to the facsimile reprint

> Before 1700 books for the young had been dominated by religious teaching, moral lessons or scholastic purpose.(3)

Newbury had however broken the mould by writing a book for, among other things, the *amusement* of children: as the title page has it,

> A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly.(53)

Still clearly didactic in its purposes, and morals drawn at every turn, but religion itself only gets briefly mentioned in passing,

> All good Boys and Girls say their Prayers at Night and in the Morning, which makes God Almighty love and bless them. (123)

But even the best part of a century later the religious agenda was still never very far away. *Masterman Ready*, for instance, is a book in which the religious discourse is there from the very beginning of the story. Thus, when the storm hits the ship and a number of the crew are washed overboard and drowned, Ready is prompt with his moralising:

> "You are young, Master Willy, but you cannot think too early of your Maker, or call to mind what they say in the burial service: 'In the midst of life we are in death.'"
> "Thank you, Ready, thank you for the lesson you have given my son," said Mr Seagrave; "and William, treasure it up in your memory." (21)

And they fall to their knees at every opportunity. Thus when they have brought the now leaking ship safely to land, the rest of the crew having taken to the boats and disappeared, the first thing they do, before they have even got ashore, is to fall to their knees.

> "All's well so far, sir," said Ready to Mr. Seagrave; "and now let us return our thanks to heaven."
> Ready kneeled down on the deck, took off his hat, and remained a short time in prayer. Mr. Seagrave did the same: the children at first looked on,

> and wondered, and then knelt down by the side of them, following the example of Juno.(37)

And the characters continue in like vein throughout the story. The existence of God is never questioned, and the practice of prayer is totally normalised. However in Ch. XXV there is a much more objective discussion of religion which goes on for several pages.(163-168) The occasion for this is the youngest child's killing of beetles. Mr. Seagrave catches him at it and reproves him:

> "Who made those beetles, Tommy?" Who made everything?"
> "God," replied Tommy after a little while.

Mr. Seagrave turns his attention to William, showing him an insect that is crawling on my finger.

> ".. look at this minute insect which is crawling on my finger; what a number of legs it has!"
> "Yes; I have seen something like it in old books. How fast it runs on its little legs; thinner than hairs – how Wonderful!"
> "Yes, William," replied Mr Seagrave, "we have only to examine every portion, however small, of creation, and we are immediately filled with wonder; we have only to look around us, wherever we may be, and we have food for contemplation. There is nothing which points out to us the immensity and the omniscience of the Almighty more than the careful provision which has been made by Him for the smallest and most insignificant of created beings.

And Mr. Seagrave goes on for a couple of pages or so to produce more and more examples that demonstrate 'the infinity of His creative power': the fact that no two people are exactly alike; the fact that, as any shepherd could confirm, even no two sheep are exactly alike. Then there is the evidence of the perfection of structure of every living thing, a perfection that no mere human could possibly hope to achieve. Indeed the very order of the natural universe itself and the laws of nature which govern it, the succession of the seasons, the creation and order of the inanimate world of rocks and earth. Even the stars in the sky, which may look disordered to us because of the variation in distance they are from the earth, have their own God given order.

In all of this the existence of God is demonstrated, but, as the subsequent exchange demonstrates, it is open to discussion, there are after all such people as atheists.

> "They say there are people who are atheists, papa. How can they be so if they only look around them? I'm sure a mere examination of the works of God ought to make them good Christians."
> "No, my child," replied Mr. Seagrave; "there you are in error. Few deny the existence of the Deity, and an examination of His works may make them good and devout men, but not Christians. There are good men to be found in every denomination, whether they be Jews, Mohammedans, or Pagans; but they are not Christians."

> "Very true, papa."
> "Faith in things seen, if I may use the term, my dear child – faith produced by an examination of the works of creation – may induce men to acknowledge the power and goodness of the Almighty, but it will not make them wise to salvation; for that end, it is necessary, as the apostle saith, to have faith in things not seen. There is little merit in acknowledging what is evident to our senses: The faith required of us as Christians, and to which are attached the great and gracious promises of the gospel, is faith in a sublime, and to us incomprehensible mystery – the incarnation of the Son of God, who descended upon earth and took the form of man, and actually suffered for out redemption. (167)

In brief, then, the works of creation constitute evidence of the existence of God, though even that needs faith, the faith in things seen, but Christianity itself requires faith in things not seen, a leap of faith as it were. But all of this is couched in the form of a rational debate *about* religion, and the fact that Mr. Seagrave, in the use of the word 'may' above: 'faith in things seen .. *may* induce men to etc.' implies that there is still the possibility of legitimate doubt. And notice also, that Mr. Seagrave does not offer any criticism of other religions, nor even dismiss atheism itself as a possibility. Beyond the implied argument that the wonders of the natural world constitute evidence for the existence of God, there is little or no proselytising; Mr. Seagrave's intentions would seem rather to be to promote understanding than to engender belief.

Michael Morpurgo's *The War of Jenkins' Ear* provides something of a contrast. We are at a British prep school[1], Redlands, and it is the beginning of the new term. The protagonist is the 12 year old Toby Jenkins. At supper on the first evening he finds himself sitting opposite a new boy, the 13 year old Simon Christopher. Rice pudding is on the menu and Toby particularly likes the skin.

> "You like skin?" said a voice from across the table. It was the new boy, Christopher. How he knew that Toby liked the skin Toby could not make out. "You can have mine then," said Christopher. "I can't stand skin." He stood up, leaned across the table and scooped the skin on to Toby's plate – not at all the sort of thing you were supposed to do at Redlands. (7)

The action has been spotted by the headmaster who makes both boys stand up on their benches, and proceeds to tell them off. In the following exchange, and to the amazement of all, Christopher quietly answers back, telling him that he doesn't eat the skin. The headmaster, unsurprisingly, is not happy.

[1] For non-English readers or those not familiar with the independent education sector in England, preparatory schools, a.k.a 'prep' schools, are fee paying schools taking pupils from as young seven years old, whose job is to prepare children for an exam which they take when they are thirteen, to get them into 'public' schools, another misnomer, since they are also fee paying schools, only available to those who can afford them, and as far from being publically funded state schools as you can possibly get. Most pupils board for the duration of the school term though there can be more locally based children who go home every night. They tend to be single sex .

> "Here you will do what you are told to do, not what you feel like doing. Food at Redlands is always eaten whether you like it or not and without complaint. We do not waste our food at Redlands, do you hear me?"
> "Yes, sir, I know, sir. It was the same at my last school. That's why I gave it to him, sir, so it wouldn't be wasted."
> No one in the dining-hall could believe what they were witnessing. (8)

It is clear that Christopher is an exceptional boy, prepared to stand up against arbitrary and dictatorial authority when nobody else will, and thereby engaging the admiration of the other boys, and as the story progresses we will discover just what it is that makes him exceptional. The religious cues are there right from the very first sentence, as the headmaster intones the Latin grace before supper, 'Benedicat Nobis Omnipotens Deus'. There is Christopher's surname with its Christ reference, there's his first name, Simon, as in Simon Peter, one of the apostles; he was previously at a school named St Peter's; his father is a carpenter. Then there is his apparent ability to divine what is in Toby's mind even when Toby hasn't said anything.

That night the headmaster catches him talking after lights out, and this time he gets slippered – three whacks on the hand; and the next morning he has gone. One of the boys has seen him go, and describes his rather odd behaviour.

> "I saw him from the bathroom window. He stops at the school gates, puts his suitcase down, takes off his shoes, shakes them, puts them on again and that was it." (18)

.. a biblical reference , the first of several.[1] The next one occurs on the following day when he is brought back by his mother and starts attending lessons. He proves to be a very fast leaner, asking questions all the way, some of them quite unexpected.

> And that was the main problem. He unnerved everyone by asking too many penetrating and unexpected questions. (31)

Echoes here certainly of the 12 year old Christ at the temple in Jerusalem.[2] In the meantime Toby has become his best friend: 'Christopher had made no lasting friends or admirers except Toby.'(30) The religious discourse becomes more explicit when Toby has the opportunity to show him around the park which constitutes the grounds of the school, showing him in particular a little camp that he had constructed under a rhododendron forest when he was younger. While there, Christopher collapses and remains unconscious even when Toby tries to revive him. He even stops breathing and Toby fears that he is dead. Toby shakes him and shouts at him, but seemingly to no avail, though Christopher does produce a hollow gurgle,

[1] I am no biblical expert, nor am I even a religious person, but having been doused in a Church of England 'education' until I was 18 or so, some of it did rub off, so when I thought I spotted the references I went searching on line to find the sources. So this one, I discovered, was from Acts 13:51: Paul and Barnabas have just been chased out of Antioch: 'But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.'

[2] St. Luke 2:46-47. Jesus is missing and his parents find him at the temple: 'And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.'

> A death rattle, Toby thought. Jesus, he's dead. He's really dead. He stood up and backed away, unable to take his eyes off Christopher's face. He was sobbing now, his hand in his hair pulling at it. "Please God, no," he cried. "Please God." (43)

The invocation, both to Jesus and God, revives Christopher, who tells him that he frequently has such fainting fits, and that when he has them he has visions in which he sees Jesus.

> "It's always the same, a blinding light and then he comes through it and stands as close to me as I am to you, so close I could reach out and touch him."
> "Him?"
> "Jesus," said Christopher. "It's Jesus, I know it is." . . . .
> . . . "He tells me that I am him reincarnated, come back, I am Jesus, and like he did before me I have to try to save the world. And today he told me that the time has come, that I have to start my work right away and with you at my side. Your will be my Peter, my rock, my first disciple."[1] (45/46)

And like Jesus before him he needs followers to spread the word.

> "Will you follow me?"
> Toby struggled for an answer that would not offend. (46)

Christopher senses his scepticism.

> "You don't believe in me do you?' Christopher turned away.
> "Look," said Toby, "I want to believe you, but . . ."
> "I know," said Christopher nodding, "I know, but a small miracle might help to persuade you. You need proof. Is that it?" (46)

Notice that Christopher needs Toby not just to believe him but also to believe *in* him, to make the leap of faith that he really is Jesus reincarnated. To prove his case he offers Toby a miracle.

> "All right then," Christopher went on. "You'll have your miracle. But promise me this, when it happens, and it will happen, don't just put it down to luck or coincidence, because it won't be either." (47)

The 'miracle' occurs a couple of days later: Toby is a keen rugby player and hopes to get into the school team, but is beaten to the post by another boy, Hetherington, but as the first match approaches, Hetherington falls downstairs and twists his ankle and Toby ends up in the team, and indeed turns out to be very good. But, as Hunter, the captain, reminds him,

[1] Matthew 16:18 'And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.'

> "Bit of a miracle, really," Hunter went on. "Couple of hours before the match and Hetherington goes and crocks himself, and there you are in the team," (53)

And when Hunter says the word 'miracle', Toby remembers Christopher's promise, so when, a bit later, Christopher congratulates him:

> He looked at him and saw that it was all true. Christopher *had* seen Jesus in the camp in the park. He was Jesus. He was the Son of God. He had worked a miracle. In that moment Toby's doubts vanished. (53)

As the story continues it becomes clear that this is the central presumption of the book, as a number of incidents will demonstrate. The first of which is one in which Toby's conversion, for such it is, is confirmed. They have returned to the camp and Christopher constructs an altar to commemorate his vision and, swearing Toby to secrecy, they pray together, Christopher praying to God the Father for an end to injustice, hunger and disease, that people should love one another and that there should be peace and joy on the earth; and Toby now willingly praying with him.

> Toby knelt down and prayed beside him, not because he felt he had to but because he wanted to. (57/58)

Christopher wants them to become blood brothers.

> ".. you and I will bind ourselves together as blood brothers in Jesus." (58)

And after they have cut their fingers and performed the ritual:

> "Blood brothers for ever," he said. And when Toby looked up into his eyes he found he could not look away. "You are in me," said Christopher, "and I am in you." (59)

Toby is now fully committed. His finger, however, goes septic and he has to go to Matron for treatment and a plaster. Christopher sees the plaster and tells him he can heal him, and takes his hand and holds it.

> "You can heal?" Toby whispered.
> "If you believe I can, then I can." (61)

Toby prays for the strength to believe Christopher, and his prayers must have worked because his finger heals overnight. The next day Matron is amazed.

> "I always knew I was a good nurse, but this, though I say it myself, this is unbelievable." (62)

Christopher gets to demonstrate his commitment to bring peace to the earth when he intervenes in the long standing feud between the boys at the school and the village boys, the 'toffs' and the

'oiks' – the river at the bottom of the grounds is the dividing line – and in the course of the plot Toby finds himself fishing from the wrong bank. The village boys attack him, and his ear gets torn – hence the title of the book – and he loses his school issued boiler suit, and when the boys from the school come to rescue him, a battle is precipitated with each side hurling stones at the other. Christopher appears and, in a remarkable display of calm courage, intervenes.

> He ran forward to the river's edge. "Stop it, stop it!" he cried. He was wading out into the river, the stones falling all around him. "Stop it, stop it everyone." He appealed to both sides, facing first one and then the other, holding his hands above his head and waving them. Gradually the barrage subsided until at last there was silence. Christopher sill held is hands in the air. "Drop your stones," he said quietly. "Drop them and there will be peace." (82/83)

He is almost successful, until one of the village boys decides he doesn't want to do anything that a toff tells him to do, and the stone throwing starts again, and this time Christopher is right in the firing line and gets badly hurt. Christopher's bravery has brought him the undying admiration of the younger boys, and the smallest of them all, Benedict Swann, has taken to following him around the school, and his devotion to Christopher takes a further leap when there is a run in the driving rain and Toby and Christopher find him sheltering under the trees and crying from the wet and the cold, and Christopher gets him moving and stays with him for the rest of the run, encouraging him as they go. In the meantime Christopher has now also recruited Hunter, though not Swann himself, Christopher telling Toby later, ' "He's too young. He wouldn't understand." '(139) The feud between the boys in the school and the village boys comes to a climax when the latter release a bull onto the school grounds. Everybody runs, except for Swann, who is standing in the bull's path, transfixed with fear. Christopher is not present. To Toby's own amazement, and despite his every instinct to run, he finds himself walking towards Swann in order to rescue him, speaking quietly to reassure him.

> He knew as he spoke that it was not his voice. It was Christopher speaking through him. "I'm right behind you, Swann. Don't look round. We'll be alright." (147)

Not content with rescuing Swann he then approaches the bull itself and manages to get close enough to it to start gently scratching the hair between its eyes and thus calming it down.

The book builds to its climax when the chronically ill daughter of one of the teachers looks as if she's going to die – the doctors can do nothing. Toby is in his den under the rhododendron bushes when he overhears her parents talking in their garden next door. Mr. Birley is crying, and his wife is trying to comfort him.

> "It's God's will, darling," she said. "I don't know why he chose Jenny – we'll never know – but he did. You must understand, it's God's will."
> "God's will!" Mr. Birley shouted at her and threw her hand off his knee. "God's will! You tell me how any loving God, any God worth

> worshipping, can pick on a small innocent child. Six years old, and put her through such pain." (130)

They catch Toby listening, and Toby without really thinking about it, tells them about Christopher's powers as a healer.

> ".. Sir, I think I know someone, someone who could help." Toby couldn't stop himself now, even though he knew he should. He had given them hope. "He's a sort of healer. He's got sort of powers." (132)

He takes Christopher, accompanied by Hunter, to see them, and Christopher tells them that yes, he can heal their daughter. Mr Birley is sceptical but Mrs Birley wants to try.

> "We must try, Arnold. You know that. We must try anything, and after all, it can't do any harm."(135)

Christopher goes upstairs to the daughter's room, and they overhear his voice, though not what he says. He returns,

> .. his face fatigued and pale. He nodded at Mrs. Birley. "it's all right," he said. "She'll get better." (136)

But Jenny does not get better. Toby and Hunter are getting more and more worried and their doubts are growing. Eventually, unbeknownst to Toby, Hunter goes to see the local vicar – he's the divinity teacher in the school – and tells him the whole story, in confidence he hopes, but the vicar breaks that confidence and tells the headmaster, who calls the whole school together in the hall and confronts the boys.

> "It seems we have amongst us a boy , who claims he is Jesus Christ, that's right, Jesus Christ. This boy pretends he can heal, that he hears voices, that he is Jesus Christ come back to earth." (170)

And he calls on the boy to stand up and reveal himself, and Christopher does indeed reveal himself by standing up.

> "You raised Mr and Mrs Birley's hopes falsely and that was cruel, cruel beyond words." (172)

The headmaster demands that he recant, but he won't. His voices have told him who he is.

> "They say I am Jesus, and I believe them."
> "Do you know, Christopher, do you know what you are saying? Co you realise that if you'd said that just a few hundred years ago they'd have burnt you at the stake?"
> "Yes, sir," said Christopher, "and a few hundred years before that they'd have crucified me." (173)

This is the final straw. Christopher will have to go, and that very day. But before he does, the head wants to root out his followers. They must be found out and punished.

> "They have been foolish, not evil, not wicked like you. They have been duped. But they are implicated in your blasphemy. They have encouraged you, and for all I know helped to spread your lies. They too will have to be punished." (174)

He calls on them to stand up, but it is Swann who stands up first, though the head won't have it.

> "Me, sir," he piped. It was me. I'm Christopher's friend, I'm his follower." . . .
> "I know who the two boys are and you are not one of them." (174/175)

Hunter and Toby then stand up, and the head gets both of them to deny that Christopher is Jesus, threatening them with expulsion if they don't, forcing Toby to say it loudly for all to hear,

> "Christopher is not Jesus." Toby said it out loud. (177)

.. Toby's denial echoing that of Peter's denial of Christ in another biblical parallel[1]. So Christopher goes, and Toby and Hunter do indeed get beaten for their part in his blasphemy. But it is Swann, who has never wavered in his belief in Christopher, who gets the last word, and it is the very last word of the novel, clinching the argument as it were, because, miraculously, the Birley's daughter does get better. Toby and Swann see her running across the field between her parents, and Swann is triumphant: ' "See?" he said.' (188)'

As can be seen, the discourse of religion is one of the major discourses of the novel, indeed it is a major theme in the book, and at the heart of it is Toby's own 'conversion' from un-thought acceptance to conviction and belief, and the same can be said of Swann. From one perspective one can read the novel as a re-telling of the Christ story in a modern setting, but it is also the case that what goes on can be read as a form of emotional blackmail. Right from the beginning Christopher applies considerable pressure on Toby, exploiting the fact that he knows that Toby values his friendship, and he knows that thus when he asks Toby to be his follower, he, Toby, will find it difficult to say no, not least because he doesn't wish to run the risk of losing him as a friend by offending him. The result is that Toby is now enough persuaded to the extent that when the 'miracle' does occur, he has effectively precluded himself from interpreting it as luck or coincidence. This is followed by the cut finger incident: Toby is caught in a classic *Catch 22* situation. If Toby's finger heals then it cannot be put down to luck, or Matron's good offices, it must be because of the power of prayer; and if it doesn't heal it only shows that Toby's prayer wasn't strong enough, and that worse still he himself is to blame for his finger not healing. Either way natural explanations are precluded. And when it comes to Toby's bravery with the bull, one could well argue the strength of mind that enabled it came from the confidence boost of his achievements on the rugby field. And of course Jenny's recovery at the end could have been a perfectly natural occurrence too.

[1] See Matthew 26:30-35; Mark 14:29-31; Luke: 22:15-62; John 13:36-38

In this chapter I have looked at politics – the exercise and articulation of power – in a number of contexts. There is the exercise of power within the state itself with the detailed account of the operation of the political process within the British parliamentary system and about the organisation of extra-parliamentary opposition in a democratic society. Then there is an account of the redistribution of power within a family, in this case a family consisting of one human and a number of animals. There is the acquisition of economic power by dint of offering services to neighbours, and the account of the economics of the exercise of power constituted by imperialism and colonialism. There is the exercise of power through and in despite of gender role stereotyping; and on the religious front there is the more objective discussion of religion to be found in *Masterman Ready* to be set against the proselytising of *The War of Jenkins Ear*.

12

MORE LIKE ADULTS THAN CHILDREN / THERE IS ONLY POWER

By Way of a Conclusion: Power and Agency in Children's Literature

> Warsaw under the Nazis was a place of terror, and without their father to protect them the Balickis had a grim time of it. But worse was in store for them. They were to endure hardships and conditions which made them think and plan and act more like adults than children.
>
> Ian Serraillier: *The Silver Sword*.

> . . . there is only power.
>
> J. K. Rowling: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

In the first chapter of this book I looked at some of the discourses currently available to us in our modern (Western, Anglo-centric) society and in the associated ways of thinking about the world – culture in the deepest sense of the word – within which we construct the idea of children, of who they are and what they should be, indeed the very notion of childhood itself. And in the public discourses they are more often than not cast in the role of victim, powerless to help themselves, and in need of rescue:- from disease and famine, from deprivation and exploitation, from involvement in war, from ignorance, from being brainwashed by unscrupulous regimes and by those who subscribe to unpalatable ideologies (i.e. those with which we disagree). And the underlying construct of the idea of the child in all these discourses is as a person without power or agency, they have to have things done for them or done to them by adults, they cannot do it for themselves, or even in some sort of perverse way, they should not do it for themselves. And with what I have called the progressive raising of the 'child leaving' age since the middle of the 19th century, older and older young people find themselves being included in that category of person known as 'the child'. And the corollary of all of this, of course, is the notion of the child as 'innocent', of childhood being a special place, a protected place, that shouldn't be sullied by adult concerns and adult knowledges, nor indeed by adult behaviour. If, however, we turn to children's literature, we will at last find a public discourse where children are finally represented in a positive light, as controllers of their own destinies, as heroes and heroines for their own narratives, as having power and agency in their own lives, and indeed thus more like adults than children, and in this book I have looked at some of the discourses within children's literature within which the young protagonists are enabled to exercise that agency and power. A couple of things to note: firstly there is a huge amount of overlap between the discourses, and many of the texts I have analysed from one perspective could just as easily been analysed from another; and the corollary of that is that there is no case in which any particular discourse that I have identified in any particular text is the defining discourse for that text – nothing could be further from the truth. In the light of that observation, then, and by way of conclusion, I want to draw the strings of my study together under some more general headings.

Adults and Children

A vast amount of children's literature, though not all, has both adult and child characters, and the texts I have examined are no exception. So, although chapters 3 and 4 are specifically about the relationship between the two, a relationship between adults and children can be found in many of the books I examined in other chapters. Adults can be the enemy, they can be malevolent, friendly, supportive, generally problematic, indifferent, or there can be a somewhat more complex relationship between the two, or for one reason or another they can quite simply be absent. To take the last example first, the absent adult takes take a number of forms. In the nostalgic autobiographies they are simply the other side of the great divide between childhood and adulthood, and what goes on in the children's world has little or nothing to do with what goes on in the adult world. Then there are the children who actively create their own spaces, all the way from The Secret Seven in their shed at the bottom of the garden to Trent McCauley and his mates occupying a derelict pub in *Pirate Cinema*, and on the way taking in *Five Run Away Together*, which I examined from a quite different perspective later in the book but which certainly fits in here too. Next there are children who find themselves inadvertently alone: *The Coral Island* and *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*. *Secret Water* is somewhere in between, but is another example of the 'big enough to look after yourselves' scenario. And finally there is the example of *Let's Get Invisible*, where there quite simply aren't any adults in the story, but where their absence or presence wouldn't make a blind bit of difference anyway. And in all these cases the children / young people are self-sufficient, free from adult surveillance, living in their own spaces, going their own ways, controlling their own day to day lives, and in a couple of examples really having to think and plan like adults in order to take control of the situation they find themselves in.

Moving on to the adult as enemy, I examined *Five on a Treasure Island* in some detail as an example of this. There the children decide to take matters into their own hands in order to have the power to challenge Uncle Quentin on *his* own terms, which they do by independently finding the treasure and taking on what is essentially the adult role of catching the villains. Then there's Lemony Snicket's dastardly Count Olaf, who is nothing if not malevolent, and has much the same role as uncle Quentin, and there the children also have to acquire the agency that will allow them to outwit him. The carnivalesque also fits into this category, since it is about nothing if it's not about challenging authority and good order, which by and large means adult authority and good order. For Richmal Crompton's William there is no question about it: adults are the enemy and their castles have to be stormed; and Magdalen Nabb's Josie and Eileen, have a similar disregard for adult authority. Finally there's Alice, battling to find the power to challenge and control the madness of the ostensibly adult inhabitants of Wonderland, though it must be confessed that she's not entirely successful, the local inhabitants as often as not defeating her with their chop logic and their undermining of the concomitant conventions of the relationship between language and meaning; and in that sense the book is actually *about* the battle, rather than being a story about children winning the battle. As for indifferent adults, they're not exactly the enemy but not exactly helpful either. Dorothy's Uncle and Aunt, for instance, are a joyless couple, leaving her to fend for herself when the hurricane hits. And William's parents, and Coraline's parents are little better, with William's father telling him to do 'nothing' and his mother suggesting he read or draw, or knit!; and Coraline's father suggesting that she, like William, should read, or play with her toys, or count everything blue, etc.

By contrast, adults can be friendly and supportive: the Blackett's Uncle Jim; Henry Huggins' parents; Ready and Mr. Seagrave; Jacob Armitage in *The Children of the New Forest*; Ramona's teacher; the crusading journalist in *Little Brother*; and in *Pirate Cinema* there's Anika, the woman who runs the anarchist bookshop, and Letitia Clarke, the supportive MP. The adults who ride to the rescue fall into the same category: Miss Peters in *Third Year at Mallory Towers*; the crusading journalist in *Little Brother*. In all cases, though, it is the children / young people who make the running and are in command of where the narrative is going to go, and the adults have to step in when requested. Then there is *Farm Boy*, where the relationship is mutually supportive, with the grandfather helping the boy to fulfil himself as a farmer, despite the attitude of this parents, and the boy, in return, teaching his grandfather to read; and in *The Borrowers* Homily certainly understands Arrietty's yearnings for wider horizons, but Arrietty has forced the issue. More complex again is *Carrie's War* in which Carrie comes to understand and even sympathise with Mr. Evans, and in that sense matures as a character, acquiring a more adult understanding of the world and the people in it in the process, and *Coraline*, too, offers us a more complex picture as Coraline battles with the alternative parents that she finds behind the bricked up doorway.

Learning

Learning is an active process, in which the learner makes at least as much of the running as does any teacher, and when there is no teacher involved, makes all the running him or herself. There are plenty of examples, some of which I looked at in the teaching and learning chapter, and some of which occurred elsewhere. Learning can require teachers, but there is also book learning and learning from experience. In the first category, children learning from their teachers, there are a number of examples: Ramona entering school eager to learn to read and write, ably supported by her teacher; and Harry Potter just as eager to learn the rules of Quidditch from Oliver Wood, In *Masterman Ready* we have William questioning his father about the formation of coral islands, or about colonialism, or about religion. And in *The Children of the New Forest* we have Edward learning to hunt from Jacob Armitage. When it comes to book learning, we have two contenders, Hermione, and Klaus, though, though we never see it happening, we also know that Hermione does also learn in the classroom – and through her learning she is also enabled to become a teacher herself, teaching Ron how to use his wand, and drawing on her book learning to be able to point them in the right direction when it comes to the action. As for learning from experience, Henry Huggins and his guppies presents us with a nice mix – he learns from experience, seeks advice from the pet shop man, accepts help from his parents, and takes a book out of the local library that will tell him all about it. There's something of a similar mix as William learns how to find water and build a well with Ready in teacher role and his father in attendance. Then there's the children in *Secret Water* exploring and mapping the channels and mud banks of their little inland sea. There's no one to help them, they have to learn as they go along. Finally you have Dr. Dolittle learning the languages of the animals from the animals themselves, though who exactly is the child and who the adult in that particular equation is open to question.

Sex and Romance.

Here, for once, adults don't get a look in. Instead in two cases we have what can perhaps best be described as the knowing child in matters of the heart. Starting with Ramona, she may be only 5, but there is no doubt that she knows exactly what she wants as she pursues Davy around

the playground, and for all that Davy runs, he is certainly disappointed if she doesn't chase him. Moving on to Anne, she of Green Gables, in her case it is the boy who does the pursuing, but since we see the action from her point of view, it is she who makes the running. Drem and Vortrix provide us with a different example again, with the two boys meeting each other as equals. In all cases, of course, the players in these little scenarios have nothing if not agency in pursuing their desires.

Fantasy

A number of the examples I looked at brought with them the necessity for the structural device that would allow the characters to pass from the primary real world to the secondary, fantasy, world. So Alice escapes from her boredom and exercises her curiosity as she chases the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole or as she passes through the looking glass. Lucy does much the same in *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Coraline does much the same again, with the added element that she is clearly in the way because they have just moved house; as are the children in Elidor. Dorothy too is faced by indifference, though her transition is involuntary, but once in Oz she regains her agency. And in the two non-fiction examples, Darrell is most decidedly desirous to get to Mallory Towers, and Jack, Ralph and Peterkin are delighted to have a coral island all to themselves, and in that sense both Mallory Towers and The Coral Island count as fantasy worlds too. As for Harry Potter, his primary world is a world of abuse, and his rescue by Hagrid is the first step in his escape from that abuse and in his subsequent acquisition of agency and power in the course of the book, and indeed in the course of the whole series.

Play

In the chapter on play I also looked at fantasy fiction, and there's plenty of agency here. Pooh and Piglet may be childlike in many ways, but their activities are certainly self-directed; and Ratty and Mole and the other denizens of the riverbank are clearly adults from the get go, living their own lives and deciding what they are going to do from day to day. Noddy too has control over his own life, facing the decidedly adult realities of having to earn a living. In *The Dolls' House* we have perhaps the most complex example of all. The dolls can talk and think, but they cannot "do". If they want something done they have to wish hard for it in the hope that Emily and Charlotte, who are of course also children but who have an adult control over the destinies of the dolls, will discern their feelings and actually do something about it. In the dolls' house itself it is Tottie who makes the running, and she herself is the child of the family. Her major problem will be Marchpane, an adult doll without a doubt. And finally, of course, there are the animals in *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* who are plainly adults too, on an equal footing with the good doctor himself. And by way of a footnote it should perhaps be added that my theoretical model of the reading process applies to all fiction, not just fantasy fiction for children. It's just that I am suggesting that fantasy fiction for children adds that extra element which is that the characters themselves are essentially children playing at being adults.

Otherwise, and in a more general sense, play often enters into the activities of the children, serving to give them shape and purpose. In *Winter Holiday* for instance, the children imagine that they are Amundsen exploring the Arctic, and of course Uncle Jim's alternative name, Captain Flint, is lifted straight from *Treasure Island*. *Robinson Crusoe* is invoked more than once for similar purposes, in *The Coral Island*, in *Masterman Ready*, in *Secret Water*, and in the latter book they also imagine they are marooned like Columbus. Even the domestic can be

turned into a game: there's Anne, who loves to play house as she sorts out the cave in *Five Run Away Together*, and there's Jacob Armitage 'amusing' the children as he shows them how to cook and generally look after themselves. Then there's the narrator in *Farm Boy* who as a child had loved to sit on the old tractor and pretend that he was driving around the farm, and as for those imaginative children who are always making up stories, they are legion: Grahame's child in *The Golden Age*, Titty, Lucy in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Alice, Dorothea in *Winter Holiday*, Roland in *Elidor* to name but a few.

The Political

As I made clear in Chapter 11, under this generic title I have included economics and the religious, plus a touch of gender politics, and politics by its very definition is all about power. So the examples are obvious enough, with Trent and the gang organising a direct challenge to parliamentary power and authority in *Pirate Cinema*; and *The Story of Dr. Dolittle* offering us a picture of a totally egalitarian society in which power is distributed equally between all its members. When it comes to economics itself, Henry Huggins has to act to all intents and purposes as an adult businessman, harbouring his assets, calculating his debts, and finding ways of making money. And while Henry's problems still remain small scale, Noddy's are far from it. He has to earn his living for real, in order to feed and house himself. When it comes to girls, in *Five Run Away Together* and *Peter Duck*, we find girls exercising power through their traditionally gendered domestic role. Elsewhere there are plenty of examples of girls being in control: George taking the initiative in both the *Famous Fives* that I looked at; Bill doing the same in *Third Year at Mallory Towers*; 26 bringing her knowledge of oppositional politics to bear in *Pirate Cinema*. There's Hermione, Ramona, Anne of Green Gables, Lucy taking the initiative in exploring the wardrobe, Tottie in the dolls' house; Carrie in *Carrie's War*. . . to name but several. So far as religion is concerned, we again find Mr. Seagrave involved in an explanatory account, again in response to William's desire to make himself more knowledgeable. Only *The War of Jenkins' Ear* offers us a counter example, depending a bit on your interpretation of the story. It could be, or even perhaps would be, argued, I guess, that Toby has gained power by finding the faith to believe Christopher's claims to be a resurrected Christ; but the alternative reading that I have offered, that Toby is a victim of Christopher's emotional blackmail, portrays him as someone whose power of independent thought has been taken away from him. Though it must of course be recognised that Christopher himself most decidedly has agency in the story.

Identity

Last, but by no means least, three of the books raise questions about the very nature of identity itself – two of them profoundly in my view, and the third more playfully. *Coraline* offers us a psychological study of what might be popularly called an identity crisis, as Coraline envisions an alternative, and horrifying, family for herself. Alice's meeting with the fawn raises what is in fact a pretty fundamental philosophical question, which is the relationship between language and meaning, and comes pretty close to the controversial suggestion by some discourse theorists that if we don't have a word for it then it doesn't exist. *Let's Get Invisible*, by contrast is much more playful, plumbing no such psychological or philosophical depths.

Power and Agency

As I have said, my central thesis in this book is that children's literature offers us a representation of children as having power and agency in their own right, in contradistinction to the representations to be found elsewhere in our culture. So in summary, here are my examples:

Self-sufficiency: In example after example we find children who have the ability to be self-sufficient, to have the right to get out from under adult control and surveillance – lots of examples, virtually every book I have looked at.

And linked with that, the right to actively challenge adult power and control: The *Famous Five*; Crompton's William; Alice; Trent and Marcus in *Pirate Cinema* and *Little Brother* respectively; Josie and Eileen; Karl; etc.

The right to work: 9 yr. old Henry Huggins has the right to work, to earn money, to take control over his own finances. Noddy, however old he may be, has the same right. Neither character is the 'victim' of unscrupulous employment practices.[1] They have examined the economic situation that world has presented them with, and decided to do something about it. And also note that Anne and Gilbert are already working as teachers at the age of 17.

The right to learn: William asking his father about the formation of coral islands etc; Hermione, Karl and Henry Huggins pursuing knowledge in their reading; Ramona determined to master the task of learning to write. And the right to learn comes with the concomitant right not to learn – the other William rejecting reading and drawing because they're lessons, and lessons go on in schools, which are places where, at least so far as William is concerned, you *don't* have control.

The right to a love life: 5 yr. old Ramona has the right to pursue Davy, and even manages to demonstrate her passion physically when she kisses him; Anne and Gilbert Blythe have the right to pursue their relationship from the ages of 11 and 13 respectively. As for Drem and Vortrix – they too have the right to love, and they're only 12 when the relationship starts and they end up in bed together, and to make matters worse they are both boys. But there are no adult imposed rules about age of consent or 'unsuitable' behaviours for children.

The right to circumvent or overcome or even simply ignore the power relations of gender specific behaviours: So we have the ostensibly timid Anne and we have Susan, both exercising power through and in despite of their domestic role; we have George and Bill who insist upon using boys' names in in order to challenge patriarchy; And in *Pirate Cinema* a boy does the cooking, and 26 is the actively political one; and of course the relationship between Drem and Vortrix defies what are, even today, our generally held assumptions about gender appropriate behaviour.

The right to fight: Drem and Vortrix have earned the right to fight when they become warriors at the age of 14. They are 'child soldiers', but they wear their skills with pride, they have achieved manhood, they are heroic in their victory, they have achieved their heart's desire. They are about as far from being the 'victims' of unscrupulous regimes with unpalatable ideologies as you could get.

[1] Unless you're Marxist, of course, in which case they are the victims of capitalism, but then we all are, so where's the difference.

The right to dream, and to play, and to use their imaginations: Lots of examples, and just for once we are looking at activities that adult culture thinks are appropriate for children.

In all these examples (with one exception, *The War of Jenkin's Ear*[1]) the children have power and agency, they have challenged the conception of what childhood should be.* They have rights that are denied them in real life – the right to work, the right to fight, the right to sexual knowledge. They have refused to accept that there is a divide between adults and children. They have refused to accept that if they have crossed that, effectively arbitrary, barrier then they must be 'victims'. They have redefined what I would call the discourse of childhood.
*(With the sole exception of the two childhood memoires where the whole purpose is to try to recapture the characteristics of childhood that actually differentiate it from adulthood.)

Which leads me to my final note, in which I shall return to my use of the word discourse itself, now that I have some concrete examples; and it is at this point that I shall finally include readers and writers in my analysis. (Though once again I would want to insist most strongly that you can only ever really know what readers make of a book if you ask them about it, and it doesn't matter how old they are, they can be as young as you like, but they will always have an answer.) In common parlance the word discourse is applied initially simply to conversation, then, by extension, to written text. But all such discourse carries with it connotations and associations, even knowledges, which may or may not resonate with the listener or the reader. To illustrate what I mean I will take a quick look at Ramona learning her letters. Our modern assumptions are that: 1. Ramona will be a child, and a young child at that. 2. All children learn their letters. 3. It happens in classrooms in schools. 4. There will be an adult teacher. 5. The likelihood is that, given that it's a kindergarten, the teacher will be a woman. 6. That teacher will be qualified. The child herself, particularly if she is an average child – whatever 'average' might mean, will have a mother and father, married to each other, with probably a couple of siblings thrown in for good measure. Go back 200 years and, with the exception of the last one, not a single one of those assumptions would have been true. And even if the child had been older than Ramona the assumptions would still have been that that child was more likely to have been illiterate than to have been literate, was more likely to have been working to help support their family than not, that they would probably never have touched sides with a school, or if they had gone to school and met a teacher he, and it would have been a he, would probably have been a cleric of one sort and another, and the child himself would indeed have been a himself not a herself. The very small minority of children that were born into the upper classes would have been educated at home by a governess or a tutor, and a larger number of children, though still a minority of them, would have been the children of the merchant and trading classes and they would have attended institutions that roughly resembled schools as we know them today. In other words the discourse of the word 'child', and thus the discourse of the very idea of the child, would have carried virtually none of the associations and connotations that it does today. The very idea that a 5 yr. old girl should be in school with a nice friendly supportive Miss Binney would have been dismissed as absurd. And a writer writing back in those days about children would assume that the reader would share those ideas, presumptions, connotations, in a word, understandings, of what a child was.

[1] Which doubtless accounts for the fact that I dislike it so much.

Back to the present. My examples of the discourses of children's literature have perhaps much more limited application, but the principles are the same. The writer of a children's book must write in such a way that he or she shares enough meaning with the reader for that reader to engage with and enjoy the story. So, to return to the account of Ramona learning to write her letters, one may suggest that that account will resonate with many young readers who will have had the same experience. Similarly, the somewhat older readers who are fans of Harry Potter, will share, one must presume, enough understandings of what goes on in classrooms with Rowling's account of it, for them, the readers, to appreciate and thoroughly enjoy the picture she paints of, for instance, the exchanges between Harry and Snape, or of the kids who get it wrong, getting it wrong, or of the know-it-all who already knows the answer to everything. And somewhere along the line will be the sense of the implied reader that a reader will pick up as he or she is reading the text. There are many accounts, for instance, of kids who read Enid Blyton when they were younger, suddenly feeling that they are being talked down to: in technical terms, feeling that the implied reader created by the text is younger than they are, and they then reject the book as babyish. Their discourse of being a child has already changed, matured we would say, they are no longer 'little kids' with all the connotations that go along with that term.

One final point. In my introduction I suggested that these discourses had a narrative function, but it should by now be clear that some examples have a more important narrative function than others. To return to *Ramona the Pest*, the whole book is about Ramona's first few weeks in her kindergarten. The account of her learning to write her letters that I have singled out is clearly an integral element of that larger account of those first few weeks, it is highly relevant to the overall theme of the book, it is clearly a constituent part of the entire narrative and has considerable importance within that narrative. By contrast, for instance, the account of William's learning about religion from his father has got little or nothing to do with the narrative of *Masterman Ready* as a whole, and certainly has no effect whatsoever on the development of the story, nor is it relevant to any of the central themes of the book, whatever they may be: human resilience and determination to survive in the face of adversity, or the related theme of the exploitation of the natural resources of the land to further that end, to name but a couple. It is, rather, a descriptive contextual detail relevant, certainly, to the underlying religious presumptions of the book, and in this particular case illustrating Mr. Seagrave's relationship with his son and confirming what we already know of William's questioning mind but, as I say, of no further narrative importance.

So, back to my general point, when there is enough of a match between the discourses of the book and those available to the young reader from his or her own life and, it may be added, from his or her previous reading, then that young reader can relax and ignore all this stuff about discourses, and simply get on and enjoy the adventure, because that indeed is what a children's book is, an adventure to be enjoyed.

THE END

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