

'The Enchanted Garden': a changing image in children's literature

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Abstract

This study is a historico-cultural examination of the rôle of the garden in literature written for children between 1850 and 2000.

The garden is considered from two perspectives – as a setting for children’s play, and as a cultural symbol that changes over time to reflect social concerns.

The central assumption of this thesis is that the garden may be considered as a symbol of childhood itself. My main concern is to investigate the nature of the construct of childhood as evidenced in texts written at different periods, focussing on what it might have meant to be a child at those times. In doing so, I frequently have cause to contrast these definitions of ‘childhood’ with each other, and with contemporary ones.

The notion of the garden suggests to me a series of ‘structural oppositions’ (Rose, 1984), such as innocence/experience, civilisation/nature, home/away, enclosure/exposure; all of which are typical concerns of literature in general, and, arguably, particularly significant themes in children’s literature and thus pertinent to its study. I suggest that the garden as a common setting for children’s literature also acts as a meeting-place, or compromise, for some of these pairings.

Since children are generally subject to adults, I consider that some of these oppositions can be regarded in terms of power and control. The thesis emphasises the ‘constructedness’ of such oppositions, in order to demonstrate the mythological – and often adult-serving – nature of much thinking about childhood.

I explore texts as diverse as Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911) and Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) in order to illustrate changes in the mythology of childhood, and in the deployment of the icon of the child in the garden. The study concludes with a detailed exploration of Pearce’s *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958), which I believe expresses many symbolic meanings of the garden image in a particularly convincing way, with considerable artistic and emotional integrity.

Chapter 1: Introductory

‘ ... the garden was the thing. That was real. Tomorrow he would go into it: he almost had the feel of tree-trunks between his hands as he climbed; he could almost smell the heavy blooming of the hyacinths in the corner beds.’

Philippa Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), p.28

1.1. Introduction to the thesis

This study is an attempt to explore ‘children’s literature’ through an examination of the different ways in which the garden is used as a setting and as an image in books written for children. I suggest that ‘the garden’ is a potent psycho-cultural icon that has been used to define and control the concept of ‘childhood’. The central thesis is that the image of the garden in children’s literature represents the ‘Eden’ of childhood: and its definition, like that of any other symbolic artefact, depends on extrinsic socio-cultural factors, and thus changes with time.

Children’s literature is a complex subject, the proper approach to which has been, and continues to be, debated and repeatedly redefined (Hunt, 1994a and 1996,b; Briggs, 1996; Nodelman, 1996). Students of children’s books tend to be divisible into two groups, which nevertheless often overlap; the ‘child-centred’ and the ‘book-centred’ (Leeson, 1985, p.142; Hunt, 1994, p.17; Hollindale, 1997, p.15). Despite my

own experience as a teacher and as a parent of children, for the purposes of this study I cast myself in the latter rôle. I am concerned here with a historico-cultural exploration of potential meanings in children's books: meanings which derive from their authors' own experiences, preoccupations and motives for writing and from the wider cultural circumstances in which the texts are situated. I stress that these meanings are 'potential', since one can only infer from the texts exactly what messages about childhood might have been transmitted to the readers of those texts. The readers, of course, may be either child or adult. My use of the past tense throughout the study reflects my concern to hypothesise contemporaneous definitions of childhood, as compared with contemporary ones. Therefore my interest in this study is in 'childhood' rather than 'children', if one accepts that there is a difference (Cunningham, 1995, pp. 2-3).

1.2. Definitions

Given such a complex blend of hypothesis and literary and cultural analysis, in a field involving relationships between producers and consumers, both past and present, it is necessary to define terms. Hollindale (1997, p.8) asks, rather baldly, 'What do we mean by "children"? And what do we mean by "literature"?'. In a sense, this study is an attempt to answer those difficult questions. They are impossible to answer simply; and the apparently obvious answers are unlikely to be either comprehensive or precise enough. My first response to Hollindale's questions is that the two terms

'children' and 'literature' depend on each other for definition (Rose, 1984, argues that 'child' and 'adult' depend on each other in this way, calling this a structural opposite): the literature under consideration is that deemed (by the surrounding culture) suitable to be offered to the contemporaneous child; and the child is the person similarly deemed suitable to be offered it. Of course this circular definition is wholly inadequate, but perhaps makes sense – since we all have our own subjective idea of what a child is; and most of us have been involved at some time either in reading 'children's literature' (as a child) or in purveying it to children. In other words, both terms can be defined in as many different ways as there are interested parties.

In order to refine my own definitions for the purposes of this study, I have considered as many alternatives as possible. While it may seem obvious what constitutes a child, it has been established (Cunningham, 1995, pp. 2-3; Hollindale, 1997, p.13; Higonnet, 1998, p.12; Heywood, 2001, pp.2-5) that definitions of *childhood* have changed over time, and there is no reason to suggest that this process will not continue. Some commentators define the child/childhood in terms of common features. Hunt (1996b, p.11-12) refers to Tucker (1977), who, in *What is a Child*, focuses on transcultural features such as play, physiological limitations and, in Piagetian terms, lack of abstract thinking abilities. This could be described as an educational/psychological definition and defines the characteristics of the child. The historian of childhood, in contrast, defines the period of childhood by considering the

treatment of children, particularly in terms of employment (Heywood, 2001, p.121) which is, of course both a historical and a legal issue, both closely tied to shifting cultural norms. Cunningham warns against confusing the child and childhood (1995, p.1): 'we need to distinguish between children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas.' I am more concerned with the latter – with external issues of power rather than attempts to define childhood by characteristics. Hunt (1994a) acknowledges that childhood is an entirely socio-cultural construct, solely defined by the prevailing social mythology: 'childhood is the period of life which *the immediate culture thinks of* as being free of responsibility and susceptible to education' (p.5, my italics). I find this definition of childhood suits this study very well, since it defines childhood in purely socio-cultural terms. This definition will therefore be implied whenever I use the word 'childhood'. Of course, even within this definition there is evidence of divergent thinking by individuals, and this is signalled by Butts (1992, Introduction):

'children's literature is not simply a reflection of such conditioning factors as its age's ideology ... To see literature as a straightforward response to social conditions is too deterministic and reductive. Literary creation is a process in which the writer often struggles with the world he or she sets out to depict, so that while some works undoubtedly do reflect their society in very passive ways, others articulate its contradictions, question its values, or even argue against them.'

I hope that my explorations of specific texts are able to do justice to the many ways in which their authors have intended and attempted to dissect their social worlds; but my overriding aim has been to seek literary expressions of common contemporaneous concerns about children and childhood, whether consciously acknowledged by the writers, or not.

Hunt (1996b) suggests that 'Definitions of literature can be conveniently divided into definitions by features, definition by cultural norms, and definitions according to the uses of text by individuals' (p.7). My approach is in the second category – I define children's literature in terms of the wider culture's expectation of what children should be offered as reading matter, that wider culture being those elements of the adult population of Britain concerned with children and their books between my chosen dates. Hollindale (1997, pp.27-28) proposes six definitions of 'children's literature' and suggests that this is a comprehensive list. To summarise briefly, he argues that children's literature is either the result of intentions and decisions on the part of those involved in book production; or a body of texts that appeal to contemporary children; or that have appealed to children in the past; or texts concerned with children, or relevant to children, and which are accessible to children; or a body of texts with such features that make 'meaningful transactions with children' (p.27) possible; or, lastly, a 'reading event ... Whenever a successful voluntary transaction takes place between any text and any one child' (p.28). In my opinion, these are all entirely valid definitions, some of which are complementary;

but none of them exactly suits my purpose in this study. Hollindale's first categorisation comes closest, but I would extend the adult participation:

'Children's literature is a body of work forming the combined outcome of intentions and decisions on the part of authors, publishers and booksellers *and all adults within the child's culture who have any interest in children and the idea of childhood.* It includes a corporate commercial design on the child market *and also attempts to define childhood and its relation to adulthood.*'

(italicised words added to Hollindale, p.27)

Having clarified my working definitions of 'childhood' and 'literature', I must now make explicit what I mean by the word 'garden', since this will be the context of my discussion of the other terms. The garden has been used as a traditional feature of mythology and literature throughout history and across many cultures. Sometimes it appears simply as a setting; at other times it would appear to have a symbolic function. It is interesting to observe occasions on which the garden appears as an alternative to the uncultivated countryside. Equally, it acts as an alternative to the home. This suggests to me that there is something specific about a tended area which may perhaps represent a compromise between civilisation and wilderness, and which may indeed be taken to represent other types of compromise, or meeting-place. Especially in children's literature, the garden is both ubiquitous and significant. Perhaps this is not particularly surprising; since gardens have always been a common

setting for children's play, at least for those children fortunate enough to have access to them. In the context of this study, gardens are featured in various guises – as the grand parks surrounding stately homes or mansions; as suburban gardens surrounded by hedges, walls or fences; as grassless back yards; and, by extension, as public parks and even, sometimes, as open countryside treated by child protagonists as virtually private property (see, for example, Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series, Saville's *Lone Pine* books and much of Blyton). This definition of 'garden' may seem loose and even arbitrary; but I emphasise that its essential nature is as a place in which the child is protected by the adult from the outside world. As I will make clear, although Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* roam apparently freely about the Lake District, the Norfolk Broads and the Hebrides, this countryside is not recognisable as the dangerous and unpredictable environment it really is (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984, p.508). The garden, then, is an extension of the home; it is a safe, enclosed place out of doors, where the opposites of nature/civilisation and home/away may meet. Important to my definition is the notion that the safety and enclosure are as much emotional and cultural as physical. In these terms, Grahame's *River Bank* is as much a garden as Tom Long's midnight garden (Pearce, 1958); and the *Swallows' and Amazons' Lake District* is as much a garden as Mary, Colin and Dickon's secret garden (Burnett, 1911). These 'gardens', while accurately described in terms of topography, are entirely safe (unlike the real Thames and Lake District).

When I write of 'the reader', I may be referring to any of a wide range of people, perhaps several groups at once. There is, of course, the potential child reader, both past and present – while the child contemporaneous with the book's first publication interests me the most, he or she is a shadowy figure and I can only speculate about what it might have meant to live at an earlier period. Hollindale points out the potential value of a culturally-based study of children's literature when he remarks, 'children are affected by the images of childhood they encounter' (1997, p.14). This may seem obvious; but it applies to literature of the past as much as to that of the present and gives me pause for thought. The writers under consideration will without doubt have been influenced by the attitudes to childhood encountered in their own childhood reading, and this will of course have affected in turn their own writing. More importantly, the great anonymous mass of child readers will have been affected by, and, as adults, will have responded to, those images. It is difficult to discover contemporaneous responses to literature, but portrayals of childhood can help us to understand a little of former children's social and emotional contexts.

Other readers of the texts under discussion are adults: including parents, teachers, politicians, literary critics, other authors; and there is myself as reader. I am on firmer ground when I recall my own childhood responses to children's books, although far from infallible. When I talk of my responses as an adult reader, that is the only time at which I can be completely confident of the reliability of my

statements. Therefore, this study is a hypothesis, based on my reading and my personal opinions and interpretations, added to those of other, mostly adult, readers.

1.3. Range of texts

The choice of texts under consideration is, of course, entirely subjective, although I have relied on the insights of many writers and critics of children's literature. I have sought out any books written for children which feature gardens as a significant element, and have then rejected any which I judged uninteresting or unlikely to yield any significance. I have admitted any literature that I feel offers new insight or presents emotions particularly vividly, and which is, at the same time, peculiarly a product of its own particular time, with its own consequent 'baggage'. For that last reason, I include some perhaps unexpected texts that exist outside the traditional 'canon', since I believe that the once popular but now forgotten can teach us a great deal about the preoccupations of its period. This is not an exercise in defining 'quality' in literature, in any sense of the word, and, as already made clear, neither is it a 'reader-response' analysis. I have, at times, however, speculated as to 'the reader's' possible responses to texts; but my concern is of course what the author (and wider culture) is telling the reader.

I have generally used British texts, although I have included two books by writers from the U.S.A. and one of Andersen's stories, translated from the Danish.

I limit my discussion to works written between 1838 and the present. The earliest text mentioned is Andersen's story 'The Garden of Paradise' (1838). I have not encountered a text intended specifically for children written before this date in which a garden is significant, but acknowledge that such texts may exist. I have therefore taken as my literary and cultural starting-point the earliest children's literature in which the Romantic influence began to be visible. My central thesis demands a consideration of an image that changes over time, and I judge that this time-span offers sufficient potential for socio-cultural and literary changes to have taken place.

Although my concern is predominantly with literature intended to be read by children (those under the age of eighteen) I refer freely to work originally intended for an adult audience, when it suits my purpose.

1.4. The garden as symbol

Throughout this study I assume that it is true to say that any symbolic artefact will change over time in terms of what it can be said to 'mean'. As Barthes hypothesises in his *Mythologies* (1957), everything is subject to the imposition of meanings (or connotations); no cultural object is ever 'pure' or 'natural'. McNeill (1996) paraphrases Barthes: 'what we accept as being "natural" is in fact an illusory reality constructed in order to mask the real structures of power obtaining in society ... The

role of the mythologist, as Barthes sees it, is to expose these signs as the artificial constructs that they are, to reveal their workings and show that what appears to be natural is, in fact, determined by history.’ In the context of this study, I regard the representation of the garden as a Barthean ‘sign’, and the ‘history’ which determines it is the changing view of childhood, which is itself one of ‘the myths that circulate in everyday life which construct a world for us and our place in it’ (McNeill).

The garden’s appearance as a literary setting may derive from its biblical use as a symbol of original innocence: Manlove (1999) discusses the garden as a familiar historical literary motif, citing *The Romance of the Rose* (translated by Chaucer c.1368) and *The Parliament of Fowls* (Chaucer, c.1382). In *Paradise Lost* (1667) ‘the enclosed garden of paradise is shown opening out to a new world’ (Manlove, p.27). Wullschläger (1995, pp.42-43) suggests that authors of literature for children too have drawn on this rich English tradition:

‘In inventing Wonderland as a beautiful, child-centred universe set apart from adult life, Carroll drew ... probably unconsciously, on one of the oldest traditions in literature – the perfect place, the Eden of Christianity, the exquisite rose garden which has captured the artistic imagination from courtly mediaeval poetry such as *The Romance of the Rose* to Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*.’

Of course the garden is not the only common element of children's literature that is also used as a symbol: I might have chosen to study, to give a few examples, the house, the parent or parent-figure or the child itself. However, I suggest, the garden is uniquely suitable both as an appropriate setting for the action of literature for and about children and also as representative of attitudes towards childhood, since I see it as commonly representing the 'Eden' of childhood; attitudes which I suggest have changed historically. I have also become fascinated by the garden's function as a 'limen' (or threshold) – a point of compromise and of contact between two oppositions: for instance, those of 'home' and 'away'; 'civilisation' and 'nature'; 'enclosure' and 'exposure', and others. I regard these pairings as relevant to changing socio-cultural and political attitudes to childhood and children; and I view the garden, with its connotations of control and nurture, as the ideal setting and symbol for inter-personal narrative, especially that concerning relations between adults and children.

I intend to argue that, while the writers of the literature sometimes use these symbolic meanings deliberately, there are other occasions when the garden has a meaning that is dependent upon the author's historical and cultural perspective, or psychological state, or individual experience of life. In other words, the writer takes certain attitudes for granted and even regards them as 'natural', where an earlier or later commentator would argue that they are cultural constructs or myths (see Cox, 1996, below). Dusinberre (1987, p.33) asserts: 'The only real freedom for adults and for

children lies in the recognition of the myths by which society orders its vision of the real and the ideal'. I note in passing that it is not suggested that culturally-based attitudes to childhood need necessarily be rejected; but, as Dusiinberre suggests, they need to be recognised and questioned. After all, this myth-making, as Warner has argued (Reith Lecture, 1994), is something that society is constantly engaged in as it seeks to interpret and make sense of important relationships, such as that between the adult and the child; and this dynamic is at the heart of my investigation. Cox (1996) talks of the 'myths' of childhood:

'These are myths in Barthes' sense of the word; ideas of immense cultural power, whose significance is built up of layers of meaning, the origins of which have long been forgotten. Such myths appear now to be "natural", to explain the world and its meaning for us, but their history, the conflict and confusions which surrounded their origins are now buried beneath an almost obsessive belief in their naturalness (Barthes, 1973). There is a politics to these myths of childhood which recent cultural and literary historians have begun to unearth.'

(p.81)

It is some of these myths of childhood which I intend to explore and interrogate by means of a study of the garden image/setting; which, I contend, is always either a

representation or an inversion of the Christian Eden, which stands in its turn for the state of childhood.

In the course of this study I have been fascinated by the number of occasions on which, in my readings of the texts, writers have been engaged in positing sets of opposites, whether consciously or not. These oppositions are what may be termed 'structural' (Rose, 1984, p.50) or 'binary' opposites (Nodelman, 1996a, p.156) and, as I have already suggested, some of these oppositions find a context in the notion of the garden and, parallel with that, in notions of childhood itself. Speaking very generally, I have found that until relatively recently in children's fiction these structural and thematic opposites have been created or upheld; whereas in more recent fiction (that of Philip Pullman, for instance) such oppositions have been questioned. The garden, then, may be seen as setting, image and ideological meeting-place or battleground in children's literature.

My thinking, then, has been guided by my desire to find out how writers for children thought and felt about childhood and so recreated it – using the image or setting of the garden – for their readers, and why they did so – whether they were influenced by socio-cultural, historical or educational principles, or by strictly personal, experiential motives, or by any combinations of these things. While reading their writings and that of literary theorists, I have also borne in mind the assumptions implicit in the children's texts, seeking out pairs of 'binary opposites' and thus trying to establish

how far the texts can be said to enshrine cultural myths, and how political this myth-making may be in terms of thinking about children and childhood. De Rijke (1994) talks of the 'atrophied myth of childhood'; and I intend to trace the development of that myth from Wordsworth to the end of the twentieth century.

1.5. Genesis of the study

My reasons for setting out to investigate children's literature are complex, arising superficially from my twin roles as parent and teacher, both of which demand a certain familiarity with the corpus of literature for children; but the original impetus and driving force stem, I think, from a very powerful personal need to understand myself – how the child I was became the adult I am – and to make sense of my own life so far. This is probably a fairly common phenomenon of middle age and the strength of this determination has, I believe, directed and informed my thinking about children's books and their authors.

One very early memory of my own that has resurfaced during this investigation is, perhaps unsurprisingly, of a garden. I must have been three or four years old and had made a little house for my doll by throwing a pink woollen blanket over the pink hydrangeas in a corner of our small front garden. It was a bright and sunny day and I remember certain features of it clearly, in particular the sensation of warmth, safety

and comfortable solitude – and my typically intense concentration on my own activities.

There are two points I would extrapolate from this very simple and, I am sure, far from unusual memory. Firstly, that the ‘child-me’, then, felt a strong sense of safety and aloneness. I was in no possible danger from the world outside, being physically very close to my mother; yet she probably did not know exactly where I was or what I was doing. I was being my own self, in a place I had made mine. Secondly, the ‘adult-me’, now, sees this memory, through the filter of intervening years that have sometimes been unhappy and during which that ‘me’ has often been compromised, as part of a time which was somehow better than now; a more innocent time, a more authentic ‘me’, a time when limitless opportunities lay before rather than behind me. I am sure that I am far from unique in this; I suggest that some of the most moving and beautiful portrayals of childhood in literature have been grounded in this feeling – which, I assert, is itself grounded in myth. Other portrayals of childhood have been differently animated, by a psychological realism that knows that the ‘child-me’ and the ‘adult-me’ are one, that both are equally valid in different places on a continuum, and that this knowledge signifies health and integration of the personality.

I have always found shady gardens and parks peculiarly evocative places, particularly in summer, bringing as they do Proustian recollections of other summers, by that

combination of the sound of birdsong, sight of white clouds in blue skies, and smell of flowers and – if the circumstances are absolutely right – of freshly-mown grass.

Of course, what I describe here is the memory of an idyll, of a past when it never rained, when I had no worries or responsibilities, and I was safe and protected from whatever was ‘out there’. It is the false memory of a childhood that never really happened, cobbled together from memories of specific occasions when the sun *did* shine, fiction that I read over the years and plenty of wishful thinking and nostalgia.

Initially, this was to be a study of ‘timeslip’ stories for children, with the emphasis on the sadness of passing time, and that intention is still apparent in my first chapter, in which I discuss nostalgia for childhood and the image of the garden as a Garden of Eden from which we are forever excluded, once adolescence is past. I then considered examining nostalgia more generally, as there were many novels dealing with this concept that deeply interested me. It gradually came to seem, however, too wide a field. The image of a garden began to present itself, suggesting the dual symbolism of the Garden of Eden (from the viewpoint of the jaded adult) and of a playground (from that of the child). At about this time I was struck by an account given by Aidan Chambers (1983) of some work carried out by Jon Stott (published as ‘Criticism and the teaching of stories to children’ in *Signal*, 32, May, 1980) in which Stott discussed the idea of the ‘enclosed garden’ (Chambers) with a group of children. Three examples caught my eye: Stott had introduced ‘Mr. McGregor’s

garden' as a 'private and forbidden area' (Stott), 'Johnny Crow's Garden' as a 'locus amoenus' (Stott) and had encouraged the children, while reading *The Secret Garden* to regard 'the changing state of the garden as an indicator of the developing characters of Mary Lennox and Colin Craven. After reading the early chapters and discussing Mary's contrary nature, we looked at her Indian hibiscus garden and the nursery rhyme, seeing how both reflected Mary's own nature' (Stott). Here was the germ of my final study: an account, not of work undertaken with children, but of an attempt to relate gardens in children's books to broad human themes.

I continued to work according to this plan, but several gardens in important children's books seemed to fit neither category – examples being the apparently haunted gardens in Penelope Lively's *A Stitch in Time* (1976) and *The House in Norham Gardens* (1974). At this point I began to think about gardens symbolically, in vaguely Freudian and Jungian terms, and it became clear that this was going to be a historically and socio-culturally based survey, following an exploration of Romantic and post-Romantic preoccupations with childhood with an investigation of the nature of childhood as seen during the supposed 'Second Golden Age' of children's literature (Leeson, 1985) – that period from about 1950 to 1970. I would conclude with an examination of the impact of psychoanalytical thinking on children's literature up to the end of the twentieth century, the garden this time representing the psychical conflict between nature and civilisation, the angel and the beast, the dark and the light which still seems to inform discussion of childhood today.

Later in the process of reading texts and thinking about the intertwined subjects of gardens and childhood, I began to think about the ‘binary oppositions’ posited by Nodelman and about what texts tell us about what it is to be a child – from the individual writer’s perspective. I realised that one of my concerns was going to be an exploration of what it has meant to be a child at different periods (according to contemporary literature) and whether, and how, children can be said to have been ‘colonised’ at different times (to use Rose’s term, 1984).

I have been endlessly fascinated (and frustrated) by the nets of dualities that have continually tangled me. On this ‘journey’ I have encountered the polarisations of adult or child – in other words, ‘who is telling the story?’; and actual child or adult-as-child – ‘who is the story written for?’ – in what I term the ‘personal’ areas of authorship and readership. In the more ‘general’ realm of society and culture I have met the dichotomies of ‘Romantic’ or modern (or post-modern) – that is, ‘what philosophies of literature and of life inform the work?’; Victorian and Edwardian or post-war and contemporary – ‘when was the story written and how is its date relevant?’; and – very significantly – is it ‘pre-Freud’ or ‘post-Freud’ – ‘in what ways, if any, has the author been influenced by Freud’s thinking about the unconscious and the child – or, of course, how does the work obviously predate or even anticipate his ideas?’ I believe that all these pairings need to be explored, and I have therefore sought a framework which can coherently incorporate all these discussions.

1.6. Outline of thesis

The garden, then, is seen in this study as a series of images, relating to different ways of regarding children in the Eden of childhood. There are naturally overlaps, and resonances are frequently carried to and fro across the chapters, and connections are made where relevant.

The first theme under discussion (in Chapters 2 and 3) is that of loss. At the beginning of Genesis, the protagonists lose their innocence; and in the texts in these chapters innocence is defined and celebrated and its loss is mourned. In Chapter 2 I discuss texts whose authors bemoan the loss of childhood itself (some of whom appear to prefer death to adulthood) and, in Chapter 3, I explore two texts which, in my opinion, equate the 'Golden Age' of childhood with the myth of the rural idyll, both myths founded on nostalgia and depending on ideas about innocence, and both explored in the context of Eden-like settings.

Many of the works I cite in Chapter 2 belong to the English Victorian and Edwardian periods, but by no means all. No literature can be wholly compartmentalised by chronological means, even with hindsight. However, I would suggest that the theme of loss is markedly present in children's literature of the Romantic period of English literature, and in that influenced by it. For example, I observe a certain 'Romantic'

attitude to childhood in some of the writing of C.S. Lewis that is comparable in spirit to that of George Macdonald (see Jenkins, 1984).

In the texts discussed in Chapter 2, for reasons which I outline, the image of the child is manipulated for the adult's own ends – whether that adult be the writer or the readership. In both chapters 2 and 3, the garden is a metaphor for the past: in Chapter 2 it represents the state of childhood, and in Chapter 3, an equivalent earlier stage in human development (the mythological 'Golden Age': Hunt, 1994a, p.30; Carpenter, 1985, Preface; see also Grahame's eponymous work, 1895). In these two chapters I ask what the texts have to say about childhood and *to* children; in what ways, if any, they can be said to create or uphold cultural myths, with particular reference to mutually-exclusive opposites; and in what ways, if any, they therefore reflect or challenge prevailing social and cultural preoccupations about the nature of childhood. This set of questions will be applied to each text throughout the entire study.

In Chapter 4, the garden appears as a nursery: a place of safety, security and space to flourish. In this case, while the garden is still Eden-like, the child is defined differently. He or she is still 'innocent' in the sense of small and helpless, but the emphasis on 'goodness' is less evident. Ang (2000) has suggested that one of the results of the First World War was an increased desire on the part of adults to protect children from the problems of the adult world. The world was increasingly seen to be a dangerous and unpredictable place and the certainties that had begun to be

disturbed by Darwin and the Industrial Revolution were further damaged by the slaughter of the war.

In this chapter, many of the works I discuss belong to the Edwardian era (thus overlapping with the previous chapter on occasion) and the period approximately up to the Second World War – but, as before, this is a fairly arbitrary distinction. Again, though I feel that social and cultural issues impinged very strongly on children's literature, I am more concerned with the themes than with forcing chronological continuity.

Although perhaps, as already suggested, I think that the experience of the First World War influenced a change in thinking about childhood, I suggest that there were other influences, including the educational thinking of Froebel and Montessori, and the popular success of such seminal children's texts as the *Alice* books (Lewis Carroll, 1865 and 1871) and *A Child's Garden of Verses* (R.L. Stevenson, 1885). The child in this instance becomes far more 'humanised' than the earlier symbol of innocence. He or she becomes an explorer, for whom the garden represents a kingdom or playground in which to act and experiment. The adult is no longer in direct control but is still a protective presence just 'off-stage'. Clearly the balance of power has shifted.

Chapter 5 concerns the garden in its function as a symbol of psychological growth and healing. Stories for children that show this kind of development can, of course, be found in various periods of literature – a notable example being *The Secret Garden* (1911); but those in which I am mostly interested are those texts described by Penelope Farmer (1972) as ‘introverted fantasies’ and which have generally been written during the second half of the twentieth century.

The inspiration here derives from the widespread dissemination of the theories (and practice) of both Jung and Freud. From Freud has come the awareness that there are strata of experience beneath the conscious; and from Jung the notion of the individual’s ‘shadow’ which has to be accepted and assimilated for psychological health. The garden, in this chapter is an extended metaphor which may be interpreted in different ways – as the unconscious, or subconscious, as time, or as life itself. The child in the garden has at last become an autonomous, self-governing creature – it is no coincidence that children in this genre of story are often orphaned or unloved. The child does not symbolise anything but itself – a developing human being.

These stories can be complex and can seem to lack external plot. They can be difficult to read and can involve characters facing painful truths; but they tend to end in understanding and fulfilment – or, to use a horticultural image, in the flowering or fruition of the self. In direct contradiction to the theme discussed in the first chapter, experience is crucial and ennobling. In many such stories there is no clear distinction

between childhood and adulthood; both are seen as stages on a kind of continuum, or even on a circle without beginning or end. These latter texts, of course, are often 'timeslip' stories, which try to escape the notion of the linearity of time. In some of them, there is significant use of the horticultural and socio-cultural idea of 'rootedness' in a place. Again, with reference to my central thesis, the nature of the garden/Eden has changed. Along with an awareness that children cannot be protected from the outside world there is an urgent sense of the need for healing. The garden is a space where children can be healed while they play. This is perhaps more akin to Christ's 'Paradise' (Luke 23:43) than with the Eden of Genesis, the emphasis on a 'perfect place' rather than on a place in which one is 'perfect'. In the texts I explore in this chapter, there is, very clearly, no compulsion to leave the garden when one grows up.

In Chapter 6, in clear contrast, I explore some texts which emphasise the necessity of leaving the 'garden' of childhood, perhaps after it has performed its nurturing and healing function as described in Chapter 5. The garden here frequently represents concepts discussed with reference to other chapters, but these qualities must now be left behind. While writers like Lively and Boston present characters 'putting down roots' and growing old in the 'gardens' of their history and heritage, the texts in Chapter 6 are more concerned with the physical and psychological movement 'out' into the adult world, and with living autonomously. Adults in these texts tend to be controlling and hostile, or benign advisors to the developing adolescent. The key

texts in this chapter are Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. These texts are the most likely to feature children escaping from difficult childhoods. As de Rijke remarks (1994, p.44), childhood is not always idyllic: '... gardens stand for childhood as realms of innocence and experience, playfulness and dreaming, entrapment and sacrifice.' In this chapter, Eden must either be left behind, or else, particularly in Pullman's books, cannot be found in either childhood or adulthood, but only in loving relationships. In Pullman's case, to summarise, while the garden, where it appears, does indeed appear to represent 'Eden', neither concept is identified with childhood. This marks a notable departure from earlier equations of childhood and the Garden of Eden, which I relate to contemporary attitudes to childhood.

Chapter 7 is devoted to a detailed reading of *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce (1958) which, in my opinion, brings together many of the themes earlier considered and through the use of imagery and setting, reconciles some of the 'opposites' seen earlier. While Pullman questions and demolishes, Pearce, writing in the tradition of *Boston and Lively*, seeks to compromise. Her book represents to me a symbol of childhood, continuity, healing and growth. It is, of course, an 'old' book, often advertised as a modern 'classic'; but I intend to show that by attempting to address ideas about time and continuity, Pearce subverts my central thesis, throwing into relief the culturally-bound nature of all the other texts. What Pearce does, I argue, is to create her own definitions of childhood and of 'Eden', which are indebted to cultural myths but, more importantly, informed by her own imagination.

In conclusion, Chapter 8 considers whether or not the hypothesis that I have tested is supported by the textual evidence; that is, whether I appear to be justified in asserting that the notion of the garden in this literature does indeed represent an Eden-like concept of childhood that is culturally defined. I summarise the evidence of individual chapters that implies that definitions of childhood have varied over time.

Before concluding this section, I quote Manlove (p.6) as a caveat against taking these texts on their own terms too unquestioningly: literature for children is, after all, written by adults – who will inevitably have their own philosophies of childhood and have of course experienced the state of childhood for themselves: ‘One ... has to allow for the way that the concept of the “child” is partly shaped by adults who either wish to preserve a province they recall as childhood, or have designs on those inhabiting it.’ Reynolds (1994) warns that we must beware of using loaded terms like ‘childhood’ unreflectively: since ‘childhood is at least as much a social construct as a physical stage’ (p.18). Perhaps even more so; since we seem to categorise human beings as ‘child’ or ‘adult’ – thus failing to discriminate between an eighteen-year-old and a centenarian. Furthermore, she remarks: ‘The attitudes and positions proffered in the literature produced for young readers tell us a great deal about the preoccupations and values of the time’ (p.5); and this is a key perspective of this study. Children’s literature, as Bottigheimer points out:

‘ ... has an overwhelming inclination to show its readers how to deal with the society into which they have been born. The strategy for doing so has flip-flopped in recent decades: the literature for children currently valorized in criticism is that which joyously inverts adults and subversively overturns perceived community values.’

(1998, p. 207)

It is clear that complex political issues are woven tightly into all thinking about what children are and what they should read. The children’s writer may well be unconscious of his or her prejudices about childhood, and may be anxious simply to amuse and enlighten the reader; but, as Hunt (1994a) remarks:

‘It is arguably impossible for a children’s book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology and, by extension, didacticism. All books must teach something, and because the checks and balances available to the mature reader are missing in the child reader, the children’s writer often feels obliged to supply them.’

(p.3)

This is, as Hunt says, inevitable; but Hunt himself concludes that one needs to be circumspect in considering such material, remembering that: ‘... children’s literature

is a powerful literature, and that such power cannot be neutral or innocent, or trivial'
(p.3).

Chapter 2: The garden as Eden: the loss of childhood

‘Sometimes before in his life, Tom had gone to sleep in disappointment or sadness, but always he had woken up to a new day and a new hope. This time he found that the morning was only a continuation of the night and the day before ... This was Saturday; he had lost his last chance; he had lost the garden.’

***Tom's Midnight Garden* (p.205-6)**

This chapter considers the theme of loss as exemplified in ‘garden-based’ books. I have noted that this is a particularly dominant theme in books of the ‘Golden Age’ of children’s literature (Carpenter, 1985) and I relate it here to Romantic notions about childhood.

One obvious use of the garden image is as the biblical Garden of Eden. This particular symbolism has been employed widely across many cultures and historical eras in literature for both adults and children, and still resonates in literature today, as I intend to demonstrate in later chapters. The central theme of the Eden myth is the loss of innocence; and in this chapter I shall show how the concept of the innocent child developed in opposition to earlier, Puritanical thinking, and how this myth ultimately became debased. By considering this idea in roughly chronological terms, I

shall explore what children's literature tells us about what it meant to be a child in the appropriate era.

2.1. Historical context

The initial inspiration behind this theme comes, I suggest, from the Romantic poets, in particular Wordsworth and Blake; and behind these is the philosophy of Rousseau. From this inspiration can be traced the development and ultimate corruption of the image of the child as the Innocent, whether as representative of the Christ-Child or as a more generalised emblem of all that is pure. The garden in this instance can be viewed as the Garden of Eden, from which the sinner (that is, the experienced adult) is forever banished.

It is interesting to consider this imagery from a political aspect. It can be seen, I suggest, that the child in the garden in the following instances serves a purely adult purpose, on behalf of the writer and indeed of all adult society of its time. The child is here being manipulated and exploited and the image cannot be seen as serving the interest of any actual child. Many so-called children's 'classics' derive from the Victorian and Edwardian periods – and are notable for their tone of nostalgia (Carpenter, 1985, Preface, and Wullschläger, 1995, p.3) – and even those originally intended for children are probably prized more by adults than by children nowadays (for instance, the *Alice* books and *Peter Pan*), although one may assume that they were once popular with children. Reynolds (1994, p.17) remarks:

‘That the *fin de siècle* nostalgia for childhood must be understood to be an *adult* preoccupation (most children at any time are only too anxious to grow up) is evident in that it is in books originally written for adult audiences that the fantasy of defying or controlling time (or the effects of maturity) first manifests itself.’

I am, however, assuming that these texts were originally intended to be read by or to children, and that they have been read by children from first publication up until the present day: and that child readers have therefore been exposed to whatever subtexts these books carry.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the garden was frequently employed as a symbol of Eden before the Fall, in literature for both adults and children, following the tradition of Milton: the child was seen as inhabiting a cultural and spiritual ‘Paradise Lost’ that was inaccessible to the adult, simply by virtue of his or her age and experience. Dusienerre (1997) quotes Traherne (c.1637-1674) – ‘Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world, than I when I was child’ (exact date unknown – published 1908) – to show how long the notion of childhood’s significance has been current; Wulfschläger too (1995) situates the origins of this notion far back in Western literature and culture, while crediting

Wordsworth and his contemporaries with reintroducing it as a persuasive societal influence in a time of upheaval:

‘The symbolic association between childhood, innocence and regeneration is age-old, lying at the heart of the New Testament and of Christian thought; Christians worship their god as a new-born baby, children are emblems of purity and faith in Shakespeare and Dante, and important images for mystical writers such as Thomas Traherne. But the nineteenth century, taking on the Romantic interpretation of Blake and Wordsworth and the focus on nature, transformed the image by relating it specifically to contemporary society and morality ... The Romantic view of childhood as a privileged and seminal state connected with both spiritual redemption and the natural world, was inherited from the French philosopher Rousseau’s concept of man as a “noble savage” and set out by Wordsworth in his ode to youth ...’

(p.17)

Cox remarks (1996, p.79-80) on possible socio-economic reasons for the emergence of the ‘innocent’ child:

‘the educated classes at the end of the eighteenth century ... had more than Rousseau to prompt them to such [anxious] thoughts. The theoretical opposition he had formulated between uncorrupted nature and polluted civilisation had become, it seemed, a reality. It was to be an anxiety, too, that

grew through the early decades of the nineteenth century, as the middle classes slowly withdrew themselves and their children from the economic frontline and retreated behind the hedge, the shrubbery and the lawn into their suburban bunkers.'

This last sentence reflects a significant theme of Chapter 4 of the present study; but serves here to emphasise the social roots of the Romantic revolution. Cox also, very importantly, stresses the significance of the Romantic child and its powerful – and insidious – legacy that is influential up to the present day. I quote at length because this notion of the cultural 'myth' is so central to my thinking:

'... the intellectual and cultural maelstrom of the nineteenth century caused a *struggle* about the nature of childhood, which was to *infiltrate* not only the everyday domestic scene, but also the public intellectual, literary and cultural life of the Victorian middle class ...

... Romanticism, as a cultural movement, must have a critical place in any discussion of childhood, not only because it *shaped* so many of our still powerful conceptions and, indeed, deepest feelings about children and about parenting, but also because, at the domestic and at the political level, it acquired its *force* in opposition not only to the growth of urban

industrialisation, but in opposition to the way in which religious evangelism sought to *shape* child-rearing in the new industrialised society.'

(p.20, my italics)

Romanticism, then, was a political theory just as much as the old Puritanism, and one must be aware of its constraints and possible attempts to manipulate the image of the child, the more so because it is still so current today, and expresses what Nodelman (1996, p.67) calls 'obviousnesses'.

Coveney, too, acknowledges Wordsworth's influence in defining 'the child', in particular the centrality of his famous 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1807): 'The Ode became undoubtedly one of the central references for the whole nineteenth century in its attitude to the child. It is indeed of the utmost significance that the most intense emotion of the poem is one of regretful loss' (1957, p.80). Wordsworth's notion, related to Plato's thinking in the *Meno* dialogue, is that some quality of spirituality, present at birth, diminishes as the infant progresses through childhood and puberty into maturity. He believes, as is clear from the 'Ode', that babies possess at birth a mystical awareness of what he variously calls 'glory', 'bliss', 'something that is gone', 'the dream'; as one grows and ages the memory of this gradually recedes:

‘Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
But He
Beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily further from the east
Must travel, still is Nature’s Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.’

Ang (2000) points out the constricting nature of the imagery here; from the ‘Heaven’ of infancy the growing and developing human being is forced into the enclosure of the metaphorical prison-house. This is an unavoidably melancholy notion, since childhood cannot be prolonged; as Ang remarks, ‘The child is not so much freed to grow up as reluctantly resigned into the hands of the inevitable. There is a narrowing rather than widening of horizons’ (p.28): but the ‘Ode’ is certainly not without optimism. Wordsworth does acknowledge some vestige of ‘childness’ (Hollindale, 1997) in the imaginative adult:

‘O joy! That in our embers
Is *something* that doth live,
That nature *yet* remembers
What was so fugitive! ...
... those first affections,
Those *shadowy* recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are *yet* the fountain light of *all our day*,
Are *yet* a master light of *all our seeing* ...’
‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’ (my italics)

Coveney (1957) stresses this optimism in Wordsworth and makes an explicit link between Wordsworth’s concept that ‘The child is father to the man’ and the crucial significance of early experience in the theories of Freud. Coveney suggests that the great Romantic poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake) attempted through poetry what modern psychoanalysis in its way attempts through exploration of the psyche: the integration of the human personality (pp.240-241). They sought this integration by emphasising and exploring the close relationship between adult and child consciousness and by stressing the essential continuity and unity of all human experience (a theme to which I will return in Chapter 5). Coveney is adamant (p.33) that Wordsworth experiences no ‘morbid involvement’ with childhood as do some subsequent writers, but that the figure of the child is the symbol for the ‘subjective

investigation of the Self (p.32)’ – much as Freud interprets the figure of the child in dreams. However, as Ang says (p.29), fairly or not, the ‘Ode’ has often been read as a lament for the loss of childhood rather than an expression of the continuity of life, and as such has been deeply influential: ‘The child of the “Ode” and the tone of regret for a lost innocence and sunlit happiness was to mould much of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature.’ Dusienerre reminds us (p.14) that for Wordsworth childhood was ‘both real and symbolic, both experience and myth’: that is, while idealising childhood, the poet still grounds his vision in ‘reality’. However, one can plainly trace through literary chronology the gradual distortion of Wordsworthian Romanticism to reflect instead an overt preference for the state of childhood, and I will consider this towards the end of this chapter.

2.2. The child made perfect

One consequence of the Romantic view of childhood was that many popular writers for children turned, with apparent relief, from the historical idea of children as ‘limbs of Satan’ that had been propagated initially by the Puritans (Avery, 1989, p.104; Ang, 2000, pp.22-24). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the fashion for seeing the ‘innocence’ in the child was sometimes taken to extremes, and, while Wordsworth’s child was recognisably imperfect and ‘realistic’, other fictional children were created who were impossibly perfect. Drawing on the theme of original sin, but this time from the assumption that children remained innocent until adolescence, some authors had their

child characters gently teach adults the errors of their ways. Perhaps the ultimate expression of this glorification of childhood innocence was the number of fictional children who – reflecting the hard realities of the time – died prematurely but who, less plausibly, made beautiful deaths, leaving their usually rather unsatisfactory lives to go willingly to heaven. Ang (pp.30-31) talks at length of the ‘reforming child’ who, as a symbol of innocence, is exploited as an example to the sinful adult, often dying young as an illustration of childhood innocence translated directly to heaven.

Two texts, ostensibly written for children, which link this preoccupation with death with the idea of Eden, are Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies* (1863) and George MacDonald’s *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871). Both texts feature garden-like paradises, but in each the ‘perfect place’ is more akin to Purgatory, despite both authors’ Anglicanism. Both Kingsley and MacDonald seem conscious of the ‘original sin’ of their boy protagonists: and it is only after undergoing the purgatorial process that Tom and Diamond can become fully-fledged Romantic children. In this it may be possible to discern the remnants of the notion of the ‘limb of Satan’ – although most readers nowadays, I suggest, would find Tom a realistically naughty character, and Diamond an impossible paragon. Certainly both authors have something to say to their readership about the perfectability of the soul (McGillis, 1991, p.154).

Carpenter (1985, p.37) sees Kingsley as 'the first writer in England, perhaps the first in the world with the exception of Hans Andersen, to discover that a children's book can be the perfect vehicle for an adult's most personal and private concerns.' Unfortunately for Kingsley's reputation, he was not able, as Carroll was a few years later, to sublimate these concerns and shape them into a fully satisfying work of art. *The Water Babies* is heavily overburdened with its author's unassimilated obsessions, as is MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*.

As remarked above, Ang has emphasised the significance of Wordsworth as a 'shaping factor' in later children's literature. She quotes Victor Watson's observation (pp.25-6) that the epigraphs to the chapters of *The Water Babies* are largely derived from the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge, with the addition of two from Longfellow and one from Spencer (*sic*). Ang interprets this as an attempt 'to convey the spontaneity and liberty of the Wordsworthian spirit of childhood through the liquid medium in which ... Tom moves' (p.25).

Critics seem to agree that Tom's immersion into the stream, which begins his long journey via the river to the open sea, represents his death and thus his escape from the dreadful life of a child chimney sweep (Carpenter and Prichard, p.561; Townsend, 1965, p.74). Kingsley writes of the instant of death not only as a relief from life, but as a delicious moment of oblivion:

‘ ... he was so hot and thirsty, and longed so to be clean for once, that he tumbled himself as quick as he could into the clear, cool stream.

And he had not been in it two minutes before he fell fast asleep, into the quietest, sunniest, cosiest sleep that ever he had in his life; and he dreamt about the green meadows by which he had walked that morning, and the tall elm trees, and the sleeping cows; and after that he dreamt of nothing at all.’

(The Water Babies, p.39)

Manlove (1999) claims that Kingsley (an Anglican priest) ‘denies the finality of hell and appropriates for Anglicanism the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory’ (p.64), which is represented in this text as a journey. Coveney (1957) sees this as evidence of Kingsley’s ‘Anglican compassion for human nature’ (p.103). Presumably, in an age when heaven and hell were generally believed in, the notion of the second chance, a spell in purgatory, might appear a more compassionate one than it seems now. According to Manlove, the ‘marine purgatory’ has the purpose and eventual effect of making Tom fit to ‘go home’ with Ellie to heaven, or ‘St. Brandon’s Isle’:

‘The first thing which Tom saw was the black cedars, high and sharp against the rosy dawn; and St. Brandon’s Isle reflected double in the still broad silver sea. The wind sang softly in the cedars, and the water sang among the caves; the sea-birds sang as they streamed out into the ocean, and the land-birds as

they built among the boughs ... But among all the songs one came across the water more sweet and clear than all; for it was the song of a young girl's voice... And as Tom neared the island, there sat upon a rock the most graceful creature that ever was seen ... and behold it was Ellie.'

(pp.201-202)

The language of this passage is quasi-Biblical and perhaps reminiscent of the beginning of Genesis. It emphasises the beauty of the scene where the land meets the water, and where the now perfected Adam-figure meets Eve. Unlike the stream/river, this is clearly Eden. It is a place that is quite separate from the world and certainly in complete contrast to the earthly world formerly inhabited by Tom. There is no hope held out in *The Water Babies*, at last for the poor child, of ever attaining anything resembling heaven on earth – despite Kingsley's social conscience and Chartist leanings he is more concerned with Tom's soul than his body. In fact, one surmises that Kingsley is both a descendent of the believers in original sin, and a precursor of some later, morbid authors who appear to find death preferable to adulthood and thus sin. Wullschläger (1995, p.26) remarks that *The Water Babies* is 'a tale riddled with images of sexual guilt and contamination' which are generally expressed through the imagery of cold water. I regard the text as a clear expression of its author's own personal preoccupations with regard to sexuality, childhood and adulthood. Children seem to need to be made clean – inside and out – and adults are either bullying, blustering males or desexed, nurturing mothers.

Diamond, the child hero of *At the Back of the North Wind*, also encounters a nurturing mother but is more fortunate than Tom in the kindly men he meets. He visits a similar Eden', 'the back of the North Wind', quite early in the book – Carpenter and Prichard (see also Carpenter, 1985, p.74) identify it at this point in the narrative as purgatory. Knoepfmacher (1988) describes it as, variously, 'limbo' (p.241), the 'realm of death' (p.243) and the internalised 'good place' (p.249), identifiable as the place sought by so many writers of the time according to Carpenter (1985, p.13). It is clearly related to a garden: although there is something artificial and dream-like about it:

‘ “It is North Wind on her doorstep,” said Diamond joyfully, and hurried on ... He was sure it was North Wind, but he thought she must be dead at last. Her face was as white as the snow, her eyes were as blue as the air in the ice-cave, and her hair hung down like icicles ... When he came to himself after he fell, he found himself at the back of the north wind ... there was plenty of a certain still rayless light. Where it came from he never found out; but he thought it belonged to the country itself. Sometimes he thought it came out of the flowers, which were very bright, but had no strong colour. He said the river ... flowed not only through, but over grass: its channel, instead of being rock, stones, pebbles, sand, or anything else, was of pure meadow grass, not over long. He insisted that if it did not sing tunes in people’s ears, it sang tunes in their heads ...’

(At the Back of the North Wind, p.94, pp.98-99)

Later in the book three dreams are described, all of which have garden-like, idyllic settings and which are, according to Knoepfmacher (1988), fantasies of ‘origins’ (p.254) or of prenatal Edens (p.261). The various versions of paradise in this text are all derived from Wordsworth’s images in the ‘Ode’, according to Knoepfmacher (p.247), who explicitly connects MacDonald’s obsessive desire to return to his mother’s womb with Wordsworth’s notions about birth:

‘By recrossing this same threshold seven days later, Diamond undergoes a second birth. He now resembles the radiant boy in Wordsworth’s “Intimations” ode, who, after entering the world “trailing clouds of glory” can dimly remember an effulgence in moments of “joy”.’

Following this strange experience Diamond is transformed from a solitary and rather strange child into a paragon: the rest of the novel is concerned with his successful attempts to help the adults in his world apparently by nothing more than example and song. Among other acts, he supports his parents through unemployment and the birth of a new baby, and reforms an alcoholic, wife-beating neighbour. Eventually, having somewhat alienated (and irritated) the other children in the story by his apparent simple-mindedness, he dies and is translated to the back of the north wind – now, presumably, heaven. While I cannot really argue with Hunt’s (1994a) summing-up of

the novel as 'a grossly sentimental, adult-voiced, perfect-child, curious mixture of social realism and a theology convoluted with sexuality' (p.76), I nonetheless find Diamond's deathbed scene (the book's final paragraph) rather moving:

'I walked up the winding stair, and entered his room. A lovely figure, as white and almost as clear as alabaster, was lying on the bed. I saw at once how it was. They thought he was dead. I knew that he had gone to the back of the north wind.'

(p.332)

Again, as in *The Water Babies*, the ideal child is innocent, both of wrongdoing and of inappropriate sexual feelings. It is not clear why Diamond has to be purified by his trip to Purgatory: unlike the engagingly mischievous Tom, he begins the book as faultless as when he leaves it. As in Kingsley's case, one may infer authorial ambivalence about sexuality, childhood and adulthood.

Both Kingsley and MacDonald, then, experienced emotional turmoil in the area of sexuality and maturity. They both wrote novels that celebrated their main protagonists' innocence while denying them the right to behave like 'real' children. Tom and Diamond suffer death rather than the erosion of that innocence. In my opinion, both writers exemplify de Mause's 'projective reaction' of adults to children, discussed by Cunningham (1995, p.8) in which 'adults use children as a

vehicle for the projection of their own unconscious, that is the children become the repository of all the adults' unacknowledged bad feelings and fears about themselves'. I suggest that virtually all the texts considered in this chapter express this reaction; and that they do it with the help of the garden as setting and symbol.

2.3. The political exploitation of the perfect child

Both Tom and Diamond are required to undergo the journey to purgatory before reaching heaven, and both earn their living as manual workers. MacDonald does not make explicit the link between this necessity for spiritual cleansing and Diamond's station in life, and presents no contrasting child character with whom to compare him. However, Tom is very clearly contrasted with Ellie, the squire's daughter. Unlike her, he needs to be 'cleansed' in order to reach heaven. One wonders about Kingsley's prejudices and motivation for this, as Tom's 'sins' seem to consist merely of his justifiable response to the brutality he endures, coupled with his physical filth. In contrast, the innocently sleeping, and dazzlingly 'white' Ellie arrives directly at St. Brandon's Isle, without the necessity of the journey through purgatory. We hear clearly the voice of the preacher in the scene set in Ellie's bedroom, and perhaps we are to surmise that Ellie is 'saved' while Tom is an ignorant heathen, in need of baptism (behind him stands the figure of the Puritan unredeemed child). This is borne out by the juxtaposition of the description of her picture of 'a man nailed to a cross' with the detailed account of her washing facilities:

'the next thing he saw, and that ... puzzled him, was a washing-stand, with ewers and basins, and soap and brushes, and towels; and a large bath, full of clean water - what a heap of things all for washing! "She must be a very dirty lady," thought Tom ... "to want as much scrubbing as all that." '

(*The Water Babies*, p.20)

This may also be unwitting class-consciousness on Kingsley's part. In his enthusiasm for the pristine Ellie he makes no reference to her great good fortune in having been born not only into a Christian family but into one wealthy enough to be able to provide the array of 'ewers and basins' (and indeed of servants to do the dirty work).

In portraying Tom as he does, Kingsley betrays his typically Victorian-bourgeois fear of the lower classes and anxiety to maintain the *status quo* (which protected the interests of children like Ellie at the expense of those like Tom). Leeson (1985, p.85) accuses Kingsley of believing that 'the poor need to be redeemed and cleansed ready to enter paradise alongside the already clean and respectable'; while I agree with Leeson, I would guess that this was a barely conscious assumption on Kingsley's part, what Nodelman (1996a, pp.67-8) calls 'an obviousness' of the time. Cox (p.82) highlights the gradual erosion of romanticism by practical concern, in some quarters at least: ' ... the conception of the child as noble savage changed as the reality of urban poverty and ignorance was brought to light.' It is, of course perfectly possible

that some, perhaps including Kingsley, simply found this reality unattractive as well as pitiful.

It may seem strange and even offensive to the modern reader that Kingsley compensates his child-hero for his dreadful life as a chimney-sweep by dispatching him to Purgatory and thence to Heaven. More recently, such a text would almost certainly have focussed far more specifically on the causes and possible relief of Tom's suffering: but Kingsley was a man of his time. In fact, as Carpenter (1985, pp. 31-34) outlines, Kingsley was indeed very much exercised by the sufferings of the poor but, as an increasingly conservative Anglican priest he suggested that the remedy lay in spiritual and personal, rather than social, reform. It might be argued that the enduring legacy of *The Water Babies* is its early portrayal of Tom the sweep (arguably the best-remembered episode) and that this vivid picture may well have helped to reform child labour laws. However, I am concerned here with reading the possible socio-cultural meanings implicit in texts rather than in assessing their possible long-term effects. The subsequent treatment of Tom suggests, to me, the significance to Kingsley of the process of spiritual purification. Like many of his contemporaries, Kingsley makes use of the image of the child, perhaps for the benefit of real, contemporaneous children – as he sees it – but not in a way which the present reader would judge advantageous to the cause of the child. The message for and about childhood that I take from *The Water Babies* is that the spiritually and

physically clean child, perhaps affected by pain and even, temporarily, by degradation, but never sinful (either in terms of wickedness or of sex) is the ideal.

This division of children into either perfect or wicked, while probably a legacy from earlier, Puritanical notions confused with Romantic ones, is an expression of psychological as well as socio-economic anxiety. Rose (1984) talks of the 'colonising' of the child as a way of denying actual children any genuine voice or autonomy. I think a parallel may be drawn between this notion and romantic or 'courtly' notions about women which were also dominant in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; while professing the purity and superiority of those they idealised, the dominant group, whether men or all adults, were able to restrict or 'enclose' (to use Ang's word) the objects of their veneration and deny them the human freedom to be themselves. Ang (2000) argues that, while the Romantic movement encouraged a more positive view of childhood than that espoused by the Puritans, 'of the young limbs of Satan, hell-bound unless saved through confession and repentance' (p.38), that the revolutionary view 'was, ultimately, one equally constricted, albeit by innocence, and thus as unfit to represent the needs and the real nature of the child' (p.25).

I suggest that it was in the interests of adults of the time to control images of childhood because the nature of adulthood was being questioned. The notion of the innocent child was posited against that of the increasingly informed and sophisticated

adult world – which some regarded as corrupt. Warner (1994, p.42) expresses the essential selfishness and unreasonableness of the adult love of childhood:

‘Grown ups want them to stay like that for their sakes, not the children’s, and they want children to be simple enough to believe in fairies too, again, for humanity’s sake on the whole, to prove something against the evidence.

Contemporary child mythology enshrines children to meet adult desires and dreams, including Romantic and Surrealist yearnings to live through the imagination, with unfettered, unrepressed fantasy; in turn, this presupposes that the child has access to a form of desirable wisdom, of potent innocence which cannot tell pretend from real, and sex from sexlessness, a kind of supernatural irrationality.’

Perhaps this is the essential ‘impossibility’ of children’s fiction: that real children are transformed into impossible beings that contradict nature: wise yet innocent, unrepressed yet sexless and so on. These are also, of course, the characteristics of the ‘Noble Savage’ and perhaps of other subservient groups that tend to be referred to in cliché.

I shall explore below some possible reasons why the post-Romantics were apparently so uncomfortable with adulthood.

2.4. Banishment from the garden: the unworthy adult

As Rose (p.50) suggests, the concept of the young child's innocence (in the sense of 'sinlessness') seems to demand that the converse be true; that the adult is, relatively, sinful and corrupt. This is borne out by the presentation in several children's texts of deeply unpleasant adults: although of course it must be remembered that where this is humorously or satirically done it may be seen as subversion, which is a guaranteed way of amusing the child reader.

Although Alice (1865 and 1871) is not idealised as are many of her literary contemporaries and successors (Clark, 1985, p.46), she is still regarded by her creators and by most commentators as innately superior to the grotesque 'adult' characters she encounters (Hunt, 1994a, p.79), since, among other things, the two *Alice* books are satires on government, educational practice and other contemporary adult structures. While the portrayal of Alice herself does no disservice to the image of the real child, Carroll's treatment of the adult betrays his preference for the child – or at least *this* child – over the adult world (Knoepflmacher, 1988, p.190, Coveney, 1957, p.246). Alice may not be a typical 'Romantic' child, but she does however move among a world of 'mad adults' (Hunt, 1994a, p.79) and is prized by Carroll (and the reader) because of her childlike straightforwardness and candour. Alice herself is, to my eyes, an endearing mixture of ignorance and knowingness, subject to misunderstandings and conceit, following the teachings of her middle-class upbringing somewhat blindly, and displaying occasional kindness and generosity; in

most ways, in fact, probably very like any child of her time and class. She has the faults of the 'real' child but she lacks the extreme selfishness and often gratuitous cruelty shown in abundance by the 'adult' characters. When Alice finally manages to enter the rose-garden she meets the Queen of Hearts, the extreme example of adult arbitrariness in the management of power, compared with whom Alice herself is shown to be cool and reasonable. There is a clear dichotomy between the ignorant and well-meaning (in other words, innocent) child and the ignorant but contrastingly arrogant adult. From this evidence Carroll appears to believe that adults, insofar as they must exist at all, should be as much as possible like children. Alice's inability to enter the rose garden is due to her temporarily increased size: Hunt (1994a, p.79) judges this to be a metaphor for 'the confusion of growing up, changing size and identity, and coming to terms with self and death and sexuality', and Briggs and Butts (Hunt, 1995) suggests confusion between the child's desires and those of the regressive adult. They point out that, although Alice is harried and bullied when small, 'this vulnerable state also confers entry into the magic rose garden, the garden of lost delight [from Carroll/Dodgson's perspective, that is]. The child's desire to grow up and stabilize her relation to the world about her here encounters the adult's desire to re-enter the secret world of childhood, a desire to "go small" ...'(p.142). My own reading (confirmed by recent re-readings of the text) is that the adult's desires predominate over the fictional child's – as they do in *The Water Babies*, and that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* exemplifies the preoccupation of the period

with adult ambivalence about childhood rather than the position of children themselves.

C.S. Lewis, in his evocation of Eden in *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), surely an old-fashioned book, even for its time (it deliberately evokes Nesbit), also shows the adult presence in the garden as the serpent in Paradise, but this time as knowledge and sophistication rather than ignorance and irrationality. Digory is sent by Aslan the lion to fetch an apple, from whose seed is to grow a tree with the power to keep the Witch out of the newly created land of Narnia. Digory is tempted to take another apple in order to heal his terminally ill mother; the Witch is presented here as both knowing and seductive:

‘She was just throwing away the core of an apple which she had eaten. The juice was darker than you would expect and had made a horrid stain around her mouth ... he began to see that there might be some sense in that last line about getting your heart’s desire and getting despair along with it. For the Witch looked stronger and prouder than ever, and even, in a way, triumphant: but her face was deadly white, white as salt ... “Foolish boy,” said the Witch “... If you do not stop and listen to me now, you will miss some knowledge that would have made you happy all your life ... do you know what that fruit is? I will tell you. It is the apple of youth, the apple of life. I know, for I have

tasted it; and I feel already such changes in myself that I know I shall never grow old or die. Eat it, Boy, eat it: and you and I will both live forever ...”

(The Magician's Nephew, p.149-50)

This is an explicit rendering of Genesis, with the difference that the woman herself is the corrupt temptress, and the virtuous child manages to resist her unpleasant adult wiles. There is also a disturbing hint of the mature woman trying to seduce the young boy in the more usual, sexual, sense, in that final ‘You and I ...’ and which may convey some of the author’s ambivalent feeling about women. Interestingly, the same Witch is rendered as a literal serpent in *The Silver Chair* (1953), in which she murders Prince Rilian’s mother. Perhaps the serpent here also represents the cancer which killed Lewis’s mother, and which Digory’s mother survives, thanks to the apple which Aslan, after all, gives him. The serpent is described as ‘great, shining, and as green as poison’ (*The Silver Chair*, p.16) and Rilian later gets his revenge, described rather horribly:

‘The Prince caught the creature’s neck in his left hand, trying to squeeze it till it choked ... All three blows fell at once ... Even that did not kill, though it began to loosen its hold on Rilian’s legs and chest. With repeated blows they hacked off its head. The horrible thing went on coiling and moving like a bit of wire long after it had died; and the floor, as you can imagine, was a nasty mess ... “I am glad, gentlemen, that the foul Witch took to her serpent form at

the last. It would not have suited well either with my heart nor with my honour to have slain a woman” ’

(The Silver Chair, p.158-9)

Even when avenging his mother’s gratuitous murder, Lewis’s character is still obliged to maintain chivalrous codes, as if by refusing to kill a woman he can deny her power. Holbrook (1973) has explored the *Narnia* series in Freudian and Kleinian terms and concludes that the witch – in all her incarnations – symbolises ‘the all-bad, all-hate mother we were capable of phantasying as an infant’, since the mother ‘has not been humanised by [Lewis], as a mother normally is, over the long years of knowing her as a child ... This explains the strange malignancy in this phantom woman’ (p.7). Having lost his actual mother very early in his life, Lewis, through the processes known in psychoanalysis as ‘splitting’ and ‘projecting’, portrays Jadis, the Witch, as the ‘bad mother’, in opposition to the ‘good mother’ on the sick bed. This also explains the preoccupation with powerful women and mothers in his books.

Having introduced into his version of Eden an evil woman who is also manifested as a snake, Lewis ensures that the virtuous young hero resists her offer of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Conversely, in Hans Andersen’s story *The Garden of Paradise* (1838) the Prince succumbs very quickly to temptation because the Fairy of the Garden resembles his lost mother:

‘He felt such joy as he had never known before; he saw the background of the hall opening where the Tree of Knowledge stood in a radiancy which blinded him. The song proceeding from it was soft and lovely, like his mother’s voice ... Then the Fairy beckoned to him and said so tenderly, “Come with me,” that he rushed towards her, forgetting his promise, forgetting everything on the very first evening that she smiled and beckoned to him ... The cold rain fell on his face, and the sharp wind blew around his head, and at last his memory came back. “What have I done?” he sighed. “I have sinned like Adam, sinned so heavily that Paradise has sunk low beneath the earth!” ’

(pp.166-167)

The Prince’s sin is ostensibly that of disobedience, since he promised the Fairy he would not kiss her. She is clearly identified with his mother, which suggests the possibility of incestuous feelings. Certainly he is driven by sexual passion, for which he is condemned; Andersen seems to be suggesting, here as elsewhere (for instance, in *The Little Mermaid*, 1837), that such urges are sinful and earn expulsion from Eden. Simply by having the desires of a fully mature man – which lead him to disobey pointless and gratuitous instructions – the Prince forfeits the right to remain in the garden. Roger Sale (1978, p.25) opines that this kind of thinking spoils Andersen’s fairy tales – of course, traditional folk and fairy tales contain morals, but generally of a more simplistic and robust type – and also hints at a corruption of

Romanticism that may be seen to reach its apotheosis in *Peter Pan* (1911): he remarks that Andersen the writer

‘became so imbued with a faint and faintly self-pitying Romanticism that even his best stories are distorted with authorial self-concern and flecked with satire and moralising.’

Thus the adult, in a certain type of late-Victorian fiction, is seen as a ‘fallen’ being, inferior to the child. The child is innocent; the adult experienced. The child is pure; the adult defiled. Childlike ignorance is a virtue; adult experience a vice. The child is seen as existing at an earlier and therefore *better* stage of life than the adult, as if the two belonged to different species.

Another, later, writer who subscribes to this myth is Oscar Wilde, who shows in his fairy tales a nostalgic sentimentality about children together with a willingness to exploit them as symbols. This is perhaps symptomatic of a man who found adult life particularly difficult. In his story *The Selfish Giant* (1888), the giant’s most beloved child is in fact the Christ-Child and is therefore symbolic of purity and holiness; his moving words to the giant directly equate the garden with Heaven:

‘And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, “You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise.”’

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.'

(p.23)

Here, the child's words evoke those of Christ on the cross, to the robber: ' "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" ' (Luke 23:43, RSV). Added to the biblical echo, the virginal connotations of 'white blossoms' suggest the innocence and holiness of all the children. The 'Child' in this case is never meant to be a real child at all; but even the other children are hardly representative. They seem to symbolise the freedom of childhood in their innocent 'playing', which includes no disagreement or other naughtiness, and are posited against the Giant's (or perhaps adult world's) nastiness and sophistication in putting up a sign – 'TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED'.

I am powerfully struck by the wistful tone of Wilde's stories for children, and am convinced that he wrote them as much for himself as for any child reader, using them as a form of what later generations would term therapy. His longing for a long-lost idealised childhood stands out from the page:

'It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that

in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. “How happy we are here!” they cried to each other ... The poor children now had nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high walls when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. “How happy we were there!” they said to each other. Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter.’

(pp.16-17)

The simple literary style here together with the description of the idyllic paradise on earth puts this in the allegorical tradition of *The Romance of the Rose* (c.1368), and there are of course unmistakable echoes of Genesis. Most obvious to me, however, is the echo of Andersen, with its gentle simplicity and almost palpable poignancy. These children have been cast out of Eden, not by their own misdemeanours, but by the selfishness of the huge Giant/adult. Unlike real children, but like the adult with the benefit of hindsight, they first appreciate, and then regret, their lost happiness.

2.5. The psychological exploitation of childhood

While all the above texts picture gardens which are corrupted by, or inaccessible to, the adult, it would appear that Carroll, at least, believes that the adult can imaginatively enter the garden again; not just by remembering childhood but by actively rejecting adulthood; and here I think is the point at which Wordsworth's enlightened empathy towards childhood and the child becomes something more self-indulgent and unhealthy.

‘ ... she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains, but she could not even get her head through the doorway; “and even if my head would go through,” thought poor Alice, “it would be of very little use without my shoulders. Oh, how I wish I could shut up like a telescope! I think I could, if I only knew how to begin.” ’

(pp.7-8)

T.S. Eliot acknowledges his debt to this passage in the opening lines of ‘Burnt Norton’ (Dusinberre, 1987, p.180):

'Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.'

(in *Four Quartets*, 1959)

Eliot's lines reproduce the poignancy of Carroll's; but are in one important respect very different. While Eliot regrets the lost opportunities that he failed to take in childhood, he is not, I suggest, regretting that childhood has given way to maturity *per se* (Coveney, p.35). While he nostalgically acknowledges the importance of childhood, he does not therefore echo Carroll's

'I'd give all wealth that years have piled,
The slow result of Life's decay,
To be once more a little child
For one bright summer-day.'
'Solitude' (1853)

It is uncomfortably clear that Carroll desperately wants to become a child again: Manlove remarks (p.104) that 'Alice's attempt to make herself small enough to enter the happy garden [can be viewed as] ... a longed-for journey back to the womb.' Briggs (1995) puts this longing into the literary context of the time: 'For Carroll, by

implication, and for later writers more explicitly, the unattainable rose garden was a place of desire: it held out the possibility of recovering the lost self, and promised ... spiritual wholeness and insight' (pp.167-168). As this remark suggests, Carroll's ideal of integration was not far removed from that of Freud: but this desire appears to have become distinctly unstable within fifty years of the publication of the *Alice* books. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Wordsworthian concept of the significance of childhood throughout life had become debased into the unwholesome 'cult of the child' (Coveney, 1957, pp.33 and 69).

I believe it is true to say that some of the most successful writers for children – both in their lifetimes and later as the authors of 'classics', as Wullschläger has demonstrated – have had difficulty in accepting the realities of adult life. Some writers, as is well documented, expressed in their writing their obsessive longing for the state of childhood and (as above demonstrated) their commensurate distaste for adulthood. They became the authors of stories that express a longing to escape somehow back into their own childhood, or at least into an idealised childhood. On occasion, gardens or quasi-gardens in children's literature represent for their authors a strong urge to escape from maturity, an urge which in some cases affected their daily lives. Part of the appeal of Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), for instance, must be the setting: the Neverland is a magical island crammed with every kind of exciting character any child could desire, down to the mermaids in the lagoon. Barrie says himself that the Neverland in the story is composed of the elements of the children's

fantasies; and while I suspect he perceives very accurately the thoughts of children – especially boys – his thoughts about childhood manage to sentimentalise the ‘Ode’:

‘Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you ... but catch them trying to draw a map of a child’s mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time. There are zigzag lines on it ... and these are probably roads in the island; for the Neverland is always more or less an island ... John’s, for instance, had a lagoon with flamingoes (*sic*) flying over it at which John was shooting, while Michael, who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over it ... On these magic shores children at play are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more.’

(Peter Pan, pp.19-20)

It is rather like a contemporary theme park. There is no possibility of boredom, since adventure follows adventure, and it represents the fulfilment of a child’s dreams of omnipotence on a grand scale (the fact that, in the play, Mr. Darling and Captain Hook are traditionally played by the same actor is rather revealing in a Freudian sense, as well as biographically: Wullschläger (p.129) indicates that both characters are based on Arthur Llewelyn Davies, whose wife and sons Barrie adored; and the possible Oedipal significance of identifying the father and the villain is obvious).

While this ensures the story's popularity, it may be explained by Barrie's own desperation to escape from adulthood, with which he could not cope.

Wullschläger draws attention to another adult-serving aspect of the myth of childhood innocence which is very far from recognising the child's real and individual nature, pointing out that Wordsworth's mystical view of the child, transformed and sentimentalised by Victorian morality, became combined with the emerging interest in childhood as a discrete stage to produce 'a powerful fantasy regarding children which adults worked out in response to their own hopes, fears and doubts about themselves' (p.13) – and which had little or nothing to do with *real children*. Rose asserts that the Romantic view of the child is in fact the exploitation (or 'colonisation') of the child:

' ... what we have been given ... is a glorification of the child. This suggests not only a refusal to acknowledge difficulties and contradictions in relation to childhood: it implies that we *use* the image of the child to deny those same difficulties in relation to ourselves'

(1984, p.8)

Dusinberre suggests that the child as symbol, and therefore real children themselves, were exploited by this cult of childhood: ' "Children became the ideal symbol of their elders' glutinous yearning for purity" ' (quoting from Peter Green: *Kenneth Grahame*,

1859-1932, London: 1959). Similarly, Ang (p.38), while appreciating the effect of Romanticism in substituting a 'more positive view of childhood' for the Puritan notion of the 'young limb of Satan', also recognises that the Romantic image of childhood 'held within it the seeds of a decadent sentimentality that was ultimately to weaken the child as symbol' – and not just as symbol. As Ang continues (p.38), 'the primary qualities that defined the Romantic child – innocence and goodness – were qualities which unfortunately rendered the child passive and unable to fight back effectively.' The cause of 'real' children's rights was hampered by this attitude (Reynolds, p.13, Coveney, p.33 and p.291).

Adult writers in the Victorian era, I suggest, exploited the sentimentality about children that was then current, even desirable, for their own psychological ends. Before Freud began to encourage exploration of the psyche and the unconscious, before many people were probably aware of an unconscious, certain desires and fears could most safely be expressed through the medium of literature written – ostensibly – for children. Briggs also shows how this fantasy of childhood served adults' needs, explaining that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, marriage had begun to take on the idealised role of 'source of spiritual sustenance', formerly provided by religion (also Coveney, p.301-302). As a result, the role of marriage as a context for sexual activity became increasingly a source of discomfort and anxiety to the Victorians:

'The figure of the child ... possessed the energizing animal spirits and impulsiveness associated with sexuality, while not yet being driven by it. In this respect, the child occupied an Eden before the fall that was puberty. The proper place for the child was in the lost playground – an Arcadia not yet touched by mortality, a past not yet burdened by the guilts of adult sexuality, Alice's rose garden that all might find and enter, if only via the little door of the imagination.'

(Briggs, 1995, p.167)

Reynolds (1994) advises us that 'one of the questions it is important to ask when reading fantasies written by adults for children is, "What is this saying about sexuality?"' (p.24); she continues:

'... it might be surprising to discover that a great deal of the most widely read and popular children's literature can be read as exploring the erotic fantasies and sexual discontents of its authors. In fact ... it seems to be precisely *because* childhood is presumed to be so innocent that so many writers have felt it safe to let their private fantasies find expression in writing for children.'

(p.24)

Reynolds (p.24) likens Victorian children's fantasy to a 'safe-house', while Wullschläger (p.27) refers to 'an unbuttoning of the psyche for men who felt

oppressed by Victorian propriety and restraint'. Both metaphors, interestingly, seem to me to have something of the furtive about them, as if it were impossible in Victorian times to achieve sexual freedom and openness.

It is likely that Carroll, at least, sublimated his sexual urges in his idealisation of little girls, quite unconsciously (Carpenter, 1985, Elwyn Jones & Gladstone, 1998). He would have been able to achieve this because the notion of child sexuality had not yet become acceptable – and I suspect that it is still unacceptable to many – although some adults obviously responded sexually to young children. According to Nodelman (1996a, p.82), Rose 'believes that the actual nature of childhood – particularly childhood sexuality – frightens adults.' If childhood is being 'used' as a construct behind which to hide from that which frightens us, and if sex is something that frightens us, then we must, logically, deny child sexuality (Nodelman, p.82). Reynolds claims that the Victorians needed 'a myth of childhood which is unthreatening and undisturbing' (p.23) – her tense suggests that this myth is still current. However, Nodelman reminds us that the price of this is a dehumanisation of the child: he paraphrases Kincaid as saying that

' ... we see being childlike as "a kind of purity, an absence and an incapacity, an impossibility to do ... Unencumbered by any necessary traits, the emptiness called a child can be constructed any way we like" [quoted from Kincaid, J. (1992) *Child-Loving: the Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*

London: Routledge]. We then present the images we have constructed to children in their literature, in order to persuade them that their lives actually are as we imagine them to be.'

(p.82)

In this context it is possibly significant that Carroll and Barrie and their imitators were close to a generation apart. Perhaps the longing for childhood innocence that began to be fashionable in Carroll's time contrasted with real children's awareness of their true selves to produce a level of guilt or discomfort at the inconsistency, thus propelling them into even more sentimentality about childhood when they themselves became parents.

2.6. The effect on society

In *An Easter Greeting* (published together with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), Carroll, with all his contempt for Victorian piety and sanctimoniousness, suggests that young children are closer to God than their elders:

'Do you think ... he does not also love to ... hear the merry voices of the children, as they roll among the hay? Surely their innocent laughter is as sweet in His ears as the grandest anthem that ever rolled up from the "dim religious light" of some solemn cathedral?'

The tone of this extract – cited by Coveney (p.244) as a ‘typical ‘fantasy of childhood’ – seems mawkish to contemporary ears; yet I for one am so steeped in the notion of childhood’s essential innocence (despite my experiences of childhood and of children) that remarks such as this by Rose (1984, p.50) are startling:

‘The opposition between the child and the adult ... between oral and written culture, between innocence and decay ... are structural oppositions in the strictest sense, in that each term only has meaning in relation to the one to which it is opposed. They do not reflect an essential truth about the child (although the way in which childhood attracts the idea of “essential truth” makes this very difficult to grasp): instead they produce a certain conception of childhood, which simply carries the weight of one half of the contradictions, which we experience in relation to ourselves.’

In other words, there is no logical or pragmatic justification for the idea that childhood is a discrete and in some way superior entity; the whole concept is a good example of what Watkins (1999) means when he talks about ‘myths’ which are first created and then made to appear ‘natural’ by an interested (usually dominant) party. I have already referred to possible reasons for the emergence of this ‘myth’ at this particular point in history; and I am interested to observe just how persuasive – and pervasive – it continued to be, throughout the twentieth century.

Nodelman (1996b) objects to the myth of childhood innocence not just on logical or conceptual grounds but on psychological grounds, citing those who cannot bear to grow away from what they perceive as an unavoidably superior state:

‘One of the ugly things the philosophy of the Romantic movement accomplished for us in its admiration of childlike qualities was the divorce of childhood from maturity ... [this] separates us from our past selves, and it makes children into strangers in our midst. Worst of all, it makes childhood, which inevitably passes, agonizingly enticing to us – somehow better than, realer than, the maturity we are stuck with. It forces us into a fruitless nostalgia – a lust for something we simply cannot have any more.’

(p.81)

Coveney, in contrast with Nodelman, argues that the great Romantic poets cannot be held responsible for what he regards as the later corruption of their philosophy. I have already referred to Coveney’s recognition of the similarity of the aims of the Romantics and the proponents of psychoanalysis, in their mutual desire to ‘establish a relation between childhood and adult consciousness, to assert the continuity, the unity of human experience’ (1957, p.240); he goes on to castigate the ‘cult of the child’, discerning ‘something detectably sick in the sensitive roots of English child fiction at the end of the [nineteenth] century’ (p.240).

Where Wordsworth used the natural landscape as a symbol of man's unity with the driving spirit of the universe, emphasising the child's immediate closeness to that landscape and to that spirit, other, later writers transplanted his palpable sense of longing for childhood into the more limited setting of the heavily symbolic garden. Coveney points out that, while the former contains 'nothing of intellectual retreat', later writers demonstrated 'the self-gratification of the affrighted, withdrawn "romantic"' (p.73).

While 'the inner child' is a contemporary psychological concept, it would seem that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the child became a separate entity from the adult, as if the two were not parts of a lifetime continuum. Wullschläger says of Carroll, Barrie, Grahame and Milne: 'Each was a boy who did not want to grow up, who remained in part always a child. Several lost parents early and had difficult childhoods; in fantasy they tried to recapture the perfect childhood they had never had. All were haunted by memories and the pastimes of youth' (p.5) – and all, of course created memorable gardens or garden-like settings for their stories of child-like worlds. They succeeded as artists not least because they were themselves 'born into a society which made a cult of childhood ... The great children's authors were men gripped personally by a longing for childhood, writing at a time when this sentiment had become a cultural phenomenon' (Wullschläger, p7).

The 'cult of childhood' ensured that the figure of the child became thoroughly sentimentalised; and the response to Barrie's *Peter Pan* represents perhaps the apotheosis of this process – although, to do Barrie credit, he, ironically, produced perhaps the most unsparingly accurate portrait of a child of his time, perhaps directly because of his otherwise disabling immaturity. Peter Pan is a far from romanticised character; he is utterly selfish, ruthless, greedy and thoughtless of others, while at the same time capable of being charming, fascinating, loving and demonstrative. Hunt (1994a, p.90) says, 'Barrie's own attitude suggests that this is fundamental to childhood ... "And thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless".' Barrie the narrator has some surprisingly harsh, if clear-sighted, things to say about children: he speaks of their 'awful craftiness' (p.50) and even describes them as 'rubbishy' (p.197). At the famous moment when the world's children are required to clap in order to save Tinkerbell's life, Barrie records, 'Many clapped. Some didn't. A few little beasts hissed'. No one could seriously describe this as sentimentality. It was not children that he romanticised, but childhood itself. While he himself desperately wished to be one, he recognised children for what they were, but still found them irresistible:

'Off we skip like the most heartless things in the world, which is what children are, but so attractive; and we have an entirely selfish time; and then, when we have need of special attention we nobly return for it, confident that we shall be embraced instead of smacked.'

(p.138)

Barrie clearly had what amounted to an insider's view of the child; which makes it rather ironic that his best-known work epitomises 'the cult of the child', whose other practitioners were not always so clear-sighted. Hunt (1994a) points out (p.18), 'it should be pointed out that sentimentality is not a notable characteristic of childhood itself'. Peter frequently shocks the reader by his callousness and, initially, by his dislike of mothers. We are told that '[n]ot only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very over-rated persons' (p.41) and 'he despised all mothers except Wendy' (p.103); but we later learn that ' "I thought like you that my mother would always keep the window open for me ... but the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed" ... So this was the truth about mothers. The toads!' (p.139) This is, I suspect, only partly flippant; for I find myself moved by the later remark: 'He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred' (p.202). If this is written from personal emotion, one must only sympathise with Barrie.

While Peter is recognisably a 'real' child – and Barrie plainly saw the imperfections even of the boys he idolised (Birkin, 1979, p.51) – one cannot escape the conclusion

that Barrie longed desperately for the state of childhood even while observing it clear-sightedly. *Peter Pan* actually begins in the Garden of Eden:

‘One day when [Wendy] was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, “Oh, why can’t you remain like this for ever!” ... henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.’

(p.13)

Again, the tone is gently ironic, but Barrie does seem to have genuinely believed in the superiority of childhood (see the discussions of his life and work by Carpenter, 1985, and Wullschläger, 1995). This belief appears to stem partly from a Wordsworthian belief that childhood is intrinsically a more authentic state of selfhood than adulthood. Coveney (p.256) remarks that ‘in perverse accord with Freud [Barrie] declared: “Nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much” ’ (the quotation comes from Barrie’s 1896 book *Margaret Ogilvy*). Of course, while Freud would have argued for the overwhelming significance of early childhood impressions, Barrie is here wholly negating the importance of later experience. Freud was later to reinterpret Wordsworth’s ‘The Child is Father to the Man’ in ways that influenced thinking about childhood, certainly up to the time of writing. I

suggest that it is now generally held that childhood is a stage in life in which one is uniquely impressionable; but that the whole of life is a unified process of discovery about the self and the wider world. Following Ang (2000) I shall later show how, since Carroll, writers for children have broadened the horizons of what is possible in children's literature. Today there is certainly no assumption that childhood *per se* is preferable to adulthood: which is why we may find remarks like the following somewhat ludicrous: this is a review of *Peter Pan* in which the play is seen to celebrate a time when

'we were absolutely ourselves; it is then that we were original. No convention had moulded us to its type. We could surprise. We said the most wonderful things that no one had ever said before; we had something of genius about us.'

(quoted by Dusinberre, pp.16-17)

This may be compared with a remark of Carroll's in the introduction to *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) in which he speaks of 'the eager enjoyment of Life that comes *only* in the happy hours of childhood, when all is new and fair, and when sin and sorrow are but names – empty words signifying nothing.' However, as Coveney says (p.242), Carroll was a writer whose 'great impulse was ... nostalgic, but who, through the creativity of his art, in some way fulfilled himself' – thus leading to the contradiction of '... Dodgson the regretful, pathetic man, and Carroll, the triumphant artist.' In

Coveney's view, the quality of Barrie's art did not justify his emotional regression but rather 'overcame the artist in him' (p.242).

Despite the vitality of Peter as a character, then, critics have tended to emphasise the unwholesomeness of Barrie's attitude to childhood, drawing heavily on biographical details. Wullschläger (p.110) describes him as 'in life the archetypal hero of *fin de siècle* fiction: the eternal boy.' Coveney (p.251) invokes the story of Barrie's elder brother's early death, and the writer's subsequent attempts to replace him in the family's affections: 'Barrie's story is not even so much the tale of a boy who didn't want to grow up, but, carrying the sentiment to its deadly conclusion, of the boy who wishes so painfully that he need never have been born.' Perhaps so; but my reading of *Peter Pan* is of a text that is crammed with incident and childlike fun (which perhaps explains its survival as book, play and film). The subtext is clearly a sombre one, but its style might today be described as 'black comedy' rather than mawkish sentiment. Lurie (p.151) says that: 'The crocodile ... is one of the wittiest and most sinister symbols ever created of the way all of us except Peter Pan are stalked by devouring Time. It is perhaps especially terrifying to those who cling to their lost childhood and youth.' It is, as she emphasises, not only dramatically very powerful, but also very funny. I find it not so much sinister as sad, allowing us to sympathise even with Peter's arch enemy:

‘ “Some day,” said Smee, “the clock will run down, and then he'll get you.”

Hook wetted his dry lips. "Aye," he said, "that's the fear that haunts me." '

(p.78)

As Coveney observes (p.32),

'In an age when it became increasingly difficult to grow up, to find valid bearings in an adult world, the temptation seems to have been for certain authors to take the line of least emotional resistance, and to regress, quite literally, into a world of fantasy and nostalgia for childhood. Over one line of art, distinguishable at the end of the century, lay the seductive shadow of Peter Pan'.

By the end of the Victorian period, the time of Grahame and Barrie, *only* childhood, and gradually, by extension, youth, seemed to matter at all. This attitude was clearly still prevalent in 1932, when Darton said, with evident approval, of *Peter Pan*, 'What matters historically is that Barrie made all but shrivelled pedagogues see the value, even the necessity, of that nonsensical creed [the belief in fairies]' (p.310). Oscar Wilde's fairy stories and Grahame's adult stories – *The Golden Age* (1895) and *Dream Days* (1898) – are populated by handsome youths, who are often imaginatively related to the significantly named god Pan, with connotations of paganism and Nature-worship (Lurie, 1990, p.148). This predilection is discussed in

more detail in my exploration of Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) in Chapter 3. Above all, youth was prized as the time of good health, outdoor pleasure and a kind of careless good nature. Coveney (p.186) describes this as 'the anti-intellectualism of public-school philistinism.' Wullschläger succinctly explains the difference between Victorian and Edwardian notions of youth: 'The Victorian child is a symbol of innocence, the Edwardian of hedonism. In fiction, the former is good, the latter has a good time'(p.111). The combined influence of this *fin-de-siecle* hedonism and the later disillusionment brought about by the Great War, and their prolonged inheritance, are discussed in Chapter 4.

2.7. Coda

The melancholy awareness of having left childhood behind is not of course peculiar to writers of any particular age, nor is any more specific sense of loss. What I am suggesting is that the Romantic movement and the notion of 'sensibility' permitted these feelings to be fully expressed in popular literature. The artist did not necessarily understand or realise the extent of his or her complex emotions; lacking the outlets later offered by modern psychology and psychiatry, writers like Wilde and Carroll – perhaps unwittingly – combined the creation of masterpieces with expression of their deepest neuroses.

While the texts I have explored here are traditionally held to be children's books, I have attempted to show that they were, in fact, written as much for their authors'

gratification as for children's entertainment. Rose suggests (p.138) that the importance of *Peter Pan* 'lies in what *Peter Pan* demonstrates about a fantasy of childhood, with children's literature as just one of the arenas in which this fantasy is played out': and this fantasy of a better past appears to be a very significant feature of late Victorian and Edwardian social and cultural life.

These books certainly have a great deal to say *about* the state of childhood; by reading them we may learn a considerable amount about how childhood was viewed from around 1860 until the early twentieth century. At the same time, they appear to have little to say directly *to* the child reader about being a child. Rose continues, supporting my own readings of the texts: 'So often it has seemed to be the case that what is at stake in an image of the child is not the child first and then the image, but the child as the most fitting representation for the gratifying plenitude of the image itself' (p.139).

It is of course impossible to determine the motives of any of these authors in writing their books, beyond attempting to entertain child readers of their day. Some of them appear to have been writing as a form of self-expression, out of a yearning for the state of 'innocent' childhood and they may have been addressing their child readers directly and intentionally on such important subjects as childhood and its innocence (and evanescence). It is also difficult to establish children's responses to these texts, although my own observations suggest two things to me. Firstly, contemporary

children (and those of my generation as far as I remember) tend to dislike these books unless presented in simplified (or ‘Disneyfied’) form. Secondly – and more significantly, from my perspective in this study – adults appear to have a vested interest in prolonging the life of these books, through publication in ever more appealing packages, through promoting them as ‘classics’ and through buying them for children. This may be due to nostalgia – of which more in Chapter 3 – or it may possibly be from a desire to communicate to our children that childhood is a short, but perfect, idyll and that adulthood is to be avoided at all costs.

My readings of the above post-Romantic, mainly late Victorian texts suggest that the garden is indeed used in children’s literature of the period – sometimes in modified form – as a symbol of the lost ‘Eden’ of childhood. The definition of that ‘Eden’ depends in these texts on socio-cultural factors, notably emotional and sexual anxiety which expressed itself in concerns about childhood, and also on the profoundly influential legacy of the Romantic movement in literature. At this chronological stage, I suggest that the ‘Eden’ of childhood is defined entirely from the adult writer’s position: that is, it is a lost Eden, composed of adult memories and regrets, rather than the idealised playground, provided for children’s pleasure, of later chapters. These authors are more concerned with their own perceived loss than with issues of child development, protection or freedom.

Chapter 3: The garden as Eden: the loss of an innocent way of life

‘He turned back to look again at what was outside, searching for some link between last night and this morning. Up to the fence of the back-yard ran strips of garden that belonged to the pink brick, semi-detached houses beyond. In one of the garden strips stood an old yew-tree. Once, certainly, the tree had been clipped to a shape.’

(Tom 's Midnight Garden, pp.36-37)

In Chapter 2, I discussed works which deal with the longing of the author (or at least the narrator or chief protagonist) to return to the state of childhood, because it is somehow intrinsically superior to adulthood. In all these works, the adult is regarded as unable, or even unworthy, to re-enter the garden simply because he or she has attained adulthood and, with it, experience of the world outside the enclosed garden of childhood. It is as if some authors felt guilt at having grown up at all. Clearly, the notion that childhood is ‘better’ than adulthood, and thus, as Reynolds says, a ‘proper subject for nostalgia’ (p.15), and the sense that one has, as an individual, lost something personally treasured, are related notions, though one is a cultural phenomenon and the second is specific to the individual. However, another aspect of loss, which is discernible in adult and child literature, is social in character, and still flavours certain genres of literature today. That aspect might be termed nostalgia for the ‘Golden Age.’

Halbwachs (1992, p.48) says:

‘all people ... instinctively adopt in regard to times past the attitude of the Greek philosophers who put the golden age not at the end of the world but at its beginning.’

This is of course a phenomenon that we may still see today, in the popularity of historical literature and films, the collecting of antiques and, in extreme cases, the uprooting of families from the city to live ‘closer to nature’ in the countryside. Lowenthal (1985) dates this preoccupation from the turbulent eighteenth century:

‘As revolutionary change rapidly distanced all known pasts, yearning for what was felt to be lost suffused European imaginations ... Paintings of timeless rustic scenes offered respite from belching chimneys and huddled tenements.’

(p.49)

Cox (1996) has placed this all-pervading yearning for ‘nature’ in its historical context:

‘ ... the educated classes at the end of the eighteenth century ... had more than Rousseau to prompt them to such [anxious] thoughts. The theoretical opposition he had formulated between uncorrupted nature and polluted

civilisation had become, it seemed, a reality. It was to be an anxiety, too, that grew through the early decades of the nineteenth century, as the middle classes slowly withdrew themselves and their children from the economic frontline and retreated behind the hedge, the shrubbery and the lawn into their suburban bunkers.'

(pp.79-80)

Cox's use of the word 'anxiety' is important, since I suspect it to have been the pervading mass emotion of the middle classes (and thus the writers for children) throughout the nineteenth century, and only exacerbated by the unimaginable horrors of the twentieth.

In his study of nostalgia, Lowenthal repeatedly uses spatial terms to talk about the past; this connects very closely with my notion that the garden can be used to denote 'time' as a continuum, or, as in Chapters 2 and 3, a specific time in the past. I am particularly intrigued by Lowenthal's observation (p.4) that

'We are *at home* in [the past] because it *is* [italics in original] our *home* – the past is *where* we come from. And few have not wished on occasion to *return* to an earlier time.'

(other italics mine)

A setting, then (the garden), can represent a temporal concept; and in this chapter I intend to discuss in close detail two texts featuring garden-like settings that are used in this symbolic manner. Both are steeped in a sense of regret for 'the past', but I suggest that their authors have different motives for writing them. The first, E.Nesbit's *Harding's Luck*, is, I believe, written out of social concern as well as nostalgia. The second text, *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, owes its powerful sense of nostalgia to its author's insecurity and, indeed, fear. As well as considering this theme of nostalgia and its implications, I shall also be asking whether these two texts have anything to say to children or about childhood.

In discussing *The Wind in the Willows* I am aware that I am defining 'the garden' rather loosely. However, I shall demonstrate that Grahame's River Bank is indeed, in my terms, a garden, since it is greatly sanitised and made cosy – in direct contrast to the threatening Wild Wood – and that Grahame's transformation of this part of the countryside into an enclosed, perfect place is significant in this study of the changing meanings of symbols. The garden, by my definition, need only be an enclosed place out of doors, able to act as a meeting-place between nature and civilisation.

3.1. Nostalgia and social change: the garden as the rural idyll

The background to these books and to many others, before and since, and corresponding with the longing for a personal past (discussed in Chapter 2), is an

equally powerful sense of the significance of a more 'collective' past; the social and cultural past as opposed to that of the individual – although the two are often observed to be inextricably linked within the individual psyche. Halbwachs links the desire for the rural idyll to the desire, already mentioned, to return to one's own childhood, hence the close correlation, in my terms, between the fictitious countryside of the rural myth and the garden of my previous chapter; 'The yearning for nature amidst society is essentially the yearning for childhood among adults' (p.49).

In other words, nostalgia has two strands in this context: the notion that one was 'better' in childhood, and the idea that life was 'better' in (often unspecified) earlier times. Once again, Wordsworth is evoked, and again, this second type of nostalgia often appears in children's literature as the imagery of Eden (what has been, and is no more) and as what Rose terms 'a fantasy of origins' (p.138).

This implies a sense of alienation from the newly adult (industrialised) world. Wulfschläger (1995) suggests that beneath the appearance of stability and security of the Victorian and Edwardian eras was fear of progress and the desire to run away from it:

'The settings of the Victorian and Edwardian children's classics themselves suggest the mood of a golden age, of a secure, prosperous, optimistic country.

Yet Wonderland, the Neverland of *Peter Pan*, the river bank of *The Wind in the Willows*, the idyll of a country station in *The Railway Children*, the enchanted rose garden in the *Secret Garden*, all also celebrate escape, the flight into an unreal dream world. They point to one of the strongest influences on the Victorian and Edwardian cult of childhood and on children's books: the desire for a pre-industrial, rural world and the identification of the child with purity, a pre-sexual life, moral purity'.

(p.17)

Since the Industrial Revolution there has been a distinct strand of fiction that expresses the desire to return to a pre-industrial past; a prejudice against cities and industrialisation has grown up in certain sections of children's literature, which feeds on the Platonic ideal (perhaps culminating, to date, in teenage ecological and post-nuclear fictions). Lowenthal points out that, from the beginnings of the Romantic Movement, this general harking-back lacked realism;

'... otherwise progressive Victorians made the past an object of nostalgic adoration ... City-dwellers expressed regret for idealized rural pasts'.

(p.9)

Of course, this nostalgia for a past that many were glad to be rid of is not confined to Victorian writers, but still persists. Lowenthal speaks of the 'desired', rather than actual, past:

'Whether recent or remote, the desired past exhibits strikingly similar traits: natural, simple, comfortable – yet also vivid and exciting'.

(p.24)

In other words, the past is a perfect Utopia. Despite the sentimentality of many manifestations of this tendency to glorify the past, it initially had a sound psychological function. The Industrial Revolution led, in many parts of Britain, to forced mass relocation. Those who had left their families' traditional homes and ways of life felt the necessity to rediscover 'roots' (an obvious natural and horticultural term). It would be interesting to compare this in detail with the apparent rootlessness of American pioneer families like the Ingalls family in the *Little House* series (Laura Ingalls Wilder) who have relatively few cultural memories and seem to have no need of roots, only of family. I imagine that these differences might be found to stem partly from the relative size of the two countries, and partly from the exhilarating sense of being a genuine pioneer, rather than the more prosaic business of getting used to a new town or city. Incidentally, the Ingalls family provide themselves with some equivalent of a garden wherever they settle, for practical rather

than aesthetic reasons; and these gardens cannot possibly be taken as metaphor or symbol.

Carpenter (1985, p.121) says: 'By Grahame's day, hatred of urban life, and of the harm that the industrial revolution had done to English society during the previous hundred years, had become a major theme in English writing.' As well as the increasingly powerful desire to find roots, many people felt a sense of social, economic and cultural dislocation that in many cases forced them to regress into the comfort of nostalgia. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of enormous social change, which undoubtedly undermined the confidence of the middle classes, from whose ranks the artists and writers of the day tended to be drawn. Inglis (1981, p.84) observes that 'From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the imagery used to describe the family included terms like "haven", "refuge", "harbour", "arbour", "garden of Eden", "secure little plot", "tiny domestic principality" and so forth' – all of which are spatial terms implying enclosure and security; and several of which, of course, are related to gardens. These, Inglis goes on, are taken from the (predominantly middle-class) literary vocabulary of the time, and signal the beginning of the bourgeois 'drawing-up of the drawbridge' which I shall discuss in Chapter 4.

Reynolds (p.16) suggests that the so-called 'cult of childhood' was perhaps due to a 'general sense of dislocation and unease', and that this sense was also expressed through a more generalised nostalgia for the past. Dusiemberre says (p.196):

'The writing of fiction is stimulated ... by times of upheaval, because they highlight its vital function of feeding the imagination with images through which change may be understood and interpreted.'

One form in which this upheaval was experienced was the continued effects of the Industrial Revolution. Coveney (p.83) remarks, significantly, that: 'Wordsworth's antithesis of town and country became of increasing importance to a century disfigured by the urban outrage of the Industrial Revolution.' Once again, there is the sense that a myth is being conjured to comfort a bewildered middle class. I have already, in the previous chapter, quoted Rose's description of 'The opposition between the child and the adult' as a structural opposition in that 'each term only has meaning in relation to the one to which it is opposed' (1984, p.50). In my opinion, the distinction between the urban and the pastoral, which became so important in art and literature, is similarly mythic. Late Victorian and Edwardian thinking about the countryside does not reflect 'an essential truth' (in Rose's terms) any more than that period's thinking about the child; but this is similarly a profound element of our post-industrial culture.

It seems likely that by the time Grahame was writing, he, along with many others, felt unable to accept that increasingly complicated adult world. In his detailed discussion of *The Wind in the Willows*, Hunt (1994b, p.3-8) sketches in the historical context of the book. In summarising, Hunt emphasises the combination of social and personal concerns that drove Grahame to seek escape from the adult world:

‘By the time that Grahame wrote *The Wind in the Willows*, his world ... was disintegrating. Quite apart from his personal tragedy of an unhappy marriage and a disabled son, his society itself was cracking. The Empire had been shown from without to be flawed, and within it the growing power of working classes and of women (particularly those of the middle and upper classes) were shaking the most stable social structures. There were rumors [sic] of war, and despite the riches in the Bank of England, Britain’s power seemed to be in decline. More directly, the idyllic agrarian world was being overtaken, shattered, by the growth of suburbia and by the noise and pollution of the automobiles and railways. It was out of this profoundly changing world, and out of a man who felt himself displaced within it, that *The Wind in the Willows* emerges as a many-layered and allusive book.’

(p.8)

3.2. The garden as an Arcadian image

The rural ideal, as it appeared in early twentieth century literature, may be seen as a result of such social and economic insecurity, grafted on to the nature-worship derived from the Romantic poets, and having little resemblance to actual conditions in the rural past. Hunt (1994b, p.79) comments that 'Grahame and his literary friends looked back to a rural, aristocratic idyll (conveniently ignoring the realities of rural life that Hardy, for example, saw).' Once again, the garden can be seen as Eden, as an idyllic, pre-industrial paradise. In this context, however, Adam and Eve are not corrupt adults, but are only forced from the garden by the restrictions of modern life. In his book *The Garden in Victorian Literature* (1988), Waters describes how Wordsworth's mountains and Lakeland fells became, in the course of the nineteenth century, Tennyson's gardens, and how the garden came to be seen as a more accommodating image of 'nature' to the later Victorians. For Waters, the garden is a compromise between nature and artifice:

'Generally speaking, the garden in Victorian literature is identified with the more positive qualities ascribed to the countryside, and frequently functions as a synecdoche of, or surrogate for, nature in its pastoral and generous modes. Its antitheses are the city – the negation or subjugation of nature – and the wilderness – nature in its sublime, threatening and least co-operative modes.'

(p.150)

In this context I would judge the 'gardens' of Nesbit and Grahame as deriving from this Victorian tradition, both authors perhaps influenced by the post-Romantic texts they themselves had read.

3.3. The message to children in such texts

One might wonder, then, if this kind of literary self-indulgence on the part of the adult writer has anything to do with the putative child reader at all; and whether or not such books have anything to say about childhood. Clearly, according to my reading, the 'garden' in such texts no longer represents childhood itself, but an Arcadian version of the past. This may, of course, derive from nostalgic memories of the writer's childhood, but is part of a more general feeling that the 'collective' past (what is sometimes known as 'heritage') is as significant as one's own personal memories.

While studying the two texts below I have borne in mind certain questions: were such conservative books ever meant for children? Are they trying to tell children that the past was better than the present? Do the sub-texts have implications for the way childhood was viewed at the time of writing? These are also, of course, the questions that I attempted to ask and answer in the preceding chapter.

3.4. E. Nesbit: *Harding's Luck*

A rewarding book for study, which, in Dusiherre's phrase 'feed[s] the imagination with images through which change may be understood and interpreted' (1987, p.198), is Nesbit's now little-known *Harding's Luck* (1909), the sequel – although the action overlaps – to the still relatively popular *The House of Arden* (1908). Nesbit manages to produce an absorbing and sympathetic story, despite her inconsistency when contemplating past and present (Moss, 1991, p.225). This inconsistency is caused, I think, by the conflict between her well-documented Fabian beliefs and her equally deep nostalgia, which she shared with many of her contemporaries. When considering the book I have concentrated on her telling descriptions of three different gardens.

At the beginning of the story we are introduced to the hero, Dickie Harding, a crippled, slum-dwelling orphan who is later revealed to be the lost Lord Arden (whose name conjures Arcadian forests in the imagination). Here Nesbit bemoans the 'progress' of urbanisation that has defiled the outskirts of London:

'All those good fields and happy gardens are built over now ... There is a little yard at the back of each house; this is called "the garden", and some of these show green ... green is the colour that most pleases and soothes men's

eyes ... there were no green things growing in the garden at the back of the house where Dickie lived with his aunt'.

(pp.2-3)

The address of the aunt's house is, with deliberate irony, 'Lavender Terrace, Rosemary Street, Deptford'. Dickie's luck changes as a direct result of his attempt to cultivate the garden. He inadvertently grows a 'moonflower', which 'stood up, beautiful and stately, and turned its cream-white face to the sun' (p.11). Its seeds prove to be magic, and transport him back to the time of James I. He finds himself transformed into the able-bodied Richard Arden whose home lies 'among the pleasant fields and orchards of Deptford':

'Quite soon Dickie was able to walk downstairs and out into the garden along the grassy walks and long alleys where fruit trees trained over trellises made such pleasant green shade, and even to try to learn to play at bowls on the long bowling-green behind the house ... But it was not only the beauty of the house and garden that made Dickie's life a new and full delight. To limp along the leafy ways, to crawl up and down the carved staircase would have been a pleasure greater than any Dickie had ever known; but he could leap up and down the stairs three at a time, he could run in the arched alleys – run and jump as he had seen other children do, and as he had never thought to do himself. Imagine what you would feel if you had lived wingless all your life

among people who could fly. That is how lame people feel among us who can walk and run. And now Dickie was lame no more.'

(pp.86-87)

There is an almost biblical ring to the last phrase; the beautiful garden is seen as part of the same miracle – reminding one irresistibly of Eden once more.

Naturally Dickie/Richard – and the reader – prefer the Deptford of the seventeenth century to that of the early twentieth century. Nesbit, however, fails to make it explicit that the crippled Dickie Harding is a working-class orphan while the Jacobean Richard Arden is a member of a wealthy aristocratic family. This is a clear example of Nesbit's conservatism overruling her desire for social equality (Moss, 1991, p.225).

However, I think Nesbit later articulates a third alternative to contemporary urban poverty or past splendour that depends on inequality and exploitation, and which accords better with her avowed socialist beliefs: the idea of hard work fairly rewarded. After a prolonged visit 'back' to 1909, Dickie/Richard self-importantly informs his seventeenth-century nurse: ' " ... you don't know how good it is to have money that you've *earned yourself* " ' to which she naturally retorts, ' "I ought to ... I've earned mine long enough." ' (p.132)

Nesbit's version of the pastoral ideal is found in the lyrical description of Old Beale in his garden. His son is the good-natured villain who has abducted Dickie and tried to use him in burglary (a recognisable but benevolent version of Dickens' Bill Sikes); and who repents when he witnesses his old father enjoying in retirement the fruits of a lifetime of honest work. Although this is intended as a contemporary scene, it now of course seems poignantly old-fashioned itself:

‘ ... and there was a cottage, with a very neat garden full of gay flowers, and a brick pathway leading from the wooden gate to the front door. And by the front door sat an old man in a Windsor chair, with a brown spaniel at his feet and a bird in a wicker cage above his head, and he was nodding, for it was a hot day, and he was an old man and tired ... the garden ablaze with flowers – blush-roses and damask roses, and sweet-williams and candytuft, white lilies and yellow lilies, pansies, larkspur, poppies, bergamot, and sage’.

(pp.201-2)

This idyllic description of a traditional country garden stocked with ‘old-fashioned’ flowers reflects what Waters (1988) has to say about Victorian connotations of flowers: ‘ ... old-fashioned plants held the positive connotations of plenitude, variety, individuality, and the kind of stability equivalent to homeliness’ (p.124) – as opposed to ‘hothouse flowers’, which proliferated in artificial, geometrical, mathematically-planned gardens, associated with factories and pits (Waters, p.125). Other

connotations of gardens such as Old Beale's were the virtues of thrift and continuity, particularly prized by the Victorians (Waters, p.124) and exemplified in the cottage garden's hardy perennials and wildflowers.

In fact, as Waters goes on to remark (p.129), these implicit virtues were appropriated by Victorians of higher social class:

‘ ... many later Victorians, particularly among the upper middle classes, attempted to distance themselves from the ugliness of the present ... by resurrecting the beautifully simple symbols of the pre-industrial past. The less obvious and more radical explanation is that the canonisation of “cottage” garden plants was motivated by a perceived need to shore up, revitalize and purify the imaginatively bankrupt floral culture of the philistine bourgeoisie.’

Of course, many of the bourgeois upper-middle class householders who so wished to distance themselves from industrialisation depended for their living on its ‘ugliness’. The most successful, if modern, critique of this situation that I have encountered in my reading of children's literature is Joan Aiken's *Midnight is a Place* (1974; highly commended, also, by Inglis for its moral stance); in which the horrors of the mill are contrasted with the luxury of the mansion's park, and both are explicitly shown to be sides of the same coin.

In *Harding's Luck*, then, Nesbit is explicitly telling her readers that in certain respects the collective past was superior to the present. She illustrates that effectively at the beginning of the novel with her unsparing description of slum housing, but later, in my opinion, damages the effect by contrasting the life of a slum boy with that of an aristocrat. Perhaps it takes a subtle reader to identify her approval of the working countryman, possibly the ideal of her book.

When I turn to *Harding's Luck* for direct or sub-textual messages about childhood, I find, as Briggs (1987, p.289) has already pointed out, a somewhat inferior but impassioned Hesba Stretton-like plea on behalf of the slum child and a moving wish-fulfilment story – ‘ “It’s the not being lame,” Dickie explained, coming to a standstill by the window that looked out on the good green garden. “You don’t know how wonderful it seems, just at first, you know, *not* to be lame”.’ (p.130) Digging deeper, I find a typical Nesbit paradox, between the Fabian who deplores the ugly life of the poor, and the reactionary. Hall (1998a, p.52) hypothesises: ‘Nesbit had a sympathy for the aristocratic lineaments of old houses. This may perhaps have had something to do with a nostalgic yearning to recapture childhood happiness’, although, as Hall herself later remarks, of *The House of Arden*, Nesbit was also haunted by the depredations of time: ‘The fragility of the continuity being traced here is a moving testimony to the destructive potential of change, which can sometimes involve irretrievable loss’ (p.53). This conservatism, then, is paradoxically ahead of its time in terms of children’s fiction: Nesbit here, despite her much lighter touch,

foreshadows the concerns of later twentieth century writers such as Boston and Lively in her linking together of the generations and her awareness of the importance of the past. I discuss those writers later; but will say here that I see Nesbit as a nostalgic writer while they are clearly not, and this for two reasons. Firstly, she regrets the past, regarding it as vastly superior to the present, at least as far as Dickie Harding/Richard Arden is concerned; and, secondly, she is selective in her presentation of that past, offering – for instance – Richard's old Nurse from the seventeenth century in direct contrast to the horrible 'aunt' who supposedly cares for Dickie in the twentieth. One is a reliable rustic of the 'faithful old retainer' school; the other is a 'baby farmer' who causes his lameness by dropping him as a baby.

Nesbit, then, is saying that the past was better than the contemporary present. This in itself would be a discouraging message to any working-class child of 1909 who happened upon the book. To the child reader of today, I speculate that the message would be confused by the fact that, with the passage of time, Dickie's adventures 'on the road' with Young Beale the housebreaker have accrued a certain glamour. To this adult reader, however, Nesbit's message is clearly that life was 'better' in every possible respect in the past, and the only way of replicating that idyll in the present is to work for one's living deep in the (impossibly clean and sunny) countryside.

3.5. Kenneth Grahame: *The Wind in the Willows*

Published in 1908, *The Wind in the Willows* is a far better-known book than *Harding's Luck*; but it shares with that text a nostalgic preoccupation with the past that depends upon the rural myth. Despite being widely regarded as a 'classic' of children's literature, opinion is divided as to whether *The Wind in the Willows* is, in fact, a children's book at all (Hunt, 1994b, pp.112-113), and this complicates any discussion of it.

It is a highly complex text, which has inspired a great deal of criticism. My own reading of it, aided by Hunt (1994b), is that it reflects the often paradoxical attitudes of the author, which in themselves are symptomatic of the confusions and doubts of the late Victorian and Edwardian society in which he lived. As Hunt points out (pp.26-27) the tension between the two major strands of the story – that is, the story of Mole and Ratty, and the farcical adventures of Toad – matches the tensions generated by these contradictions. Hunt (p.47) quotes a passage from Gilead, which I see as extremely significant for this chapter and the preceding one:

'Much children's literature ... dramatises conflict between a child-realm and an adult-realm, without being able to settle conceptually in either one. "Childhood" may be lost in the past and retrievable only through distorting adult fantasy, wish, or memory; "adulthood" may be intolerably weighted

with frustration and loss. But it is rare to find these issues dramatized in the interaction between two rival plot lines and in their alternate narrative perspectives. In Grahame's novel, we find the narrative structure itself made metaphor for the psychocultural conflicts within the characters, the work as a whole, and perhaps the literary genre which that work exemplifies.'

(from 'The Undoing of Idyll in *The Wind in the Willows*', 'Children's Literature', 16 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp.156-157)

Grahame set out (according to Philip, 1989) to create a literary Arcadia, 'clean of the clash of sex' (quoted by Philip, 1989, pp. 312-313, from the 1908 edition's blurb by Grahame) and of other complicating factors; yet one can all too clearly detect the insecurity inherent in the world of the River Bank. Again, he writes of a cosy, physically comfortable world (which perhaps explains much of the book's historical popularity) but the threat of violence from the Wild Wood is always tangible. Lastly, the text clearly reflects his ambiguous feelings about freedom versus safety (or 'home' versus 'away' as Nodelman would express it, 1996, pp. 155-159). I suggest that the significance of this book as a part of the canon of children's literature – beyond the obvious attraction of anthropomorphised animals – is that these dualities or sets of opposites are all to some extent childhood concerns.

Arguably, the greatest part of the appeal of *The Wind in the Willows* derives from its exquisitely lush and detailed presentation of a rural, riverbank idyll (Carpenter, 1985, p.155). Tucker (1981, p.102) describes this as 'a safe little bachelor world ... where a serene leisured existence is threatened both from within and without' – in other words, the animals' sense of security is continuously undermined by the creatures in the Wild Wood and by the unpredictable behaviour of Toad.

Like *Harding's Luck*, it expresses deep appreciation for traditional country life; but while Nesbit's dislike of modern urbanisation was at least partly rooted in her concern for the welfare for the poor, Grahame (according to Carpenter, 1985, p.165) appears to have had little interest in social reform. He seems to have been partly motivated by a personal sense of deprivation (Sale, 1978, p.192), following a rather sad childhood, and by immense frustration at the strictures of adult life, which in itself links him with writers mentioned earlier, such as Barrie and Andersen. Philip (1989, p.313) suggests that the inhabitants of the Wild Wood represent, as well as the intruding lower classes, 'the forces which for Grahame threaten and destroy the ideal life: the destructive part of human nature, and the inconvenient demands of human society.' At the same time, he had broader socio-cultural concerns, although altruism seems to have played little part. His dislike of the urban and preference for the rural seems to have been largely aesthetic, and reflecting the essential conservatism of his character. I shall develop this theme further in discussion of the nature of Grahame's 'Arcadia'.

It seems likely that Grahame, far from sympathising with the situation of the working classes (as did Nesbit: Briggs, p.293) felt threatened by their increasing influence, if one accepts the usual reading of the *Wild Wood*. Philip (1989, p.313) points out that the inhabitants of the *Wild Wood* 'are built up into a class enemy, uncomfortably like the Victorian working class' and he talks of 'genteel Victorian paranoia about the mob'. Carpenter (1985, p.165) remarks that, by 1908, after 'many decades of social unrest ... anarchy or revolution was an all too familiar terror'.

In this social context it is fascinating to read Jan Needle's 1981 novel *Wild Wood* as counterpoint to the original book. In this text the well-known story of the Riverbankers is told from the contrasting viewpoint of the 'Wild Wooders' – the stoats, weasels and ferrets – notably Baxter Ferret, the narrator – who inspire such mixed feelings in the Riverbankers. Baxter points out that, from his perspective, life is certainly no idyll:

'The River Bank was where the smart set lived. Not all of them were exactly rich, but it was hard not to notice that while we all worked our fingers to the bone to keep a roof over our heads and a bite of food in the larder, they did very little that wasn't directly connected with pleasure and leisure.'

(p.62)

This is possibly a point of view that Grahame and his friends would never even have considered.

Despite Grahame's claim, to Theodore Roosevelt (10 October, 1908, quoted by Philip, 1989, p.313), that '[the book's] qualities, if any, are mostly negative – i.e. – no problems, no sex, no second meaning – it is only an expression of the very simplest joys of life ...' it is, of course, as countless critics have shown, 'a densely layered text fairly cluttered with second meanings ... but Grahame could not for his peace of mind afford to admit it' (Philip, 1989, p.313). Hunt (1994b, p.20): quotes Peter Green, Grahame's 1959 biographer:

'The social picture which *The Wind in the Willows* presents is not life as Grahame thought it was, or once had been: it is his ideal vision of what it *should* be, his dream of the true Golden Age ... The curious thing is that though Grahame set out to create a trouble-free Arcadia he could not stifle his anxieties: the Wild Wood loomed menacingly across the River, stoats and weasels lurked ready to invade Toad's ancestral home.'

As Hunt (1994b, p.7) himself says, Grahame was 'an essentially conservative man, an outsider... [in] a society whose traditional values were under threat' and, later, 'even Grahame was unable to keep his fears, and perhaps the fears of his generation, out of the book' (p.78).

The antithesis of the threat from outside is, in *The Wind in the Willows*, the almost tangible sense of warmth and comfort that pervades the descriptions of interiors, most famously Badger's kitchen. Home is very significant in the text, and in the chapter titled 'Dulce Domum', in which Mole returns briefly to his almost-forgotten underground home, it is soon restored to a blissful cosiness that is almost palpable:

'... ere he closed his eyes he let them wander round his old room, mellow in the glow of the firelight that played or rested on familiar and friendly things ... it was good to think he had this to come back to, this place which was all his own, these things which were so glad to see him again and could always be counted upon for the same simple welcome.'

(pp.89-90)

While Sale (p.175) claims that the book's 'sense of fun carries with it a sense of belonging, of the deep rightness of this kind of pleasure', Wullschläger discerns an uncertainty which she regards as Grahame's own (1995, p.165):

'Home, longing, the outsider pining to get in, echo through *The Wind in the Willows* as they do in many Edwardian children's books ... Grahame's ability, however, was to distil into this sense of snug sweetness the timeless human conflicts which for him had come to a head with marriage – freedom versus responsibility, adventure versus hominess; adaptation to change versus panic

at the disappearing ways – and to find some resolution to them, in an all-embracing faith in Nature.’

One way in which he achieved this in *The Wind in the Willows* was by making his characters animals. He was able to produce a smooth, even, nearly uneventful pattern in the text when he wanted to, by emulating the inevitable progression of the seasons, and showing his characters’ acceptance of the ebb and flow of the natural world. While their life is not, in fact, entirely ‘idyllic’, it is rarely less than ‘natural’: defined here as holding to the essentially artificial rural ideal. Despite the anthropomorphic tone of the writing, the friends live a recognisably animal life:

‘Drowsy animals, snug in their holes while wind and rain were battering at their doors, recalled still keen mornings, an hour before sunrise ... then the shock of the early plunge, the scamper along the bank, and the radiant transformation of earth, air, and water, when suddenly the sun was with them again, and grey was gold and colour was born and sprang out of the earth once more. They recalled the languorous siesta of hot midday, deep in green undergrowth, the sun striking through in tiny golden shafts and spots; the boating and bathing of the afternoon, the rambles along dusty lanes and through yellow cornfields; and the long cool evening at last, when so many threads were gathered up, so many friendships rounded, and so many adventures planned for the morrow.’

(pp.41-42)

Sale (1978, p.179) regards this as 'a secure present where all time is rhythmic time, and rhythmic time brings all the changes one needs' – and this is probably very close to what Grahame dreamed of experiencing. It is, of course, only the 'acceptable' face of the natural world, and far less realistic than, for instance, Beatrix Potter's version of nature (she, of course, while literally 'escaping' through her writing, did not seek to escape reality altogether in her books: Carpenter, 1985, p.147). Philip (1989, p.305) emphasises the way in which Grahame manipulates the natural world for comfort: 'Nature for Grahame is not red in tooth and claw, but a nurturing, idyllic, cosy world in which one can escape the pressure of adult responsibilities and the confines of adult behaviour.'

Another, connected way, in which Grahame creates a strong sense of security is through the hierarchical social structure of the book, based very loosely on 'nature' (from the point of view of the chief characters): that is, the fierce but wise Badger at the 'top' and the vicious, untrustworthy weasels, stoats and foxes at the 'bottom'. This is not merely presented as 'natural' but, more significantly, social. Sale remarks (p.173) that: 'the pleasure of creating hierarchies was mostly the pleasure of being inside a charmed circle ... and thus beyond care.' To put it slightly differently, Grahame wrote of an ordered world in which animals follow their 'natures', possibly without admitting to himself that he was using them to disguise the strict social

hierarchy of his day, by means of which he and other insecure middle-class men shored up their threatened sense of identity. Part of Grahame's impetus for writing the book may be this barely-acknowledged nostalgia for a time when everyone knew their place: Hunt (1994b, p.77) observes that by the end of the book 'the ruling order has been restored ... the working classes ... have been put back in their place. Arcadia is safe again ... we might ... suspect that Grahame's arcadia is built on a series of denials and evasions.' While this seems evident, Grahame may well have believed his own propaganda, and his fear and his need for escape may have been only partially conscious and were surely expressed in self-defence. Ang reminds us (p.4) that: '... boundaries both serve to shut away the sight of chaos into a temporary forgetfulness, as well as to define the self more strongly by separating chaos from the self.' This is true of the attempts to escape the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that I have discussed here; and is equally true of all efforts to hide behind the 'garden wall' that I shall explore later. Ang goes on to look far back in social history before returning to the consideration of children's literature development (she is considering Lawrence's 'Chaos in Poetry', 1928): '... there is the implication that at the roots of man's impulse to enclose and build, the need to construct images, lies a fear of disorder and disorientation in a basically unknowable world ... the growth of children's literature was partly stimulated by the increasing whirl of chaos (social, religious and so forth) in that it developed in reaction to it' (p.13).

In *The Wind in the Willows*, then, Grahame's aim was to create for himself (and, presumably, for his readers) a sense of comfort and security – a rural Arcadia, free from the worries, pressures and frustrations of contemporary adult life. Carpenter is of the opinion that he succeeds in this (p.155): 'Of all the Victorians and Edwardians who tried to create Arcadia in print, only Grahame really managed it. His opening chapter gives a full, rich portrait of the earthly paradise'. While I acknowledge the beauty and sincerity of the writing, I would also concur with Hunt and Wulfschläger, above, that the book is riddled with ambivalence and doubt.

While we have seen that Grahame did not fully have the courage of his convictions, he tried to achieve his Arcadia by steeping his river-bank world in nostalgia. Hunt, (1994b, p.77) describes the whole book as 'an arcadia, a retreat.' Tucker, too (1981, pp.102-103, my italics), emphasises the regressive nature of the text: it is a 'rural *escape* ... from the pressures of an industrial society ... a *back* to nature, anti-contemporary idyll, *rejecting* ... modern technology ... a kind of ... alternative to modern living – a *return* to a traditional rural society where everyone knew their place in the best of possible worlds.' This is, very obviously, what Philip (1989, p. 306) describes as 'a townsman's potent blend of recollection and fantasy: wish-fulfilment, not observation.' In this way, Grahame's past is very closely related to Nesbit's, however different their reasons for recreating them thus.

At one point, as Hunt points out, there is 'a literal collision between old and new, between cart and car' (p.41). Grahame seems to condemn the noisy, pollution-creating car, while possibly, and wistfully, sharing Toad's rather helpless zest for speed:

' ... he was only conscious that he was Toad once more, Toad at his best and highest, Toad the terror, the traffic-queller, the Lord of the lone trail, before whom all must give way or be smitten into nothingness and everlasting night. He chanted as he flew, and the car responded with sonorous drone; the miles were eaten up under him as he sped he knew not whither, fulfilling his instincts, living his hour, reckless of what might come to him.'

(p.104)

Toad, however, soon finds himself reaping the rewards of this breaking of the rules as Grahame allows his conservative self to reassert itself. In the end, I suspect, it is the car's modernity that condemns it, as much as its speed. Quite apart from its ugliness, noise and danger, it was, by Grahame's time, an important means by which his beloved countryside was being opened up to all; and one suspects that Grahame was moved by the kind of nostalgia that would deny others the pleasures that he and his peers traditionally enjoyed. Certainly he has the Rat say (pp.13-14):

‘ “The bank is so crowded nowadays that many people are moving away altogether. O no, it isn’t what it used to be, at all.” ’

Grahame also falls prey to a distinctly Edwardian literary tendency that reaches its apotheosis here and in *Peter Pan* – the corruption of Romanticism that culminated in Pan-worship (Lurie, 1990, p.164; Sale, p.190; Wulfschläger, 1995, p.146). This is partly based on mythology, partly on the ‘rural myth’ already discussed, and partly on the post-Kingsleyan cult of ‘muscular Christianity’ and the Edwardian cult of the healthy youth; and owed much to the prevailing mood of nostalgia. It is unfortunate that it now seems generally laughable, as Grahame was without doubt sincere in his use of Pan as an emblem (without of course literally believing in him: Sale, p.191). Both Philip (1989, p.309) and Hunt (1994b, p.101) see fit to quote Somerset Maugham’s remark, regarding Pan’s ubiquitousness at the time: ‘Poets saw him lurking in the twilight on London commons, and literary ladies in Surrey, nymphs of an industrial age, mysteriously surrendered their virginity to his rough embrace.’ Ultimately, says Philip, of this ‘pallid Edwardian paganism ... it was [Grahame’s] unique achievement to reduce the savage god to a sort of woodland nanny’ (p.309). This is, of course, consistent with his interpretation of the ‘countryside’ – a far from uncivilised, almost suburban, stretch of the Thames.

The River itself is supremely important in *The Wind in the Willows*. Hunt (1994b, p.89), in a book published in the U.S.A., emphasises for his readers the unique

symbolism of the Thames, for the English generally, and for Grahame himself particularly. It is, we are told, ‘ “Old Father Thames”, the river that is in some ways a symbol of Englishness. It flows through the Oxford that Grahame was denied and on into the [sic] Berkshire, through one of the most civilized, secure and wealthy areas of England’ – not to mention its significance in the life of the capital. In fact, of course, Grahame is not interested in the ‘real’ countryside at all – that of the peasant, the struggling farmer – he is simply disingenuous. The river itself is far from ‘natural’, as Sale has explained (p.177): ‘Nature does not quite create such rivers ... a warren of streams, weirs, locks, and marshes that had been created to make purposeful navigation possible and that also made purposeless navigation delightful’ – and this is why I consider the river bank to be a garden, a meeting-place of the natural and the cultivated. What Grahame wanted, in the writing of this book, was to escape from adult constraints, but only temporarily. He never quite dared attempt true freedom: ‘simply messing about in boats’ (p.11) would seem to be the extent of his desire. ‘It is easy ...’ says Sale (p.183), ‘to exclude the Wide World; one just messes about in boats or has lunch and all thought of it is gone’ – along with one’s demanding wife and neurotic son (whom one loves) and one’s job at the Bank of England (upon which one depends for the funds for this ‘freedom’).

From the very beginning, then, the river is seen as a playground (in this respect, it anticipates the many playgrounds in my next chapter). Mole is released from the

tedium of his spring-cleaning (and implicitly from his rather narrow underground existence) by Ratty's invitation:

'The Rat sculled smartly across and made fast. Then he held up his fore-paw as the Mole stepped gingerly down. "Lean on that!" he said. "Now then, step lively!" and the Mole to his surprise and rapture found himself actually seated in the stern of a real boat.'

(p.10)

Hunt (1994b, p.10) remarks that 'Without doubt, the idyllic, irresponsible riverbank is an ideal playground for children, but it is also a nostalgic escape for the adult' – and most critics agree that the river-bank characters are generally conceived as adults. The animals' hedonistic fun on the river, and especially the quantities of food consumed, is based on weekends in the country enjoyed by Grahame and various male friends (Philip, p.311-312). Inglis emphasises the dominance of male, middle-class values in this idyll, 'effected out of a blend of an Oxford college staircase and bachelor rooms in the Albany, untroubled by money or guilt or girls' (1981, p.122). Here again, a reading of Needle's *Wild Wood* highlights the essentially elitist nature of the River Bank's pleasures. The Wild Wooders are acutely class-conscious, and social class is a common topic of discussion as is inevitable among the resentful subjugated class. The subject is seemingly irrelevant to the ruling class but is of course what Nodelman calls an 'obviousness' (1996, p.67) – that is, a barely-

conscious prejudice that is taken as read. Baxter Ferret remarks of the Chief Weasel that

‘He had a fine extensive burrow and wasn’t short of food or drink, but compared with the River Bankers, say, he was financially – and they would no doubt have added socially – decidedly inferior. It was a point which those animals did not tire of making either, unfortunately for friendly relations.’

(p.33)

While celebrating freedom from tedious adult concerns, *The Wind in the Willows* warns against total freedom, which, I have already hypothesised, is a step too far for Grahame. We are shown the inhabitants of the Wild Wood as examples of anarchy, which is deeply feared by Grahame. He appears to posit enclosure and exposure – and conformism and anarchy – as absolute opposites (similar to ‘home’ and ‘away’, or ‘child’ and ‘adult’) and instead of developing a comfortable compromise, switches uneasily between utter contentment and desperate restlessness. This explains the bizarre chapter ‘Wayfarers All’. Here, the reader is given a piece of very explicit advice: that ‘home’ is better than ‘away’. The Rat is temporarily seduced by the idea of travel, and at first resists:

‘With closed eyes he dared to dream a moment in full abandonment, and when he looked again the river seemed steely and chill, the green fields grey

and lightless. Then his *loyal* heart seemed to cry out on his *weaker* self for its *treachery*.'

(p.144, my italics)

When eventually he is overcome by the desire to travel, Mole manages to stop him by force – it is implied that Ratty has been saved from disaster. Mole sees his eyes as 'glazed and set and turned a streaked and shifting grey – not his friend's eyes, but the eyes of some other animal!' (p.157) and regards this urge as a 'strange seizure' (p.157) or a 'fit, or attack' (p.158).

A precursor of this warning appears much earlier in the text, when Ratty tells Mole that the 'Wide World' is 'taboo' (Hunt, 1994b, p.43) to the Riverbankers:

' "Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World," said the Rat. "And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all. Don't ever refer to it again, please." '

(p.15)

In this ambiguous attitude to freedom – it is only good if limited – *The Wind in the Willows* anticipates my discussion of the concept of 'secure liberation' in Chapter 4.

This notion, that complete freedom can be dangerous, or at least in some way unwholesome, is one of the few explicit messages that *The Wind in the Willows* conveys to the child reader: and even then, I suspect, it is not intended as didacticism, but is the expression of one of his own contradictory attitudes. Carpenter implies (p.167) that while Grahame was obsessed with all things Mediterranean, he feared its possibly enervating effect on the poet's creativity, that there might be something 'lotus-eating' or decadent about life in the South. This is akin to his ambivalent attitude to the motor car: as shown above, he was attracted to the excitement of speed but repelled by the possibilities of disturbance to his way of life implicit in the car.

In fact, I suggest that *The Wind in the Willows* is not specifically a children's book, while being perfectly appropriate reading matter for children. In this, I am in agreement with Carpenter (1985), who says: 'it can be enjoyed by the young, who thereby experience (though they do not rationally understand) what its author has to say, and are able to sense some of its resonances' (p.168). Rather, it is one of many books, ostensibly written for children, which is in reality written for the author himself. While some such texts may be said to have been written for 'the-author-as-child', I feel that this book was written as a piece of escapism for the author as he was in 1908 – a conservative, middle-aged man, unhappy in his family life, frustrated in his work and nostalgic for an idyllic past that never existed. Barbara Wall (quoted by Hunt, 1994b, p.112) describes the book as a 'smokescreen' for an exploration of 'the author's own imperfectly understood longings.'

In that case, then, this book has little consciously to say to the child reader, except for the message that children invariably hear from their elders: that things were 'better' in the past. Added to that, the similarly conservative warnings against breaking social rules, and venturing too far from home, render the book the type of text that reinforces traditional adult controls over children. Hunt (1994b, p.117) describes it as 'a manipulative book, providing not only social harmony for adults but social conditioning for children ... The assumption that the life of the riverbankers is a good one is in fact highly political: conservatism is not neutral'.

However, as I have already hinted, the sub-text of the book concerns dilemmas and tensions, between 'home' and 'away', and between the security of belonging to an established group and the threat from 'out there' (both the Wild Wood and the Wide World). Grahame also, as I have suggested, posits certain extremes as absolute opposites in what could be described as a childlike, certainly a simplistic, way; that is, that one must be entirely safe *or* completely exposed; that one is obedient to society's norms *or* becomes a rebel or an anarchist. These, of course, are typical childhood – and especially adolescent – concerns and modes of thinking (although, unlike Sale (p.174), I cannot imagine that even the most 'frightened' twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy would much enjoy the book nowadays, especially since the advent of the sensitive hero, Harry Potter, with whom the reader can identify). Having argued for the conservatism of *The Wind in the Willows*, Hunt (1994b, p.118) is prepared to acknowledge that, in showing the tension between conservatism and

rebellion, Grahame is, in fact, presenting 'a form of reality – telling children the truth, that life is limited'.

The riverbank (the 'garden' of this text) does not, for once represent childhood, but I suspect that Grahame saw it as a symbol of all life (Hunt, 1994b, p.89). Of course, he is only seriously interested in the 'riverbankers' as characters – the lower orders are various generic types of unpleasant animals who are banished to the Wild Wood; and while their lives are of great significance to Needle (1981), they are so unimportant in Grahame's scheme of things that their implied roles as servants to the Riverbankers is never even mentioned. Baxter Ferret's sister, Dolly, hears the Riverbankers' plans for Toad because they 'talked pretty freely about all this in front of the servants, for it's always the way that rich animals don't even seem to look on their staff as human' (*Wild Wood*, p.165).

The garden, then, in this text, is a place of retreat and seductive nostalgic glamour, an adult version of the Neverland. Kenneth Grahame was of course a man of his time; and to determine whether or not he may be held responsible for what can now be perceived as social prejudice lies beyond the scope of this study. My intention has been to emphasise and interpret that aspect of his writing which corresponds to my theme of gardens, and in that process I have remarked on limits to his imagination which in no way destroy my appreciation of the many enjoyable aspects of *The Wind in the Willows*.

3.6. Coda

I am aware that this chapter appears to depart somewhat from my central thesis: that the garden is an image of childhood, which has taken on different meanings and connotations throughout recent history. Clearly, my reading of them does not see them as representative of childhood. Initially, I hesitated about using these two texts, but felt strongly that the idyllic ‘garden-like’ setting of *The Wind in the Willows* and the sequence of gardens in *Harding's Luck* were too significant to ignore. I have attempted to link the yearning to return to the state of childhood (described in Chapter 2) with the more general desire to return to ‘the past’ that is so powerful in these two books.

In both texts I clearly identify the ‘garden’ as standing for a perfect place, or Eden. In these cases, however, that Eden is not specifically the state of childhood, as in Chapter 2, but the past and its perceived values, regarded by both authors as superior to those of the contemporaneous present. To express this notion another way: the Eden of the personal past is, in these books, replaced by that of the collective past. This is a slightly different type of nostalgia, but is similarly influenced by Romanticism, with the emphasis this time on the dyads of past/present, rural/urban, agricultural/industrial, rather than that of child/adult; but retaining the tension between innocence and experience. Again, I judge the definition of these alternatives of Eden to be heavily dependent on the surrounding culture – on anxieties about

industrialisation and about the increasing mobilisation of the working classes and other subordinate social groups.

In both chapters so far, I have considered books that were written 'from the heart', expressing their authors' preoccupations – and, presumably, those of their society and period. In the present chapter, I have tried to focus on the two authors' inconsistencies and evasions, not in any way to discredit them (both are books that I admire and enjoy hugely), but in order to convey a flavour of the *fin de siècle* anxiety about childhood, adulthood, the past and the future which haunted so many thinking people in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods of history. Inglis (1981) summarises much of what I have discussed in these two chapters:

'The garden and its wider setting is the setting of both books [the *Alice* books]. This metonymy for a whole frame of feeling about childhood and its story, and about the England in which they are cast ... recurs as motif in a great many more. The power of that metonymy – the secret garden of childhood and of England – shapes a whole way of thinking and feeling ... It is ... set out most systematically in the work of Beatrix Potter ... the imagery of Beatrix Potter's world balances a colonised, accomplished horticulture and agriculture, and the stable but mysterious Nature which lies untamed beyond the garden wall. Everybody's daydream of a perfect holiday for children occurs in such a scene. For the grown-up such a holiday, a pastoral idyll

beside the sea or up the dale, lies always glowing at the horizon of memory, twenty, thirty, forty years back. For a nation ... it lies just over the rim of its oldest members' memories – Edwardian summers, the old Queen's last Jubilee, the "fin de siècle".'

(p.109)

In Chapter 4, I will concentrate on texts which exemplify 'the perfect holiday for children' and will show why this kind of escapism came increasingly to be regarded as essential for the child. By contrast with the present chapter, I shall return to the garden as a representation of childhood and how the ideal childhood should be, and encounter texts that speak directly to children about childhood.

Chapter 4: The garden as a playground: an image of security

‘She showed him the garden ... now, with Hatty, he saw places and things he had not guessed at before. She showed him all her hiding-places: a leafy crevice between a wall and a tree-trunk, where a small human body could just wedge itself; a hollowed-out centre to a box-bush, and a run leading to it - like the run made in the hedge by the meadow; a wigwam shelter made by a re-arrangement of the bean-sticks that Abel had left leaning against the side of the heating-house; a series of hiding-holes beyond the fronds of the great ferns that grew along the side of the greenhouse; a feathery green tunnel between the asparagus ridges.’

Tom's Midnight Garden (pp.76-77)

Chapter 2 concluded with mention of a gradual shift from the post-Romantic reverence for childhood towards a mawkish idolisation of youth for its own sake. I suggest here that the massive social changes that occurred during the first half of the twentieth century, not least the cataclysm of the First World War, changed this whimsical fear of growing up into a desperate need to protect the ‘innocent’ child. The new appreciation of childhood and domesticity that came home from the trenches brought with it, I suggest, a new respect for the ‘real’, playful child, who was now more able to be ‘real’ in fiction. This significantly, if not irrevocably, altered the balance of power between child and adult. Furthermore, the ground was prepared for the even more radical power shifts of the later decades of the century.

Many of the works I discuss in this chapter belong to the Edwardian era (thus overlapping with the previous chapters on occasion) and the period approximately up to the Second World War – but as before, this is a fairly arbitrary distinction. Again, though I feel that social and cultural issues impinge very strongly on children's literature, I am more concerned with the themes than with forcing chronological continuity. However, although it is of course impossible in this kind of study to determine whether the literature of the period reflects current thinking or actually helps shape it, I am convinced that in this period at least, external events must surely have determined how adults viewed childhood and how they wrote about it.

4.1. Escapism in children's literature

This chapter considers the theme of safety, or security, in the context of 'idyllic' accounts of childhood. I have already discussed the growing desire on the part of the bourgeoisie to protect their children from the worst effects of industrialisation; and I suggest that the garden behind its walls, hedges or fences is both a metaphor for that anxiety to protect the young and also a locus for their play. Ang (2000) has suggested that one of the results of the First World War was an increased desire on the part of all adults to protect children from the problems of the adult world. The world was increasingly seen to be a dangerous and unpredictable place and the certainties that had begun to be disturbed by Darwin and the Industrial Revolution were further damaged by the slaughter of the war. Other factors of change (suggested by Hunt,

1995) include the General Strike, the national government, the first Labour administrations, the Abdication, the Jarrow marches, the influence of the suffragettes, the gradual rise of the 'working classes' and – already mentioned in Chapter 3 – the opening up of the countryside to town dwellers. It was a time of great change; and the relatively newly- (and perhaps uneasily-) established suburban middle classes responded to these perceived threats by 'pulling up the drawbridge'.

I suggest that, while the child at play was already an accepted and significant icon before 1914, as evidenced by Stevenson, Barrie, Grahame and Nesbit, the child became after the First World War a physically far more enclosed and protected figure in the works of writers like Milne, Farjeon, P.L. Travers and others. Hunt (1995) says of the period 1914 to 1945 that:

'There were contrasts, too, between the rather sentimental and whimsical view of childhood typified by A.A. Milne or Rose Fyleman [who wrote the poem 'There are fairies at the bottom of my garden!'](1918)], and the quasi-realism of writers like Ransome or the extravagance of fantasists like John Masefield. But perhaps the single theme which unites these strands is a pervading quietism, a retreat from the realities of the world surrounding the child and the book'.

(p.193)

One can hardly blame the writers for this. Townsend points out (1990, p.127) that 'Britain lost an appalling and disproportionate number of its best men – and also the children they would have had. And the psychological shock of the war was immense ... Walter de la Mare and John Masefield and A.A. Milne and Arthur Ransome survived the war; but we cannot know how many were killed who might have written works to compare with theirs.' In the light of such a cataclysm, it is unsurprising that those who had direct experience of the horrors of the war, or who at least had some knowledge of it and were able to experience it imaginatively, were determined that the child should remain safely behind garden walls to learn through play about the hopeful things in life. He or she becomes during this period an explorer, for whom the garden represents a kingdom or playground in which to act or experiment. The adult in the text is not in direct control but is still a protective presence just 'off-stage'.

While children (in and out of fiction) are shielded from certain aspects of life in the texts discussed below, they are presented as more 'realistic' than in the didactic texts of Chapter 2; less attempt is made to manipulate the idea of childhood. Clearly the balance of power between child reader and adult author has shifted, as well as between fictional child and adult.

4.2. The texts under consideration

In this chapter I shall discuss, among others, the writings of E. Nesbit (whose best-known children's fiction was published between 1899 and 1913), A.A. Milne (*Winnie-the-Pooh*, 1926, and *The House at Pooh Corner*, 1928), and Arthur Ransome (the *Swallows and Amazons* series published between 1930 and 1947); all of whom wrote of gardens or of what I consider to be garden-substitutes. In the course of this discussion I feel it imperative to address the question of why some of these texts continue to be accepted as popular classics of literature while others are virtually forgotten, despite having been bestsellers in their day. As in Chapter 2 I believe this is a matter of innovative and even revolutionary creativity having gradually fallen prey to sentimental and derivative thinking in the hands of less gifted writers. Much of the literature of the period was derivative, bland and forgettable: indeed, Robert Leeson refers to the inter-war period as the 'Age of Brass' to contrast it with the so-called 'Golden Age' of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras and the later 'second flowering' (Carpenter, 1985, Leeson, 1985) or 'second Golden Age' of the post-war period. I have found it interesting to explore texts from this period which are virtually forgotten, since I think they demonstrate the prescribed and approved fare for children which failed to transcend its era and become 'classic' literature. For example, Eleanor Farjeon's *Martin Pippin in the Apple Orchard* (1921) was originally intended for young adults, if one considers the language and subject matter; but while the stories in the volume have a certain imaginative quality, the linking

passages are now virtually unreadable. This kind of passage, while demonstrating Farjeon's poetic gifts, seems (to this reader) embarrassingly coy and precious in its self-conscious pseudo-mediaevalism:

‘ ... in walking by a certain garden he heard a sound of sobbing; and curiosity, of which he was largely made, caused him to climb the old brick wall that he might discover the cause. What he saw from his perch was a garden laid out in neat plots between grassy walks edged with double daisies, red, white and pink, or bordered with sweet herbs, or with lavender and wallflower; and here and there were cordons of fruit-trees, apple, plum and cherry, and in a sunny corner a clump of flowering currant heavy with humming bees; and against the inner walls flat pear-trees stretched their long straight lines, like music-staves whereon a lovely melody was written in notes of snow.’

(p.8)

My own collection of ‘Wonder Books’ for children, dating from the early 1930s, contains dozens of ephemeral poems similar to the one below, clearly derived from the work of such enormously successful poets as Rose Fyleman, Milne, John Drinkwater and E.V. Lucas:

‘I have a little garden, and
I dig it every day;

I water all the pretty flowers

And throw the weeds away.

And yet, tho' flowers are very scarce,

Of weeds there is no lack;

For when I'm fast asleep in bed,

They all come creeping back.

And this is most annoying, for,

As anyone can tell,

They never come back by themselves-

They bring their friends as well!

'The Wily Weeds' by Mary W. McClure: taken from *The Mammoth Wonder Book* (1935)

Here, the counterpoint of self-consciously 'childlike' syntax and equally self-conscious archaisms creates what now seems painfully arch verse. Ironically, however, I believe that the literature of this 'Age of Brass' links, in terms of the perception of childhood as well as chronologically, the two periods to which it looks forward and back, and helped to facilitate the generally superior writing for children of the 1950s onwards. This is what I intend to demonstrate in the present chapter.

The defining text in this chapter, whose spirit informs my reading of the others, is R.L. Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885). Despite having been written thirty years before the First World War confirmed, in my opinion, the need to shelter the child, Stevenson's collection of poems foreshadows later texts that concern children at play in realistic settings; and generally sidesteps the excesses of late nineteenth-century sentimentality about childhood. I regard it as being more akin in spirit to Nesbit, for instance, than Wilde.

The fiction of this era – or that derived from it, such as the *Mary Poppins* series by P.L. Travers (1934-1954, 1982) – abounds with child characters playing in gardens, parks or in the countryside under varying degrees of adult supervision, which is, however, never enough to inhibit completely free play. The child in Stevenson's poems, probably the poet himself (Calder, 1980; Townsend, 1990), stands behind all those later children; like them, he is always able to experience himself as *himself* and is no mere symbol of innocence or of time's irrevocability – although the hauntingly elegiac final poem in the collection is almost Wordsworthian:

‘As from the house your mother sees
 You playing round the garden trees,
So you may see, if you but look
 Through the windows of this book,

Another child, far, far away
And in another garden, play.
But do not think you can at all,
By knocking on the window, call
That child to hear you. He intent
Is still on his play-business bent.
He does not hear, he will not look,
Nor yet be lured out of this book.
For long ago, the truth to say,
He has grown up and gone away;
And it is but a child of air
That lingers in the garden there.'

A Child's Garden of Verses: 'To Any Reader'

Like some of Wordsworth's verse, this poetry has an air of mawkishness about some elements of the structure and rhymes; yet the overall effect is of compelling simplicity and sincerity. The phrase 'Another child, far, far away' with its echo: 'He has grown up and gone away' recalls the gentle melancholy of some of the writing touched on in the previous chapter (for instance, the short stories of Wilde and C.S. Lewis at his most movingly personal); however, this extract summarises a great deal of what I wish to elaborate on in the present chapter.

This child is occupied in the most prosaic circumstances; he (or she) is playing in the garden, watched from time to time through the window by his mother. This image, of course, transports me straight back to my own image of my doll's 'house' referred to in the introductory chapter, and to dozens of other occasions on which I was semi-aware of being casually watched by my mother or perhaps by that of a friend, in another garden. This memory must be common to all of us, for even those without a garden tend to find some substitute (Singer and Singer, 1990). The significance is that the child is safe, while not controlled by the adult. This notion is echoed in most literature for children from the late Victorian/Edwardian era up until the 1960s and will be explored further.

Despite the child's consciousness of being protected, he is at one level oblivious of the adult – 'He does not hear, he will not look'. This has a two-fold importance. On the one hand, the child is utterly 'intent ... bent' on the task in hand, and this accords well with educational and psychological thinking about child development from the nineteenth century onwards. Froebel and others (Dusinberre, p.13) comment on the seriousness of the child's 'play', and children like the Walkers and Blacketts in the *Swallows and Amazons* series can hardly be said to be playing at all. However, on the other hand, the child who ignores the interested adult is behaving in typically self-absorbed and self-centred fashion. Children in early twentieth-century literature tend to be extremely narrow-minded and interested in their own limited concerns and are allowed to be so, unlike the unconvincingly saintly children of earlier literature

(Leeson, 1985, pp.80-81) or the prematurely responsible or even damaged children of the more pessimistic type of late twentieth-century fiction (Ang, 2000, p.162).

Stevenson's child is able to indulge his fantasies of omnipotence through his solitary games; 'This was the world and I was king' ('My Kingdom') – and again, this is a familiar theme in other literature and has a theoretical validity derived from Freud.

Above all, the child in *A Child's Garden of Verses* uses his imagination. Calder emphasises the negative side of Stevenson's experience of childhood, reminding us that he was frequently ill and confined to bed, yet the poems 'are full of the sense of looking out to territories that are beyond the child's reach: only imagination will take him there' (p.30). This pre-empted Singer & Singer's findings, both anecdotal and formally researched and is echoed many times in the children's literature of that and other periods. Briggs & Butts (in Hunt, 1995) remark that Stevenson not only 'valued and was able to recreate the imaginative experiences of children at play', but showed a profound insight into the child's state of mind while engaging in such play: he was able 'to show, in the poem "A Good Play", for instance, that complex state of childhood in which the child maintains total absorption in a game, while always recognising that it is only a game' (p.162). This particular poem is also a study in the kind of gentle but unsubtle bathos, which Nesbit was to master in *The Treasure Seekers* and its sequels. In 'A Good Play' the children 'built a ship upon the stairs':

**‘We sailed along for days and days,
And had the very best of plays;
But Tom fell out and hurt his knee,
So there was no one left but me.’**

Equally, Nesbit makes it clear that her fictional children, while involved in their imaginative play, know it is not reality. The following passage is extracted from the first chapter of *The Wouldbegoods* (1901), in which the Bastables together with two other children (initially seen as ‘white mice’ because of their timidity) decide to create a jungle in their garden:

‘ ... And we looked, and it was a creature with great horns and a fur rug – something like a bull and something like a minotaur – and I don’t wonder Denny was frightened. It was Alice, and it was first-class.

Up to now all was not yet lost beyond recall. It was the stuffed fox that did the mischief – and I am sorry to own it was Oswald who thought of it. He is not ashamed of having *thought* of it. That was rather clever of him. But he knows now that it is better not to take other people’s foxes and things without asking, even if you live in the same house with them.’

(pp.19-20)

Like Stevenson's children, and unlike so many earlier children in fiction, these children are not judged by the author as either 'good' or 'bad'; while they are naughty, they also show themselves to be kind, loyal and resourceful, as well as prone to complicated disagreements and reconciliations. Through her treatment of children's imaginative play Nesbit shows children being *themselves*.

Calder regards *A Child's Garden of Verses* as being cathartic for its author: it is an 'evocation of the delights and of the fears' of childhood, of 'childhood as a time of pain and loneliness as well as of discovery and play' (p.213). This is perhaps how childhood is experienced by most children, but the children in the texts I am examining seem to absorb themselves in their play to the extent that pain and loneliness, if not forgotten, are often transformed and dramatised, as I intend to demonstrate. Some of Stevenson's poems deal with the fears of 'darkness, night thoughts and night spectres, the *thrill and the terror* of being alone in the dark with one's own visions' (Calder, p.30, my italics); and this evokes in me recollections of fictional children terrifying themselves pleasurably – and safely – often in the setting of a garden. Again, I shall show examples in this chapter.

Darton (1932) emphasises the significance of *A Child's Garden of Verses* in its empowerment of the 'real' child; significantly, Darton's book concludes with his discussion of Stevenson's verses: 'Ninety per cent of all verse written for children before the last quarter of the nineteenth century was poetry-substitute, manufactured

in good faith, but in a deliberate purposeful way. It was not perceived that children were their own spontaneous poets - the makers of their own world of imagination' (p.314). Darton's original 1932 study ends with the words:

'It was left for the most serious of all grown-up epochs, the Victorian, to break down for good and all, in poetry as well as prose, the high fence that for centuries shut in the imagination of mankind at the very stage in its periodic growth when it is most naturally fitted to be free.'

(p.315)

Of course, Darton was himself perhaps too close to the First World War and to the literature of the early twentieth century to see how, while the imagination was freed for good and all, the figure of the child continued to be protected behind the 'fence', or garden wall.

I am not claiming here that Stevenson 'invented' the modern child or the notion that children need the confidence of freedom with security, or that they need times with others and time to play alone; I simply find *A Child's Garden of Verses* a simple and compelling summary of how the child was coming to be seen in 1885 by someone who himself had vivid (and not always happy) memories of childhood, and poetic insight into them. Stevenson is for me a kind of template against which the themes of children's literature in the first half of the last century can be matched.

4.3. Secure liberation

Ang (2000) suggests that, 'throughout the [nineteenth] century, childhood and children's literature represented an enclosed space, a walled garden where doubt and anxiety were not allowed to intrude, a domain still ruled by authority' (pp.56-57). This comment summarises the advantages to the child of this view of childhood; and the price that has to be paid for those advantages. The child is kept safe from adult worries in return for deference to the parental edict. I would speculate that the early twentieth-century middle-class parent (especially the father) had much to exercise the mind during this turbulent era, and that the late-Victorian image of the benevolently despotic parent would be clung to in many homes as a source of reassurance and an image of continuity – as it still appears to be today, at least according to the more reactionary sections of the media.

The garden, by definition, is a limited area; it may be more, or less, cultivated and well-tended, but still represents Nature – except in cases like, for instance, the concreted-over yard which (in *Tom's Midnight Garden*) is the twentieth-century replacement for Hatty's beautiful garden, and no longer really a garden at all. A garden is a means of enjoying nature tamed and obedient, and is thus an extension of the home. Cox (1996) draws attention to the essentially *bourgeois* nature of the Victorian garden. Certainly, not all children had (or indeed have) access to a garden – see, for instance, the pitiful garden at the beginning of *Harding's Luck*, discussed in

the previous chapter; however, literature for children was until relatively recently written by middle class authors, and the realities of working-class lives rarely played a significant role in children's fiction, unless as starting-point in a 'rags-to-riches' tale, such as *Harding's Luck*. I regard the garden metaphor in this context as representative of a benevolent, protective attitude that traditionally allies itself with middle-class attitudes to child-raising, and depends heavily on middle-class funds with which to indulge them.

This chapter explores both literal and metaphorical ways in which the garden in literature for children demonstrates ways in which children are viewed as being, and growing. If, as I have already suggested, the garden represents 'secure liberation', it is necessary to answer two questions: liberation *from* what, or whom; and liberation *for* what purposes? Here I shall attempt to answer my first question.

4.4. Freedom from fear

From the point of view of the adult writing the book, and of the adult – probably the parent – buying the book, the moral or emotional security of the child reader was, certainly until well into the twentieth century, of central importance in determining what a 'good' children's book should be about. Both Inglis (1981) and Ang (2000) are concerned about relativism in post-modern children's literature and hark back to the established and seemingly widely accepted values to be found in children's

literature of the early and middle parts of the twentieth century. For Inglis, the great children's authors are Kipling and Ransome. He says that the latter's children's books exemplify moral balance: 'the children are left the large space in the middle in which they may become themselves ... these children are free moral agents, and they live within a secure framework of a role and its duties' (p.135). Ang is particularly anxious about contemporary books such as those by Cormier, which she regards as 'deeply defeatist writings' (p.163). What these two critics are saying is, that while children need freedom for exploration, play and self-directed learning, they also need rules and protective barriers to shield them from their own potential self-destructive urges, and also from the great world outside. Ang uses the useful imagery of enclosure and openness in her book, reaching the conclusion that the middle way is to be preferred. Both writers deplore the apparent tendency of some recent literature to insist that '*all* structures of authority and institutions [are] deadly, and ... in their super-ruthless and efficient way, break the spirit of the individual' (Inglis, p.277).

I suggest that the great children's writers of the late Victorian to mid-twentieth-century periods managed to keep in balance the two opposing strains of safety versus freedom. Each of these writers wrote from a middle-class standpoint, of middle-class children. In all cases, the parent is either entirely absent from the scene, or somewhere just outside the picture, but always available for help. It is important to note that these are strongly middle-class stories: the children require *both* wide open spaces *and* the proximity of a sympathetic adult when needed. It is unlikely that a

working-class protagonist would have both of these, although Eve Garnett (in *The Family from One-End Street*, 1937) shows a family enjoying almost complete freedom as well as a sense of loving parental security, a situation which must appear extraordinary to the contemporary child, since the Ruggles children are totally safe on the streets. Of course, Garnett herself wrote from a middle-class viewpoint. Cox emphasises the essentially *bourgeois* origins of what he terms the 'myth' of the garden (1996, pp.113-114); and Avery (in Hunt, 1996) reminds us that middle-class children differed from the working classes, not only in having gardens to play in, rather than streets, but also in being somewhat isolated from other children. Middle-class children of this era are often depicted in their 'nurseries' (Nesbit, and later, Travers in the *Mary Poppins* books) and this rather neatly evokes Froebel's concept of the *Kindergarten*, where the child is protected and nurtured so that development can occur; just as a nursery is also a place where young plants are protected from the elements and nurtured so that growth can take place and maturity will be attained at the right time. This protective environment would probably have contributed to their being 'young for their age', as Avery says (1996, p.340). This relative unworldliness, coupled with access to books and stories, would have resulted in children like Nesbit's Bastables. Avery herself wrote of characters very close in spirit to the Bastable children in *The Warden's Niece* (1957), who enjoy themselves hugely in their adjoining Oxford gardens, together with their Lewis Carroll-like tutor:

“ ... It's a very good ladder, Thomas, my boy, a most useful contrivance.”

“But you didn’t get on it properly,” objected Joshua, “you only stepped on two rungs.”

“Very well, I’ll come down and go up it step by step. Do you think the professor’s henhouse will hold me? It ought to, I am told it has borne generations of young men from Canterbury.” And he jumped down on to it.

There was a sharp crack, a desolate sound of breaking wood, and Mr. Copplestone was waist deep in the henhouse with the hens scattering in all directions round their enclosure, squawking wildly. The children were silent with horror.

“This is most uncomfortable,” said Mr Copplestone, “and most unfortunate, because I am utterly unable to move.”

“Joshua,” said Thomas, “you’ll have to find Papa and tell him what has happened and try not to let Mamma know; it will get her into such a state. And don’t say anything about rope ladders ...”

(pp.50-51)

Maria, who has run away from her dreadful boarding school, finds herself inextricably involved with the Smith boys and their extraordinary tutor; and it is

through their companionship and a research project she undertakes that she learns how to enjoy life. She is a plausible, well-rounded character, far removed from the idealised child of Chapter 2, who, however – looking ahead to my next chapter – does not in the course of the narrative make any especially significant or profound discoveries about herself; nor does Avery attempt to address the issues of bad schools and of those who allow children like Maria to be so abused. As recently as 1957, then, popular children's authors apparently considered it their task to entertain children and protect them from unpleasant worries beyond their control. Adults in these stories tend to be either loving and considerate or thoroughly evil. Bad adult characters are often, as in traditional folk and fairy tales, unconnected to the children by blood, being step-parents or others in *loco parentis*, such as Maria's bullying teachers. Characters like Maria are often rescued by blood relatives, as is the case when Maria escapes to her benevolent uncle, the Warden of 'Canterbury College'.

The novels I am considering here contain many such optimistic children as Maria; sensitive and thoughtful but frequently lacking in judgement, disinclined to brood once the immediate danger is past, and like Maria, highly serious in their playfulness. Another Maria, in the largely forgotten Carnegie prize-winning novel of 1946, *The Little White Horse* by Elizabeth Goudge, is a relentlessly materialistic and prosaic heroine, despite the generally rather cloying tone of the book (Carpenter & Prichard (1984) remark that 'it has been attacked for its over-sweetness and whimsy'):

‘... it was not her orphaned state that had depressed Maria and made her turn to the contemplation of her boots for comfort. Her mother she did not remember, her father, a soldier, who had nearly always been abroad with his regiment, and who did not care for children anyway, had never had much hold upon her affections ... No, what was depressing Maria was the wretchedness of the journey and the discomfort of country life that it surely foreboded ... She was a London lady born and bred, and she loved luxury.’

(p.9)

The kind of countryside that Maria finds herself in is an exquisite Arcadian fantasy, in which her kind guardian, Sir Benjamin Merryweather, is the benign lord of the manor. He owns an entire valley and thus Maria is able to regard it as an extended garden:

‘ ... with Wroff and Wiggins behind them they were trotting through the bright sunshine and the early spring loveliness of the formal garden, out through the door in the old battlemented walls, and away into the glory of the park.’

(p.46)

It is perhaps understandable that this fantasy of a kind of medievalised Paradise should be considered the best kind of fiction for a generation of readers who knew

nothing but war, rationing and bomb-sites. I find the last few pages quite touching in their excessive – and wistful – mood of ‘happy ever after’, within the confines of the feudal *status quo*:

‘And all the days that followed were happy too ... The men were happy in their castle in the pinewoods ... And Sir Benjamin and Loveday, and Maria and Robin, and Digweed and Marmaduke Scarlet, and all the animals were happy in the manor-house; and Miss Heliotrope and Old Parson and all the people of Silverydew were happy in their houses in the village; and up on Paradise Hill the sheep were happy and the birds sang and the little shrine was a beloved place of pilgrimage for all the countryside. Happy were the days of sunlight, and happy the moonlit nights, too, and full of sweet dreams ... [Maria and Robin] had ten children, and the ten of them kneeling with their father and mother on the twelve hassocks in the Merryweather pew in the church were a godly sight, and when Maria looked down the row she felt she had nothing left to wish for ...’

(pp.236-7)

While this kind of writing might embarrass the child reader of today, one can see how seductive this vision may well have been for the child and the adult of 1946.

At the same time, the literature of the period does include sensitive and thoughtful, even 'damaged', children like Tolly in the Green Knowe series by Lucy Boston (published from 1954, but belonging in spirit, I think to the earlier, rather whimsical era of de la Mare and Farjeon, and often similar in style and mood to Goudge). I see Tolly as a precursor of Tom Long (*Tom's Midnight Garden*), although Boston does not demonstrate the psychological insight and subtlety of Pearce. Tolly experiences what I have earlier referred to as 'the thrill and the terror of being alone in the dark' (Calder, 1980, p.30), but his terror derives from his imagination and he is not, at this stage in the series, under any threat from outside. In fact, like many such protagonists, his imagination is forced into life by the potential boredom of a physically comfortable and socially privileged existence; at the beginning of *The Chimneys of Green Knowe*,

'Tolly spent the afternoon in the garden, where he found Boggis the gardener, but nobody else. He had Orlando to play with, and Orlando found Hedgeprickles rolled up under a heap of leaves. This roused Tolly's hopes for a while, but soon it was achingly clear that his former [ghostly or imaginary] playfellows were gone quite out of reach.'

(p.13)

When he is afraid, he is at least stimulated, and he and the reader know that he is perfectly safe from actual harm. Tolly begins to explore the grounds of Green

Knowe, the old manor house, in the evening, driven by the fascinating notion that 'The garden was not quite so much his after sunset' (p.104). He discovers a secret tunnel that is perhaps a little too exciting:

'It had a sharp mouldy smell. The walls were slimy to touch and the steps slimy to tread on ... Tolly got very tired with stumbling and began to have nightmare fears. Suppose the bulging walls gave way behind him and he was trapped? Suppose there was someone or something beside himself in the tunnel? ... Tolly was eaten up with curiosity but also, equally, with panic. He desperately wanted to be safely out again ... He crept out thankfully into the air. The first thing he saw was the Evening Star. He had quite lost his sense of time. Down there where there was neither sunrise nor sunset he might have lost days, or like Rip Van Winkle, a hundred years. He was glad to see the candlelight shining from the house ... Tolly followed slowly, looking at the shapes of the boughs he knew so well, and at the shape of the spaces between the trees, usually alive with birds, but now they were all asleep. Everything seemed fixed in a trance of eternal sameness.'

(The Children of Green Knowe, pp.118-120)

Like any highly imaginative child, Tolly lives through a series of terrors that never materialise, only to return with relief to the familiar and comforting domestic world, symbolised here by the welcoming candlelight; just as Stevenson's child returns

home in the evening from thrilling imaginary adventures. Here, again, I regard the garden as a meeting-place, or compromise, between the safe but unexciting world of the home, in which a child is generally supervised, and the exciting but threatening world outside in which the child is more vulnerable. I venture to suggest that this type of self-induced terror, quickly resolved by the return home, would be especially pleasing to writers and parents who had lived through the Great War.

4.5. Limited freedom from adult interference

I have already indicated that creative play needs, ideally, a physical space in which to play and also a psychological space – circumstances in which the child is free of adult interference, yet has an adult available when needed. This is, of course, the case in the vignette from my own childhood with which I introduced this study.

In the predominantly middle-class circumstances of much fiction involving play, children have these requirements: large open spaces and apparent freedom, and also parents who are always available. The mothers in the *Swallows and Amazons* books are traditional, non-working mothers (the fathers in the two main families are either dead or away at sea) and, although mothers and aunts in Nesbit's books are obliged to earn a living, as she herself did, they do so, like Nesbit, working from home as writers or even as landladies (in *The House of Arden*). These mothers are both loved

and appreciated; and, fortunately, have the humour and understanding to recognise when (and why) they are not wanted.

In *Swallows and Amazons*, apart from Jim Turner (Captain Flint), all adults are 'natives' and not wholly to be trusted: *Swallows and Amazons*, pp.251-252:

'These natives! Friendly though they were, there was never knowing what mischief they might do ... Mother knew that the Dixons would let her know at once if no one had come up from the island with the milk-can. Natives were like that, useful in a way, but sometimes a bother. They all held together, a huge network of gossip and scouting, through the meshes of which it was difficult for explorers and pirates to slip.'

Captain Flint, the 'Amazons' ' uncle, is the only exception, as he joins in the children's activities fully; although the 'Swallows' ' mother participates cheerfully when required (and, fortunately for the children, who depend on her for provisions, does not take offence at being kept in her place) she is still sufficiently concerned about adult matters as only to rate as a 'friendly native'.

' "Three o'clock tomorrow, and the scuppers will be red with blood," said Captain Flint. "But I suppose you don't mind my stopping to dinner today."

“Not a bit,” said Nancy. “The mate’s invited you. And there’s lots to eat. We brought a plum pudding to cut up in pieces, and fry. Most luscious. Cook gave it us. And then afterwards we found a cold tongue. It had hardly been touched so we brought it too. But we came away rather privately because we thought we might be stopped, and so we went and forgot the grog.”

“I’ll have the kettle boiling in a minute,” said Susan. “You bring the plates out, Titty. Pick out some of the best potatoes, Roger, and we’ll bake them. There’s lots of hot ashes at the edge of the fire.”

“Come on, Peggy, and we’ll bring our stores into camp,” said Captain Nancy.

“Can I give you a hand with that lacing?” said Captain Flint, and in another moment he was sitting on the ground stretching out the sail while John reeved the lacing through the eyelet holes along the edge of the sail, and Susan was busy with the fire and the kettle, and Titty and the boy were bringing out plates and mugs and knives.

“This is a lot better than writing books,” said Captain Flint presently. “Now, skipper, if you’ll take two turns there and hold fast, I’ll show you a good way of finishing off.” ’

(Swallows and Amazons, p.289)

There are several points worth making about this very typical extract. Arthur Ransome himself enjoyed such holidays as a child and, most importantly, remembered exactly how he felt at the time. His empathy for his child characters, together with his talent for dialogue, enabled him to write entirely from the child's perspective, with humour as well as the utmost seriousness about the task in hand, and with immense tact. Like Captain Flint, Ransome treats the children with utter respect. Although the children are, strictly speaking, playing – at explorers, sailors, pirates and so on – the activities in which they are engaged, while purely voluntary, are also necessary and important, and are hard work; preparing a meal for seven people, setting up camp, and lacing a sail. The children are temporarily free of their parents, but are instead expected to take responsibility for themselves in potentially dangerous situations. Although we hear Nancy use the euphemism ‘ “we came away rather privately” ’ and smile at it, Ransome is careful not to leave any space for complicity between author and adult reader; Nancy takes herself seriously but is herself aware of the ambiguity in what she says, so that the knowing adult laughs with, not at, her.

Inglis asserts that ‘Play is free in the important sense that you don't have to pay for it and in that it has few limits, its rules and conventions encourage variety and novelty, the ease and joyfulness of creating new possibilities out of the form and its laws’ (p.38). I agree that this is the child's view of play; but I would modify Inglis's statement slightly in the light of what he himself and Ang have said about boundaries.

There *is* a price to be paid for play as Inglis sees it; the child needs to be physically safe, which means he or she must experience a certain curtailment of freedom, and must submit to the parent's will. Inglis says that Ransome 'wrote of the absolute safety of a Lake District (and Norfolk Broads) bounded by the absolute justice of the parental writ' (p.66). In other words, the price of safe freedom to play is that the freedom is illusory; for the child, freedom from fear – and from the potential dangers of the world 'outside' – is incompatible with complete freedom from the adult. Children in these novels, as I have shown in the case of the Ransome books, are, in fact, totally dependent on adults for their survival and this is why their exploring and learning, while deeply serious, is, nonetheless, *play*. Ultimately, their play depends on adults' continuing approval, which in turn is concerned with the children's well-being, as the adult judges it. Much has been made (Carpenter & Prichard, Tucker, 1993) of Captain Walker's famous telegram: ' "Better drowned than duffers if not duffers wont drown" ' (*Swallows and Amazons*, p.12). The children's father is apparently showing a certain amount of insouciance towards his family; on the other hand, he demonstrates a profound trust in their common sense, especially that of 'Captain' John, and, more importantly, knows that they have been well taught the art of sailing. Tucker (1981, p.117) describes Ransome's books, somewhat scathingly, as 'careful adult propaganda, encouraging Gordonstoun initiatives and well-planned explorers' diets.' Certainly, everything depends on each crew member's unquestioning obedience to a higher authority: Roger asks his mother,

‘ “Does it mean me, too?”

“Yes, if John and Susan will take you, and if you promise to do whatever they tell you” ’

(*Swallows and Amazons*, p.12).

Because he has been brought up to respect and obey the authority of his parents, John is devastated when he loses his ship (in *Swallowdale*, 1931).

‘Captain John knew all the bitterness of a captain who has lost his ship. Now that it was too late he was telling himself that he ought to have guessed that the wind would be so much stronger ... It was all his fault. And now *Swallow* was gone and it was only the third day of the holiday. What was it his father had said about duffers? Better drowned. John thought so too. And then a new flock of black, wretched thoughts came crowding in like cormorants coming to roost ... He knew what Titty was thinking as she stood dripping, looking at the waves breaking on that hateful rock. For Titty and himself, *Swallow* was something alive. And now, with *Swallow* gone, how could they live on Wild Cat Island? How could anything lovely happen any more? What would mother say? After all, they might easily have been drowned. Mother was very good at understanding things, but wouldn’t even she put an end to exploring for this summer at least?’

(Swallowdale, pp.76-77)

As always, Ransome writes of the children with understanding, tact and sympathy, and without a trace of patronage. John's anguish is profound and palpable; he takes his adult-like responsibilities deadly seriously and thus feels that he has failed. He is able to apologise, make amends and accept forgiveness in an impressively adult manner, and continues, unnecessarily, to castigate himself for his error of judgement throughout the rest of the book.

However, it is of course John's respect for his parents' opinion that causes this unhappiness. He knows quite well that *if* he is obedient and remembers their advice he and the other children will be safe. John learns a painful lesson; that pride comes before a fall. He has done something of which his father would disapprove, and has risked everyone's safety. He has also been reminded that parents tend to know best and that 'freedom' for the privileged child is an illusion.

This is an example of what Ang means when she says,

'A balance between the two forces of control and freedom represents ... an ideal, and this ideal to some extent is realised in children's literature from the middle of the nineteenth century to about the 1950s. Here, the child and the adult are allies; the adult represents neither a repressive force to be

overthrown nor an overly solicitous one whose existence might protect but also diminish the child, never allowing it to develop, but instead forcing it to remain a default Peter Pan. In works written during this period ... there is a respect and trust between adult and child. The child trusts the adult to be there when needed, to put things right when necessary and respects his right to exert discipline over his young life. The adult in turn trusts the child to be sensible and not to stray past the boundaries erected for his safety.'

(p.118).

In contrast with this protected, predominantly middle-class world behind the garden wall (whether literal or metaphorical) Ang inveighs against some elements of contemporary literature for children, in which 'parental authority has been represented as strangely weakened or rejected ... Thus have the protective walls separating the child from the bleak "real" world come down. The child within, and the child reader of, modern fiction encounter ... the whole gamut of societal evil, not at a decent distance, but in the full immediacy of personal experience, and under the implied defence that this *is* real life, after all' (p.16). Ang's implied criticism is, presumably, that this is real life only for an unfortunate minority. A full discussion of this issue is outside the scope of this thesis; I acknowledge, however, that the 'Golden Age' literature that I am discussing in this chapter, with its expansive gardens and landscapes, and generous and enlightened parents, is no more typical of the actual

lives of contemporary children than the Eden-landscapes and Christ-like heroes of Chapter 2; or, indeed, the gritty realism of late twentieth century literature.

4.6. Freedom from adult problems

In most of the books under consideration, the adults are peripheral characters, only significant in that they supply – or thwart – the needs of the protagonists. These books deal with only one aspect of the child's experience; the importance of play. Relationships with adults are usually comfortable enough to be ignored, and those with peers are more important. In cases where children are not in good relationships with adults, they seem to suffer indifference rather than cruelty, as I will discuss elsewhere. Generally, however, the adult's rôle is to feed and clothe the children, police their activities benevolently (and often forgivingly) and to be available whenever needed, but otherwise to keep out of the children's way. They are rarely allowed to have worries of their own. I imagine that writers and other adults of the time were constantly concerned to protect children from knowledge that might seriously disturb their childhood idyll. The Bastable children in Nesbit's three *Treasure Seekers* books have lost their mother and their father's business is failing; most of the time this appears to be a device to justify their grandiose plans for the restoring of the family fortunes. Just once, however, the reader sees the sadness and anxiety of the father, and it is disturbing, perhaps because Nesbit was well acquainted with such emotions herself and is writing from the heart:

'That evening Father had a letter by the seven-o'clock post. And when he had read it he came up into the nursery ... So we told him all about it. It took a long time, and Father sat in the armchair. It was jolly. He doesn't often come and talk to us now. He has to spend all his time thinking about his business. And when we'd told him all about it he said –

"You haven't done any harm this time, children; rather good than harm, indeed. Mr Rosenbaum has written me a very kind letter." ... He stopped and then said: "No; you didn't do any harm to-day; but I want you for the future not to do anything so serious as to try to buy a partnership without consulting me, that's all. I don't want to interfere with your plays and pleasures; but you will consult me about business matters, won't you?"

Of course we said we should be delighted, but then Alice, who was sitting on his knee, said, "We didn't like to bother you." Father said, "I haven't much time to be with you, for my business takes most of my time. It is an anxious business – but I can't bear to think of your being left all alone like this."

He looked so sad we all said we liked being alone. And then he looked sadder than ever. Then Alice said, "We don't mean that exactly, Father. It is rather lonely sometimes, since Mother died."

'Then we were all quiet a little while.'

(*The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, pp.123-4)

Elsewhere, Nesbit maintains her usual, briskly humorous tone. Other writers prefer to shield their characters completely from such adult worries. Tucker (in a lecture given to the Arthur Ransome Society, 1993) points out the benefits of this to the young reader of such essentially optimistic fiction, in an article about Ransome:

'Children read for pleasure, and Arthur Ransome's stories principally deal in enjoyment. Although his young characters have to work hard for whatever they get, they always have a lot going for them. We see them on holiday rather than bowed down with uncongenial school work. Their parents are usually affluent, well able to afford ample leisure both for themselves and for children ... his young characters generally expect and manage to have as good a time as possible.'

No wonder so many readers have always warmed to this picture. An economically and emotionally stable background enables these child characters to get on with their adventures without constantly having to check that everything is still all right at base. Child readers, sometimes aware of

instability in their own lives, can forget such fears when reading about such blessedly confident and secure characters.'

Of course, this view depends on the assumption that everything *is* 'all right at base'. Very little is made of Mrs. Blackett's widowhood or Mrs. Walker's feelings about her husband being away at sea for long periods; ironically, much of the Swallows' and Amazons' physical freedom depends on this very lack of fathers. In the context of these stories, such matters are irrelevant. Ransome protects the child character and the child reader by ignoring adult worries except when they concern the children's physical well-being. Mrs. Walker, despite being the 'best of all natives' fusses a little about chills and damp clothes, and Susan is her very able deputy, but the children's emotions and those of their parents are unexplored.

As in many other books of this period, the child has to be shielded from adult unpleasantness; adults are one-dimensional, either friendly or hostile to children, but with no other personality traits of their own, and the only problems the children have to contend with are either external, puzzle-like ones with neat solutions, or the occasional disagreement among their own ranks.

4.7. Freedom from the need to work

As the Singers have shown (1990), free play requires certain conditions to be met (a person who encourages or at least tolerates play, space and time for play, and some form of props – which includes books and stories). This of course means that play is not equally readily available to all children. Avery comments, with reference to Nesbit's families, 'They are genteelly poor ... Nesbit provided even the struggling Railway family with someone to cook and clean' (1996, p.340). This may be compared with, for example, Tom in *The Water Babies* (a chimney sweep) and Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind* (a stable boy and coachman), neither of whom are given ideal circumstances for play, although, like all children, they find opportunities and improvise playthings for fantasy and play. An interesting contrast with such families as the Walkers and the Blacketts (*Swallows and Amazons*), who are free to engage in very serious play, are the child characters in Noel Streatfeild's novels, who begin earning their own livings as early as twelve years old. While Ransome's children treat their play as work, Streatfeild's earn money working hard at activities that resemble play. They all excel in very exciting and glamorous careers as singers, actors, dancers, or ice skaters and are therefore characters of sheer wish-fulfilment. They are generally obliged to earn money to help the family finances; although in *Ballet Shoes* (1936), at least, the money is not needed to pay the servants, who loyally – and miraculously – offer to work for no wages. It is however notable that, as the embodiments of wish-fulfilment, children like the Fossils (*Ballet Shoes*)

tend to lead fairy tale lives, with the colour and glamour in the foreground and little time (or need) for imaginative play.

4.8. Freedom from authorial exploitation of childhood

If one returns briefly to the images of childhood discussed in Chapter 2, it becomes quite clear that Carroll's Alice is not only an exception to the post-Romantic tendency to sentimentalise the child, she also prefigures fictional children to come. Despite what I have earlier said about Carroll's regressive feelings about the state of childhood, he somehow presents a child who is a 'realistic' mixture of characteristics. Perhaps this is because she is based upon a real, individual child. I suggest that, from Nesbit's time on, the earlier influences of Carroll on character and of Stevenson on action have been very significant.

Dusinberre declares (in the introduction to her 1987 book *Alice to the Lighthouse*) that: 'The turning-away from allegory to a more solid vision of childhood was part of a whole cultural movement in which children were allowed to be part of a Darwinian world, recovering a relation to animals rather than angels' and that in this cultural shift lay 'emancipation for the child in the book, as well as for the child reader'. Dusinberre (p.57) continues a discussion of Froebel's theories by reiterating the remarks of E.R. Murray, 'who in 1914 claimed Froebel as a pioneer of modern psychology, pointing out that he was "pre-Darwinian in time ... but post-Darwinian

in many of his beliefs” '. The child, in this instance becomes far more literal and humanised than the earlier symbol of innocence – although still seen as an ‘innocent’ in need of protection. Dusiaberre points out in her final chapter, ‘The literary and the literal’, that another freedom, experienced this time by child readers of these books as well as by their characters, is freedom from unrealistic adult expectations and the burdens incurred by having to fulfil adult longings. She explains that ‘the suggestiveness of the metaphor itself imposes limits on perception. The literal world is freer’ (p.222). During the period when most of these works were written, then, children were increasingly regarded as individuals and were portrayed as realistic characters rather than idealised or even symbolic ones. Dusiaberre quotes with approval from the writings of such ‘literal’ authors as Laura Ingalls Wilder, for whom the journeying of the pioneers was the search for a better home, rather than a ‘quest’ narrative, a metaphor for the journey of life (p.226). She goes on, ‘children’s writers began to feel that they would like to describe real places and real journeys – that is, happenings which, though imagined, did not stand for something other than what they literally were’ (p.225). Similarly, she notes (p.7) that Robert Louis Stevenson, in *A Child’s Garden of Verses* writes of real children, in real gardens:

‘For each child the discovery of Nature is a rediscovery of the parable of Eden. It is no coincidence that Stevenson’s influential *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1885) echoes both name and idea, for the child in the poems plays, as

F.J. Harvey Darton pointed out in 1932, “in an ordinary English garden, not Paradise.” ’

The garden, as I regard it in this chapter, is a literal garden and not a metaphor; although it can, clearly, stand as an *image* of safety and freedom, it more significantly *is*, literally, a place of safety and freedom. Didacticism and the imposition of symbolic meanings on material objects and events has given way to acceptance of children as people with a complex range of needs, including the freedom to play and sometimes to behave badly. For instance, Toad in *The Wind in the Willows* is like a child, according to Briggs (1995, p.180), with his ‘sudden, short-lived enthusiasms ... self-absorption, self-confidence and lack of moral inhibitions, and his urgent and disruptive desires. He is a naughty child in a world of adults, carefree, irresponsible, and amoral.’ He serves no didactic authorial purpose other than the delighted depiction of high spirits; even after he has been severely punished for his crimes he continues irrepressibly on his hedonistic way and fails triumphantly to learn his lesson:

‘ “ Ho, ho!” he cried, in ecstasies of self-admiration. “Toad again! Toad, as usual, comes out on the top! ... Who escaped, flying gaily and unscathed through the air, leaving the narrow-minded, grudging, timid excursionists in the mud where they should rightly be? Why, Toad, of course; clever Toad, great Toad, *good* Toad!” ... “O, how clever I am! How clever, how clever, how very clev – ”

A slight noise at a distance behind him made him turn his head and look. O horror! O misery! O despair!

About two fields off, a chauffeur in his leather gaiters and two large rural policemen were visible, running towards him as hard as they could go ...'

(pp.178-9)

Wullschläger emphasises the lifelikeness of the children in Milne's poetry, compared with earlier characters (such as Diamond or Ellie):

'Unlike earlier fantasy writers, Milne is a devastatingly accurate child psychologist. The witty conviction with which he presents his child-centred universe has kept young readers hooked for seventy years. But it also marked the end of an idealism which had provided the climate for the fantasy genre to develop. With Milne, the cult of the innocent child was over.'

(p.186)

Christopher Robin is presented very differently from the innocent or 'ministering' child of the previous century or indeed the often-manipulated child character of the later twentieth century 'problem' story. The stories discussed in this chapter, then, are concerned primarily with pleasure and entertainment for child protagonist and

child audience, and their child characters are therefore permitted to be realistic and thus often naughty children.

However, while on the one hand, these child characters are not puppets like so many of their predecessors, but usually 'real' and convincing characters, neither are they fully rounded, as the emphasis in this type of text is on fun and humour rather than the development of the individual. For instance, in Ransome's books there is no hint of sexual awareness in these stories, despite the fact that the children continue to spend holidays together as they grow towards adulthood. Neither is there ever much aggression or serious conflict between the characters. Tucker (1993) defends Ransome from criticism, as I would, by saying that:

'It would be silly to blame him for evasion in his books, given that he never claimed to write the whole truth about childhood. His decision to stay silent about all aspects of his previous experiences of a war-torn world in his stories reflects the general feeling in children's publishing at the time. As a writer, his books describe extended forms of play better than any other author before or since. That he did not also introduce his deeper knowledge of the human soul into his books does not rule him out from greatness in what he achieved.'

The children in these play-centred books will be compared in the next chapter with children who grow in insight and understanding of themselves and the world.

I have described the constraints from which I believe early twentieth century children's books freed their protagonists and, presumably, to a lesser extent, their readership; I shall now consider what developed as a result of that qualified liberation.

4.9. Freedom to play

I have already considered some of the required preconditions for 'free' play and how those conditions are met in these works of fiction and poetry, but I now need to define what play is, what types of play occur in my chosen texts, and how it can be seen as beneficial to the protagonist and, by extension to the child reader. I am here assuming that the same contemporaneous socio-cultural and educational thinking would have informed the way fictional *and* actual children were regarded and nurtured; in other words, that if fictional children were, for example, allowed to be fully 'themselves', that was more or less true of 'real' children.

Children's play blurs the distinctions between the physical and other parts of human beings. Dusienerre quotes Froebel's observations that it would be difficult "to define where the purely physical ends and the purely intellectual begins", and she relates this to the once radical vision of such writers as Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, in whose fiction body, mind and emotions are integrated. Although it may be true

that, because children's play so clearly involves the *whole* child, it is difficult to separate out its constituent effects, Singer & Singer (1990) attempt to do so, suggesting that extended play fosters specific cognitive and emotional development such as increased discrimination between fantasy and reality, and the ability to recognise, express and control emotions. They conclude (p.151) that

‘Whatever the limits of the research literature and the clear need for much more investigation, we cannot avoid the belief that imaginative play serves important purposes in the emergence of the psychologically complex and adaptable person. Individual differences in the frequency and variety of such play seem to be associated not only with richer and more complex language but also with a greater potential for cognitive differentiation, divergent thought, impulse control, self-entertainment, emotional expressiveness, and perhaps, self-awareness.’

Reading the above list in the light of such fiction as Nesbit's ‘Bastable’ stories, I recognise that a great deal of highly ‘playful’ children's literature of the late Victorian to 1945 period comically exemplifies such benefits; the Bastable children derive a richness of language from their reading and develop it in their role play; their divergence of thought is well illustrated in their disastrous schemes; they are of course experts in ‘self-entertainment’; and their emotional expressiveness and self-awareness are quite obvious. It is useful to compare the Bastables with Enid Blyton's

'Famous Five' and 'Secret Seven', who start from a very similar premise – no interfering adults in view and a problem to be solved using their own resources – to see how play for Nesbit has a deep significance for the development of the personality, while for Blyton it is the driving force behind the plot and little more.

I do not intend to discuss in detail research into children's play that dates from later than my chosen period; I simply wish to show that children's play is now formally acknowledged, in most quarters, to be of benefit in ways that writers of fiction have known for well over a century. My next chapter, on growth, will focus on more recent fiction that makes more explicit these insights.

Play is, as Singer & Singer themselves acknowledge, 'just plain fun' (p.40). Children are not generally aware that adults approve of play as a means of development; in the stories I am considering, their play is often subversive and resistant to what the children imagine adults want of them. It is clear, I think, that the benefits of children's play are somewhat 'organic' in nature; that the child derives from play whatever she or he wants or needs at the time. In literature dating from the beginning of the last century it is often the case that adults only care about measurable development. Dusiemberre (p.191) says of Nesbit's *Five Children and It*, 'Author, reader and child within the book share a space which allows them to sport with the adult obsession with facts.' Of course, much earlier, Lewis Carroll satirised this obsession in the many pedagogical-seeming characters encountered by Alice.

In other books of this type, the adults are either more enlightened than this or too preoccupied to worry about the quality of the child's play. In the third *Green Knowe* book, *The River at Green Knowe* (1959), the two elderly ladies nominally in charge of Ida and the two 'Displaced Children', Ping and Oskar, treat them with a kind of benign neglect. Dr. Maud Biggin cares only about her academic research, and remarks, ' "You can't stop children playing. They'll play all right. There's the river, isn't there? And a house you can hardly believe in when you see it. What more can a child want? Just turn them out." ' (p.7). Miss Bunn's 'only remaining passion in life was food' (p.6). Unsurprisingly, the children have an idyllic holiday, freely exploring the river during the daytime, then being fed vast, sugary meals in the evenings. Similarly, the children in Grahame's *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, both written for, and in their time extremely popular with, adults, are free of the interfering kind of adult. These children, in fact, despise most adults and are generally embarrassed by their attempts to ingratiate themselves. Adults are ironically termed 'the Olympians', and condemned as 'hopeless and incapable creatures'. The Oswald Bastable-like narrator explains:

'These elders, our betters by a trick of chance, commanded no respect, but only a certain blend of envy – of their good luck – and pity – for their inability to make use of it. Indeed, it was one of the most hopeless features in their character (when we troubled ourselves to waste a thought on them: which

wasn't often) that, having absolute licence to indulge in the pleasures of life, they could get no good of it'.

(The Golden Age, p.3)

This passage, written in 1895, carries none of the anger or bitterness it might have possessed, if it had been written a century later. It is cheerfully accepted that adults are different from children and are best kept out of the way. Later texts would begin to explore notions of continuity in human life, and they will form the basis of a later chapter.

4.10. Freedom to act out roles

Inglis says that 'play ... is the purposive and endless exploration of other possibilities' (p.38) and Briggs (1995, p.173) quotes Stevenson's *Virginibus puerisque* (1881, and described here as a 'starting-point' for *A Child's Garden of Verses*), in which the author 'describes the child's rapt absorption in imaginary games that continually transform his surroundings: "In the child's world of dim sensation, play is all in all. 'Making believe' is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character".' Much of children's imaginative play seems to involve improving ordinary, dull surroundings (the use of play in healing is discussed in the following chapter). As Dusiemberre points out (p.190), this kind of play has a long literary history: 'When Nesbit shows the Bastable children in

The Story of the Treasure Seekers transforming their drab, everyday existence into a fable, she enters as artist a country bounded by Stevenson on one side and Oscar Wilde on the other.' Singer & Singer (p.20 and p.149) suggest that this is not merely wishful thinking but an actual 'trying out' of possibilities without committing oneself to a course of action.

Nesbit's Bastable children are as well-read as all the children in her books and they 'act out their reading' (Briggs, 1995, p.176). This simply provides a familiar and exciting plot by means of which to enliven their surroundings or, as Dusiinberre remarks, 'to colour the narrative of their own exploring' (p.216). Singer & Singer might be referring to the Bastables or the 'Swallows and Amazons' when they hypothesise that 'children choose plot lines that reflect danger, because these themes seem to be interesting to them and allow for more adventure and conflict in their play' (p.74). Of course, in children's literature this has an extra, important dimension: the child characters' 'plot lines' inevitably lead to either comedy (in Nesbit) or 'real' danger (Ransome), thus providing vicarious excitement for the child reader – and, potentially, the possibility of a third level of imaginative play (as a child I enjoyed the Ransome books and occasionally pretended to be one of the characters).

4.11. Freedom to live out fantasies of omnipotence

Manlove (p.2) has remarked in his study of English fantasy writing that fantasy ‘gives scope to the English love of play – play with the imagination, play with the rules of fairy-tale, play with philosophical ideas concerning such topics as time or a fourth dimension, play by mixing the supernatural comically with real life, by animating toys, having speaking animals or inventing wholly new world with their own rules.’ It is interesting to note how many of these elements of play are concerned with control. The Singers stress the importance of imaginative play in making sense of a world largely beyond the child’s control (p.29) and that much observed children’s play is concerned with mastering and thus controlling aspects of the environment. They go on to discuss the common creation of ‘a make-believe dimension, a controlled, reduced-to-size realm that is the child’s domain of personal power’ (p.43). This may explain the popularity of literature (and toys) involving miniaturisation – for instance, Mary Norton’s *Borrowers* series. In a significant number of children’s stories the idea of mastery and control is linked with wish-fulfilment. I shall discuss this more fully in Chapter 5.

If the world is miniaturised, then it usually follows that the child grows imaginatively in stature. Books such as A.A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) are familiar examples. Christopher Robin takes on the role of a god-like figure, while the toys represents children (Carpenter, 1985, p.202:

Wullschläger, 1995 [2001], p.188). Lurie (1990) includes the *Pooh* books in her study of subversive children's literature; and subversion can, of course, be a significant pleasure of children's play. She remarks on the comforting – to the child reader – discrepancy between reality and fantasy:

'In reality Christopher Robin is a very small boy in a world of adults; but in the *Pooh* books he rules over – and in the illustrations physically towers over – a society of smaller beings ... Surely part of the universal appeal of the *Pooh* books is due to the pleasure any child must feel in imagining himself or herself larger, wiser, and more powerful than the surrounding adults.'

(p.167)

There is little suggestion in the *Pooh* books that this omnipotence is in any way compensatory, beyond the common childhood experience of feeling sometimes helpless in an adult world. Some texts in which children learn to compensate for unhappiness are discussed in the next chapter. There is no serious experience of fear or threat through which characters can explore the ambivalence of the world and of their own feelings. The world of the Hundred Acre Wood is always, ultimately, utterly safe (Lurie, p.169): 'Christopher Robin ... is the most omnipotent of all child-heroes, the *deus ex machina* who makes all come right. There is no Hook, no "Off with his head", no threat to his safe playground of stuffed toys with its child-props of balloons, twigs, spoonfuls of medicine' (Wullschläger, 1995 [2001], p.188).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, as already mentioned, Edith Nesbit wrote a series of fantasies that might be labelled 'enchanted realism' in which, as Julia Briggs points out, it is impossible to tell whether the magic is meant to be plausible or whether it is an extended metaphor for the imagination (1987, p.22). Clearly, in Nesbit's books magic – or imagination – is used for purposes of wish-fulfilment. Her characters are frequently granted wishes or 'powers' and are then shown their unsuitability for omnipotence. Her 'enchanted realism' is intriguing, as she combines what was, for its time, highly innovative realism with traditional, shape-shifting magic, often concerned with wish-fulfilment. In Nesbit the two strands are successfully twisted together. In fact, she wrote a story in 1912 called *The Wonderful Garden*, now virtually forgotten, which, while not a true fantasy, embodies her conviction that imagination is almost more important than everyday life and can transform it. In this story, the three child protagonists discover a book about 'The Language of Flowers' and attempt to pervert the course of nature by its means. They inevitably achieve the desired result, through bizarre coincidence or the agency of kind adults, but, while the reader knows better, they remain convinced that it is indeed magic. This 'magic', of course, is theirs for the using, and they delude themselves into thinking that adults are helpless in the face of their power. Interestingly, most of their experiments are paralleled by closely similar events in other Nesbit books, in which we *are* expected to 'suspend our disbelief'.

I have already referred to the freedom from direct adult interference that typifies many books; some child characters are especially careful to keep their activities secret from the adult world. J.D. Stahl has discussed this at length in his essay 'The imaginative uses of secrecy in children's literature'. He speculates that this often reveals a dual perspective: 'the naïve but authentic internal perspective of childhood, and the experienced though also limited external perspective of adulthood, sometimes indulgent or ironic, frequently affectionate or nostalgic' (p.39). This remark puts me in mind of some of my own comments in Chapter 2, where I discuss ways in which authors manipulate child characters to fulfil their own nostalgic needs; but on the other hand it also brings forcibly to mind the narrative device used successfully by Grahame (1895 and 1898) and later, and more famously, by Nesbit in the *Treasure Seekers* books (1899 onwards). In these texts the authors manage to sustain a conspiracy between author and child reader *and* between author and adult reader by having a child character act the role of omniscient narrator, more traditionally carried out by the 'author-as-narrator'. Despite Carpenter & Prichard's claim that Nesbit's writing is thereby rendered 'condescending and patronising', it is, in my opinion, a device that gives the child reader 'ownership' of the text much more effectively than the more usual third person narrator. Stahl goes on to say that 'At the root of this illuminating tension [between the dual perspectives] lies respect for the development of the child's personal and social identity' (p.47). The effect of authors such as Grahame, Nesbit and Blyton writing of secret games from the child's

viewpoint is to convey this deep respect for the child's need for some, if limited and short-lived, sense of omnipotence.

4.12. Coda

Dusinberre suggests (p.198) that while privacy is important in children's play, the removal of the adult is also a political issue:

'The image of the child rooted in the earth and needing its own ground may derive initially from the teaching of both Rousseau and Froebel, but it becomes in many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century children's books an emblem of protest against adult refusal to allow children their own territory.'

She continues (p.200):

'These writers [Stevenson, Grahame and the Kipling of *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*] give children not a dream place to be inhabited by tired adults, but a piece of ground which is their own, from which they can exclude adults, tired or energetic as the case may be ... The request for a bit of earth voices a need for emotional space as much as for physical territory, as it also does in a contemporary children's book, *Tom's Midnight Garden* by

Philippa Pearce. The lonely twentieth-century apartment child, Tom Long, escapes at night into an old Victorian garden where he plays with Hatty, a little Victorian girl: “She had made this garden a kind of kingdom”.’

This is more than a demand for physical space, more even than a plea for an emotional escape from needy adults. Dusiinberre here makes explicit the most significant idea in this chapter; the child’s urgent need to be his or herself, not the repository of adult ideals or anxieties:

‘Froebel had urged that children should be given gardens, not Arcadias to dream in or Never-Never lands to ensure perpetual childhood, but territories for the exercise of real power: “To be a child who has never called a piece of ground its own, has never tilled it in the sweat of its brow, has never expended its fostering love on plants and animals, there will always be a gap in the development of the soul, and it will be difficult for that child to attain the capacity for human nurture in a comprehensive sense.” In Stevenson’s *A Child’s Garden of Verses* the child is lord of the outdoors in a way that he never can be in the house, which belongs to adults. Outside “All about was mine, I said / ... This was the world and I was king.” ’

(p.198)

The garden, then, is at this point a 'kingdom' ruled over by the child; a place in which to learn to be oneself; and, above all, a safe place.

The texts explored in this chapter, then, begin to 'understand' the figure of the child, rather than using him or her as a symbol of longing. This understanding consists of two elements; the acknowledgement in print that children need freedom to play; and the parallel belief, perhaps more passionately held, that they need protection from the outside world. These books and poems told contemporaneous children that childhood was fun – as long as they followed the rules. Perhaps the message to any contemporary child reader might be slightly different; that childhood used to be fun if you were lucky enough to have a big garden and helpful parents. These texts seem as laden with nostalgia now as the more explicitly yearning books I considered in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

In all the texts under consideration in the present chapter, I argue, the garden is a safe and enclosed place, less a prelapsarian Eden (for children now emerge as mischievous, if usually charmingly so) than a 'heaven on earth'. The 'garden' of childhood is, in Ang's terminology, an enclosure, in which children have the illusion of freedom – to play and to be themselves – but are guarded and policed by benevolent adults.

It is ironic that world-changing crises in the 'adult' world should have contributed to the widespread acceptance of the child's need to be protected but also permitted to experience the fun of childhood to the full. As Wullschläger says of the immediate pre-First World War period: 'To anyone looking at Britain from outside, the ideal of a child-centred Arcadian idyll was deeply interwoven into the imaginative life of the country' (p.147) – and I would go further than this, saying that this continued to seem the case for a long time after the war, but increasingly became born of a desperate need to protect children (and, indeed, adults) from an increasingly frightening outside world. In the next chapter I shall show how some writers for children attempted to bring the 'adult' and 'child' worlds closer together, by portraying children growing towards adulthood, rather than being hidden from it behind garden walls.

Chapter 5: The garden as a place of healing and growth

‘There was a quietness, then, in which could be heard a cuckoo’s stuttering cry from the wood beyond the garden; and then the sound of Hatty’s beginning softly to weep. “I’m not dead – oh, please, Tom, I’m not dead!” Now that the shouting had stopped, Tom was not sure of the truth, after all, but only sure that Hatty was crying as he had never seen her cry, since she had been a very little girl, wearing mourning-black and weeping her way along the sundial path – weeping for death so early.’

Tom’s Midnight Garden, pp.106-107

In Chapter 2 it was suggested that the garden could represent the healing power of nature – for instance, in the episode in *The Magician’s Nephew* in which Digory receives the apple from the Tree of Life, which heals his sick mother – but this is closely entwined with the notion of childhood’s innocence. The authors discussed in that chapter seem to me to claim that spiritual, and indeed physical, wholeness is available only to the ‘Romantic’ child, trailing clouds of glory within the landscape of unspoilt Nature. The water baby (1863), Tom, is unfit to enter the innocent Ellie’s room when he is a filthy sweep’s boy; when he has been cleansed in the ‘cool, clear’ water (p.38) she at last joins him as an almost equal partner (p.203). On the other hand, dwelling in a beautiful, ‘natural’ landscape seems to be of no

help to anyone once they have achieved adulthood and become corrupted by their knowledge of the world (for instance the Witch in *The Magician's Nephew*).

I turn now to texts in which gardens feature as agents of nurturing and healing but this time without any idea of 'sin' or of the intrinsic superiority of the innocent child. Indeed, some of these books feature difficult or naughty children. Unlike the idyllic texts of Chapter 4, these 'true to life' children have worries and problems of their own, not least connected with the adults around them. I have categorised these texts as those which show a garden as a sanctuary, those which show the child growing and achieving a measure of self-realisation, and those through which the child receives physical, emotional or spiritual healing. Growth, in this chapter, means physical, mental, emotional or spiritual growth, or any combination of these processes. In modern (post-1945) children's literature growth, while frequently regarded as complicated and even painful, is generally accepted as inevitable, and maturity as desirable, however uncomfortably attained. This is in contrast with the position of some of the writers discussed in Chapter 2, who try to deny the necessity of growing up at all. It is notable that in many more recent texts the growth experienced by the child protagonist is psychological. Children's literature as a whole has become, certainly since 1945, more concerned with the child's psyche, perhaps as part of the move towards considering childhood as part of a continuum rather than a separate condition, and therefore something to be taken seriously and on equal terms with adulthood.

Tucker (1992) is interested in the effects of psychoanalytical theory on children's literature towards the end of the twentieth century, saying that a

'more complex view of the causes of individual behaviour has resulted in a number of stories that may appear fairly static on the surface but where the main adventures are more taken up with inner journeys of psychological understanding ... These adventures where physical danger and ultimate survival are the chief concern are still with us in the field of children's literature. But even they more commonly discuss the psychological dimension to heroism as well, in contrast to the former stress on courage and endurance alone.'

(pp.172-173)

There is still a clear chronological perspective in that all but one of these texts post-date the Second World War. Again, it is impossible to ascertain the dynamic of the relationship between contemporaneous writing and historical development, but a relationship is evidently there, and I shall outline some possible external influences on children's literature from 1945 to the end of the twentieth century. However, one novel, *The Secret Garden* (1911), is notable by its inclusion among these later texts, and will receive sustained attention.

In this chapter I examine texts that introduce the concept that children are simply younger and less experienced versions of adults; that they feel joy and disappointment just as keenly as their elders, as Rees (1971) points out with reference to *Tom's Midnight Garden*.

5.1. The garden as a sanctuary from rapid change

In many post-1945 texts, as in the books discussed in Chapter 4, the garden is still presented as a safe place or 'playground' where children can be themselves, albeit with limited freedom. In a very similar way to some of the texts discussed in Chapter 2, but for very different reasons, the garden is often seen as a paradise.

I suggest that the crucial difference between these texts and those of the late nineteenth century (as discussed in Chapter 2) is that the protagonists in the latter are *not allowed* to leave the 'garden' of childhood, which might be regarded as a prison; while those in the former choose to cling to the certainties of earlier times and to celebrate the links between the past and the present. For example, Lucy Boston and Penelope Lively emphasise the childlike elements in the elderly. Mrs. Oldknow (in *The Chimneys of Green Knowe*) advises Tolly on climbing the beech tree 'as though she climbed [it] frequently herself' (p.44); while Clare (in Lively's *The House in Norham Gardens*) gives her Aunt Susan a young copper beech – which might take fifty years to reach maturity – as an eighty-first birthday present. Her

aunt is delighted with it, and is reminded of a favourite tree from long ago. The two aunts argue about the location of that former tree, but, ‘ “ Never mind,” said Aunt Susan, “It’s the tree I remember best, anyway. How nice that I am giving birth to one like it, as it were” ’(p.147). While authors like Boston and Lively celebrate the past and produce novels perhaps at odds with mainstream contemporary literature – Boston began her sequence in the mid-1950s and Lively published children’s books almost annually throughout the 1970s – concerned as they are with the significance of the past, there is no suggestion that the past is *more* important than the present; and old age is certainly not a tragedy *per se*.

J.M. Barrie, when he has Peter Pan cry out, ‘I don’t want ever to be a man ... I want always to be a little boy and to have fun’ (p.44), may possibly be articulating the thoughts of any carefree child. There is, however, as already discussed, something desperate about Peter’s dread of adulthood, which we can assume is derived from Barrie’s own discomfort. This attitude is as typical of its time and seems now as morbid as that of the Victorian novelist Marie Corelli, when she remarks, in her best-selling novel *Boy*:

‘We may ask whether for many a child it would not have been happiest never to have grown up at all. Honestly speaking, we cannot grieve for the fair legions of beloved children who have passed away in their childhood – we

know, even without the aid of Gospel comfort, that it is “far better” with them so.’

Quoting this passage, Coveney (1957) remarks on its ‘devastating lunacy’ (p.191), and rightly remarks that Corelli (with whom he brackets Barrie) has turned the ‘Gospel of life’ into one of death.

In the more recent texts, in contrast, I perceive an element of nostalgia for a completely defunct way of life, for childhood as it once was (in the ways that I myself defined it in Chapter 4). Writing about Boston’s work from a historical perspective, Hall (1998b) says of her and some of her contemporaries that

‘Their collective sense of the England they knew being under threat and likely to be lost led to a series of time-slip stories ... that nowhere overtly address contemporary national change, yet in their portrayal of old houses and magical gardens they evoke a world of social difference, in which “the ceremony of innocence” (W.B. Yeats) teeters on the edge of destruction’.

(p.225)

This is very similar to a point (already discussed in Chapter 3) raised by Hall in her discussion of Nesbit’s conservatism (1998a); and indeed this remark could refer to the themes I explored in Chapter 3. However, I suggest that the texts under

discussion here concern the conservation of the positive elements of the past and their relations to childhood – which Nesbit and Grahame fail to address.

Authors such as Lively, Pearce and, earlier, Lucy Boston, do not appear to me to be overtly longing for their own childhood or even to regard childhood as superior to maturity; I believe they write in reaction against modern perspectives on childhood. Ang (2000) has inveighed against certain elements in contemporary literature (as I have already mentioned). She feels that the modern child has been abandoned by many modern authors to harsh realities in literature which serve to compound the harshness of the contemporary world. I am particularly intrigued by her argument against texts by authors such as Robert Cormier; but I feel that her position is undermined by her championing of Antonia Forest's 'Marlowe' series, books which she approves of as 'affirm[ing].... objective standards' in a world of moral relativism, but which I imagine are now virtually unread, thanks mainly to their upper-class and faintly snobbish characters and settings. She criticizes some modern texts for their 'moral relativism' and rejection of all external authority:

'The unfortunate aspect of this anti-establishmentarianism is that in discrediting authority and moral standards, the individual then finds himself with one less resource to turn to when in pain; because he has denied the power of God, parents and society to change things, to be of help, he is, for

all practical purposes, alone. The rejected adult is powerless to help, for he cannot even get near the child.'

(p.156)

This lack of moral certainties in contemporary children's literature is of course a reflection of a parallel situation in society generally. I have already remarked that the First World War swept away a great deal of moral and social confidence and, while destroying much of the romance associated with 'the cult of youth' – since so many young men died unnecessarily – at the same time drove the majority of children's authors to 'play safe' and write Arcadian texts which celebrate the protected nature of childhood (Ang, pp.137-138). It took the more extensive social revolutions associated with the 1960s to encourage children's writers to force their readers out of their 'secret gardens'. As an interesting aside, however, the most popular children's books of the *fin de siècle* and, so far, of the new century, have been J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* sequence, which extol the virtues of *wise* adult guidance. These books are highly traditional in terms of the child-adult relationship: there are 'bad' adults, who mistreat or thwart the child protagonists, and there are 'good' ones, who support and, when needed, rescue them. There are, of course, as in all traditional school stories, 'heroic' and 'villainous' child characters; and good and evil are ultimately easily distinguishable – although there are some temporary ambiguities (Harry's godfather Sirius, for instance). It would appear that early

twenty-first century children demand the moral certainties perhaps prematurely mourned by Ang.

One can imagine that such dawning realities in the post-war adult world as the liberation of the concentration camps and the threat of the Cold War, as well as the apparent loss of respect for any higher authority, might have driven later writers in either of two directions. One group – those criticized by Ang, such as Cormier and the Garner of *Red Shift* – apparently took a pessimistic attitude and wrote with a kind of resigned cynicism, while others struggled to find a new kind of idealism. I am particularly interested in this latter group and their conscientious (and brave) attempts to make sense of the post-nuclear world without resorting to escapism or relativism. Reynolds (1994) says of Lucy Boston's work:

‘The sense of discontinuity which typified the post-war period and found its best-known expression in adolescent culture (music, dance, fashion, films, all of which rejected adults and adult values) is systematically combated in *The Children of Green Knowe*. With her interest in the collective unconscious and her determination to foreground continuity and coherence, Boston essentially brings the “Beautiful Child” into the present day.’

(pp.39-40)

While most of the above summarises my concern in this chapter, I would disagree with Reynolds' identification of Tolly as the 'Beautiful Child' of the later, decadent Victorian and Edwardian period. Tolly is emphatically a normal boy, if unusually sensitive and self-contained. He is presented as a plausible, fully three-dimensional child capable of thoughtlessness and disobedience and of remorse. He is far more a character from the idylls of Chapter 4 than one of the innocents described in Chapter 2, who were created both to satisfy their authors' needs for escape and to present a manageable, controllable icon of the child's nature. I suspect that Reynolds refers to Tolly's affinity with nature – as available to him in the garden – and to his *relative* innocence; he seems somehow young for his age, and is unaffected by the earliest symptoms of 'youth culture' which were not yet very widespread in 1954, when the first book was written. She may also refer to Tolly's essential optimism, which he shares with his elderly great-grandmother. Optimism is a significant feature in these 'introspective' stories (to borrow Penelope Farmer's word, 1972), in which a plausible alternative model of childhood must be presented, in opposition to the pessimistic model termed 'bleak' by Hunt (1995, p.280).

For instance, the protagonist of *If Winter Comes* (Lynn Hall, 1986), set in the days before a threatened nuclear holocaust, encounters a woman in the streets of Chicago, who is struggling to create a garden among the graffiti and vandalism, and against the background of the greater threat:

‘Most of the area was covered with rubble, chunks of brick embedded in concrete, but in the center was a five-foot square of genuine grass, with a tiny tree growing out of its center. In some places the rubble had been laid flat to form paths, and along one of the walls the chunks of concrete had been wrestled into a low retaining wall that held a flower-bed.’

(p.83)

Barry is feeling understandably depressed and hopeless about the threat of imminent war, and expresses his cynicism to the woman, perhaps echoing the reader’s sentiments: ‘ “You’re busting a gut to plant flowers and trees when there’s a good chance everything is going to die, maybe right now, tonight” ’ (p.86). Her reply is bracing: ‘ “Life ain’t over till it’s over, and if you throw away what you got, you’re a fool. You could wipe yourself out, sure. Or you could spend your life being so scared of losing it that you’d be just as well off if you did lose it. But these are *choices*, boy” ’ (p.90). Barry returns home feeling braver and capable of facing what comes, even though he can do nothing in the least to prevent it. The positive message here is one that applies not just to an adolescent experiencing existential *angst* or even the fear of annihilation, but to any potential reader: that one has certain choices in life, if only the choice of how to face the future, and the power to make them and accept the consequences.

Similarly, in *Fireweed* (1969), Jill Paton Walsh's novel of the Second World War, we see on the very last page a positive symbol of hope and new life:

'Grass grows here, covering, healing, and russet sorrel in tall spikes, and goldenrod, swaying beside broken walls, full of butterflies, and purple loose-strife, and one plant, willow-herb, that some people call fireweed, grows wild in this stony place as plentifully as grass, though it used to be rare enough to be searched out and collected. It is a strange plant; it has its own rugged sort of loveliness, and it grows only on the scars of ruin and flame.

I suppose they will build on this again, some day: but I like it best like this; grown over; healed.'

(p.127)

Fireweed, as well as being a convincing description of the fragility of life for two homeless children amid the London blitz, is also a very moving narrative of first love. Despite the ultimate separation of the two young protagonists, they learn positively from one another: both experience the dawning of an adult relationship with more than usual pressures and worries, they learn to survive and depend upon each other practically, and, as that final paragraph hints, Bill, at least, is able, eventually, to look with some hope into a peaceful future.

Reynolds (p.38) regards Green Knowe, in the eponymous series of stories, as a 'place of healing' and recalls the way in which the house is seen, at the beginning of the first *Green Knowe* book, as a kind of 'ark' for the little boy Tolly, who is adrift from his family (also Hall, 1998b, p.233). In fact, Reynolds extrapolates from the treatment of Tolly's plight that the stories and their setting can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with some post-war, post-nuclear preoccupations. In the first book, *The Children of Green Knowe*, Mrs. Oldknow, the great-grandmother, reminds us that 'there's nothing new under the sun' and thus provides a comforting distance from the worrying concerns of the post-war world:

'... "Do you want to read the papers now?"

"Good gracious no, child. What should I do that for? The world doesn't alter every day. As far as I can see, it's always the same." '

(p.27)

This could arguably be criticised as irresponsible escapism; although it might be said that Lucy Boston is, in these books, trying to show that, while dreadful events *do* undoubtedly happen (the original 'children' having all died of the plague), life continues as a cycle of both favourable and less favourable events and worry and debate are often futile. Hall (1998b) relates the notion that 'the responsibility of the individual being is one of care, respect and intelligent transmission – from the past

to the present' (Hollindale, 'Lucy Boston, Storyteller', 1991) to the common experience that the nation had undergone a few years before the writing of *The Children of Green Knowe*: 'This vision, in its social aspect, may well reflect, and probably owes much to, the ethos of the war years when the nation was bound together by common fears and suffering' (p.235). It is notable that there is harmony between the generations rather than conflict – again, an aspect of the 'pulling together' of the war and immediate post-war years. Here, an older character is shown as possessing the steady courage, born of experience, that the fearful child or adolescent may lack.

In fact Tolly learns that even death is a purely material phenomenon and therefore to his sensitive and deeply spiritual great-grandmother – and himself – almost of no account. Lucy Boston, in her *Green Knowe* books, invested her own, ancient, home with memories that in her fiction become ghostly presences. Having bought what seemed a Georgian house, she discovered that it was in fact far older:

'She set about restoring it so that the original Norman stone features were once more visible. This, I think, is an appropriate metaphor for what she herself does in her children's stories. She makes visible, albeit intermittently, those "anonymous past generations whose vanished presence (through her pen) is so palpable there" ' [Jill Paton Walsh – introduction to Boston, (1992): *Memories*].

(Hall, 1998b, p.229)

Her *Green Knowe* books weave past and present almost indistinguishably together. Mrs. Oldknow is certainly not an advocate of the past for its own sake; she is more than happy to accept the convenience of a car when out Christmas shopping, for example. Similarly, Clare (*The House in Norham Gardens*) rejects 'fashionable' old artefacts for Aunt Susan's birthday (p.145) in favour of the young copper beech, which will outlive, but delight, the old lady. Clare sees no point in buying pieces of other people's history, despite her passionate involvement with that of her own family.

The characters in these books by Lucy Boston and Penelope Lively see the need to preserve some elements from each period of history. Both writers are interested primarily in notions of *continuity* in contrast with the Victorian and Edwardian writers of Chapter 3, who write out of *nostalgia*, a conviction that the past which is lost was better than the present. Ironically, of course, as Clare must notice in the extract alluded to above, one age's despised modernity quickly becomes another's nostalgia:

'Oil lamps. For three pounds fifty pence you could dispense with electric light. For two seventy-five you could remember the war with a gas mask ...'

(p.145)

When it comes to old family photographs though, Clare is conscious of the importance of the past in helping her to know the aunts as people, rather than just old people. It is rather poignant, but significant to see them in their youth:

‘ ... like ghosts of themselves ...they stood together in the preserved sunshine of some long-distant summer, young and pretty, hair piled on their heads like a cottage loaf, skirts brushing the grass.’

(p.21)

These old women, who were once pretty, have survived many losses and live quite cheerfully in both present and past, concerned that Clare understands the lessons they have learnt, that ‘ “you can’t carry a museum round with you ... You are a listener. It is only those who have never listened who find themselves in trouble eventually” ’ (p.153). Clare, like Tolly, listens and learns about life from his elders, as well as from limited direct experience. That, to Lively and Boston, is the significance of the past, and of communication between the different generations. Interestingly, in both the *Greene Knowe* series and in several of Lively’s children’s books, the children are portrayed as deeply thoughtful, serious and generally sensible characters, while the elderly are seen as light-hearted and, while wise, unsophisticated. Both these writers are at pains to show that the divisions between generations are arbitrary, and that the life of the individual is a continuum, along the length of which one maintains the integrity of one’s nature.

This recalls Rose (1984, p.13): 'The idea that childhood is something separate which can be scrutinised and assessed is the other side of the illusion which makes of childhood something which we have simply ceased to be.' These old ladies, who enjoy their gardens and commune with past, present and future, may be contrasted with the adolescents whose exits from the 'garden' I shall explore in the next chapter.

5.2. A sanctuary from the adult

Some of these texts show children finding for themselves a private place, away from adults. This differs in kind, as well as degree, from, for example, the child in A.A. Milne's 'Solitude' (*Now we are Six*) or indeed Nesbit's children, who try at all costs to avoid parents and servants who are actually quite benign and even helpful at times. Here, in contrast, the child feels impelled to hide from actual cruelty, neglect or indifference.

In *The Children of the House*, written by Philippa Pearce in co-operation with Brian Fairfax-Lucy (upon whose childhood the story is closely based), the four children escape from their parents into the grounds of their home. The book is very reminiscent of Lively's *Going Back*; both families live in large houses and have the freedom of extensive grounds, and both suffer at the hands of autocratic, unfeeling fathers who send unwilling sons to boarding school. The children in the Pearce book experience a painfully claustrophobic upbringing in the years immediately preceding

the First World War. It occurs to me that if this book had been written contemporaneously it would have been utterly different. As it is, Pearce (writing in 1968) clearly condemns the parents of Laura, Thomas, Hugh and Margaret Hatton for their extreme 'Victorian' strictness, and, perhaps, even more for their obsession with 'keeping up appearances' while economising on anything to do with the children, whose happiness is seen as dispensable. The younger son, Hugh, is mortified by his father's refusal to buy the uniform for his public school: ' "We must not be stampeded into ridiculously unnecessary expense by these school authorities" (p.91)' and Laura's rebellion is precipitated by being expected to wear an unsuitable dress for a dinner party. The party is held because Sir Robert has ambitions to become an M.P. and, 'if you were really to know the right people, you had also to entertain them ... Tom now supposed that they were to dress up in order to be shown off to the guests in the dining-room beforehand; to curtsy or bow and say "How do you do?" ' (p.113) An Edwardian writer might have attacked the Hatton parents less scathingly; but Pearce is writing at a time of growing awareness of children's rights, when the pre-war formality between parent and child is dying out.

Similarly, with post-war hindsight and perspective, Pearce counterpoints Tom's joy at the prospect of gaining his commission ' "at once, without my going to Sandhurst. Otherwise I may miss the fighting" ' (p.140) – with the sombre ending of the book, where we learn that Tom was awarded a posthumous V.C., Hugh was killed in action at sea, age sixteen, and Laura, a nurse, died of fever just before the Armistice.

My interpretation is that Pearce, with an awareness of human psychology, has them die young and recklessly as an escape from the possibilities of their adult lives and responsibilities, as impressed upon them by their dreadful parents. Margaret, the only survivor, lives abroad at the end of the book, keeping away from the hated Stanford Hall. The book is all about escape and the failure to escape. The four children escape from their parents' regime into their garden and yet fail, as adults, to escape from their deadening childhood.

The children in Lively's novel are not so loveless or desolate, but, even so, we are told that the garden is paradise to the motherless children: 'The garden was our territory – the space within which we knew the arrangement of every leaf and stone and branch. Beyond the garden was an undefined and forbidden world' (p.13).

From the child's perspective, the garden is a perfect, safe place, in an increasingly unpredictable world, and, as such, would match the garden environments explored in Chapter 4; it is variously described as 'our world: the safe, controlled world of the garden' (p.1), 'a planned and ordered place amid the random fields and trees' (p.1) and 'a quiet, safe, encircled place' (p.5). However, what makes the book distinctive (and similar to Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*) is the framing of the memories within the narrative of the adult returning to the scene, which has the effect of calling into question the exactness of some of the child's recollections. Lively articulates the problem: 'People's lives tell a story, I thought once: and then, and then, and then ...

But they don't. Nothing is so simple. If it's a story at all, then there are two of them, running side by side. What actually happened, and what we remember. Which is more important, I wonder?' (p.12)

For Jane, returning to Medleycott brings the usual illusion that everything has shrunk: 'It seems smaller, going back: the garden, the house, everything. But the garden, especially. When I was a small child it was infinite' (p.1).

With those opening words, Lively prepares us for her dual perspective on what has gone before; and for the adult's reasoned response to the events that affected the young child. Because we know at the outset how the story 'ends' – with the death of the father and the great house being sold – we are able to put the childhood events into the context of the children growing up and going away. Furthermore, we learn right at the end that Edward went away to his death in Korea and that Jane herself is happily married and has managed to accommodate the past. The garden, from this distance, is seen as an idyll that has already been left behind when the house is sold.

5.3. Growth in the garden

Mistress Masham's Repose (1947) is another text in which a child (solitary, this time) is thrown upon her own resources by uncaring adults. Unlike the siblings in the previous two books, she is actually under threat from her guardians in a plot

which would be outrageously melodramatic had not T.H. White chosen to write it as a tragi-comedy – in much the same vein as his better-known work, *The Sword in the Stone* (1938). There is no real sense of the guardians as rounded human characters; rather, they are comedy villains, prefiguring those of the Dahl books (such as the awful Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda* (1988) or the aunts Sponge and Spiker in *James and the Giant Peach* (1961)):

‘Both the Vicar and the Governess were so repulsive that it is difficult to write about them fairly ... [the Vicar’s] name was Mr. Hater. He was a bachelor. It was suspicious that he had a Rolls Royce and spent much of his time in London, while Maria had to live in the ruined house on sago and other horrors.

Miss Brown had been Mr. Hater’s matron at the public school. She must have had some mysterious hold over him, for it seems impossible that he could have chosen her freely, considering what she was.’

(p.7)

In Maria’s case, malign neglect has just the same happy consequences as the more benign neglect of other characters; she finds adventure in the form of a colony of Lilliputians, introduced to the island of Mistress Masham’s Repose by Jonathan Swift in 1725. Through her dealings with these tiny people, Maria is able to explore

her feelings of smallness and helplessness, and, through her own inconsiderate behaviour she learns a great deal about bullying. Her moral mentor is a rather clichéd absent-minded Professor, who nonetheless gives her sound advice when she has accidentally injured a Lilliputian:

‘ “ ... you must try to look at this from their point of view. It is an exceedingly curious situation. You are a child, but very big; they are grown-up, but very small ... You must never, never force them to do anything. You must be as polite to them as you are polite to any other person of your own size, and then, when they see your magnanimity in not exerting brute force, they will admire you, and give you love.

“I know it is difficult,” he added gently, ‘because the trouble about loving things is that one wants to possess them. But you must keep hold of your emotions and always be guarding against meanness.’ ’

(p.61)

This advice shows why the ‘omnipotence’ of the protagonist in this book works at a level deeper than that in Milne’s *Pooh* books. Since Milne’s books are sheer escapism, the author need not trouble to advise Christopher Robin about his responsibilities like this – after all, things always seem to work out perfectly at his

mere command. There is somewhat more sense of cause-and-effect in Malplaquet Park than in the Hundred Acre Wood.

It is easy, however, to see the wish-fulfilment in this story; Maria feels tiny and unloved and then stumbles upon an even smaller race of people who come to love and admire her, and eventually collude in the downfall of the wicked Mr. Hater and Miss Brown. It is in the huge wilderness of Malplaquet Park that she discovers the power to overcome the bullies. In the eyes of the Lilliputians she is a literal giant, and Malplaquet is her kingdom, as the garden is to many other child protagonists.

While Maria learns the virtues of tolerance and tact, as well as cunning and assertiveness through purposeful play in Malplaquet Park, Susan, the heroine of William Mayne's *A Parcel of Trees* (1963) hones her already considerable skills of persistence and observation through the desire to own a piece of land. Like Maria's, her tale carries a sense of inevitable 'rightness' and wish-fulfilment; Maria is, by her own resourcefulness and with the aid of the Lilliputians, able to reclaim her rightful property; Susan uses her own detective skills and draws on older people's memories and eventually establishes the ownership of the 'parcel of trees'. In her doggedness and interest in inconsequential details she is a typical Mayne character. Despite the generally concrete matter-of-factness of the prose, Mayne allows a slightly mystical element into this variation on the traditional treasure hunt (Carpenter & Prichard,

1984). Susan feels a sense of familiarity, or of *déjà vu*, when she first enters the tiny patch of ground:

‘Susan suddenly felt it was like a dream, as if she was still, when she woke, in a place she had been dreaming about. She looked about, and the place itself seemed to get farther away ... But when she looked at the ground and looked up again there was still that feeling of being in a place she knew ... It was a place she had been in, she thought. Somewhere else, almost in another world.’

(pp.29-30)

This has almost the feeling of a passage by C.S. Lewis, perhaps the description of the ‘Wood between the Worlds’ in *The Magician’s Nephew*. It clearly conveys a sense of mystery and potential, and there is a feeling that this will prove to be Susan’s own particular ‘paradise’. This does not happen easily, however, and Susan becomes during the book’s action a tireless and resourceful character who ruthlessly pursues her own ends, using whatever means she can. Once the ‘parcel of trees’ is legally hers, however, she has her own refuge from noisy family life: ‘ “I can stand you all being a lot worse now, because I can always go there” ’(p.155).

I have suggested that both Maria and Susan grow, in terms of confidence and wisdom through their interactions with their respective ‘gardens’. Growth is, of

course, an obvious characteristic of gardens; and, as I have discussed elsewhere, the garden, rather than 'nature' in more general terms, is a particularly appropriate metaphor for childhood, with its connotations of protection and nurturing. Of course, gardens (like children) receive varying types of treatment and may be neglected or, alternatively, very strictly controlled, depending completely on the 'gardener'. With this in mind, I find Janni Howker's short story, *The Topiary Garden*, particularly interesting, especially in the edition illustrated by Anthony Browne (1993).

The story hinges on Sally Beck's attempt to escape the limitations of her gender. She disguises herself as a boy and works successfully as a gardener until her sex becomes impossible to disguise. Her work involves cutting trees into unnatural, 'artistic' shapes, and is clearly a metaphor for her perceived need to force her female body into a boy's clothes and the strain of having to pretend to be something she is not. I regard the topiary trees, which dominate the illustrations, as representatives of this conflict between nature and art. An intriguing aspect of the illustrations is the series of unexplained threads, mostly red, which disappear beneath the trees in many of the pictures until at last we are shown a pair of scissors and a severed red thread. Another picture shows a statue of a nude female, and yet another, a group of trees cut in women's shapes. I imagine that the red thread, while recalling the clue to the centre of a maze, as in the story of Theseus or in Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), also symbolises denied femininity (the colour suggesting menstrual blood).

Sally herself makes it clear that she has no wish to be male in reality, but her disguise is simply a way of overcoming prejudice and becoming independent:

‘ “You see, lass, it wasn’t that I wanted to be a boy in me nature or me body - I just wanted to be Sally Beck. Not Jack. But Sally Beck with Jack’s freedom - do you follow? ...”

(p.43)

Dressed as a boy, Sally is able to learn a trade – which she maintains, even after her deception has been found out – and has unusual freedom for a girl of her day. She manages to achieve a considerable degree of autonomy and self-realisation.

4.4. The numinous garden

I have been aware of a separate set of texts which could almost have been included in my discussion of children’s play, in Chapter 4, but which seem to me to possess distinguishing characteristics. These are texts which use the garden as a setting rather than as a symbol but which carry echoes of other texts (even using what might be called mythic or ‘archetypal’ imagery, such as the Eden motif) which may convey certain intended meanings to the sophisticated reader. These stories differ from most of those so far quoted in this chapter in being full of excitement and incident as well as mystery and atmosphere.

Two books by Diana Wynne Jones, *Charmed Life* (1977) and *Fire and Hemlock* (1985), feature gardens at climactic moments in the action. They are very different books, aimed perhaps at two different audiences. *Charmed Life* is, I imagine, intended for a slightly younger readership, although it is highly sophisticated and demanding of the reader. It is full of witty allusions to other literatures and, to be fully appreciated, needs a widely-read reader. The garden itself is elusive in exactly the same way as the garden in *Through the Looking-Glass*:

‘They turned back and walked towards the high wall. All they found was the long, low wall of the orchard. There was no gate in it, and the forbidden garden was beyond it. They went along the orchard wall to the nearest gate. Whereupon they were in the rose garden, and the ruined wall was behind them again, towering above the orchard.

“This couldn’t be an enchantment to stop people getting into it, could it?” said Janet, as they plodded through the orchard again.

“I think it must be,” said Cat. And they were in the formal garden again with the high wall behind them.’

(pp.210-11)

The garden, when they reach it, is like a mediaeval tapestry, showing all the seasons of the year at the same time: it is described as smelling like paradise (p.213) and Cat 'had seldom felt anything magical so strongly' (p.214). At the very 'heart of the garden' is an apple tree, which has a strange golden spring at its foot, and which reminds me inevitably of the garden in *The Magician's Nephew* (1955). This idyllic scene is interrupted by an inrush of people; Accredited Witches, warlocks, necromancers and wizards (p.219), and develops into a frightening showdown between the magical forces of good and evil, that is so instantly reminiscent of the sacrifice of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), that it cannot be coincidental. Various confusions and apparent anomalies in the plot are resolved at this point, but not before an exciting fight and act of sacrifice (and nearly one of self-sacrifice). The language here is almost exactly that of the Lewis scene, but the situation is surprisingly funny, given that Cat, of course, is an enchanter possessed of nine lives:

'Cat stared resentfully at the Willing Warlock. He had always seemed so friendly. Apart from that, Cat was not as frightened as he might have been. Of course Gwendolen [Cat's appalling sister, who has sold him to the forces of evil] had known he had lives to spare. But he hoped his throat would heal after they cut it. He would be very uncomfortable until it did.'

(p.225-6)

Diana Wynne Jones' novel *Fire and Hemlock* (1985) is an extremely complex and demanding fantasy which pays a similar kind of compliment to the reader's intelligence as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. I find some of this writer's fantasies confusing and their unpredictability disquieting: but this book, while challenging, is deeply rewarding, and particularly effective in conveying an atmosphere of menace, and a growing feeling of panic and paranoia. The garden of Hunsdon House, with its bizarre stone vases that can be made to spell 'NOW – HERE' or 'WHERE – NOW' or 'NOWHERE' or 'HERE – NOW' (pp.33-34) is a frightening place which becomes, at the climax of the action, the site of another sacrifice; the claiming of Tom Lynn's life by the demonic fairy-like family who live at the house. The book is a reworking of the ballad of *Tam Lin* set in contemporary times. The garden is only significant at the very end, at which point Polly (the teenage protagonist) thinks it has changed, but is made uncertain, both by the preceding bewildering events, and by the curious, garden-party atmosphere of the sacrificial meeting:

'At first sight it seemed to be autumn in the garden. The trees there were an unmoving glory of rust, copper-green, olive-silver and strong yellow, fading to purple and deep rose-red. But it was hot as summer ... Swallows flickered in the blue sky overhead, and bees filled the crowding roses to one side – not white roses as Polly remembered, but heavy red and bronze and glaring pink. The shape of the garden had changed too. The lawn now

sloped clear down from the house to the place with the empty concrete pool ... flanked by six-foot growths of hemlock. The pool was not precisely empty any more ... The people were all gathered in the upper part of the lawn, holding wine glasses. It could have been a harmless, charming picnic. They were in elegant clothes, the women in long dresses and picture hats, the men in white or in morning dress. There was a murmur of talk and laughter.'

(pp.373-374)

The confusion of seasons here evokes the extract quoted from *Charmed Life*; but the superb writing summons up much more powerfully a sense of threat. I feel that this scene forcefully equates 'grown-up' sophistication with duplicity and corruption. The people are 'elegant' and 'charming', and seem 'harmless', but they are gathered together in the deceptive garden (whose shape changes, in which the roses change from the white of purity to 'heavy' and 'glaring' colours and which is dominated by rank hemlock), whose swimming pool is 'not precisely empty any more'. Despite the novel's extreme denseness and complexity, the description nudges the reader, by means of literary association, into the appropriate distrustful, even paranoiac, frame of mind. The effect here of the text's allusiveness is to emphasise Polly's growth from a trusting child at the opening of the book to a disillusioned young adult at the end. Although she saves – and wins – Tom, she learns that love can be terribly difficult: 'To love someone enough to let them go, you had to let them go forever or

you did not love them that much. The jet of misery rose in Polly, far higher and stronger than it had ever been' (p.392).

Two books by Helen Cresswell feature large, formal gardens as very significant settings; and while I frequently find the writing and plotting poor, the atmosphere and mood evoked in both *Stonestruck* (1995) and *Moondial* (1987) are powerful enough to justify their inclusion here.

Stonestruck exemplifies, in my opinion, the potential power of the garden image when harnessed to a frightening story. The promising central plot of Cresswell's story, concerning a curse which causes children to split into the 'real' self and a 'shadow' self, is hampered by a deeply unconvincing 'Green Lady' who rather pointlessly turns herself into an old woman called Priscilla, and by the undeveloped story of two mediaeval children, Harry and Beth. On the other hand, the atmosphere is superbly evoked, especially the unnatural mist and the desolation of the peacock's cry, both of which herald unnatural doings:

'She ran down and through the wicket gate to the garden and turned right along a path lined with azaleas and rhododendrons, their colours glowing in the twilight ... Slowly she became aware of the peacefulness, the vast hush settling about her.

A scream tore the silence. Jessica whirled about. The peacock! ... [The pool] lay calm and unbroken as before but now she saw, rising from the far bank, a white mist. As she watched, a shape appeared, moving ... She barely noticed that now the hush was absolute, that there was not a sound in all that valley ...'

(pp.36-37)

The garden in this book is beautifully realised (and based on an actual one), a formal, terraced garden with an orangery, yew trees and statues, and its chilling atmosphere created by the mist, the peacock and the sound of ghostly children's running footsteps. It is unfortunate that the characters are two-dimensional and the plot is a muddled amalgam of riddles and curses, reminding me a little of Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* series and Alan Garner at his least convincing. Ultimately, it strikes me as a good example of the garden motif being used to evoke tremendous emotion and atmosphere, to little purpose. Jessica, the protagonist, has been virtually abandoned at Powis Castle by her mother, who rushes off to drive ambulances (the novel is set during the Second World War, although a sense of period seems to be lacking) and I think this could have been more explicitly linked to the sense of dread she repeatedly experiences, and to the desolation of the long-lost children, separated from themselves.

Again, in *Moondial* we have some vivid and memorable descriptions of the garden at Belton House. Especially effective is the way that Cresswell counterpoints the daytime garden, always visited in hot and sunny weather, and full of strolling tourists, with the silent and haunted night-time garden, heavy with the presences of ghostly children. Added to this is the poignant sub-plot of Minty's mother lying in a coma after a car accident. Cresswell is trying to say something about the importance of what cannot be apprehended by the normal human senses: Minty spends much of her day time talking to her mother, who cannot, apparently, hear; and she spends her 'moon time' with ghosts from two entirely different periods, trying to help them escape from their wretched circumstances. This has the potential for being another *Tom's Midnight Garden* or *The Children of Green Knowe*, but the philosophy behind it seems both complicated and vague, and it simply lacks internal integrity. What I personally retain from a recent re-reading of this book is the image of the statue on the sundial, the eternal struggle between the old man, Chronos (Time), and the child, Eros (Love), and its inscription: *Lux et Umbra vicissim, sed semper Amor* (Light and Shadow by turns, but always Love). Like *Stonestruck*, the significance of the garden in this book is the brooding atmosphere and sense of threat that mirrors the insecurity and depression of the abandoned child.

The texts that result from this use of recognisable or 'archetypal' elements (whether or not they are used well) are dense and allusive but suggest to me the concept of growth as change and of increased awareness of life's potentialities. This includes

the dawning – for some of the protagonists – that others can be corrupt or even wicked, and that the world (the garden) can be dangerous; part cultivated, belonging to the house, part unknown and wild. I see these texts as ‘modern’ in that they are identifiably post-Freudian and post-Jungian in their use of imagery, and also in their often subversive attitude towards adults which is more overt than Nesbit’s or even that of Lewis Carroll.

5.5. The healing powers of the garden

In some cases, in contrast, the garden becomes again a kind of sanctuary; not merely a hiding-place for the confused child, but itself also the agent of healing, physical, psychological, social or spiritual. The text which incorporates all these functions is *The Secret Garden* (1911).

Frances Hodgson Burnett’s novel *The Secret Garden* has been seen as a groundbreaking novel, ahead of its time in its portrayal of what might now be termed ‘holistic’ healing. Hollindale (1997) regards it as a ‘moving demonstration of *mens sana in corpore sano*, the diagnosis of psychosomatic illness, the celebration of therapeutic play, the castigation of parental neglect, the proof of redemptive power in constructive motivation’ (p.33), drawing one’s attention inescapably to the strangely contemporary elements of this work. Hollindale goes on to show, however, that the novel is in fact drawing on very ancient principles:

‘Through significant natural detail, a redemptive image of physical healing, recovery from bereavement and natural therapy takes on still further resonances of, paradoxically, a pagan Christianity.’

(p.34)

Ang (p.8) describes ‘a sort of pantheistic magic’ which transforms the lives of the two sickly cousins, Mary and Colin. Wilkie (1997) contrasts Burnett’s writing favourably with Grahame’s and outlines possible influences and contexts for the text: ‘Radical readings ... would reposition the work in Darwinism, in the philosophies of Christian Science, the Occult, and in the turn-of-the-century Neo-Paganism with which Grahame struggled so ineffectually to come to terms’ (p.74). This is indeed my reading of the book; and the Darwinian aspect (the notion of children as closer to animals than to angels – Dusingberre, 1987, introduction) partly accounts for my discussing the book here rather than in Chapter 2.

Both children are seen at the beginning of the novel as ‘enclosed’ in bedrooms, large houses or railway carriages, and both are last seen in the secret garden on a beautiful summer’s evening. Ang’s main concern is with tracing contrasting images of enclosure and openness; and *The Secret Garden* is for her – and indeed for me – the ideal exemplifying text: ‘the garden acts as a living, organic metaphor of space both liberated and enclosed, of growth that is both natural and cultivated.’ Again, I

emphasise the usefulness of the symbolic garden, uniting as it does concepts of freedom and security, and of nature and civilisation.

A great part of the 'Magic' that occurs in the novel is in fact brought about by apparently mundane elements. Hodgson Burnett was a Christian Scientist and a believer in the healing power of nature, and much of the book's philosophy derives from traditional 'folk' wisdom. While the garden is the outward symbol of the beneficent changes in Mary and Colin, the obvious architect of the change is Dickon; but behind him, as Bixler (p.212) reminds us, is the 'common sense' practicality of his (and Martha's) mother, Susan Sowerby. Her pronouncements are repeatedly quoted by other characters, all of whom approve of her.

The figure of Dickon is, in fact, a variant of Pan, earlier found in the figure of Barrie's Peter Pan, and in a more 'godlike' incarnation in *The Wind in the Willows*. Lurie (p.164) refers to 'the new paganism that found a following among liberal intellectuals of the time' and traces this Pan-figure through Edwardian fiction to the 'nature spirit' who rescues Forster's, and later Lawrence's, heroines from 'death in life'. As well as the pagan origin, one can still trace the line of descent from Wordsworth's glorious 'Child' who is at one with nature. Again, Wilkie (1997) indicates the line of descent: she places the three children in a strand of Western thought 'that connects directly with the cult of the child in primitivism, popularized in the nineteenth century, of a sentimentalized, innocent child, in the strain of the

early Romantics, but with traces as far back as Juvenal. In it the child is perceived as an image of prelapsarian Adam and thus an exemplar of primitivist thought' (p.75). However, I think that the more 'modern', post-Stevenson elements of the presentation of the children, or at least of Mary and Colin, outweigh these symbolic aspects.

The difference between Grahame's Pan and Burnett's Dickon is that of humanity. Grahame's chapter 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn' shows us a god, a mystical figure who inspires a deeply spiritual, Wordsworthian passion for nature in the overwhelmed Ratty and Mole. Dickon is an earthy figure, at one with nature because of his practical knowledge and understanding of it. His is a highly concrete spirituality. His love of the moors reminds one of Emily Brontë's Heathcliff, but with the grudges and the bitterness passed to Colin and Mary, at least at the start of the book. Carpenter (1985, p.189) characterises him as 'a kind of Heathcliff-gone-right': and indeed the novel echoes with references to *Wuthering Heights*, notably the repeated descriptions of the 'wuthering' wind. Similarly, he is a far more attractive personality (to the adult reader, at least) than Peter Pan, who displays to us the selfish, amoral side of childhood. This is partly because he is a deeply kind character, but also, I think, because Burnett does her best to present him as a plausible, flesh-and-blood boy, 'a common moor boy, in patched clothes and with a funny face and a rough, rusty-red head' (p.86).

While Dickon is portrayed as an utterly healthy, wholesome boy possessed of almost supernatural charisma – he is able to ‘charm’ wild animals, and eventually Colin jokes that he is a ‘boy-charmer’ as well (p.202) – Mary and Colin are initially presented as not merely physically unhealthy but socially and spiritually ailing: ‘spoiled’ in both senses. Great emphasis is given to Mary’s unattractiveness at the outset, and Colin is portrayed as unpleasantly hysterical and despotic. In fact, Mary’s marked lack of saintly qualities is part of what cures Colin, as the author makes clear, with acute psychological insight: she is described as ‘not a self-sacrificing person’ (p.142) and when she loses patience with Colin’s tantrums her behaviour is exactly what he needs to bring him out of his severe apathy and hypochondria:

‘ ... “You *will* scream yourself to death in a minute, and I wish you would!”

A nice, sympathetic child could neither have thought nor said such things, but it just happened that the shock of hearing them was the best possible thing for this hysterical boy whom no one had ever dared to restrain or contradict.

... His face looked dreadful, white and red, and swollen, and he was gasping and choking; but savage little Mary did not care an atom.

"If you scream another scream, she said, "I'll scream, too - and I can scream louder than you can ..."'

(p.151)

This presentation of Mary as an 'anti-heroine' is one of the book's particularly contemporary-seeming features. As Carpenter and Prichard remark (1984), 'It is almost a revolution in children's literature when an unattractive child, acting reprehensibly, can achieve such a moral victory.'

Mary and Colin's joint transformation into happy, outgoing children, interested in nature and in other people, is, then, effected by a combination of fresh air, exercise and wholesome food, and the psychological release provided by the expression of feelings which have long been denied. Colin's groundless but incapacitating fear of a lump on his back is equivalent to his father's restless and aimless wanderings around Europe; both are attempting to escape their grief. The garden is the perfect setting and vehicle for this cure, embodying as it does the concepts of hard, satisfying, physical and creative labour, a shared and co-operative endeavour, the close observation of, even identification with, natural phenomena, and good fresh moorland air. They even eat in the garden, to avoid raising suspicions about their newly increased appetites. The food is provided by Dickon's mother and is, naturally, simple and nourishing:

‘ “ ... When tha’ goes to ’em in th’ mornin’s tha’ shall take a pail o’ good new milk an’ I’ll bake ’em a crusty cottage loaf or some buns wi’ currents in ’em, same as you children like. Nothin’s so good as fresh milk an’ bread” ’

(p.213)

In addition, the secret garden has been in the past the scene of Colin’s mother’s greatest happiness and also of her fatal accident, lending Colin’s recovery especial poignancy in the eyes of the book’s adult characters:

‘All at once Susan Sowerby bent down and drew him with her warm arms close against the bosom under the blue cloak - as if he had been Dickon’s brother. The quick mist swept over her eyes.

“Eh! dear lad!” she said. “Thy own mother’s in this ’ere very garden, I do believe. She couldna’ keep out of it.” ’

(p.237)

Part of the beauty of *The Secret Garden* is the perfect dovetailing of image and theme, which perhaps helps explain why the book is so popular, and why it seems so entirely plausible. Nothing in the book’s conception seems to me to be out of place. The central image, of the neglected garden, rediscovered, nurtured and finally

bringing forth new growth, is, of course, paralleled by the experience of the two damaged children; but because the children are themselves the agents of that change – in the garden *and* in themselves – the central drama *is* the image, and the image contains the drama. It is possible to enjoy the developing drama without being explicitly aware that it is an image; and for that reason I feel that discussion of *The Secret Garden* might belong in any of my chapters but one. At the literal level it is deeply concerned with children's creative play, and with various forms of freedom, looking backwards to my previous chapter; and it owes its place in this chapter to its concern with continuity, between generations, between members of families and from one season to the next. However, this novel could not be included in my second chapter, with others from roughly its own period, since it is not concerned at all with regret for the past, or with loss, except in a highly modern, holistic, post-Freudian, way. The damaged characters are obliged to confront and acknowledge their grief in order to appreciate and participate in the joys of the present. Nowhere in *The Secret Garden* is it suggested that childhood *per se* is better than adulthood, that the past is better than the present (although traditional country wisdom is celebrated), or that time is an enemy. Thus it is an extraordinarily forward-looking and optimistic book. In it the child's spirit is seen as freed, as Stahl (1986) puts it, 'from adult restraints and inner bonds of self-pity and defeat' (p.41).

Ang (2000) points out that, 'Whereas in early children's literature "being" is seen in terms of spiritual health, the physical domain is here shown to be important in any

consideration of self' (p.120). In a sense, *The Secret Garden* combines early Victorian Romanticism – a belief in the healing power of nature – with the later pragmatism – belief in the healing power of purposeful play – both of which have occupied me so far. Wilkie emphasises the way in which the secret garden, like so many gardens in this study, is 'a site of oppositional paradoxes' (p.78): a meeting-place of the Rousseauist and pagan with the Arcadian and Edenic; and of Christian innocence with the fertility rite and the occult. Increasingly 'modern' elements are the concepts of self-determination, self-motivation and hence self-fulfilment; and these are characteristics that are desirable in the modern child, in fiction and in actuality; and particularly in the texts I discuss in Chapter 6.

5.6. Coda

This chapter necessarily moves away from the more or less consistent chronological categorisation of earlier chapters. I have attempted to explore texts which show, like those in Chapter Four, children escaping from the adult world and its concerns to be 'themselves' in their play; unlike those, some of these stories have shown children who are very far from being carefree. In these books comfort or even growth is obtained from the garden itself, as a sanctuary from frightening change, or as an agent of wholesome change. All these texts share the characteristic that, while deliberately not reflecting a 'realistic' and often pessimistic worldview, neither do any of them engage in escapism. In fact, most of them could be loosely described as

belonging to the *Bildungsroman* genre, since they generally contain a problem to be solved and a journey (perhaps internal), which ends where it began. They can also be contrasted with the garden-oriented texts of Chapters 2 and 3, which are very clearly escapism for their world-weary writers. It is clear from a wide reading of post-war children's fiction that the relationship between adult and child has changed again since the times when the child reader needed protection from life's unpleasantness: all the books I have explored here suggest that this is no longer possible or indeed desirable. For the first time in this study I feel that I have encountered books that engage with the concerns of contemporary children, despite settings and characters who may appear archaic. At last children's books are explicitly addressing problems of identity and belonging, and the relationship of child and adult. The differences between authors, I suggest, are simply of degree. The texts I have discussed here, and those I explore in the final two chapters, are, on a political level, about giving childhood back to children.

In the present chapter, then, the garden is (as in Chapter 4) used as a setting; but, unlike the idyllic playground of Chapter 4, it is not merely a setting. It is also an image of stability and sanctuary in a rapidly-changing world, and a forum for the expression of adult anxiety. That anxiety, in sharp contrast to Chapters 2 and 3, relates to the rôle and welfare of children in difficult or tragic circumstances. While childhood is still 'Eden', it is an Eden surrounded by threatening forces. Within the

garden the child – and the adult who is willing to be *childlike* – is supported and nurtured by the numinous and timeless power of nature.

In the next chapter I examine a series of texts that demonstrate their authors' apparent conclusion that, while the garden is indeed a sanctuary, it is temporary and must ultimately be left behind; once again invoking the idea of Adam and Eve and the leaving of Eden. Finally, I shall consider in detail one particular book which I believe exemplifies all the functions of the garden in literature so far discussed; the idyllic setting where the child can play, the sanctuary where healing can take place, and the lost Eden, recoverable only in memory.

Chapter 6: Leaving the garden

‘The garden was still there, but meanwhile Hatty’s Time had stolen a march on him, and had turned Hatty herself from his playmate into a grown-up woman’

***Tom’s Midnight Garden*, p.196**

Having – I hope – established the importance of the garden in children’s literature as a symbol and facilitator of growth, I now turn to the question of when and how characters leave the ‘garden’. In other words, I intend to look at texts that continue where *The Secret Garden* finishes; in which children have to move forward, towards adulthood and out of the garden, literally or figuratively. This kind of ‘rite of passage’, it might be argued, is what some of the great Victorian and Edwardian children’s writers never managed to complete in their own lives. These texts, therefore, contrast sharply with the late Victorian and Edwardian novels, which I explored in Chapter 2, that idealise the childhood idyll and, in some cases, refuse to leave it behind. The gardens in these texts are not necessarily ‘real’: that is, they may be imagined or dreamed.

I intend to consider some novels that show the young protagonist escaping from a childhood which is *not* idyllic. Ultimately, ‘the garden’ often seems almost to be anachronistic in this type of text and is employed as a symbol of a by now outgrown

construct – that is, the artificial, protected state of childhood that the developing adolescent will eventually have to leave. This use of the metaphor sometimes also carries the implication that the garden (as described in Chapter 4) is a strictly middle-class concept. In Chapter 4 I described the garden as a playground for the fortunate middle classes after the First World War, a period when children's writers felt the urgent need to protect children from other such horrors. By the 1950s, large private estates and even generous suburban gardens were increasingly seen to be the province of a relatively small minority. At about the same time, children's fiction began to concern itself with the worries of children and adolescents for whom life was not the idyll enjoyed by the characters of writers like Ransome and Blyton (a concept which I began to explore in Chapter 5). The idea of essential childhood innocence had been discounted by Freud (Cunningham, p.170); although Nodelman can still remark on 'our modern assumptions that children in their innocence need protection from the wickedness of the world, that childhood ignorance is bliss, and that children will find out about evil soon enough' (1996a, p.75) – assumptions which he traces back to the nineteenth century. I shall, however, conclude this chapter with a study of the work of an influential contemporary author whose vision incorporates children who can look after themselves and who believes that 'knowledge not innocence gives grace to humanity' (Wullschläger, 1995 [2001], p.217).

Compared with other chapters in this study, most especially Chapter 4, this chapter necessarily examines a small sample of texts. I found few novels which I could interpret as showing the child leaving a garden, although there are, of course, many involving growing up. This is unsurprising to me, since the whole focus of the books explored in Chapter 4 was play in a safe environment; and the garden is so frequently such an environment that I had a huge range of texts from which to choose. Furthermore, because these texts were written during the first half of the twentieth century, when middle-class values and settings were predominant, gardens feature almost inevitably. This contrasts with many contemporary books concerned with leaving childhood, which are peopled by a far wider range of characters in terms of social class and experience. I have encountered texts in which a protagonist leaves a suburban or rural childhood to move to the city – and grow up – notably Robert Swindells' *Stone Cold* (1993) and Melvin Burgess' *Junk* (1996); but in none of these texts is the garden at all significant. This chapter is therefore devoted to a rather detailed reading of a small number of texts, rather than the thematic exploration of earlier chapters. The texts under consideration tend to be recommended, whether by reviewers, publishers or other adults – sometimes including their authors – for children of about twelve or above, that is, for the adolescent or immediately pre-adolescent reader; and they tend also to have been written during the second half of the twentieth century. While attitudes towards children and childhood have certainly changed hugely in the last hundred and fifty years or so, we are still, as Wullschläger puts it (1995 [2001]) 'as fixated on childhood as the Victorians were' (p.213) in that

‘every aspect of childhood is neurotically analysed’ (p.214). This may be so; I would add that there is a perceptible tendency for some aspects of ‘childhood’ to be prolonged much further into adulthood than in, for instance, the 1950s. This may reflect greater longevity, permitting the idea of lengthening childhood and adolescence to account for a greater proportion of the lifespan; and it may also reflect the wider availability of higher education, thus making a twenty-one-year-old as (or more) likely to be a student as a worker or parent. Certainly I agree with Wullschläger that we are ‘fixated on childhood’ and its affairs. The most significant difference (in the context of children’s literature), I suggest, is that the contemporary writer is more conscious of this, indeed is reacting against many of the attitudes that have gone before, and is concerned with the psychology of the child-protagonist and child-reader. Of course MacDonald, Kingsley *et al* were themselves reacting against what had gone before – in their case, the Puritanical notion of the child as ‘the limb of Satan’ – but, before the dissemination of Freud and modern psychology they were also partly engaged in ‘writing out’ their own neuroses (see Carpenter, 1985, and Wullschläger, 1995 [2001]).

6.1. Leaving the fantasy garden: the need for independence

Katherine Paterson is one of many ‘contemporary writers of realistic children’s literature [who] work from the premise that children and young adults experience the

world as very complex and often difficult' (Reynolds, 1994, p.44), but she offers a possible way of making meaning of life's vicissitudes. Her *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) has certain obvious parallels with Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. It has two joint protagonists, a girl and a boy; and the girl helps to transform the life of the boy through their experiences in a kind of 'secret garden'. Through the acting out of elaborate fantasies – much like some of the children in Chapter 4, such as the Bastables – Jess escapes from the deadening values of his insensitive family, and the destruction of his self-esteem provoked by their lack of appreciation for their imaginative son. This is a recognisably modern text which, without resorting to horror or melodrama, portrays childhood, at least for its hero, as far from idyllic. Jess's life is difficult and frustrating and he often feels that he does not belong in his family. Like many dissatisfied children, he fantasises about more 'appropriate' parents: 'I was a foundling, like in the stories ... Somewhere I have a family who have rooms filled with nothing but books and who still grieve for their baby who was stolen' (p.69). With Leslie, the new neighbour from an unusually educated family (her father has moved to the country to concentrate on his writing) he indulges his creativity in the imaginary land of Terabithia, and as a by-product develops his own strength of character. Jess's 'garden' is seductive because of its social nature; at one point, we learn, 'Jess tried going to Terabithia alone, but it was no good. It needed Leslie to make the magic' (p.77). The very word 'magic' is an echo of the numinous power of *The Secret Garden* (1911). Jess and Leslie work and play co-operatively rather like Mary, Dickon and Colin in *The Secret Garden*, and

discover things about themselves and one another. The most important thing that Jess learns is how fulfilling a true meeting of minds can be, and how real friendship can buttress us against many of life's problems; although Leslie too has been lonely before their meeting:

'There in their secret place, his feelings bubbled inside him like a stew on the back of the stove – some sad for her in her lonesomeness, but chunks of happiness, too. To be able to be Leslie's one whole friend in the world as she was his – he couldn't help being satisfied about that.'

(p.89)

Through Leslie's eyes, the timid Jess begins to see himself differently: 'She was his other, more exciting self – his way to Terabithia and all the worlds beyond ... He grabbed the end of the rope and swung out towards the other bank with a kind of wild exhilaration and landed gently on his feet, taller and stronger and wiser in that mysterious land' (p.56). Leslie's friendship encourages Jess, not only to stand up to the school bully, but also actually to see *her* unhappiness and befriend her. He comes to appreciate that 'before Leslie came, he had been a nothing' (p.139). In some ways this is mutual, as Leslie's father admits, after her death: ' "She loved you, you know." He could tell from Bill's voice that he was crying. "She told me once that if it weren't for you ..." His voice broke completely. "Thank you," he said a moment later. "Thank you for being such a wonderful friend to her." '(p.127)

This, of course, contrasts with the *Swallows and Amazons* children and those in Nesbit, whose play, while co-operative, is play for its own sake and rarely involves such by-products as dawning self-awareness or psychological healing. Like those other children, however, Jess and Leslie are engaged in mastering the world through their play. Like Stevenson's child in *A Child's Garden of Verses* they come to believe themselves omnipotent. Stevenson's child says, 'This was the world and I was king' ('My Kingdom') and, similarly, Leslie whispers to Jess, ' "It might be a whole secret country ... and you and I would be the rulers of it" ' (p.49). They are creators, like Mary, Colin and Dickon, and, like them, become able to believe in anything: 'Like God in the Bible, they looked at what they had made and found it very good ... there in the shadowy light of the stronghold everything seemed possible' (p.51).

Nikolajeva (2000), in her consideration of linear and circular time, points out that the story develops from this idyll (which in her terms is always circular or mythic in its temporal structure, and which corresponds to the childhoods portrayed in Chapter 4) to a linear narrative, in which time progresses and circumstances change, and the past is gone forever – which, in her terms, is a more sophisticated type of narrative. She suggests that Jess 'becomes, with Leslie's help, a king and a glorious knight, strong and brave and a match for any enemy. Constructed as a spiritual quest, his transformation into a hero at the same time creates in Jess a self-delusion' (p.198) – that their happiness in their secret country can last forever. This may be seen as the

'downside' to their increasing self-confidence; although, in fact, it is the internal aspect of this 'transformation into a hero' which saves Jess from permanent despair after Leslie's sudden death, when the rope over the creek breaks. Ultimately, he discovers resources within himself of which he was quite unaware, although it takes this catastrophe to expose them.

After Leslie's death, Jess believes, fleetingly, that 'There was nowhere to go. Nowhere. Ever again' (p.130). Jess is mistaken; and the book ends optimistically, with Jess realising fully how Leslie has helped him, first by giving him some faith in himself, and then by leaving him to go into the world as an independent being:

'It was Leslie who had taken him from the cow pasture into Terabithia and turned him into a king. He had thought that was it. Wasn't king the best you could be? Now it occurred to him that perhaps Terabithia was like a castle where you came to be knighted. After you stayed for a while and grew strong you had to move on. For hadn't Leslie, even in Terabithia, tried to push back the walls of his mind and make him see beyond to the shining world – huge and terrible and beautiful and very fragile? (Handle with care – everything – even the predators.)

Now it was time for him to move out ... It was up to him to pay back to the world in beauty and caring what Leslie had loaned him in vision and strength.'

(p.140)

Leslie has been in the rôle of the 'good mother' who nurtures her child, prepares him to survive the outside world, and then gently pushes him out. Jess himself then takes on that same nurturing rôle with regard to his little sister, May Belle, thus passing on Leslie's legacy:

'And when he finished, he put flowers in her hair and led her across the bridge – the great bridge into Terabithia – which might look to someone with no magic in him like a few planks across a nearly dry gully.'

(p.142)

In terms of 'opposites', it is clear that, in this text, the past is gone (unlike texts explored in Chapters 2 and 3). What matters to Jess and Leslie for much of the book is the present, and in that they are more like the children in Chapter 4. However, by the end of the book, Jess and May Belle are looking ahead, fairly confidently, to the future. While receiving a certain kind of social and psychic healing in Terabithia – much as Colin receives physical and psychic healing in the Secret Garden – Jess is made, quite explicitly, to leave and enter the world, despite his willingness to enter

May Belle's games and fantasies. He plays with her as an adult, not as a peer. If one considers Ang's terms, 'enclosure' and 'exposure', Jess needs his protected time of growth in the 'nursery' environment of the imaginary land, but, having been 'exposed' to the unavoidable pain of Leslie's death, knows he must move on and grow, simply because that is the way things are. There is no wishful thinking in this text, although there is a great deal of sadness and poignancy; and for that reason it shows the reader a powerful and sophisticated version of 'reality'. One might say that, once again, the myth of the permanent childhood idyll is exploded, as is that of the rural idyll. This particular text, on the other hand, exemplifies the enduring myth of the 'American Dream' – Jess is encouraged to aspire to a more sophisticated level of consciousness than his exhausted, under-educated, irritable parents, and to emulate Leslie's articulate, creative parents. This is, clearly, an aspiration concerned with growth and with actively shaping the future as compared with the conservatism and nostalgia observed in earlier, British, texts.

It is ironic that Jess and Leslie base their fantasy world on C.S. Lewis's Narnia, since Lewis's children never leave Narnia at all: indeed, it is regarded as a 'higher' reality, to which they are transmuted after their deaths in a railway accident. While Paterson's characters grow imaginatively and in confidence during their brief spell in Arcadia, Lewis's are forced to deny the importance of any other world. After the apocalyptic final destruction of Narnia, the children are consoled by witnessing the birth of the 'new' Narnia; and Aslan's slightly bathetic final words to them are,

‘ “The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning” ’ (*The Last Battle*, p.165).

6.2. The garden as a trap: escaping from the fantasy garden

The next work under consideration is *Walking the Maze* by Margret Shaw (1999). It is in complete thematic and stylistic contrast to *Bridge to Terabithia*. The fifteen-year-old heroine is drawn into a solitary world of fantasy which nearly destroys her, thus contrasting sharply with the escape from the limitations of his background experienced by Jess in *Terabithia*.

The story concerns Annice Campbell, whose family (herself and her preoccupied parents) has repeatedly moved around the country, uprooting Annice from a series of schools. Because of this, she has developed a cynical persona, and is judged by her new schoolmates as standoffish and pretentious. In this respect the text resembles *The Secret Garden*, *The Bridge to Terabithia* and many other twentieth-century books in its initial presentation of an unhappy and confused child, who is almost an ‘anti-hero’. This particular text, however, differs from those cited in that nothing very much is resolved by the end, although Annice does find out that she has two friends who like her; for this reason, the text lacks satisfactory closure – again, perhaps typical of the late twentieth century.

The external narrative involves her tentative attempts to make friends in the context of a school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while the internal narrative is concerned with her growing obsession with a pair of pictures. One is the photograph of a painting of a family in their garden; the other is the result of the artist's painting over the original to create an apparently 'updated' version, in which all but one of the family appear older, and the garden is dead. From this, and her reading of a horticultural book, *Naturalists both Amateur and Mercenary*, Annice weaves a complex and vivid fantasy. Her depiction of the Wolsington family and their garden at Caffelmeade, a Tudor mansion, is vivid and convincing; she is an invisible observer throughout, like Tom in the first chapters of *Tom's Midnight Garden*. Annice is desperate to believe that she has somehow entered the life of the pictures, and convinces herself of a pseudo-scientific, J.W. Dunne-like explanation concerning so-called 'hyperstrings' or 'rifts in space-time' (p.91): 'I wanted an explanation that was outside myself and so the idea seeded itself in my mind' (p.94). The nightmare garden in which she finds herself is lush and sensuous and very obviously the product of a disturbed adolescent's imagination. I interpret the maze itself as a symbol of the protagonist's confusion, at finding herself in a series of situations over which she has no control. The novel carries, in my opinion, powerful psychological conviction: Annice is clearly projecting parts of her own psyche on to not only the fantasy characters in the book but on to the garden itself. There is certainly no hint of paradise or pre-adolescent innocence in the garden at Caffelmeade (it is reminiscent of the garden in Diana Wynne Jones' *Fire and*

Hemlock, discussed in Chapter 5); it is repeatedly described as overblown, crammed with over-ripe produce and, at times, the plants are seen as corrupt:

‘[Matt] took a bill-hook and began to pull down the crippled plant. The distorted, grotesque shapes of the embryo pitchers, swollen and hardened, hit the ground with dull thuds. I looked up and began to shiver ... As though in slow motion Matt reached up and pulled the pitcher down and the remains of the cat fell to the floor, its fur wet and clumped by a dark greenish-red ooze.’

(p.76)

The roses are seen as decadent, in contrast to their more usual rôle as the meeting of art and nature, or else as a Christian motif (Waters, 1988, pp.159-160): ‘The scent of the roses was heavy, lulling, drugging’ (p.29). Annice appears to be projecting all her most unpleasant and destructive emotions on to the garden, until even the reader begins to believe that she *has* somehow (like Tom Long in *Tom’s Midnight Garden*) stepped out of time into a real garden. At one point, we (and Annice) are warned that ‘ “A garden is not always a lovesome thing” ’ (p.53) – although it nearly always is in children’s books, if not in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The teacher who is directing the school play makes explicit this link between the plot and sub-plot: ‘ “We’ve talked before about the dark side of *The Dream* ... Always remember that this is not a pretty safe English garden, it is a place where ‘*the snake throws her enamelled skin, Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in ...*’ ” ’ (p.97)

Annice records 'a feeling of menace' (p.44) and 'malevolence' (p.115), culminating in a sense that 'everything was far from well in the garden' (p.117), which is quickly confirmed:

'Flora gasped and recoiled and I looked down at a dead badger. It was lying on its back with stiff snout and paws in the air. There was no blood. Further on we found dead birds lying as though they had just fallen from the air. Flora lost her footing and put her hand down. She stayed still as though frozen and stared at her hand. I looked and saw that she had put her hand on a rabbit. I knew that it was still warm, but I also knew that it was quite dead.'

(pp.119-120)

If this were not enough to warn Annice of the intrinsic destructiveness of her fantasy, she goes on to hallucinate the drowning of a small girl who tries to lie on a giant water lily in the Caffelmeade conservatory. She is pitched into the water and the huge leaves seem, malevolently and repeatedly, to push her back under (p.134).

This is the only book about a garden that I have encountered in which the geographical origins of plants are explored. Much is made of the exotic nature of many of the Caffelmeade plants and flowers – that is, they are not native to England, or not, in one sense, natural; the chapter headings, which purport to be extracts from *Naturalists both Amateur and Mercenary*, emphasise, as I myself have done

elsewhere, the essential compromise between nature and art which constitutes a garden: 'Nothing could be more unnatural than a rose garden ... [it] is the manifestation of a dream, the culmination of human will' (heading to Chapter 4, p.23) ' ... A garden is unnatural. The plants have been forced to live in places of our choice, not theirs. This introduces an element of unreality' (heading to Chapter 15, p.149).

This distinction between nature and civilisation becomes gradually blurred at Caffelmeade as the garden begins to invade the house. Twice we observe the effects of this process, and on both occasions we are invited to make the connection between Annice's 'Romantic' (even Gothic) taste in literature, and her feverish imagination. When she first visits the house we are shown its decrepitude:

'I turned through what had been imposing gateposts, but the gates were rusty and off their hinges, propped back on crumbling bricks. The door of the lodge hung slackly open, the unglazed windows were blind, the York-stone tiles, missing in patches, revealed the wooden skeleton. Ahead of me ancient horse-chestnuts lined the drive. They met overhead, cutting out the sun.

"Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again."

(p.16)

Again, later, the family open up a disused room to find it overgrown:

‘The Virginia creeper that was on the outside wall had found its way between the stone and had grown right over the window, under the casements, and across the floor. We were standing on leaves ... Not a table leg or chair back were free of the tendrils which crept steadily up and over everything. Something slithered over a footstool and Elizabeth pointed wordlessly.

“And a thousand thousand slimy things

Lived on; and so did I,” came unbidden to my mind.’

(p.101)

One of the few pragmatic characters in the book, David, remarks, ‘ “The garden is only an area of land that we choose to define. It’s only an idea really” ’ (p.51) – and I interpret this as a definition of the imagination. The reader is gradually introduced to the notion that there are as many ways of seeing the world as there are people, and that one’s vision depends very largely on one’s interpretation of personal experience. Annice’s vision is dark and melancholy, her imagination crammed with images of death and decay. I think that the author is suggesting that her imagination has been perverted, largely through the loneliness that is only partly due to her parents’ somewhat nomadic lifestyle. She copes with frequent changes of home and school by withdrawing into literature and her imagination. One girl, Heather, almost forces

her friendship upon Annice; and Heather's grandmother (a traditional 'wise woman' figure) observes that ' "It's good to like one's own company, essential as you get older, but it's not good to be too solitary. If you are, and if you have the normal desire for company, then you invent your own. That's what you've done" ' (p.110).

Another way of seeing the world is suggested by another classmate, Philip, who

' "believes that the world is a binary system where everything is either nought or one, on or off, right or wrong, real or unreal" ' (p.70); and yet another by Heather, who responds that ' "We don't live in a black and white world. There's colour, lots of colours, lots of shades" ' (p.70). Annice's sensual and decadent vision seems to her far more sophisticated and seductive than her friends' pragmatism; yet, by the end of the novel she appears to be hopelessly confused between reality and fantasy. Just before she succumbs to the fantasy, she warns herself, 'Healthy people tell themselves healthy stories. I knew myself to be sickening by the strange happenings at Caffelmeade' (p.141). Soon, however, she is genuinely hallucinating:

'The flowers were noisy. The beds whispered as I approached, murmured as I passed and screamed as they fell behind me. I began to run to get away from the tumult, the clamour as they called for my attention. I came to the rose garden, heavy with scent. Look at me, the rose of York seemed to say. No, look at me, the Lancastrian rose wheedled, think of me, create me.'

(pp.156-157)

This is unsettlingly like the rose-garden scene at the end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It is not until she is rescued by her friends – who care about her more than she has imagined possible – that Annice realises, just as the reader, presumably, does, that fantasy is a tool for change and a power that is under one's own control. After all the inward-looking, over-ripe adolescent fantasy, Annice finally makes a mature realisation that links the threads of the novel, the themes of friendship, fantasy and growth:

‘And then I truly knew. I knew that I had always been in charge. I had had a choice as we all have a choice. Every person always has, and always has had, the freedom to choose how they see the world. What I understood for the first time was that we make the world by sifting what we see, feel, hear, read; choosing some of it, rejecting some of it. I knew then that I had to judge what is true. It is up to me.’

(p.164)

Ultimately, then, Annice – like Alice, much earlier – is tempted and obsessed by her dreams of the apparently perfect, yet somehow corrupt garden. Whereas in Chapter 2 I examined texts that suggest knowledge and sophistication are inferior to child-like innocence and purity, here the author suggests that the grandiose dreams of childhood and adolescence can be dangerous when they become dominant. Annice's fantasies come close to taking over her entire life and preventing her from forming

healthy relationships. Ironically, as she and the reader discover at the end of the novel, her fantasies are merely that, rather than some magical time-travelling experience, and have no connection with reality. Annice's garden, unlike Jess's (*Bridge to Terabithia*) or Tom's (*Tom's Midnight Garden*) is one in which she is essentially alone; and, in her imaginative habitation of the Caffelmeade garden, she is all-powerful. Her temptation, then, is to remain in the garden as an omniscient, omnipresent, observer. This connects with what I have said in Chapter 4 about the value of fantasies of omnipotence in children's play: the difference is that, while R.L. Stevenson's children (and later A.A. Milne's) enjoy the illusion of omnipotence available from their games, Annice is so drawn into the game that she begins to believe in its reality, and her psychological and social well-being are both disturbed. She has to leave the Caffelmeade garden to save her sanity; or rather she re-invents it as a perfectly ordinary, neglected garden that has nothing at all to do with her personal fantasy. In this context, then, imaginative play is neither hedonistic – as in Chapter 4 – or healing, as in Chapter 5, and in *Bridge to Terabithia*. On the contrary, it is dangerous if it is mistaken for reality.

6.3. The garden as a trap: escaping from childhood

The next text under consideration in this section (*Escape*, by June Oldham) is a disturbing novel for adolescents which concerns incest between father and daughter. Magdalen's name signifies her status as 'fallen woman' – in her own eyes only, as is

made very clear. She writes a private journal of her experiences in the guise of a fairy tale, in which she is the beloved and protected princess, her father is the loving king, and the gardener is the master of the monster which assaults her. The beautiful rose garden that exists both in her fable and in 'reality' bears fairy tale and other associations, reminding me of the perverted garden in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in which the gardeners paint the white roses red, in an attempt to corrupt nature, and also of the garden of rampion (or rapunzel) in *Rapunzel*.

'The only blemish on her happiness was the gardener. He remained, always digging and tending the roses and watching (p.24) ... He had magic. "Just look at the roses!" the king would exclaim. "The fellow's a wizard." The princess knew wizards had magic, so that was how the gardener did what he did. He let out the Monster he kept for chasing naughty children and he sent it into the castle'.

(p.33)

The novel's title is highly significant in terms of the narrative structure. The text consists of Magdalen's increasingly ambitious plans for escape from her father, gradually expanding the physical horizons of the book and also gradually introducing a cast of supportive characters. At the beginning of the novel Magdalen is timid and fearful as a result of her father's treatment of her, and also because she has lived a pampered life, protected from the outside world, which she fears. She is afraid to

confide in anyone and is therefore a very lonely figure. Initially she is only able to think of escaping a short distance:

‘And when she reached the moor ... she would not even glance in the direction of this house. For a short space she would put it behind her and all that had happened in it.’

(p.3)

She dreams of travelling further, to a hall of residence at Edinburgh University where she will, she imagines, be completely safe. Her father forestalls this plan by buying her a flat – where he can visit her at his convenience. Ironically, Magdalen’s few friends, whom she keeps at arm’s length, envy her, not only her material luxuries, but also her charismatic and fabulously handsome father. He begins to take on the appearance of a fairy-tale villain; a wicked prince or a Bluebeard-like character who controls circumstances by means of his wealth, power and attractiveness, until Magdalen is fooled into believing that it is she who is somehow wrong. She is easily manipulated: ‘Soon he’ll be old, she thought, needing her in a different way; she felt pity for him and an unexpected, irrational remorse’(p.27).

She is saved, ironically, by a failed suicide attempt, witnessed by the cousin of a young teacher. The two cousins, Greg and Melanie, are forced to acknowledge that something is wrong; and are the first people to stand up to Magdalen’s father and

offer her unconditional help and support. Eventually, with Greg's not altogether welcome help, Magdalen escapes to the wider landscape of the sea. She is determined throughout the book to reach the sea – 'It had never failed her. Always it had renewed her strength' (p.57) ... 'She saw the wide stretch of sand, the splashes of water holding the light, the waves folding, cleaning as they ebbed. She did not wish him to go there; it was not a place to be shared' (p.68). During the car journey, Magdalen's anger begins to surface, partly prompted by her continued writing-down of her memories, and partly by her experiences on the trip, which at times takes on an almost epic, if domesticated, quality. Intriguingly, some of these observations are expressed in descriptions of gardens, which are contrasted with the nightmare fairy-tale garden of her journal. She recalls the garden of her first friend, Delia:

'Delia's house was not as big as the castle and all it had at the back was a very small lawn splashed over with daisies. Delia's father said he liked daisies. Therefore the lawn was not cut and there wasn't a gardener. That made the princess glad.'

(p.94)

Delia's garden represents Delia's straightforward experience of childhood (this is made explicit by the reinforcing mention of her father as an 'ordinary' father). This garden is reminiscent of the gardens I discussed in Chapter 4, in which children can 'be themselves': the next garden, that of Magdalen's other friend, Gail, is even more

so:

‘There was a swing and a slide and a climbing frame and a tricycle and a cart for Gail’s brother Kevin, and cricket stumps and a football net for Peter, and a netball post for Gail and a play-pen for the baby. Nor were they the only people who used all these things. Children came from far and wide and their shouts and their laughing and their arguments made such a noise that it penetrated the walls and windows and echoed through the whole house ... In that house the princess never listened to the silence with only her heartbeats for company.’

(p.99)

Magdalen does not express any envy for this noisy and uninhibited kind of childhood, but she begins to experience anger, triggered by the sight of ‘the unchecked garden’ (p.103) of the bungalow in which she and Greg stay overnight. She is beginning to recognise the essential artificiality of the life in which she has been imprisoned, symbolised by the manicured formal gardens at her home. Once again, we see ‘binary opposites’, the mutually exclusive concepts of ‘home’ and ‘away’ (Nodelman), and ‘enclosed’ and ‘exposed’ (Ang). Unlike many other texts, *Escape* presents the ‘home/enclosed’ dyad as harmful (which it clearly is, in this specific case) and the ‘away/exposed’ dyad as preferable. In this modestly-achieved reversal of normal cultural and literary expectations, Oldham may be seen to pre-

empt Pullman's more epic confounding of expectations in his positing of innocence against experience. She also, however, like Pullman, echoes Blake's transforming of 'innocence' from freedom into imprisonment, and of 'experience' from sorrow into liberation (Ellis, p.304).

Magdalen's experience of childhood is clearly pitifully sad; it has taught her the lesson, very painfully unlearned, that adult males are not to be trusted. This is reinforced by the apparently wilful ignorance of her complacent headmaster, who is dazzled by the charm and influence of Magdalen's father: ' "He's first-rate; a devoted parent. I only wish all our pupils were as fortunate" ' (p.7).

While she waits for her A-Level results, her father is away on business and she tastes freedom and safety. This is described in terms of control, indicating that sexual abuse is an issue of power:

' ... she had been beyond his control. She had led her own life; he had been unable to take charge. This was the stuff of dreams. She felt as if for years she had been clamped in a vice, but suddenly it had loosened. She was allowed to stretch; the oxygen could course through her blood, flexing the muscles and brain.

Invigorated, she had looked at herself and said, "This is *me*. I'm not wagging at the end of his string. This is what it's like to be myself." '

(p.13)

Behind the exploration of incest and its effects on the victim, I think there is a sub-text concerning the power relationship between adult and child, as in so many of the texts I have considered. This text exemplifies perhaps the most horrifying reason for escaping the childhood garden: for Magdalen, childhood itself has been corrupted, and remaining in this prison-like garden would be dangerous. A text like this could never have been written at an earlier time; even as recently as twenty years ago, I suggest, the notion of childhood innocence was so exclusively bound up with their (presumed) lack of sexuality that the central premise of this book would have been problematic for a writer. Perhaps until quite recently a child's innocence was defined by this ignorance of sexual matters, so that the idea that a young girl (initially, indeed, a child) could be sexually abused by her father; that she could appear perfectly normal, indeed, be an attractive heroine, while psychically damaged; and that the father could be portrayed with some sympathy, rather than as a villain, would have been unacceptable in a text intended for vulnerable young people, even if a writer had found this scenario plausible. Magdalen is sexually not an innocent; yet she demonstrates admirable and lovable qualities that make her a contemporary heroine – as does Lyra, the protagonist of Philip Pullman's *His Dark*

Materials trilogy. Both girls are 'innocent' if that can be defined as being loving and well-intentioned.

Pullman has objected vehemently and vocally to the vision of childhood presented by established writers such as Lewis and Milne. In a newspaper interview Pullman attacks Lewis: 'Lewis was so fixated on innocent children in Narnia that he killed them rather than let them go through adolescence, Pullman says. "He had an odd view of children. Either he had never been a child himself or he had never stopped being a child" ' ('The Lost Children', *Sunday Times*, 11.11.01.). Pullman's own version of childhood is certainly very different from Lewis'.

6.4. The inversion of Romanticism: leaving innocence behind

Philip Pullman himself has recently produced an ambitious trilogy of children's books which posits a contrary vision to that of Lewis (again, ironically, some critics have enthusiastically and favourably compared it with the *Narnia* books). Pullman's books celebrate children just as they are – and teach understanding of the rest of the world, just as it is, while Lewis is constantly longing for a better world.

The publication of the first volume, *Northern Lights* (1995) was recognised by literary critics as a significant event in the field of children's literature and received serious consideration as a text, regardless of its status as a 'children's' book. The

second volume, *The Subtle Knife*, followed in 1997 and the final book, *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), made literary history by being voted Whitbread 'Book of the Year' as well as 'Best Children's Book' (22.1.02). A large part of the significance of these texts, then, lies in their appeal to adults as well as children. Pullman himself has said:

'You can't actually "intend" to have an audience at all; the most you can do is tell a story and hope someone listens. Circumstances being what they were in this case [*The Amber Spyglass*], I knew from the responses from the first two books that quite a lot of people were waiting for it, and I also knew that the readers who were waiting included people of both sexes and all ages. That mixed audience was what I had always hoped for ...'

(personal email message, Feb. 2002).

However, in terms of the present investigation, the importance of these books is the way in which they present a serious challenge to a variety of socio-cultural myths, notably the Romantic and post-Romantic 'cult of the child'. *His Dark Materials* partially subverts my central hypothesis, in that, while it presents an Eden more like that in Genesis than in any other books discussed here, his 'Eden' emphatically does not represent childhood. In my reading of the trilogy Pullman is saying that, while there is no heaven after life, neither is the innocence of childhood to be regarded as a

paradise. Heaven, says Pullman, is something that we create for ourselves where we are; and maturity is needed for that creation.

Childhood is certainly not seen by Pullman as especially privileged. In the first book, *Northern Lights*, Roger the kitchen boy and Tony Makarios, a London slum child, are portrayed almost entirely in terms of the suffering they experience in their short lives. Mrs. Coulter has no difficulty in luring Tony away from his sad circumstances:

‘His mother thinks he’s nine years old, but she has a poor memory that the drink has rotted; he might be eight, or ten ... Tony’s not very bright, but he has a sort of clumsy tenderness that sometimes prompts him to give his mother a rough hug and plant a sticky kiss on her cheeks. The poor woman is usually too fuddled to start such a procedure herself; but she responds warmly enough, once she realises what’s happening.’

(p.41)

Pullman writes with compassion of the inadequate mother and her neglected child, reserving his venom for the ‘beautiful lady’ (p.43) who abducts the children; but he permits no illusions of a childhood idyll in his portrayal of nineteenth century London. Lyra herself, and Will, whom we encounter in the second and third volumes, both begin their stories from insecure bases, which I shall discuss further

later. Lyra's very name hints at her far from perfect character (p.308, *The Amber Spyglass*): her deceitfulness and facility with lies saves her and her friends on many occasions and are always deployed in what we are clearly intended to see as 'just causes'. Will, too, is no innocent. When he first appears in the story he has accidentally killed a man – Lyra is encouraged rather than otherwise to discover from the alethiometer that he is a murderer (*The Subtle Knife*, p.29). In fact, the implications of Lyra's ability to read the alethiometer (which ' "tells you the truth" ', *Northern Lights*, p.74) – while her name sounds like 'liar' (*The Amber Spyglass*, p.308) underline Pullman's faith in integrity rather than Christian virtue. Will's name emphasises his strength of character, which is considerable to begin with but is tested and develops through his quest. On the cusp of adolescence, Lyra and Will combine into a formidable force: as Lyra acknowledges: '[Will] was truly fearless, and she admired that beyond measure; but he wasn't good at lying and betraying and cheating, which all came to her as naturally as breathing. When she thought of that she felt warm and virtuous, because she did it for Will, never for herself' (*The Amber Spyglass*, p.180). If one compares this fictional child to Diamond (*At the Back of the North Wind*) for example, or even Carroll's Alice, we can see how Pullman is anxious to present a true individual, and to defy the post-Romantic conventions about childhood.

Pullman has himself complained, with regard to adults' ideas about children, that 'There is no realistic view of children which encompasses the fact that they don't

know very much about the world and the fact that they're beset by all kinds of temptations and they're no better or worse than us' ('The Lost Children', *Sunday Times*, 11.11.01). Clearly Pullman sees children as being just like 'us' – the adults – rather than like 'angels', as some Victorians and Edwardians did; in fact, Pullman's angels (in *The Amber Spyglass*) are very far from cherubic. The two whom we learn most about, Balthamos and Baruch, are solemn and awe-inspiring beings, made of pure spirit (Dust), but, surprisingly, have very human characteristics. They clearly love each other and this love manifests itself, in Balthamos, as possessive and even petulant behaviour, as well as tenderness. In Pullman's eyes, no one is perfect, not even the angels – and certainly not God.

Children, then, might not be 'better' than adults in Pullman's view – in fact, as he shows, there are ways in which we might regard adulthood as potentially superior to childhood as a state of being. The whole Pullman sequence is concerned with the concept of 'innocence' versus 'experience', but Pullman inverts the traditional post-Romantic concept that the child is closer to God and to nature than the adult – and therefore superior – by relating the concepts of innocence and experience to those of consciousness and wisdom (the Dust of his stories). Dust is a highly complex metaphor in the three novels. Bird (2001) highlights Pullman's debt to Milton:

'Underpinning the concept of Dust is Milton's metaphor for the mass of informed primal matter left over from the construction of the universe; in

other words, the “dark materials” of *Paradise Lost* (II, 1.916). In Pullman’s narrative, however, Dust contains much more than the beginning and end of humanity’s physical existence or the origins of the universe.’

(p.112)

The meaning of Dust is the central puzzle of Pullman’s highly challenging trilogy. Reading the books, one encounters many partial definitions of it: it is seen as “elementary particles ... attracted to human beings ... Adults attract them, but not children. At least, not much, and not until adolescence” ’(*Northern Lights*, p.90). It is the substance that makes ‘ “the matter of this world thin, so that we can see through it for a brief time’ ” (*Northern Lights*, p.187), and also the force that works the alethiometer or truth-teller (*Northern Lights*, p.370) and the subtle knife, that can cut through anything, including the invisible barriers between worlds. Clearly it is antagonistic to the Church: Serafina Pekkala, a witch-queen, tells Lyra that ‘ “where there are priests, there is fear of Dust” ’ (*Northern Lights*, p.318). Towards the end of the first volume, in fact, we learn that Dust is regarded as the ‘ “physical evidence for original sin” ’ (p.371) and that this is why it is feared and hated by the priesthood. Lord Asriel reads Lyra the relevant passage from a strangely-modified Genesis, which explains how the fruit from the tree opened the eyes of the man and the woman, showing them the true and fixed shapes of their dæmons (or external manifestations of the soul), their difference from the animals and likeness to gods, and the knowledge of good and evil. Asriel summarises: ‘ “And when Rusakov

discovered Dust, at last there was a physical proof that something happened when innocence changed into experience.” ’(*Northern Lights*, p.373). Dust, then, is *consciousness* (*The Subtle Knife*, pp.92, 259).

So far, none of this implies any value-judgements about Dust. At the very end of *Northern Lights*, however, Lyra says, considering her many enemies, ‘ “ ... if *they* all think it’s bad, it must be good” ’ (p.397) – and in the final volume, *The Amber Spyglass*, we see Lyra herself (whom we know to be a heroine) cast in the rôle of Eve, the one who introduces Dust into the prelapsarian world. Fra Pavel, an associate of Mrs. Coulter’s and thus incriminated in the abduction and torture of children, declares that Lyra is ‘ “in the position of Eve, the wife of Adam, the mother of us all, and the cause of all sin ... if this temptation does take place, and if the child gives in, then Dust and sin will triumph” ’ (p.71). A young zealot, Father Gomez, is given ‘pre-emptive absolution’ and sent to assassinate Lyra. As he prepares to depart, the Director of the Consistorial Court (Inquisition) remarks: ‘ “How much better for us all if there had been a Father Gomez in the garden of Eden! We would never have left paradise” ’ (p.75). In those words, I think, lies the most important difference between Pullman’s vision and that of the Romantics and the post-Romantics. The writers I discussed in Chapter 2 (and to a lesser extent in Chapter 4) see the garden as a paradise, a *good place*, where the innocent – that is, children – can play safely, free from sin. Pullman posits a world in which authority figures set

out to murder a child, in order to prevent her attaining adulthood and therefore consciousness, and leaving the garden of ignorance.

The moment at which Lyra fulfils her destiny, at which the bleeding away of Dust begins to be reversed, is the moment when Lyra and Will consummate their newly awoken love. This takes place in one of the few idyllic settings of the trilogy:

‘There was a little clearing in the middle of the grove, which was floored with soft grass and moss-covered rocks. The branches laced across overhead, almost shutting out the sky and letting through little moving spangles and sequins of sunlight so that everything was dappled with gold and silver ... Then Lyra took one of those little red fruits. With a fast-beating heart, she turned to him and said, “Will ...”

And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth.

She could see from his eyes that he knew at once what she meant, and that he was too joyful to speak ...’

(The Amber Spyglass, pp.492-3)

The Botanic Garden in Oxford is the idyllic setting for the poignant last chapter of *The Amber Spyglass* and it is the place where Lyra and Will, in their separate worlds,

go each year on Midsummer's Day in the hope that they will be close together, though in different 'Oxfords'. It could conceivably be said that in this they remain in the garden of their shared childhood; but I think, in view of Pullman's celebration of Dust, of consciousness and the leaving behind of the 'garden' of childhood, they are permitted this connection as an act of memory, of celebration of what they experienced together and of their eventual adult love for one another. In their separate worlds they actually have very 'adult', if mundane, roles to fulfil: Will must return to care for his damaged mother and Lyra has to relearn, this time by normal means, the meanings of the alethiometer. Both have been forced to grow up in several senses – now the time has come for them to take on fully adult and responsible tasks.

As well as the post-Romantic mythological opposition of 'innocence' with 'experience', Pullman is in these books concerned with a whole range of *binary opposites* (to use Nodelman's term once again). Pullman's method of debunking these myths is not merely to argue against them logically, as Rose does (1984): as a novelist he fictionalises them in dramatic contexts. The traditional *Bildungsroman* opposition of 'home' and 'away' is dramatized in Lyra's, and later Will's, leaving home behind to go on their epic journeys. The opposition is seen to be more complex and subtle than in the traditional folk or fairy tale (and indeed most children's quest stories) when one considers the nature of 'home'. Neither child has a conventional home life, although Lyra's is seen as idyllic at the beginning of

Northern Lights. She, apparently, is an orphan, brought up by the Scholars of an Oxford college and allowed to run wild with the other college, university and town children, and enjoys seasonal feuds with the brick-burners' and 'gyptians' ' children. This is the nearest that Pullman comes to describing an idyll, in the terms of Chapter 4, in the whole of the trilogy:

'In many ways Lyra was a barbarian. What she liked best was clambering over the College roofs with Roger, the kitchen boy who was her particular friend, to spit plum-stones on the heads of passing Scholars or to hoot like owls outside a window where a tutorial was going on; or racing through the narrow streets, or stealing apples from the market, or waging war ... Children playing together: how pleasant to see! What could be more innocent and charming?'

(pp.35-36)

However, we soon learn that Lyra's parents are both alive and that she is the child of an adulterous relationship that ended in murder and hatred; that her parents are the bitter enemies, Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter, whose machinations dominate all three books, neither of whom can safely be described as either completely good or completely evil. The absolute opposition of 'good' and 'evil' is thus challenged by Pullman, and he refutes the notion of the existence of wholly good or wholly evil

people. Since Lyra's parents do behave in ways that damage her trust, her childhood 'idyll' is thus founded on lies and rejection.

Lyra's journey begins with her realisation that Mrs. Coulter is connected with the 'Gobblers', who have been abducting children; and with the disappearance of Roger, the kitchen boy and her best friend. She escapes from the woman she does not yet know to be her own mother and sets off on a difficult and dangerous adventure that will test her courage and ingenuity to the utmost. It is clear, then, that Lyra's 'home' is not the stable, settled environment from which we might expect an epic journey to start.

Nor is the journey itself without its compensations. Despite hardship and danger, and despite the many tragedies and treacheries that she encounters, Lyra also experiences new relationships with loving, *trustworthy* and heroic figures who are not 'mythic', but convincingly real – if not always human: Farder Coram, Ma Costa and John Faa, the gyptians; the armoured bear, Iorek Byrnison; Lee Scoresby, the Texan 'aëronaut'; the witches and their clans; and other characters who help her in her quest. She also meets the other child protagonist, Will Parry.

The 'home' which Will leaves (at the beginning of *The Subtle Knife*) to travel on his quest is never portrayed as idyllic, but is rather sad. His father has disappeared during an Arctic expedition, just after Will's birth, and his mother appears to be

suffering severe paranoid delusions. Will realises that his mother's fears are well-founded just in time to get her into hiding; he then inadvertently causes the death of one of her persecutors. Unlike Lyra, Will originates from our universe, and when he happens upon the opening into another, third world, Cittàgaze, he is relieved to escape there from his pursuers. Like Lyra, he leaves home to embark on a dangerous journey. Among his sufferings are the loss of two fingers, which almost kills him, and the finding, then immediate death, of his lost father. Yet, also like Lyra, he grows in stature throughout his adventures and discovers new and deep friendships, which he lacked at home.

Pullman, then, takes the traditional device of the epic journey and modifies it to demonstrate the complexity of the 'journey' of life: both children leave familiar but insecure starting-points to voyage into dangerous, often life-threatening, but compensatingly comforting circumstances which test and prove them.

I consider that there are two other major sets of binary opposites that are modified, indeed inverted, in this trilogy: the opposition of obedience and disobedience (which is an extension of goodness and badness) and of spirit and matter. Both of these sets are explored in the context of the establishments or authorities known variously as the Church, the Magisterium and the Authority. I have already argued that we are to see the representatives of the Church as villains, since the Church authorises the attempted assassination of Lyra. Pullman goes beyond this; he even, audaciously,

kills off God, whom he shows as an exhausted and second-rate angel (*The Amber Spyglass*, p.432). The theme of disobedience is significant in the cosmology of the trilogy, as it is in Milton's original epic. Satan and his followers have indeed rebelled against God, but have, according to Pullman, been right to do so. God (the 'Authority') is seen as an angel who sets himself up as a dictator and demands unthinking obedience from all 'his' subjects. The author himself is quoted as saying (Wulfschl ger, 1995 [2001], p.217) that ' "My line is that the Fall was a very good thing. If it had not happened we would still be mere playthings of the Creator" ('London Evening Standard', 3.11.00.)'. The rebel angels, in contrast, are viewed as champions of freethinking, adult consciousness ('Dust') and the virtues of love and generosity embodied in Lyra and her many friends. The banishment from the garden, then, may be seen in this context as a flight from a paternalistic prison into a human world, full of sorrows and joys.

In the course of the above discussion of *His Dark Materials* it should have become clear that I regard Pullman as questioning and attacking two sets of myths that have for many years been significant in the Western world: Romantic thinking about childhood and innocence which – like the Magisterium itself – sentimentalises and harms children; and Christian doctrine concerning obedience and subservience, and the supremacy of the spirit. While his vision is perhaps unconventional and his achievement is certainly unique, I believe that Pullman, like all my chosen authors, reflects some of the social and cultural preoccupations of his time. It is of course

difficult, from so close in time, to identify the contemporary myths which Pullman may himself be perpetuating: as Warner has said, summarising the position of Barthes, 'myths are not eternal verities, but historical compounds, which successfully conceal their own contingency, changes and transitoriness so that the story they tell looks as if it cannot be told otherwise' (1994, p.xiii).

One way in which Pullman reflects modern thinking about the child – as do most writers for children today – is in the creation of autonomous children who take responsibility for their own actions as, for instance, the children in Lewis and Dahl do not (Wulfschläger, 1995 [2001], p.221). In fact, Wulfschläger argues, Lyra (and Harry Potter) are throwbacks to Carroll's Alice, who was herself an unusually tough heroine for her day, sharing the 'integrity, loyalty, bravery, intellectual curiosity' of the traditional folk- and fairytale character (1995 [2001], p.220). One could of course argue that Lewis and Dahl wrote for young children of perhaps eight to twelve years, while Pullman, like Carroll, is also clearly writing for adolescents and at least partly with the adult reader in mind – and of course folk- and fairytales originated as adult oral tales. They might therefore be expected to provide more complex and multi-faceted characters. That does not, however, take into account the fact (my own anecdotal evidence being supported by Wulfschläger, p.212) that Harry Potter and his friends are riddled with doubt and uncertainty and yet appeal to children from as young as six or seven years old.

6.5. Coda

Speaking of many contemporary writers of 'realistic' fiction for children, Reynolds (1994, p.45) suggests that 'at the end of their stories ... the protagonists have clearly left childhood behind.' While this is clearly true of the cases she cites, I suggest that it is also true of certain fantasy novels – both the small-scale, introverted fantasy, such as *Walking the Maze*, and the contemporary epic (*His Dark Materials* and, of course, the projected seven-book *Harry Potter* sequence). More significantly, perhaps, Lyra and Harry Potter stand, as much in their time as did Alice in hers, for Everyman (Wullschläger, p.50), the ignorant but determined child struggling against unknown and thus unpredictable forces to find an identity; just as many adult Victorians suffered a kind of existential *angst* because of rapid social change, so many adults over the period of the latest *fin de siècle* have felt a loss of certainty and identity. Wullschläger remarks (1995 [2001], p.216) that Pullman and Rowling's 'genius is to have found a symbolism and a language for our unease and uncertainty, which taps into ancient myths and yet is absolutely modern' – which offers the freshness of something new and thrilling together with the deep sense of security of something traditional, even ancient.

The texts that I have discussed in this chapter, then, clearly contrast with the books of Boston and Lively, for instance, in which the individual's life is a smooth continuum rather than a discrete set of phases; and in which the emphasis is on acceptance of one's circumstances rather than the struggle to escape or overcome

them. This parallels my own perception, that some texts present 'the garden' as a temporary stage in a linear progression through life, while others show life itself as in some way 'non-linear'. Unlike Nikolajeva (2000, p.10), however, I do not see the latter as merely a primitive and therefore obsolete concept but as a valid construct that involves other people and their lives.

To summarise, then, in the last two chapters I have highlighted the apparent contrast between two different groups of writers about the 'garden' of childhood, some of which overlap with each other chronologically. The first group, discussed in detail in Chapter 5, believe that, while the chronological or physical stage which we call childhood must indeed be outgrown, the temptation to stay in the nurturing 'garden' of childhood should not be resisted if the adult or adolescent feels the need to draw on that garden's healing powers. The other group – investigated in this chapter – regard childhood as a state of relative dependence which eventually must be left behind, except in memory. In Chapter 6, the garden of childhood is potentially dangerous, either because lingering there too long can provoke over-dependence, or because – in *Walking the Maze* – it can too easily become the site of loneliness and emotional sickness, or because, being helpless, the child is all too vulnerable to abuse.

Both types of books are written out of a consciousness on their authors' parts – their messages are contrasting but equally explicit, so that the contemporaneous – and

contemporary – child reader would be left in no doubt about what childhood and adulthood comprise.

I have only encountered one text which weaves together these two threads, together with the other two significant threads that I have teased out during this study. Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) achieves an almost miraculous reconciliation between the desperate longing to stay in the garden and defy time, and the sorrowful appreciation of the imperative to leave: and adds to that a powerful longing for childhood, for a personal and social 'Golden Age'; and an awareness of the importance of children's freedom to play in security. This book is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Resolving the paradox: *Tom's Midnight Garden*

‘Tom said: “We’re both real; Then and Now. It’s as the angel said: Time No Longer.”’

Tom's Midnight Garden (p.216)

I regard Philippa Pearce’s celebrated novel *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) as exemplifying the themes so far explored in this study; but it is more than merely an exemplar. It seeks to resolve the paradox of the simultaneous need to leave the garden (discussed in Chapter 6 and the post-war texts concerned with the leaving behind of childhood) and the desire to remain within it (expressed in many garden-based texts, outlined in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5). Like some of her contemporaries – notably Penelope Lively and Lucy Boston – Pearce believes the way to find a compromise between these two opposite drives is through themes of memory and rootedness, both of which are expressed through the devices of the ghost and of the ‘timeslip’, in all three writers’ work. These texts display no desire to abandon the past; their protagonists come to understand it as part of the present. The garden motif again asserts continuity – the life cycle is demonstrated through the unfolding of the seasonal cycle in the garden, as well as through the inclusion of young and old human characters. Everything is seen to be repeated and life is essentially circular (Nikolajeva, 2000, p.10).

I see *Tom's Midnight Garden* as an attempt to integrate the personality and, more broadly, the worlds of children and of adults. Tom wants to stay in the 'garden' (like some of the authors I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3) while Pearce will not let him; not because the garden is dangerous, as in Chapter 6, but because time cannot 'stand still'. Pearce is a realist; but a very hopeful one.

In one sense, she subverts my main thesis, that the image of the garden changes over time under the effects of external factors. She uses elements of the different usages of 'the garden', as I have attempted to trace them, to produce a two-fold picture of childhood. On the one hand is the seductive Romantic vision of perpetual childlikeness (which I outlined in Chapter 2) underlined by the more robust but still essentially romantic sight of the innocent child at play (Chapter 4) and the notion of nature's healing power (Chapter 5 – Tom and Hatty are both desperately lonely and homesick until they meet in the garden). On the other hand is the harsh realism of Hatty's growing up, and away from Tom and the garden, and Tom's inability to stop time and stay in the garden for ever. In essence, the significance of this text in this context is that it revisits familiar themes and reworks them into a coherent whole that seeks to resolve some of our most profound and commonly-expressed anxieties and longings about childhood. *Tom's Midnight Garden* is of course culturally embedded like every other text, but I would argue that its author is unusually willing and able to transcend her own context. This is partly achieved by the book's genre; a timeslip story offers an alternative to the 'now'.

Typically, the setting for timeslip stories is a particular inhabited spot of land, often an old house. The garden is also a common starting point for adventures into the past, since it is a place where children tend to be free to play away from adult supervision. A less pragmatic and, I think, more significant reason is that, as I emphasise elsewhere, the garden represents a meeting-place between 'Nature' where change, death and decay happen inevitably and effortlessly, and 'Civilization' where people impose, or try to impose, meanings, reasons and prejudices upon these same processes. Inglis (1981) summarises: '[Tom] learns again what he knows of the great joy of gardens, and all they provide by way of freedom and order, nature and culture' (p.262). *Tom's Midnight Garden* is, then, on one level, a highly sophisticated and fully conscious version of the 'idyll' texts explored in Chapter 4.

Tom's Midnight Garden owes its centrality in this study partly to its use of the garden as the most significant non-human element. As in the works of Lively and Boston, the garden is far more than simply a setting, although, as a setting, it is magnificently evoked. The book's significance also derives from its critically acknowledged success in posing serious psychological and metaphysical questions and in answering them explicitly through the controlled narrative and implicitly through the use of language and image.

Townsend (1968, 1990) and Jones (1985) both call *Tom's Midnight Garden* a 'masterpiece' and Carpenter & Prichard (1984) consider it 'one of the most accomplished and mature works of modern English children's fiction, brilliantly combining narrative excitement with seriousness of purpose.' The book has been praised for its engagement, through mastery of image, language and plot, with themes of universal significance (Townsend, 1971, p.166; Rustin & Rustin, pp.27, 37).

It is certainly not constrained by the preoccupations of earlier eras (as highlighted in this study) and may seem in this respect comparatively universal and timeless. The late Victorian and Edwardian longing for the past *per se*, and the glorification of the 'Romantic child' are not dominant themes, although there are clear echoes of these longings throughout the novel. Similarly, Tom and Hatty's experiences in the garden are not the purely hedonistic idylls of earlier twentieth century fiction, although, again, the book does, very explicitly, celebrate carefree play. While the book, then, may seem free from earlier generations' preoccupations and myth-making, it is however not immune from those of its own age, as Nodelman (1996a, p.72) reminds us: 'as ideology, our own assumptions about children tend to strike us as being so obvious as to be not worth thinking about'. *Tom's Midnight Garden* is in fact specific to a particular place, and a particular social setting; and this must be borne in mind if one is tempted to make generalised claims for the book. It is obviously, like most of the texts examined in this study, an English and a middle-class exploration of its chosen themes. Having chosen to explore texts written in English and featuring

gardens, I am not surprised that they almost invariably involve families wealthy enough to have the 'traditional' garden with its green lawns and flower beds, nor, given the apparently notorious English obsession with gardening (and the predominance of English writers in the English-speaking world of children's literature), that these books should so frequently be written by and about the English. While I remain conscious of this culturally specific context, I intend to show how its meanings can be extrapolated into other, if not all, times and cultures.

7.1. The garden as a sanctuary and a playground in *Tom's Midnight Garden*

At perhaps the most obvious level the book is a celebration of outdoor play. When, after a few solitary visits to the garden, Tom encounters Hatty and realizes that she can see and hear him, he at first accepts her a little grudgingly, since she is a girl, as the only playmate he is likely to meet in this new world; ' " I don't mind playing," said Tom, doggedly, "but I'm not used to playing silly girls' games" ' (p.76). Their friendship quickly deepens and various critics have commented on the obvious parallel between Tom and Hatty in the early part of the book and Adam and Eve before the Fall (Rustin & Rustin, 1987, Rees, 1971, Jones, 1985). The two prepubescent children begin a period of idyllic play in the garden. This is more akin to the image of the child in Chapter 4 than in my second chapter, since they are 'real' children who quarrel and flout authority, despite their secondary symbolic role. The descriptions of their happiness in the garden and of their growing intimacy are at

times moving and even from the beginning there are hints that their time together will be limited:

‘Not only on that first day of meeting, but on all the days following, her secrets and stories poured from her with haste and eagerness *as though she were afraid that Tom’s company would not be hers for long*. When they were tired with playing in the garden, Hatty would lead the way to the summer-house. They went up the steps and Hatty opened the door for them. From the back of the summer-house she brought forward two twisted iron garden chairs, and put them in the doorway, for herself and Tom. There they used to sit, looking over the oblong pond, watching the fish rise, and Hatty talked.’

(p.81, my italics)

Jones (1985) has drawn attention to the psychological significance of the garden to Tom, suggesting that it is ‘on one level, the product of psychological necessity’. Re-reading the novel, I am struck by the emphasis on Tom’s disappointment when his brother Peter’s illness robs him of the holidays to which he was looking forward. The opening chapter, indeed, is entitled ‘Exile’, and his anger and hopelessness are emphasised, ‘Tom looked his good-bye at the garden, and raged that he had to leave it - leave it and Peter (p.7) ... He had never visited [his aunt and uncle] before, but he knew that they lived in a flat, with no garden’ (p.9). His loneliness and boredom are powerfully evoked. He is, in a sense, benevolently imprisoned by his aunt and uncle,

who are well intentioned but ignorant of children's needs. Jones (1985) points out that Tom's aunt treats him like a far younger child, talking whimsically about fairies and attempting to deal with his boredom by feeding him more and more rich food, and this unhealthy treatment feeds his desperation: 'It seemed to him that this *longing* to be free swelled up in him and in his room, until it should surely be large enough to burst the walls and set him free indeed' (p.18, my italics). This urgent need is matched by Hatty's desperation. She suffers much more than he before their meeting, since she is unwanted, a 'charity-child', teased and bullied by her cousins, like the young Jane Eyre. At the end of the book this palpable sense of longing is again evoked to show how these two lonely children have managed to circumvent time in order to fulfil their needs, almost in a supernatural version of *The Secret Garden*:

'... never before this summer had [Mrs. Bartholomew] dreamed of the garden so often, and never before this summer had she been able to remember so vividly what it had *felt* [original italics] like to be the little Hatty - to be *longing* for someone to play with and for somewhere to play.

"But those were the things I wanted here, this summer," said Tom, suddenly recognizing himself exactly in Mrs. Bartholomew's description. He had *longed* for someone to play with and for somewhere to play; and that great *longing*, beating about unhappily in the big house, must have made its entry

into Mrs. Bartholomew's dreaming mind ... [she] had gone back in Time to when she was a girl, wanting to play in the garden; and Tom had been able to go back with her, to that same garden'.

(pp.214-215, my italics)

When Tom discovers the garden it 'provides the psychological release and recreation he requires' (Jones, 1985, p.214) as well as the physical activity he lacks in the Kitsons' flat; and, even more crucially, the company of another child.

As already suggested, Hatty's unhappiness has been greater than that of Tom. The apparition of the very young Hatty, grieving for her parents long after (in Tom's chronology) she has been established as a lively and sometimes bumptious child, is a masterstroke, forcing the reader's awareness of the garden's beneficial effect – and of course that of Tom's company – and giving Tom a very powerful experience of compassion:

'Tom had never seen a grief like this. He was going to tiptoe away, but there was something in the child's loneliness and littleness that made him change his mind ... This was Hatty, exactly the Hatty he knew already, and yet a different Hatty, because she was ... a *younger* Hatty: a very young, forlorn little Hatty whose father and mother had just died and whose home was, therefore gone ... He never saw the little Hatty again ... When, sometimes,

Hatty remembered to stand upon her dignity and act again the old romance of her being a royal exile and prisoner, he did not contradict her.'

(pp.96-97)

The midnight garden is indeed a place of growth and healing. Tom's loneliness and Hatty's grief are assuaged by their play together, and, even more strikingly, Tom grows in wisdom and kindness, as shown above, and also in the extract below, where he is beginning to apprehend other kinds of truth than the literal:

' " Do you hear me?" Tom shouted. "You're a ghost, and I've proved it! You're dead and gone and a ghost!"

There was a quietness, then, in which could be heard a cuckoo's stuttering cry from the wood beyond the garden; and then the sound of Hatty's beginning softly to weep. "I'm not dead - oh, please, Tom, I'm not dead!" Now that the shouting had stopped, Tom was not sure of the truth, after all, but only sure that Hatty was crying as he had never seen her cry since she had been a very little girl, wearing mourning-black and weeping her way along the sundial path - weeping for death so early.'

(pp. 106-107)

This is sublime writing, in my opinion; profoundly compassionate while not at all sentimental, and marvellously crafted, each word and phrase carrying resonances from other parts of the text. It also exemplifies the sense in which Tom and Hatty are clearly not wish-fulfilment child characters created out of their author's yearning for childhood. They are normal children who quarrel and then think better of it; and this is what makes the story convincing – and, according to Inglis (p.262), what makes the story happen:

‘[Tom’s] ordinary, irresistible human sympathy forces him into human contact across and through the peculiar dislocation of time and space which joins him to and separates him from the garden.’

7.2. The garden as an escape from the modern world

The garden is not only an escape from boredom for Tom and from loneliness and bullying for Hatty, it is, for Tom, the author and, by extension, the reader, a ‘temporal retreat from the modern world’ (Jones, 1985, p.213). Jones (p. 214) makes the link that I have already remarked upon, between the ‘innocence’ of the child and the ‘innocence’ of a lost age:

‘The garden represents, not only a time in the social history of England, but more especially, a time in every individual’s life ... the walled garden

symbolizes the security of early childhood ... In fact, it is even richer than this. Tom's journeys to the garden do represent an entry into the ideal of childhood innocence and happiness, but Pearce's use of the conventions of pastoralism add to the symbolic and thematic richness of the setting.'

(p.214)

Jones is careful (p.214) to emphasise the fact that Pearce certainly does not present the late Victorian era as perfect; but suggests that she does seem to regard it as preferable to the world of 1958. This is somewhat ironic, if one refers back to Chapter 2, in which I discussed writers from that same late Victorian period, themselves grieving for the past, both personal and social, when things were somehow 'better'. Any consideration of the theme of nostalgia shows that this emotion is apparently universal and eternal.

Reynolds (1994, p.40), too, remarks on Pearce's 'anxiety about the effects of change upon the landscape' which she equates with Lucy Boston's; one cannot help noting that both writers fear or regret the destruction of large, single-family homes in favour of more, smaller (and 'lower-class'), dwellings, much as Nesbit did in *Harding's Luck*. Pearce's opinion of Tom's 'daylight' garden can be inferred as a negative one:

'At the back of the house was a narrow, paved space enclosed by a wooden fence, with a gateway on to the sideroads at one end. There were five dustbins, and near the dustbins was parked an old car from beneath which

stuck a pair of legs in trousers. A piece of newspaper bowled about, blown in from outside and imprisoned here; and the place smelt of sun on stone and metal and the creosote of the fencing’.

(pp.34-35)

Of course, it could also be remarked that the Victorian garden offers pleasure to the four privileged cousins of the story (and Tom) and that the contemporary yard gives pleasure to no one; but Pearce mentions elsewhere that one of the original yew trees is still visible, now in one of the ‘strips of garden that belonged to the pink brick, semi-detached houses beyond’ (p.37). This slightly snobbish tone allies her attitude with Nesbit’s (see Hall, 1998a), and dates the book, since I suspect this attitude would be far less acceptable today.

7.3. The ‘Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up’

Carpenter (1985, p.219) remarks that the novel ‘re-examines and inverts two of the old Arcadian images, the Secret Garden and The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up.’ Like Peter Pan before him, Tom is tempted by the garden’s beauty and the pleasures it offers. Unlike Adam and Eve, he is tempted by the notion of eternal childhood, rather than by knowledge. I have previously mentioned Jess (*The Bridge to Terabithia*) and Annice (*Walking the Maze*), both of whom are tempted by their very different garden-kingdoms, and both of whom ultimately resist the temptation and

acknowledge the need to grow up and move on. Like theirs, Tom's circumstances make the temptation especially powerful.

Jones (1985, pp.214-215) explores the use of pastoral conventions and of Eden references in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, much as I considered these usages in other, earlier texts in Chapters 2 and 3. He notes such elements as the concept of the enclosed garden: 'Often compared to the Garden of Eden, it is a place set apart from the world ... the *locus amoenus* or pleasant place that restores' (p.214) – as I myself have earlier characterised it. However, as Jones goes on, 'it takes on the other quality of the traditional enclosed garden, becoming a garden of earthly delights that is so appealing that it offers a nearly deadly temptation to Tom' (p.214) and, as Jones continues, the Eden connotation adds a certain ironic tension to the narrative, since Hatty is perpetually moving, in Blakean terms, 'from childhood innocence to mature experience' (p.215). Philip (1982) points to the inevitable end of this idyll by noting that, upon their first meeting, Hatty is eating an apple (p.76).

More explicitly, as Jones notes (1985, p.215), Tom dreams that his way to the garden is barred one night by an angel with 'a flaming sword' (*Tom's Midnight Garden*, p.161), in an echo of Genesis (3:24). The angel is also, according to Rustin & Rustin (1987), reminiscent of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* (1789 & 1794), and hence may be held to represent the inevitability of growing up. However,

Tom himself is unaware of the temporary nature of his access to the garden until it is too late:

‘Tom does not realize the import of his dream during his waking hours and, thus, succumbs to its temptations [,] a garden of earthly childhood delights. Realizing that his visits to the night-time garden cost him nothing of ordinary time, Tom declares, “I could stay in the garden forever” [p.174].’

(Jones, 1985, p.215)

When his nightmare does come true, Tom is shattered to find the garden – and, he thinks, Hatty – gone forever:

‘He turned and ran then, like a rat with the dogs after it, back into the house ... he halted in the middle of the hall by the grandfather clock, sobbing. The grandfather clock ticked coldly on ... he began weeping softly now, but as though he would never stop.’

(p.202)

Pearce turns to the other end of the Bible, to the Book of Revelation, for the picture of the angel on Mrs. Bartholomew’s grandfather clock and its cryptic legend, ‘Time no Longer’, over which Tom and Hatty themselves puzzle (pp.157-160) and which ultimately give Tom the idea of staying in the garden with Hatty for ever:

‘ “Time no longer ...” murmured Tom, and thought of all the clocks in the world stopping ticking, and their striking stopped too, drowned and stopped for ever by the sound of a great Trumpet. “Time no longer ...” repeated Tom; and the three words began to seem full of enormous possibilities’.

(p.160)

In Ely Cathedral they encounter a memorial tablet to a gentleman who has ‘exchanged Time for Eternity’ (p.184); the ‘quaint’ phrase is oddly comforting to Tom, and encourages his notion that he can escape the fate of every other child. Hatty innocently colludes with Tom in his plan to remain in the garden, when she reassures him (p.177) that ‘ “The garden will always be there.” ’ Tom does not hurry to enlist Hatty’s help with his plan, since ‘He would have plenty of time’ later (p.185). He never again, of course, meets Hatty as a young girl. When, eventually, they are reunited – a few days later for Tom, in old age for Hatty – she admits, in the book’s defining phrase, that she was wrong, and that ‘nothing stands still, except in our memory’ (p.212).

The balance to Tom’s drive to remain in the garden is Hatty’s equally powerfully drive to leave. Although for much of the book she shares his utter joy at their shared experiences in the garden, she gradually begins – even literally – to fade out of his consciousness. The reason, of course, is that they inhabit different chronologies.

While Tom visits the garden nightly for perhaps several weeks, Hatty is growing from a playful child into a young adult woman, with only two incidents that are obviously out of sequence (the appearance of Hatty as a very young recently orphaned child, as already mentioned, and the storm which fells the fir tree on the night before her wedding). By the time they last meet in the distant past – significantly, not in the garden – Hatty shows more interest in her future husband than in Tom, and does not notice his leaving them. She no longer shares his desire to remain in the garden. Jones puts it thus: ‘Whereas earlier Tom had climbed the garden wall to describe “what seemed to be the whole world [p.121]” of experience beyond childhood, Hatty can now see for herself’ (p.216).

7.4. The need to leave the garden

In fact, as various critics have observed, Pearce has left clues to suggest that Tom must eventually leave the garden – that is, that he cannot remain a child. These clues appear as symbols. Carpenter (1985), having established that ‘Tom and Hatty’s garden is childhood itself’ (p.219), continues: ‘he has decided not to grow up ... the book has already given a covert warning against clinging onto childhood ... Tom observes that his room has bars across the bottom of the window’ (p.219). Although Tom is outraged – ‘ “This is a nursery! I’m not a baby!” (p.12)’ – he quite clearly plans to retain the more desirable aspects of childhood. One cannot hold on to childhood’s freedom without accepting the need for adult protection and supervision

(as discussed in Chapter 4); as Carpenter observes, 'His escape to the garden is merely the exchange of one sort of permanent childhood for another' (1985, p.219).

Nikolajeva shows in her study (2000) how writers who are concerned about the psychology of child development use both narrative method and image to make this process concrete:

'The garden symbolises lost childhood, and like the Neverland, it offers the child a temporal retreat. Thus ... we note a transformation of a spatial concept – garden – into a temporal state – childhood'

(p.104)

– and of course such transformations are what this study attempts to identify. Nikolajeva continues: 'The garden offers a nearly *deadly* temptation for Tom ... to stay there forever, a temptation ... that almost all time travellers in children's fantasy are exposed to and more or less successfully reject' – unlike Peter Pan, one might add. In Nikolajeva's terms, Tom must progress from the 'mythic', circular experience of time to the 'linear' perception of the mature adult. Although I cannot accept her neat distinction of experienced time into the childlike and the mature, since I suspect that both are modes of perception experienced by everyone, depending largely on context and circumstance, I would acknowledge that there are very clear signals in the text that Tom must leave the garden (grow up). Nikolajeva remarks that

Tom's Midnight Garden has only one winter scene, which is also the last scene between Tom and the young Hatty, and that this suggests the movement from childhood towards growth, and, ultimately, ageing and death. She contrasts this, the memorable episode in which Tom and Hatty 'strike out' towards Ely, with the enclosed garden scenes of the earlier chapters: As in all such lyrical accounts, this Eden contains a serpent; Time, which brings change, death and decay. Tom has to accept that it is, in fact, impossible in the normal world to 'put the clock back' and, furthermore, to accept that the organism is truly *itself* throughout the entire cycle of life:

' ... he studied closely her appearance and her movements. Her bright black eyes were certainly like Hatty's; and now he began to notice, again and again, a gesture, a tone of the voice, a way of laughing that reminded him of the little girl in the garden.

Quite early in Mrs. Bartholomew's story, Tom suddenly leaned forward and whispered: "You were Hatty – you *are* Hatty! You're really Hatty!" '

(p.209)

It is made very explicit by Pearce that Tom *must* leave and lose the garden, albeit against his will, and this is where she directly contradicts such writers as Barrie, who colludes almost enviously in Peter Pan's refusal to grow up.

7.5. The perception of time in *Tom's Midnight Garden*

I believe that in *Tom's Midnight Garden* Pearce comes close to reconciling these two drives – to remain a child and to grow up – and that this is achieved through the novel's sophisticated treatment of time. What I believe makes this book a masterpiece is the apparent naturalness with which this extraordinarily complex treatise on the human experience of time arises out of its central image and setting: the beautiful enclosed garden.

One obvious advantage of garden settings in fiction, remarked upon by Waters (1988), is that outdoor scenes demonstrate seasonal changes and those worked by the accumulating years much more explicitly than indoor ones:

'[G]ardens register change, loss and the passing of time – the processes which animate the associations of place – more swiftly, sensitively and conspicuously than, for example, the buildings to which they are attached.'

(p.300)

Tom's Midnight Garden is not the only novel which uses this conceit to poignant effect. In one of her adult novels, Penelope Lively remarks:

‘How much grows ... in a summer. So many pounds of grass and leaf and flower and seed, all gushing out, come what may ... A garden is an unresponsive thing, its anarchic temperament re-asserting itself as soon as the back is turned ... A garden is a fantasy – an arrangement of plants as we think they should be, not as they really are. And time of course puts everything back in place.’

***The Road to Lichfield*, (1977), p.193**

Similarly, and this time in an early novel for children, Lively describes how, with time, what has once been a garden becomes indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape:

‘ “There’s been a garden once,” [Mair] said. “You can see where there’s been hedges and paving stones.” But brambles and saplings had engulfed it now, and the sheep roamed over what had perhaps been a lawn.’

***Astercote* (1976), p.125**

In the ancient village of Astercote nature has had ‘plenty of time’ to reclaim the cultivated land.

Again, in Alison Uttley's haunting novel *A Traveller in Time* (1939), the passage of centuries is brought home graphically to the reader, and to Penelope Taberner, the protagonist, when she observes the altered appearance of a familiar tree:

'We ... took a path skirting a lawn smooth as green silk with a cedar tree in the centre. On the border grew an oak-tree which I recognised as the giant tree under which I had rested with Uncle Barnabas. The forking boughs and the horizontal branch were the same, but the girth of the tree was smaller.'

(p.70)

The death of a tree (as in *Tom's Midnight Garden*) is both an illustration of the realities of nature, and a warning that nothing else stays the same. Having deliberately made this point, Pearce turns it on its head, and the effect is as thrilling for the reader as for Tom: after the mesmerising experience of seeing the great fir tree 'like one flame, and falling' he peeps out to check that he did not imagine it:

'[Tom] opened the door again, and looked out. The summer storm was still raging. The flashes of lightning were distant now: they lit up the ugly gap in the trees round the lawn, where the fir-tree had stood.'

(p.57)

Far more disturbing than the felling of the tree, and what contributes to the book's peculiar haunting quality, is that, the next night, Tom is forcibly reminded that time is being, to use Inglis' term, severely 'dislocated':

'On the next night came the greatest shock of all. He opened the garden door as usual, and surveyed the garden. At first, he did not understand what was odd in its appearance; then he realized that its usual appearance was in itself an oddity. In the trees round the lawn there was no gap: the ivy-grown fir-tree still towered above them.'

(p.57)

This is against nature: and Tom is shocked into confiding in his highly rational and sceptical Uncle Alan:

' "You said a tree could not be lying fallen at one time, and then be standing up again as it was before it fell, unless you put the clock back. What clock?"

"Oh, no particular clock ... It's just a saying, Tom - 'to put the clock back.' It means, to have the Past again, and no one can have that. Time isn't like that".'

(p.59)

Of course, the reader, child or adult, knows that Uncle Alan speaks 'the truth': yet such is Pearce's skill that we are able to collude with her and the two children: we know, as the rational uncle does not, that there *is* another kind of time.

As well as exploring metaphysical possibilities, the distortion of 'reality' has been used to heighten the poignancy of that reality. Earlier in the book the garden has shown him all its seasonal variations within a few days, as if to emphasise the inexorability of change:

'He saw the garden at many different times of its day, and at different seasons – its favourite season was summer, with perfect weather. In earliest summer hyacinths were still out in the crescent beds on the lawn, and wallflowers in the round ones. Then the hyacinths bowed and died; and the wallflowers were uprooted, and stocks and asters bloomed in their stead. There was a clipped box bush by the greenhouse, with a cavity like a great mouth cut into the side of it: this was stacked full of pots of geraniums in flower. Along the sundial path, heavy red poppies came out, and roses; and, in summer dusk, the evening primroses glimmered like little moons. In the latest summer the pears on the wall were muffled in muslin bags for safe ripening.'

(p. 49)

This is, of course exciting and intensely pleasurable for Tom, and it leads him to believe he himself can circumvent time. Of course he can – and at the same time, he cannot. Already, there is a hint of corruption. The garden's 'favourite' season is summer, the peak of the year, which gradually but relentlessly progresses towards autumn and winter.

Tom's Midnight Garden, then, is an attempt to present the apparent contradiction: that '“nothing stands still”' (p.212) and yet that there are levels of experience that complement our sensory lives. Several critics have attempted to summarise and justify the metaphysics of a novel of which even the author has said, 'I think I must have felt a certain self-doubt in this ...' (1990, quoted by Hollindale, 1997).

In his 1982 article '*Tom's Midnight Garden* and the Vision of Eden', Neil Philip equates the complex philosophical framework of the novel with Freudian theory, with Biblical symbolism and with the theory of J.W. Dunne about the nature of time. Philip clearly regards the novelist's task as a variant of the psychoanalyst's, theologian's or philosopher's, as does Inglis (1981). The latter talks of the 'theorist' and adds 'artist, moralist and scientist' to the list, suggesting that the task of any such theorist is 'to create images (figures of speech of all and any kinds – metaphor or metonymy) capable of grasping the order and motion of things' (p.81). Philip explores the various influences on Pearce:

‘That dreams disrupt sequential time is not a new insight, but in a century in which dreams, *pace* Freud, have assumed a new importance, in which they are seen not as disordered imaginings or intermittent portents but as the frame of a deeper truth, dreams have become a precise tool with which to explore temporal as well as psychological dimensions. J.W. Dunne’s seminal *An Experiment with Time* provided the philosophical framework, Genesis the symbolic one; the two are linked, perhaps by a lurking awareness of the ways in which the aboriginal concept of “the dreamtime” touches our own sense of the loss and recoverability of a perfection outside the linear time.’

(p.22)

This may sound like a grand claim for a children’s book; but Pearce’s work justifies it, as do the writings of her contemporaries Lively and Boston, as well as some of those of the present generation of children’s writers (notably Pullman and Almond, who both produce fiction that is grounded in highly sophisticated and complex philosophy as well as drawing on literary tradition). According to Philip then, Pearce presents the reader with two distinct models of what time is: ‘sequential’ and ‘non-sequential’.

In a closely related argument, Maria Nikolajeva suggests that ‘mythic’ time in children’s literature – which she recognises in such Arcadian texts as *Winnie the Pooh* – is an aspect of a childlike and primitive way of interpreting the world, and

that one purpose of literature is to 'move the reader on' towards regarding life in terms of 'linear' time; that is, the development from an Arcadian vision to a notion of the quest.

I disagree with her in the value judgments she seems to place on these two differing types of vision. On the other hand, I fully agree with her perception that some texts present 'the garden' of childhood as a temporary stage in a linear progression through life (as in the texts discussed in Chapter 6), while others show life itself as in some way 'non-linear', *Tom's Midnight Garden* being, arguably, an especially successful example of the latter. While I may have judged some 'classic' children's authors harshly in Chapter 2 for writing of their longing for childhood in ways that manipulate and have even damaged the image of the child, I believe that the notion of the 'Paradise' garden has been used by twentieth century writers to express an alternative to the view that time is linear and childhood must be left behind. For instance, when Milne says 'a little boy and his Bear will always be playing' (*The House at Pooh Corner*, p.176) he is acknowledging that fictional characters, because imaginary, are immortal, and that fiction therefore subverts time itself. Many texts (like *Tom's Midnight Garden*) go beyond even this concept and explicitly experiment with time.

Valerie Krips (1999) points out that Pearce, in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, develops an approach to the past which is new in children's fiction:

'In it a new way of relating to the past was rehearsed, one which would, within a decade, become the new orthodoxy. *Tom's Midnight Garden* is, above all, concerned with memory ... The time of dreams, which is the time of the unconscious, is atemporal ... This is fulfilled time, a form of concordance of past, present and future known as *katros*, which, as Frank Kermode argues, is capable of "treating the past (and the future) as a special case of the present" ... *Tom's Midnight Garden* destroys history's chronologies, producing an account of the past in which moments of time are interchangeable, of importance only insofar as they are brought into focus through an individual.'

(pp.178-179)

I think Krips' remark about memory is the most pertinent of many perceptive comments. It is reminiscent of Mary Warnock's notions (1987) about the significance and power of memory:

'The past self in some sense exists for me even if I cannot at the moment remember exactly what that self did or felt. The past self can be revived. There is always the possibility of *feeling* the identity between myself now and myself then.'

(p.69)

Pearce well understands the very widespread longings for childhood (our own, and childhood as a post-Romantic myth) and for the lost 'Golden Age' of our shared heritage; and while sympathising and expressing this, is also aware, as a post-war, indeed post-Freudian writer, of the importance of accepting our childhood experiences, healing our wounds and moving into autonomous adulthood. Surely Townsend (1971, p.167) is right to say: 'If I understand it correctly, the book is concerned with the four-dimensional wholeness of life. In the child the old person is implicit; in the old person the child remains.'

One can think of several examples of texts which, according to Krips, are indebted to *Tom's Midnight Garden*: Penelope Lively's *A Stitch in Time* (1976) and *The Driftway* (1972), Penelope Farmer's *Charlotte Sometimes* (1969) and K.M. Peyton's *A Pattern of Roses* (1972) are among them. Alison Uttley's *A Traveller in Time* (1939), however, predates Pearce's book by nineteen years and shares with it a powerful, poignant sense of the numinous, while lacking Pearce's generally crisper writing. Uttley's text is far more dream-like, although, to me, equally satisfying to read. Its heroine, Penelope, moves back through time to the sixteenth century, and begins to appreciate that people can somehow live on, not only through memory, but through an almost concrete closeness to a piece of earth. Sitting with Francis Babington in the sixteenth-century Thackers garden (pp.118-119), Penelope reflects, in almost Biblical phrasing:

'Uncle Barnabas who seemed part of the soil itself and Aunt Tissie who was living in both centuries were ever present. They were made of Thackers earth, they were the place quickened to life and I remembered them ...

' "That can't be," scoffed the boy ... "The future hasn't happened. This is Now" ... "I belong to the future," I said again, "and the future is all round us, but you can't see it. I belong to the past too, because I am sharing it with you. Both are now." '

With reference to other texts, Tucker (1992) sees fantasy as 'a metaphor for the passage of human life itself' as well as a vehicle for describing life and expressing the processes of growth and change. Jill Paton Walsh (1975) makes the same point:

'[It] cannot for long escape the working writer ... that a narrative is in itself an image. It is a linear image, extended in time. It is an image of a sequence of changes ... When superlatively executed it carries a full charge of meaning, becomes incandescent in the mind.'

What particularly interests me about Paton Walsh's remark is her assumption that time is linear. Without wishing to become involved in discussion along the lines of J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, in which Dunne tries to prove that time is not linear, and which Pearce acknowledged as an influence on *Tom's Midnight*

Garden, I suggest that the garden would be an excellent metaphor for time, were it *not* linear, as is the case in timeslip fiction. In horticulture, as in life – real life, that is, not fictional narrative – one element or organism thrives, or flowers, or bears fruit, as another fades, or dies, or decays. Sometimes there is a causal relationship but more often these things are governed by some seemingly vast and inexplicable power. In the garden, of course this power is the climate and weather. In the fiction of time travel, there is usually an urgent reason for time to behave surprisingly; a certain place bears traces of earlier occupants or even ghosts, someone, from either end of time, needs help, or some object causes time to be ‘out of joint’.

Hollindale (1997, pp.90-91) takes Pearce to task over her ‘dubious’ and ‘casual’ manipulation of time in the book; he seems to be allying himself with the super-rational Uncle Alan when he rejects this philosophical inconsistency as ‘objectionable’, although he does go on to say that Pearce has thrown in the final ‘dream’ explanation as a sop to the adult reader, and ought to have had the courage of her original conviction (that Tom can indeed travel in time). I think this is perhaps over-precise, given my reading of the text as a complex metaphor, an attempt to flesh out a psychological state and also an expression of an ‘archetypal’ image (to use Jung’s term). Pearce is here trying to express the numinous through narrative and image, and cannot always force this into a completely consistent external frame. Tom himself tries to rationalise what is happening, until ‘He was dissatisfied with his own explanation, and suddenly sick of needing to explain at all’ (p.29). One cannot,

as Hollindale would, dismiss the device of old Mrs. Bartholomew 'dreaming of the scenes of her childhood' (p.39), since it is important for the whole text that 'Hatty' like Tom, should be lonely and longing, in old age as well as in childhood. Inglis, too (1981), objects to the 'problem' of Pearce's lack of precision, although he appears to contradict what he has already said about the power of the imagination:

'In so far as we could plan the work of the imagination, we should not think of it as the imagination; we should have no further use for the concept. It is a power which we do not expect to understand, and, we may even say, we do not want to understand it.'

(p.7)

Inglis continues, waxing even more lyrical:

'Tom's Midnight Garden and Puck of Pook's Hill are wonderful books whoever you are, and that judgement stands whether or not your children can make head or tail of them. The joy they bring revives in us the child-like qualities of freshness and innocence and delight ... a beautiful novel for children touches that quality of mind and spirit in us which issues as a cadence of attention - the attention (and responsiveness) we call innocence.'

(pp. 7-8)

While I would quarrel with Inglis' turn of phrase and his rhetoric, I share his appreciation of the book.

Essentially, I think what each of these critics is struggling to do is to meld together the disparate elements and preoccupations of the text – the loss of 'innocence', the yearning for childhood and yet the drive towards moving beyond the 'garden walls', and, above all, in my eyes, Pearce's hauntingly beautiful prose and imagery, which Townsend equates with 'the still sad music of humanity' – into one coherent idea.

In *Tom's Midnight Garden* every loss is followed by compensation. Time, seen as an enemy for most of the narrative, is ultimately shown to be a friend:

‘ “Barty and I were very happy in the Fens [says old Mrs. Bartholomew]. We had two children – boys. They were both killed in the Great War – the First World War they call it now.” Mrs. Bartholomew did not cry, because she had done all her crying for that so long ago.’

(p.214)

Although it may be inferred that Pearce finds the world of the late Victorians more congenial than that of 1958, when the book was written, it is important to reiterate that, if Townsend is right about *Tom's Midnight Garden* being concerned with the continuity of the individual life, then the past is not 'better' than the present or future.

but cannot lightly be jettisoned, either. Rustin & Rustin (1987, p.35) emphasise this: 'The principal commitment of the author is not to the past as a preferable world, but to the need to remain connected to it in memory and relationship.'

The final paragraph of the novel is often quoted as a moving example of Pearce's demonstration of 'what is alive in feeling' (Rustin & Rustin, p.30). Carpenter (1985, p.220) remarks that the 'conclusion' of the book – in both senses of the word – 'describes Tom's acceptance of what Peter Pan can never accept: that Time must be allowed to pass, and growth, even old age, must be accepted as necessary and even desirable facets of human experience'. This brings to mind the 'conclusion' of another novel, *The House in Norham Gardens*, in which Clare muses, ' "I can't make it stop at now ... and you shouldn't want to, not really" ' (p.154).

In other words, the book has a 'happy ending' in spite of itself; and I make no apology for concluding this section with its final paragraph:

'Afterwards, Aunt Gwen tried to describe to her husband that second parting between them. "He ran up to her, and they hugged each other as if they had known each other for years and years, instead of only having met for the first time this morning. There was something else, too, Alan, although I know you'll say it sounds even more absurd ... Of course, Mrs. Bartholomew's such a shrunken little old woman, she's hardly bigger than Tom, anyway: but, you

know, he put his arms right round her and he hugged her good-bye as if she were a little girl.” ’

(p.218)

7.6. Coda

With reference to my central ideas about childhood and myths of childhood, *Tom's Midnight Garden* can be seen as complementing the notions of some authors and their contemporaneous preoccupations, and contrasting with others.

This book, like all the others I have considered, has much to say to the reader about childhood. In its poignant presentation of the inevitable passing of time it is reminiscent of some works explored in Chapter 2, notably *Peter Pan*, but, unlike those, it has a tone of wistfulness rather than despair. Pearce stresses that memory is the means by which we retain the qualities of the early phase of life (which we call childhood), adding our later experiences to produce a complex pattern which is neither good nor bad, but unique to the individual. This, she indicates, is what can save us from despair; for, like the writers I considered in Chapter 4, she knows that childhood always has idyllic moments which later take on the character of episodes from a ‘golden age’.

Tom's Midnight Garden also reminds the young reader that old people were once children and, conversely, that they themselves will one day become old. This is a concept that, while known intellectually, may be apprehended fully when dramatised in such a context. While this notion is also explored in some of the texts mentioned in Chapter 5 (such as many of Lively's novels) the last paragraph of *Tom's Midnight Garden* has a powerful emotional impact that, in my opinion, exceeds all others.

This book also has a great deal to say about the 'binary opposites' of innocence and experience, youth and age, past and present, enclosed and exposed and stasis and change. Essentially, all these sets of 'opposites' might, according to Pearce, be plotted as points on a series of continua, along which life moves, rather than the mutually exclusive contraries presented in Chapters 2 and 3, and even in Chapter 4 (where the child is still seen as a separate species in need of protection). One moves from extreme 'innocence' (ignorance) at birth towards the theoretical but unattainable point of total 'experience' (knowledge and wisdom). Neither of these is intrinsically good or bad.

Similarly, 'the past' is one of an infinite series of moments on another continuum, while 'the present' is merely another. Again, neither is necessarily 'better'. The passage of time may be seen as different images. Carroll and Barrie, to their regret, may have seen it as a line (such as a line on a graph); some critics and authors see it differently according to the age of the protagonist (Nikolajeva is perhaps close to

writers like Stevenson in seeing it as circular in childhood, and more like a loop than a line, as witness Stevenson's *Bildungsroman* novels for older children); while Lively and Pearce may be said to regard time as akin to a garden, in which things happen in their season.

In the fading relationship of Tom and Hatty – before they lose each other for the first time – we can see and understand Tom's desire to remain enclosed in the garden, yet we can equally sympathise with Hatty's desire for adulthood and marriage. She is certainly no Susan, condemned for being ‘ “interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up” ’ (Lewis, *The Last Battle*, p.124).

As already suggested, *Tom's Midnight Garden* dramatises these conflicts – which are not conflicts – in a gentle, almost mystical way, through acceptance. In this it contrasts with Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, which often dramatises these issues angrily and violently. Of course, the subject matter is different – Lyra faces a hostile world while Tom only faces boredom; but the central concerns are similar: innocence and experience, childhood and adulthood.

The historical context of *Tom's Midnight Garden* is perhaps important, as it was written only thirteen years after the end of the Second World War, when many writers were still preoccupied with its aftermath, and with the nuclear threat and the

new world order. Much of the writing of this era is notably insecure (Reynolds, p.35) and this book resembles those discussed in Chapter 3 by expressing a certain preference for the past, although this is arguably more justifiable than Nesbit's and Grahame's (ironically, it is their deteriorated 'present' for which Tom longs). Hall (1998b, p.229) comments that Pearce knows what she is doing in her preference for more unequal times:

'All that is left of the garden is an ugly paved backyard as a space for dustbins. This physical loss has its social parallel and is actually emblematic of the differences between then and now. The modern inhabitants of the house hardly know each other and live in fear or resentment of the old lady owner on the top floor. Though apparently more democratic than the past, the present is a more fragmented, atomized world. There is a greater sense of community during the Victorian heyday of the house, which despite its inequalities involved people in a web of relationships.'

In other words, Pearce sees both advantages and disadvantages in both past and present – after all, she tells her readers, we do not live in a perfect world.

The image of the garden in *Tom's Midnight Garden*, then, is complex. According to my reading, Pearce makes use of all the 'garden' symbolism already mentioned, as well as presenting the garden simply as a setting. The garden is clearly an Eden, and

one which must inevitably be left, but which may be retained in imagination. My own opinion is that this vision of the 'garden' of childhood is both realistic and comforting. Because Pearce has made such comprehensive use of the canon of 'gardens' in children's literature, I believe that the book transcends historico-cultural notions of childhood, as far as this is possible.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1. Development of my thinking and some changes in my stance

Before I attempt to record any conclusions I feel able to draw from this investigation, it is necessary to outline the experiences that I have had in the course of this often very frustrating – because open-ended – process. Throughout the process I have echoed Lissa Paul's observations: 'Sometimes I wish I could come up with a definite answer, a complete, foolproof explanation of what I'm reading ... But literature is not like that' (1998, p. 31) – nor, might I add, is cultural history. Like Paul, I have learnt 'not to trust simplistic ideas of historical progression' and to be 'cautious about linear ideas of progress' (1998, pp. 31 and 36). I am acutely conscious, however, that the notion of the garden as a changing image, which may be used to track historical changes in the perception of childhood between 1850 and the present, has tempted me. I hope this has not seduced me into perpetrating such 'simplistic ... linear ideas'. I have attempted at all times to avoid making moral or cultural value judgments, although I have given free rein to my tendency towards literary ones.

I began this study in the position of a 'scholar' of children's literature, wanting to trace a particular image through as wide a range of texts as possible. Admittedly, I was initially drawn to the notion of 'the garden' by the idea that, with its literary and Biblical resonances, it might represent different things to different audiences –

'Paradise Lost' to the adult, freedom and play to the child – but, in the early stages at least, I simply 'collected' texts for (and, occasionally, about) children, which featured gardens.

Once I had connected the theme of 'Paradise Lost' with the authors of the 'classic' Victorian and Edwardian children's texts (following, of course, the guidance of Humphrey Carpenter, 1985, and Jackie Wullschläger, 1995), I began to wonder if the garden image could perhaps be followed through a more extensive time period as a historico-cultural marker as well as a literary one. I began to try to read texts in a dual way: as far as I was able, from the point of view of the reader (and writer) of the time of publication, and as a sceptical, but certainly not objective, reader of today. While trying to understand the prejudices of earlier times, I tried to be aware of the existence of my own.

In addition to this, I began to contemplate the obvious political implications of a literature produced and disseminated by adults but intended to be read by children, and in this I was helped by Susan Ang's discussion of enclosure and exposure (2000) and Nodelman's open-ended and thought-provoking questions as to the nature of literature and culture (1996a). Nodelman is especially concerned with challenging preconceptions about what constitutes childhood: he suggests that adults define childhood in order to protect their view of *themselves* (p.81). In contrast, Ang argues

that adults 'protect' children for their own good - that is, that adults know best what is good for children (p.119).

I began to connect all these threads, however clumsily, after reading Nikolajeva's definition (1995) of children's literature as 'a particular *semiosphere*' and its history as 'a succession of changing cultural codes' and her additional remark that 'what sets children's texts apart from mainstream literature is the presence of a *double* code system consisting of a "children's code" and an "adult code".' This is of course highly complex, but I have made the attempt to hold these two potential complementary systems in my mind while responding to texts: to consider the image of the garden in terms of 'changing cultural codes' and in terms of the message conveyed to the child and its possible genesis.

In the process of trying to make coherent connections between different texts involving gardens, then, I have moved some way from being a novice 'scholar', someone who reads and appreciates a variety of texts for children, towards being a 'critic' of children's literature, exploring and questioning the potential forces behind the production of a text, without, I hope, abandoning the element of 'literary' appreciation.

During the long period of formulating and organising my responses to texts I have, as already indicated, been helped by several writers whose theories or 'frameworks'

have been useful in suggesting ways of working out my own framework for making a coherent investigation. At the same time, I have been encouraged and often cheered by critics such as Lissa Paul and Perry Nodelman, who have reminded me that children's literature is essentially a very complex field and that one's conclusions can, after all, only ever be subjective. Nodelman especially interests me when he talks about 'obviousnesses' (1996a, p. 67): that is, those concepts which are so much part of our specific culture and upbringing that we are not aware of them as subjective constructs and instead take them for granted as being 'common sense' or 'reality'. Nodelman has challenged my own thinking and has thus enabled me in my turn to challenge some other critics and, of course, the authors of the books I have explored. Like Nodelman (also Reynolds, 1994), Lissa Paul stresses this tendency to 'objectivise' the subjective, and, furthermore, remarks that this error is common to all ages, not least our own: 'What you see depends on who is looking, when, and from what ideological vantage point ... There is nothing new or surprising about a cultural characteristic being visible only after its time is past' (1998, pp.10-11). Despite my early interest in looking at literature across a broad timescale, this idea of interrogating what lies behind the 'façade' of the text modified my original, much more 'literary' plan. This idea of interrogation has helped me to formulate and confirm the main assumption on which my entire thesis rests; that any symbolic artefact – including a literary 'image' – inevitably changes over time in terms of what it can be seen to 'mean'. Many things impact on what a symbol – the garden – means: the literary tradition in which the text is situated; cultural, social and

historical influences; the author's personal beliefs, prior experience and circumstances at the time of writing. Insight into any or all of the above may assist the individual's reading of the text, but even then it is a subjective interpretation of what is known and perceived.

It may seem as if this process has developed smoothly and comfortably as I have read texts for children and reflected on them, while being helped in my thinking by other writers; but of course such a complicated undertaking has been neither smooth nor comfortable. I have continually been haunted by the possibility that my entire approach lacks logic and even integrity.

To summarise this concern: having isolated a motif that is generally recognised as a common one in a variety of literatures I have extrapolated from it a series of possible 'meanings' that, in my eyes, have changed according to chronology and evolving socio-cultural standards. These meanings, it occurred to me early in the process, pertain to how childhood is and has been perceived by those who write, at least ostensibly, for children. I have repeatedly interrogated myself: is this too 'neat' an assessment? Has this seeming consistency been bought at the price of ignoring 'inconvenient' evidence?

I have conscientiously attempted to address this by contemplating *all* the texts I could find in which (in my opinion) the garden is significant, not just incidental. Of course,

since the garden *is* such an important motif in children's literature, I may have reduced the likelihood of being charged with 'cherry-picking' only to lay myself open to the possible charge of superficiality. Where a text has not fitted into my central categorical structure I have tried to relate it to other texts where possible, and to articulate what, for me, is the significance of that text. For instance, upon a rereading of *The Secret Garden* I was more struck by its themes of rebirth and redemption than by its echoes of 'Paradise Lost' and its emphasis on play and shared physical activity, important though those themes are. I felt the need for a section on growth and healing, even though I was uncertain that this could be fitted into my chronological progression. In fact, after writing Chapter 5, it seemed to me that this type of text accorded fairly closely with what I had learned about some writers' concerns in the approximate period 1945 to 1975, and that the Burnett text was, according to this reading, forward-looking rather than representative of its actual time.

Another worry was the thought that struck me while reading Peter Coveney's *The Image of Childhood* (1957) and, again, Kimberley Reynolds' *Children's Literature in the 1880s and the 1990s* (1994), that, if one wants to examine changing attitudes to childhood, is it not logical to do this directly, as do these writers? Is there any advantage in considering the garden – or any other thematic device – at all?

The answer to this last question is, I think, twofold. Firstly, I cannot escape the fact that I began my period of study by looking at the garden as a motif, and I intend this

thesis to be as far as possible an honest record of the process as well as the result of that process. Additionally, and more satisfactorily, I remain convinced that the garden *is* a highly rewarding area for study (although naturally not the only possible one), by virtue of its historical literary and scriptural usages which permeate Western literature. In this study the garden has appeared as, variously: a plausible background or setting; a highly complex symbol, of (among other things) the series of dualities and paradoxes inherent in post-Romantic existence (Nodelman, 1996a, p.155-156); and a Proustian trigger for regret and nostalgia. In the texts that I value most highly (most obviously *Tom's Midnight Garden*) the garden may carry resonances of all of these.

8.2. Summary of thesis

As I draw near the end of what, at risk of cliché, I must describe as a journey (or perhaps a Bildungsroman, since I have learnt a great deal about myself and have challenged a variety of preconceptions), I am able to summarise what I have discovered.

I feel confident that I have confirmed that children's literature is a direct, if not necessarily conscious, result of how childhood is regarded. Every text written for children betrays its author's attitude to childhood, among many other preoccupations. In this study, I have taken a particular image that is common in children's literature

and have attempted to ascertain, in each instance of its use, whether the view of childhood exposed is personal to the author, or whether it may be said to enshrine more generalised cultural attitudes. To return very briefly to examples, J.M. Barrie was an individual who, by all contemporary accounts, preferred the company of children to that of adults and suffered unresolved conflicts to do with growing up. While his acknowledged masterpiece, *Peter Pan*, does not sentimentalise childhood as much as some critics suggest, Barrie presents childhood (the Neverland) as a place of utter freedom, hedonism and joyful adventure, where females never become possible sexual partners but remain eternal and nurturing mothers. *Peter Pan*, I suggest, achieved its popularity and has since retained its place as a 'classic' largely because it captured the *zeitgeist*; because many shared Barrie's fear of adulthood. Its 'garden' is a childhood utopia that, nonetheless, qualifies as a garden by my definition. That garden signifies, in my opinion, Barrie's personally evolved notions about childhood versus adulthood and also a culturally-evolved theory (that childhood is better than adulthood) which became popular during the Victorian period.

If one turns now to a contemporary and well-regarded book, Melvin Burgess' *Junk*, one can hypothesise from the book itself and also from its reception how childhood is now regarded. The author is deeply concerned with the well being of children (as, one infers, was J.M Barrie) but has an entirely different opinion as to children's need to see the world as it is, rather than how it 'should' be. There is no 'garden' or

utopian place within the book (if one could be 'written into' this text, it would surely be before the opening – that is, when the protagonists are much younger). The text teaches the reader that childhood and early adulthood can be difficult; that young people, while vulnerable, are not 'innocent', in the Victorian sense. I surmise from my reading that these – and perhaps other – views of childhood underlie the text. From the fact that *Junk* has been acclaimed by critics and is still recommended as a helpful text for young readers, I infer that Burgess's construct of childhood can be accommodated within generally accepted socio-cultural beliefs about the nature of childhood.

It has become very clear to me, then, that the perception of childhood by the adult world has changed slowly but distinctly since 1838, the publication year of Andersen's *The Garden of Paradise* (the earliest of the texts studied here). The way in which childhood is perceived is very closely connected with how the adult world sees itself, and that in turn is dependent on a highly complex mesh of social, cultural and economic pressures, as well as on the prejudices and experiences of individual writers. The child has always been a significant member of any society (Cunningham, 1995, and Cox, 1996) and therefore changing attitudes to childhood are part of the general 'evolution' of social ideas during the past century and a half.

The 'garden' too has, according to my thinking, changed in parallel ways and fulfils literary needs just as the 'image of childhood' (to use Coveney's phrase, 1957) fulfils

psychological, social, economic and cultural ones. In my first two chapters I consider the garden in its guise as the Garden of Eden, and thus as an emblem of regret and loss. This is a self-consciously literary device, derived from Wordsworth. In Chapter 4, in contrast, the garden fulfils the role of setting, with no burden of symbolism, but with many implications for the status of the child. My discussion here relates to what Dusiñberre (1987) says about the conflict in children's books between the 'literary' and the 'literal' and about radicalism in literature. Even so, the 'Eden' motif is still pervasive, since the garden is a place of freedom, carelessness and pleasure (and other childhood virtues that were, at the time, inalienable middle-class rights). By Chapter 5 the garden is both setting and symbol: while it represents the healing power of nature, this healing does not come about by magic, but as a result of hard effort in the literal garden by the protagonists, effort which is physical as well as emotional and sometimes spiritual. Chapter 6 considers texts that portray children growing up and leaving the 'garden' of childhood; in some, that garden is a safe place, and in others, a place where children suffer indifference or abuse. Finally, the chapter on *Tom's Midnight Garden* demonstrates how Pearce moves about these various manifestations of the garden – a sanctuary, a playground, a place of growth and a spot redolent of regret.

Therefore the changing literary image of the garden, it is suggested, parallels what is being said at different times about what it was, and is, to be a child.

It is necessary here to repeat the outline of the thesis, chapter by chapter, to show how my points interact with and depend on each other. During the course of this work I have taken pleasure in the way in which seemingly disparate interpretations have slowly resolved themselves into sometimes complex relationships.

Chapter 2, in which I investigated the appearance of the garden as an expression of loss, fits into the loose chronological framework, as already explained. The texts therein were mostly written during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (with some exceptions) and I have tried to relate them to socio-cultural and literary occurrences during that *fin de siècle* period. All the texts discussed in that chapter concern regret at the loss of childhood, either childhood in general, or the author's personal childhood, which is seen as happier and intrinsically better (even purer) than adulthood, even when it is clearly not so (for instance, the poor and ultimately pathetic Diamond in MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*). As in the following chapter, the 'garden' can be seen to be a version of Eden.

In Chapter 3 I turn to the closely related theme of loss for, this time, an impersonal past or 'Golden Age', which does not refer to a specific period, but merely to an earlier and 'better' time. Again the loss is of Eden, but this time it is the loss of a society, of a simpler and, it is assumed, superior, way of life. Once again, I interpret this manifestation in children's books as a reflection of the author's personal philosophy rather than an explicit desire to tell the child that the past was 'better'. In

other words, I think that this use of the garden image (in both chapters) is more an indication of current assumptions than anything consciously planned: when Grahame or Nesbit imply that the past was better, this can be ranked as an 'obviousness', to use Nodelman's word - something that is so 'obvious' as to deserve no questioning. It is important to emphasise here the significant difference between this concept of the 'Golden Age' and another concept that I discuss in Chapter 6: the value of the past and of the 'collective unconscious' in the individual, present, life. The former is a matter of regret and nostalgia; the latter (outstandingly explored by Penelope Lively) is more a matter of acknowledging the impact of the past on the present and of the experiences of our forebears on our own selves – celebration rather than nostalgia.

Chapter 4, while continuing to follow the chronological path, takes a different direction. In this chapter, the garden loses its status as a symbol and becomes an everyday setting for play – a literal garden. Here I am concerned with the idea that childhood is not superior to adulthood, as the Romantics would have it, although it is still vulnerable, and children need to be protected from the 'realities' of life. The children in these texts are recognisably 'real' and often naughty, although they are still 'innocent' compared with, for instance, the children in *A High Wind in Jamaica* (Hughes, 1929) and the later *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954). The children in Chapter 4 need to remain in the garden (Eden) not to avoid corruption, but to be safe from harm – represented in the outside world by, among other things, the two world wars. This idea of safety is contrasted with the idea of freedom, real and illusory, and

is later reiterated in Chapter 6, in which I consider the necessity of leaving 'the garden' of childhood.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, is the one that caused me most initial doubt. I originally intended to follow a straightforwardly chronological approach to the concept of the garden, but I came up against the inescapable notion of the garden as a place of growth and healing. In most people's eyes, the most famous garden in children's literature would seem to be Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, and it was obvious to me that this would have to be a significant text. However, I was – and remain – convinced that it is not a book about childhood's superiority, nor, despite its pantheistic overtones, is it primarily concerned with the value of 'the old ways' or of the rural ideal. I knew that there were other texts in which gardens provided the setting for and the cause of growth and psychological healing; but they did not seem to belong to any particular historical period. I decided that this chapter would have to be solely thematically, rather than historically, oriented. The texts in this chapter, then, are those that celebrate the redemptive power of gardens, gardening and, more broadly, 'Nature'. I refer to such texts as *The Children of Green Knowe*, in which there is little distinction between the great-grandmother and her great-grandson, and in which the experience of both is deeply rooted both in the experiences of others and in the soil of the old house.

The next chapter considers more contemporary attitudes to the garden (in its role as a representative of childhood), given that defining childhood once again seems controversial (see Marina Warner, *Managing Monsters*, 1994, for instance). Among the texts I wished to explore were some in which 'the garden', having done its healing work (as in Chapter 5) had to be left behind, while the protagonists moved towards adulthood; there was also, however, a significant body of work in which the garden of childhood is a very dangerous place. These are the often bleak, generally contemporary, novels for and about young people that continue to give concern to adults (Ang, 2000). While Pullman's trilogy belongs in this category, it is included because it so notably inverts the Eden myth (Chapter 2).

It gradually became obvious to me that the central, most significant 'garden' text was *Tom's Midnight Garden*, partly because it illustrates all my earlier observations about the possible uses of the garden image; and partly because it achieves this so convincingly and movingly. I hope Chapter 7 has made it clear how, to my mind, this book embodies complex notions about gardens and childhood. I shall, however, briefly conclude with a summary of the way in which *Tom's Midnight Garden* links the themes of the earlier chapters. The loss of one's own childhood is clearly felt in the figure of old Mrs. Bartholomew: although she readily admits her childhood was less than perfectly happy, she still, in old age, is seen to be dreaming sweetly of it (p.39). In Pearce's slightly ambivalent treatment of Hatty's childhood circumstances we can nonetheless see a regret for the more gracious world of the 'Late Victorians'.

Some of Pearce's most brilliant writing is found in the descriptions of Tom and Hatty's play together. They are safe in an earthly paradise where almost everything seems provided for their pleasure and convenience. Of course they learn a great deal through their play, from tree climbing (p.116) to tolerance and compassion for others, and in that way the text fits neatly into my chapters on play and on growth and healing. Most subtly of all, Pearce presents us with the impossible paradox; Tom longs to remain a child in the garden forever, and, of course, he cannot, unlike Peter Pan, be allowed to: yet, through her deft use of symbol and memory, Pearce reassures us that, while, ' "[N]othing stands still, except in our memory" '(p.212) – because of our memories, nothing is ever really lost, either. Pearce was writing in 1958, and I argue that, while *Tom's Midnight Garden* is very plainly a post-war text, in terms of its preoccupations with enclosure and change, Pearce has nonetheless managed to transcend contemporaneous notions by her successful use of 'timeslip' conventions.

8.3. Conclusions

My central thesis is as follows: that the image of the garden in children's literature represents the 'Eden' of childhood: and that its definition, like that of any other symbolic artefact, depends on extrinsic socio-cultural factors. I hope that I have provided a wide enough range of texts to demonstrate that this is so. In the course of this wide-ranging survey I have identified a variety of symbolic or literal uses of the image of the garden, across a broad time-span. Almost all of these uses have,

explicitly or implicitly, related the garden to the state of childhood by means of equating childhood with a 'good place' or 'Eden' (contrasting with the difficult, or boring, or corrupt state of adulthood). Where there is not this exact equation, as in the cases of *The Wind in the Willows* and *His Dark Materials*, I have argued that the garden is nevertheless still a symbol of Eden and is closely connected with ideas about childhood – whether childhood and adulthood are opposites, for instance, or different points on a continuum.

In all the texts under analysis I have demonstrated the significance of contemporary socio-cultural attitudes on the ideas embodied in them, whether obvious to the writers or not. This process has been easier where I have been concerned with texts more distant in time, since changes in attitude become clearer as time passes. I suggest, however, that every text concerned with the nature of childhood is inextricably bound up with current myths and is therefore a social construct. This is of course not in itself an original hypothesis, and neither is consideration of the garden in literature; but I would argue that this study closely interweaves an examination of how childhood has altered as a concept with literary and cultural analysis of the garden image within a coherent framework, which involves a particularly wide range of uses of 'the garden' in the context of a variety of texts.

8.4. Last thoughts

This has been, for me, a fascinating and rewarding investigation of many of the relationships implicit within the body of literature for children: that between image and text, between adult and child – not forgetting that between the adult and himself- or herself-as-child – and, perhaps most poignantly, between the need to leave ‘the garden’ and the longing to remain.

I am unable to resist the temptation to end this study in the way that Wullschläger concludes her own study of meanings in children’s books (1995 [2001], pp.222-223). She illustrates the beautiful symmetry in the way Pullman’s *Botanic Garden* echoes Carroll’s *Wonderland*, illuminating – for me – the way in which Carroll’s tough, challenging child became weakened, even perverted by writers like Barrie and Lewis, before gradually reappearing in the form of the thoughtful, questioning characters of Pearce, Lively and Boston, and finally the utterly determined Lyra:

‘In a tribute to the English tradition that started with an over-curious daughter of an Oxford college tumbling into a fantasy land, and which he has, consciously or not, brought full circle, Pullman in his final, comforting images locates truth in Oxford’s Botanic Garden and recalls the view that Lewis Carroll saw from his college window and transformed into the secret garden of *Wonderland* ...

... “Somewhere in the garden a nightingale was singing, and a little breeze touched her hair and stirred the leaves overhead. All the different bells of the city chimed, once each, this one high, that one low, some close by, others further off, one cracked and peevish, another grave and sonorous, but agreeing in their different voices on what time it was, even if some of them got to it a little more slowly than others. In that other Oxford where she and Will had kissed goodbye, the bells would be chiming too, and a nightingale would be singing, and a little breeze would be stirring the leaves in the Botanic Garden.” ’

(The Amber Spyglass, p.548)

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