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The Precocious Child in the Late Nineteenth Century

by Roisín Laing

Abstract

Precocity is incongruous with the nineteenth-century ideology of childhood innocence. It is, nevertheless, a prominent subject across discourses in the century's final decades. This thesis argues that in the late nineteenth century precocious children are depicted and debated in ways that reveal their particularly post-Darwinian significance.

Through an analysis of a broad range of literary texts, in dialogue with key contributions to the emergent branch of psychology known as Child Study, this thesis illustrates that the precocious child functions as a problematic origin for narratives of adult selfhood in an era when such narratives were ever more tentative, and ever more tenacious.

The thesis first examines precocity and innocence in a scientific overview of the subject, and in a selection of Henry James's fiction, to suggest that these contradictory qualities are inextricably bound up with the question of adult self-construction. Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* and E. Nesbit's *Treasure Seekers* series are then shown to complicate the assumptions about, and functions of, the precocious child in contemporaneous medical studies of precocity. Following this, the thesis interrogates the extent to which autobiography enables authors and psychologists to create a remembered child who might function as the precocious origin to the adult self. J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* is then analysed as a study of the ideology and contextual significance of the precocious child. A final chapter discusses work produced by two precocious children themselves.

This thesis illustrates that the precocious child emblematises the continuity of the self across time, but only by reflecting an adult to whom it is supposed to be a primitive antecedent. Precocity can thus be read as a study of the idea of progressive selfhood which was so central to the Victorian era after Darwin.

The Precocious Child in the Late Nineteenth Century

by

Roisín Laing

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Table of Contents

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Introduction: Precocity in the Nineteenth Century

Childhood has long been equated with innocence, but childhood and innocence are inseparable from adulthood and corruption. This synchronicity is encapsulated in the concept of precocity. This thesis argues that, because it problematizes the state of childhood itself, precocity is a highly disruptive component in late nineteenth-century discourse about childhood.

Innocence, and its supposedly inevitable ends in corruption or death, are the subject of much research into nineteenth-century childhood. Peter Coveney's overview of childhood innocence in literature from the eighteenth to the twentieth century is an influential early example.[1] James R. Kincaid's exploration of the same theme in *Child-Loving* (1992) was provocative enough to merit further discussion in his *Annoying the Victorians* (1995).[2] Kevin Ohi's *Innocence and Rapture* (2005) similarly studies innocence and childhood in canonical and/ or 'adult' literature and, like Kincaid, offers an analysis which is entirely consistent with the pornographic connotations of the adjective 'adult' in this context.[3] Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan* (1984) is perhaps the most in/famous analysis of the significance of innocence as a theme in children's literature. Rose's work has been credited with reinvigorating the field of children's literature studies, to the paradoxical point of calcifying it around the same analytical framework—namely, the representation and significance of innocence.[4]

More recently, however, research has moved beyond that framework. Marah Gubar, for example, argues that many children in nineteenth-century children's literature are less innocent and more knowing than previous analyses have assumed.[5] Following Malcolm

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[1] Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society: A Study of the Theme in English Literature* (1957; 2nd edn., Middlesex: Penguin, 1967). See also Gillian Avery, *Nineteenth Century Children: Heroes and Heroines in English Children's Stories 1780-1900* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965). Although Chapter Ten is called 'The Innocent Child', the entire work is focused around the questions of sin, correction or punishment, and innocence in children's literature.

[2] James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Kincaid, *Annoying the Victorians* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 35-46 and pp. 233-250.

[3] Kevin Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture: The Erotic Child in Pater, Wilde, James, and Nabokov* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[4] Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan: Or, The Impossibility of Children's Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). Peter Hunt, for example, has described Rose's work as 'an intellectual dead-end' which has nevertheless, '(embarrassingly) proved to be a long-lived poltergeist' in the field of children's literature studies (Hunt, "by another name", email to David Rudd, 5 August 2009, quoted in Rudd and Anthony Pavlik, 'The (Im)Possibility of Children's Fiction: Rose Twenty-Five Years On', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 35/3 (2010), 223-239, at p. 224-225). In addition to the contributions to this special issue of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* see Rudd, *Reading the Child in Children's Literature: An Heretical Approach* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 17-38 for an overview of Rose's influence, and a re-interrogation of her work.

[5] Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Maria Nikolajeva, 'Growing Up: The Dilemma of Children's Literature', in *Children's Literature as Communication,* ed. Roger D. Sell (Amsterdam:

Andrews's study of age-inversion in the works of Dickens, Claudia Nelson similarly moves beyond a focus on the question of innocence in her study of children in canonical nineteenth-century literature.[6] Nelson here, and Gubar elsewhere, both identify the theme of precocity as a neglected but prevalent and productively problematic element of nineteenth-century literary studies of childhood.[7]

These studies are nevertheless methodologically consistent with their predecessors in offering largely genre-specific studies of the nineteenth-century representation of children. A broader textual corpus has informed several fruitful studies of, for example, gender, or illness, in nineteenth-century thought in the past decade, but Sally Shuttleworth's *The Mind of the Child* (2010) marks an innovative contribution to the study of nineteenth-century childhood for its comparative analysis of literary and scientific or medical studies of childhood in the period.[8]

It is more than a decade since Shuttleworth first identified children's literature as '[a]nother piece of the picture we need to set in place' for a fuller understanding of nineteenth-century childhood, and nearly twenty years since Jenny Bourne Taylor described psychologist James Sully as a 'crucial reference point' for fiction by E. Nesbit and Frances Hodgson Burnett.[9] Despite this, children's literature is still almost invariably studied in isolation from canonical literary and scientific studies of childhood.[10] Through a comparative analysis of children in children's, canonical literary, and scientific or medical texts, this thesis begins to fit children's literature back into the picture to which it contributed in the late nineteenth century.

John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), 111-136, for an earlier analysis of the role of adulthood in representations of childhood.

[6] Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013). Much subsequent research on the question of age inversion in nineteenth-century literature has, however, remained focused on Dickens. See, for example, Rosemarie Bodenheimer, 'Dickens and the Knowing Child', in *Dickens and the Imagined Child,* ed. Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 13-26.

[7] Gubar, 'Who Watched *The Children's Pinafore*?: Age Transvestism on the Nineteenth-Century Stage', *Victorian Studies,* 54/3 (2012), 410-426.

[8] Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Katharina Boehm, *Charles Dickens and the Sciences of Childhood: Popular Medicine, Child Health, and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), and Jessica Straley, *Evolution and Imagination in Victorian Children's Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), have since used similar methods in studies of nineteenth-century childhood and children's literature respectively.

[9] Shuttleworth, 'Victorian Childhood', *Journal of Victorian Culture,* 9/1 (2004), 107-113, at p. 111; Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Between Atavism and Altruism: The Child on the Threshold in Victorian Psychology and Edwardian Children's Fiction', in *Children in Culture: Approaches to Culture,* ed. Karín Lesnick-Oberstein (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 89-121, at p. 93.

[10] Holly Virginia Blackford, 'Apertures into the House of Fiction: Novel Methods and Child Study, 1870-1910', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 32/4 (2007), 368-389, is one exception.

Gubar asserts that '[t]o be disturbed by precocity . . . indicates one's commitment to the idea that there ought to be a strict dividing line separating child from adult.'[11] Childhood knowledge of, or capacity for, whatever is considered 'adult' has the power to disturb not only the defining association of childhood and innocence, but the separation between child and adult which this definition supports. Through an analysis of precocity in late nineteenth-century studies of childhood, this thesis explores the significance of that line in texts which consolidate or interrogate it. This study is informed by children's, scientific, periodical, and canonical literary texts of the late nineteenth century, to contribute to the more complicated picture of nineteenth-century childhood which is emerging from recent interrogations of the thematic and methodological frameworks of innocence and genre respectively. Unlike the innocent child, the precocious child embodies incipient adulthood. This thesis will argue that it is this impending adult which makes the precocious child an object of such uneasy fascination across late nineteenth-century discourse.

Precocity and the Ideology of Childhood in the Early Nineteenth Century

The problematic relationship between precocity and innocence is evident in one of the most influential treatises on childhood to emerge in the eighteenth century. In *Émile, ou de l'Education* (1762), Jean-Jacques Rousseau offers a concept of childhood which is essentially innocent and therefore comes to be closely aligned with genius.[12] Precocity is incompatible with this childhood genius, but is nevertheless difficult, if not impossible, to separate from it. By insisting that '[e]verything should . . . be brought into harmony with [the child's] natural tendencies', Rousseau presents a child who is innately good.[13] However, that goodness is always threatened by the corrupting effects of 'precocious instruction'.[14] For Rousseau, the child represents a standard of natural purity which is symbolically equivalent with genius. Precocity is equivalent not with this innocent childhood genius, but with its opposite in a worldly corruption to which it is always susceptible.

Rousseau's influence, and the amalgamation of his concept of the natural with an idea of genius, are evident in the premise of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789), which are ostensibly written under the inspiration of a child 'on a cloud', and in which it is

[11] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, p. 3.
[12] As Coveney argues, Rousseau thereby essentially imbues the 'tabula rasa' of the child-mind with an implicitly moral significance. In its original formulation in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), the 'tabula rasa' signifies potential rather than innate morality. See Coveney, pp. 37-51, on childhood in the transition from Locke and eighteenth-century Reason to Rousseau and nineteenth-century Feeling.
[13] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, or On Education*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1969), p. 7.
[14] Rousseau, p. 56.

the child's point of view throughout which has the insight of poetic genius.[15] William Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1815) is also clearly influenced by Rousseau. 'Youth' is 'Nature's Priest', and, as the religious metaphor suggests, childhood thus becomes 'a time when meadow, grove, and stream/ The earth, and every common sight' can seem '[a]pparelled in celestial light'.[16] The child's affinity with nature is equated with a receptiveness to 'delight' and therefore with a Romantic conception of genius. Coveney suggests that Blake offers 'the first coordinated utterance of the Romantic Imaginative and spiritually sensitive child', but it is in Wordsworth's Romanticism that genius can be located in the state of childhood itself.[17]

Youth has retained in the present day some of this multivalent nineteenth-century significance. Malcolm Gladwell, for example, has asked '[w]hy . . . we equate genius with precocity'; his answer is that we assume that 'the freshness and exuberance and energy *of youth*' are necessary for creativity.[18] The 'shouts' and 'jollity' of Wordsworth's 'Child of Joy', or of the children in Blake's 'Laughing Song', are revived in the energy and exuberance which, according to Gladwell, are still considered *youthful* by definition.[19] In other words, we continue to ascribe to the nineteenth-century view that youth embodies qualities which define an idea of genius. If what Gladwell calls the late bloomers of the world are neglected in modern analyses of genius, this may be because many of the exceptional qualities—energy, insight, delight—with which genius is aligned, have been considered traits of childhood, rather than of adulthood, from the early nineteenth century to the present day.

Thus, the equation between genius and *precocity* which Gladwell disputes is more accurately the equation between genius and *youth*, and an association of youth with its end which likewise finds earlier expression in nineteenth-century discourse.[20] As Wordsworth observes, '[s]hades of the prison-house begin to close/ Upon the growing Boy' even while the poet describes his childhood transcendence.[21] Genius is equated with precocity because

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[15] William Blake, 'Introduction', *Songs of Innocence* in *Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (1971; 3rd edn., Edinburgh: Pearson, 2007), 59-60, at p. 59. All references to Blake will be taken from this edition.
[16] William Wordsworth, 'Ode ("There was a time")', in *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 297-302, at p. 299 and p. 297. All references to Wordsworth will be taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.
[17] Coveney, p. 51.
[18] Malcolm Gladwell, 'Late Bloomers', *The New Yorker* (20 October 2008). <http://www.newyorker.com>, emphasis added; last accessed 5 September 2016.
[19] Wordsworth, 'Ode', p. 298; Blake, 'Laughing Song', 62-63.
[20] See Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (London: Penguin, 2008) for a fuller study of the factors which influence achievement, including, at pp. 15-68, a possible explanation for the correlation between childhood precocity and adult genius.
[21] Wordsworth, 'Ode', p. 299.

precocity—the adulthood always foreshadowed by the idea of childhood—is inseparable from youth.

As Wordsworth's metaphor suggests, adulthood is not only inevitable; it is also menacing. This resistance to, or rejection of, even the shadow of adulthood is central to the Romantic ideology of childhood. Judith Plotz observes that 'it is hard to overstate [Blake's] importance' for Victorian and Edwardian 'cultists', but she does not discuss his work in her *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (2001) because the 'developmental . . . view of childhood', which is (self-evidently) offered in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience,* was not integrated into the Romantic ideology of childhood.[22] By contrast, the developmental view is definitive of the Victorian ideology of childhood to be discussed in this thesis.[23]

The Romantic concept of the child as an innocent and imminently corrupted genius remains, nevertheless, a powerful one in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray contains the very 'passions' and 'thoughts' 'whose mere memory might stain [his] cheek with shame' even while Lord Henry adulates his 'rose-red youth and rose-white boyhood'.[24] Rousseau's 'precocious instruction' recurs in the 'homely Nurse' who educates Wordsworth's child out of 'the glories he hath known' and again in Lord Henry's 'influence' on Dorian's previously 'simple and beautiful nature'.[25] From Rousseau to Wilde, the natural, innocent, genius of youth invites, even contains, its own corruption, and that corruption is represented in a precociously foreshadowed adulthood.

This Romantic ideology of an innocence which adulthood might corrupt performed an essential function in the nineteenth century. The narrator of J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911) claims that '[a]ll children, except one, grow up', but this is patently falsified in the fictions, and the facts, of the period.[26] Dickens is famous (or, rather, infamous among today's readers) for his childhood death scenes, but similar scenes proliferate in fiction by

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[22] Judith Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. xv. Barbara Garlitz, 'The Immortality Ode: Its Cultural Progeny', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900,* 6/4 (1966), 639-649, outlines the influence Wordsworth's 'Immortality' Ode alone had on later thinking about childhood. See Deborah Thacker, 'Imagining the Child', in *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism,* ed. Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb (London: Routledge, 2002), 13-25 on the impact of Romanticism on children's literature, and Alan Richardson, 'Romanticism and the End of Childhood', in *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations,* ed. James Holt McGavran (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 23-43, on the continuing presence of Romantic ideology in current discourse about childhood.
[23] This perhaps accounts for some of Blake's prominence in this era's cult of childhood.
[24] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* ed. Donald L. Lawler (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), p. 20.
[25] Wordsworth, 'Ode', p. 299; Wilde, p. 17.
[26] J. M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy,* in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens and Peter and Wendy,* ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 67-226, at p. 69.

many authors throughout the century.[27] Wordsworth's 'Lucy Gray' offers a clear articulation of what the dead children of literature can offer as the only alternative, outside Neverland, to the attainment of corrupted adulthood. Lucy is an eternally 'living Child' because she is already a dead child at the start of the poem.[28] By eluding even the shadow of an adulthood which was equated with corruption, Lucy and her counterparts across the century's fiction perpetuate the innocent genius they represent.

This enduring, Rousseauian conceptualisation of the dead child serves as what Lawrence Lerner calls a 'strategy of consolation' in an era of high infant and childhood mortality.[29] Little Nell's death in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) is illustrative: as Richard Walsh argues, it has become a 'notorious example of the lachrymose excesses of early Victorian sentimentality', but 'it is striking how many of those moved by [it when it was first published] had themselves mourned the early death of a favourite [child].'[30] Thus, Randal Keynes claims that 'Charles [Darwin] found one consolation in an idea which Rousseau had mentioned in *Émile*' after the death of his daughter Annie.[31] Although Keynes suggests that the consolation is, specifically, that Darwin 'had never spoken a harsh word to' Annie, the influence of Rousseau is also evident in the 'buoyant joyousness', 'sensitiveness', and 'strong affection' which Darwin ascribes to Annie in his memorial.[32] Similarly, when his youngest child, Charles Waring, died some years later, Darwin remarks that, '[t]hank God[,] he will never suffer more in this world.'[33] Darwin's responses to the deaths of his children suggest that Lucy Gray, Little Nell, and their like perform a consolatory function in

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[27] See Laurence Lerner, *Angels and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997), 82-125 on children's deaths in Dickens's work, and pp. 126-173 on the same theme in the works of some of his contemporaries. See also Judith Plotz, 'Literary Ways of Killing a Child: The 19th Century Practice', in *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature,* ed. Maria Nikolajeva (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 1-24.

[28] Wordsworth, 'Lucy Gray', pp. 149-150, at p. 150.

[29] See Lerner, pp. 40-81. See Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 90, for a brief overview of infant mortality statistics across Europe from 1600 to 1899. Robert Woods, 'Infant Mortality in Britain: A Survey of Current Knowledge on Historical Trends and Variations', in *Infant and Child Mortality in the Past,* ed. Alain Bideau, Bertrand Desjardins, and Héctor Pérez Brignoli (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 74-88, offers a discussion of the data on infant mortality in Britain from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, and, on. p. 79, a comparative estimate of infant mortality rates in rural and urban regions of England and Wales. Robert Woods and P. R. Andrew Hinde, 'Mortality in Victorian England: Models and Patterns', *Journal of History,* 18/1 (1987), 27-54, offers an overview of age-specific and regional variations in mortality in nineteenth-century Britain.

[30] Richard Walsh, 'Why We Wept for Little Nell: Character and Emotional Investment', *Narrative,* 5/3 (1997), 306-321, at p. 307.

[31] Randal Keynes, *Annie's Box: Charles Darwin, His Daughter and Human Evolution* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002), p. 192.

[32] Keynes, p. 192; Darwin, 'Our poor child, Annie', in *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 5.540-42, qtd. in Keynes, p. 195-196.

[33] Keynes, p. 226. Keynes also refers to the deaths of William Darwin Fox's daughter Louisa and of Joseph Hooker's daughter Maria, giving an indication of just how common this experience was (Keynes, p. 220 and p. 247). See also Lerner, pp. 1-39, on the deaths of real children, and responses to them, in the nineteenth century.

the nineteenth century.[34] That this function is less necessary today goes some way towards explaining the contrasting responses to their deaths then and now.

Not all children do grow up, then, and much research has been undertaken on the fictions of childhood death as a reflection of, and response to, this fact of nineteenth-century society. However, the child who might, will, or does grow up becomes increasingly prominent throughout the century and, as such studies as Nelson's and Gubar's indicate, this child has a different (and, perhaps, less redundant) function than to embody a consolatory idea of Romantic, natural, or innocent genius. If '[t]he Child is the Father of the Man', childhood traits, behaviours, and circumstances can anticipate or even create the adult self.[35] Although the phrase is Wordsworth's, the child in 'My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold' is not the embodiment of a Romantic ideology of childhood. It is, rather, the starting point for a study of the continuity of the Romantic self across time. As Gillian Beer observes, 'the primary interest' for Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1798) is likewise 'in the process of growth itself rather than in its confirming conclusion, or anterior purpose'.[36] Growing up may be contrary to the Romantic ideology of childhood, but it is centrally significant to the child who is the origin of the self in Romantic autobiography.

The tension between these two functions which the child is required to perform becomes more evident in the fiction of the mid- to late nineteenth century. Once again, works by Dickens are illustrative. The 'strange, old-fashioned, thoughtful' precocity displayed by Paul Dombey in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1848) is ambivalently both adulated, as the embodiment of a Romantic idea of childhood, and ominous because it foreshadows the corruption of that ideal by his father's expectation that he will become 'part of his own greatness'.[37] Although Andrews claims that Paul 'is not innocent', it is in fact because he is paradoxically both precocious and innocent that Andrews finds him '*disconcertingly* shrewd and penetrating'.[38] Since, as Shuttleworth suggests, Paul's precocity is an 'incongruous mirroring' of his father, this 'grotesque' child anticipates not only his own failure to attain adult 'greatness', but the failure of the father whose image corrupts his

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[34] Darwin is representative not of the general response to childhood death, but of the role of a highly class-specific ideology of childhood in supporting an equally class-specific response. Although child mortality affected all classes, it was, of course, most common among the working classes, who were unlikely to turn to Rousseau for consolation. The responses of working-class families have, however, often been read not as different but as deficient. See Cunningham, p. 107, for a discussion of such readings. See Aaron Antonovsky and Judith Bernstein, 'Social Class and Infant Mortality', *Social Science and Medicine*, 11/ 8-9 (1977), 453-470 on the enduring inverse relationship between infant mortality and class in the twentieth century.

[35] Wordsworth, 'My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold', p. 246.

[36] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983; 3rd edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 102.

[37] Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Alan Horsman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 98 and p. 97.

[38] Andrews, p. 112, emphasis added.

innocence: Paul's death is causally connected with his father's disgrace.[39] Little Nell likewise embodies a Romantic ideal in a world which cannot support it: she too is compelled to become the precocious adult to her childish grandfather, and is therefore destined for the same fate as Paul.[40] By foreshadowing an adulthood by which the innocent child must be corrupted, precocity becomes a condition which the Romantic child cannot survive.

This conflict between the requirements for an innocent child and for a continuous self is evaded in many fictional autobiographies and *Bildungsroman* narratives of the mid-nineteenth century, which obviate the child's function in a Romantic ideology of childhood to reaffirm her function in a Romantic ideology of selfhood instead. The child-protagonists in the opening chapters of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861), and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) are not innocent, immortalised, and dead. Instead, they are in the process of growing up in an adult world with which they are fully engaged, and which often confuses and even angers them.[41]

Those children who grow up into adults who tell their own stories—Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, and Pip—are largely vindicated by the adults they become. Although the more ambivalent ends which Catherine Earnshaw and Maggie Tulliver meet have been foreshadowed by, and therefore do not wholly justify, their childhood behaviour, they are nevertheless comparable with Jane, David, and Pip in that the adults they become have clearly been performed, and consequently formed, by the children they once were. By foreshadowing an adult self which it is the narrator's objective to affirm, precocity becomes a means through which the child of Romantic autobiography can anticipate, and perhaps vindicate, the adult s/he has become.

This shift from the child as immortalised embodiment of innocent genius to the child as precocious ancestor to an adult self whose development is the subject of the text—from the Romantic to the developmental view of childhood—both reflects and contributes to a teleological understanding of evolution which was prevalent in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Peter Bowler describes the aftermath of the publication of Charles Darwin's *The*

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[39] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 108; Andrews, p. 112.

[40] See Helen Small, *The Long Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 187-198 on the relationship between youth and age in *The Old Curiosity Shop.* Amy Dorrit of *Little Dorrit* (1857) and Jenny Wren of *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) offer two more Dickensian variations on this theme.

[41] See Maria Teresa Chialant, 'The Adult Narrator's Memory of Childhood in David's, Esther's and Pip's Autobiographies', in Merchant and Waters, pp. 77-91, on fictional autobiographical narration, and Robert Newsom, 'Fictions of Childhood', in *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. John O. Jordan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 92-105 for a comparative discussion of the same issue in *David Copperfield* and *Jane Eyre.* Thackeray also wrote a novel for children—*The Rose and the Ring* (1854)—which was similarly sceptical about the idea of childhood innocence. See U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Ventures into Childhood: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 74-115.

Origin of Species (1859) as the non-Darwinian revolution. What occurred was a revolution because 'Darwin converted the scientific world to evolutionism', but it was not a Darwinian revolution, because it is characterised by 'the emergence of what might be called the "developmental" model of evolution'.[42] Despite Darwin's argument that the mechanism of evolution—natural selection—is non-teleological, the evolution of the species was, as Bowler has shown, still understood by many in terms of 'progressionism, with the human race as its inevitable goal'.[43] It was the 'belief that the growth of the embryo provides the best model for the history of life'—the idea that the development of the individual recapitulated the development of the race—which particularly supported this conceptualisation of evolution.[44]

According to Bowler, the analogy between growth and evolution on which this developmental model was predicated 'was non-Darwinian in character because it encouraged the belief that evolution shares the progressive and teleological character of individual growth', but ontogeny can only recapitulate a teleological phylogeny if childhood is conceived as a primitive stage in the progress towards adulthood as a goal and end-point.[45] Bowler's overview of non-Darwinian evolution reveals the underlying dependence of the developmental model on a concept of the child as a narratable origin to a stable end.

This thesis argues that the impact of Darwin's argument about the human species is made visible in the narratable precocity of the Victorian child. The once-innocent child of Romantic ideology is required, in the Victorian era, precociously to anticipate, by embodying progress toward, the adult. Late nineteenth-century literary and scientific studies of childhood will be analysed in terms of their interrogations of the child as the origin of a teleology of self, to suggest that the precocity of the child as narratable origin has problematic implications for that self. The precocious child of Victorian ideology is therefore a dubious disavowal of Darwin's disturbing world-view, since that disavowal is predicated, primarily, on the imagined teleology of individual growth.

In the view of childhood as a primitive stage in the progressive evolution towards adulthood, childhood genius becomes a precocious anticipation of an adulthood in which that genius ought to be more fully realised. In other words, precocity becomes the *potential* genius of the adult. As such, it is implicitly desirable, even as it conjures up a multiplicity of less optimistic possibilities. Thus, as Shuttleworth has demonstrated, the 'forcing' of intellectual precocity in order to produce adult genius was common in the nineteenth

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[42] Peter Bowler, *The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 47 and p. 5.
[43] Bowler, p. 74.
[44] Bowler, pp. 74-75.
[45] Bowler, p. 51.

century, even as it was also seen to lead to the sort of intellectual degradation represented by, for example, Mr Toots of *Dombey and Son.*[46]

The conflict which Mr Toots implies, between attempts to cultivate precocity to produce genius, and fears for the adult which might be the outcome of such an un-Romantic child, is less comically rendered in, for example, the un-innocent childhood and consequent adulthood of Becky Sharpe in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-48). This problematic teleology of a self whose origins are precocious rather than innocent is equally implicit in the awkward or ambivalent resolutions of many such fictional autobiographies of the mid-nineteenth century. The two different but equally inconclusive final sentences of *Great Expectations* are perhaps the best example, but the last chapter of *Jane Eyre* is curiously irrelevant to this 'autobiography', while Catherine Earnshaw's ghostly returns entirely falsify the idea that either adulthood, or even death, can resolve the story of the self enacted by the child.

Such conflict between a precociously foreshadowed selfhood and the corrupted innocence of that self's childhood origins intensifies at the *fin de siècle.* Anxieties about ontogenic and phylogenic degeneration make the innocence of the childhood self ever more necessary in the final decades of the nineteenth century.[47] In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), for example, Little Father Time is forced into precocious insight of his parents' poverty. Not only precociously aware, like Paul Dombey and Becky Sharp, but also precociously responsible for the adult consequences of that corrupting knowledge, Little Father Time's suicide represents what Henry James might call another turn of the screw of precocity from mid- to late nineteenth century. By tainting an ideologically innocent childhood with a precociously foreshadowed adulthood, precocious children falsify the necessary innocence of adulthood's origin.

In other words, the mutually exclusive ideologies of childhood innocence and coherent selfhood become paradoxically inter-reliant by the late nineteenth century. This thesis will demonstrate that, as the inappropriate reflection of the coherent adult self, the precocious child performs Romantic ideologies of childhood and selfhood as co-dependent—whether symbiotically, or mutually parasitically—in the final decades of the Victorian period. Romantic ideologies of childhood and of selfhood merge, and are therefore both enacted and disrupted, by these late Victorian studies of precocity.

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[46] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, pp. 107-130. Shuttleworth's ongoing 'Diseases of Modern Life' project indicates the range of such parallels between nineteenth-century and contemporary concerns about the effects of modernity ('Diseases of Modern Life', <https://diseasesofmodernlife.org/>, last accessed 5 September 2016.

[47] See Nelson, *Precocious Children*, pp. 53-70, on the related anxieties about the 'arrested child-man' of *fin de siècle* literature, and Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Psychology at the *Fin de Siècle*', in *The Cambridge Companion to the* Fin de Siècle, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-30, on the effect of ideas about degeneration in late nineteenth-century psychology.

Precocity and the Ideology of Childhood in the Late Nineteenth Century

Walter Benjamin claims that it is 'characteristic that not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff that stories are made of—first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death': it is by writing this particular 'Finis' that the narrator 'invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life'.[48] However, in the decades following the publication of the *Origin of Species,* the adult individual was required to reconstitute, by extension from the theory of recapitulation, that 'special place' for the human species which, as Beer observes, Darwin had undermined.[49] More particularly, the individual self was required to emblematise the developmental model by representing its end-point.

In her analysis of William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890)—one of the most significant and enduring works in the history of psychology—Deborah J. Coon argues that psychology 'represented a process of secularising the soul . . . repackaging it for a new, secularised era as the "self"'. [50] According to Coon, the emergence of psychology represents an attempt to constitute an explanatory self in the wake of Darwinism and its attack on God and the soul.

Carolyn Steedman claims that the clearest expression of this 'interiorised self' was embodied in the idea of childhood in the nineteenth century.[51] This thesis will demonstrate that the child was so central to selfhood in the late nineteenth century because the self had to be imagined as a *finis* to a developmental process. The self which Coon discusses became the end to the story which the child represents or enacts. In other words, in the late nineteenth century, it is not the moment of death which imbues the story of life with meaning. It is, instead, the *finis* which adulthood represents to the story of childhood. The narrated child offers an interrogation of a teleology of the self: adult selfhood is both encountered and imaginatively resolved in the narrative necessitated by that child.

Thus, and perhaps inevitably, the psychology of children's minds became of increasing interest from mid- to late century. The earliest texts of psychology—Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Psychology* (1855), for example—often look to the *child's* mind as the origin of this explanatory self. Darwin's 'Biographical Sketch of an Infant' (1877) and Taine's 'On the Acquisition of Language by Children' (1877) mark two early contributions

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[48] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 83-107, at p. 93 and p. 99.
[49] Beer, p. xviii.
[50] Deborah J. Coon, 'Salvaging the Self in a World without Soul: William James's *The Principles of Psychology*', *History of Psychology,* 3/2 (2000), 83-103, at p. 85.
[51] Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1790-1930* (London: Virago, 1995), p. 5.

to a specific study of the child's psychology. James Sully was particularly influential in professionalising Child Study in Britain, by raising public awareness of its aims, methods, and insights in articles for such non-specialist publications as *Longman's Magazine.*[52]

Such works are consonant with the broader cultural investment in the precociously anticipated adult end to the developmental story which the child was required to enact in the period. In addition to those Victorian authors already mentioned—Thackeray, Dickens, Eliot, the Brontës, and Hardy—who made childhood and selfhood the subjects of their adult-marketed work, others such Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling increasingly contributed to what was, as Bourne Taylor has suggested, initially a 'new market niche for women writers' by writing specifically for, and often about, children.[53]

The category of children's literature is consistent with the more widespread separation of childhood from adulthood which was emerging across a range of discourses in the nineteenth century. The legal definition of childhood to emerge from the labour and education acts of the period resembles and formalises that ideological and idealised childhood which is evident from Rousseau to Hardy; precocious responsibility is, once again, a destructive force in a childhood that is imagined as naturally separate from the world of commerce, work, and adulthood.[54] Similarly, the founding of Great Ormond Street Hospital in 1852, and the practice of paediatric medicine which was thereby initiated, are also consistent with the period's separation between adult and child.

Of course, paediatric medicine, and Victorian reforms in labour and education, do not *only* support an ideological separation of adult and child. There are clear clinical reasons for specialised paediatric care, and clear moral and economic arguments for limiting child labour and for educating children.[55] Likewise, although the so-called Golden Age of children's literature reflects an increasingly powerful idea of child and adult as separate entities (or at least as separate markets), it is also a highly productive and innovative period

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[52] See Lyubov G. Gurjeva, 'James Sully and Scientific Psychology, 1870-1910', in *Psychology in Britain: Historical Essays and Personal Reflections*, ed. G. C. Bunn, A. D. Lovie, and G. D. Richards (Leicester: BPS, 2001), 72-94, on Sully's role in the history of Child Study.

[53] Bourne Taylor, 'Atavism', p. 105.

[54] Inevitably, childhood as thus imagined was, as Kimberley Reynolds has argued, 'rooted in middle-class life and values, with the children of the poor either disappearing from view or being used as symbols and ciphers for literary and political ends' (Kimberley Reynolds, 'Perceptions of Childhood', <http://www.bl.uk/>, last accessed 5 September 2016). Although it was the plight of working class children which initiated literary and legislative action on behalf of childhood, the childhood to emerge was a construct of the middle-classes, and only the middle-classes could aspire to conform entirely to its increasingly absolute separation of adulthood and work from childhood and play.

[55] A brief scan of its own series of guides, 'Breakthroughs in Children's Medicine', indicates the scale of the challenge faced by nineteenth-century paediatrics. None of the 'breakthroughs' described by the guides came about before the mid-twentieth century. See Nicholas Baldwin, 'The History of the Hospital for Sick Children at Great Ormond Street (1852-1914)', <http://hharp.org/>, last accessed 5 September 2016, for an overview of the hospital's early years.

in literary history.[56] In particular, the child-protagonists of mid- to late nineteenth-century literature are, as Gubar has argued, less 'good' (or 'bad'), than their predecessors; they are more resourceful, and 'tak[e] a hand in the production of stories and their own self-fashioning'.[57]

This change in the representation of children from early to late nineteenth century is associated with the change in the child's function in this period. Plotz claims that by '[l]egitimizing childhood transience', representations of childhood death provided 'the enabling conditions for the confident creation of major children's literature' in the late Victorian period.[58] Like Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp, the children of Victorian children's literature are much less innocent than their Romantic predecessors and, like Jane or Becky, this is because they embody transience not in that they anticipate imminent death, but in that they anticipate adulthood. The developments in theme, style, and content of late nineteenth-century literature for children are consistent with the investment in the child mind as the same anticipation, interrogation, or consolidation of adult selfhood which Jane and Becky represent. Children of late Victorian children's literature are the precocious embodiments of adult selves, and therefore necessitate that interrogation of the Romantic ideology of childhood innocence which Gubar discusses.

What Bennett Zon has described as the 'insatiable Victorian appetite for writings of life and works'—for what might now be called celebrity biography and autobiography—reflects the same interest in the child's mind, and is perhaps the most obviously invested in its significance for the adult self.[59] That so many eminent Victorians wrote autobiographies suggests that selfhood was a vital but unstable concept in the period; that so many such autobiographies open with detailed accounts of childhood experience suggests the centrality of childhood to the interrogation and consolidation of that concept.

Adulthood is an alternative to death as the *finis* to many late nineteenth-century studies of childhood. It is consonant with this that the stage directions in Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904) insist that Peter is mistaken in his belief that '[t]o die will be an awfully big adventure.'[60] The final remark in the stage directions, that '[i]f he could get the hang of the

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[56] See Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 59-105 on the major works of children's literature in this period, and F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 3rd ed. (London: British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 1999), 140-155 on earlier children's authors Maria Edgeworth, Thomas Day, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and the connections between their literature for children and Rousseau's ideas about childhood innocence.

[57] Gubar, *Artful Dodgers*, p. 7. See pp. 3-38 for a fuller discussion of this issue.

[58] Plotz, 'Literary Ways', p. 17.

[59] Bennett Zon, 'The "non-Darwinian" Revolution and the Great Chain of Musical Being', in *Evolution and Victorian Culture*, ed. Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 196-226, at p. 200.

[60] Barrie, *Peter Pan* in *Peter Pan and Other Plays* ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 73-154, at p. 125.

thing his cry might become "To live would be an awfully big adventure!"', indicates that selfhood is not an end to be attained in death.[61] Rather, selfhood is attained in the process of life, or, in the terms of the play itself, the process of growing up. As will be discussed, however, *Peter Pan* is one of several texts of the period which problematize the imaginative end to this process which adulthood is supposed to represent.

The birth of the specific branch of psychology known as Child Study, in the same decades as this blossoming literary interest in the child mind, indicates that the ideologies of selfhood and of childhood become mutually constitutive during the latter half of the nineteenth century. A (problematically resolved) narrative of the child's growth into adult selfhood recurs in autobiography, in psychology, and in literature for and about children, and indicates that the study of the self is conducted through the study of the child in the late nineteenth century.

Kincaid suggests that, '[a]s a category created but not occupied, the child could be a repository of cultural needs or fears not adequately disposed of elsewhere' during the Victorian period.[62] By studying the developing science of Child Study in dialogue with literary studies of the child mind which emerged at the same time, this thesis will explore the role of precocity in the ideology of childhood as it coalesces in the late nineteenth century, and specifically the significance of precocity for the period's understanding of, and need for, childhood as the origin of adult selfhood. Selfhood came to be interrogated through the mind of the child in the science of Child Study, and in contemporaneous literary counterparts. The child mind is a repository for selfhood in the late nineteenth century, but this ideological function is complicated by the precocity with which it imbues, and thus potentially corrupts, that mind.

Chapter Summaries

This thesis is divided into four sections of two chapters each. The sections are distinguished by the genre of the literary texts under discussion. Section One discusses Henry James, a canonical author of the *fin de siècle* and modernist period. Section Two analyses works by two of the most influential authors of children's literature in the same period: Frances Hodgson Burnett and E. Nesbit. The third section of the thesis examines the autobiographical and non-fictional work of these three authors. Finally, Section Four discusses the ideological implications of J. M. Barrie's hugely successful *Peter Pan*, and of the works of two child authors whose works were popular in the period. Although these texts

[61] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, p. 153.
[62] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 78.

represent a wide spectrum of literary fiction at the end of the nineteenth century, all are considered in dialogue with comparable, contemporaneous scientific texts.

Of the literary authors discussed in this thesis, Henry James was the least successful, in commercial terms, during his lifetime.[63] The first section of this thesis will look at some of James's fictional studies of childhood as essays on the ambivalences, anxieties, contradictions, and consequences of the late nineteenth-century ideology of childhood. Chapter One examines precocity in James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), in comparison with the overview of medical studies of precocity offered in Leonard Guthrie's *Contributions to the Study of Precocity* (1921); this discussion is informed by the discourse on childhood as art which James presents in 'The Author of Beltraffio' (1884). The narrator of *The Turn of the Screw*, who describes with escalating horror her suspicions about the (implicitly sexual) precocity of the children in her care, typifies the pejorative view of precocity necessitated by a Romantic ideology of childhood innocence. However, her revulsion is, paradoxically, intensified precisely because both children are 'imperturbable little prodig[ies] of delightful, loveable goodness'.[64] The same fearful fascination with the precocious child is echoed in Guthrie's overview. 'The Author of Beltraffio' offers a distillation of the ideologies which produce this contradictory and intense attention. This chapter suggests that in these texts an ideology of childhood innocence collides with a necessity for adult selfhood, to produce a precocious child whose end is as inevitable as, but less consolatory than, his Romantic ancestors.

In Chapter Two, James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) is analysed in comparison with contributions to Child Study by its British pioneer Sully, and his American counterpart G. Stanley Hall. This chapter argues that the child Maisie's mind is a repository for adult selfhood which interrogates, rather than pre-empts, the possibility that precocity and innocence might co-exist. In his 1908 Preface to the novel, James notes that its eponymous child 'would have to be saved', but also that she might save others, by 'keeping the torch of virtue alive'.[65] This chapter argues that it is, more particularly, Maisie's non-linguistic knowledge—her innocent precocity—which enables her to save and be saved.

Just as what Maisie knows is innocent insofar as it is Other than what she could be *said* to know, so, this chapter argues, in contributions to Child Study by Sully and Hall the child's vision is innocent only when not-yet-spoken. The child thus embodies *potential*

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[63] See Philip Horne, 'James, Henry (1843-1916)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com>, last accessed 20 September 2016, for a brief overview of James's life and work.

[64] Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren (1966; 2nd edn., New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 1-85, at p. 34.

[65] Henry James, 'Preface to the New York Edition, Volume IX, 1908', in *What Maisie Knew*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 2013), 289-298, at p. 291 and p. 292.

selfhood, in an adulthood which is imagined to be perfectly articulate of her innocent knowledge. Although Maisie represents the ideal self which the precocious yet innocent child was made to embody in Sully's work, she also points to the impossibility of realising that ideal. In both theme and style, *What Maisie Knew* thus explores the challenges encountered in literary and scientific attempts to access the child's mind.

Section Two of this thesis interrogates the extent to which children's literature complicates current understandings of the nineteenth-century ideology of childhood. This section looks particularly to extend Shuttleworth's study of lies and the imagination, by looking at their representation in two classics of children's literature.[66] Shuttleworth argues that 'the transgressive force of the lie' 'was not a power . . . that novelists were willing to grant to children' in science and canonical literature of the Victorian period, but by the end of the century, '[t]he concept of lying itself is redefined to accommodate new models of the imaginative child.'[67] Section Two indicates that children's literature complicates this analysis in two major respects. Firstly, in children's literature, the transgressive power of lying *was* granted to children. Secondly, in children's literature it is the model of the imaginative child which is redefined, such that this model paradoxically accommodates adults as well. Each of these interrogations of contemporary ideas about children also constitutes a different response to the function that ideological child performed. Frances Hodgson Burnett's study of lies in *A Little Princess* (1905) validates even as it falsifies the functional child of developmental evolution. In her *Treasure Seekers* series (1899-1904) E. Nesbit posits an alternative to that model of progress and end.

Burnett was an acquaintance of James's, but unlike him she was a celebrity, with a celebrity's ambivalent literary credibility, for most of her adult life.[68] Burnett is now lauded for one work—*The Secret Garden* (1911)—and derided in almost equal measure for her 'odious' but phenomenally successful *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886).[69] Chapter Three analyses Burnett's *A Little Princess* as a study of the experiences and perspective of its precocious child protagonist, Sara Crewe. In much canonical literature of the Victorian period, the precocious child is an agent in a narrative of adult redemption. In Victorian child psychology, childhood storytelling was associated with lying and with moral insanity; adult stories are, implicitly, true by contrast. Both discourses thus reduce the precocious child to the role of agent in the tacit truth of adult stories. Many such nineteenth-century scientific and literary studies of precocity are, then, essentially characterized by the effacement of the precocious child herself.

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[66] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, pp. 60-74.
[67] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 66 and p. 73.
[68] See Phyllis Bixler, *Frances Hodgson Burnett* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), for an overview of Burnett's published writing and its critical and commercial reception during her lifetime.
[69] Avery, p. 178.

Chapter Three argues that, through its focus on the child herself, *A Little Princess* suggests that the effacement of the precocious child in contemporary discourse is a result of the threat she represents to the adult, and to the supposed truth of adult stories. Sara Crewe obviates the moral difference between adult's stories and children's stories, and between truth and deceit, upheld in contemporary psychology. She therefore undermines the difference between adult and child which informed debate about precocity in much canonical fiction and psychology of the Victorian period. In *A Little Princess,* this transgression of boundaries is a productive, enabling, and even moral act.

E. Nesbit aspired to Jamesian literariness, but met with both a success that was comparable with Burnett's, and a literary reputation that was equally uncertain in her lifetime. She has since been recognised as one of the most influential children's authors, though the work she considered most important—her poetry for adult readers—is now largely forgotten.[70] Nesbit's three-part *Treasure Seekers* series had a profound influence on children's literature, particularly for its innovative use of a child, the unforgettable Oswald Bastable, as narrator. The fourth chapter of this thesis suggests that the *Treasure Seekers* series not only undermines the nineteenth-century association between the imagination and mental pathology, but also challenges the related and more enduring association between the imagination and childhood.

By influential practitioners of Child Study, the imagination was considered almost universally active in childhood, but was also viewed as the source of many of the disorders specific to it. The representation of imaginative play in the *Treasure Seekers* series functions as a protest against criticism of the imagination in such discourse. Moreover, in the *Treasure Seekers* series, the imagination is a primary characteristic not of a child, but of a competent reader: any reader who enjoys the series identifies with the imaginative child who narrates it.

Through his celebration of the imagination, Oswald Bastable contests the 'adult' power which pathologises childhood and its attributes. Through his address to any imaginative reader, rather than to a child in particular, Oswald undermines the boundary between adult and child which more fundamentally consolidates such power. The imagination is presented as a disruptive and productive force in the series, particularly by disturbing the perceived boundary between adult and child, and the effects of this boundary on the status of the child.

James, Burnett, and Nesbit not only wrote about children in their fiction but also published autobiographical accounts of their childhood years, in which the remembered

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[70] As is suggested by its title, Marcus Crouch, *The Nesbit Tradition: The Children's Novel in England, 1945-1970* (London: Ernest Benn, 1972) claims that '[n]o writer for children today is free of debt to this remarkable woman' (Crouch, p. 16). See Doris Langley Moore, *E. Nesbit: A Biography* (London: Ernest Benn, 1967), 115-124, and pp. 166-181, on Nesbit's literary ambitions.

child anticipates and informs the writing adult self. The ideology of childhood to emerge from autobiography in these texts and in contemporaneous psychology of memory and childhood is the subject of Section Three. Chapter Five discusses autobiography as a literary investment in the child as the origin of a Romantic self: identity between remembered child and writing adult is central to this model. This chapter also explores contemporary psychology to suggest that it is comparable with these autobiographical accounts of childhood both in its aim to understand the adult self, and in the methods through which it attempts to access that understanding.

However, the late nineteenth century requires what Zon calls a recapitulationary narrative which 'gratif[ies] . . . [the] teleological needs' of authors and audiences alike.[71] The precocious identity of the child with the adult disrupts that recapitulationary narrative. Chapter Six discusses the varying ways authors and psychologists responded to the problem of precocity in these autobiographical constructions of the self. In particular, it discusses Burnett's and Nesbit's autobiographical works and contemporary psychology to argue that the resolution offered by these texts is problematized by James's work: the teleology of individual growth, which Burnett and Nesbit affirm, is undermined by the deliberate openness of the end to James's autobiography.

Section Three of this thesis therefore argues that psychological Child Study compares productively with literary autobiography as responses to the same need for an authoritative model of selfhood. Through the remembered child of autobiographical memory, Child Study and literary autobiography interrogate, but only problematically affirm, the meaning of the adult self.

The final section of this thesis discusses precocity and the ideology of childhood from two opposing positions. It first discusses ideological childhood as it is epitomised in Barrie's *Peter Pan,* and then discusses actual childhood in as far as it can be read from the output of two precocious child authors of the nineteenth century. Although it was the greatest success of Barrie's very prosperous career, and although he bequeathed it to Great Ormond Street Hospital, *Peter Pan* has done more harm than good to Barrie's literary and personal reputation.[72] Chapter Seven suggests that Barrie's *Peter Pan* epitomises the problem of selfhood in an era when God had lost what Beer calls his 'explanatory

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[71] Zon, p. 201.

[72] See Hollindale, 'A Hundred Years of *Peter Pan*', in *Children's Literature: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends,* ed. Heather Montgomery and Nicola J. Watson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 153-163 on the interrelatedness of Barrie's work and biography. See R. D. S. Jack, *The Road to Neverland: A Reassessment of J. M. Barrie's Dramatic Art* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991) on Barrie's literary reputation and contributions, and Lisa Chaney, *Hide and Seek with Angels: A Life of J. M. Barrie* (London: Arrow Books, 2005) for a reappraisal of Barrie's personal life.

function'.[73] Barrie's *Peter Pan* is a study of Darwinism, its difficulties for the human self, and the significance which childhood acquires after Darwin.

More particularly, Barrie's *Peter Pan* performs Darwinism to its audience, even as it also offers up its eponymous child to enable the still-necessary teleological fiction of the self. By refuting origins and ends both within its plot and in its textual history, Barrie's *Peter Pan* is a study of Darwin's science. By offering those same origins and ends in the fantasy spaces and stories it represents and constitutes, it is also a study of the necessary, explanatory function of childhood.

A study of precocious children which focuses exclusively on texts written by adults might reveal much about the ideologies which define its subject, but risks presenting that subject purely in terms of its ideological construction and function. An analysis of the works by precocious children is therefore a necessary counterpoint to the analysis of works about them by adult authors in the nineteenth century. Chapter Eight analyses the work of two child-authors of the period to explore the divergence of ideological precocity from whatever can be established from these texts about its actuality. Daisy Ashford's fiction is discussed to illustrate the disjunction of the child mind in adult-authored fiction and science from the child mind as far as it might be revealed in those texts. The Victorian edition of the diaries of Marjory Fleming is the subject of an analysis of the difficulties that disjunction presents for adults as they studied real precocious children.

The conclusion points toward the questions raised by this study of precocity and the ideology of childhood in the context of late nineteenth-century interrogations of selfhood and teleology. In particular, through an analysis of Sigmund Freud's seminal work in psychoanalysis, the conclusion posits that ideologies of childhood and selfhood are reformed once again in the aftermath of the twentieth century's Freudian revolution.

Ideologies are not genre-specific, so an analysis of the impact of precocity on the ideology of childhood requires an analysis of a range of the genres in which that ideology was produced. Consequently, as this overview suggests, this thesis analyses scientific and fictional discourses about precocious children in dialogue rather than in isolation. Likewise, although the generic features of children's literature are discussed insofar as a generic divide between it and ostensibly 'adult' literature informs or inhibits current analyses of the nineteenth-century ideology of childhood, the same methodology is applied to so-called children's texts as to adult and scientific texts. The question of teleology is central to my analysis of the mutually constructed ideologies of childhood and selfhood in the late nineteenth century. Narrative theory consequently provides a theoretical basis for my

[73] Beer, p. xviii.

analysis throughout, but this is deployed in conjunction with whichever other theoretical models best illuminate pertinent aspects of the texts in question.

Limitations

Many questions have necessarily been left unexplored in this analysis of precocity and the Victorian ideology of childhood. Precocious children of the working class are not discussed, for example, but there is a clear and class-based distinction between Paul Dombey's intellectual precocity and the more pragmatic, if more 'dismal [,] precocity of poverty' which Becky Sharp displays.[74] The particularities of that distinction, though only vaguely suggested by Becky's adult behaviour, are clear in the description of the little watercress girl in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). That this child is already a woman 'in thoughts and manner' points, if obscurely, to her probable fate when (if not before) she becomes a woman in body.[75]

Deborah Gorham's discussion of the assumptions about class which informed such discourse on childhood and sexuality in the Victorian period does not take into account the many medical studies of sexual precocity.[76] A study of sexual precocity in both literary and medical texts may complicate its association with working-class children, and may therefore problematize the assumptions about Victorian conceptions of middle-class childhood innocence which are made by a study which focuses exclusively on literary texts.

Male and female children are discussed in almost equal ratio in this thesis. This is coincidental, but the significance of gender in studies of nineteenth-century precocity is implicit in the difference between children of the same class like the little watercress girl and the Artful Dodger of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839), or Jane Eyre and Paul Dombey.[77] A study of the function of precocity in the related areas of gender and sexuality could inform the extent to which attempts to contain precocity within the bounds of working-class or female sexuality reinforces divisions between the upper and lower classes, and between male and female, which are threatened by Victorian reforms in labour, education, and women's rights. Such a study could situate the ideological separation of childhood and adulthood within other ideological and increasingly unstable nineteenth-century binaries.

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[74] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, ed. Peter Shillingsburg (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), p. 12.
[75] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (London, 1865), p. 157, <http://www.bl.uk>, last accessed 4 June 2016.
[76] Deborah Gorham, 'The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England', *Victorian Studies*, 21/3 (1978), 353-379.
[77] See Larry Wolff, '"The Boys are Pickpockets, and the Girl is a Prostitute": Gender and Juvenile Criminality in Early Victorian England from *Oliver Twist* to *London Labour*', *New Literary History*, 27/2 (1996), 227-249, on the gender of criminality in working-class Victorian England.

Race seems a particularly rich area for further research. Much research has been done into the role of the child and children's literature in the construction and consolidation of imperial ideology.[78] However, the widespread nineteenth-century theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny suggests that precocious children might raise the possibility of, or even embody, precocity in the infantilised races of Britain's colonies. Spencer, for example, uses the claim that 'the Australian has very small legs: thus reminding us of the chimpanzee and the gorilla', while 'in the European, the greater length and massiveness of the legs have become marked', to support the assumption that the European is at a later stage in a developmental evolutionary process.[79] The possibility that an Australian might display precociously European physical features would disturbs the basis of Spencer's idea of progressive evolution as much as, if not more than, precocious children themselves do.

The perceived precocity of indigenous peoples might also speak to the construction of imperial and other identities. In *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), for example, Darwin describes Australia as 'a rising infant'.[80] His paternalism suggests the presence of the 'thoughtless aboriginal' in his image of Australia: although the 'white man' is making it a 'new and splendid country', he shares with its 'primitive' inhabitants the position of child in Victorian discourse.[81] Darwin's remark suggests that Indigenous culture and Australia were mutually constructed through their metaphorical equivalence with the state of childhood in the Victorian imagination. This example indicates that productive research might be done into the effect of precocity in ideological constructions of imperialist identities which were problematically informed by the infantilised Indigenous peoples of colonised nations.

Within the constraints outlined, this thesis explores child study in the literature and mental science of the late nineteenth century, to argue that the Romantic association of childhood with innocence is problematized by its ideology of selfhood. The self became newly necessary after Darwin, and the collision of Romantic childhood with Romantic selfhood produces the peculiarly Victorian fascination with precocity. Precocity—the childhood expression of adult characteristics—precludes the previously innocent origins of an adult selfhood which it can nevertheless reflect, interrogate, and even be imagined to perfect. Through a comparative analysis of childhood in work by a disparate range of literary, scientific, and child-authors, this thesis argues that ideologies of childhood and

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[78] See, for example, M. Daphne Kutzer, *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books* (New York: Garland, 2000) and Don Randall, *Kipling's Imperial Boy: Adolescence and Cultural Hybridity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).
[79] Herbert Spencer, 'Progress: Its Law and Cause', in *Essays, Scientific, Political, and Speculative, Vol. 1* (New York: D. Appleton, 1904), 8-62, at p. 17.
[80] Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, ed. Janet Browne and Michael Neve (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 332.
[81] Darwin, *Beagle*, p. 324; p. 328.

selfhood are mutually reformed in the precocious self of Victorian literary and scientific child study.

Chapter One: Precocity and the Art of Self-Construction

One medical doctor of the Victorian period offers a succinct example of the rhetoric with which precocity was often vilified in nineteenth-century discourse. For George King, '[m]ental precocity is generally a symptom of disease; and hence those who exhibit it frequently die young.'[1] King's remark suggests that precocious children were doomed to premature death, but that, unlike the innocent children who shared their fate, they were more to be blamed than pitied for it. Such 'strident rhetoric' was, as Kincaid suggests, 'widespread' in the nineteenth century.[2]

This chapter will analyse the significance of children who die young in two late nineteenth-century tales by Henry James, in dialogue with the wider discourse around precocity, ongoing in many periodicals of the era and summarised in Leonard Guthrie's *Contributions to the Study of Precocity* (1921). It will argue that children who exhibit precocity die young because that precocity is required, impossibly, to be innocent. More specifically, James's tales scrutinise the function of precocity as a problematic means through which the child can reflect a perfected adult self in nineteenth-century discourse. The tales thereby distil the contradictory ideology of innocence underlying this vilifying discourse about the precocious child.

The introduction to Guthrie's overview of the study of precocity suggests that the fears King articulates in 1855 were still prevalent at the end of the century. Child mortality in general was in secular decline, but, as Guthrie notes, '[n]o one doubts that many precocious children have died young'.[3] Consequently, precocity still 'has for the majority an evil significance' (p. 3).[4] Although Guthrie's objective is to examine the extent to which this is 'borne out by facts' (p. 3), he does so by noting that 'there is not sufficient evidence to show that precocity caused their early deaths' (p. 52). In other words, the mortality of precocity is still an area for further research at the turn of the twentieth century.

However, by adding that '*[n]ormal intellectual precocity may be defined as an early manifestation of mental development approaching the highest adult type—namely, that of genius*' (p. 4), Guthrie registers an association between precocity and genius which was also

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[1] George King, 'Education in Parochial Schools: Its Influence on Insanity and Mental Aberration', *Association Medical Journal*, 3/141 (1855), 855-857, at p. 856.
[2] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 120.
[3] Leonard Guthrie, *Contributions to the Study of Precocity in Children and The History of Neurology* (London: Eric G. Millar, 1921), p. 52. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses. The contents of this book were originally presented to The Royal College of Physicians as part of The Fitzpatrick Lectures on the History of Medicine, in 1907 and 1908. Both its original form and its subsequent posthumous publication testify to the long-lived fascination with childhood precocity in the medical profession.
[4] The word 'precocious' is still 'mildly derogatory' today ('precocious', *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2014), <http://www.oed.com>, last accessed 28 August 2016).

prevalent throughout the nineteenth century. Nelson observes that then, as now, 'childhood was an object of simultaneous adulation and obsessive anxiety', but by *defining* precocity as the early expression of genius, Guthrie points to the inseparability of the adulation and the anxiety in studies of precocious childhood.[5] His disquiet about precocity is predicated on the very exaltedness of its premature attributes.

Much has been written on the governess's pathology in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), but the tale also depicts in enduringly powerful form the pathology of precocious genius, and the uneasy fascination it produces.[6] In this respect, it can be productively compared with the earlier study of innocence, precocity, and pathology offered in James's 'The Author of Beltraffio' (1884). Because Miles, Flora, and their 1884 counterpart Dolcino each have what Guthrie might read as a precocious genius for goodness, that goodness is confusedly implicated in their potential corruption; as in Guthrie's *Contributions,* the 'evil significance' (p. 3) which these children embody is predicated on the untimeliness of their eulogised characteristics.[7] The ambivalent fascination which the narrators of both tales betray towards these children thus emblematises the wider discourse surrounding precocity as summarised in Guthrie's *Contributions.*

This comparative analysis of 'The Author of Beltraffio', *The Turn of the Screw*, and *Contributions to the Study of Precocity* will demonstrate that, through its displacement onto the precocious child, adulthood becomes pathological. By embodying the problematic self, the precocious child enables the imaginative resolution of that self in adulthood. However, James's tales also highlight that the precocious child who reflects the adult self is also required to be innocent of adult knowledge. By suggesting that this is an impossible demand, James's tales place culpability for the child's early death in the hands of the adult embodied in his narrators. More broadly, then, these tales illuminate the innocence which adult

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[5] Nelson, *Precocious Children*, p. 2.

[6] On the governess's pathology see, for example, Stanley Renner, 'Sexual Hysteria, Physiognomical Bogeymen, and the "Ghosts" in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 43/2 (1988), 175-194, William A. Scheick, 'A Medical Source for *The Turn of the Screw*', *Studies in American Fiction*, 19/2 (1991), 217-220, and Albaraq Mahbobah, 'Hysteria, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Reversal in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*', *Henry James Review*, 17/2 (1996), 149-161. T. J. Lustig has observed that 'Victorian writers endlessly elaborated' on the tendency of governesses in general to suffer with 'ill-health, discontent, nervousness, morbidity, hysteria, and insanity' (Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 151). See also Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp. 126-163 on governesses and the gendering of illness. Coveney has claimed that the text is 'the product of [the] seriously disordered sensibility' of James himself (Coveney, p. 210).

[7] The 'evil' in *The Turn of the Screw* is much more prominent than the anticipated corruption of Dolcino in 'The Author of Beltraffio'. This 'evil' produced some very unfavourable contemporary reviews of the former tale. See 'Early Reactions: 1898-1921', in Esch and Warren, pp, 149-160, for a selection. See also Robert Weisbuch, 'Henry James and the Idea of Evil', in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 102-119.

discourse demands of the precocious child, and ask whether such adulatory anxiety is accountable for that child's imagined fate.

1.1: Precocity, Innocence, and the Adult

Thomas J. Bontly observes that '[f]ew critics have asked why . . . we, the governess, Mrs Grose, and apparently even James himself . . . have associated [the children's] knowledge with some kind of sexual taboo' in *The Turn of the Screw*.[8] The implication that the children in *The Turn of the Screw* have a specifically sexual sort of precocity is nevertheless inescapable, and resonates with many medical studies of the period, in which precocity seems to *be* a sexual characteristic. The subject of F. J. Poynton's 'Precocious Development in a Boy, aged 8', for example, is the early development of a child's secondary sexual characteristics; in his title, Poynton has used the word 'precocious' to mean 'sexually precocious'.[9] The first definition and earliest use of 'precocious' provided in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are, moreover, in reference to plants which have flowered early, suggesting that Poynton's use of 'precocious' to mean 'sexually precocious', and critics' assumption that Miles and Flora have a specifically sexually precocious knowledge, are both consistent with the etymology of the word.[10]

However, sexual precocity is only one expression of what can more generally be understood as the early expression of attributes or abilities which are considered adult. The precocious development of secondary sexual characteristics may be a particularly obvious example, and one of particular concern in the nineteenth century, but the problem of precocity itself was much more general. Thus, although Guthrie seems to diverge from studies like Poynton's by defining precocity as the pathologically early expression of 'genius', rather than sexuality, he defines genius as the 'highest *adult* type' (p. 4, emphasis added). By defining genius as an adult characteristic, Guthrie makes it perform the same function as sexuality in other medical studies of precocity: it allows Guthrie to transmute the specific symptom but retain the general definition.

Likewise, as Adrian Poole argues, for the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* 'the figure of sexual experience becomes literalised as the possession of knowledge.'[11] Sexual

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[8] Thomas J. Bontly, 'Henry James's "General Vision of Evil" in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 9/4 (1969), 721-735, at p. 727.
[9] F. J. Poynton, 'Precocious Development in a Boy, aged 8', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 6 (March 5, 1913), xviii-xx. See also E. Cecil Williams, 'Notes on a Case of Precocious Development in a Boy, aged 6 years', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 6 (1913), 24-26. F. Wellesley Kendle, 'Case of Precocious Puberty in a Female Cretin', *BMJ* (Feb 4 1905), 246 is a study of female sexual precocity. See Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 137-138, on the concerns about the effect of female mental precocity on reproductive potential.
[10] 'precocious', *Oxford English Dictionary*.
[11] Adrian Poole, *Henry James* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 44.

knowledge is an instance of a more general knowledge, which is precocious because it is adult. Precocity is thus defined as the childhood expression of adult characteristics, whether those are the characteristics of sexuality, or of genius, or of knowledge.[12]

Furthermore, although precocious genius might seem preferable to precocious sexuality, it is no less problematic. In fact, Guthrie essentially understands precocity not as a childhood expression of genius, but as a childhood expression of the same pathology which, in adults, is evidence of genius. Just as Paul Dombey is '*stricken* with . . . precocious mood[s]', which are 'terrible' because they are 'old-fashioned', so precocity is *symptomatized*, in Guthrie's analysis, by adult characteristics, which are pathological because they are premature.[13]

This essentially aversive view is obscured, in Guthrie's work, in a description of that pathology which, because its temporality is unclear, implies that precocity might not only have the same symptoms as genius, but might also be simultaneous with it. Guthrie observes that 'precocity on the emotional side *is* always present in' artistic geniuses, which is to say that artistic geniuses '*have been* . . . notoriously unstable in character, unbalanced in mind, and swayed by every emotion and idea which they portray . . . prone to fits of wild elation and deep depression, childishly vain and exacting, selfish and faithless, unbridled in their appetites and desires, moral and physical cowards' (p. 58-59, emphases added). Whether genius *is* indicated in the present characteristics of the precocious child, or *has been* indicated in the past characteristics of the adult genius, is unclear. Emotional precocity and artistic genius are elided such that whether they co-exist only in the same person, or at the same *moment* in that person's life, is not established.[14]

However, a temporal difference between *having been* precocious and *now being* a genius is actually suggested, though obliquely. The emotionally precocious artistic genius is, among other qualities, described as '*childishly* vain' (p. 58, emphasis added). Unless Guthrie is guilty of an obvious tautology, the word 'childish' is an indication that the emotionally precocious artistic genius he describes is an adult. Far from dissociating childhood precocity from these characteristics however, the fact that Guthrie's subject has been an adult only dissociates precocity from the genius that legitimises it.

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[12] The same definition applies in an article which claims that precocious children are those 'born with a kind of spurious native experience of their own' (Anon., 'Precocity in Children', *Bow Bells: A Magazine of General Literature and Art for Family Reading*, 4/99 (Jun. 1866), 492). Precocity is here defined (and derided) as the childhood expression of the adult characteristic of 'experience'.

[13] Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 98, emphasis added.

[14] That the behaviour that signifies artistic genius is pathological is consistent with a long-held association between mental illness and creativity. See *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, ed. Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), on the expressions and implications of this association in literature and in medicine.

This is made inescapably clear in the assertion that '[a]ll the faults of character named may render the precocious child notorious in after life, but *without genius* they will not make him famous' (p. 59, emphasis added). In Guthrie's overview, precocity and genius share pathological signifiers, but the connection between them can only be established in retrospect. The adult-genius has invariably been precocious in childhood, but the precocious child does not always become a genius. The legitimacy of childhood precocity is therefore contingent on the adult-genius that might be its end result.

Many journalists of music in particular problematize even this consolatory prospect, by claiming that precocity almost by definition precludes genius. One writer argues that a 'wise education . . . would primarily be directed to avoiding the evil consequences of vanity and of a deadening self-consciousness', but instead, 'newspaper puffs and the nauseatingly indiscriminate praise of society blunt his feelings.'[15] The consequence of this 'wicked ill-treatment is the destruction of the genius of almost every such child'.[16] Another writer insists that '[i]nitial facility is often the most fatal bar to ultimate success.'[17] Once again, King is more succinct: 'attempts to produce a prodigy' will produce 'an idiot'.[18]

James Sully is more optimistic about the probability that precocity anticipates genius, but nevertheless implies, like Guthrie, that genius is the potential 'fruit' of a childhood that is otherwise pathological.[19] Sully asserts that 'precocity preponderates' in the childhood histories of adult geniuses in every field: 'the man of superb ability is precocious just because, having a finer brain to start with, he is raised above the average mental stature of his years.'[20] Those who 'gave no sign of their high destiny in their youth must accordingly be regarded as exceptions to the general rule'.[21] However, those who fail to reach the 'high destiny' implied by childhood precocity are 'like a tree that bears fruit too soon'.[22] Sully does not literalise his prognosis, but the same metaphor is more fully developed in an earlier article on precocity in *The Saturday Review*: although '[t]here are cases . . . in which the triumphs of youth and boyhood are but the perpetual harvest of intellectual fruit . . . there are none the less the slower growths of mind.'[23] For children with

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[15] Anon., 'Musically Precocious Children', *The Musical Standard*, 7/174 (1897), 285.
[16] Anon., 'Musically Precocious Children', p. 285.
[17] Anon., 'Precocious Talent', *Musical Times and Singing Circular, 1844-1903*, 26/505 (1885), 132-133, at p. 132.
[18] King, p. 856. See Shuttleworth. *Mind*, pp. 107-130, on contemporary debates about education and 'forcing'.
[19] James Sully, 'Genius and Precocity', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 19/112 (June 1886), 827-848, at p. 848.
[20] Sully, 'Genius', p. 843 and p. 848.
[21] Sully, 'Genius', p. 843.
[22] Sully, 'Genius', p. 848.
[23] Anon., 'Precocity', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 24/631 (1867), 689-690 at p. 690. This metaphor retains the sexual connotations of precocity even when the 'adult' characteristic under scrutiny is not sexuality.

this 'slower growth', '[t]he keen and delicate organisation which springs up to rapid life under the forcing-frame of culture is often too frail for the struggle of life.'[24] What Sully calls the 'tree that bears fruit too soon' has, in this analysis, an implicitly shorter lifespan than either his un-precocious peers, or the children who go on to become adult geniuses.[25]

Guthrie elaborates in less metaphorical terms on the prospects of precocious children who do not become geniuses:

> They develop every form of hysteria and neurasthenia. They spend their lives in seeking patent cures for exhaustion bred by passion, and shriek and rail against an inappreciative world. They sometimes end in monomania or perhaps in lunacy or suicide—or they swell the roll of cranks and faddists who burn to reform something and to punish somebody, and usually end in extinguishing themselves. (p. 62)

Thus, for many scientists of the period, precocity is non-pathological only if genius is its end result, and only once that end result is achieved.

'On the whole', then, 'the trend of opinion is against precocious children' in nineteenth-century discourse.[26] Only the attainment of adult-genius (or the failure to attain it), can, retrospectively, resolve the anxieties which accrue around the precocious child. The precocious child is thus a pathologically unresolved narrative in nineteenth-century medical analyses. The instability of adult selfhood is both encountered and imaginatively resolved in the narrative necessitated by that child.

The relationship between child and adult in Freudian psychoanalysis is clearly anticipated in this analysis of the child's function in adult self-construction. 'The Ratman' offers a succinct iteration of Freud's understanding of this relationship, and one which neatly echoes its Victorian ancestors. Although precocious children had what Guthrie calls an 'evil significance' (p. 3) in the nineteenth century, and one which, as I have shown, was particularly pertinent to that child's adulthood, the 'Ratman' 'expresses doubt . . . that all his evil impulses have their origin in childhood'.[27] Freud 'promise[s] to prove it to him in the course of the therapy'.[28] Freud is confident that the adult's problems can be resolved through a narrative in which the child is the origin, and the adult is the end.

The governess's compulsion to narrate her experience with the precocious children in her care in James's *The Turn of the Screw* can be read as a compulsion to resolve the same

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[24] See also the claim that 'precocious talent is like hot-house fruit, it lacks the hardiness and aroma of products grown more slowly' (Anon., 'Precocious Talent', p.133).
[25] For the author of the article in *Bow Bells*, by contrast, precocity does not lead to early death; it actually extends life, but this is, seemingly, a worse outcome: 'there is no life-preserver like the precocity of a narrow spirit and a cold heart' (p. 492).
[26] Anon., 'Is Genius Precocious?', *The Review of Reviews,* 29/172 (1904), 372.
[27] Sigmund Freud, 'Some Remarks on a Case of Obsessive-Compulsive Neurosis [The "Ratman"]', in *The 'Wolfman' and Other Cases,* ed. Adam Phillips, trans. Louise Adey Huish (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 123-202, at p. 148).
[28] Freud, 'The Ratman', p. 148.

narrative disease which the precocious child embodies in Guthrie's, and in Freud's, analyses.[29] However, as I will illustrate, by representing Miles and Flora specifically as prodigies of 'goodness', *The Turn of the Screw* equates precocity with the concept most often associated with childhood in the nineteenth century. By presenting precocity as a pathological form of innocence, James's tale indicates that the 'evil significance' (Guthrie, p. 3) which Guthrie attributes to precocity is, more accurately, the impossibility of the child who must embody both innocence and adult genius.

The text also anticipates Freud in making explicit the unacknowledged but unmistakeable autobiographical function of the child in Victorian medical analyses of precocity. Although the governess's narrative is ostensibly about her effort to establish whether the children are innocent or corrupt, it is more accurately about her effort to constitute her own self-image.[30] As such, whether the child is innocent or corrupt becomes a question of determining significance for the governess, but one which she herself creates the answer to. Displacing this authorship is the necessary illusion through which her selfhood can be constituted in, but not culpable for, a narrative which corrupts the innocent child.

The defining but disruptive significance of the image of the child for the image of the adult is clear from the start of *The Turn of the Screw*. Despite the governess's insistence that 'there could be no uneasiness in a connection with anything so beatific as the radiant image of my little girl', precisely this 'vision of [Flora's] angelic beauty had probably more than anything else to do with the restlessness that, before morning, made me several times rise and wander about my room' (p. 7). It is explicitly not Flora herself but the 'radiant image' of her created in the mind of her governess which generates both the uneasiness which the governess disavows, and the inconsistency of this disavowal with the restlessness she reports. An idea of Flora's precocious goodness is thus implicated in the governess's malaise, and in the symptomatic fragmentation of her narrative. The image of Flora creates a disturbed reflection of her narrator.[31]

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[29] As far back as 1977, Ralf Norrman 'hesitate[d] to add to the already extraordinarily rich crop of criticism' on *The Turn of the Screw* (Norrman, *Techniques of Ambiguity in the Fiction of Henry James* (Abo: Abo Ackademi, 1977), p. 152). The objective of this analysis is less to attempt to contribute something new to this wealth of criticism than to use the text as a distillation of the issues raised in contemporary medical studies of precocity.

[30] See Beth Newman, 'Getting Fixed: Feminine Identity and Scopic Crisis in *The Turn of the Screw*', in *New Casebooks:* The Turn of the Screw *and* What Maisie Knew, ed. Neil Cornwell and Maggie Malone (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 112-141, on self-construction through the eyes of others in *The Turn of the Screw.* See Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp 87-93, on the exploration of James's 'own emotional life' which *The Turn of the Screw* offers through its study of the role of ghosts in Freudian self-construction (Flatley, p. 92). The question of James's self-construction through ghostly memories is discussed in an analysis of his autobiographical work in Section Three of this thesis.

[31] Lustig makes a similar point through a comparison of *The Turn of the Screw* with *Jane Eyre*: although 'the governess tries, fails and abandons the attempt to become the adult Jane', Flora

As Shuttleworth suggests, the governess's 'self-definition' is more closely and 'complexly interrelated' with her construction of Miles.[32] Miles compounds the sense that his image is more accurately an image of the adult who creates it, and also intensifies the uneasiness and incoherence of that image. Miles first appears as a corrupt image in a letter from his school. Only the governess has access to its contents which, rather than disclose, she interprets, in unexpectedly adverse terms: for the governess, the letter 'can have but one meaning . . . That he's an injury to the others' (p. 10). Her next statement is, however, completely incongruous: 'though I had not yet seen the child', 'I found myself' repeating '*sarcastically*' the idea that Miles is an injury to other children (p. 11, emphasis added). The governess's notorious inconsistency and incoherence as a narrator is evident in this vacillation between roles as creator of and respondent to the letter's meaning. This ambivalent self-image is, moreover, produced by the uncertainty of what that letter means as it pertains to Miles. Again, the child's image is more accurately a disturbed image of the narrator.

As Marius Bewley suggests, the 'one meaning' the governess reads in the letter, and her immediate rejection of that meaning, are both 'gratuitous contributions of her own' which, despite their incongruity, 'have an insidious look of plausibility about them'.[33] The plausibility of these contributions emerges, in part, from the governess's disavowal of their authorship. She suggests that 'my very fears made me jump to the absurdity of the idea' (p. 11) of Miles's corruption. By acknowledging the existence of fears which she purports to disavow, the governess has implied that these fears are based on something other than, or more authoritative than, her own authority. She sustains the image of the evil child, but locates its authorship elsewhere.

The illiterate housekeeper Mrs Grose is implicated in this authorship first.[34] The governess implies that her 'curiosity' to see Miles, which 'was to deepen almost to pain', was 'produced' by Mrs Grose who is, moreover, 'aware, I could judge, of what *she had produced in me*' (p. 11, emphasis added). However, when the governess promptly covers Flora 'with kisses in which there was a sob of atonement' (p. 11), she registers that by making Mrs Grose the author, she has renounced her own authority.

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performs 'a plausible and relatively undistorted version of the young Jane's career' by being locked up and eventually sent away (p. 143). By thus becoming a version of the very image—of Jane Eyre—in which the governess attempts to construct her *self*-image, Flora becomes a reflection of her governess which threatens that self-image.

[32] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 219.

[33] Marius Bewley, *The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James, and Some Other American Writers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), p. 103.

[34] See Stuart Burrows, 'The Place of a Servant in the Scale', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 63/1 (2008), 73-103 on servants in *The Turn of the Screw* and other fiction by James from the same period.

Mrs Grose's authority is sustained despite the governess's attempts to reclaim it by atoning for its associated guilt. Mrs Grose answers the governess's questions about Miles's history with a 'brevity . . . that struck me as ambiguous' (p. 12). What Miles is (or is not) guilty of is not articulated and, as John Carlos Rowe argues, '[t]he very ambiguity of [this] secret may be considered a strategy that initiates the sort of interpretative activities that will transfer its authorship to others, especially those whom it would rule.'[35] If Mrs Grose has 'produced' an idea that Miles is corrupt, it is because such interpretive authorship is necessitated by the governess's secrecy about the contents of the letter, but if the governess has produced the same idea, it is because the authors of the letter from Miles's school 'go into no particulars' (p. 10) about his crime, and because Mrs Grose is equally ambiguous about his history. By being as ambiguous as the governess, Mrs Grose becomes another author of Miles's (potential) evil, despite the governess's efforts to retain all such authority for herself.

As this suggests, uncertainty about the source or authorship of Miles's corrupted image emerges from uncertainty about the substance or absence of his corruption. Mrs Grose's ambiguity might be a secrecy which conceals corruption, but equally might be the absence of any such secret: what Joseph J. Firebaugh calls Miles's 'nameless evil' is evil because it is nameless, and although it is the teller's secrecy which compels the auditor's interpretative activity, it is only through that interpretation that Miles's image is 'evil'.[36] Those who protect Miles's innocence by remaining silent paradoxically narrate its corruption by inviting interpretation, but this secrecy about the substance of Miles's evil transfers its authorship from the secretive teller to her interpreting auditor.

Responsibility for Miles's evil does not, of course, only fluctuate between the letter, the governess, and the housekeeper. In James's own words, it is exactly by omitting 'the offered example, the imputed vice, the cited act' that the reader's 'own imagination . . . will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars' of Miles's evil.[37] Compelled to interpret for herself the secret kept by other authors, the reader must assume responsibility for this secret so that, as one contemporary reviewer notes, by reading *The Turn of the Screw* 'one has been assisting in an outrage . . . helping to debauch.'[38] Consequently, as Shoshana Felman suggests, 'there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text.'[39] Every auditor of the governess's story, within and beyond the text, becomes an image of the narrator

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[35] John Carlos Rowe, 'The Use and Abuse of Uncertainty in *The Turn of the Screw*', in Cornwell and Malone, pp. 54-78, at p. 57.
[36] Joseph J. Firebaugh, 'Inadequacy in Eden: Knowledge and "The Turn of the Screw"', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3/1 (1957), 57-63, at p. 60.
[37] Henry James, 'Preface to the New York Edition', in Esch and Warren, pp. 123-129, at p. 128.
[38] Anon., 'The Most Hopelessly Evil Story', in Esch and Warren, 156.
[39] Shoshana Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', *Yale French Studies*, 55/56 (1977), 94-207, at p. 97.

herself and, therefore, a disturbed and incoherent reflection of the child whose innocence or corruption she and we narrate. The reader, paradoxically, becomes the author of the absent child's corruption.

As Rowe suggests, 'the radically ambiguous secret . . . prompts those who "read" its truth to assume responsibility for it.'[40] The listener must assume responsibility for whatever 'truth' she interprets from the narrative. Of course, the child himself is one of the governess's audience. When asked what she will say of the letter 'to the boy himself', the governess insists '[n]othing at all' (p. 13). Rowe's analysis suggests that such secrecy should be particularly problematic when it displaces authorship and responsibility from the adult to the supposedly innocent child, but by keeping the letter secret from Miles—by transferring interpretive power onto the child—the governess seems to have established his innocence. The 'great glow of freshness, the . . . positive fragrance of purity' (p. 13) which surround Miles suggest that his innocence is a tangible, verifiable certainty.

Miles is so utterly innocent that he seems to know 'nothing in the world but love' (p. 13), and this absolute innocence implicitly makes it impossible for Miles to read any 'truth' less innocent than himself. Indeed, innocent not only of the contents of letter but of its existence, Miles is seemingly unable to read anything at all. Once power is displaced onto the innocent child, the secret becomes as innocent as his reading of it. As Miles is unable to read it, the secret, ostensibly, no longer exists.

1.2: Innocence and Narrative

For Miles to be so entirely innocent that there is no secret at all, he must be without any experience whatsoever. The erasure of the secret is contingent on the erasure of Miles's story. Consequently, the governess suggests that he has 'nothing to call even an infinitesimal history'; he 'struck me as beginning anew each day' (p. 19). The innocent child has no past, but moreover, he has no future; 'the only form that in my fancy the after-years could take for them was that of a romantic, a really royal extension of the garden and the park' in which childhood is 'fenced about and ordered and arranged' (p. 14). The children have no beginning and no end; childhood is a static image, not a narratable process.

In 'The Author of Beltraffio' James represents the only possible conclusion to childhood when the idea of innocence has primacy over the inevitability of narrative. This tale features an 'extraordinarily beautiful' child, with 'the eyes, the hair, the smile of innocence'.[41] Like Miles's, Dolcino's innocence is expressed in his very physicality and is

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[40] Rowe, p. 57.
[41] James, 'The Author of Beltraffio', in *Henry James: The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Penguin, 1986), 57-112, at p. 64. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses.

therefore a verifiable—indeed, an irrefutable—fact. However, Dolcino's innocence is immediately associated with a 'more than mortal bloom . . . too fine and pure for the breath of this world' (p. 64). Dolcino's innocence is inseparable from his death. Miles and Flora thus share with Dolcino 'the particular infant charm' which, as Lucy Gray, Little Nell, Paul Dombey, and so many others testify, is 'as good as a death warrant' (p. 64) in nineteenth-century literature.

Innocence is a death warrant in 'The Author of Beltraffio' particularly, even literally, because of the same separation of childhood and narrative which the governess enforces in *The Turn of the Screw*. This separation is enacted in the tension between Dolcino's parents; his father, Mark Ambient, is the eponymous author of 'Beltraffio', and his mother, Beatrice, 'doesn't like his [Mark's] ideas. She doesn't like them for the child. She thinks them undesirable' (p. 80). As the reiterated plural—she thinks '*them*' undesirable, and, later, 'she was afraid of *these things* for the child'—suggests, it is not the father himself, but the father as an author, and the ideas, writings, and 'pernicious' (p. 84) influence he introduces, from whom and from which Beatrice wishes to protect her child.

In 'The Art of Fiction', published in the same year as 'The Author of Beltraffio', James argues that 'Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints.'[42] Beatrice's 'dread of [Mark's] influence' (p. 84) is, then, a dread of that upon which Art—of which narrative fiction is the specific form explored in both essay and short story—lives. Beatrice's fear of the author's influence is more particularly her fear of Art (in narrative form) coming to life in her son, and this fear compels her to enforce a separation between Dolcino and narrative as embodied by his father.

As Beatrice intensifies her efforts to exclude narrative from her child's life, the impression of his innocence and associated death also intensifies. Soon after his mother first takes him away from his father's care, Dolcino becomes 'rather unwell—a little feverish' (p. 79). Later, while clutched in his mother's arms, and 'rather white' because of his worsening illness, he is, nevertheless, 'even more beautiful than the day before' (p. 96). Thus, as Frank Kermode observes, Dolcino has a 'dangerously Paterian air in [the narrator's] account of him'.[43] An image of non-narrative, of impending death, and of 'beautiful' 'white' (p. 96) innocence, Dolcino is simultaneously protected from narrative and thus from corruption, and confined to innocence and therefore to death.

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[42] James 'The Art of Fiction (1884)', in James, *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), 186-206, at p. 187.

[43] Frank Kermode, 'Introduction', in James, *The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories*, ed. Kermode (London: Penguin, 2007), 7-30, at p. 14. See Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture*, pp. 13-60, on the role of the child in Walter Pater's aesthetics.

Literalising this association between innocence, the separation of childhood from narrative, and death, Beatrice is reading 'the proof-sheets of [Mark's] new book' (p. 103) while she watches over Dolcino on what becomes his deathbed. The question of 'what change could have taken place in [Dolcino's health] . . . that would justify Beatrice in denying' the doctor access to the child is implicitly answered by the image 'of her sitting there in the sick-chamber in the still hours of the night . . . turning and turning those pages of genius and wrestling with their magical influence' (p. 107); the change has not been in Dolcino's health but in his mother's mind. As Mark's sister, Miss Ambient, states, '[t]he book gave [Beatrice] a horror; she determined to rescue [Dolcino]—to prevent him from ever being touched' (p. 110). Narrative is the horror from which Dolcino's innocence must be protected. His innocence is therefore what necessitates his death.

The child's 'last half-hour', during which 'Beatrice had had a revulsion . . . [and] would now give heaven and earth to save the child' (p. 110-111) is consequently little more than a device to sustain suspense. Mark Ambient's frantic journey for the doctor is, inevitably, 'too late' (p. 109). Equally inevitable, 'his adored son was more exquisitely beautiful in death than he had been in life' (p. 111). Dolcino has become the consummate image of innocence because that innocence is eternal, untainted by the possibility of narration and, therefore, the possibility of corruption.

Beatrice's insistence on Dolcino's innocence culminates in infanticide as the only way to remove the conditions under which the narrative corruption of her child is possible. Beatrice's project in 'The Author of Beltraffio' thus coincides, paradoxically, with the novelist's project as D. A. Miller understands it. If, as Miller argues, 'the novelist's implied ambition extends beyond resolving the particular issues of the story at hand to removing the very conditions under which a story is possible', Beatrice paradoxically performs the role of novelist in her efforts to eliminate narrative.[44]

Beatrice thus indicates that Dolcino's innocence actually necessitates the authorship which might corrupt it. The corruptive necessity of authorship is more obviously suggested in the figure and ambition of the story's anonymous narrator. Dolcino's (facial) 'expression' as he looks at the narrator is taken as a silent expression of his 'desire to say something to me' (p. 98). As Ohi argues, the narrator's insistence on Dolcino's innocence 'renders [the child] mute', but also 'all but exhorts speech on its behalf'.[45] Dolcino's innocence compels a silence which either necessitates its preservation through his mother's infanticidal plot, or, as the only alternative, exhorts the narrator's efforts to interpret that now-signifying silence.

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[44] D. A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. x.
[45] Kevin Ohi, '"The Author of Beltraffio": The Exquisite Boy and Henry James's Equivocal Aestheticism', *ELH*, 72/3 (2005), 747-767 at p. 753.

For Ohi, moreover, Dolcino's 'expression' 'renders uncertain the source of meaning', by registering a conflict between Dolcino's 'desire to signify . . . [and] the interpreting gaze and its desire to read'.[46] The very silence compelled by the child's innocence becomes a signifying act and, as such, renders the innocent child as, potentially, a precocious source of authorship. In other words, the idea of innocence not only produces the interpretive narratives of Beatrice and the narrator; it also produces the possibility of the child's precocious authorship of another such narrative. If, as Rowe suggests, narrative secrecy is a disguise for, through displacement of, authorial power, Dolcino's innocence contains its own corruption, in the disguise of his secretive, signifying, precocious silence.

The same possibility intrudes on the governess's 'garden' in *The Turn of the Screw.* By insisting that Miles knows 'nothing in the world but love', and that she will therefore tell him '[n]othing at all' (p. 13) that might change this innocent state, the governess both interprets Miles's silence as innocence, and preserves that innocence by maintaining her own silence. This silence is the essential condition for the innocence which she, like Beatrice, wishes to preserve, but it is also the characteristic condition of secrecy which she, like the narrator of 'The Author of Beltraffio', wishes to interpret.

James's tales thus suggest that late nineteenth-century childhood is a site for such contradictory responses as Nelson describes because innocence both exhorts and refutes the child's authority to narrate and to interpret. Ohi asserts that '[i]nnocence makes all children prodigies', but innocence is also what pathologises that precocity.[47] Precocity is the emblem of the synchronicity of innocence with what Guthrie presents as its associated pathology, and James identifies as its concomitant corruption. Precocity thus requires a story of innocence which will both establish and exorcise its corruption.

Tellingly, therefore, almost immediately after ordering and arranging the children into an image of unnarratable innocence, the governess sees Peter Quint for the first time. More precisely, as she describes it, 'my imagination had, in a flash, turned real' (p. 15); the counterpart to innocence turns real, and corruption materialises. The status of these figures has been the subject of debate since Edna Kenton first introduced the possibility that they were not ghosts at all, but the hallucinations of the governess's disturbed mind.[48]

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[46] Ohi, 'Beltraffio', p. 756.
[47] Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture*, p. 136.
[48] Edna Kenton, 'Henry James to the Ruminant Reader: *The Turn of the Screw*', in Esch and Warren, pp. 169-170. This is the first of what are now called Freudian readings of *The Turn of the Screw.* Edmund Wilson's 'The Ambiguity of Henry James', in Esch and Warren, pp. 170-173, is perhaps the best known of these readings. Robert Heilman is an early respondent on the side of the ghosts: in 'The Freudian Reading of *The Turn of The Screw*', *Modern Language Notes,* 62/7 (1947), 433-445, Heilman claims that Mrs Grose's ability to recognise Peter Quint from the governess's description is evidence that she has not hallucinated him. However, Renner uses the same episode to corroborate the Freudian thesis: Renner suggests that the governess's description is merely that of the sexual predator

However, when Kenton uses the observation that Miss Jessel first appears 'not to the charming little Flora, but, behind Flora and facing the governess' to insist as a 'large matter of literal fact' that it is the governess who has created these ghosts, she overlooks their necessary association with the children.[49] Miss Jessel appears behind Flora, Peter Quint appears 'at the very top of the tower to which, on that first morning, little Flora had conducted me' (p. 15), and both appear only after the governess has imposed on the children the 'charm of stillness' (p. 14), or seeming stasis of innocence.

The children's innocence both produces and is represented by its corruption in the figures of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, so that to ask whether these figures are hallucinations or visitations is to ask whether the children are only *imagined* to be corrupt by the hallucinating governess, or actually *are* corrupt. As the abundant debate should indicate, this question is impossible to answer, but the answer is, as John H. Pearson asserts, 'ultimately irrelevant'.[50] The impossibility of determining whether they are hallucinations or ghosts emblematises the impossibility of determining whether innocence is actually, or only potentially, corrupted.

Thus, as Ronald Schleifer suggests, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel make the children's '"unnatural" goodness, their uncanny Otherness, humanly and verbally, if supernaturally, comprehensible'.[51] Quint and Miss Jessel function not only as the source to which the governess, Mrs Grose, or any other reader, can attribute the children's corruption. They also represent how that corruption is imagined, which is, specifically, through the children's '"unnatural" goodness', through their innocence.[52] The children's silence, though it must ultimately signify *either* corruption or innocence, paradoxically signifies *both* until its ultimate meaning can be established, and the ghosts embody this paradox in their contradictory presence-in-absence.

The governess desires to establish which of the two incompatible interpretations of the children's silence is true but if, as Peter Brooks argues, '[d]esire is always there at the start of a narrative . . . such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun', this is an impossible desire.[53] Because of her desire to interpret innocence, the governess necessitates narrative: movement must be created, or, in her terms, Miles and

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as he was imagined at the time. This is an 'eminently logical, quite unsupernatural' explanation for what are, then, the governess's hallucinations (Renner, p. 176).

[49] Kenton, p. 170.

[50] John H. Pearson, 'Repetition and Subversion in *The Turn of the Screw*', in Cornwell and Malone, pp. 79-99, at p. 83.

[51] Ronald Schleifer, 'The Trap of the Imagination: The Gothic Tradition, Fiction and *The Turn of the Screw*', in Cornwell and Malone, pp. 19-41, at p. 38.

[52] Schleifer, p. 38.

[53] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 38. The lengthy debate about whether Quint and Miss Jessel are ghosts or hallucinations suggests that the governess is not alone in this desire.

Flora must leave the 'garden'. Innocence and corruption in James's text thus equate with precocity and genius in Guthrie's. Just as both precocity and genius are signified by pathology, and can only be differentiated by the adulthood which is the end to the childhood process of growing up, so both innocence and corruption are signified by silence, and can only be differentiated by a narrative which, as will be argued, ends not in the innocent child but in the adult self.

1.3: The Art of Self-Construction

'The Author of Beltraffio' literalises the impossibility of the precocious child in a narrative of adult self-construction, by literalising the connection between the child's perfect innocence and the adult's perfect Art. Through death, Dolcino achieves an innocence which, as the narrator shows, is otherwise potentially corrupted but is also actually *corruptive* because it is potentially, precociously signifying. Dolcino's corruptive effect on adult Art is clearly recognised by his father: in contrast to his wife, Mark Ambient 'hoped Dolcino would read all his works—when he was twenty', not because to read them sooner might be 'bad for' the child, but because it would be 'very bad . . . for the poor dear old novel itself' (p. 90).[54] Although both parents wish to prevent Dolcino from reading his father's writing, his mother wishes to protect the child, his father, curiously, to protect the writing.

Viola Hopkins Winner argues that this implicates Mark in his son's death: 'a concomitant of his artistic temperament . . . is a detachment from "real" life as well as a passivity in his role as a husband and father' and this passivity, when, for example, he should have insisted on allowing the doctor to see Dolcino, precipitates the child's death.[55] However, as I will demonstrate, Mark's artistic philosophy actively enforces a separation between Art (in the form of writing) and life (in the form of Dolcino). While this philosophic separation may not implicate Mark in Dolcino's death as directly as his real-life passivity has, the idea of Art which it encapsulates mirrors Beatrice's idea of innocence, and is consequently equally problematic. Mark's 'artistic temperament' may lead him passively to condone infanticide; his artistic philosophy leads to an active, if conceptual, compulsion to sacrifice the child to Art.[56]

In 'The Author of Beltraffio', Art is to the artist what the child is to the mother; pure, innocent, and vulnerable to corruption. This correspondence between Art and the child

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[54] See James, 'The Future of the Novel (1899)', in Gard, pp. 335-345, especially p. 336, on James's own comparable views of the effect, on the 'poor' novel, of 'making readers of women and of the very young' (James, 'Future', p. 336).

[55] Viola Hopkins Winner, 'The Artist and the Man in "The Author of Beltraffio"', *PMLA*, 83/1 (1968), 102-108, at p. 108. See Mary P. Freier, 'The Story of "The Author of Beltraffio"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 24/3 (1987), 308-309 on the role of Dolcino's aunt, Gwendolen Ambient, in apportioning responsibility for his death.

[56] Hopkins Winner, p. 108.

is implied in the narrator's observation that Dolcino is 'like some perfect little work of art' (p. 71). Mark's response—'don't call him that, or you'll—you'll . . . You'll make his little future very difficult' (p. 71)—anticipates the fatal implications of the correspondence. Dolcino's death is necessitated as much by Mark's idea of art as by Beatrice's idea of innocence.

Mark claims that the objective of his Art is not 'Life herself' (p. 88) but 'the impression of life itself' (p. 87), a 'purest distillation of the actual' (p. 87) which 'catch[es] her peculiar trick' (pp. 88).[57] Pure art culminates not in the perfect signification of Life itself, but in the perfection of its own constitution. Moreover, for Mark, 'all life [is] plastic material' (p. 89) and therefore subject to the distilling powers of the artist. In other words, Mark sees 'all life' (p. 89) as material to be purified by the artist, and Art ideally as pure, free of any trace of the material—object or human subject—from which it is distilled.[58]

Consequently, when the narrator observes to Mark that Dolcino is 'like some perfect little work of art' (p. 71), he points to what James Scoggins argues is the main conflict in the story; 'the conflict within Ambient himself between the demands of an aesthetic vision and approach to life and the demands on a man in the world not ordered according to aesthetic doctrine'.[59] For Dolcino to be a perfect work of art, his life must be distilled into artistic form and, as such, cannot be in the process of being lived, an aesthetic imperative which obviously conflicts with Mark's fatherly duties and feelings. Since Mark nevertheless has a 'desire to resolve his experience of life into a literary form' (p. 78) however, he continues to write and, as Lawrence Schehr observes, '[t]he more Mark Ambient writes, the more Dolcino whitens.'[60] The closer Mark gets to achieving his ideal of Art (in narrative form), the more removed Dolcino becomes from life.

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[57] This is remarkably similar to James's ambition as described by Dorothea Krook. According to Krook, 'the artist's overriding task' was, for James, 'to exhibit in the concrete, with the greatest possible completeness and consistency, as well as vividness and intensity, the particular world of appearances accessible to a particular consciousness under the specific conditions created for it by the artist' (Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1962), 399-400). See also James, 'The Real Thing' (1892), in *Tales of Henry James*, ed. Christof Wegelin (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 239-259.

[58] Of course, this is the narrator's account of Mark's world-view, not necessarily Mark's view itself. See José Antonio Álvarez Amorós, 'On Mark Ambient's Henpeckery in "The Author of Beltraffio," or, How to Keep Up Narratorial Preconceptions', *Journal of Narrative Theory,* 38/3 (2008), 317-341, on the presentation and significance of the narrator's aesthetic theory. See Donald Reiman, 'The Inevitable Imitation: The Narrator in "The Author of Beltraffio"', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 3/4 (1962), 503-509, on the activity of the narrator in promoting the purity of Mark's Art, and therefore on the culpability of the narrator in Dolcino's death.

[59] James Scoggins, '"The Author of Beltraffio': A Reappportionment of Guilt", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 5/2 (1963), 265-270, at p. 269.

[60] Lawrence R. Schehr, '"The Author of Beltraffio" as Theory', *Modern Language Notes,* 105/5 (1990), 992-1015, at p. 1009. 'Experience' of course extends beyond Dolcino; Mark's surroundings, sister, etc. are all 'aestheticised'.

If lapses in Mark's conception of artistic integrity are 'the highest social offence . . . [and] absolutely ought . . . to be capital' (p. 89), the lapse in artistry embodied in the imperfect work of art that is Dolcino can only *be* capital. Dolcino's status as 'plastic material' (p. 89) to his father necessitates that his future is not merely 'difficult' (p. 71); it is impossible. Schehr suggests that 'Dolcino is the progressive absence of mark(s), the increase of whiteness, and the anti-text' in 'The Author of Beltraffio'.[61] This is as much to purify Mark's Art as to reify Dolcino's innocence. Beatrice insists that the innocent child is entirely without mark; Mark insists that Art is entirely without life: like innocence, Art necessitates the 'progressive absence of' story from, or less euphemistically the death of, the child.[62]

The claim that *The Turn of the Screw* 'is essentially about telling and listening to stories, reading, and the circulation of manuscripts' suggests that, like the 'The Author of Beltraffio', it too is a study of the Art of fiction.[63] The conflict enacted by Mark and Beatrice, between the project of Art and the project of innocence, is internalised in the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*. Moreover, the event which fulfils both Mark's and Beatrice's ambitions anticipates the only possible resolution to the governess's otherwise irreconcilable roles. Dorothea Krook asks '[w]here is the moral necessity; where therefore the artistic inevitability [of Miles's death]?'[64] The answer is that only death can establish Miles's innocence, and so only it can represent the aesthetic culmination (and vindication) of the narrator's perfected but otherwise corruptive and corrupted art.

Since this narrator's art is specifically the art of self-construction, however, Miles's death is not enough. Although that death might fulfil the governess's ambition to prove and to preserve his innocence, she has another ambition which must be fulfilled first. She simultaneously both insists, and demands proof to verify, that the children can see the ghosts—that they are corrupt. George E. Haggerty argues that this is necessary because the governess is otherwise 'uneasy about her sanity'.[65] In fact, it is necessary because the children's secret, silent innocence is an uncertainty, which is therefore inconsistent with the governess's authority as narrator. The children must see what the governess sees to preserve a self-image which might, as Haggerty suggests, otherwise be mad, but this is indicative of

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[61] Schehr, p. 1009.
[62] Schehr, p. 1009.
[63] Gert Buelens and Celia Aijmer, 'The Sense of the Past: History and Historical Criticism', in *Henry James Studies*, ed. Peter Rawlings (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 192-211, at p. 206. Felman's influential work has situated the extensive debate about the status of the ghosts in this tale within an analysis of this central concern with reading, telling, and interpretation.
[64] Krook, p. 122.
[65] George E. Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 132. Marcus Klein observes, comparably, that '[a]s a governess, . . . she will be confronted with the necessity to assert authority over young children who are her social superiors' and that, to counter this inherent weakness in her authority, 'she may fabricate her own narrative of events' (Klein, 'Convention and Chaos in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Hudson Review*, 59/4 (2007), 595-613, at p. 603).

the more fundamental susceptibility of that self-image to interpretation and narration by others. This susceptibility can be addressed only through the certainty of the children's corruption.

As this suggests, the governess's self-image as a dutiful governess is predicated on a more fundamental idea of herself as the author of that image. Indeed, she characterises herself in terms which qualify her more for the latter than for the former role. She has, first, a 'dreadful liability to impressions' (p. 24), a capacity to see what the non-artist, Mrs Grose, cannot. This liability is, moreover, met not with scepticism by the housekeeper, but with the 'deference' (p. 24) which is the mark of the reader's submission to narrative authority. What the governess describes as the 'portentous clearness' through which she can insist that 'I know, I know, I know' validates this authority and facilitates her 'exaltation' (p. 25) as a narrative artist.

Since the governess cannot possibly know that the children are innocent, that innocence cannot be allowed to endure in her narrative. In a passage which typifies the nature of innocence in *The Turn of the Screw*, the children's corruption becomes a certainty after an accidental vagueness in the governess's language, which functions as an accidental statement of the perpetual, intolerable uncertainty of their innocence. Mrs Grose asks 'What if *he* [Miles] should see him [Peter Quint]?', to which the governess answers, 'Little Miles? That's what he wants!' (p. 25). The ambiguity of reference in the governess's pronoun here means that the housekeeper, and, indeed, the reader, must ask if the governess is referring to '[t]he child?' (p. 25). She immediately denounces the possibility, but it soon 'strike[s]' her 'that my pupils have never mentioned . . . [t]he time they were with him, and his name, his presence, his history, in any way. They've never alluded to it' (p. 25). Her own ambiguous pronoun points to the uncertainty both of Miles's innocence, and of her own control over that uncertainty. This debilitating doubt is then promptly converted to the only conviction which the governess can possibly have: 'Miles would remember – Miles would know' (p. 25). The governess is convinced of Miles's corruption because his innocence undermines her authority, as is made insistently clear in the troublesome interpretative openness of her words prior to that conviction.

J. Hillis Miller argues, moreover, that James's ghost stories 'bring into the open the way all works of fiction that are "believed in" by the reader work their magic on him or her by using language to "raise the ghosts" of the characters'.[66] Comparably, the proof of the governess's narrative magic is that her ghost story is believed in by her audience. In order to

[66] J. Hillis Miller, 'The "Quasi-Turn-of-the-Screw Effect": How to Raise a Ghost with Words', *Oxford Literary Review*, 25/1 (2003), 121-137, at p. 124.

consolidate her self-image as an authoritative artist, Miles and Flora must see the ghosts she has raised.

Therefore, of course, the children's suspect innocence 'didn't last as suspense—it was superseded by horrible proofs' (p. 27). The governess's 'certitude of . . . the inconceivable communion' (p. 33) between the children and the ghosts is attained when she notices 'the perceptible increase of movement, the greater intensity of play, the singing, the gabbling of nonsense and the invitation to romp' which indicate, to her, Flora's efforts 'to divert my attention' (p. 34) from the ghost of Miss Jessel. The 'horrible proofs' of the children's corruption are nothing more than an alternative reading of precisely the silence which previously signified their innocence. The governess's interpretation is presented as incontrovertible proof of this corruption, and therefore becomes an assertion of her authority over the meaning of the children's signifying acts. Their corruption establishes the veracity of the suspicions introduced by the governess's language. An act of interpretation establishes the narrator's authority, but only by closing down the interpretive potential of silence—by foreclosing the possibility of innocence.[67]

However, the fact that, as she expresses it, '[t]hey *know* . . . they know, they know' (p. 29) echoes her own prior claim, 'I know, I know, I know' (p. 25). Although it asserts narrative authority, the children's corruption also replicates the claim to that authority. This is reiterated in the recurrent parallels the governess sees between herself and the children. She notes, for example, that 'if it occurred to me that I might occasionally excite suspicion by the little outbreaks of my sharper passion for them, so too I remember asking if I mightn't see a queerness in the traceable increase of their own demonstrations' (p. 37), and later, more literally, that 'I wanted to get [to the church] before the question between us opened up further; I *reflected* hungrily that he [Miles] would have for more than an hour to be silent' (p. 54, emphasis added).[68]

Since, as demonstrated above, the children are identified with Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, they also point to the reflection of the governess herself which the ghosts represent.[69] Thus, as E. Duncan Aswell observes, 'every one of the visitations echoes or foreshadows the specific behaviour of the governess.'[70] Through this series of identifications, *The Turn of the*

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[67] See Lustig, p.112.

[68] Mahbobah claims that Flora 'suffers a fit of hysteria' at the end of the text (Mahbobah, p. 152). His argument that the governess is a study of hysteria therefore supports the claim that Flora is a reflection of the governess.

[69] As Weisbuch notes, 'it seems almost shameful to rehearse' again the observation that 'every sighting of the ghosts includes a potentially sexual implication' (p. 107). This is, of course, consistent with the sexual connotations of precocity discussed above, but does not account for the full significance of precocity either in James's tale or in contemporaneous discourse.

[70] E. Duncan Aswell, 'Reflections of a Governess: Image and Distortion in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 23/1 (1968), 49-63, at p. 50. Indeed, as Flatley has observed, the governess is 'a bit like a ghost' from the start of the text, in that her dubious authority over the

Screw represents the precocious child as a ghostly reflection of the adult. The governess's signifying and interpretive silence is reflected by the children, so that their mutual silence becomes proof of the children's corruption, and corruptive of the governess's Art. The children's precocious knowledge is therefore precisely synchronous with their innocence, in time and in effect: it both exhorts and refutes, establishes and challenges, the narrator's authority.

The governess presents her ultimate response to the corrupted, corrupting child as what Shuttleworth describes as 'a classic case of demonic dispossession'.[71] Through her exorcism of the ghost of corruption which possesses Miles, the child's innocence can be reinstated by the heroic governess, and the narrator's art can achieve aesthetic culmination. By vindicating her fears in the act which exorcises them, the governess-narrator can dispossess the narrative and the child of their corruption to produce what Weisbuch calls 'a final, self-confirming, self-advertising narrative told to sustain a self's sense of worth'.[72] Insofar as this narrative is conclusive, it suggests that, by perfecting her Art, the governess can create an image of the perfected innocence of the child through whom she constructs her self-image.

What John J. Allen describes as the governess's 'consciousness of triumph' thus, unsettlingly, emerges when Miles finally conforms to the image she demands.[73] Inevitably, and as anticipated in 'The Author of Beltraffio', this image requires that 'his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped' (p. 85). Death is the only condition in which the child cannot present an alternative to the governess's authority. Through infanticidal dispossession, the governess has attained perfection by restoring the innocence of the child. Through the same act, the narrator has attained perfection by exorcising that child's corruptive influence on her narrative authority. Dispossessed of corrupting ghosts, and of narrative authority, the dead child represents the attainment of perfect innocence, and of perfect art. The governess and the narrator are supposedly reflected in perfected form in this dead child.

However, since Muriel West can claim that '[i]n the final section of *The Turn of the Screw* the governess indulges in an exuberant debauch of violence that contributes to the sudden death of the little Miles', the image of the governess is clearly far from perfect, and, of course, her reliability as a narrator is precisely what is at stake on the fault line—whether

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socially superior children, and their uncle's orders that she is not to communicate with him, make her 'not fully *there*' in her position at Bly (Flatley, p. 96). See also Lustig, p.188-189, Poole, *Henry James*, p. 142, and Lisa G. Chinitz, 'Fairy Tale Turned Ghost Story: James's *The Turn of the Screw*', *Henry James Review*, 15/3 (1994), 264-285, p. 273-274.

[71] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 219.

[72] Weisbuch, p. 108.

[73] John J. Allen, 'The Governess and the Ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw*', *Henry James Review*, 1/1 (1979), 73-80, at p. 80.

the ghosts are real or hallucinated—along which critical debate has split since the 1930s.[74] Thus, as Weisbuch argues, in 'our final understanding' this tale is about 'the terms for living in a modern world where all comforting authority has been lost'.[75] The governess's compulsion for authoritative self-construction leads her to 'impose meaning on [this] recalcitrant world', or, more accurately, on the recalcitrantly precocious children in whose image she sees herself reflected.[76]

Consequently, *The Turn of the Screw* does not present the death of the child as a resolution to the problems presented by, and reflected in, the child. Death, to return to Miller, is a removal of the conditions under which a story is possible; it is not (or not necessarily) a resolution of that story. The dead child is not a self-confirming image of his narrator in *The Turn of the Screw*. Instead, as Felman notes, '*death* itself . . . moves the narrative chain forward.'[77] Just as the death of a previous narrator '*inaugurates* the manuscript's *displacements* and the process of the *substitution* of the narrators', so Miles's death has generated not a final self-image for the governess but the necessity to continue telling her story, even after her own death.[78]

The most insistent statement that death cannot remove the conditions under which a story is possible is made through the ghosts. By returning after death, and by embodying precisely the paradox which generates the narrative, the ghosts represent the indefinite potential of the child to threaten the purity of adult authority.[79] In *The Turn of the Screw*, death does not perform the narrative function ascribed to it by Benjamin. Instead, it registers the ghostly presence of the precocious child in the adult's self-image, and points toward what Freud influentially theorised as the disruptive effect of this child. Of course, *The Turn of the Screw* does not substantiate Freud's confidence that 'it is in the nature of things that the emotion [which causes the 'Ratman' his distress] is always overcome, usually while the work [of psychoanalysis] is in progress.'[80] In James's text, if the adult's self-image is constituted through the precocious child, that image must be subject to an indefinite process of re-telling.

Considered in light of the relationship between adult and child presented in the literary texts that precede it, Guthrie's *Contributions* reiterates the uneasy investment which, as James's tales show, adults make in the image of the child. Adulthood becomes

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[74] Muriel West, 'The Death of Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*', *PMLA*, 79/3 (1964), 283-288, at p. 288.
[75] Weisbuch, p. 111.
[76] Weisbuch, p. 111.
[77] Felman, p. 128.
[78] Felman, p. 128.
[79] See Kiyoon Jang, 'Governess as Ghostwriter: Unauthorised Authority and Uncanny Authorship in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*', *Henry James Review*, 28/1 (2007), 13-25, on the effect of the governess's ghost on authority in the text.
[80] Freud, 'Ratman', p. 142.

pathological when it is reflected in the precocity of the innocent child. In art, this pathology culminates in the death of the child, which ostensibly removes the conditions in which that problem exists and therefore, ostensibly, reflects an unproblematic adult self. In the real-life referent of scientific discourse, the same pathology is resolved by growing up, by a story which ends in adulthood (although, of course, many premature deaths themselves were attributed to, or rather presented as the culmination of, precocity in medical discourse as well). Adulthood is therefore an end to the narrative of the late nineteenth-century child, but an end which is, in James's work, provisional at best.

Romantic innocence is highly problematic in an era which required a concept of childhood progress toward adult-as-end. Precocity embodies the concept of the narratable child, but is incompatible with the innocent origins which the Romantic child offers for the adult self. The aesthetic death of the child, with which both Guthrie's and James's studies end, does not resolve the problem of the adult within the precocious child. Rather, it attempts to exorcise adulthood and to reassert innocence and, in its violence, does so with dubious success. The dead child does not perform a consolatory function in these texts, but nor does it represent an unambivalent source for a narrative of adult self-construction. Rather, these late nineteenth-century texts suggest that the only possible *finis* to such a narrative is the inadequate one offered in the image of the dead child.

Chapter Two: Selfhood in the Mind of the Precocious Child

James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) engages with the same ideas about childhood, innocence, precocity, and adult selfhood which lead to such problematic endings in 'The Author of Beltraffio' and *The Turn of the Screw*. In *What Maisie Knew*, however, James presents an alternative conceptualisation of innocence, and one which is compatible with, rather than corrupted by, the precocity of its child-protagonist, Maisie. Through this, James offers a potential resolution to the problematic conflict between an ideology of innocence and a necessity for precocity. The child in *What Maisie Knew* offers a Victorian resolution to the conflict between a static Romantic childhood and a narrative of Romantic selfhood.

During the same decades in which *What Maisie Knew*, 'The Author of Beltraffio', and *The Turn of the Screw* were published, many psychologists became increasingly dedicated to an effort to access and understand the child's mind. Just one month before the first issue of James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) appeared in *The New Review*, American psychologist G. Stanley Hall co-authored an innovative work on a seemingly esoteric subject. 'A Study of Dolls' (1896) presents scrupulously detailed statistical data on childhood doll-play, based on responses to a questionnaire distributed to over eight hundred parents and teachers.[1] Fellow psychologist James Sully shared Hall's interest in dolls: in 1898, he contributed an essay called 'Dollatry' to the *Contemporary Review*, and thereby publicised, to a wider audience than Hall and Ellis had reached, the unconventional methodology sometimes employed in the name of psychological research.

Sully's objective in publishing his research in the *Contemporary Review* was to justify this methodology, and thus to confer credibility on the newly emerging branch of psychology—known to its practitioners as Child Study—which he and Hall were pioneering in Britain and in America respectively. When Sully argues that 'if dolls could tell us what they are supposed, as confidants and confessors, to hear from the lips of their small devotees, they might throw more light on the nature of "the child's mind" than all the psychologists', he validates the study of doll-play as one method through which psychologists might access the mind of the child.[2]

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[1] Hall is most famous for his 1904 study, *Adolescence*, which '[e]very psychologist studying adolescents today knows' (Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, 'G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*: Brilliance and Nonsense', *History of Psychology*, 9/3 (2006), 186-197, at p. 186). He was a friend of Henry James's brother, William James. See Saul Rosenzweig, *Freud, Jung, and Hall the King-Maker: The Historic Expedition to America (1909)* (St. Louis: Rana House Press, 1992), 80-117, for a detailed account of their relationship. Hall's co-author, A. Caswell Ellis, was a recent PhD graduate and adjunct professor of pedagogy at the University of Texas. See 'Ellis, Alexander Caswell', *Handbook of Texas Online*, (Texas State Historical Association, June 2010), <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online>, last accessed 31 August 2016, for more information on Ellis.

[2] James Sully, 'Dollatry', *The Contemporary Review*, 75 (Jan. 1899), 58-72, at p. 58.

The very title of *What Maisie Knew* (1897) seems, as Poole observes, 'to make a promise' that it will provide similar access to the child's mind.[3] However, in its 'Preface', James notes that '[s]mall children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their at all producible vocabulary.'[4] This observation isolates what becomes the central representational and thematic problem of the text, and of the project it shares with contemporary Child Study.

For Glenn Clifton, this prefatory remark anticipates the novel's thematic and stylistic preoccupation with language, and with the disjunction between language and experience which is so central to *What Maisie Knew*. However, Clifton's analysis is inattentive to the significance of the small children to whom James refers. James's own study of childhood mental experience follows explorations of the same subject by many major nineteenth-century authors, and coincides both with the earliest years of the first Golden Age of children's literature and with the emergence of Child Study in work by Hall, Sully, and many others.[5] By specifying that small children are his subject, James plainly situates *What Maisie Knew* within a discourse about childhood which had become increasingly prominent in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

In the context of this burgeoning interest in the mind of the child, James's statement is not only about language in itself; it must be about language for the child. It is particularly the child's vision which language cannot translate; it is specifically what *Maisie* knows which is beyond what she has the terms to express. *What Maisie Knew* explores the disjunction between language and experience, as Clifton suggests, but it does so because it is a literary study of the child.

Such studies of childhood as James's *What Maisie Knew* and Sully's or Hall's psychological Child Study proliferated in response to the specific cultural and intellectual crisis initiated by Darwin's *The Origin of Species.* As Bowler argues, in the late nineteenth century growth was imagined to follow 'the pattern laid down by evolution, and since growth is progressive and goal-directed, there is an implication that evolution must share these characteristics'.[6] The child became a repository for selfhood as a newly emergent adult need in the late nineteenth century, when the child's growth, progress towards, and end in

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[3] Adrian Poole, 'Introduction', in James, *What Maisie Knew,* ed. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii-xxvi, at p. vii.
[4] James, 'Preface IX', p. 294.
[5] *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss* are two of the earliest literary studies of childhood mental experience. See Muriel G. Shine, *The Fictional Children of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), and Maeve Pearson, 'Re-exposing the Jamesian Child: The Paradox of Children's Privacy', *Henry James Review,* 28/2 (2007), 101-119, on children in other fiction by James throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Blackford discusses of the correlations between the emergence of Child Study and of experimental literary technique in the same period.
[6] Bowler, p. 85.

adulthood were of such significance in facilitating that era's 'eclipse of Darwinism' (though, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this eclipse was as problematic at the time as it is known to have been temporary now).[7]

As the previous chapter argues, childhood is a particularly apt forum for the exploration of selfhood because of the innocence it is supposed to embody, even if that innocence is problematically inconsistent with the late nineteenth-century compulsion to narrate the child. If selfhood as a substitute for the soul is represented by what Jacques Lacan calls the 'Ideal-I', it is always 'more constituent that constituted', because 'the dialectical syntheses by which [the subject] must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality' is only ever partially successful: selfhood is a constituent part of a never-quite constituted self.[8]

By identifying language—'*I*'—as that which inhibits this constituted self, Lacan suggests that the child might experience such an 'Ideal' self because she is outside language.[9] As Ohi argues, however, it is not the child herself, but the idea of innocence she represents, which 'serves to contain difference internal to language and subjectivity'.[10] That disjunction between language and experience described by Clifton is, in the late nineteenth century, often a more specific disjunction between language and selfhood, and one which the innocent child was imagined to resolve.

2.1 Child Study in Science and Literature

This function for the innocent child is implicit in the findings of much psychological Child Study: 'A Study of Dolls', for example, finds a child mind which is innocent in a specific and contextually significant way. Many responses to Hall and Ellis's survey describe '[d]iscussions with sceptical brothers, who assert that the doll is nothing but wood, rubber, wax, etc.'; these assertions 'are often met with a resentment as keen as that vented . . . upon those who assert cerebral, automatic or necessitarian theories of the soul'.[11] The cerebral theories of the soul referred to are those theories which, substantiated most influentially by the theory of Darwinian evolution, in fact questioned the very existence of the soul. That word, 'dollatry', which Sully coined in his study, is a more succinct

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[7] Julian Huxley, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), 22-28, qtd. in Bowler, p. 92.
[8] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 1-7, at p. 2.
[9] Lacan, p. 2.
[10] Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture*, p. 7.
[11] A. Caswell Ellis and G. Stanley Hall, 'A Study of Dolls', *Pedagogical Seminary*, 4/2 (1896), 129-175, at p. 136.

articulation of the observations made by Hall and Ellis. The now-idolatrous belief in the soul is resurrected, in newly validated form, in the mind of the child.

This association of the child's belief with religious belief suggests that Hall, Ellis, and Sully, among many others, conducted their research in response to the threatened loss of the soul in the post-Darwinian period. The breadth and intensity of interest in childhood in the final decades of the nineteenth century suggests that children represented an increasingly necessary complement to the purely scientific approach which had brought about this loss. The self as it is contained within the Victorian child mind (and expressed in, for example, her dollatry) might be a sufficient substitute for the outdated Christian soul. This child mind is not blankly innocent, according to Romantic ideology. It is, rather, precociously innocent, and thus responds to a Victorian need for a child who contains, but is not corrupted by, the adult which is the end to the story of its growth.

Situating James's novel in the context of contemporaneous Child Study indicates that what Maisie knows is in fact this innocent knowledge of self which it was the project of Child Study, and of countless studies of childhood in literature and in science, to access. Indeed, the issue of *The New Review* in which the first instalment of *What Maisie Knew* was published featured an essay which is suggestive of this context. In 'Contemporary Human Gods', Frederick Boyle suggests that '[s]tudents of primitive man contend that he was unable to distinguish the nature of a deity from that of human kind', thus making the same association between the 'primitive' and (certain kinds of) religious belief as that made by Hall and Ellis.[12] The coincidence of Boyle's study of 'primitive' cultures with James's study of childhood, and the particular interest, in both contributions, in the significance of belief for these objects of study, indicate, again, an investment in forms of knowledge which were uninformed by—or, rather, innocent of—Darwinian, scientific knowledge.

Like the child in Lacan's 'Mirror-Stage', Maisie's knowledge is richer than language, and therefore serves the function of innocence Ohi describes. It transcends the difference internal to language, and *therefore* transcends the difference otherwise internal to selfhood. As far as Maisie's knowledge is beyond her language, that knowledge can, paradoxically, be synonymous with her innocence. In its late nineteenth-century context, Maisie's innocent knowledge is essentially a knowledge of self which is outside language and therefore imaginatively transcends the difference between self and soul, science and story, which Darwinian evolution introduces.

This is not to suggest that the question of Maisie's innocence is not, also, the question of the extent of her knowledge of sex. Indeed, Kerry H. Robinson has suggested

[12] Frederick Boyle, 'Contemporary Human Gods', *New Review*, 16/ 93 (1897), 195-203, at p. 195.

that the very idea of innocence seems to contain 'a denial of children's sexuality'.[13] However, while innocence might contain such a denial, it is not necessarily limited to or even defined by this. One of the earliest *assertions* of children's sexuality is predicated on an idea of innocence, and one which is, moreover, consistent with the particular form of innocence attributed to Maisie, and to her counter-part subjects in scientific Child Study. Freud's 'Infantile Sexuality' (1905) attributes adult forgetfulness of childhood sexuality to the child's innocence not of that sexuality, but of language.[14]

Freud claims that 'there is no period at which the capacity for receiving and reproducing impressions is greater than precisely during the years of childhood.'[15] The observation that 'of all this we, when we are grown up, have no knowledge of our own' is a reference to the phenomenon of childhood amnesia.[16] Although Freud focuses specifically on the forgetfulness of sexual impressions, childhood amnesia operates on all experiences up to a certain age, and as Charles Fernyhough has noted, 'it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the end of childhood amnesia corresponds to the period in which small children become thoroughly verbal beings.'[17] The centrality of infantile amnesia to Freud's analysis of infantile sexuality therefore associates the loss of the child's particularly vivid capacity for vision—the loss of innocence—not with the onset of sexuality, but with the onset of language.

Therefore, although when James notes that Maisie 'would have to be saved', he refers in part to the pragmatic necessity that Maisie be removed from what Coveney describes as the 'squalid, vulgar, negative' adult society represented in the novel, the subsequent remark that she might also save others, by 'sowing on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of the moral life' is the more essential concern of the novel.[18] Insofar as it is innocent of language, Maisie's vision represents a form of selfhood which might 'save' the adults around her. The 'barren strands' James refers to denote both the 'squalid' adult society represented in the text, and the soulless world for which the child's innocence—Maisie's vision—might represent the salvation of selfhood.[19]

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[13] Kerry H. Robinson, *Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood: The Contradictory Nature of Sexuality and Censorship in Children's Contemporary Lives* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 49.

[14] Although Freud is commonly credited with the 'discovery' of childhood sexuality, he was, rather, an influential contributor to an ongoing debate on the subject at the turn of the twentieth century. See Lutz D. H. Sauerteig, 'Loss of Innocence: Albert Moll, Sigmund Freud and the Invention of Childhood Sexuality Around 1900', *Medical History*, 56/2 (2012), 156-183, for more information on the intellectual culture in which contemporary understandings of childhood sexuality developed.

[15] Freud, 'Infantile Sexuality', in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2011), 51-84, at p. 53.

[16] Freud, p. 53.

[17] Charles Fernyhough, *Pieces of Light: The New Science of Memory* (London: Profile Books, 2012), p. 75.

[18] Coveney, p. 199; James, 'Preface IX', p. 292.

[19] James, 'Preface IX', p. 292; Coveney, p. 199.

Of course, the squalor which surrounds Maisie, and the question of whether she is, ultimately, saved from it, point to the risk, if not the impossibility, of accessing the child's innocent knowledge. The promise to reveal what Maisie knew is the promise to provide insight into the knowledge of self for which Maisie is the repository. However, surrounded by moral and linguistic squalor, that innocent knowledge is always potentially, if not already, corrupted. *What Maisie Knew* therefore problematizes the project of Child Study, the culture of studying childhood, and the promise of its own title, by interrogating the attempt to access the child's innocent, inarticulable, knowledge of self.

Maisie is explicitly presented as precocious from the first chapter and, as in Guthrie's *Contributions* and James's *The Turn of the Screw*, the adults with whom Maisie interacts are, problematically, implicated in this precocity. The narrator states that '[i]t was to be the fate of this patient little girl to see much more than, at first, she understood, but also, even at first, to understand much more than any little girl, however patient, had perhaps ever understood before.'[20] Already, Maisie has a capacity for insight that is prodigious not only for a child. It evokes the genius that, for Guthrie, is the evidence of true precocity.[21] However, because it is paradoxically innocent, Maisie's knowledge is resistant, if not antithetical, to the means by which the author—and the psychologist—might access and represent it: to need the child is to risk contaminating the very knowledge for which she is needed. The attempt to access selfhood in the child's mind therefore presents a major difficulty in *What Maisie Knew*. An idea of innocence, and the effect of adult need on that innocence, are the central thematic concerns of the novel, which thus thematises the conflict underlying the broader culture of child study in the late nineteenth century.

This conflict is represented from the opening pages, in the dispute between Maisie's parents and, eventually, step-parents. As John C. McCloskey observes, Maisie's divorced parents argue over her because her 'physical presence is a symbol of external propriety'.[22] Adults need Maisie, initially, as a pretext for their otherwise prohibited relationships. Accordingly, Maisie's first governess, Miss Overmore, insists that 'a lady couldn't stay with a gentleman . . . without some awfully proper reason'(p. 25). When Maisie asks "what reason is proper?' Beale's response, 'a long-legged stick of a tomboy: there's none so good as that', (p. 25) indicates that Maisie is in her father's house because her presence authorises Miss Overmore's residence there. Likewise, later, it is only 'in connection with herself' that

[20] Henry James, *What Maisie Knew*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 8. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses.
[21] The preface likewise insists on Maisie's precocity: James suggests that Maisie has 'dispositions originally promising . . . perceptions easily and almost *infinitely* quickened' (James, 'Preface IX', p. 293, emphasis added). As with Miles and Flora in *The Turn of the Screw*, and with Guthrie's precocious children, Maisie's capabilities are not merely adult; they are genius, if not superhuman.
[22] John C. McCloskey, 'What Maisie Knows: A Study of Childhood and Adolescence', *American Literature*, 36/4 (1965), 485-513, at p. 490.

'the pleasant possibility . . . of a relation . . . between [the second] Mrs Beale and Sir Claude' (p. 46) can arise, and, again, only her presence which lends the arrangement proposed by this couple, of a 'little household we three should make' (p. 244), its (superficial) propriety.

As the scandalised gossips ventriloquized in the opening chapter suggest, this is all 'very shocking' (p. 5). Adult need consistently exposes Maisie to morally problematic knowledge.[23] The possible consequences of this exposure have generated some remarkably polarised analyses of the novel.[24] Whatever the extent of Maisie's adult knowledge at the end of the novel, her exposure to such knowledge accounts for many uncomfortable, even disturbing, moments throughout. The unsettling passage which describes Maisie's game with her doll, Lisette, is one of the first of such moments. Maisie gradually 'understood more' (p. 26) about the laughter of her mother's friends, but her imitative shrieks of laughter are uncomfortably incongruous with the childish doll-play through which she comes to this understanding. Her demonstrably 'producible' knowledge at this point is essentially, if at this moment only imitatively, adult: Maisie is 'convulsed' (p. 26) by the innocence she is supposed to represent.

The concern James here represents, that the adult's need might corrupt that which is needed, is equally evident in Child Study. The possibility that the child is performing for, rather than being illuminated by, the adult observer, is raised when Sully takes issue with one of Hall's claims: the claim cannot be 'conclusive', because the data on which it is based suggest, to Sully, not the true feelings of the child in question, but a 'priggish "contrariness", by no means uncommon among children'.[25] Hall himself had already published an extensive study, the title of which indicates his similar concerns: in 'Children's Lies' (1890), he observes that '[t]he loves of showing off and seeming big, to attract attention or to win admiration, sometimes leads children to assume false characters.'[26] In his claim that '[a] few children, especially girls, are honeycombed with morbid self-consciousness and affectation, and seem to have no natural character of their own', Hall raises the possibility that, by

[23] In fact, Maisie is often the pretext for behaviour which constitutes that problematic knowledge. When, for example, Maisie's presence among her father's friends invites their thinly veiled lewdness, she generates the very knowledge which threatens her innocence.
[24] Compare, for example, Harris W. Wilson, 'What Did Maisie Know?', *College English*, 17/5 (1956), 279-282, who claims that Maisie ultimately offers her virginity to Sir Claude, with F. R. Leavis, '*What Maisie Knew:* A Disagreement by F. R. Leavis', in Bewley, pp. 114-131, who claims that Maisie remains 'to the end uninterested in, and uncognizant of, sex' (Wilson, p. 281; Leavis, p. 130). Such commentary is unified in one respect however: Maisie's innocence has evidently invited adults to think and talk about sex not only within the novel, but also in criticism about it, performing what Ohi describes as a 'discourse of child endangerment' in which the 'compensations of eroticism' are perhaps acknowledged more by the adults within the text than by some of those writing about it (Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture*, p. 6).
[25] Sully, 'Dollatry', p. 60.
[26] G. Stanley Hall, 'Children's Lies', *American Journal of Psychology*, 3/1 (1890), 59-70, at p. 67.

making the child self-conscious, adult questions might obscure what they are intended to illuminate.[27] His exasperation at this possibility is, like Sully's, palpable.

Maeve Pearson suggests that Maisie dramatizes the 'inherent split . . . between a performed ideal and a more complex and inaccessible interior selfhood'.[28] In doing so, Maisie dramatizes one major difficulty of Child Study. The performed and dissonantly adult knowledge which Maisie displays in her game with Lisette, and which the children in studies by Sully and Hall display in their 'priggish contrariness' and 'morbid self-consciousness', indicate a corruption of innocence by adult need.[29] This performed knowledge is irreconcilable with the inaccessible, unproducible knowledge—the knowledge of self—which, as children, they are imagined to represent. When Maisie offers a 'performed ideal', she embodies the effect of scrutiny on the idea of childhood in the period.[30] Performing in response to this scrutiny, children not only obscure, but actually threaten, the innocent knowledge which is the true objective of literary and scientific child study.

In its thematic concern with the effect of adult need on Maisie's innocence, *What Maisie Knew* engages with the difficulty, encountered by practitioners of Child Study, of the potential corruption of that innocence. The stylistic challenge James sets himself in *What Maisie Knew* engages with the more fundamental difficulty of the representation of that innocence. James presents Maisie's knowledge as by definition inarticulable, and thus points to the corollary of that same idea of innocent childhood knowledge which is promulgated in Child Study. Specifically, James represents the stalemate such a concept presents for attempts, literary or scientific, to access the child's knowledge.

According to James W. Gargano, James's use of 'a central intelligence not altogether capable . . . of assessing and conceptualising the value of her experiences' necessitates 'the wealth of authorial explanation' which characterises *What Maisie Knew*.[31] However, the moment when Maisie meets her mother's new partner, the Captain (or 'the Count', as Sir Claude misleadingly refers to him) for the first time indicates that authorial explanations of Maisie's knowledge are insufficient, at best.[32] The narrator describes what Maisie observes as her mother approaches her and Sir Claude:

> [L]eaving the Count apparently to come round more circuitously—an outflanking movement, if Maisie had but known—[Ida] resumed the onset . . . "What are you doing with

[27] Hall, 'Lies', p. 67.
[28] Pearson, p. 113.
[29] Sully, 'Dollatry', p. 60; Hall, 'Lies', p. 67.
[30] Pearson, p. 113.
[31] James W. Gargano, '*What Maisie Knew:* The Evolution of a "Moral Sense"', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 16/1 (1961), 33-46, at p. 35.
[32] Martha Banta, 'The Quality of Experience in *What Maisie Knew*', *New England Quarterly*, 42/4 (1969), 483–510, identifies this as one of the most important scenes in the text, a view that is supported by the quantity of critical attention the passage has received (Banta, p. 487-488).

> my daughter?" she demanded of her husband; in spite of the indignant tone of which Maisie had a greater sense than ever in her life before of not being personally noticed. (p. 106-107)

The reader cannot fail to recognise that Maisie is here used as a pretext for a confrontation between Ida and Sir Claude. However, the narrator's wish that 'Maisie had but known' (p. 106) emphasises that the reader's understanding of the scene is facilitated not by Maisie's assessment of it, but by the narrator's. More particularly, the narrator's metaphorical description of the scene in terms of a battle—that is, his language—facilitates the reader's understanding of the scene.

For many critics, the articulate, authoritative narrative voice exemplified in this passage offers a reliable transmission of Maisie's experience.[33] Indeed, James insists that his 'own commentary', which 'constantly attends and *amplifies*' Maisie's more limited 'terms', is '*required* whenever those aspects about her and those parts of her experience that she understands darken off into others that she rather tormentedly misses'.[34] According to this, Maisie's presence necessitates, and thus validates, the capacity of the narrator to articulate, and even augment, the child's mind. In this analysis, the narrator functions as what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as 'an extra-artistic medium', and his 'discourse' as 'an artistically neutral means of communication'.[35] Language is a neutral means through which an impartial narrator can articulate what Maisie knows. If language is this extra-artistic medium, *What Maisie Knew* can fulfil the promise of its title, because its author has resolved the extraordinary technical challenge of representing the mind of a child by exhibiting, in language, knowledge which exists outside language.

Of course, *What Maisie Knew* does not do this. The conflict between Maisie's experience and the narrator's language is repeatedly and explicitly expressed by the narrator throughout. Far from being resolved, the problem of representing the meaning of Maisie's experience exemplifies that more fundamental conflict identified by Clifton, between experience and language in general. Indeed, immediately after Ida's 'onset' (p. 106), and the seeming clarity which that metaphor constructs for the scene, Maisie and the Captain have an exchange which is, ostensibly, about the Captain's feelings for Ida but is, actually, about the inadequacy of language to encompass either his own or Maisie's experience. The Captain's speech culminates in 'a small sigh that mourned the limits of the speakable' (p. 112). Maisie 'found herself, in the intensity of her response, throbbing with a joy still less

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[33] See, for example, Mary Galbraith, 'What Everybody Knew vs. What Maisie Knew', *Style*, 23/2 (1989), 197-212, and, more recently, Matthew Sussman, 'Henry James and Stupidity', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 48/1 (2015), 45-62.

[34] James, 'Preface IX', p. 294-295, emphasis added.

[35] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259-422, at p. 260.

utterable than the essence of the Captain's admiration' (p. 112-113). This is, of course, not unusual for Maisie; as the narrator observes, she '*had ever* . . . in her mind fewer names than conceptions' (p. 150, emphasis added). The Captain's momentary encounter with the limits of the speakable therefore replicates the defining condition of Maisie's mind.

The primary effect of this passage is to suggest experience that, in intensity, is *beyond* language. This must undermine Gargano's claim that Maisie cannot conceptualise her experience because she cannot articulate it, and must therefore also question the view that the narrator is a neutral medium for the communication of Maisie's mind. The narrator, in fact, makes it insistently clear that Maisie's perceptions exceed not only her own language, but *his* language, as, for example, when he remarks that 'the fullest expression we may give to Sir Claude's conduct is a poor and pale copy of the picture it presented to his young friend' (p. 149). The narrator's poor copy of her knowledge here indicates that what Maisie knows is beyond what *any* vocabulary might communicate. Whatever knowledge the child's mind contains is by definition unproducible, not only by Maisie herself but also by the narrator.

2.2: Innocence, Language, and Selfhood

In thus presenting the child's mind as beyond language, *What Maisie Knew* engages with the idea of childhood expressed in contemporaneous Child Study. Nineteenth-century child psychologists like Sully and Hall do not focus particularly on child sexuality, but their work anticipates Freud's suggestion that 'determining' visions and impressions are received in childhood, and forgotten in adulthood.[36] Language, moreover, is intrinsic both to childhood vision, and to adult forgetfulness of it: the child's knowledge is innocent only because, and as long as, it is inarticulable. Works by Sully and Hall not only reiterate the idea in *What Maisie Knew* of the child's unproducible knowledge; they also point to the contextual significance of this idea. Because it is both knowledgeable and unproducible, the child mind actually resolves an adult disjunction between language and selfhood. Conceptualised as innocently precocious, the child of Child Study can be imagined as a narratable origin to the adult self.

In, for example, 'Children's Lies', Hall claims that '[t]he fancy of some children is almost visualisation.'[37] This promptly escalates into the suggestion that, for children, '[r]every . . . materialises all wishes.'[38] According to this, language and reality unify in the child's mind. To suggest that 'Mr Gradgrind would war upon [this] as inimical to scientific

[36] Freud 'Infantile', p. 53.
[37] Hall, 'Lies', p. 66.
[38] Hall, 'Lies', p. 66.

veracity' is to suggest that science—and therefore Hall himself, by association—is limited by its inability to share the child's unscientific perception.[39]

Sully's *Studies of Childhood* (1895) likewise represents the disjunction between language and reality as an adult experience which is particularly exposed by efforts to access the child mind, and represents the child as the embodied resolution of that disjunction. Sully suggests that, in childhood, 'spoken words as sounds for the ear have in themselves something of the immediate objective reality of all sense-impressions.'[40] For children, language not only refers to a universally recognised, 'objective reality' but, consequently, 'to name a thing is in a sense to make it present.'[41]

Both Hall and Sully make it clear that it is specifically the child who has a vision of 'immediate objective reality' through language. When Hall suggests that '[w]e might almost say *of children at least* . . . that all their life is imagination', he claims that what children imagine to be true actually *is* true, if only to children themselves.[42] Similarly, Sully claims that the adult's explanation of language 'rudely breaks the spell of the illusion, calling off the attention from the vision [the child] sees in the word-crystal . . . to the cold lifeless crystal itself'.[43] In these studies of the child's mind, what Wordsworth calls the 'meddling intellect' is that of the psychologist, who '[m]is-shapes the beauteous forms' of things as they appear, by what Sully calls 'a secret child-art', in the child's innocent vision.[44] According to Sully and Hall, children in general not only insist on the unity of language and reality, but actually have the capacity to make that reality present in language.

Maisie epitomises the possible unity of language and experience—of language and self—which is implicit in such studies of the child mind. For Sheila Teahan, the narrator's repeated intrusions in the first person in the second half of *What Maisie Knew* demonstrate that, 'though the narrator claims merely to report what Maisie knows, he is deeply implicated in the construction of that knowledge.'[45] These moments make the reader aware of the narrator's active role in the construction, in language, of Maisie's mind, and this puts under particular strain the illusion of unity between the narrator's language and that mind. I

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[39] Hall, 'Lies', p. 66-7. The 'Mr Gradgrind' Hall refers to is that infamous advocate, in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), of the principle that children should be educated in 'nothing but Facts' (Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 5).
[40] Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (London: Longmans, Green, 1919), p. 55.
[41] Sully, *Studies*, p. 55.
[42] Hall, 'Lies', p. 67, emphasis added.
[43] Sully, *Studies*, p. 56.
[44] Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', in *Selected Poems*, ed. Stephen Gill (London: Penguin, 2004), 60-61, at p. 61; Sully, *Studies*, p. 56.
[45] Sheila Teahan, '*What Maisie Knew* and the Improper Third Person', in Cornwell and Malone, pp. 220-236, at p. 220. Many critics similarly consider the narrator's relationship with Maisie to be highly problematic. See, for example, Marcus Klein, 'What to Make of "Maisie"', *New England Review*, 27/4 (2006), 134-157 and Susan E. Honeyman, 'What Maisie Knew and the Impossible Representation of Childhood', *Henry James Review*, 22/1 (2001), 67-80.

suggest that, by thus so openly failing to sustain the illusion that he articulates Maisie's mind, the narrator insists that Maisie herself has the capacity for a vision which makes present the reality of selfhood mis-shapen by his language.

The narrator's first intrusion in the first person coincides with a comic moment of miscommunication between Mrs Wix and Maisie. Mrs Wix's claim that Sir Claude 'leans on me', gives Maisie 'the impression of a support literally supplied by her person' (p. 73). This 'glimpse of a misconception led [Mrs Wix] to be explicit': '[t]he life she wanted him to take right hold of was the public: "she", *I* hasten to add, was, in this connection, not the mistress of his fate, but only Mrs Wix herself' (p. 73, emphasis added). By intruding as 'I' at this point, and several times afterwards, the narrator draws attention to himself and therefore to Maisie's mind as a construction in his language. Moreover, of course, he intrudes to explain; his own words, like Mrs Wix's, obscure rather than clarify the relationship between Mrs Wix and Sir Claude which they try to describe.

The obscurity, *within* the text, of Mrs Wix's words, leads to Maisie's mis-interpretation. As Kenny Marotta has suggested, this mis-interpretation demonstrates that Maisie 'seeks, to the consternation of her elders, to connect their words to literal realities'.[46] The obscurity *of* the text, which the narrator interrupts in an attempt to clarify, therefore coincides with Maisie's insistence, at this moment, on the unity of language with literal reality. The text thus questions the validity of the belief which it simultaneously suggests Maisie embodies. Maisie's belief in the unity of language and reality is, itself, what exposes Mrs Wix's failure to validate that belief, and, seemingly, what triggers the narrator's admission of his own, equivalent, failure. Maisie's belief becomes the very obstacle inhibiting Mrs Wix's, the narrator's, and the reader's, access to that belief.

Those readers who accept the narrator's words as what Bakhtin calls the 'artistically neutral' means to communicate Maisie's mind replicate Maisie's erroneous assumption about the relationship between Mrs Wix's words and the reality to which they supposedly refer. That Maisie's misconception coincides with the first intrusion of the narrator in the first-person seems, therefore, to insist that the narrator's words are *not* to be viewed as the authoritative articulation of the child's mind and consequently that the text should *not* be read in the way that Maisie reads Mrs. Wix's words. Mrs Wix's obscurity, and the narrator's intrusion, are not the accidental self-defeat of a writer who has attempted to advocate Maisie's—mistaken—approach to language. They are, rather, consistent with a broader cultural understanding, evident in Child Study as in *What Maisie Knew,* of language and selfhood as unified *only* in the mind of the child. Maisie's mind both represents the potential

[46] Kenny Marotta, '*What Maisie Knew:* The Question of Our Speech', *ELH,* 46/3 (1979), 495-508, at p. 497.

unity of language with reality, and exposes their disunity in the adult. The novel insists that only through the child's mind is language what Bakhtin calls an 'extra-artistic medium', which connects transparently with, rather than modifying or corrupting, the literal realities to which it refers.

Tellingly, therefore, immediately subsequent to that first intrusion, the narrator remarks that 'these days brought on a high quickening of Maisie's direct perceptions, of her gratified sense of arriving by herself at conclusions' (p. 75). Maisie's hope that there is an objective reality beyond language both coincides with the narrator's inability to share her hope, and precedes his admission that Maisie's perception of that reality is becoming more conclusive. Teahan suggests that the illusion that we are reading a narrative of Maisie's consciousness 'breaks down' towards the end of the novel, and with it, 'the representational strategy of the central consciousness'.[47] What Maisie is coming, 'by herself' (p. 75), to know is the objective reality which, according to Sully, children can make present through language: it is, of course, only by being inarticulable that Maisie's perceptions can be thus imagined. If Sully and Hall exemplify the prevalence of Maisie's hope in the unity of language and reality, they also indicate that, at the turn of the twentieth century, it was the child whose imagined vision validated this hope. The breakdown of James's representational strategy is therefore the necessary corollary to the image of the child as the embodiment of knowledge in which language and reality are unified.[48]

2.3: What Maisie Knows

Maisie's knowledge of the unity of language and reality speaks to the contemporary need for selfhood to which, as outlined, this fascination with childhood responded. Towards the end of the novel, Mrs Wix asks Maisie '[h]aven't you really and truly *any* moral sense?' (p. 205). As many critics have noted, the answer to this question has implications beyond the narrow conventionality which is Mrs Wix's morality. Maisie's answer, which the narrator suggests 'was vague even to imbecility', (p. 205) is omitted from the narrative itself. Maisie's moral sense is seemingly characterised by a deficiency and vagueness which are necessarily replicated by the narrator.

However, Maisie, only '*began* . . . with scarcely knowing what [a moral sense] was' (p. 205, emphasis added). It quickly 'proved something that, with scarce an outward sign . . . she could . . . strike up a sort of acquaintance with' (p. 205). The implication that this 'sort of acquaintance' is insignificant is belied by the narrator's subsequent observation that

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[47] Teahan, p. 225.

[48] As Teahan suggests, moreover, this breakdown seems to be propagated by Maisie's impending adulthood. The closer Maisie comes to a capacity for articulating her knowledge, the further that knowledge seems to recede from the possibility of articulation.

'[n]othing more remarkable had taken place . . . no phenomenon of perception more inscrutable by our rough method, than her vision, the rest of that Boulogne day, of the manner in which she figured' (p. 206). While the reader attempts, through this difficult and vague sentence, to solve the riddle of Maisie's moral sense, Maisie herself attains 'remarkable' vision of that moral sense. Because it is inarticulable by the narrator, however, it is inaccessible to the reader.

The debate over how much sexual knowledge Maisie has at the end of the novel is therefore, surely, irresolvable, but it is also misguided. Mrs Wix's question is less about Maisie's sexual innocence, and more about that innocent sense of self which might, to return to Ohi, 'contain difference internal to language and subjectivity'.[49] Lacan's analysis of the pre-lingual child's interaction with his image in the mirror suggests that, as an instance of non-lingual self-perception, the *I* here is consistent with the child-self, because it evades the asymptotic 'coming-into-being of the subject', which emerges from that discordance between '*I*' and 'his own reality', between language and the adult subject.[50] If, in her remarkable vision of 'the manner in which she figured' (p. 206), Maisie similarly demonstrates a non-lingual 'coming-into-being', she likewise evades the asymptotic tension between the *I* of language and the self of her own reality.[51]

Maisie's innocent knowledge is, therefore, of the objective reality of the self. The conclusion towards which the text moves is therefore the moment in which she comes to see herself clearly. The narrator states that '[s]omehow, now that it was there, the great moment was not so bad. What helped the child was that she knew what she wanted . . . Bewilderment had simply gone or at any rate was going fast' (p. 260). Maisie seemingly discovers at this point that Sir Claude is 'what she wanted'. However, the declaration that 'I love Sir Claude' is made, firstly, 'with a sense slightly rueful and embarrassed that she appeared to offer it as something that would do as well' as claiming to love Mrs Beale and, secondly, as 'an answer to [Sir Claude's] pats' (p. 262). The statement 'I love Sir Claude' (p. 262) is a response to the demands of the adults around her, not an articulation of her vision at this 'great moment' (p. 260). If knowing what she wants has 'helped the child' (p. 260), it has helped her towards a clearer vision of herself, but that vision is concealed, not expressed, by her words about Sir Claude.

This 'great moment' is thus anticipated by the 'moral revolution' (p. 13) she experiences much earlier in the text. Knowing, finally, what she wants is the culmination of an idea that first occurs to her in Chapter Two, when 'the idea of an inner self, or, in other words, of concealment' (p. 13) first occurs to her. Just as the moral revolution which reveals

[49] Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture*, p. 7.
[50] Lacan, p. 2.
[51] Lacan, p. 2.

to Maisie the idea of an inner self coincides and is equated with the idea and practice of concealment, so the great moment of Maisie's self-knowledge coincides with its concealment from the reader. Maisie's bewilderment may have gone. The reader's bewilderment remains, precisely because what, if anything, Maisie has come to know is her inner self, which is, 'in other words' (p. 13), concealment. The culmination of Maisie's knowledge is the culmination of her concealment: Maisie's vision is most complete when it is least articulated.

Carren Osna Kaston suggests that what 'we finally see in the novel is Maisie's escape from alien "fictions" or versions of her experience, from the prologue's neutralisation of her predicament, from the custodial hands and structures of various parents . . . and from the abstract version of her experience pressed upon us at times in the preface when James invokes some of those same voices and techniques'.[52] What we actually see is Maisie's vision of herself not only separated from any of the 'voices' which have thus far attempted to access that self, but independent of language itself. The narrator suggests that Maisie's vision 'of the manner in which she figured' is 'a phenomenon of perception. . . inscrutable by our rough method' (p. 206). The narrator's rough method—language—is in fact antithetical to the self-knowledge Maisie here attains.

The narrator's admission of his incapacity to communicate Maisie's non-linguistic knowledge of her own objective reality is therefore inevitable, but it also propagates the collapse of his capacity to communicate at all. The narrator admits that:

> I so despair of tracing her steps that I must crudely give you my word for its being from this time on a picture literally present to her. Mrs Wix saw her as a little person knowing so extraordinarily much that . . . what she still didn't know would be ridiculous if it hadn't been embarrassing. (p. 206)

The unexpected introduction of Mrs Wix as the subject, in a passage which had seemingly referred to Maisie, marks the collapse of linguistic clarity which was anticipated in the narrator's very first intrusion. His earlier attempt to be explicit gives way, at this stage, to despair.

The mention of Mrs Wix does more than suggest 'the difficulties of the narrator' in his attempt to 'follow and understand' Maisie, however.[53] It also introduces the crucial question of Maisie's knowledge, not only of her self, but of adult selfhood. The obscurity demands that the reader ask whether the 'her' in the first of these sentences is Maisie or Mrs Wix, and, by extension, whether Maisie's remarkable vision is of the manner in which 'she'

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[52] Carren Osna Kaston, 'Houses of Fiction in *What Maisie Knew*', *Criticism*, 18/1 (1976), 27-42, at p. 30.

[53] Michelle H. Phillips, 'The *Partegé* Child and the Emergence of the Modernist Novel in *What Maisie Knew*', *Henry James Review*, 31/2 (2010), 95-110, at p. 106.

(Maisie) figures to herself, or of the manner in which 'she' (Mrs Wix) figures to Maisie. The impossibility of establishing which is the correct interpretation enables Maisie's vision to be potentially either, and potentially both.

Steedman argues that the nineteenth century belief in 'a wholeness in interiority, that will figure itself forth, from inside to outside' finds its 'location in the child'.[54] The child is the expression of 'the impulse to personify ideas of the [adult] self' and enables personification of the 'wholeness' of that self.[55] The obscurity of the narrator's language here allows for the possibility that Maisie's remarkable vision is of the wholeness of Mrs Wix. As with her vision of herself, however, her vision of Mrs Wix is most complete when most concealed. Mrs Wix's interiority therefore only figures forth on her presence in Maisie's inarticulable vision. Only by being inarticulable—and therefore concealed from Mrs Wix, and from the reader—can Maisie's inner world redeem the adult self from the asymptotic disjunction between it and the *I*, or perception of that self in language.

Moreover, Maisie's knowledge can be outside language only while she is a child. What Maisie knew therefore represents that repository described by Kincaid. The mind of the child is to be filled with the narrator's, and, if such explorations as 'Dollatry', 'A Study of Dolls', 'Children's Lies', and *Studies of Childhood* are indicative, the psychologist's, imagined self-image, in which language and the self are unified, and that self consequently has objective reality. The wholeness of the interior self is figured forth on the mere presence of the child, because that presence embodies her imagined, inarticulable, and therefore innocent knowledge.

However, when Maisie actually speaks, she suggests the transitory nature of the Ideal-I. Maisie's words anticipate her entry into language and adulthood, and the consequences of this entry for the imagined wholeness of the self which, as a child, she represents. Indeed, her first words in the novel demonstrate this:

> [S]he found the words spoken by her beastly papa to be, after all, in her bewildered little ears, from which, at her mother's appeal, they passed, in her clear, shrill voice, straight to her little innocent lips. 'He said I was to tell you, from him', she faithfully reported, 'that you're a nasty, horrid pig!' (p. 11)

The moment is, primarily, funny (at least to the reader), because of the disjunction between Maisie's innocent repetition of her father's words, and what those words actually say.

This disjunction enacts Bakhtin's insistence that, rather than function as an artistically neutral means of communication, 'no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject,

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[54] Steedman, p. 15.
[55] Steedman, p. 1.

there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme.'[56] Maisie's language here points to the failure of the speaking subject to control the meaning of language in the elastic environment of her audience. Between the word 'pig' and its object (Ida), and between the word 'pig' and its speaking subject (Maisie), there exists the elastic environment, of which Beale's words about the same object are a part. This environment undermines the neutral communication of Maisie's intention when obeying her parents. Beale's words, repeated by Maisie, and heard by Ida, become meaningless in themselves even as their meaning is comically apparent in the environment in which they are spoken.

For J. M. Barrie, '[n]o-one ever gets over the first unfairness . . . except Peter [Pan].'[57] If this is 'the real difference' between Peter Pan and other children, then Maisie, like 'all the rest', 'will never afterwards be quite the same'.[58] Rather than conjure up an image of objective reality, Maisie's language is illustrative of the social and linguistic environment in which she exists. What might, in Barrie's words, be called the unfairness of the disjunction between the intention behind, and the effect of, Maisie's words is the first of many experiences which indicate that, unlike Peter Pan, Maisie will never quite be the same. Such moments point to the inevitability that, in Barrie's words, '[a]ll children, except one, grow up.'[59] Maisie has always imminently, if not already, lost her innocence.

Indeed, such moments indicate that, outside Neverland, the idea of the child's innocence is necessary because it defers the certain corruption it nevertheless represents. The moment when the promise of the novel's title is to be fulfilled expresses this contradiction. When, finally, '[t]hey stood confronted, the step-parents, still under Maisie's observation' (p. 264), the bewilderment which formerly characterised Maisie's observations has implicitly gone or is going, and she seemingly sees her step-parents with perfect 'deep' (p. 264) clarity. Maisie's repeated insistence, 'I know', is, potentially, a statement of this innocent knowledge. Equally, however, that 'I know' may be an instance, in language, of the same imitative behaviour Maisie displayed when she 'shrieked' at the innocence of her doll; her 'I know' may be as knowledgeable, as duplicitous, as the language of the adults around her. The clarity and wholeness of Maisie's imagined vision is asserted through her repeated declaration that 'I know', but its very articulation inhibits the reader's ability to attain similar clarity.

The reader cannot attain the same clarity of vision which Maisie seemingly attains in this scene because the only medium through which we might be able to access Maisie's

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[56] Bakhtin, p. 276.
[57] Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, p. 150.
[58] Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, p. 150.
[59] Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*, p. 69.

knowledge is the very medium, language, which that knowledge has transcended. Whatever Maisie knows, the reader cannot know. What, ultimately, it means for Maisie to 'know' therefore remains ambivalent: Maisie's innocence is sustained as a possibility within the very words which simultaneously suggest its corruption.

Maisie's knowledge is therefore in doubt at the end of the novel. Only thus can it remain imaginatively possible. Poole suggests that a 'sad way of understanding the [past tense of the] title is that Maisie's knowledge is bound to belong to the past. She knew something as a child which she will forget as a grown up.'[60] Although Freud's discussion of infantile amnesia refers particularly to the forgetfulness, in adulthood, of childhood sexual impressions, contemporary psychologists shared James's wider conception of the child's innocent knowledge. That knowledge is not specifically of sex but, more essentially, of self. Childhood innocence thus becomes the precocious site for adult selfhood, the loss of which is then, necessarily and problematically, attributed to the end-point of adulthood.

As Poole's use of the future tense to refer to what Maisie *will* forget in adulthood suggests, however, *her* adulthood is never quite reached. Instead of attaining an articulate adulthood, Maisie retains the innocence she embodies as a child. Instead of ending with Maisie's certain failure, in adulthood, to articulate the objective reality of the self, *What Maisie Knew* defers that adulthood, and instead perpetuates the implied, innocent knowledge of self which Maisie represents as a child.

[60] Poole, 'Introduction', p. xxii.

Chapter Three: Precocious Storytelling in Victorian Children's Literature

From King's assertion that 'attempts to produce a prodigy' will produce 'an idiot', to Sully's conceptualisation of the child's experience of language, the overview of the scientific study of precocity at the end of the Victorian period offered in the previous section indicates that the primary concern in medical studies is not the effect of precocity on the child, but the possible consequences or implications of precocity for the adult.[1] Similarly, when Nelson argues that many precocious children in nineteenth-century literature 'hint at adult culpability in not providing the middle-class child with an upbringing that shields him or her from the contradictions and difficulties of the world', and 'also suggest the adult's own helplessness', she identifies that the disquiet about precocity evident in much nineteenth-century literature is founded not in fears about childhood sexuality but in the indictment of adulthood which precocity so often offers.[2] Paul Dombey typifies this: as argued above, Paul's death and his father's humiliation are inextricably linked, particularly because both are anticipated in the 'strange, old-fashioned, thoughtful' precocity with which Paul is characterised throughout.[3]

The child in the opening chapters of *Jane Eyre* or *The Mill on the Floss* might seem to be Paul Dombey's opposite. Jane is not a cipher for adult ambition; her precocity is, instead, figured in the 'unchildlike look and voice' with which she protests against a world which often confuses and even angers her.[4] Eliot's text opens with a comparably poignant study of the 'early bitterness' of its precocious protagonist's childhood emotions.[5] However, the adult Jane, and the adult Maggie, are clearly performed, and thus, implicitly, formed, by the precocious children they once were.[6] The adult is thus of determining significance in these literary studies of childhood precocity, as it is in *Dombey and Son,* and in medical studies such as Guthrie's.

The conclusion to Maisie's story likewise points to the adult as the point at which the meaning of Maisie's precocious childhood might be determined. Such texts substantiate Shuttleworth's observation that late-Victorian discourse in general shows 'very little concern

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[1] King, p. 856.
[2] Nelson, *Precocious Children,* p. 40.
[3] Dickens, *Dombey and Son,* p. 98.
[4] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre,* ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 251.
[5] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss,* ed. Carol T. Christ (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), p.56.
[6] This is characteristic of canonical mid-Victorian fiction: as suggested above, *Wuthering Heights, David Copperfield,* and *Great Expectations* all likewise follow the development of a precocious child into adulthood. The child protagonist of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1836-7), by contrast, neither anticipates adulthood through any precocious knowledge, nor attains adulthood within the text. Oliver is instead a study of childhood innocence, and is therefore an 'innocent and unoffending child' at the end of the novel, as he is at the start (*Oliver Twist,* ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 401.

with the effects [of precocity] on the children themselves'.[7] Whether the child is problematically precocious, or innocently so, her precocity is a mechanism for the exploration of possible adults, possible ends.

However, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905), and E. Nesbit's *Treasure Seekers* series complicate this picture of nineteenth-century discourse about precocity. The precocious child protagonist of *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe, challenges not only Victorian ideas about precocious children in both psychology and literature, but also the difference between adult and child on which those ideas were founded. In *A Little Princess*, moreover, this transgression of boundaries vindicates not just the child, but the supposedly adult behaviour she precociously performs. Likewise, the precocious child-narrator of the *Treasure Seekers* series, Oswald Bastable, challenges the conceptual separation of adult and child which informs so much scientific discourse and canonical literature of the late nineteenth century. These texts ultimately obviate much of the basis on which this separation is predicated, and thus do not contribute to an ideology, promulgated by so many texts of the Victorian period, of the child as the origin of and progress toward the adult as end.

3.1: Precocity in *A Little Princess*

The prolonged popularity of *A Little Princess* reflects the fascination with precocity characteristic of its era. Sara made her first appearance in the children's magazine *St. Nicholas*, in the serial 'Sara Crewe; or What Happened at Miss Minchin's', published during 1885. This series was subsequently revised and expanded for the stage and first performed, as *The Little Princess*, in 1902.[8] The play's success prompted Burnett's publishers to invite her to expand it further, into a full-length novel, *A Little Princess*, published in 1905.[9] Although Burnett is now best known for *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess* was, as its multiple commercially successful versions indicate, more popular during her lifetime.[10]

Sara's precocity engages with Victorian ideas about precocious children in both psychology and literature. Sara is both a condemnation of her father's childishness, like the

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[7] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 150.
[8] See Barbara Jo Maier, '"A Delicate Invisible Hand": Frances Hodgson Burnett's Contributions to Theatre for Youth', in *In the Garden: Essays in Honour of Frances Hodgson Burnett,* ed. Angelica Shirley Carpenter (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 113-129, for a discussion of this and other of Burnett's plays in an analysis of Burnett's influence on the genre of children's theatre.
[9] See Marian E. Brown, 'Three Versions of *A Little Princess*: How the Story Developed', *Children's Literature in Education,* 19/4 (1988), 199-210, on the differences and similarities between the three versions, and Janice Kirkland, 'Frances Hodgson Burnett's Sara Crewe Through 110 Years', *Children's Literature in Education,* 28/4 (1997), 191-203, on the development of Sara's character in twentieth-century adaptations of her story.
[10] See Roderick McGillis, *A Little Princess: Gender and Empire* (New York: Twayne, 1996), pp. 27-34, on the critical reception of *A Little Princess.*

precocious children Nelson describes, and a response to the perceived diagnostic significance of precocity in contemporary psychology. However, Sara's story deviates from the general tone of nineteenth-century debate about precocity, because it is primarily concerned with issues which, as Shuttleworth suggests, receive less attention in psychology and in canonical or more literary fiction. Like *What Maisie Knew, A Little Princess* does not narrate the problem *of* the precocious child, but the problems its protagonist Sara faces *as* a precocious child.

Sara's precocity is nevertheless fundamentally different from, and more challenging than, Maisie's. If Maisie's precocity can redeem the sordid adult world around her, it is because that precocity is essentially pre-linguistic and therefore essentially innocent. Sara's precocity, by contrast with Maisie's, is indicated most particularly in her remarkable proficiency with language. The precocious knowledge of James's children is coupled, in *A Little Princess*, with a capacity for articulation which disrupts the very equation on which the difference between adult and child is, in James, based.

A concomitant of this difference between adult and child is the idea that adults should have power over children. This chapter will compare Sara's disruptive articulacy with analyses of children's language in contemporary child psychology. It will thereby illustrate that the precociously articulate child embodies a threat to adults either represented in, or responsible for—as author of—those texts. Adults whose reputations and authority are predicated on their ideas about children are threatened by children who have, and can express, their own ideas.

More specifically, Sara's linguistic precocity obviates the supposed moral difference between truth and lies, and therefore undermines the difference between the adult and the child which the former polarity upheld in psychological studies of precociously articulate children.[11] However, because *A Little Princess* is interested in the child herself, rather than the adult reflected or anticipated by her precocity, such disruption becomes a vindication both of Sara and of storytelling. John Kucich has argued that truth-telling became a trope for 'ethical incoherence' in the late Victorian period.[12] In *A Little Princess*, the precociously articulate child becomes an assertion of the ethical potential of lies instead. By advocating the transgression of those lines dividing deceit from truth, child from adult, *A Little Princess* challenges the Victorian demand for progress from one to the other.

From the start of *A Little Princess*, Sara Crewe and her father disrupt any clear boundary between adult and child. Sara is introduced through her capacity to be the equal,

[11] My focus on precocious articulacy is in part determined by Sara's class; as suggested above, working class precocity was usually represented as sexual.
[12] John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 201.

even the guardian, of her father: '[t]o keep house for her father; to ride with him and sit at the head of his table when he had dinner-parties; to talk to him and read his books—that would be what she would like most in the world.'[13] Language clearly contributes to this inversion of the parent-child relationship. Not only does Sara read her father's books; she 'was . . . always inventing stories of beautiful things, and telling them to herself. Sometimes she had told them to her father, and he had liked them as much as she did' (p. 10). If, as Phyllis Bixler suggests, 'Burnett's later fictional children . . . often associate primarily with adults for whom they feel protective and on whom they have a beneficent effect', in *A Little Princess* Sara has the capacity for this effect specifically through her precocious aptitude for language.[14]

To be what is, as Deborah Druley has suggested, her father's mother is not only what Sara would 'like most'.[15] The relationship between Sara and Captain Crewe is also inverted in the terms through which each is characterised. While Sara is described as 'old-fashioned' (p. 7, p. 10, p. 18) three times in the opening chapter, her father is described as 'a rash, innocent young man' (p. 15) with a 'boyish expression' (p. 17). Such characterisation is, of course, inseparable from the novel's plot: by characterising Captain Crewe as innocent, *A Little Princess* anticipates the plot of his corruption, and by characterising his daughter as precociously maternal, it evokes the role she might play in his salvation.

Such a role is typical of precocious children in the literature of the Victorian period. Kermode observes that '[o]f an agent there is nothing to be said except that he performs a function'; of precocious Victorian children there is often little to be said but that they are agents of adult redemption.[16] In Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, for example, Little Nell represents the capabilities and responsibilities of the precocious child as a standard of moral purity.[17] The same themes recur at the *fin de siècle*; in James's 'The Author of Beltraffio' and *The Turn of the Screw*, Dolcino and Miles represent ideals to the adults ostensibly responsible for them. Moral and powerful children might be considered a hallmark of Burnett's fiction for children as well. The plot and eponymous hero of her phenomenally successful *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Mary Lennox's transformation of life at Misselthwaite Manor in *The Secret Garden*, and the role of the child hero, Marco Loristan, on the fate of

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[13] Burnett, *A Little Princess* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 9-10. Subsequent page numbers will be given in parentheses.
[14] Bixler, p. 52.
[15] Deborah Druley, 'The Changing Mothering Roles in *Little Lord Fauntleroy, A Little Princess,* and *The Secret Garden*', in Carpenter, pp. 51-65, at p. 55.
[16] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 98.
[17] See Catherine Robson, 'The Ideal Girl in Industrial England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 3/2 (1998), 197-233 for a discussion of Little Nell and ideas about girls in the context of mid-century debates about child labour.

his country in *The Lost Prince* (1915): all represent the precocious child as a profound force for good in a degraded adult society.

Sully's 'A Learned Infant' (1887) is a satirical comment on two principles underlying the ideas about childhood promoted by such fiction. Firstly, Sully is clearly impatient with the idea that the precocious child has such power at all. Thus, what G. K. Chesterton described as Little Nell's 'saintly precocity' and 'constrained and awkward piety' clearly informs Sully's satirical claim that, in consequence of spectacularly precocious familiarity with the Bible, 'the all-wise infant', Christian Heineken, can offer his mother 'a consolatory quotation or two' from it to overcome her 'natural dislike to the idea of [the] sea-voyage' he has decided to take.[18] Similarly, 'when he saw the crew dejected by a protracted storm, he manned them to new efforts by consolatory quotations from their vernacular Scriptures.'[19] The implication is that Christian's abilities are remarkable not in themselves but for their effect on the adults around him, and that effect is almost ludicrous in its quasi-religious potency.

However, such power is not only laughable. As Sully observes, '[t]o one who feels the potent charm of childish talent, the future of the little hero is a matter of indifference.'[20] Indeed, 'the lustre of childish talents needs not the addition of the more diffused and vulgar splendour of adult fame.'[21] Since precocity is important only in its effect, and has its most potent effect if it is not 'diffused' in adulthood, Sully suggests that '[w]hat we want is a chronicle of a great child who died before there was time to think of a later career, and who is therefore plainly immortalised in virtue of his young achievements.'[22]

Despite the sarcasm of this remark, it is corroborated in much literature of the Victorian period. George Gissing's observation that Nell's 'one safe refuge [is] in the grave' could also be applied to Paul Dombey, to Dolcino, and to Miles.[23] Just as Paul dies both as a retreat from the world his father represents within the text, and also dies, as Chesterton puts it, 'rhetorically upon the stage' of the text itself, so death is presented as a 'refuge' for Dolcino in 'The Author of Beltraffio' and for Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*, but is more

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[18] Sully, 'A Learned Infant', *The Cornhill Magazine,* 8/43 (1887), 48-60, at p. 54; G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (1906; 8th edn., London: Methuen, 1913), p. 95; Chesterton, 'Old Curiosity Shop', in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton XV: Chesterton on Dickens,* ed. Alzina Stone Dale (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 271-281, at p. 273. The child Sully refers to is the subject of a German text, 'Life, Deeds, Travels, and Death of a Very Wise and Very Nicely Behaved Four-Year-Old Child, Christian Heinrich Heineken', which was written by Christian's tutor, Christian von Schöneich and published in 1779. Sully discusses this text because it is, he claims, one of a 'very small' number of 'perfect tributes to the genius of childhood' (Sully, 'Learned', p. 49). Guthrie mentions the same child—referred to as Christian Hemerken—in his discussion of the connection between precocity and early death (Guthrie, p. 44).

[19] Sully, 'Learned', p. 54.

[20] Sully, 'Learned', p. 48.

[21] Sully, 'Learned', p. 48.

[22] Sully, 'Learned', p. 49.

[23] George Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Gresham, 1904), p. 211.

accurately a necessity for the adults around them, because only death can safeguard the ideal—innocence—which these children represent.[24]

In a context in which (if only implicitly and fictionally) the future of the precocious child was a matter of indifference when compared with the effect of childish talent on adults, it is ominous that, early in *A Little Princess,* Sara's father enters into a speculation on diamond mines which promises 'such wealth as it made one dizzy to think of', '[i]f all went as was confidently anticipated' (p. 60). The 'if' conditioning this expectation holds the promise of its disappointment. Inevitably, Captain Crewe is soon 'overweighted by the business connected with the diamond mines', and turns for help to his precocious daughter: '"You see, little Sara," he wrote, "your daddy is not a business man at all . . . If my little missus were here, I dare say she would give me some solemn, good advice"' (p. 69). In keeping with Nelson's analysis, Sara's precocity testifies to Captain Crewe's culpability because it is demanded of her by the situation in which she is placed by his irresponsibility, and also testifies to his helplessness because it is so sharply contrasted with his own 'boyish' (p. 17) innocence. In keeping with the function of the precocious child as 'agent' in contemporaneous fiction, Sara's sacrificial death should be imminent.[25]

However, as Kermode suggests, 'when the agent becomes a kind of person, all is changed.'[26] The possibility that Sara is the agent of her father's redemption is represented in *A Little Princess* only in order to be dismissed. Captain Crewe 'died delirious, raving about his little girl—and didn't leave a penny' (p. 82). The 'jerky brusqueness' (p. 81) of the style in which his death is announced is replicated in the narrative itself. It is clearly indicative of the treatment Sara will receive at Miss Minchin's hands as a result, but also suggests that for the narrator Captain Crewe is more to be blamed than pitied for leaving his daughter to fend, adult-like, for herself. Sara's capacity to be her father's moral guide is promptly made superfluous in *A Little Princess* but, because the novel is focalised through her—because in contrast with so many studies of childhood precocity, *A Little Princess* is about childhood itself, and thus because Sara is, in Kermode's terms, a person, not an agent—this is not an entirely unsatisfactory outcome.

Sara's now-superfluous power to mother her father is, or was, evident particularly in her power to tell stories. Captain Crewe's death constitutes a response to the redemptive function of precocity in much contemporary literature. If, as Roderick McGillis argues, '[t]he power to tell a story is the power, to a certain extent, to fashion the self and the self's

[24] Chesterton, 'Old Curiosity Shop', p. 273.
[25] Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 98.
[26] Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 98.

world' in *A Little Princess*, Captain Crewe's death indicates that Sara's storytelling abilities will instead serve her own needs.[27]

This marks a significant distinction between Sara and Miles or Maisie. For Maisie, '[e]verything had something behind it: life was like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors.'[28] In other words, as Poole observes, Maisie's difficulty is the 'plot-filled and story bound . . . world into which she finds herself inserted and in which, if she is to survive, she will eventually have to find a way for herself'.[29] The potential for survival aside, the same is clearly true of Miles and Dolcino, and, indeed, of Paul Dombey and Little Nell. These innocent prodigies function as props in adult plots because they are unable to create their own stories. Sara, however, *is* able to access the meaning 'behind' language, and this is so from the start of the text. When, for example, Miss Minchin calls her 'beautiful', she quickly 'learned why she had said it', and is 'not at all elated by Miss Minchin's flattery' (p. 13). Sara has access to whatever is behind Miss Minchin's language, and can therefore critique the adult plots which Maisie and Miles are trapped within.

Sara not only understands language, but is able to use it. Indeed, it is most often through her articulate use of language that Sara's precocious understanding is indicated. On being left at her boarding school, for example, she remarks that 'I suppose we must be resigned'; although her father 'laughed at her old-fashioned speech . . . he was really not at all resigned himself' (p. 10). The implication is that Sara not only knows and states that 'we must be resigned' (p. 10), but that she manages to become so. Her father, lacking both Sara's understanding and her articulacy, is unable to change his own approach to their situation. Thus, Maisie's problem is precisely Sara's salvation; language, and its power to construct a world, has diametrically opposed functions in the two texts, so that the story-bound world in which Maisie is a prop is, for Sara, a world of her own making.

A Little Princess thus deviates from the representation of precocity which Shuttleworth has discussed in canonical literature, not only in its concern for Sara's experiences as a precocious child, but also in its representation of her precocity specifically as an aptitude for language which precludes the possibility of innocence. Sara has the power to open the rows of doors which are necessarily closed to Maisie if her precocious knowledge is to be imagined as innocent. Sara's precocity is therefore not available to the same capacious significance as the innocent precocity of her predecessors in fiction from Dickens to James.

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[27] McGillis, p. 70.
[28] James, *Maisie*, p. 26.
[29] Poole, *Henry James*, p. 99.

3.2: Sara and Moral Authority

Sara's precocious storytelling does nevertheless enable her to exert a moral influence that is at times a little too evocative of the 'all-wise infant' satirised by Sully. Sara's kindness to Miss Minchin's mis-treated servant Becky is presented as a specifically ethical consequence of telling stories. After listening to Sara's stories, Becky 'was not the same Becky who had staggered up[stairs], loaded down by the weight of the coalscuttle . . . she had been fed and warmed, but not only by cake and fire. Something else had warmed and fed her, and the something else was Sara' (p. 58). Later, the moral effect of Sara's storytelling is more explicitly articulated: '[t]hough there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that—warm things, kind things, sweet things—help and comfort and laughter—and sometimes gay, kind laughter is the best help of all' (p. 69). Rather like Christian Heineken's ability to 'man' his sailors to 'new efforts' through apt quotation, Sara's stories have a rather implausibly profound moral effect on Becky's world.[30]

Though this piety can seem as 'constrained and awkward' as Little Nell's, it is at least a more tolerant representation of children's storytelling abilities than that which characterises contemporary child psychiatry.[31] The power to tell stories has long been associated with the power to tell lies.[32] This association is evident in *A Little Princess,* but has serious, diagnostic significance in an era when an indeterminate disorder called 'moral insanity' was the most commonly diagnosed childhood mental illness.[33] Henry Maudsley summarises popular nineteenth-century opinion when he suggests that children could not 'go mad' before they have 'some mind to go wrong, and then only in proportion to the quantity and quality of mind which [they] have'.[34] As this suggests, because of their advanced 'quantity and quality of mind', precocious children were thought unusually vulnerable to 'an adult type of insanity'.[35]

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[30] Sully, 'Learned', p. 54. Becky is not the only child to benefit from this effect, but she is probably the most sympathetic. See Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, '"The Whole of the Story": Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*', in *Triumphs of the Spirit in Children's Literature,* ed. Francelia Butler and Richard Rotert (Connecticut: Library Professional Publications, 1986), 230-243 for a discussion of the parallels between Sara's 'selfish, parasitic audience' and the 'psychic and economic' dependence of Burnett's own family on her stories (Keyser, p. 239 and p. 241).

[31] Chesterton, 'Old Curiosity Shop', p. 273.

[32] Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy* (1595) is a particularly well-known analysis of this association, but see, for example, A. R. Sharrock, 'The Art of Deceit: Pseudolus and the Nature of Reading', *The Classical Quarterly,* 46/1 (1996), 152-174, especially pp. 152-156, on the same association in classical literature.

[33] Alexander von Gontard, 'The Development of Child Psychiatry in Britain', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 29/5 (1988), 569-588, at p. 573.

[34] Henry Maudsley, *The Pathology of Mind: A Study of its Distempers, Deformities and Disorder* (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 364.

[35] von Gontard, p. 572. See von Gontard, pp. 571-572, on other exceptions to the nineteenth-century 'rule' that children could not be insane.

Precociously articulate children were particularly prone to exemption from the rule that children could not 'go mad', because they were particularly capable of telling stories. Just as the death of Sara's father interrogates the redemptive function of other precocious children in Victorian literature, so, in an era when Sara's precocious ability to tell stories is diagnostically significant, that ability and its pious effects become a powerful challenge to the assumptions about children and adults implied by the attitude to children's stories in contemporary psychiatry.

One recurrent symptom of moral insanity was the habit of lying. James Crichton-Browne, for example, specifies dishonesty among the four principal traits of morally insane patients. Of the three cases he describes in more detail, one 'quick, lively child, of ready apprehension' becomes 'prone to invent falsehoods'.[36] It is seemingly sufficient to describe another patient as 'lazy and deceitful, given to lying and pilfering, and thoroughly disreputable even when a boy'.[37] Similarly, Robert Hunter Steen lists among the 'crimes against the moral code' committed by morally insane patients the following: '[a] confirmed liar', '[f]alse accusations against young men', '[u]psetting the discipline of nursing-homes and private houses by lying gossip', and 'making false accusations against the school authorities'.[38] Such studies indicate that in the late nineteenth century 'the desire to tell a falsehood' was considered to be, as Steen puts it, 'a natural disposition' in cases of moral insanity.[39]

This was of particular significance for cases of childhood moral insanity. Because lying was a recurrent diagnostic criterion, precociously articulate children must have been particularly susceptible to this diagnosis. George Savage makes a clear statement of the potential connection between moral insanity and a form of precocity manifested particularly in the ability to lie, by claiming that 'it is not very uncommon to find some genius, or, at all events, some precocity . . . in some morally insane children' and, more particularly, that '[t]he morally insane child generally begins to evidence the fact by persistent lying.'[40] Fletcher Beach likewise contends that the 'intellectual faculties are unimpaired' in cases of childhood moral insanity.[41] In fact, 'the child is usually sharp and clever, but morally he is a

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[36] James Crichton-Browne, 'Psychical Diseases in Early Life', *Journal of Mental Science,* 6 (1860), 284-329, at p. 314.
[37] Crichton-Browne, p. 315.
[38] Robert Hunter Steen, 'Moral Insanity', *Journal of Mental Science,* 59/246 (1913), 478-486, at p. 478-479. See H. A. Kidd, 'Robert Hunter Steen, M. D., F. R. C. P. Lond.', *British Journal of Psychiatry,* 72/299 (1926), 720-721, for more information on Steen.
[39] Steen, p. 480.
[40] George Savage, 'Moral Insanity', *Journal of Mental Science,* 27 (1881), 147-155, at p. 150.
[41] Fletcher Beach, 'Insanity in Children', *Journal of Mental Science,* 44 (1898), 459-475, at p. 470. See p. 473 for Beach's claim that 'over-pressure' might cause mental disorders, including moral insanity; this again indicates that association between precocity and mental illness which von Gontard has observed. See G. H. Brown, 'Fletcher Beach', in *Munk's Roll: Lives of the Fellows 4 (1826-*

thief, a liar, full of cunning, horribly cruel, and often of immoral tendencies.'[42] Lying is central to the diagnosis of moral insanity. Savage and Beach imply that precocity enables the child to lie, and therefore that precocious linguistic abilities have the potential to inform a diagnosis of childhood moral insanity.

Moreover, since Savage has 'seen one or two instructive cases in which the power of romancing as a genius and the power or habit of lying was scarcely to be distinguished', storytelling or romancing becomes potentially equivalent to lying.[43] According to this observation, the propensity to tell stories at all is potentially a symptom of moral insanity. It is therefore not surprising that any imaginative storytelling by children was viewed warily by psychologists of the period. The pathological connotations of precocious storytelling are reflected in Sully's *Studies of Childhood*, which claims that '[a]n unbridled fancy and strong love of effect will lead an older child to say what he knows, vaguely at least, at the moment to be false in order to startle and mystify others.'[44] Sully 'distinctly challenge[s] the assertion that lying is instinctive' in children, but such an assertion is implied in his association of precocious articulacy with a tendency to exaggerate, modify, or conceal the truth.[45]

In 'Children's Lies', Hall makes the very assertion that Sully claims to challenge. Although Hall opens the essay by saying that '[n]o children [in his research] were found destitute of high ideals of truthfulness', most of the essay is a discussion of when, why, and to what extent, morally speaking, children fall short of these ideals.[46] Hall in fact concurs with Savage in seeming almost to conflate storytelling with lying:

> The fondness and even sense of exhilaration, with which children often describe such situations, is often due to a feeling of easement from a rather tedious sense of the obligation of undiscriminating, universal and rigorously literal veracity, under which also very often lurks an effort to find the flavour of exculpation for *more inexcusable lies*.[47]

The implication that children's taste for embellished or incomplete description is essentially a taste for deceit is expressed more frankly in an article on 'Love of Children' for *The Saturday Review*: the child 'will tell lies as soon as it begins to discover what is the use of language'.[48] Neither 'Children's Lies', *Studies of Childhood*, nor 'Love of Children', is specifically concerned with childhood mental illness. The anxiety they register about children's lies is nevertheless indicative of the potential pathology of children's imaginative

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1925), <http://munksroll.rcplondon.ac.uk>, last accessed 29 August 2016, for a short biography of Beach.

[42] Beach, p. 470.

[43] Savage, p. 150.

[44] Sully, *Studies*, p. 255.

[45] Sully, *Studies*, p. 264.

[46] Hall, 'Lies', p. 60.

[47] Hall, 'Lies', p. 61, emphasis added.

[48] Anon., 'Love of Children', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 31/ 815 (1871), 724-725, at p. 725.

lives in general, and of their storytelling in particular, evident in much child psychiatry of the era.

This anxiety about precociously articulate children indicates that children's language was viewed differently from the adult language in which, for example, such studies were produced. The dividing line between adult and child which Gubar describes is clearly at work in psychological analyses of precociously articulate children of the late Victorian period, and operates to make pathological in the child the very quality—language—through which the adult could create such pathology. The status of language—either objective, scientific, and diagnostic, or misleading, deceitful, and fanciful—thus contributed to the separation of adult and child in late nineteenth-century Child Study.

If 'Victorian culture' was, as Shuttleworth has demonstrated, 'obsessed by the horror of the lie', the association I have outlined between lies and childhood moral insanity suggests a particular horror of children's lies.[49] It is consistent with this that it is particularly the accusation that she has a 'tendency to deceit' which propagates Jane Eyre's momentous and memorable rebellion against her aunt Reed.[50] However, Robert Newsom claims that '[w]hat is so strikingly authentic in [*Jane Eyre*'s] opening chapters is not the child's voice, . . . but rather the vivid memory of the child's angry sense of powerlessness.'[51] Jane's insistence that 'I am not deceitful' is significant not only as an instance of precocious self-assertion, but also because it absolves her adult self of the morbid implications of childhood deceitfulness.[52]

Newsom identifies *Jane Eyre* as a major influence on Dickens's experiments with first-person retrospective accounts of childhood. His observation that the 'most extended and complicated example of Dickens's writing in this mode'—the opening scene of *Great Expectations*—'is not really about childhood at all, but about growing up', could be applied to a large extent to the opening chapters of *Jane Eyre* itself, in which retrospection is likewise so central.[53] If Victorian culture had a particular horror of children's lies, this may have emerged less from concerns about the child-liar itself than from concerns about the adult that child might grow into.

By contrast, because *A Little Princess* is concerned not with the adult Sara might become but with the child she is, this text offers no denial of its protagonist's deceitfulness. Indeed, the narrator repeatedly suggests that, by telling stories, Sara is blurring the

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[49] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 333.
[50] Brontë, p. 35.
[51] Newsom. p. 100.
[52] Brontë, p. 37.
[53] Newsom, p. 101. Chialant similarly argues that this and other autobiographical fictions by Dickens emphasise the 'distance between narrator and character and give the former a leading role' (Chialant, p. 88).

boundaries between imagination and reality in ways that are closely akin to the horror of deceit. It is therefore clearly untenable to claim, as Roger L. Bedard does, that 'Sara reflects all that was considered proper for children.'[54] Sara's power to tell stories is, moreover, as problematic for adults within *A Little Princess* as it was for child psychologists of the time:

> Sometimes, when [Miss Minchin] was in the midst of some harsh, domineering speech, [she] would find the still, unchildish eyes fixed upon her with something like a proud smile in them. At such times she did not know that Sara was saying to herself: "You don't know that you are saying these things to a princess . . . I only spare you because I *am* a princess, and you are a poor, stupid, unkind, vulgar old thing." (p. 145)

Sara, moreover, 'spoke in a manner which had an effect even upon Miss Minchin. It almost seemed for the moment to her narrow, unimaginative mind that there must be some real power hidden behind this candid daring' (p. 148). Miss Minchin describes Sara as a 'little pauper' (p. 84). In contradicting these words with her insistence that 'I *am* a princess', Sara has created a (transient) world of her own making, but she has done so through perhaps intentional deceit.

As Elizabeth Lennox Keyser observes, 'Sara's repeated use of the phrase "telling a story" for telling a lie reminds us of how closely related the two acts are.'[55] When, for example, Sara insists that 'I should be telling a story if I said she [Miss Minchin] was beautiful . . . and I should know I was telling a story' (p. 13) she therefore highlights, by refuting, the connection between Miss Minchin and herself. Elizabeth Rose Gruner claims that '[w]hile Miss Minchin uses story to conceal and manipulate, Sara uses it to understand and to create', but this difference collapses when Sara manipulates Miss Minchin into fears for her own reputation, and into behaving less abusively towards Sara herself.[56]

Sara can oppose and, momentarily, triumph over the world as Miss Minchin tells it, because she can match Miss Minchin's ability to conceal and manipulate through story: Sara and Miss Minchin *both* have the power to tell stories, and it is particularly through this equivalence that *all* stories are associated with lies in *A Little Princess*. *A Little Princess* represents the parallel between childhood storytelling and childhood deceit which features so recurrently in child psychiatry. In doing so, however, the text suggests that Sara represents a threat to the adult because, by disrupting any clear distinction between the child and the adult, she indicates that adult story-tellers are liars too.

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[54] Roger L. Bedard, 'Sara, Jack, Ellie: Three Generations of Characters', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 9/3 (1984), 103-104, at p. 103. Maier makes a similar claim, but extends it to apply to characters in children's literature in general (Maier, p. 120).
[55] Keyser, p.234.
[56] Elizabeth Rose Gruner, 'Cinderella, Marie Antoinette, and Sara: Roles and Role Models in *A Little Princess*', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 22/2 (1998), 163-187, at p. 173.

Because Sara is articulate rather than innocent, *A Little Princess* undermines the distinction between adult and child sustained by the self-sacrificial function of precocious children in contemporary literature, and by the pathologization of children's language in contemporary psychology. As will be argued, Burnett's novel also suggests that the stories of the precociously articulate child are constructed as lies, and the child herself is an innocent agent of adult stories in contemporary discourse, because she otherwise threatens to become the equal of adults, like Miss Minchin, but also like Sully, Burnett, and their peers in the fields of Child Study and children's literature, as a legitimate, alternative source of ideas and stories about children.

3.3: Precocious Children and Adults

A Little Princess engages with the threat to adult stories presented by the precocious child. 'A Learned Infant' exemplifies the effacement of this threat which characterises so many studies of precocity in the period. Despite its apparent concern for the precocious child, the account in 'A Learned Infant' of the description of Christian's death at the age of four is principally an account of his 'last scholarly achievement . . . a learned commentary on a map of Palestine'; as Sully says, it is the 'fulness and accuracy of his geographical and historical knowledge' which 'are here presented in a striking light'.[57] This conclusion is in fact consistent with the style of Sully's essay throughout. Despite pages of description of his precocious articulacy, and several quotations, usually in Latin, which are attributed to him, nothing Christian is recorded as saying indicates any particular precocity of thought or language whatsoever.

The same is true of many discussions of precocious ability (rather than precocious sexual development) in the Victorian period. The ability is referred to as precocious, but not represented or described, so that the adult author remains in control of the precocious child's voice and mind as it is expressed in text. Those commentators who do recount the specifics of the precocious child's output often do so to support decidedly pejorative interpretations of precocity. Thus, one author quotes the 'admirably appropriate remarks' made by Berlioz after a concert at which the pianist, aged twelve, performed a programme of 'seventy-two pieces—sonatas, concertos, fantasias, fugues, variations, *études*, by Beethoven, Weber, Cramer, Bach, Handel, Liszt, Thalberg, Chopin, etc., which she knew by heart, and could, without hesitation, play from memory'. [58] Berlioz asks whether 'there [is] not something prodigious in it, and calculated to inspire as much terror as admiration'.[59] For the author of the article these 'sinister forebodings' are, of course, 'only too well founded. This highly

[57] Sully, 'Learned', p. 60.
[58] Berlioz, quoted in Anon., 'Precocious Talent', at p. 132.
[59] Anon., 'Precocious Talent', p. 132.

gifted girl . . . was struck down by a premature death.' [60] The cause of death is unspecified, and is therefore implicitly attributed to the precocity which Berlioz has described in such specific detail.

Alexander Bain's overview of the life and remarkably precocious childhood of John Stuart Mill might be considered an exception for several reasons.[61] For one, Mill's adulthood was atypically successful: Florence Maccunn describes him as 'the most elastic as well as the most reasoning optimist of his time', in her defence of childhood precocity in general.[62] Moreover, Bain quotes at length from several of Mill's childhood works. Seemingly, Mill's precocity is to speak for itself.

However, the first of the essays on history which Mill had a childhood 'fondness' for writing is quoted only in footnote.[63] More pertinently, it is introduced in terms which mitigate both its autonomy and its precocity: '[i]f it is wonderful for the writer's age, it also shows that his enormous reading had as yet done little for him. He can make short sentences neatly enough . . . and, in imitation of his author, he supplies erudite and critical notes.'[64] Even in his non-imitative work, Mill does not write well; he 'incontinently plunges . . . into descriptive particulars'.[65] Bain concedes that 'Mill's *power of application* all through his early years was without doubt amazing . . . [and] attested a combination of cerebral activity and constitutional vigour which is *as rare as* genius', but this is a highly qualified concession. [66] Mill's childhood achievements may be remarkable, but are carefully distinguished from the adult and intellectual achievements of genius.

Thus, inevitably, Mill's precocity itself becomes suspect. His classical knowledge, 'such as it was, could easily be forced upon a clever youth at that age' and so, perhaps inevitably, we find that only on those subjects which Mill's father, James Mill, 'could and did teach effectually' was 'John . . . a truly precocious youth'.[67] Even the admission that Mill's 'innate aptitudes [in these subjects] . . . must have been great' is followed by the

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[60] Anon., 'Precocious Talent', p. 132.
[61] Bain founded *Mind* in 1876 and was editor until 1892. As the first English-language journal of psychology, *Mind* was influential in consolidating the status of psychology as a professional academic discipline. See Graham Richards, 'Bain, Alexander (1818-1903)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com>, last accessed 29 August 2016, for more information on Bain, and Francis Neary, 'A Question of "Peculiar Importance": George Croom Robertson, *Mind* and the Changing Relationship Between British Psychology and Philosophy', in Bunn, Lovie, and Richards, pp. 54-71, for a discussion of the role of *Mind* in the early history of psychology.
[62] Florence Maccunn, 'A Plea for Precocious Children', *Good Words*, (Jan 1897), 268-272, at p. 268.
[63] Alexander Bain, 'John Stuart Mill', *Mind*, 14 (1879), 211-229, at p. 212.
[64] Bain, p. 212.
[65] Bain, p. 214.
[66] Bain, p. 225, emphasis added.
[67] Bain, p. 227.

insistence that those aptitudes 'received the utmost stimulation that it was possible to apply'.[68]

Another writer in the period took issue with displays of precocity 'because one never knows how many forcing-tricks may have been resorted to in its development'.[69] Bain implies that Mill's abilities are dependent on his father's abilities, and even, implicitly, on his forcing-tricks. Mill's precocity is thereby contained, firstly, within Bain's interpretations of it and, secondly, within James Mill's abilities, interests, and demands. Consequently, Bain's testimony is as much to James Mill as it is to John Stuart Mill, and also testifies as much to Bain's discernment as to Mill's precocity.

Sully's 'A Learned Infant' satirises the adults who, like James Mill in Bain's analysis, tutor precocious children, but it also replicates Bain's dubious tribute to such children. Whatever the precocious child Christian might have the capacity to think or say is effaced in a testimony firstly to his tutor, and secondly to Sully's own thoughts, and articulacy, on the subject of precocious children. Sully concludes his essay with an almost elegiac tribute that is ambivalently both to Christian and to Christian's biographer, but the remark that 'the devoted tutor himself has erected the best monument to his pupil by writing a book' about this 'matchless infant' is inevitably self-reflexive.[70] In the skilful display of satirical writing which 'A Learned Infant' represents, Sully's abilities and insights become more prominent than those of the child ostensibly defended by his satire. Just as Christian's biography is as much a monument to the abilities of his tutor as to Christian himself, so 'A Learned Infant' is as much a tribute to Sully's skill as a child psychologist and writer as it is his attempt to promote a better understanding of children.

The absence of the articulate child from Sully's essay, the association of children's language with deceit and even moral insanity in contemporary psychiatry, and the early demise or adult retrospect which characterises such children in much literature, all register, in different ways, resistance to the potential power of the precociously articulate child. *A Little Princess* registers the same resistance to that child's power. However, Burnett's novel also engages with the possibilities the child represents, to suggest that a collapse of the separation between child and adult can be highly productive. In particular, by making adult stories equivalent to children's stories, precocity can function to exonerate the deceit which all stories must represent.

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[68] Bain, p. 227. In fact, Mill's 'application' was 'excessive' so that, like many precocious peers in literature and in medicine, 'his health suffered' (Bain, p. 225).
[69] Anon., 'Precocity', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art,* 15/388 (1863), 430-431, at p. 430. It is consistent with Shuttleworth's observation that, once again, the concern seems to be more for the potentially deceived observer than for the child subjected to 'forcing-tricks'.
[70] Sully, 'Learned', p. 60.

Like 'A Learned Infant', *A Little Princess* is as much an acknowledgement of the narrator's as of the child's skill as a story-teller. In fact, by making a spectacle of the moment when Sara's stories fail, and by ostentatiously coming to her rescue, the narrator shows the same antipathy towards the precocious child that Sully and others demonstrate in different ways. At this point, Sara is overcome by loneliness. Her pretence that her doll, Emily, is a real person, fails to comfort her: confronted with the reality that '[t]here was nobody but Emily', Sara 'looked at the staring glass eyes and complacent face, and suddenly a sort of heartbroken rage seized her. She lifted a savage little hand and knocked Emily off the chair, bursting into a passion of crying' (p. 132).

This failure of the precociously articulate Sara to believe the pretence that Emily is real is associated with the failure of story actually to alter her difficult world. Although Sara persists with the story that she is a princess, she remains 'cold and hungry', with 'no one in the world' (p. 132) to help her. Just as the Emily story failed to change these facts, so the more important story that Sara has told Miss Minchin—that she is a princess, that she has some claim to better treatment or, more fundamentally, that she has some 'real power' (p. 148)—must also fail.

The effect of Sara's interaction with Emily at this point is markedly different from a parallel incident in *What Maisie Knew*, and in this respect points to an unexpected similarity between the two texts. Unlike Sara, Maisie is able to believe in her pretence with her doll Lisette, and thereby to benefit from it. Maisie is initially bewildered by the behaviour of the adults around her:

> Little by little, however, she understood more, for it befell that she was enlightened by Lisette's questions, which reproduced the effect of her own upon those for whom she sat in the very darkness of Lisette. Was she herself not convulsed by such innocence? In the presence of it she often imitated the shrieking ladies.[71]

As Paul Armstrong argues, 'by projecting ambiguity and bondage onto her doll' Maisie can 'appropriate clarity and freedom for herself'.[72] By imitating 'the shrieking ladies', Maisie can pretend to understand them and, by *pretending* to understand, can actually transform her own experience of adult behaviour, from 'ambiguity and bondage' to 'clarity and freedom'.[73]

The extent to which Maisie's pretence with her doll really transforms her world is indicated when, addressing Lisette, '[s]he mimicked her mother's sharpness', and 'was rather ashamed afterwards, though as to whether of the sharpness or of the mimicry was not

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[71] James, *Maisie*, p. 26.
[72] Paul Armstrong, 'How Maisie Knows: The Phenomenology of James's Moral Vision', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 20/4 (1978), 517-537, at p. 520.
[73] Armstrong, p. 520.

quite clear'.[74] Maisie can only be ashamed of her sharpness towards a doll if she really believes that the doll's imaginary feelings are real, but can only be ashamed of the mimicry if she identifies the 'sharpness' as a pretence, and thus identifies it as her mother's, not her own, behaviour.

Dick Cate suggests that:

> the very act of creating a doll, making an image, a reflection of oneself, is in itself if not an act of narration then at least the providing of the medium for narration and the overt acceptance of the need, the almost compulsive need for make-believe, for trying out, for rehearsing those contingencies, those relationships, that will occur and which *are occurring simultaneously* in what we refer to as 'real life.'[75]

Through the pretence that Lisette's feelings are real, Maisie can project her own 'real-life' responses onto her doll. By simultaneously recognising this *as* a pretence, Maisie can *recognise* those responses as her own responses to her mother. Thus, Maisie can recognise the real effect of her mother's sharpness on her and, consequently, better understand her 'real' world and her interactions with it. Maisie's pretence thereby effects an actual change in her experience of the world.

The narrator of *What Maisie Knew* thus implies that Maisie's vision can change her experience in a world that adults have created. Sara might be able to create her own stories about a similarly adult-plotted world, but they are unable to effect real change in that world. These contrasting incidents therefore point to an apparent similarity in the construction of the precocious child's potential in each text. Despite its precociously articulate protagonist, *A Little Princess* seems to echo the implication in *What Maisie Knew* that the child's vision has only imagined, unspoken power, rather than real, articulate power, in an adult world.

Fittingly, then, the transformation Sara wishes for in her world can only come about through a new event in the plot. Immediately after this crisis in Sara's storytelling powers, the narrator reiterates a wish Sara has previously expressed that 'someone would take the empty house next door' (p. 133) to Miss Minchin's school. A mere two paragraphs after this, Sara 'saw to her great delight that . . . a van full of furniture had stopped before the next

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[74] James, *Maisie,* p. 27.

[75] Dick Cate, 'Forms of Storying: The Inner and Outer Worlds: "Uses of Narrative", from *English in Education,* 5/3 (1971), 45-50, in *The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading,* ed. Margaret Meek, Aidan Warlow, and Griselda Barton (London: Bodley Head, 1977), 24-31, at p. 24. Cate's analysis of the function of the doll makes a pertinent contrast with the discussion offered by W. H. Hinch in 1906. Hinch asks whether 'a girl playing with a doll [is] preparing for the development of the maternal instinct, or exercising an embryonic maternal instinct', and thus illustrates, once again, the nineteenth-century interest in the child for the adult she anticipates or creates (W. H. Hinch, 'Psychology and Philosophy of Play', *Mind,* 15/58 (1906), 177-190, at p. 182). Cate is not only interested in the function of the doll for the child herself, but points to a parallel between that function and the function of the child for the adult in nineteenth-century fiction, namely, as a 'reflection of oneself' (Cate, p. 24).

house, the front doors were thrown open, and men were going in and out carrying heavy packages and pieces of furniture' (p. 134). The new neighbour happens to be a very rich friend of Sara's dead father, who feels responsible for Captain Crewe's death, and who therefore ultimately comes to rescue Sara from Miss Minchin's cruelty. The narrator rectifies the world that Sara's stories have, prominently, failed to alter, in an audacious coincidence which seems to make a spectacle of the narrator's power to alter a world which Sara's stories cannot change.

However, if this is the '*moment* of interpretation' which, according to Kermode, 'gives sense and structure' to *A Little Princess*, it is problematic for two major reasons.[76] Firstly, because it over-writes Sara's power, this moment is difficult to reconcile with the centrality of that power in 'the larger whole' of the novel; this seeming resolution to *A Little Princess* is inconsistent with the person of its protagonist.[77] Secondly, the almost clumsily obtrusive plotting at this point has obvious repercussions in the context of the novel's association between storytelling and lying; it hints at the fictionality—the deceit—embedded in the novel and the act of novel-writing itself.

The moment when the narrator obtrusively engineers a happy ending for Sara is, of course, not the moment of sense for the novel. *A Little Princess* in fact engages with both problems raised by this moment. The preface to *A Little Princess* explicitly discusses the ethical problems associated with storytelling in the period. Its title, 'The Whole of the Story', must be read as ironic in light of its substance. It opens with the claim that 'I do not know whether many people realise how much more than is ever written there really is in a story—how many parts of it are never told—how much more really happened, than there is in the book one holds in one's hands.'[78] In other words, 'The Whole of the Story' will not be told, a confession of deceit by omission.

However, the preface insists that such deceit is necessitated by the very nature of story. The whole of the story cannot be told because 'if one told all that really happened perhaps the book would never end' (p. vi). Burnett's claim that 'in this new "Little Princess" I have put all I have been able to discover' (p. ix) is, then, a statement of the limits, rather than the extent, of the 'truth' of her story. When James observes that '[r]eally, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem for the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle in which they shall happily *appear* to do so', he re-formulates that long-acknowledged association between art and deceit.[79] Burnett uses the

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[76] Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 16.
[77] Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 17.
[78] Burnett, 'The Whole of the Story', in Burnett, *A Little Princess* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1917), v-vii, at p. v. Subsequent page numbers will be given in parentheses.
[79] James, 'Preface to *Roderick Hudson*', in Gard, pp. 450-463, at p. 452.

same philosophy to question not the association between storytelling and deceit, but the notion that this association is problematic.

In suggesting that 'really' (p. vi), truthfully, the whole of the story would never end, Burnett suggests that the truth is impossible when story is the medium. However, the difference between truth and deceit is, of course, not necessarily the difference between good and bad in *A Little Princess.* The obtrusively pious effects of Sara's storytelling not only refute the moral condemnation of children's storytelling in contemporary psychology. They also, and more directly, ensure that, though Sara and Miss Minchin are equals in their capacity to tell misleading stories, they are clearly differentiated in moral terms throughout the text. Sara's precocious ability to match Miss Minchin in storytelling therefore not only points to the equivalence between Miss Minchin's stories and her own, but, by thus highlighting Miss Minchin's deceitfulness, actually offers a justification for Sara's own lies.

Miss Minchin may be threatened by Sara's precocious storytelling, but the novel's focalization through Sara indicates that Sara is vindicated in representing such a threat. Kucich argues that by 'idealising conduct that hybridizes honesty and dishonesty', Victorian novelists could 'construct potent new kinds of moral sophistication'.[80] By collapsing the perceived moral difference between adults' stories and children's stories, and thereby idealising Sara's conduct in contrast with Miss Minchin's, *A Little Princess* suggests that some stories (or lies) can constitute moral action.

Sara precociously emblematises the moral potential of storytelling: *A Little Princess* offers this doubly transgressive child as an alternative to those powerful and mutually constitutive binaries, adult/ child, and truth/ deceit. Sara's ethical transgressions thus constitute a defence of any storytelling, and of any story-tellers. As this suggests, although *A Little Princess* betrays in its plot the antipathy towards the precocious child characteristic of the period, it also, paradoxically, recognises the legitimacy of Sara's power by making her a 'person', and an alternative source of plot.[81] Thus, the happy end to the narrator-plotted story of Sara's rescue is told simultaneously with another happy ending, and *this* one is brought about by a story told by Sara herself. While out running errands, Sara finds a sixpence outside a bakery; though she is starving, she notices a beggar, 'hungrier than me' (p. 164), sitting nearby. In the story she tells herself, in which she is a princess, the beggar becomes 'one of the populace' (p. 164). Since, according to Sara, princesses 'always shared—with the populace' (p. 164), she uses the sixpence to buy six buns, and gives five to the beggar. Insofar as her story here has any effect on Sara's world, it works to her disadvantage at this

[80] Kucich, p. 4.
[81] Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 98.

point, but it undoubtedly has a positive effect nevertheless. Sara's kindness is noticed by the baker, who is inspired by it to invite the beggar to '[g]et yourself warm' (p. 168) in her shop.

The novel then resumes its narrative of Sara's difficulties. However, at the end, re-established in privilege and luxury by the narrator, Sara visits the bakery:

> [A] girl came out . . . it was the beggar-child, clean and neatly clothed, and looking as if she had not been hungry for a long time . . . "You see", said the [baker], "I told her to come when she was hungry, and when she'd come I'd give her odd jobs to do . . . and the end of it was, I've given her a place an' a home . . . Her name's Anne. (p. 256)

Sara's stories do not, ultimately, enable her to fashion her own world, as McGillis suggests, but they do help another child who is given a role in her story.[82]

Sara thus creates a story which has an effect comparable with, and equivalent to, the narrator's, an equivalence which produces tension between narrator and child, even as it sustains the power of that child to tell her own stories. Rosemarie Bodenheimer describes the separation between Dickens's precociously 'canny' children and the retrospective adult narrators they have become as 'the rift between observation and language: the child part observes; the adult part puts things into words.'[83] In *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations,* and so many other studies of precocity, if precocious children do not die to indict the adult whose responsibilities they take on, they grow up to vindicate, through language, the adult formed by that child's precocious knowledge. *A Little Princess,* which treats the precocious child as a subject in itself, obviates any such 'rift' between child and adult, and thus precludes the moral difference between children's language and adults' language, and between deceit and truth.[84]

Thus, both the child's power, and its tension with the narrator's, are evident in the final paragraph of the novel: 'Sara felt as if she understood [Anne] . . . and looked after her as she went out of the shop and . . . got into the carriage and drove away' (p. 256). At its close, *A Little Princess* is split between the narrator's insistence on *her* ending, in which Sara finds her home, and Sara's absorption in her own ending, which gives Anne a home.[85] By obviating any moral difference between children's language and adults' language, *A Little Princess* validates the lies told in fiction. Though she is in competition with the authority of the narrator's story, Sara also demonstrates that the precociously articulate child can complement, augment, and even exonerate that story.

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[82] McGillis, p. 70.
[83] Bodenheimer, p. 19.
[84] Bodenheimer, p. 19.
[85] The different expectations for working and for middle-class children outlined by Gorham are clearly operating here. See Carole Dunbar, 'Rats in Black Holes and Corners: An Examination of Frances Hodgson Burnett's Portrayal of the Urban Poor', in Carpenter, pp. 67-77, for a discussion of class in Burnett's fiction.

The novel does not resolve the tension between the narrator and Sara—between adult and precocious child—represented by this competition between their stories at the end. This final lack of closure exemplifies the 'secrecy' which, Kermode argues, is ultimately 'a property of all narrative'.[86] For Kermode, such narrative secrecy is only seemingly uncovered by 'our impudent intervention': the interpretation which produces narrative coherence is, in short, a form of deceit.[87] By sustaining a final, unresolved secret at its end, *A Little Princess* invites such impudence. McGillis suggests that '[t]he final gesture of the book is . . . an encouragement to the reader to go beyond the book and act in the reader's real world.'[88] This final scene invites its reader specifically to continue to interpret, to try to uncover another of its secrets. Just as through her impudent and deceitful stories 'princess' Sara can triumph over Miss Minchin, and can help Anne, so the text invites its reader to make a similar intervention, to create a story which can resolve the tension between adult and precocious child. Sara's deceit is synonymous with her moral authority. *A Little Princess* invites its reader to similar deceit, and thus to enact moral authority herself.

A Little Princess thereby validates the lies told in stories by adults of the Victorian period, among them Sully's disingenuous satire, 'A Learned Infant'. *A Little Princess* reminds us that in this essay Sully himself is showing that 'unbridled fancy and strong love of effect' which he has said children display; he is, effectively, saying 'what he knows […] to be false in order to startle and mystify others'.[89] *A Little Princess* also proposes, however, that such lies can have a positive effect, as, indeed, Sully's essay may have had, by laughing at some of the more absurd ideas about precocious children circulating at the time.

The non-Darwinian revolution coincided with unprecedented literary and scientific interest in children and childhood. As I have shown, many studies of precocity in the period represent the child as an origin in which both progress and end can, however problematically, be read. They do so in a context in which this story spoke to the origins, development, and future not only of the child, but of the human species it emblematized. By rejecting any essential moral difference between children's stories and such adult-authored stories as Sully's, *A Little Princess* points to the moral potential of stories—or of lies—in themselves. *A Little Princess* therefore exculpates the paradigmatic Victorian story of childhood progress to adult-as-end which the separation of child and adult enables.

In this respect, precocity in *A Little Princess* ultimately serves a function comparable with that of precocity in *What Maisie Knew*, *The Turn of the Screw*, or 'The Author of Beltraffio'. Although Sara's precocity is highly articulate, and therefore cannot be

[86] Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 144.
[87] Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 145.
[88] McGillis, p. 71.
[89] Sully, *Studies*, p. 255.

innocent, it nevertheless reflects and thus enables an interrogation of the power ordinarily embodied in adults. While in James's work that power is problematically implicated in innocence and therefore in either infanticide or corruption, in *A Little Princess* it is ultimately vindicated. Through its very disregard for the line separating child from adult, *A Little Princess* exculpates the story which that line enables. Though Sara herself is not available as an origin to the story of adult selfhood, she acquits the stories about children told in the service of that need.

Chapter Four: The Imagination in Victorian Children's Literature

Julia Briggs identifies 'Sara Crewe' as a model for *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899), the first book in Nesbit's highly successful *Treasure Seekers* series.[1] Nesbit's opinion of Burnett's works might be surmised from fact that one of the least sympathetic characters in the *Treasure Seekers* series, Albert-next-door, is clearly wearing a Little Lord Fauntleroy suit when he first appears in the text. However, there are significant similarities in the work of these two authors. Through her child narrator, Oswald Bastable, Nesbit interrogates the same discourse about childhood which Burnett examines. Nesbit also shares Burnett's deep scepticism towards this discourse and particularly towards its insistence on a separation between adult and child. Finally, like Burnett, Nesbit uses a precociously articulate child ultimately to undermine this distinction.

In some studies of childhood in the nineteenth century, such as James's *What Maisie Knew*, adult and child are differentiated by the presence or absence of language. In others, the same distinction between adult and child is based on the relationship, studied in Burnett's *A Little Princess*, of language with truth. In yet other analyses, the difference between adult and child was based in the imagination as an attribute unique to childhood. However, if the status of language—as truth or as deceit—was a relatively stable distinction between adult and child in Victorian discourse, the status of the imagination was fraught with contradictions.

This chapter will first demonstrate that, as its present-day associations suggest, the child's imagination was associated with genius in nineteenth-century discourse. However, it was also the imagination which made children's language inherently deceitful, because it was the imagination which obscured children's sense of the truth.[2] By comparing psychological and scientific discourse about the imagination with its presentation in the *Treasure Seekers* series, this chapter will illustrate that the imagination served as a conceptual code for that multivalent child mind which was so central to nineteenth-century discourse, but also characterised a child who could not easily be appropriated for this endlessly signifying function.

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[1] Julia Briggs, 'E. Nesbit, the Bastables, and The Red House: A Response', *Children's Literature,* 25 (1997), 71-85, at p. 79. Like *A Little Princess*, the *Treasure Seekers* series first appeared in the form of a series of short stories which Nesbit wrote for the *Pall Mall* and *Windsor* magazines. Langley Moore notes that these stories offered Nesbit a 'handsome source of income which it was in her power to increase almost at will' (Langley Moore, p. 181). The other books in the series are *The Wouldbegoods* (1901) and *New Treasure Seekers* (1904). I will refer to the following editions: *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995); *The Wouldbegoods* (Middlesex: Puffin Books, 1981); *New Treasure Seekers* (Middlesex: Puffin Books, 1982), and will use the following abbreviations for in-text citations: *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*: *TS; The Wouldbegoods: WB; New Treasure Seekers: NT.*

[2] See Shuttleworth, *Mind*, pp. 60-74.

The chapter will then analyse the significance of Oswald's narrative voice in the context of an ideological separation of child and adult, concentrating particularly on the idea of naughtiness which has been such a focal point for criticism of the Bastables both within the series and in recent critical analyses of it. Like Sara, Oswald is precociously articulate, but he is not only a principal character in the *Treasure Seeker* series: he is also the narrator of that series.[3] Like Maisie, Miles, Dolcino, and Sara, Oswald's precocity reflects, and thus enables an interrogation of, the power ordinarily embodied in adults, and particularly the power over children and ideas about children. However, as the teller of his own story the precocious child of the *Treasure Seekers* series offers an interrogation which differs significantly from that offered in the texts previously discussed. Because he tells his own story, Oswald cannot be defined in opposition with, as the absence of, or as the origin to, a coherent adult self.

The chapter will conclude by suggesting that the series not only undermines the child's function in relation to adult selfhood, but also posits an alternative response to the conditions in which selfhood had become so urgently necessary. Gubar has argued that many children in nineteenth-century fiction were willing collaborators in their construction in adult texts and worlds. Oswald's articulated imagination advocates this collaborative dialogue as an alternative to authoritative narrative as a means to construct a self in the post-Darwin era.

4.1: The Imagination in Child Study

In late nineteenth-century Child Study, the imagination had ambivalent connotations. Crichton-Browne's discussion is indicative: what he describes as 'dreamy mental states' are 'experienced only at a certain stage of mental evolution . . . often vexing adolescence and vanishing in adult life'.[4] These specifically childish mental states 'are often the outcome of those of a simpler and more innocent nature', and their content is 'almost invariably concerned with those ultimate ideas—space, time, matter, motion or relativity—which are beyond the domain of certain knowledge', but their 'pathological significance' is nevertheless 'demonstrable'.[5] As Crichton-Browne suggests, the imagination is, almost by

[3] He and his siblings also make a brief appearance in one of Nesbit's books for adults, *The Red House* (1902). This 'cross-writing', and its implications for the child in Nesbit's work, is the focus of three articles in the 1997 issue of *Children's Literature*. For details of instances of the Red House in Nesbit's fiction, and of the house (Well Hall) on which it was based, see Langley Moore, pp. 182-197.
[4] Crichton-Browne, 'Dreamy Mental States', in *Stray Leaves from a Physician's Portfolio* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 1-42, at p. 6. The essay was first given as a lecture to the West London Medico-Chronological Society in June 1895.
[5] Crichton-Browne, 'Mental States', p. 7 and p. 8.

definition, an attribute of childhood. It is also associated both with metaphysical insight, and with many disorders specific to, or most pernicious in, children.[6]

The association of imagination with insight predominates in Sully's work which, as Shuttleworth argues, offers an essentially 'Romanticized account' of its significance and effects.[7] In 'George Sand's Childhood' (1889), Sully refers to Schopenhauer's claim of 'the essential similarity of the man of genius and the child' to argue that 'the gifted child seems not less but more of a child because of his gifts.'[8] George Sand's genius, then, can be recognised in her own accounts of a childhood in which 'common childish impulses and tendencies [were] exalted'.[9] Since *Studies of Childhood* opens with the claim that childhood, 'we all know, is the age for dreaming, for decking out the world as yet unknown with the gay colours of imagination', these 'common childish impulses' are more specifically the impulses of Sand's imagination.[10] The 'daring irregularities of genius' are only an exalted form of the imaginative play which all children enact: the imagination is universally present in children, and specifically present in genius.[11]

This Romanticised view was, as Jenny Holt has argued, more common among writers of fiction than of psychology in the Victorian period.[12] Thus, Sully refers to the writer Jean Ingelow's 'The History of an Infancy' (1890) in his discussion of the imagination in *Studies of Childhood*.[13] His association of the imagination, childhood, and genius is anticipated in Ingelow's claim that even in early childhood 'I knew . . . what poetry was, though I had never heard its name': 'I had a great delight—I should have called it poetic delight if I had known the words—in various noises and sights and scents.'[14] This poetic, childhood 'wonder and imagination, as well as all the strange new speculations natural to me, receded in some degree, and were kept in abeyance, before the inroads of

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[6] See Bourne Taylor, 'Atavism', on the prevalence of the association between imagination and childhood in nineteenth-century mental science. One voice which dissented from this view can be found in Clifford Allbutt's contribution to the quarterly meeting Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britian and Ireland, recorded in 'Notes and News', *Journal of Mental Science,* 35 (1889), 129-134, at p. 133.
[7] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 84.
[8] Sully, 'George Sand's Childhood', *Longman's Magazine,* 15/86 (1889), 149-164, at p. 149.
[9] Sully, 'Sand', p. 149.
[10] Sully, *Studies*, p. 25; Sully, 'Sand', p. 149.
[11] Sully, 'Sand', p. 149.
[12] Jenny Holt, '"Normal" versus "Deviant" Play in Children's Literature: An Historical Overview', *The Lion and the Unicorn,* 34/1 (2010), 34-56, at p. 52. Holt actually uses Sully to substantiate this claim. While, as I will show, he was more ambivalent about the imagination than Shuttleworth suggests, the previous paragraph indicates that he was more receptive to a Romantic view of the imagination than many other psychologists in the period.
[13] In addition to her novels and poems for adults, Ingelow wrote several books and stories for children. See Kathleen Hickok, 'Ingelow, Jean 1820-1897', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com>, last accessed 31 August 2016.
[14] Jean Ingelow, 'The History of an Infancy', *Longman's Magazine,* 15/88 (1890), 379-390, at p. 387.

learning'.[15] Childhood is associated with the imagination as opposed to learning: both are therefore dissociated from adulthood, and associated instead with 'poetic delight'; with genius.

Crichton-Browne points to the specifically Romantic view of the imagination here implied when he attributes to Samuel Taylor Coleridge the advice that one should '[t]hink not . . . of having touched the skirts of immensity and mystery until you have had a dreamy mental state.'[16] Since children are more susceptible to this receptive mental state, '[t]he conclusion which observation of children leads us to is', according to Sully, that 'as compared with adults, they are endowed with strong imaginative power, the activity of which leads to a surprisingly intense inner realisation of what lies *above* sense.'[17] Children are contrasted with adults specifically because of their imaginative power and this leads not only to a different realisation of the sensory world, but to a transcendent one.

Moreover, Ingelow states that with 'my first experience of pain . . . the true period of infancy came to an end'.[18] The state of childhood transcends a world of which pain is the defining feature. A less poignant instance of the same dissociation between childhood and pain can be found in Robert Louis Stevenson's claim that while '[t]o the grown person, cold mutton is cold mutton all the world over . . . for the child it is still possible to weave an enchantment over eatables; and if he has but read of a dish in a story book, it will be heavenly manna to him for a week.'[19] Whether because true childhood ends with the advent of pain, or because that pain is transformed by the child's imagination, the child is defined by an imagination which equates with and enables her transcendence of suffering.

These Romanticized accounts of the childhood imagination anticipate the child in contemporary Western culture according to Karín Lesnik-Oberstein. In this analysis, the child 'is made to preserve . . . a safe world of an emotion which is spontaneous, caring, and unified, and only in aberration abusive, violent, or divided against itself'.[20] This is part of a broader 'double function of simultaneously protecting and upholding the claim of a vital priority of a particular version of emotion and feeling'.[21] In nineteenth-century analyses, this transcendent function was enabled specifically by the child's imagination.

Kincaid has shown that this 'good' child is 'invitingly vacant', and offers an 'utter blankness' onto which the adult can project her own desires—Miles and his governess in

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[15] Ingelow, p. 389.
[16] Crichton-Browne, 'Mental States', p. 7.
[17] Sully, *Studies*, p. 61, emphasis added.
[18] Ingelow, p. 388.
[19] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Child's Play', in *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers* (London: Heinemann, 1924), 106-116, at p. 192.
[20] Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, 'Childhood and Textuality: Culture, History, Literature', in Lesnik-Oberstein, pp. 1-28, at p. 26.
[21] Lesnick-Oberstein, p. 7.

James's *The Turn of the Screw* typify this relationship.[22] What the adult calls the naughty child is just as useful. The naughty child 'keeps its distance from the professed standard, remains Other, [and therefore] does not so much rebel as respond more accurately to what is wanted'.[23] In other words, naughtiness is as convenient as goodness in constructing a child according to what is wanted by the adult. The blankness and permanent Otherness of the good/ naughty child provides a canvas for the projection of adult desires.

The naughty child of adult discourse is evident in the many distinctly un-Romanticized accounts of the imagination offered by many contributors to Child Study of the Victorian period. In fact, although Shuttleworth claims that Sully's analysis of the imagination 'allows no space for the possible conflict it may entail', even his account of childhood imagination is not entirely Romanticised.[24] Sully actually extends Hall's observation that '[m]uch childish play owes its charm to partial self-deception' to suggest that 'the realising force of young imagination may expose it [not only] to deception by others . . . [but also] to self-deception too, with results that closely simulate the guise of a knowing falsehood.'[25] The habit of lying and the pathology, outlined in the previous chapter, associated with that habit, are here attributed to a capacity for deceit which, because it originates in the imagination, is actually non-linguistic.

Holt contrasts what she views as a late-Victorian tendency to espouse (at least in fiction) the 'superior benefits of imaginary play' with the view of earlier writers such as Thomas Day and Maria Edgeworth.[26] Influenced by Rousseau's idea that 'society was corrupted by desire and envy—emotions he believed were intensified by an overactive imagination', Day and Edgeworth 'were wary of letting children indulge in independent imaginative activities, since an immature imagination let loose has a tendency to breed those feelings of greed, envy and desire' which were, for Rousseau, 'at the root of social problems'.[27] In associating lies with the imagination, the two most prominent child psychologists of the late-Victorian period show that such thinking was still prevalent a century later.

Indeed, Hall's analysis is directly comparable with Rousseau's. As Shuttleworth has argued, although 'Hall pays lip service to the positive qualities of imagination', he 'simultaneously plac[es] childhood fantasy and lies at the heart of modern society's problems'.[28] For Hall, '[t]he stimulus and charm of the imagination makes [children] act a

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[22] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 223.
[23] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 246.
[24] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 84.
[25] Hall, 'Lies', p. 64; Sully, *Studies*, p. 28.
[26] Holt, p. 37.
[27] Holt, p. 35.
[28] Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 84.

part different from their natural selves' and thereby, as Shuttleworth observes, 'fuel[s] the social ambitions of a restless society, with adults seeking to live out their childhood fantasies rather than remaining in the social niche nature had allotted them'.[29]

Like so much that children did in the late Victorian period, this living-out of social ambition not only retained the serious social consequences identified by Rousseau, but was also seen to have serious personal consequences for the adult. Seeking to live out, in adulthood, the fantasies of an over-active childhood imagination might, according to Hall, lead to 'a life long passion for deception', a 'love [of] the stimulus of violent ruptures from the truth, or [the] love [of] lies for their own sake'.[30] Hall pathologises children's imaginary self-construction because such 'falsity to fact' in childhood might lead to an adulthood which is pathological both societally and individually.[31]

Hall goes further even than this in his wariness about imaginative play. When he suggests that '[t]he love of showing off and of seeming big, to attract attention or to win admiration, sometimes leads children to assume false characters' he suggests that 'falsity to fact' is not only the (potential) adult consequence of an imaginative childhood, but that children themselves might *wilfully* mislead others as to their 'natural' selves.[32] Hall recasts playful self-deception in childhood as intentional rupture with the truth, so that the potential passion for deception in adulthood becomes the actual passion for deception in childhood. Far from having 'superior benefits', imaginative play has diagnostic significance in Hall's analysis.

As discussed in the previous chapter, von Gontard has identified moral insanity as the most common psychiatric diagnosis for children in the nineteenth century: it was so specifically because of the openness of its diagnostic criteria.[33] The diagnostic potential of the imagination in Hall's analysis complements this openness, and therefore supports the use of the imagination not only in the diagnosis of moral insanity, but in a broader potential pathology through which, as von Gontard observes, 'any deviant behaviour could be arbitrarily declared a form of insanity' in children.[34]

Thus, nineteenth-century Child Study is characterised by an intense but ambivalent, even contradictory, view of the imagination and its effects. Though contributors disagree on whether the imaginative child was transcendently good or pathologically naughty, they are united in an underlying premise that the child is fundamentally different from the adult. The good child who cannot experience pain allows the adult to imagine that 'unified' world

[29] Hall, 'Lies', p. 66; Shuttleworth, *Mind*, p. 87.
[30] Hall, 'Lies', p. 68.
[31] Hall, 'Lies', p. 66.
[32] Hall, 'Lies', p. 67.
[33] von Gontard, p. 573-574.
[34] von Gontard, p. 574.

described by Lesnik-Oberstein.[35] The naughty child, onto whom adult discontents are projected, 'vacate[s] the position of true child, becomes Other, so that [this] child-spot'— this otherwise 'sealed-off', painless, unified world— 'is left open for the adult' instead.[36] Despite the contradictory views held by leading contributors to nineteenth-century Child Study, that discourse consistently offers a child who is defined, primarily, by the function it performs for the adult.

4.2: The Imagination and the Child Narrator

In both the content of his narrative and his position as narrator Oswald erodes the opposition between child and adult on which the image of both was based in nineteenth-century Child Study. Rather than embodying an adult desire to transcend or control the world, the precocious and imaginative child narrator Oswald Bastable models an approach to the world which obviates this desire. He does so, moreover, by suggesting that the adult might well be characterised by those qualities which the child is imagined to represent, by suggesting that some adults might be as imaginative as the child is supposed to be.

The *Treasure Seekers* series is considered by many critics to be a harbinger of 'the emancipation of children' from the 'goodness' both of much fiction written for them, and of their representation in such fiction, in the nineteenth century.[37] However, the Bastables do often display something like a transcendence of a world which aligns them with the good child of Kincaid's analysis. Contrasted with the placidity of their less imaginative friends Denny and Daisy and with the behaviour of some of the adults they encounter, moreover, that transcendent goodness is associated with the Bastables' greater imaginative capacity. In this respect, the series appears to support Holt's claim that for late Victorian writers 'imaginary play is a means of coming to understand the vicissitudes of human nature, particularly from an emotional point of view.'[38] In keeping with Sully's Romanticised analysis of the child's imagination, the Bastables are often oblivious to cruelty and conflict in the world around them, and respond, accordingly, with an innocence that transcends that world.

The 'Castilian Amaroso' episode is perhaps the best example of this, but as such it also demonstrates how dubious the very idea of transcendence is when applied to the

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[35] Lesnik-Oberstein, p. 26.
[36] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 247 and p. 221.
[37] Mary Croxon, 'The Emancipated Child in the Novels of E. Nesbit', *Signal*, 14 (1974), 51-64, at p. 51. Croxon cites several earlier critics who make this claim. See also Marcus Crouch's *Treasure Seekers and Borrowers: Children's Books in Britain, 1900-1960*, (London: Library Association, 1962) and *The Nesbit Tradition* for an analysis of Nesbit's influence, particularly through this innovation, on twentieth-century children's fiction. Nesbit's opinion of Little Lord Fauntleroy suggests that she had this emancipation in mind when she wrote the series.
[38] Holt, p. 34.

Bastables. Oswald and his sisters, who have been trying to restore their father's fortune by selling sherry, decide to call with a 'stray' clergyman and it occurs to them that 'we might as well take the sherry with us' (*TS*, p. 119). Unsurprisingly, they are taken aback to be called '[n]asty, sordid little things' (p. 122) by the clergyman's housekeeper for doing so. Of course, it is clearly the housekeeper whose behaviour is 'nasty', and whose interpretation of their behaviour is even somewhat 'sordid' (p. 122); the adult's misguided and sanctimonious disapproval is explicitly contrasted first with the Bastables' innocent good intentions, and subsequently with active moral authority when Dora replies that 'we are not those things you say, but we are sorry we came here to be called names' (p. 122). Oswald, moreover, thinks 'that was rather smart of Dora, even if it was rather rude' (p. 122). His confidence in his own, and in Dora's, sense of right and wrong is unshaken by adult admonishment. It is the Bastables who display moral authority, which is constituted in opposition to adult authority, at this point of the text.

Like many of the child-protagonists Nelson describes, moreover, the Bastables might be seen to serve a narrative in which their father is redeemed through the imaginative goodness they represent.[39] Although their efforts to help their father out of his financial difficulties by selling sherry are not a success, a more imaginative game does bring about his redemption. By imagining that their pudding is 'a wild boar at bay' (p. 175), the Bastables not only make the pudding palatable, as Stevenson suggests they might. They actually succeed where their father could not in inclining their rich Indian uncle to support their father's business. The Bastables' imaginative games thereby both restore the 'fortunes of the House of Bastable' and reconstitute the family unit 'in the big house on the Heath' (p. 188). Although the children's direct efforts to make money do not restore their father's financial and social power, they are, nevertheless, the agents of this redemption.[40]

In this, the series at least ostensibly reflects the view of the child's imagination as a redemptive force which can transcend the adult world. However, the banal and comic content of these episodes means that they are much less earnest studies of the child's redemptive potential than, for example, Little Nell's death. The tone of Oswald's narrative means that the Bastables are also less satisfactory as mechanisms for adult redemption even than Sara Crewe. Sara is ultimately and unconsciously designated as a device in yet another narrative of the redemption, by a child, of a culpable, helpless adult (albeit in the form of father-figure Mr Carrisford rather than her irretrievably hapless father). Sara, who has no consciousness of her father's inadequacies, seems to share Maisie's imagined vision of a

[39] Nelson, *Precocious Children*.
[40] See Holt for a critique of the representation of money in the series. Diana Chlebek, 'Money as Moral and Social Catalyst in Children's Books of the Nineteenth Century', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 11/2 (1986), 77-80 offers an alternative analysis.

better version of the adult self: her role fulfils even if it also falsifies the role of agent in the same narrative of adult redemption which was so common in the nineteenth century.

The Bastables, by contrast, are fully conscious of their father's difficulties. Oswald remarks that:

> [w]e left off going to school, and Father said . . . a holiday would do us all good. We thought he was right, but we wished he had told us he couldn't afford it. For of course we knew . . . So you see it was time we looked for treasure. (p. 13)

If the Bastables are too knowing to sustain Maisie's innocent vision of adults, they are also too interfering to be so straightforwardly co-opted in the service of a narrative which realises that vision. Sara's transcendence comes about through 'solemn, good advice', which is not essentially different from the 'consolatory quotation' of Sully's Learned Infant.[41] The Bastables are indirectly involved in 'restor[ing] the fallen fortunes of the House of Bastable' (p. 43) but, as the very phrasing of this objective suggests, they participate as much for their own amusement as for any more transcendent or redemptive purpose.

Indeed, a more cooperative image of redemptive children is satirised within the series itself. As Nelson suggests, the Bastables' friends Denny and Daisy conform 'to the prim and unimaginative pattern . . . of goodness, so convenient to adult authority'.[42] The Bastables' behaviour is too knowing, too disruptive, and too motivated by their own pleasure, to be quite as convenient for that adult. Contrasted with Denny and Daisy, and compared with Sara or Maisie, the Bastables' are more imaginative, but are also, for that very reason, less transcendent.

If the *Treasure Seekers* series fits problematically with Romanticised accounts of the imagination, a resistance to such pathologising accounts as Hall's is both more obvious in the texts, and more urgent in their context. Just as Oswald's phrasing of his supposedly redemptive function—his ambition to 'restore the fallen fortunes of the House of Bastable'—undermines that function, so Oswald's own account of his naughtiness problematizes the very idea of naughtiness, or its medical equivalent, pathology.

A striking parallel between their first imaginative game in *The Wouldbegoods* and a description of one form of childhood insanity demonstrates the significance of the context in which the Bastables first appear. The game is called *Jungle Book*, in a clear reference to Rudyard Kipling's novel of 1894, the significance of which will be discussed below. It

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[41] Burnett, *Princess*, p. 69; Sully, 'Learned', p. 54.
[42] Claudia Nelson, 'E. Nesbit (15 August 1858-4 May 1924)', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 141: British Children's Writers, 1880-1914*, ed. Laura M. Zaidman (London: Gale Research, 1984), 199-216, at p. 207.

involves appropriating and accidentally destroying valuable articles from their uncle's house. Unexpectedly:

> the uncle, three other gentlemen and two ladies burst upon the scene. We had no clothes on to speak of . . . And all the stuffed animals were there . . . Most of them had got a sprinkling, and the otter and the duck-bill brute were simply soaked. And three of us were dark brown. (*WB*, p. 24)

The reader is in no doubt that, up until this point, the game was, as Oswald insists, 'jolly good fun to do' (p. 20-21). There may not be much 'genius' in the Bastables' game, but there is no pathology either.

However, three years prior to the publication of *The Wouldbegoods*, Fletcher Beach suggested that one form of childhood insanity was 'characterised by a general delirium, with loquacity, incoherence, intellectual excitement, and delirious conceptions . . . The children cry, run about, laugh, sing, break and destroy things, undress themselves and do everything without any aim or design.'[43] The behaviour of the Bastables during their game is noticeably consistent with the criteria for a diagnosis of what Beach calls '[*m*]*ania*'.[44]

What Hall presents as the problematic 'stimulus and charm' of imaginative games in fact repeatedly leads the Bastables to act in ways that might be pathological in a medical context.[45] They make their brother Noel sick in order to test the medicines they hope to sell; Steen notes, specifically, that '[a]ttempted poisoning of members of the family' is a recurrent crime in the histories of the morally insane.[46] *The Wouldbegoods* also depends on the fact that the Bastables are impervious to correction; according to G. E. Shuttleworth and W. A. Potts, among the '[e]ssential features in the diagnosis [of moral imbecility]' is that 'the moral shortcomings . . . are not influenced by ordinary discipline and punishment.'[47] The behaviour of the Bastables, then, makes a surprisingly clear fit with the diagnostic criteria for many forms of childhood insanity.

There is, of course, one obvious but crucial difference between children in the medical and the fictional texts cited. Beach suggests that the child inflicted with mania acts without 'aim or design', while, according to Shuttleworth and Potts, another 'essential feature' of moral imbecility is 'that the moral shortcomings are not to be explained by training and environment'.[48] Through her child narrator, Nesbit contextualises every one of the Bastables' acts specifically within the aim or design which motivates it. Just as Oswald

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[43] Beach, p. 469.
[44] Beach, p. 469.
[45] Hall, 'Lies', p. 66.
[46] Steen, pp. 478-479.
[47] G. E. Shuttleworth and W. A. Potts, *Mentally Deficient Children: Their Treatment and Training* (1895; 4th edn., Philadelphia: P. Blakiston's, 1916), p. 140.
[48] Beach, p. 469; Shuttleworth and Potts, p. 140.

intends to 'restore the fallen fortunes of the House of Bastable' as much because it is fun as to help his father, so although their uncle may be unable to explain the Bastables behaviour, it is explicable to the reader because the child himself explains it.

Because their acts are narrated exclusively from the perspective of one of the children who performs them, the *Treasure Seekers* series insists both on the insignificance and on the essential harmlessness of imaginative play. The context in which the Bastables' behaviour is potentially symptomatic of mental disturbance or of transcendent insight is pertinent precisely because Oswald's own perspective invalidates both.

In doing so, Oswald's perspective also invalidates the distinction between adult and child which is predicated on such ideas about the imagination. This more fundamentally transgressive effect of Nesbit's innovative use of a child narrator is apparent from the start of the series.[49] Oswald opens his narrative with an excoriating comment on the work of some writers:

> I have read books myself, and I know how beastly it is when a story begins, '"Alas!' said Hildegarde with a deep sigh, "we must look our last on this ancestral home"'. . . and you don't know for pages where the home is, or who Hildegarde is or anything about it. (*TS*, p. 11)

He then demonstrates how a story *should* start: 'Our ancestral home is in the Lewisham Road . . . We are the Bastables' (p. 11). Oswald's parody is a successful joke at the expense of this recognisable, if exaggerated, (adult) style.[50] His style, an alternative in the child's voice, is clearly superior both in Oswald's own opinion and, if the favourable reviews the series enjoyed when first published, its commercial success, and its enduring popularity, are indicative, in the opinion of many readers.[51]

However, the documented reception of the *Treasure Seekers* series reflects at least in part its popularity among an adult audience. For Susan Anderson, the critical and commercial success of Nesbit's writing for children can therefore be attributed to its appeal

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[49] Although several writers, including Mary Louisa Molesworth, Dinah Craik, and Julia Ewing, experimented with child narrators before Nesbit, Oswald is generally considered the most successful example of the period. Barbara Wall, for example, describes Oswald as 'the first truly individual child narrative voice' (Wall, *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 152). See Gubar, *Artful Dodgers,* for more information on the development of the child narrator during the nineteenth century.

[50] See Gubar, 'Partners in Crime: E. Nesbit and the Art of Thieving', *Style*, 35/3 (2001), 410-429, on the parallels between Oswald's and Nesbit's parodic appropriations of conventional literary forms and tropes.

[51] See, for example, the reviews of 'The Story of the Treasure Seekers', *The Bookman*, 17/99 (Dec. 1899), 21, and in 'Novels of the Week', *The Spectator*, 83/3727 (Dec. 1899), 843 and, more recently, affectionate descriptions of Oswald in Judith Barisonzi, 'E. Nesbit (15 August 1858-4 May 1924)', in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 153, Late-Victorian and Edwardian British Novelists,* ed. George M. Johnson (London: Gale Research, 1995), 216-227, at p. 221 as well as in criticism by Wall and Gubar.

to the specifically adult taste for 'the pleasures of nostalgia': '[i]n simultaneously addressing both adult and child readers' such texts 'emphasise the gap between them, evoking the sense of an irrevocable loss of a childhood space of pleasure and freedom'.[52]

For Anderson, moreover, the *Treasure Seekers* series is particularly open to such nostalgic engagement, and, further, such openness is intentionally developed by Nesbit, specifically through her use of a child narrator. She claims that 'Nesbit clearly recognises the differences between adult and child reading habits when Oswald Bastable asserts . . . that there is no point in writing such things as prefaces since "they are just for people to skip."'[53] Anderson thus suggests that the *Treasure Seekers* is popular because the 'polysemic' use of the child's voice offers childhood experience up to nostalgic, adult pleasure or, more generally, because the child narrator reinforces that difference from the adult which defines the Victorian and, indeed, the twenty-first century child.[54]

However, far from pointing to any difference between adult and child reading habits, Oswald's habit of skipping prefaces highlights one of the primary pleasures all readers share. Gubar claims that 'the very act of delegating the power of narration to a child surrogate reveals Nesbit's interest in dissolving any strict division between [adult] author and [child] audience', but since adults are a substantial audience for the series, Nesbit's child surrogate also erodes a boundary between child narrator and *adult* audience.[55] Through Oswald, then, Nesbit not only suggests that adults and children are less different than they are imagined to be, but also suggests that the balance of power might not, or should not, always lie in the adult's favour.

The implicit value-judgement which Anderson makes when she suggests that children skip the preface to read for the plot, and that adults laugh at them for doing so, is highlighted by Peter Brooks, who claims that '"[r]eading for the plot", we learned somewhere in our schooling, is a low form of activity', so that 'plot is why we read *Jaws,* but not Henry James.'[56] In Anderson's analysis, plot is why children read, but not why adults read. Since 'skipping the preface' is, however, a common, if surreptitious, adult practice when reading a novel for the first time, Oswald's comment does not 'emphasise the gap between' adult and child readers.[57] Rather, it identifies a key point of similarity.

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[52] Susan Anderson, 'Time, Subjectivity and Modernism in E. Nesbit's Children's Fiction', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 32/4 (2007), 308-322, at p. 308 and p. 310.
[53] Anderson, p. 310.
[54] Anderson, p. 310. See also Erika Rothwell, '"You Catch it if You Try to do it Otherwise": The Limitations of E. Nesbit's Cross-Written Vision of the Child', *Children's Literature,* 25 (1997), 60-70, p. 61 and p. 66, and 'Nesbit, E(dith) (1858-1924)', in *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature,* ed. Humphry Carpenter and Mari Prichard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 371-374, at p. 374 for a more critical analysis of Nesbit's contribution to children's literature.
[55] Gubar, 'Partners', p. 412.
[56] Brooks, p. 4.
[57] Anderson, p. 310.

The *Treasure Seekers* series therefore does not consistently address two distinct implied readers, defined by age. It does, however, address a reader who is implied to have characteristics commonly associated with childhood. For example, at one point Oswald confides in the reader that 'Babel' 'is a very good game' and asks, '[d]id you ever play it?' (p. 15). Following Anderson, this comment would appeal 'to the adult reader's sense of a superior appreciation of' the problems a game like 'Babel' might present.[58] However, for the adult reader to enjoy a sense of superior appreciation of Oswald's comment assumes that (all) children are oblivious to the problems games might create, and that (all) adults are oblivious to the pleasures they might offer, assumptions that are undermined by several characters within the series.

The children's fourteen-year-old cousin, Archibald, for example, 'was that kind of boy we knew at once it was no good trying to start anything new and jolly' with, while Mrs Bax, by contrast, 'taught us eleven new games that we had not known before; and only four of the new games were rotters' (*NT*, p. 47, p. 206). Although, as Oswald laments, 'seldom can as much be said for the games of a grown-up' (p. 206), there are, in fact, more grown-ups than children, throughout the series, who are capable of sharing the Bastables' pleasure in imaginative play. The texts themselves therefore invert the association made by Oswald and by many contemporary studies between imagination and childhood.

In perhaps its most prominent manifestation, this inversion is explicitly associated with the relative competence of the two characters as readers. Nine-year old Albert-next-door 'cannot play properly at all . . . You see, Albert-next-door doesn't care for reading . . . so he is very foolish and ignorant' (*TS*, p. 21). His uncle, in contrast, 'talks like a book . . . [and] can pretend beautifully' (p. 164). As Oswald observes, Albert's uncle 'is more like us, inside of his mind, than most grown up people are' (p. 164). Albert's uncle possesses the ability, more typically considered childish, to enter imaginatively into the Bastables' games and pleasures. This childlikeness 'inside of his mind' (p. 164) is implicitly both the result of, and a qualification for, his competence as a reader.

Consequently, Oswald appeals specifically to the taste of Albert's uncle to justify many of his own narrative decisions as when, for example, he remarks that '[i]t would be sickening to write [everything] down . . . I said so to Albert-next-door's-uncle, who writes books, and he said "Quite right, that is what we call selection, a necessity of true art." . . . So you see' (p. 19). Albert's uncle is evidently one of the readers *Oswald* has in mind. Oswald is aware that his reader might be an adult, but assumes that that reader can, nevertheless, participate in childish pleasures.

[58] Anderson, p. 310.

Occasionally, Oswald does seem specifically to address a child reader. However, when, for example, he quotes French from a newspaper and advises that '[a]ny of your grown-ups will tell you what it means' (*NT*, p. 87) he also seems specifically to address a reader of his own class. In other words, such lapses indicate the erroneous assumptions Oswald makes about similarities between himself and his reader, of which age is, occasionally, one. Thus, such instances take to extreme the basic assumption Oswald makes about his reader, which is that she is essentially like-minded. As he explains, 'I shall not tell you anything about us except what I should like to know about if I was reading the story and you were writing it' (*TS*, p. 19). Oswald neither assumes nor requires that his reader is a child; nor, therefore, is adult pleasure derived exclusively from aspects of the narrative of which he is unconscious.

Those critics who suggest that the popularity of the *Treasure Seekers* can be attributed to its simultaneous address to two distinct readers therefore participate in constructing the gap which Nesbit's texts actually function to undermine. Anita Moss demonstrates that in the *Treasure Seekers* series 'books become a mode by which adults and children may understand one another.'[59] The function of books within the series, which Moss describes, is repeated by the texts themselves so that the (adult) reader will enjoy the series at least in part through her ability to understand—to enter into—Oswald's pleasures, and therefore, more generally, to ignore or defy the gaps constructed between adult and childish pleasures.

Its context indicates that the child narrator's account of his imaginative life must be taken as a response to the concerns expressed by some of Nesbit's contemporaries. Although, as Holt suggests, such defence of imaginary play undoubtedly enabled writers like Nesbit and Burnett to avoid 'inconvenient debates about the nature of labor and consumption that would have eroded the moral authority of the middle and upper classes' in the late Victorian period, it does not follow that the same defence cannot also function 'as a liberating motif or as a means of empowering children'.[60] By Romanticising or pathologising it, contemporary discourse attempted to co-opt the imagination, and the children who embodied it, in the service of an adult need to disavow childhood suffering or the adult's own discontents. In the *Treasure Seekers* series, the child's own voice ridicules both versions of this adult-oriented discourse, and thereby undermines its constraining effects on middle-class children, and suggests that those children might be able to contribute to a new conversation about the imagination. The *Treasure Seekers* series does little for

[59] Anita Moss, '*The Story of the Treasure Seekers*: The Idiom of Childhood', *Touchstones: Reflections on the Best in Children's Literature,* 1 (1985), 188-197, at p. 195.
[60] Holt, p. 53.

children outside the Bastables' privileged class, but it is both liberating and empowering within this limit.

4.3: The Imaginative Reader

If Oswald has 'often thought that if the people who write books for children knew a little more it would be better' (*TS*, p. 19), his narrative suggests that it is the idea that there is an absolute difference between 'the adult reader' and 'the child reader', which produces the 'books for children' that he finds so unsatisfactory.[61] As an alternative, the *Treasure Seekers* rarely offers a polysemic address to adult taste through the pleasures of nostalgia, and to childhood taste through 'low form[s] of activity' like playing Babel or reading for the plot.[62] It more often simply addresses any reader capable of engaging in the pleasures of imagination, represented most prominently in the figure of Albert's adult uncle.

This advocacy of the imagination as a reader's quality, rather than a child's quality, is pertinent in a context in which the concept of the child and its distinction from the adult played such central roles. The contrast between Denny and Daisy, or Little Nell, or Sara, and the Bastables illustrates this: the former conform to (one version of) the good/ naughty child so convenient to adult authority; the Bastables contribute to new ideas about children which extend beyond the good/ naughty model. Unlike the naughty child whose lies make adult language true by contrast, or the good child in whose mind the adult too becomes innocent, the Bastables' behaviour is not so easily contained; nor, therefore are the Bastables themselves so easily made to reflect a stable, authoritative adult self. Instead, Oswald not only performs a more imaginative mode of self-construction, but directly addresses the reader to invite her to do so as well.

As Gubar argues, 'the fact that Oswald opens his first three chapters with sharp-eyed critiques of various kinds of literature suggests that reading enables writing; or rather, that *critical* reading releases or empowers one's own creative efforts.'[63] Oswald's critique of, and deviation from, convention extends beyond the reading and writing of literal texts. He is equally creative with the spoken texts about children in the world around him, and by assuming that his reader is imaginative, assumes that she can respond to his own and to other texts with comparable adaptability.

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[61] According to Knoepflmacher, Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* likewise 'call[s] attention to the arbitrariness of our tendency to separate adult fictions from those that appeal to children' (Knoepflmacher, p. 111-112). The *Treasure Seekers* series thus substantiates Knoepflmacher's claim that Nesbit is 'far less resistant, ideologically and formally', to *The Rose and the Ring* than are earlier authors such as John Ruskin, George MacDonald, or Lewis Carroll (Knoepflmacher, p. 114).
[62] Brooks, p. 4.
[63] Gubar, 'Partners', p. 413.

Unlike, for example, the child's contrary view of the status of the dead in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' (1810) Oswald's critical imagination is more easily mistaken for naughtiness than for goodness, not only by adults within the series, but by many critics of it even today. What follows is consequently an analysis of the Bastables' supposed naughtiness, but it also applies to the less frequent instances of their 'goodness'.[64]

Erika Rothwell argues that the Bastables 'are frequently bewildered to find that acting on good intentions results in accusations of naughtiness from adults', to support the claim that the *Treasure Seekers* series uses the idea of naughtiness to exaggerate differences between adults and children.[65] However, Oswald and his siblings are rarely 'bewildered' when accused of naughtiness. More often than not they evince the attitude that 'even quite wrong things sometimes lead to adventures; as everyone knows who has ever read about pirates or highwaymen' (*TS*, p. 140). Oswald's sophisticated literary criticism therefore anticipates a more general irreverence for dominant voices, attitudes, and actions which characterises both the events he describes and his style of narrating them.

Indeed, almost every chapter of *The Wouldbegoods* ends with a remark that indicates unrepentant delight in the naughtiness, and, therefore, implicit disdain for, rather than bewilderment at, adult responses to it. For example, after detailing the chaos of the *Jungle Book* game, Oswald admits that 'we said we were sorry—and we really were' (*WB*, p. 25). However, he ends the chapter not at this penitent moment, but with a cheerful Appendix: 'I have not told you half the things we did for the jungle—for instance, about the elephants' tusks and the horse hair sofa-cushions, and uncle's fishing boots' (p. 25). The jubilant tone of this appendix more accurately reflects the attitude Oswald evinces throughout the episode than does the apology with which the chapter ostensibly ends.

Likewise, after buying a pistol, accidentally shooting a fox with it, and having it confiscated in consequence, Oswald's response is to 'hope the house will never be attacked by burglars'; '[w]hen it is, Albert's uncle will only have himself to thank if we are rapidly overpowered, because it will be his fault that we shall have to meet them totally unarmed' (p. 183). 'Naughtiness' is a filter through which the Bastables' behaviour is momentarily viewed. Oswald's response to this filter is more often perfunctory acceptance than bewilderment. As this essential indifference indicates, Oswald's account of the Bastables' adventures is not defined by the adult text of naughtiness. It is, rather, characterised by thorough enjoyment of the acts themselves.

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[64] Nesbit may have engaged more directly with the idea of naughtiness than of goodness in part because, as argued above, naughtiness was dangerously comparable with madness in the nineteenth-century, but it seems likely that she also chose to study naughtiness because it produces a highly entertaining novel.

[65] Rothwell, p. 63.

That the reader participates, vicariously, in the same adventures is made emphatically clear. Oswald points out that '[i]n a story about Wouldbegoods it is not proper to tell of times when only some of us were naughty', and for this reason:

> will pass lightly over the time when Noel got up the kitchen chimney . . . Nor do I wish to dwell on what H. O. did when he went into the dairy . . . The only thing [Oswald] did just about then was making a booby-trap for Mrs Pettigrew. (p. 66-67)

These tantalising references to instances of individual naughtiness provoke and frustrate the reader's curiosity, and therefore insist that her pleasure, as much as the Bastables', comes from the eventfulness of naughty behaviour.

Comparably, after '[t]wo of us' shovel snow onto 'the Water Rates man', and are duly 'very sorry', Oswald explains that 'we were all sent to bed for it', but '[w]e all deserved the punishment, because the other would have shovelled down snow just as we did if they'd thought of it—only they are not so quick at thinking of things as we are' (*TS,* p. 139-140). This, the 'story of one of the most far-reaching and influentially naughty things we ever did in our lives'(*WB,* p. 85), and many similarly 'naughty' incidents throughout the series primarily communicate Oswald's pride at the scope, influence, and ingenuity of the Bastables' naughty behaviour, and, as Moss suggests, few readers 'fail to respond with pleasure' to his triumphant version of events.[66] The narrative pleasure provided by the Bastables' imaginative naughtiness replicates the Bastables' own pleasure in those acts.

Naughtiness is thus associated with readerly pleasure. It is thereby, and more explicitly, also associated with the primary characteristic of a competent reader, namely, the imagination. As shown above, in contemporary Child Study the imagination is either Romanticized or, more frequently, pathologised. In the *Treasure Seekers,* the imagination produces what some characters in the series, and some readers of it, might describe as naughtiness, but which Oswald presents as something with much more subversive potential. As such, what has been read as childish naughtiness is in fact an approach to the world which Oswald not only performs but also invites his audience to perform.

When Rothwell argues that '[t]he children's naughtiness may be seen as simply an aspect of their realistic nature, and by extension of their lack of understanding', she criticises Nesbit for thus disempowering the child.[67] However, by invoking a spurious 'real' child whose naughtiness the Bastables' replicate, Rothwell actually creates the naughty child whose lack of understanding 'is wanted' as Other to the adult's plenitude.[68] Such a child is

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[66] Anita Moss, 'E. Nesbit's Romantic Child in Modern Dress', in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England,* ed. James Holt McGavran, Jr. (London: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 225-247, at p. 129.
[67] Rothwell, p. 63.
[68] Kincaid, *Child-Loving,* p. 246.

only available within the *Treasure Seekers* series if many of its 'low', childish pleasures—such as, for example, laughing *with* the Bastables and *at* the Water Rates representative—are resisted.[69] Oswald's narrative does not offer a naughty child up for adult delectation. Though such a child can be created from that narrative, Oswald invites the adult instead to become a naughty child and, therefore, to problematize the text of naughtiness itself.

Oswald ends the story of the 'far-reaching and influentially naughty thing' with an explicit address to the reader: 'if you have never done naughty acts I expect it is only because you have never had the sense to think of anything' (*WB*, p. 106). In her analysis of 'engaging narrators' in canonical literature, Robyn Warhol argues that 'the narrators' earnestly confidential attitudes towards "you" encourage actual readers to see themselves reflected in that pronoun.'[70] Oswald's confidential address does not so much encourage as *challenge* the reader to see herself thus. He does so by ostensibly encouraging the reader to decide for herself what characteristics are reflected in 'you'. If she has never done anything naughty, however, she is compelled to see herself as unimaginative and, therefore, as an inadequate reader. Alternatively, if she has 'the sense' to see 'naughty acts' (p. 106) as evidence of imagination, she demonstrates the very quality which qualifies her as a reader.

Moreover, when Oswald demands that 'if any of you kids who read this ever had two such adventures in one night you can just write and tell me'(*TS*, p. 156), he insists, as an engaging narrator would, 'that the characters exist . . . outside the world of the fiction'.[71] In the novels by Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell which Warhol discusses, such instances of elision between the fictional narrator's and the actual reader's worlds are intended 'to foster commitment to improving the extradiegetic situation the fiction depicts'.[72] Nesbit's work is less obviously political than these texts. Oswald's elisions nevertheless function likewise to foster the reader's commitment to improving the extradiegetic context in which, as demonstrated above, the imagination and the child who embodied it were appropriated for such divergent and potentially destructive discourses. More specifically, such elisions underline the reader's imaginative investment in Oswald's fictional world, and therefore insist that reading itself requires the imagination. The reader therefore by definition resists the pathologization and the idealisation of the imagination as a specifically childish trait which prevailed in some contemporary perspectives.

As Holt argues, unlike contemporary theorists of play, Nesbit 'puts no age limit on socio-dramatic play'; 'the adults in the book are themselves involved in different kinds of

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[69] Brooks, p. 4.
[70] Robyn Warhol, 'Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator: Earnest Interventions in Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot', *PMLA*, 101/5 (1986), 811-818, at p. 814.
[71] Warhol, p. 815.
[72] Warhol, p. 815.

imaginary activity.'[73] Likewise, the (adult) reader of the book is compelled to recognise her own involvement in imaginative activity as she reads. By thus collapsing purported boundaries between adult and child, the *Treasure Seekers* series implements the same technique used by its child narrator. By reading the *Treasure Seekers*, the reader identifies herself as childish or, more accurately, as imaginative, irrespective of her age. This has implications for her response to textual and narrative authority as they are expressed within the series. As will be illustrated, that response is comparable to the imaginative appropriation of text which the Bastables model.

Gubar has shown that although 'Nesbit's child characters are saturated in and fascinated by all kinds of literature', they 'revise rather than simply reenact' these texts.[74] Thus, Kipling's *Jungle Book* becomes a game, and when the Bastables are punished for its consequences, they respond to other adult-authored texts—accusations of naughtiness and ideas about goodness—in ways which, again, suit them. They create a game—the Wouldbegoods—in which they pretend to aspire to being good, but in ways that respond imaginatively to, rather than conforming to, adult texts about childhood goodness. They dismiss the prospect of 'smooth[ing] the pillows of the sick, or read[ing] to the aged poor, or any rot out of [Maria Louisa Charlesworth's] *Ministering Children* [1854]', or of being 'a sweet influence' (*WB*, p. 34, p. 45) like Katy in Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872), and although the game itself is inspired by John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the Bastables' version manages to incorporate some battle scenes from Tennyson, with predictably 'naughty' consequences. Because Oswald narrates the series, many of the rules, limits, and texts imposed on children are presented as 'rot' (*WB*, p. 34). The Bastables' imaginative engagement with text enables them to be good in their own way instead.

Through their imaginations, the Bastables can engage with the rules and limits imposed by adult power, to create new, if sometimes inconvenient, ways of being children within those limits. Comparably, the reader is invited to respond imaginatively to the rules and limits imposed by Oswald on her reading of the series, the clearest example of which is summarised in his opening challenge: '[i]t is one of us that tells this story—but I shall not tell you which: only at the very end perhaps I will. While the story is going on you may be trying to guess, only I bet you don't' (*TS*, p. 11). It may be obvious to some readers that the narrator who then remarks that 'Oswald often thinks of very interesting things' (p. 11) might well be Oswald himself. Others may only identify the narrator when he finally announces himself to the Indian Uncle and hopes 'that you people who are reading the story have not guessed before that I was Oswald all the time' (p. 172). Either way, Oswald is inevitably

[73] Holt, p. 40.
[74] Gubar, 'Partners', p. 411.

identified as the narrator, and when he is, his claims about 'The Nobleness of Oswald' (p. 125) present both that nobleness, and the authority to describe it, as comic self-aggrandisement.

Since all readers will eventually work out Oswald's identity, it is not the child he ostensibly represents who is thus ridiculed, but the idea of absolute narrative authority to which Oswald, like many narrators, aspires. The voice of the child narrator invites the reader to approach the *Treasure Seekers* series with the same ironic adaptability that the Bastables themselves demonstrate towards their own reading, and therefore, more generally, to respond creatively to the limits others' texts impose on her world. More particularly, it is through the imagination—neither the conflict-free quality Sully romanticises, nor the destructive force Hall pathologises—that she can do so. In the *Treasure Seekers* series, imagination is a childish, disruptive force. Through it, the child, and therefore any adult willing to identify herself as childish, can respond creatively to the limits reality presents.

Lesnik-Oberstein observes that the child in many twenty-first century analyses of children's literature 'can be seen to re-emerge to preserve the distinction between the "real" and language'.[75] When, for example, Mavis Reimer asks how 'Nesbit's texts represent to the child his or her position in such a way that the child is likely to consent to that position' she too constructs a 'child' who enables the distinction between the 'real' and language to be preserved.[76] Reimer constructs an actual child reader who is, implicitly, vulnerable to the coercive manufacture of consent to textual representations of herself. Likewise, Briggs, Anderson, and Rothwell refer to an actual child reader, who is invited 'to identify with Oswald or his siblings'.[77]

These critics thus subscribe to the view most clearly articulated by Lois R. Kusnets, who claims that 'unquestioning identification with the protagonist [is] not only naïve but a type of reading to be gradually shed as one matures.'[78] In other words, unquestioning identification with Oswald is a reading error specific to, and universal in, children. The adult reader constructed through, and in contrast with, this homogenised child reader, is therefore implicitly resistant, even impervious, to coercive representations, in text, of herself and of her world. In recent criticism on the *Treasure Seekers* then, the actual child reader is constructed in order to imply an adult reader for whom the distinction between the 'real' and language is absolute.

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[75] Lesnik-Oberstein, p. 24.
[76] Mavis Reimer, 'Treasure Seekers and Invaders: E. Nesbit's Cross-Writing of the Bastables', *Children's Literature,* 25 (1997), 50-59, at p. 52.
[77] Briggs, p. 72.
[78] Lois R. Kusnets, 'Henry James and the Storyteller: The Development of a Central Consciousness in Realistic Fiction for Children', in *The Voice of the Narrator in Children's Literature: Insights from Writers and Critics*, ed. Charlotte F. Otten and Gary D. Schmidt (London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 187-198, at p. 189.

In other words, the distinction between the ‘real’ and language as it is upheld in some children’s literature, and in some children’s literature criticism, depends in part on the purported distinction between adult and child readers. By collapsing the latter, the Bastables must also collapse the former as a distinction between an adult real world and a child’s partly imaginary world. Oswald’s narrative neither entirely rejects, nor is entirely defined by, other narratives. Likewise, he and his siblings are neither entirely emancipated from, nor entirely controlled by, the adult-dominated world in which they live. The *Treasure Seekers* invites its readers to identify with the imaginative child, and both to interrupt the simple exercise of adult authority and to be empowered to respond to the limitations it nevertheless represents. The imaginative child narrator of the *Treasure Seekers* series no more represents transcendent goodness than tantalising naughtiness. Instead, he models disruptive participation in the construction of the self in text. Thereby, the *Treasure Seekers* series posits an alternative to the model of progress and end which depends on the absolute but impossible separation of child and adult.

Chapter Five: Romantic Selfhood in the Victorian Era

Ulric Neisser and Lisa L. Libby suggest that life narratives 'are one of the ways of saying who we are'.[1] The centrality of the child to late nineteenth-century explorations of who we are as adults and, by extension, as a species indicates that narrative accounts which focus primarily on remembered childhood experience offer a particularly powerful way to say, or at least to interrogate, who the self is in the post-Darwin era.

However, Frances Wilson argues that '[a]utobiography is an inherently Romantic form' because it is predicated on continuity, on what Thomas De Quincey calls the 'deep, mysterious identity' between 'adult and infant'.[2] This section will look at the life narratives of the three authors already discussed—James, Burnett, and Nesbit—to evaluate the role of the precocious child in Victorian variations of this Romantic form. The first chapter in this section will situate the methods, claims, and assumptions of Victorian autobiographical writings in the context of contemporaneous scientific analyses of life narratives. This chapter demonstrates that the inherently Romantic effort to establish the identity of child with adult is also evident in Victorian autobiography.

The following chapter will then demonstrate that the remembered child of Victorian autobiography participates, precociously, in the Romantic project of autobiographical self-construction. As such, that child makes a challenging contribution to the textual affirmation of an adult self which can be both continuous and authoritative. Chapter Six illustrates that the precocious child threatens to bring Oswald Bastable's model of disruptive participation into Victorian self-construction. Responses to this threat characterise Victorian variations on the Romantic form of autobiography.

The present chapter begins by outlining the connections between Burnett's and Nesbit's autobiographies and contemporary psychology, to argue that concerns about the reliability of memory are transcended by individuals who are claimed to have particular access to remembered childhood experience. This access is paradoxically facilitated by the language which is understood to separate the child from the adult. The child mind was, as will be illustrated, imagined to contain knowledge of, or insight into, the development of selfhood. Both in Sully's Child Study and in contemporary autobiographical work by Burnett and Nesbit, those adults who have the capacity to remember and to articulate that child mind are implied to have the associated capacity to articulate an adult self.

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[1] Ulric Neisser and Lisa K. Libby, 'Remembering Life Experiences', in *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, ed. Endel Tulving and Fergus I. M. Craik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 315-332, at p. 318. See Neisser, 'Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge', *Philosophical Psychology*, 1/1 (1988), 35-59, on other ways of understanding the self.

[2] Frances Wilson, 'Romantic Autobiography', in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, ed. Maria diBattista and Emily O. Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 71-86, at p. 71 and p. 72-73.

This adult self is, moreover, implied to be universal. Despite the autobiographical subject of their works, both Burnett and Nesbit insist on the generality of the experiences they describe. In the Preface to her autobiographical *The One I Knew the Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child* (1893) Burnett claims to feel 'absolved from any charge of the bad taste of personality' because 'I believe I might fairly entitle it "The Story of *Any* Child with an Imagination."'[3] Shuttleworth's observation that Burnett's autobiography is consequently 'an attempt to understand the working of the child mind by studying one particular example in detail' holds true for Nesbit's autobiographical work as well.[4] The series of autobiographical essays which Nesbit published in *The Girl's Own Paper* between October 1896 and September 1897 opens with the following disclaimer:

> Not because my childhood was different from that of others, not because I have anything strange to relate, anything new to tell, are these words written . . . rather—that I was a child as other children, that my memories are their memories . . . I open the book of memory to tear out some pages for you. [5]

The seeming diffidence of this statement, like Burnett's attempted self-absolution, is belied by the implicit claim both writers make, that they can offer generalizable insights into children and childhood. Burnett and Nesbit insist on the universal truth of their written memories of childhood, and therefore demonstrate confidence that, between the remembered self, language, and the writing self, a collective insight into the mind of the child can be found and, through this, a comprehensive self articulated.

The newly emerging discipline of Child Study is another attempt to understand the workings of the child mind, and its most influential practitioner, Sully, often deploys the same method as Burnett and Nesbit. In articles for *Longman's Magazine,* and subsequently in *Studies of Childhood,* Sully analyses the autobiographies of George Sand and Pierre Loti not only as narratives of their own childhood experiences, but as illustrations of the child mind in general. He therefore offers literary autobiography as a source of primary evidence for fellow pioneers in Child Study.

In this ground-breaking work in the discipline, Sully hypothesises that the retrospective adult might illuminate the mind of the child he remembers. As will be argued, Sully therefore suggests that the mind of that remembered child might illuminate, in turn, the meaning of the adult self. Sully thus offers autobiography as a method for Child Study, implies that Child Study might function as an alternative to autobiography in understanding

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[3] Burnett, *The One I Knew the Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1893), p. vii. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses.
[4] Shuttleworth, 'Inventing a Discipline: Autobiography and the Science of Child Study in the 1890s', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 2/2 (2005), 143-163, at p. 153.
[5] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *The Girl's Own Paper,* 876 (Oct. 1896), p. 28.

the relationship between childhood and selfhood, and, therefore, presents Child Study itself as a necessary response to the Victorian era after Darwin.

In contrast, and despite its initial statement of intent, Henry James's 'A Small Boy and Others' (1913) is unapologetically autobiographical, and, therefore, unapologetically idiosyncratic. The particular capacity of written memory for *self*-construction is apparent from the opening lines of James's autobiography. Not only does James's text offer very limited 'particulars of the early life of William James', despite this opening statement of intent: it is problematic even as a reliable source of information about the early life of *Henry* James.[6]

As Meghan Marie Hammond observes, by reading 'A Small Boy and Others', we read 'about the exploits of the writing I' as much as about the exploits of the text's ostensible protagonist.[7] James regularly discusses the difficulties 'I', the writer, 'struggle[s] under . . . of seeing the whole content of memory' (p. 6) and even admits that 'my present aim is really but to testify to what most comes up for me *to-day* in the queer educative air I have been trying to breathe again' (p. 134). Such statements insist that 'A Small Boy and Others' will not satisfy what Louis A. Renza describes as the 'commonsense' function of autobiography.[8] The function of this autobiography is not to offer an account of childhood experience, but to construct the present, writing, adult self.

This chapter concludes with an analysis of James's interrogation of his representation of the Small Boy, and the implications of this interrogation for Burnett's, Nesbit's, or Sully's model of a universal adult self. Linda Anderson argues that according to the 'Romantic notion of selfhood . . . each individual possesses a *unified,* unique selfhood'.[9] James highlights that this Romantic identification between remembered child and retrospective adult is problematic in the Victorian era, and posits that an alternative model is necessitated by the precociously adult childhood self who features in his autobiography.

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[6] James, 'A Small Boy and Others', in *Autobiographies,* ed. Philip Horne (New York: Library of America, 2016), 1-250, at p. 5. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses. To avoid confusion between William James and Henry James, I will refer to the former as W. James hereafter, and to the latter as James throughout the thesis. I use this mode of reference because I discuss the work of Henry James more extensively.

[7] Meghan Marie Hammond, 'Henry James's Autobiography and Early Psychology', *a/b: Auto/biography Studies,* 27/2 (2012), 338-353, at p. 343.

[8] Louis A. Renza, 'The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography', *New Literary History,* 9/1 (1977), 1-26 at p. 1. See Paul Jay, *Being in the Text: Self Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) on the evolution of autobiography and of notions of subjectivity, and Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), and 'Autobiography and the Feminist Subject', in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory,* ed. Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 119-135, on the significance of these revisions in conceptions of the subject for feminist autobiographers and critics.

[9] Anderson, *Autobiography,* p. 5.

5.1: Language and Childhood Amnesia

Although both Burnett and Nesbit claim that their own memories of childhood might be anyone's memories, both authors explicitly recognise the same difficulty of remembering childhood at all which James so directly problematizes. In her treatise on 'children and the needs of children', *Wings and the Child* (1913), Nesbit claims that '[b]etween the child and the grown-up there is a great gulf fixed . . . [which] can never really be bridged.'[10] This gulf is evident in Burnett's autobiography, in which she claims that 'it was not myself about whom I was being diffuse' (p. viii) when she wrote her autobiography.

The gulf between child and adult is so absolute in Burnett's text that, throughout it, she refers to the subject of her autobiography as 'the Small Person'. This semantic separation between 'myself' and the child she writes about represents the remembered child as entirely autonomous of the author she becomes. Indeed, '[w]hat I remember most clearly and feel most serious is one thing above all: it is that I have no memory of any time so early in her life that she was not a distinct little *individual*' (p. 3). Burnett's insistence on the individuality of the Small Person, and Nesbit's reference to an unbridgeable gulf between adult and child, seem to preclude the possibility that the adult self might accurately remember her own mind as a child.

This autobiographical recognition of the gulf between child and adult is consistent with studies of memory in psychology of the same period. George Stout—whose *A Manual of Psychology* (1899) was the most widely used psychology textbook in British universities in the first decades of the twentieth century—cites experiments conducted by Hermann Ebbinghaus which concluded that memories 'tend to die away in course of time if they are not refreshed'.[11] Wilhelm Wundt, a leading proponent of experimental psychology and founder of the first psychology laboratory, argues that 'the memory image is, oftentimes, weaker and more transient than the image of direct perception.'[12] W. James—'the most

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[10] E. Nesbit, *Wings and the Child, or, The Building of Magic Cities* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), p. 4. *Wings and the Child* was in part an account of Nesbit's contribution to the Children's Welfare Exhibition, held in London from 31st December 1912 to 11th January 1913. See Jenny Bavidge, 'Exhibiting Childhood: E. Nesbit and the Children's Welfare Exhibitions', in *Childhood in Edwardian Fiction: Worlds Enough and Time,* ed. Adrienne E. Gavin and Andrew F. Humphries (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 125-142, for more information on Nesbit's contributions to the Exhibition, and on its position within Steedman's analysis of the child's interiority in the period.

[11] Alan Collins, 'The Psychology of Memory', in Bunn, Lovie, and Richards, 150-168, at p. 151; George Stout, *A Manual of Psychology* (1899; 4th edn., London: University Tutorial Press, 1932), at p. 525. Stout was the editor of *Mind* from 1892–1921. See Neary, pp. 65-67, for more information on Stout's editorship.

[12] Wilhelm Wundt, *Principles of Physiological Psychology,* trans. Edward Bradford Titchener (1874; 5th edn., London: Swan Sonnenchein; New York: Macmillan, 1904), p. 14. Alan Kim suggests that it was the introduction, by Wundt, of empirical methodologies to the study of psychology which brought about its evolution into a distinct discipline, contrary to Wundt's own view that it was a branch of philosophy (Alan Kim, 'Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt', *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2014), <http://plato.stanford.edu>, last accessed 1

influential psychologist America was to produce'—insists, more emphatically than Stout or Wundt, on the dubious actuality of remembered experience when he suggests that '*the object of memory is only an object imagined in the past . . . to which the emotion of belief adheres.*'[13] These psychological studies of memory support Burnett's and Nesbit's representations of the remembered child as obscured to, and thus separated from, the adult.

None of these contributors to nineteenth-century psychology is concerned specifically with studying the child mind, but such a study might have provided further evidence for their scepticism about memory. As Robyn Fivush and Katherine Nelson suggest, 'adults' inability to recall events that occurred before 3 or 4 years of age', the phenomenon of childhood amnesia, was identified by Freud in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1924).[14] In their recognition of the particular obscurity of early childhood memories, Nesbit and Burnett anticipate Freud's work.

Research into the causes of childhood amnesia by Gabrielle Simcock and Harlene Hayne suggests that 'language development may preclude the retrieval of memories that were acquired without the benefit of language.'[15] Because the onset of language is associated with the end of childhood amnesia, language presents a particular barrier to studies of the pre-linguistic child mind. Burnett's autobiography is consonant with this research. When she

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September 2016). See Wan-chi Wong, 'Retracing the Footsteps of Wilhelm Wundt: Explorations in the Disciplinary Frontiers of Psychology and in *Völkerpsychologie*', *History of Psychology*, 12/4 (2009), 229-265, for a detailed overview of Wundt's work.

[13] Daniel N. Robinson, *Toward a Science of Human Nature: Essays on the Psychologies of Mill, Hegel, Wundt, and James* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. xii; W. James, *The Principles of Psychology, Vol. 1* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 614. Coon describes *The Principles of Psychology* as 'a *shaper* of the developing discipline' (Coon, p. 88). See Russell Goodman, 'William James', *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2013), <http://plato.stanford.edu>, last accessed 1 September 2016, for more information on James's work in philosophy and psychology. Paul J. Croce, 'Reaching Beyond Uncle William: A Century of William James in Theory and in Life', *History of Psychology*, 13/4 (2010), 351-377, provides an overview of biographical and disciplinary studies of W. James.

[14] Robyn Fivush and Katherine Nelson, 'Culture and Language in the Emergence of Autobiographical Memory', *Psychological Science*, 15/9 (2004), 573-577, at p. 573.

[15] Gabrielle Simcock and Harlene Hayne, 'Breaking the Barrier? Children Fail to Translate Their Preverbal Memories into Language', *Psychological Science*, 13/3 (2002), 225-231, p. 225. However, memory itself is not dependent on language; very young children can remember experiences which they subsequently forget with the onset of childhood amnesia. See Robyn Fivush and April Schwarzmueller, 'Children Remember Childhood: Implications for Childhood Amnesia', *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 12/5 (1998), 455-473, for an analysis of this observation. Additionally, Fernyhough cites a BBC survey on childhood memories, conducted in 2006, many of the responses to which seem to contradict the findings presented by Simcock and Hayne (Fernyhough, p. 12). He also describes two experiments in which children were able to remember and recount, in words, experiences which had occurred before they had acquired the language relevant to those experiences (Fernyhough, pp. 81-83, discussing Aletha Solter, 'A 2-Year Old Child's Memory of Hospitalization during Early Infancy', *Infant and Child Development*, 17/6 (2008), 593-605). In response to the results of the BBC survey, Hayne suggested that although none of her research has confirmed the existence of preverbal memory, 'she cannot rule . . . out' the possibility without further research ('In my Pram I Remember', *The Memory Experience: BBC Radio Four*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk>, last accessed 10 September 2016).

observes that '[t]here must be so many thoughts for which child courage and child language have not the exact words', and even admits that '[h]ow the Small Person expressed herself in those days I do not know at all' (p. 6), Burnett suggests that it is specifically the non-linguistic which the retrospective author cannot know. As is implied at the end of James's *What Maisie Knew*, language obscures the writing adult's memory of her childhood self.

When Trevor Harley suggests that 'language is a major component of understanding human behaviour', he points to the linguistic basis of psychology itself.[16] By specifying the observation of a child learning language as one of the 'exceptional circumstances' in which 'we might become aware of the complexity involved' in learning and using language, he suggests that the child is just one embodiment of the problematic efficacy of language as a basis for psychology in general.[17] What Nesbit called the gulf between remembered child and remembering adult only typifies what Stout describes as the tendency of any memory to 'die away'.[18] The obscurity of childhood memories only epitomises a universally problematic relationship between language and memory in particular, and between language and mind in general.

Language as a means to access the mind was problematized, to varying degrees, by many nineteenth-century psychologists but, as will be shown, certain adults were seen as able to resolve this problem through the unusual relationship they were imagined to have with their childhood selves. In his analysis of the role of language in psychology, Stout argues that '[t]he word only calls up what is relevant to the controlling interest guiding the train of thought.'[19] Each word can therefore only stand for 'some general aspect of the concrete detail of actual perception'.[20] For Stout, language can only ever partially correspond with perception.

Wundt concurs with Stout in questioning the direct correspondence of language with perception, but claims that '[t]he words coined by language to symbolise certain groups of experience still bear upon them marks which show that, in their primitive meanings, they stood not merely for separate modes of existence . . . but actually for personal beings.'[21] Although, since this 'primitive' past, 'the word-symbols of conceptual ideas . . . have gradually lost all such fanciful reference' to 'personal beings', Wundt insists that 'we are not called upon, on that account, to dispense with the use whether of the concepts themselves or of the words that designate them.'[22] Wundt seems to concede Stout's point that language is

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[16] Trevor Harley, *The Psychology of Language: From Data to Theory* (1995; 2nd edn., East Sussex: Psychology Press, 2001), p. 3.
[17] Harley, p. 4.
[18] Stout, p. 525.
[19] Stout, p. 539.
[20] Stout, p. 539.
[21] Wundt, p. 17-18.
[22] Wundt, p. 18.

only a partial articulation of thought, but to insist, nevertheless, that it once was a full articulation of 'personal being'; of self.

However, by locating this fully coherent relationship between language and self in a 'primitive' past, Wundt problematizes (even if he does not 'dispense with') such coherence for the present. This is evident when, immediately subsequent to his reference to the primitive, Wundt outlines, in almost emotive terms, the limitations imposed on his study specifically by its dependence on language: '[l]anguage brings us against an array of concepts like "sensibility", "feeling", "reason", "understanding"—a classification of the processes given in internal perception against which, bound down as we are to the use of these words, we are practically powerless.'[23] Wundt's claim that language once corresponded with thought leads to the recognition that it no longer does. The view that language once stood for the primitive self undermines the possibility that it still stands for the present self.

According to Rose, the child embodies a 'pure point of origin for language, sexuality, and the state' in children's literature but, in Wundt's analysis, it is the 'primitive' which serves this purpose.[24] The child, as demonstrated above, embodies a disjunction between self and language for many late nineteenth-century writers, and therefore serves a different, if related, purpose in their work. This purpose is hinted at in Wundt's suggestion that language *mis*-classifies 'internal perception' for the present self.[25] Wundt here suggests that there may not *be* words for some subjective mental experiences, and thus posits that thought can take place without language, a view which is, as will be shown, supported by many psychologists and authors of the period, including Sully, Burnett, and Nesbit.

Wayne Dennis observes that, because congenitally deaf children are taught how to use and understand language at a later age than most children, they offer particularly useful objects for empirical study into the relationship between thought and language.[26] W. James was one of the most influential psychologists to refer to childhood mental life as recollected by congenitally deaf adults in his investigation of the subject. His major contributions to the question can be found in two separate accounts published in the early 1890s. Melville Ballard's account was first published in 1881 in the *Princeton Review*; in response to this 'favourite topic' among philosophers, W. James transcribed a large section of Ballard's account in the first volume of *The Principles of Psychology*.[27] Two years later, James

[23] Wundt, p. 18.
[24] Rose, p. 8.
[25] Wundt, p. 18.
[26] Wayne Dennis, Introduction to 'Melville Ballard (1839-1912): Recollections of a Deaf Mute (1881)', in *Historical Readings in Developmental Psychology*, ed. Wayne Dennis (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1972), 101-102, at p. 101.
[27] W. James, *Principles*, p. 256.

transcribed and commented on an autobiographical letter written by Theophilus H. d'Estrella, and on an extract from a previous account d'Estrella had published several years earlier.

In the latter article, W. James insists that Ballard's narrative 'shows him to have had a very extensive command of abstract, even of metaphysical conceptions, when as yet his only language was pantomime'.[28] The conclusion to this article is that d'Estrella's contribution likewise 'tends to discountenance the notion that no abstract thought is possible without words'.[29] Despite W. James's consensus with contemporary misgivings in psychology about the actuality of remembered thoughts and experiences, he here implies that the memories of d'Estrella and Ballard are both indispensable and sufficient in establishing that thought *can* occur without language.

Child psychologists were particularly qualified by their specialism in the pre-linguistic mind to contribute to analyses of the relationship between thought and language, at least according to the most prolific advocate for Child Study. In a preliminary discussion of 'Baby Linguistics' (1884) in *The English Illustrated Magazine*, Sully proposes that 'venerable and learned disputes about the exact relation of speech to thought . . . may some day be amicably settled by a reference to that most unimpeachable of testimonies, the babblings of infancy.'[30] As he is fully aware, this is not an entirely 'fanciful . . . supposition'.[31] In a seminal study on child psychology published four years later, William Preyer introduces his analysis of the development of language in children as a response to exactly that question, '*Is there any thinking without words?*', which the 'venerable' W. James was also considering.[32]

The title of the chapter in which Preyer discusses this issue, 'Development of the Child's Intellect Independently of Language', indicates that, like W. James, his answer to the question '*Is there any thinking without words?*' is a definite affirmative. The introductory paragraph of the chapter actually dismisses the opposite view outright as a 'prejudice' which is 'at least unproved'. [33] Sully offers a more nuanced view. In *Studies of Childhood*, he suggests that:

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[28] W. James, 'Thought Before Language: A Deaf-Mute's Recollections', *Philosophical Review*, 1/6 (1892), 613-624, at p. 613.
[29] W. James, 'Recollections', p. 623.
[30] James Sully, 'Baby Linguistics', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, 14 (Nov. 1884), 110-118, at p. 111.
[31] Sully, 'Linguistics', p. 111.
[32] William Preyer, *The Mind of the Child Part II: The Development of the Intellect* (New York: Appleton, 1895), p. 3. See J. F. Fitzpatrick Jr, 'Preyer, Thierry William (1841–1897)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com>, last accessed 1 September 2016, for more information on Preyer's life and work.
[33] Preyer, p. 3.

> [t]he growth of a child's speech means a concurrent progress in the mastery of words and in the acquisition of ideas. In this each of the two factors aids the other, the advance of ideas pushing the child to new uses of sounds, and the growing facility in word-formation reacting powerfully on the ideas, giving them definiteness of outline and fixity of structure.[34]

Language supports the development of ideas, but ideas themselves also push the development of language, and can therefore occur, at some level, prior to and independent of it. If, as Sully suggests in 'Baby Linguistics', '[l]anguage is the "*instrument* of thought" because a word can 'symbolise a whole class of objects', the instrument in this metaphor is both mechanical and musical.[35] Language helps to produce thought, but it also expresses thought which has already taken place.

Since, as Jenny Bavidge has argued, 'authors of imaginative literature for children . . . [were] presumed to have a (childlike) insight into children's lives of feelings, [and] to be possessed of a unique ability to remember back into their own childhoods' in this period, authors of children's literature were at least as qualified as child psychologists to shed light on the relationship between thought and language.[36] Both Nesbit and Burnett concur with W. James, Preyer, and Sully in the conviction that children have the capacity for non-linguistic thought. Recalling the thought processes of her childhood self, Burnett states that 'I recognise that she was too young to have had in her vocabulary the *words* to put her thoughts and mental arguments into—and yet they were there, as thoughts and mental arguments are there today' (p. 8-9). Similarly, recollecting 'the first social difficulty of the Small Person', in which she is confronted with 'the overwhelming problem of how to adjust perfect truth to perfect politeness', Burnett observes that '[l]anguage seems required to mentally confront this problem' (p. 10). Although 'the Small Person cannot have had words', Burnett insists that it is '*certain* that she confronted and wrestled with it' (p. 10, emphasis added).

Nesbit's essays in *The Girl's Own Paper* (*G. O. P.*) are primarily about her mental life as a child. The thoughts which mark her as 'as gloomy a cynic as any child of my age', and the vivid daydreams she recalls on a childhood journey, constitute just two of the many accounts of what Nesbit insists were her childhood thoughts.[37] Suzanne Rahn suggests that the subject and subtitle of *Wings and the Child*, '*the Building of Magic Cities*', 'may well have had some symbolic meaning for its author'.[38] That symbolic meaning is, as will be

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[34] Sully, *Studies*, p. 160.
[35] Sully, 'Linguistics', p. 113.
[36] Bavidge, p. 139.
[37] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 881 (Nov. 1896), 106; Nesbit, *G. O. P.*, 908 (May 1897), 534-535, at p. 534.
[38] Suzanne Rhan, 'News From E. Nesbit: The Story of the Amulet and the Socialist Utopia', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 28/2 (1985), 124-144, at p. 143.

argued in the following chapter, another instance of non-linguistic thought. Just as d'Estrella's childhood ability to think without language is apparent, for W. James, in his written memory as an adult, so Burnett's and Nesbit's written memories are also deployed as evidence to 'discountenance the notion that no abstract thought is possible without words'.[39]

If thought can occur without language, the child's mind can be imagined as pre-linguistic but otherwise continuous with the adult mind. As will be demonstrated, for writers who hold that thought could occur without language, the child mind represents a disjunction between language and self, which the adult resolves by articulating what the child could not. The articulation of autobiographical memory is thus imagined to represent a self which is both continuous in time and coherent in language.

5.2: Language and The Content of Children's Mind

Both Preyer and Sully refer in their work on the topic to an earlier study of a child's acquisition of language by Hippolyte Taine.[40] Taine's study suggests that the objective of scientific Child Study is comparable to the objective of such autobiographical Child Study as Burnett's and Nesbit's. Taine is persuaded by his observations 'that all the shades of emotion, wonder, joy, wilfulness and sadness are expressed by differences of tone' in the child's 'twitter'; 'in this she equals or even surpasses a grown up person'.[41] Shades of emotion may not constitute analytical thought, but they are instances of what Stout might call the child's perception of her mental experiences and, as will be argued, this broader conception of mind is of particular significance to studies of the child mind.

Taine concludes his study with the claim that 'the variety of intonation that [the child] acquires shows in it a superior delicacy of impression and expression. By this delicacy it is capable of general ideas.'[42] By suggesting that the pre-linguistic child surpasses some adults in expressiveness, Taine evokes that scepticism towards language as a basis for the study of the mind described by Wundt and Stout. By suggesting that the child nevertheless has 'superior delicacy' of impression, he evokes that idea of her purer receptiveness which finds literary embodiment in the child characters of James, Burnett, and many others of the period.

Consequently, when Preyer insists that the child 'shows plainly . . . [that] long before . . . the first successful attempt to express himself in articulate words . . . he combines

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[39] W. James, 'Recollections', p. 623.
[40] Taine's is one of the earliest in a wave of so-called baby biographies written at the turn of the twentieth century. See Wayne Dennis, 'A Bibliography of Baby Biographies', *Child Development,* 7/1 (1936), 71-73.
[41] Hippolyte Taine, 'On the Acquisition of Language by Children', *Mind,* 2/6 (1877), 252-259, at p. 253.
[42] Taine, p. 257.

ideas in a logical manner—i. e., he *thinks*', he not only insists that the child is capable of thought before he is capable of speech, but makes this claim in a context in which *what* the child thinks is in some way superior to what the adult thinks.[43] The conclusion to 'Baby Linguistics' is suggestive of what, specifically, the child is thought to have superior insight into. The essay concludes with an analysis of the relationship between the development of language and of self-consciousness. Although the process of 'generalising' which has begun prior to language is revealed by the child's misapplication of the word 'papa' to refer to all men, 'the act of distinguishing between his father and other men followed rapidly . . . the first use of his own name.'[44] Thus, Clifford's eventual ability to use the word 'papa' correctly 'clearly involved a dim apprehension of the special relation of things to himself': 'the recognition of kindred grew out of self-reflection.'[45] The articulation of perception by the child studied in 'Baby Linguistics' offers, in this instance, an insight into the development of selfhood.

At the start of 'Baby Linguistics', Sully observes that 'scientific fathers have been taking notes of the first utterances of their children, with as much care as if they might be expected to contain clear reminiscences of that exalted antenatal condition which some philosophers have ascribed to the soul.'[46] The conclusion Sully draws from the connection between the child's ability to use his own name and his ability to distinguish his own father from other men shows that, once again, the significance Sully places on 'the babblings of infancy' is not as 'fanciful' as he first presents it to be. Clifford has offered an insight into the relationship between 'that exalted antenatal condition' which, after Darwin, had to be attributed to the self, and the language which might be used to articulate that self.[47] As Maisie's vision, and the governess's self-construction through a narrated image of the precocious child, and the re-definition of child and adult in *A Little Princess* and the *Treasure Seekers* all indicate, this insight into the relationship between the impression and the expression of self is the objective of many studies, literary and scientific, of the child mind in the Victorian period.

However, the reliability of memory was, as argued above, doubtful to many psychologists and authors of the period. Since W. James, Burnett, and Nesbit all attempt to use what they acknowledge to be this unreliable mechanism to demonstrate childhood capacity for non-linguistic thought, all three are compelled to insist that the memories that testify to pre-linguistic thought are atypical in this respect. As will be argued, Burnett's autobiography makes clear that those memoirs which articulate the child mind do so because

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[43] Preyer, p. 4.
[44] Sully, 'Linguistics', p. 116.
[45] Sully, 'Linguistics', p. 116; p. 117.
[46] Sully, 'Linguistics', p. 111.
[47] Sully, 'Linguistics', p. 111.

of the remembering adult's capacity to identify with the pre-linguistic child through language. Memory is a problematic mechanism for accessing the child mind and its insights into selfhood, but some adults—the autobiographer herself inevitably among them—transcend the difficulties of memory, through language, and thereby offer an articulation of the child's insight into the adult self.

Although Burnett anticipates recent studies which suggest that the onset of language is a principal cause of childhood amnesia, she goes on to claim that 'there was one child of whom I could write from the inside point of view, and with *certain* knowledge' (p. vii, emphasis added), and consequently implies the veracity of her 'little sketch of the one I knew best of all' (p. vii). Burnett suggests that she can *write* the interiority of her pre-linguistic self, and that the 'sketch' (p. vii) she thereby produces is a representation-in-language of that which, without-language, must by this definition be obscured to her. Language is the medium on which the project of identifying with the child mind is dependent, even as it is also what the remembered child lacks, and what therefore constitutes the gulf between that child and the writing adult.

Nesbit's essays in *The Girl's Own Paper* reiterate both Burnett's prescient suggestion that the gulf between adult and child is defined by language, and her implicit transcendence of that gulf through language itself. In her first contribution to the magazine, Nesbit recalls a 'detested' fellow school-pupil; on being made a new dress of the material she had come to associate with that child, Nesbit is reluctant to wear it, but 'I could not say why.'[48] Her concluding remark in this essay is a more explicit assertion of the linguistic limitations of childhood: 'I have often wondered what it is that keeps children from telling their mothers these things—and even now I don't know. I might have been saved many of these little-big troubles if I had only been able to explain.'[49]

Another contribution similarly recalls that, suffering under her difficulties with arithmetic, 'I could not express how wretched I had been . . . I must have expressed my trouble without uttering it.'[50] Again, in a subsequent essay, the power of Nesbit's account of a childhood nightmare emerges from the contrast between the intensity of her fear at the time and the silence with which Nesbit represents her inability to express that fear:

> to a child who is frightened, the darkness and the silence of its lonely room are only a shade less terrible than the wild horrors of dreamland. One used to lie awake in the silence, listening, listening . . . One used to lie quite, quite still, I remember, listening, listening.[51]

[48] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 876 (Oct. 1896), 28.
[49] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 876 (Oct. 1896), 28.
[50] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 881 (Nov. 1896), 106.
[51] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 891 (Jan. 1897), 264-266, at p. 264.

Of course, each of these recollected moments also functions as an implicit statement of Nesbit's present ability, as an adult with language and an 'imperishable' memory, to articulate her childhood suffering.[52]

While Nesbit does not explicitly articulate the view that language can express non-linguistic thought, her writing is in fact perhaps more effective than Burnett's in communicating what she claims those thoughts to have been. When, for example, she asks the reader to:

> [c]onsider the horror of having behind you, as you lay trembling in the chill linen of a strange bed, a dark space, from which, even now, in the black silence something might be stealthily creeping—something which would presently lean over you, in the dark—whose touch you would feel, not knowing whether it were the old woman in the mask or some new terror

she does not merely describe, but actually invokes, the thoughts and feelings which she claims to have endured as a child.[53] Hence, Nesbit can claim that '[t]here is nothing here that is not in my most clear and vivid recollection.'[54] Unlike (most) adults, Nesbit has an exact memory of her childhood. Unlike children, she also has language. Nesbit, then, has the requisite materials both to identify with and to articulate the child's mind.

Wings and the Child ostensibly dissents from the view that language is what separates the remembered child from the retrospective adult. In this text, Nesbit justifies her use of the word 'grown-up' because this 'word which the child himself uses seems to me, for all reasons, to be the best word for my use, because it expresses fully and finally the nature of the gulf'.[55] Nesbit seems not only to concede, but actually to defer to, the child's linguistic capacities. However, by here attributing the term 'grown-up' to *children* and thus implying that *adults* would use a different word, Nesbit is in fact using her own words to exemplify both the 'gulf' between adult and child, and her own ability to transcend the limits of either side. Thus, although Nesbit defines 'grown-ups' as 'the people who once were children and who have forgotten what it felt like to be a child', she is one of those 'who have managed to slip past the Customs-house with their bundle of memories in tact'.[56] While recognising the difficulty of remembering childhood identified in contemporary psychology, Nesbit claims to have transcended it by identifying with the pre-linguistic child through language.

W. James similarly implies that language enables d'Estrella to recollect what was pre-linguistic. He notes that d'Estrella recalls how his teacher 'used to make me write about

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[52] Nesbit, *Wings*, p. 16.
[53] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 891 (Jan. 1897), 264.
[54] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 876 (Oct. 1896), 28.
[55] Nesbit, *Wings*, p. 5.
[56] Nesbit, *Wings*, p. 5

what I did before I came to school' (where he learned language), and insists that '[i]t helped me much thus to repeat the memory. Ever since my recollections have been the same, though the words have changed now and then to get better style and more definite meanings in language.'[57] It is precisely *language* which has made d'Estrella's memory reliable. That memory is, moreover, specifically an 'account of himself'.[58] D'Estrella's memories of his childhood self have 'been the same' since he articulated them in language, and for W. James this testimony demonstrates not only that thought can occur without language, but that language can enable access to the pre-linguistic self.[59] For the psychologist, as for children's authors like Burnett and Nesbit, language actually consolidates the memory of non-linguistic thought, and thus facilitates access to what Sully calls 'that exalted antenatal condition', the child's insight into the self.[60]

Insight into the self is an acknowledged objective of autobiography, but since, as shown above, it is an implicit objective of Child Study as well, autobiography itself has scientific value. Consequently, in 1891 Sully contributed an article about Pierre Loti's *Le Roman d'un Enfant* (1890) to *Longman's Magazine*. His analysis of this work is consonant with the function of autobiographical memory which is presented in *The One I Knew the Best of All, Wings and the Child,* Nesbit's essays for *The Girl's Own Paper,* and W. James's discussion of d'Estrella's memoirs. Sully suggests that Loti's memory of childhood is doubly paradoxical. Firstly, despite the exceptional intensity of his remembered experience, and the resultant exceptional tenacity of Loti's memory, that memory is representative of childhood experience in general. Secondly, although Loti's child mind is pre-linguistic, it has been recovered through language. Ultimately, then, Loti's autobiography offers access to the self which is contained within that remembered child mind.

Sully reiterates again and again the peculiar tenacity of Loti's memory. Not only was the child Loti 'subject to powerful impressions which . . . remained indelibly graven on the memory'.[61] The narrative actually 'surpasses in retrospective reach all other records of childish experience'.[62] Scientific authority, in the form of Darwin, is invoked at one point to support Loti's claim to 'photographic registration of sense impressions'.[63] Sully points to the parallel between Loti's claim that 'the welling up of new childish emotion . . . causes the image of the moment to penetrate into the very texture of the mind, never to be dislodged', with the fact that 'Darwin tells us that he preserved to the end a picture of the exact aspect of

[57] Theophilus d'Estrella, in W. James, 'Recollections', p. 622.
[58] W. Wilkinson, in W. James, 'Recollections', at p. 614.
[59] d'Estrella, p. 622.
[60] Sully, 'Linguistics', p. 111.
[61] James Sully, 'The Story of a Child', *Longman's Magazine,* 19/110 (Dec.1891), 200-214, at p. 201.
[62] Sully, 'Story', p. 202.
[63] Sully, 'Story', p. 205.

the old tree or bank where, as a Cambridge undergraduate, he made a good capture of beetles.'[64] According to Sully's analysis, in *Le Roman d'un Enfant* Loti has offered the reader photographic, indelible, and exceptionally early memories of childhood experience.

Moreover, the mind uncovered in Loti's autobiography, as in Burnett's or Nesbit's, might be that of any child: Loti has, 'the true feeling' not just for his *own* 'child-nature' but 'for child-nature' itself, and 'its original way of envisaging things'.[65] Sully makes comparable claims about George Sand's *Histoire de ma Vie* (1855) in 'George Sand's Childhood', and 'A Girl's Religion' (1890). Although 'George Sand's Childhood' opens with the admission that '[t]he reader need not be told that the child who was to become the representative among modern women of the daring irregularities of genius was an uncommon child', Sully goes on to claim that 'close inspection shows that the untamed and untameable "oddities" were, after all, only certain common childish impulses and tendencies exalted, or, if the reader prefers, exaggerated.'[66]

Because of this assertion, Sully's analyses of autobiographical accounts of Sand's childhood experiences can be reproduced in his seminal contribution to the study of the child mind in general. Although '[t]he early recollections of George Sand' which Sully summarises in 'A Girl's Religion' (1890), 'furnish what is probably the most remarkable instance of childish daring in fashioning a new religion', this account forms the basis and main evidence for Sully's analysis of children's religious beliefs in general in *Studies of Childhood,* in which Sand's experiences illustrate, 'no doubt, a true *childish* aspiration towards the great Unseen, and also an impulse to invent a form of worship which should harmonise with and express the little worshipper's individual thoughts'.[67] Just as Burnett and Nesbit must be both exceptionally able to recollect childhood, and typical in the experiences they had as children, so Loti and Sand are both extraordinary, in their ability to remember, and representative, in the content of their memory.

In short, then, 'the gifted child seems not less but more of a child because of his gifts.'[68] The child who is exceptionally prone to intensity of emotion and insight—as Loti, Sand, Burnett, and Nesbit all claim to have been—is, paradoxically, the epitome of the child

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[64] Sully, 'Story', p. 205. Bernard Lightman notes that another Victorian popularizer of science, Lydia Becker, 'called on Darwin and Newton to help her make the point that anyone could make an important scientific discovery' (Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 162). In his reference to Darwin, Sully may similarly have been attempting to legitimise both Loti's recollection, and the inference—the scientific discovery—which he himself draws from it.

[65] Sully, 'Story', p. 200.

[66] Sully, 'Sand', p. 149 and *Studies,* at p. 490. Because my argument is particularly about the use Sully makes of George Sand's account of her childhood memories, to analyse the child-mind in general, I will hereafter give citations from *Studies of Childhood.*

[67] Sully, 'A Girl's Religion', *Longman's Magazine,* 16/91 (May 1890), 89-99, at p. 90 and *Studies,* p. 507; *Studies,* p. 513, emphasis added.

[68] Sully, *Studies,* p. 489.

mind because of this very exceptionality. This exceptional intensity of childhood impressions also makes such children capable of recollecting childhood as adults. As Bavidge suggests, authors like Burnett and Nesbit base their reputations on memories of childhood which are presented as utterly reliable. Likewise, the claims of Sully's Child Study are validated by the assertion that the memories on which they are based are both tenacious and typical.

The simultaneous exceptionality and typicality of such memories as Burnett's, Nesbit's, Sand's, and Loti's is significant not only because these paradoxical qualities allow Sully to use such autobiographies as evidence for his pioneering analyses of the child mind. When Sully observes that '[t]he peculiarity of [Loti's] reminiscences is that they give us in an almost startling vividness impressions of particular moments, sudden and transient awakenings of childish "clairvoyance"', it is impossible to determine whether the word 'childish' applies to the 'clairvoyance' of the remembered child, or of the remembering adult in whom that clairvoyance has been re-awakened.[69]

Approaching the same identification between the remembered and inarticulate child and the remembering and articulate adult which Burnett, Nesbit, and d'Estrella offer, Sully claims that 'it is as if [Loti] were writing of another, of one whose innermost secrets had revealed themselves to him in a calm clairvoyant vision.'[70] Like 'the Small Person' about whom Burnett writes, the remembered child of Loti's autobiography is 'another', but Loti's 'true feeling' of being that child enables him to recover and thus to articulate the innermost, non-linguistic secrets of that other mind. Just as the very quality—language—that constitutes the gulf between Burnett or d'Estrella and the Small Person or the mute child, also enables each now-articulate adult to transcend that gulf, so it is particularly by '*writing* of another' that Loti can access, identify with, and articulate, the 'vision' of that inarticulate other.[71]

That language enables this identification of the child with the adult mind is clear in Sully's analysis, in *Studies of Childhood,* of what he describes as the 'slow and irksome business' of acquiring 'pronominal forms'.[72] Sully suggests that the transition to the correct use of pronominal forms, and particularly to the use of first- rather than third-person pronouns in referring to the self, 'seems to be due in part . . . to a growing self-consciousness, to a clearer singling out of the *ego* or self as the centre of thought and activity, and the understanding of the other "persons" in relation to this centre'.[73] Not, he argues, that:

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[69] Sully, 'Story', p. 201.
[70] Sully, 'Story', p. 200.
[71] Sully, 'Story', p. 200.
[72] Sully, *Studies,* p. 181.
[73] Sully, *Studies,* p. 180.

> self-consciousness *begins* with the use of 'I'. The child has no doubt a rudimentary self-consciousness when he talks about himself as about another object: yet the use of the forms 'I', 'me' may be taken to mark the greater precision of the idea of 'self' as not merely a bodily object and nameable thing just like other sensible things, but as something distinct from and opposed to all objects of sense, as what we call the 'subject' or *ego*.[74]

In this discussion of 'The Little Linguist' in general, Sully summarises the premise of his own analyses of the individual child mind in autobiographies by Sand and Loti, and in Clifford's acquisition of language, and the basis of Burnett's and Nesbit's autobiographies of childhood experience. Greater precision of the idea of the self is constituted through the articulation of the child mind by the articulate adult who identifies with that child.

5.3: Romantic Selfhood in the Victorian Era

The principle on which many such autobiographies, and Sully's analyses of them, are based—that by identifying with the child through language, the adult can access that child's knowledge of self—is thematised in James's autobiography. This text engages with what H. Porter Abbott claims as the fact that 'all autobiographies . . . are corrupted by the present.'[75] More particularly, James presents identification with the remembered child as corruption of that child and, as in his earlier, fictional studies, that corruption is figured as precocity. Like Miles, the precociously corrupt child of autobiography is threatening less to a (redundant) idea of childhood innocence than to the adult self whose image depends on its progress beyond that child.

Given who the remembering self of James's autobiography *is,* it is perhaps inevitable that, as Paul John Eakin suggests, 'the whole point of' 'A Small Boy and Others' is essentially 'to testify to the reality of the small boy's gift, his identity as the artist, in the period preceding the documentation of this reality in his published work'.[76] Therefore, although, as Leon Edel suggests, 'A Small Boy and Others' tells us that '[t]he human material close to the future novelist is abundant', the text is less insistent on this circumstance of James's childhood than on the significance this abundance acquires in the memory of the 'future novelist'.[77] James repeatedly describes moments in which the 'gift' of the small boy is particularly evident, not only to illustrate that gift but also to anticipate its expression in the work of the adult artist.

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[74] Sully, *Studies,* p. 180.
[75] H. Porter Abbott, 'Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories', *New Literary History,* 19/3 (1988), 597-615, at p. 602.
[76] Paul John Eakin, 'Henry James's "obscure hurt": Can Autobiography Serve Biography?', *New Literary History,* 19/3 (1988), 675-692, at p. 690.
[77] Leon Edel, *The Life of Henry James, Vol. 1: 1843-1889* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), p. 87.

James claims, for example, 'to glory in [the] shame' of his early life as 'an hotel child' (p. 23) because 'there, incomparably, was the chance to dawdle and gape; there were human appearances in endless variety' (p. 23). He 'glories' because the 'entrancing interest' in human variety which he felt as a child indicates that he did not *become* a writer, but always was one: 'it was even as if I had become positively conscious that the social scene so peopled would pretty well always say more to me than anything else' (p. 23). According to Richard P. Blackmur, 'the informed imagination' is James's 'ideal'.[78] This 'positive consciousness' of the significance of the social scene, like the '[p]edestrian gaping' which was 'in childhood . . . prevailingly my line' (p. 123), and the 'one success' that 'I had . . . always—that of endlessly supposing, wondering, admiring' (p. 149), all indicate to the future novelist that his informed imagination is an innate, rather than emergent, attribute in the small boy. James's memories are not necessarily or primarily of the facts of his childhood. They more urgently suggest the continuity of his intuitively writerly consciousness across the span of time from child to adult. By suggesting that the child is identical with the adult, James's memories suggest a coherent, continuous, authorial self.

Of course, the authorial adult self can only be identified in, and with, the remembered child if that child is reliably remembered. Like Nesbit's insistence that she has not forgotten her childhood sufferings, James's repeated claim that he has a 'singularly unobliterated memory' (p. 23) for many of the events he recounts, that 'I have lost nothing of what I saw' (p.66), is not only in keeping with the attentiveness of the 'gaping' (p. 123) child he was. It also suggests that the adult writer's consciousness remains *as* open and receptive as that child's consciousness. Both the fact of this attentiveness, and its continuity across time, assert the identity of the remembering with the remembered self.

James takes Sully's claim that Loti has the 'true feeling' of being a child to an extreme, repeatedly claiming not only to remember, but actually to re-experience, many of the childhood sensations and emotions he describes.[79] Although he initially claims to 'see the world of our childhood as very young indeed', the distance from which 'I' sees is quickly narrowed, so that, when the world of childhood 'exhale[s] . . . a simple freshness . . . I catch its pure breath' (p. 6). Similarly, when he recalls 'our visits to the Bookstore . . . I feel again the pang of that disappointment' he felt, as a child, on learning that 'the new number' (p. 55) had not arrived and likewise, remembering a childhood visit to an exhibition, 'I live again in the thrill of that evening' (p. 162). Writing about childhood becomes catching, feeling, even living it again. What Hammond describes as 'the exploits of

[78] Richard P. Blackmur, 'Introduction', in Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1948), p. xv.
[79] See Hammond, especially p. 341, on the connection between the form of empathy James thus claims to experience and contemporary psychology and aesthetic theory.

the writing I' are, often, the exploits of the young Henry, *re-experienced* by the adult he has become.[80]

For Elizabeth W. Bruss, James thereby 'exchanges the traditional role of author-as-agent for that of an experiencer', and consequently 'relegat[es] himself to the position of one who merely observes the act of composition'.[81] In the role of *experiencer,* however, James obviously cannot merely observe the act of composition through which he accesses those experiences again. Rather, he purports to perform the act of composition *as* the remembered child. If his autobiography is an image of the retrospective, writing adult, then that adult not only writes *about* the small boy he once was; he experiences what it is like to be that child. The 'I' of James's autobiography is therefore constructed not through childhood experience, nor through the memory of it, but because writing the memory of that experience enables the author to re-live it.

Thus, what Hammond calls the 'sensory empathy' which James claims with the small boy enables him to represent the child's precocious insight as identical with the adult's written memory.[82] The small boy lacks the language through which he can articulate his insight; the adult has, seemingly, retained the insight, and acquired the language. In his precocious and non-linguistic insight, the Small Boy is comparable with the precocious child-protagonist of *What Maisie Knew*. However, Maisie does not quite reach the adulthood in which she might articulate her vision. The small boy, by contrast, has already become the adult—James himself—anticipated by his precocious vision. Laura Saltz claims that 'James is able to discern in (or project on) the small boy he once was the origins of the writer he would become.' [83] The small boy's precocious insight is implicitly identical with, and therefore offers a validation of, its representation in language by the present, articulate, adult self.

In other words, James highlights that identification between writing adult and inarticulate child, on which the written autobiographies of Burnett, Nesbit, and—according to Sully—Loti and Sand, are all premised. Although both Burnett and Nesbit reiterate the consensus in contemporary psychology that memory is unreliable, they nevertheless anticipate the twentieth-century perspective outlined by Bavidge, by presenting *their own* memories as uniquely capable of retaining the contents of the child's mind, and their own authorial language as the medium through which those contents might be communicated to their readers. The key insight contained by the child's mind is, moreover, the condition of selfhood which language otherwise disrupts.

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[80] Hammond, p. 343.
[81] Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 29.
[82] Hammond, p. 342.
[83] Laura Saltz, 'Henry James's Overexposures', *Henry James Review,* 25/3 (2004), 254-266, at p. 257.

If such a theory of the self is evident in the efforts, described above, in James's autobiography to mark the traces of his present authorial self in his past childhood self, the same theory explains Burnett's focus throughout her autobiography. She too offers an account primarily of those experiences which anticipate the author who recollects and records them. Indeed, Burnett is rather more obvious than James in this endeavour. She explicitly recounts the childhood experience which, she claims, inspired one of her most successful works. Having 'always wanted to know what happened' (p. 84) to the 'strong, pale creature with the stately head' (p. 81) which she remembers noticing on the street near her home as a child, 'she wrote a beginning, a middle, and an end herself. She made the factory operative a Pit Girl, and she called her Joan Lowrie' (p. 84). Burnett narrates a childhood experience such that her subsequent novel, *That Lass O' Lowrie's* (1877), is its inevitable outcome.[84]

W. James's analysis of the same hypothesis in his article on d'Estrella, and Sully's analysis of autobiographical work by Loti and Sand, indicate that psychologists likewise considered that language might establish the true significance of obscure childhood memories. That significance is, more specifically, the articulation of childhood knowledge of self. For these late nineteenth-century literary and scientific practitioners of Child Study, the articulation of memory in language might construct a universal insight into the child mind and thus into adult selfhood. James more directly testifies to the value of such identification with the child of autobiographical memory for the consolidation of a particular image of the adult self.

'A Small Boy and Others' thereby indicates that it, *The One I Knew the Best of All*, Nesbit's autobiographical work, and Sully's analyses of other autobiographies, all appear to support what Anderson describes as 'the beliefs and values of an essentialist or Romantic notion of selfhood', in which 'each individual possesses a unified, unique selfhood.'[85] Insofar as they offer 'an unmediated and yet stabilizing wholeness for the self' of their authors, these texts support the view of those critics for whom, according to Anderson, 'there is little apparent difference . . . between realising the self and representing the self.'[86] The author is, seemingly, realised through the act of self-representation in literary autobiography. The self is unified, and the unifying function of art established, by the memory of that self in language or, in other words, by autobiography. The prominent

[84] Katherine Slater seems to replicate Burnett's interpretation of her childhood experiences in terms of the author's productions, when she claims that Burnett's childhood emigration from England to America gave her 'a lifelong appreciation for distinct local idiosyncrasies, which served as a colourful sieve through which she strained her life's fiction' (Slater, 'Putting Down Routes: Translocal Place in *The Secret Garden*', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 40/1 (2015), 3-23, at p. 6).
[85] Anderson, *Autobiography*, p. 4-5.
[86] Anderson, *Autobiography*, p. 5 and p. 4.

instances of what Porter Abbott calls the 'corruption' of the past by the present in James's and Burnett's autobiographies emerge from the necessity for temporal consistency—for identification of child with adult—for the construction of self.[87]

However, in making identification between the 'Master' and the 'Small Boy' such a prominent theme in his autobiography, James problematizes his retrospective insight into actual childhood experience: such dubious identification between literary adult and inarticulate child suggests that the memory of the child is corrupted by what Eakin describes as 'the needs and requirements of the self that we have become in any present'.[88] Although this is made insistently clear in the obviously and exclusively authorly qualities which James claims to remember in the Small Boy, however, the problem lies less in the effect of such needs on the child than in the implications of identification for the adult. Just as the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is threatened by Miles's precociously signifying silence, so James's authorial self-image becomes problematically doubled by its identity with a precociously authorial boy.

By conflating remembered child with writing adult, the Romantic self undermines the progressive development which the child is imagined to enact, and the end which the adult is supposed to represent, in late nineteenth-century thought. The following chapter will argue that the specifically Victorian moment in which Burnett and Nesbit wrote their autobiographies is evident in the precocity of the remembered child in each autobiography. This precocity necessitates narrative, through which the evolution from childhood to selfhood can be presented as the progress toward, and attainment of, an end. The 'pure point of origin' which Rose claims is embodied in the child in Victorian children's literature, and which Wundt posits in a primitive prior state, is replaced in Victorian autobiography, and in psychological analyses of it, with a point of closure, represented by the present state of the retrospective adult.[89]

Although the identification with the child enables the constitution of a coherent adult self in James's as in Burnett's and Nesbit's autobiographical writing, its corruptive effect registers the necessity for a paradoxical separation between these child and adult selves. This necessity is explicit in James's work, but its effects are also evident in Burnett's and Nesbit's. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, the inarticulate remembered child is made to embody the problem of saying who the self is in late nineteenth-century autobiography and psychology. By locating this problem in the child, the adult could be imagined to have resolved it, and thus to represent the end-point of a progressive model of development.

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[87] Porter Abbott, p. 602.
[88] Eakin, p. 687.
[89] Rose, p. 8.

Chapter Six: Victorian Autobiography

In an analysis which might be emblematised in the figure of James's precocious childhood self, Paul de Man argues that when 'the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding', he 'reveals the tropological structure that underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of the self'.[1] Only by substituting language for the self can the autobiographer perceive his self-image and, because of this 'specular structure', '[t]he interest of autobiography . . . is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge—it does not—but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions.'[2] Like the visual self-portrait in which, as Saltz observes, the subject is both 'embodied and divided against itself', autobiography engenders a split in the self which it is supposed to unify.[3] The failure of autobiography to constitute a unified self is a condition of the very medium through which that aim is expressed.

Therefore, as Anderson suggests, 'the Romantic self—post-de Man—is fatally divided, threatened by representation, forced to summon up rhetorically the ghosts of a self they can never hope to be.'[4] The Romantic notion of a self which is unified through art, of the synonymity of representation with realisation, to which James, Burnett, Nesbit and, according to Sully, many others, seemingly ascribe, is a contradiction which predetermines its own collapse. However, this divided Romantic self is not only an inevitable consequence of the text in which that self has been constructed. As this chapter will illustrate, the autobiographical writings of Burnett, Nesbit, and James in fact scrutinise, and ultimately undermine, the idea that representing the self is the same as realising the self. This scrutiny is invited particularly by the figure of the precocious child.

The grammatical distinction between the 'Small Person', the 'Small Boy', or the 'me' of memory, and the 'I' who remembers in these texts, and the concerns about memory which this distinction illustrates and which was expressed by contemporary psychology, all reflect what de Man suggests is the basic impossibility of autobiography. Language disrupts the unity of the remembered with the remembering self which it is supposed to construct. However, by obstructing the simple identification of the childhood 'me' and the writing 'I', this linguistic disjunction supports a distinction between the child and the adult which is, as the psychology discussed in the previous section suggests, equally necessary. As the origin of progressive ontogenic development which thus emblematises comparably progressive

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[1] Paul De Man, 'Autobiography as De-Facement', in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 67-81, at p. 70 and p. 71.
[2] De Man, p. 71.
[3] Saltz, p. 256.
[4] Anderson, *Autobiography*, p. 14.

phylogenic evolution, the child must embody the incoherence of the self prior to the language attained in adulthood. The Romantic identification of child with adult evinced in, for example, Sully's analysis of Loti's autobiography, is less straightforward in the context of the Victorian paradigm of progress.

As the epitome of a pathological continuity between child and adult in the Victorian period, precocity functions to problematize the unity of self on which Romantic autobiography depends. This chapter will first use James's study of his own childhood precocity to illustrate that the precocious child is a Victorian embodiment of de Man's specular self-knowledge. Though it is not embodied in such insistent precocity, the identification of the Small Person with Burnett comparably problematizes the adult as the meaningful end to an incoherent childhood, even while it is, like James's identification with the small boy, also necessary.

By problematizing the identification of child with adult on which, as argued in the previous chapter, they are nevertheless predicated, Victorian autobiographies of childhood precocity necessitate that 'action' or 'change' which initiates narrative.[5] This chapter will show that in Burnett's *The One I Knew the Best of All*, and in Nesbit's *Wings and the Child* and autobiographical essays for *The Girl's Own Paper,* story is presented as central to meaning-making. However, only the story of the child's development into language ends in a meaningful, adult self in Burnett's autobiography. Likewise, in Nesbit's non-fiction the child's mind is both the source of the adult self, and the embodiment of an incoherence prior to language which the articulate adult has resolved.

Beer observes that growth is 'registered only in retrospect': it can 'be expressed intellectually only as narrative'.[6] The *narrative* of selfhood offered by Burnett and Nesbit enables the adult self to register the child's growth, from the retrospective position of that narrative's end. The previous chapter argues that the difference between adult and child is the difference between language and its absence. The first sections of this chapter will show that Burnett and Nesbit resolve the problem of identification with the precocious but inarticulate child by presenting the transition from child to adult as growth into language, and thus as progress toward that adult-as-end. The presentation of story in Burnett's and Nesbit's non-fiction indicates that the difference between precocious child and retrospective adult is more particularly between the evolution and the attainment of a unified self in language.

The final section of this chapter suggests that James posits a different model of selfhood in response to the inadequacy of both the unified Romantic self and the narrated

[5] Brooks, p. 38.
[6] Beer, p. 99.

Victorian self. Peter Collister describes 'A Small Boy and Others' as 'a model . . . [which] illustrat[es]' de Man's assertion of the 'impossibility of closure'.[7] James represents his autobiography as an expression of its own failure to constitute the self. 'A Small Boy and Others' becomes instead an ongoing dialogue between present and past selves, so that the self is never quite constituted. For James, the transition from child to adult is not the progressive narrative of late nineteenth-century recapitulation theory, but a dialogic process which, like Oswald Bastable's, looks forward to twentieth-century psychological models of selfhood.

6.1: The Precocious Self

The problem presented by adult identification with the precocious child is clearest in the work which is most emphatic about that child's precocity. James is simultaneously more insistent on, and more derisive of, his childhood precocity than either Burnett or Nesbit, and therefore illuminates the problem that precocity represents to the retrospective adult. Through his ambivalent representation of precocity, James represents both the autobiographical effort to construct a continuous self, and his resistance to the identification of precocious child with adult which such an autobiography requires.[8]

For example, at one point James recalls the Small Boy's 'prompt distaste . . . for so much aridity' in a remembered landscape, but then immediately derides this as 'a strange precocity of criticism . . . since of what lost Arcadia, at that age, had I really had the least glimpse?' (p. 27). Similarly, he and his brother 'were also to note—so far as we may be conceived as so precociously "noting," though we were certainly incorrigible observers—that . . . [their friends are] but *feebly* sophisticated' (p. 38). James repeatedly describes the Small Boy's precocity and claims it as evidence of his identity with the gifted adult writer, but in his scepticism towards the remembered precocity of the small boy at these moments he implies that it was not the child at all, but the adult writer, who has had a glimpse of a 'lost Arcadia' (p. 27); who has noted things, from his recollected observations.

At these moments, James differentiates his childhood from his adult subjectivity, to insist that the insights offered here are those of the present mind of the adult, not the remembered mind of the child. Hammond argues that the 'persistent doubling' in 'A Small Boy and Others' 'means the young James maintains a subjectivity that, while implicated in

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[7] Peter Collister, 'Introduction', in James, *A Small Boy and Others*, ed. Collister (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), xi-xxvii, at p. xv.

[8] This tension between remembering adult and remembered child is comparable with 'the psychic and philosophical battle between generations' which Deborah Epstein Nord claims 'is at the heart of the autobiographical form' for many Victorian autobiographers (Epstein Nord, 'Victorian Autobiography', in diBattista and Wilson, pp. 87-101, at p. 87). The autonomy and authority of the writing adult is threatened by the precocity of the remembered child in my analysis and, in Epstein Nord's analysis, by the prior claims of the autobiographer's father.

the narrative actions of James the writer, is nevertheless separate', but at such moments James actually highlights the supposedly problematic separate subjectivity of 'Me', the Small Boy.[9] Hammond suggests that the 'I acts upon the Me to construe a continuous self' in 'A Small Boy and Others'. [10] However, by simultaneously presenting and discrediting the Small Boy's precocity, James simultaneously construes and disallows that continuous self which his childhood precocity emblematises.

Anne K. Mellor observes that '[m]asculine Romanticism has traditionally been identified with the assertion of a self that is unified, unique, enduring . . . and above all aware of itself as a self.'[11] Although many critics have noted that the project of one of the most significant works of Romantic autobiography, Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850), 'was undercut by [the poet's] recognition that language can never be more than an alienating "garment"', that project is nevertheless defined by the *attempt* 'to represent a unitary self that is maintained over time by the activity of memory'.[12] In 'A Small Boy and Others' James makes no such attempt. If Wordsworth's Romantic self requires the 'strenuous', if ultimately impossible, 'repression of its Others', James's Victorian self is equally strenuous in foregrounding those Others, by undermining the identity of his Other, childhood self with his present, adult self.[13]

James's reticence to affirm his childhood precocity fits with what Kincaid describes as a culture of 'fearing and reviling the precocious child'.[14] This revulsion emerges in James's autobiography because the precocity of the Small Boy threatens to conflate the adult self with the inarticulate child beyond whom he is supposed to have developed. As outlined in Chapter Four, the gap between adult and child which, as Kincaid suggests, is sustained by the naughty/good child, is collapsed by the precocious child. The naughty child may be 'safely other'.[15] The precocious child is unsettlingly similar: he is, in fact constructed to be *identical* with the adult. Precocity is therefore reviled because it collapses the difference between adult and child. James's cynical derision for the precocious child he nevertheless suggests he once was is an effort to re-categorise the child as safely other. It produces a difference between the author's gift and the child's precocity, which constitutes a safe gap between the small boy and the writing adult.

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[9] Hammond, p. 344.
[10] Hammond, p. 348.
[11] Anne K. Mellor, 'Writing the Self/ Self Writing: William Wordsworth's *Prelude*', in *William Wordsworth's* The Prelude: *A Casebook,* ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 293-304, at p. 293.
[12] Mellor, p. 293.
[13] Anderson, *Autobiography,* p. 59.
[14] Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p. 122.
[15] Kincaid, *Child-Loving,* p. 65.

However, James insists on the otherness of the small boy only as a response to that child's precocious identity with him. The precocious child is paradoxically both identical with, and the Other of, the retrospective author. Conversely, then, the precocious small boy can neither be an absolute Other to, nor fully identical with, the adult self. The precocious child paradigmatically embodies both the necessary unity of, and the equally necessary split in, the self, and therefore epitomises the impossibility of closure which is, according to de Man, always embodied in the remembered self of autobiography.

In both representing and rejecting his childhood precocity, James's autobiography registers that the present must not only be anticipated by, but also represent progress beyond, the past. This developmental model of selfhood differs in significant ways from Wordsworth's Romantic model. Although it too is, as Anderson suggests, 'based on notions of . . . development', the Romantic model of selfhood is not a progressive evolution from the partial self of childhood to the full self of adulthood.[16] It is rather, as Geoffrey H. Hartman argues, a *Bildungsroman* 'from solipsism to society . . . the epic of the emergence of an individual consciousness out of a field of forces that includes imagination, nature, and society'.[17] Wordsworth records the *emergence* into society of a poet's mind which is at least ideally unified across time. James represents the potential for the *evolution* of the artist's mind, which is therefore necessarily Other in the past.

It is, moreover, particularly the Small Boy, and his effect as epitomised by precocity, which produces James's recognition of the necessity of differentiation. More generally, then, the precocious child problematizes a unified Romantic self. This is suggested in the contrast between theories of selfhood put forward by psychologists who did not specialise in the child mind, and the comparable theories of those who did. Neither Wundt nor W. James refers explicitly to childhood in their discussions of selfhood and memory, and neither insists that language is an essential tool for retrospection, which the child, by definition, lacks. Stout, in contrast, does discuss the child mind, and he makes a strong statement of the relationship between retrospective self-narrative and the supposedly adult attribute of language.

For example, in *Principles of Psychology,* W. James suggests that '[a]ll the intellectual value for us of a state of mind depends on our after-memory of it' because only retrospectively can mental experience be 'combined in a system and knowingly made to contribute to a result'. [18] According to Michael Ross this idea, that 'a sense of personal identity is derived from [a] perception of temporal consistency', was influentially propounded by W. James, but the primacy of retrospection for self-knowledge which W.

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[16] Anderson, *Autobiography,* p. 59.
[17] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 16.
[18] W. James, *Principles,* p. 606.

James insists on is also implicit in Wundt's work.[19] In his summary of Wundt's contribution to psychology, Daniel N. Robinson suggests that Wundt 'installed an active, inwardly directed mind whose entire history participated in each of its acts; a mind so constituted as to impose logical coherence on all its intellectual operations'.[20] For these foundational contributors to American and European psychology respectively, present self-image is characterised by the identity of the past with that present self.

Stout, by comparison, suggests that '[s]elf as a whole uniting present, past and future phases . . . [is an] ideal construction, built up gradually in the course of human development.'[21] However, this 'ideal construction of Self . . . is comparatively rudimentary in the lower races of mankind' because:

> [i]n the case of the lower animals and young children, it is impossible, and in the case of savages it is difficult, to obtain verbal descriptions of their own mental states and processes . . . partly because they either do not use language, or use language inadequate to the purpose.[22]

According to Stout, language is essential for the 'ideational processes' through which moments of perception can 'unite to form a continuous system, such as is implied in the conception of a person'.[23] 'Lower races', and, more pertinently for this analysis, children, are limited to what Stout calls 'the perceptual plane' as far as they are limited in the linguistic capacities which enable ideation.[24] Consequently, for the child 'there is no single continuous Self contrasted with a single continuous world', because, for as long as the child exists on a purely perceptual plane, the construction of Self has 'never begun'.[25]

Stout thus offers the attainment of language as the end to the story (or 'ideational process', in his words) of the self: his theory of selfhood resolves the opposition between the precocious identity with, and necessary Otherness of, the child. Comparably, both Burnett and Nesbit insist that language is essential to a meaningful story of the self. The child must be remembered Other as well as precocious self, and to resolve this paradox, Burnett and Nesbit, like Stout, represent selfhood as anticipated in the pre-linguistic child, and achieved with the attainment of language. In other words, Burnett and Nesbit present the precocious child as a story, the end to which is articulate adulthood. This suggests that the emphasis on a difference between remembered and remembering self—the difference of language—by

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[19] Michael Ross, 'Relation of Implicit Theories to the Construction of Personal Histories', *Psychological Review,* 96/2 (1989), 341-357, at p. 324.
[20] Daniel N. Robinson, p. 166.
[21] Stout, p. 268.
[22] Stout, p. 226; p. 21.
[23] Stout, p. 266.
[24] Stout, p. 266.
[25] Stout, p. 266.

both literary and scientific practitioners of Child Study, is in response to a threat of identification with the pre-linguistic child. That threat is less obvious in general psychology, which therefore emphasises the continuity of the self across time, instead of the development of the self into language.

If, as Roland Barthes claims, 'narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting . . . stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation', it is at least potentially independent of language.[26] The instances of narrative represented within Nesbit's and Burnett's works engage with this possibility: both authors use non-linguistic narrative to reiterate its meaning-making function, and to interrogate the potential separation of language and meaning which such narratives might represent. As I will demonstrate, however, non-linguistic narrative is fundamentally limited for both authors, who ultimately assert the mutual dependence of story and language for the construction of meaning.

As suggested above, in *Wings and the Child* Nesbit offers an alternative representation of the conviction she shares with many psychologists and authors of the period—that thought can occur without language. In the building of magic cities, Nesbit suggests an alternative to language as a medium for the representation not only of non-linguistic thought, but more particularly of non-linguistic story. Nesbit asserts that 'I have never met a child who did not like building magic cities', a liking which provides the analogy between the child mind and the magic city, on which her subsequent discussion is based.[27]

Although at one stage in her instructions on how to build a magic city, Nesbit claims that '[n]ow I come to write all this down it seems very trivial', the equivalence of the magic city and the non-linguistic mind indicates, of course, that her subject 'is not really trivial' (p. 125). Nesbit's description of the child's mind as 'a store-house of beautiful and wonderful things' (p. 25) recurs in various forms throughout the text. Her first instruction for building a city is to 'wander round the house seeking beautiful things which look like other beautiful things' (p. 156). This recurrent emphasis on the commonality of beauty to both indicates that Nesbit's instructions for building a magic city are also her instructions for building a child's mind.

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[26] Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in *Image-Music-Text: Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath* (Fontana: Collins, 1977), 79-124, at p. 79. Marie-Laure Ryan suggests that in this work, and the work of Claude Bremond, narrative was 'emancipated from literature' (Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Narrative', in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan (London: Taylor and Francis, 2007), 344-348, at p. 344). See Michael Toolan, 'Language', in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 231-244, for a discussion of the relationship between narrative and language.

[27] Nesbit, *Wings*, p. 124. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses.

Intermittently, the metaphorical equivalence between the magic city and the child's mind becomes literal. The building of magic cities is actually claimed to have a morally improving effect on the child:

> [I]n the labour of creation will blossom those domestic virtues which best adorn the home; patience—for it is not often that for the young architect dream and image even vaguely coincide at the first effort, or the second or the third; good temper, for no one can build anything in a rage. (p. 155)

The opening claim made in *Wings and the Child*, that it 'took shape as an attempt to contribute something, however small and unworthy, to the science of building a magic city in the soul of a child, a city built of all things pure and fine and beautiful' (p. vii), can thus be read as an affirmation of the capabilities of the non-linguistic mind, and as an appeal to adults on how best to cultivate that mind. The magic city is both a metaphor for, and a strategy to stimulate, the child's thoughts without language.

Those thoughts, moreover, are represented particularly as they create stories. This is apparent in Nesbit's suggestion that city-building is inextricable from story-making:

> [W]hen you have finished your city, if you ever do finish it, you make up stories about it, and always, even when you are building it, you imagine how splendid it would be if you were small enough to walk through the arches of your city gates, to run along the little corridors of your city palaces. (p. 125)

For Nesbit, the magic city initiates story and *as such* it is representative of the child's mind; building magic cities is presented as a specific, non-linguistic form of narrative. The child's thoughts are abstracted from language in *Wings and the Child*, and are indicated by her non-linguistic story-making.

This story-making is, moreover, essential for the child's understanding of her world. David Herman suggests that the extent to which 'narrative scaffold[s] efforts to make sense of experience itself' is 'centrally relevant' to studies of the relationship between narrative and mind.[28] In her treatise on children's needs, Nesbit studies the relationship between non-linguistic narrative and the child's mind to examine the extent to which such narratives can scaffold the child's efforts to make sense of her experience. The imagination is the story-making faculty in *Wings and the Child*: thus, for example, the child uses 'his imagination and ingenuity in making the objects available serve the purposes of such plays as he has in hand' (p. 40), and while 'it is well to encourage children to act scenes which they have observed, or heard about or read about' (p. 113), 'the more highly cultivated the imagination the more intensely joyous are [these] games' (p. 112). The child's imagination can

[28] David Herman, 'Narrative Theory and the Sciences of Mind', *Literature Compass*, 10/5 (2013), 421-436, at p. 421.

appropriate and adapt for particular, sense-making purpose the real-world scenes and situations he experiences.[29]

Nesbit in fact claims that 'in every movement and desire of the natural child, it is imagination which tints the picture and makes the whole enterprise worth while' (p. 107). The child's experiences and actions are made valuable by the story-making powers of the imagination more particularly because of the association story-making builds between those experiences and what Nesbit calls 'knowledge':

> To show a child beautiful things . . . to charm and thrill his imagination with pictures and statues and models . . . to familiarise the child with beauty . . . is worth doing . . . [because] if we associate knowledge with beauty the child will love them both. (p. 53)

What Nesbit means by 'knowledge' becomes clearer when she states that the 'highest work of the imagination' is 'to teach the child so to put himself in the place of the one he has wronged that the knowledge of that wrong shall be its own punishment' (p. 72). Through the imagination, inspired by beautiful things, the child can ultimately come to make sense not only of his own experience, but of others' experiences. In other words, the imagination transforms 'beauty' into story, through which the child will be enabled to make sense of his own and others' experiences, or, in Nesbit's words, will acquire 'knowledge'.

Nesbit's treatise considers the extent to which narrative can make sense of the child's experience. As an autobiography, *The One I Knew the Best of All* is more invested in the extent to which narrative might function similarly for the adult. As I will illustrate, Burnett concurs with Nesbit in suggesting that the Small Person's non-linguistic stories might help her make sense of her experience. Burnett's work also indicates that Nesbit does not refer to adults in her treatise because non-linguistic stories cannot make sense of the child as part of the story of the adult self. In *The One I Knew the Best of All*, only by telling the story of the child in language can the meaning of the self be constituted.

The Small Person demonstrates the sense-making function of non-linguistic story-making as far as it applies to the specifically childish experience of doll-play. When Burnett asks '[w]hether as impression-creating and mind-moulding influences, Literature or the Doll came first into [the Small Person's] life' (p. 44), the answer implies that the doll only makes sense through story:

> [T]here is, before the advent of the Doll, a memory of something like stories—imperfect, unsatisfactory, filling her with vague, restless craving for greater completeness of form, but still creating images for her, and setting her small mind at work. (p. 44)

[29] The magic city in Nesbit's novel of the same title serves a similar purpose. Magically transported into a miniature city made from household materials, the protagonist, Philip, comes to a better understanding of his changed circumstances following his sister's marriage (Nesbit, *The Magic City* (Radford, VA: Wilder, 2010).

Stories here function not only to make sense of the child's thoughts, but actually to generate them. Like the imagination in Nesbit's work, the Small Person's mind has become capable of generating knowledge through story.

Likewise, when Burnett subsequently observes that:

> [i]t is not in the least likely she did not own dolls before she owned books, but it is certain that until literature assisted imagination and gave them character, they seemed only things stuffed with sawdust and made no special impression. (p. 44)

she suggests that story—in the form of literature, in this instance—not only assists the child's imaginative efforts to make sense of experience, but can then inform subsequent experiences. Just as Nesbit claims that the imagination can influence future behaviour by inflicting 'its own punishment' (p. 72) for previous wrong-doing, so Burnett claims that the imagination creates the 'character' which transforms her doll from a thing 'stuffed with sawdust' (p. 51) into a useful prop for future games.

Although literature is here the specific form from which the doll acquires its character, it is particularly because literature is a form for the creation and communication of story that it can influence the Small Person's experience. That it is story, rather than literature or story-in-language, which Burnett identifies as the Small Person's primary interest, is clear when she recalls her frustrated bewilderment that her Nurse could 'learn a couple of verses of a song suggesting a story, and not only neglect to learn more, but neglect to inquire about the story itself' (p. 46). The language of the song is incidental to the story which it serves to communicate. Thus, although Burnett claims that '[i]t was not until Literature in the form of story, romance, tragedy, and adventure had quickened her imagination that the figure of the Doll loomed up in the character of an absorbing interest' (p. 50), her phrase can be inverted in as far as it accounts solely for the Small Person's experience. For the child, story in the (incidental) form of literature scaffolds efforts to make sense of experience.

According to these texts, story-making might enable that understanding of the human mind which was sought by scientists and authors throughout the Victorian period. Since, moreover, language plays only an incidental part in the sense-making function of stories for the children in Burnett's and Nesbit's work, such stories can be created by the child. The child herself might, therefore, be capable of understanding her own mind, of communicating that understanding, and thereby of revealing the answer to the problem of selfhood which that mind was imagined to hold.

6.2: Narrative and Selfhood

Of course, the stories told by the children of Nesbit's and Burnett's texts do not quite provide this answer. Bourne Taylor suggests that '*The One I Knew the Best of All* and *Wings and the Child* each stress the psychic and social role of play, above all, in the creation of miniature worlds.'[30] Although the play Bourne Taylor describes in these texts primarily takes the form of non-linguistic storytelling, its miniature status indicates that the meaning the child herself can construct through such storytelling is highly limited. The stories told by the developing self are fundamentally different from the story *of* that self, and that difference is attributed to the difference between language and its absence.[31]

The difference between language and its absence constitutes that separation between adult and child which is necessitated by the threat of their identity, a threat epitomised by the memory of the precocious self. The representation of linguistic and non-linguistic narratives as fundamentally different, in Burnett's autobiography and in Nesbit's essays and treatise, therefore supports an underlying evaluation of the present adult-in-language as the end to the story of the pre-linguistic child. This end both sustains the continuity of the self in time, and attains its coherence in an articulate adulthood.

Burnett's phrase—'Literature in the form of story' (p. 50) (and her capitalisation of the word 'literature')—indicates that, for the *author*, the form of story is not incidental. For the author it is specifically literature—narrative in language—which makes sense of experience. Burnett's articulation of memory is therefore in tension with what she remembers at this point: the author recollects the meaning-making capacity of non-linguistic story, but she specifies the meaning-making capacity of linguistic story. This contradiction emerges because the Small Person's 'restless craving' (p. 44) for story is precociously like the present adult's use of story to make sense of that remembered child. This instance of continuity between the child and the adult threatens to indicate that the adult self is as restless, as incomplete, as inarticulate, as the child with whom she is identified here.

It is therefore no coincidence that, despite the Small Person's indifference to its linguistic basis, *literature* is the form in which story constitutes and makes sense of her experience. By specifying story-in-language as that which enables the Small Person to make sense of her experiences, and by presenting story-in-language as the means to make sense of the Small Person herself, Burnett presents story as the consistent feature which enables the

[30] Bourne Taylor, 'Atavism', p. 103.

[31] Beer's observation that the theory of recapitulation 'offered the pleasures of miniaturisation' to Victorian writers seems pertinent here (Beer, p. 99). By playing a miniaturised version of adult activities through her magic city, the child represents a primitive stage of a miniaturised version of progressive evolution. In other words, miniaturization, as depicted in the child's magic city, implies both ontogenic and phylogenic progress.

child to be identified with the adult, and language as that which distinguishes pre-linguistic from fully articulate self.

This indicates that although Burnett describes the precocity of her childhood self less frequently than James, she is nevertheless required by the Small Person to respond to the same problematic identity which the precocious Small Boy epitomises. When Burnett insists that the child craves not story itself, but 'Literature in the form of story' (p. 50), she offers a response to this problem which is at once more conclusive and, as will be argued, more superficial, than the one James arrives at.

The chapter in which Burnett recounts 'A Confidence Betrayed' is particularly illustrative of the fundamental dependence of meaning on a story told in language. This chapter establishes at the start that the Small Person 'did not quite realise' (p. 91) what had happened to her during the events to be recounted, and concludes with the recollection that she and her friend 'went home sadder *but not much wiser* little girls' (p. 107, emphasis added). Burnett is explicit in her assertion that, outside the play-world of dolls and magic cities, children are unable to make sense of experience.

The reason for this inability is not stated, but it is implied in the means by which Burnett *can* make sense of it. Throughout the chapter, Burnett oscillates between describing the event as it appeared to the Small Person and offering insights into the meaning of that event. For example, the emphasis in the observation that '[t]here were Nurses who let her *hold* the new baby' (p. 95) marks a moment of free indirect discourse, in which the author identifies with the Small Person's response to the offer made to her in this chapter, but the recurrent reference to 'the unbiassed opinion of mature years' (p. 94) in contrast with the 'innocence of tender years' (p. 99), insists on the separation of the adult and child, and presents the adult's understanding of the event as the substance of this separation. Furthermore, this understanding is articulated in highly obtrusive language. Burnett's description of the Small Person's 'rapturous incredulity' (p. 100), and her criticism of the 'Machiavellian Monthly Nurse' (p. 102) who tricks her, insist, by intertextuality, alliteration, and sophisticated vocabulary, that language is integral to the sense of the scene. Meaning is constituted through linguistic retrospection, by telling the story of the child's experience in the words of the remembering adult.

When Burnett suggests that the children 'did not realise that the respectable elderly person had had a delightful, relatable joke at the expense of their innocent little maternal souls' (p. 107), she therefore substantiates both her claim that she can communicate the mind of one child—her former self—and her claim that she can make sense of that mind specifically through telling the story of this remembered self in language. The correlation between written memory and sense-making is demonstrated in the divergence between the experiencing child who cannot understand and the narrating adult who can. Written

retrospection is simultaneous with meaning in this chapter. The meaning of the chapter is, therefore, less the musing on childhood innocence which Burnett offers in its final sentence than the adult self who constructs that meaning by telling the story in language. The sense which emerges from this retelling of Burnett's childhood is the author who writes it.

This chapter is therefore consonant with Burnett's resolution to the opposition between unified and progressive models of selfhood in the autobiography as a whole. A single continuous self is constituted by the autobiographical memory, in language, of the precocious child, and this resolution to the story of the self is both anticipated throughout, and represented by, Burnett's autobiography. When the Small Person comes to commit her first story to paper, to make the transition from story across media to story-in-language, Burnett recalls that she 'felt very still and happy, and as if she wanted to say or do something new, which would somehow be an expression of feeling and goodness and—and—she did not know at all what else' (p. 194):

> [S]he turned slowly to the exercise-book again—not with any particular intention, but reminded by the pen in her hand of the pleasantness of scribbling. A delightful, queer, and tremendously bold idea came to her. It was so daring that she smiled a little. 'I wonder if I could write—a piece of poetry'. (p. 194)

The significance of moment gestures towards the ultimate object of Burnett's 'record of the principal events which influenced the mental life of a Small Person' (p. 241), which is to narrate the development of the Small Person into language and, synonymously, into Frances Hodgson Burnett.

Consequently, the chapter with which Burnett concludes her autobiography, 'The First One', is the account of her first publication. The end of Burnett's story is her transition from remembered child into present author. After this transition, Burnett claims that the Small Person 'had crossed the delicate, impalpable dividing line. And after that, Life itself began, and memories of her lose the meaning which attaches itself to the memories of the Mind of a Child' (p. 325). The publication of a story in language represents the beginning of Burnett herself, and therefore the end of the story which led to that self. The story of the child's progression into language is the story of the development of the self. In the retrospective narrative of the self represented by Burnett's autobiography, language constitutes—or, to return to Wundt, stands for—that self.

Similarly, the meaning-making potential of the child's magic city remains hypothetical throughout *Wings and the Child.* Nesbit claims that the child *might,* or even *will,* make sense of experience through non-linguistic story, but does not actually represent this meaning-making. In this, the child's stories contrast fundamentally with the story of *Wings and the Child*. Nesbit's own autobiographical essays likewise represent the

significance of the child's mind to be its influence on the formation of the adult self, and represent that self to make sense specifically, and only, through the retrospective narration of her experiences in language. The child makes sense only to, and therefore *as*, the adult she becomes. For both Nesbit and Burnett, the stories of the non-linguistic mind are a form of play, prior to, and part of, the narrative evolution of the fully articulated adult self.

Nesbit does not narrate the construction of her adult self in *Wings and the Child*. She does, however, use her own memories to resolve the problem of the remembered child epitomised in James's autobiography, by arguing, like Burnett, that the adult self is constituted both in childhood, and through a retrospective account of childhood in language. Based on the first claim—that childhood forms the adult self—Nesbit makes a case for what she suggests are children's needs: 'Liberty' (p. 10), toys 'which lend themselves to . . . symbolic use' (p. 18), or 'the consciousness of being useful' (p. 85). In what is perhaps the most powerful articulation of this claim Nesbit insists that '[i]t cannot be put too plainly that the nation which will not pay for her schools must pay for her prisons and asylums' (p. 195).

The need on which Nesbit focuses in this text—the need to build magic cities—is therefore, for Nesbit, central to a childhood which might produce a meaningful adult self. Bavidge suggests that, in *Wings and the Child*, Nesbit 'encourages a narrative of children escaping into a fantastic construction made out of the bits and pieces of the adult world'.[32] However, the focus throughout on the transition from schools in childhood to, perhaps, 'prisons and asylums' (p. 195) in adulthood, indicates that Nesbit does not represent children *escaping* from an adult world of which they have been part. Rather, she suggests that children are in the (perilous) process of entering that adult world.

However, that process cannot be completed—a meaningful adult self cannot be constituted—exclusively through building magic cities, or through satisfying any other childhood need. To make sense of the world as a whole requires language. From the start of her text, Nesbit appeals to her reader to try to recall 'how it feels not to be so clever as you are now . . . how it feels to believe in things and in people as you did when you were new to the journey of life . . . try to look at the world with the clear, clean eyes that once were yours in the days when you had never read a newspaper or deceived a friend' (p. 12-14). These insistences on the limitations of the child's knowledge of the world are supported by the recurrent image of the child as 'an explorer in a new country' (p. 10), a 'small inexperienced traveller' (p. 28) in a world that is consequently implied to be adult. The view that Nesbit 'holds the realities of child and adult apart' so that adults can be imagined to define and

[32] Bavidge, p. 135.

control the world, is substantiated by *Wings and the Child* more than by the novels for children against which this criticism is generally made.[33]

Their limited knowledge of the world in which they nevertheless exist indicates the impossibility that children can make sense of themselves within that world. This is the essential difference between children's stories within Nesbit's text and Nesbit's text itself, and demonstrates the centrality of language to Nesbit's as to Burnett's analysis of the relationship between the child and the self. In *Wings and the Child,* Nesbit has done what children themselves cannot: she has made sense of the child's experience. Moreover, she has done so specifically through the metaphor of the magic city: it is a linguistic construct which enables Nesbit to make meaning. Nesbit's account of the magic city therefore not only 'suggest[s] children's entrance into language', as Bavidge observes: it represents that entrance as the point at which that child becomes meaningful.[34] Nesbit makes sense of the child's mind by telling the story of that mind in language. The meaning of the magic city, of the child's story, is attained only by, and therefore in, the retrospective adult who articulates it.

Nesbit's autobiographical essays offer the same resolution to the contradictory need for both temporal consistency with, and a meaningful end to, the childhood self. Alison Lurie suggests that 'Nesbit was the first [author] to write at length for children as intellectual equals and in their own language.'[35] Nesbit's fiction may support this analysis, but *The Girl's Own Paper* essays anticipate the view, subsequently presented in *Wings and the Child,* that children and adults are separated by language. Despite their conversational address to their intended audience, these essays therefore preclude the possibility of intellectual equality between author and reader, between adult and child.[36]

Most directly, these essays affirm the difference between the child and the writing adult by their context. Terri Doughty suggests that *The Girl's Own Paper* 'increasingly [featured] information on new educational and professional opportunities for women'.[37] Nesbit was therefore writing explicitly *as* a successful and well-known professional author when she contributed her recollections of the childhood which preceded this adult. Nesbit's final contribution to *The Girl's Own Paper* also affirms this presentation of the adult-in-

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[33] Rothwell, p. 62 and p. 66.
[34] Bavidge, p. 135.
[35] Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown Ups: Subversive Children's Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), p. 100.
[36] See Beth Rodgers, 'Competing Girlhoods: Competition, Community, and Reader Contribution in *The Girl's Own Paper* and *The Girl's Realm*', *Victorian Periodicals Review,* 45/3 (2012), 277-300 for more information on the constructed and actual readership of these periodicals.
[37] Terri Doughty, 'Introduction', in *Selections from* The Girl's Own Paper, *1880-1907,* ed. Terri Doughty (Plymouth: Broadview Reprint Edition, 2004), 7-14, at p.7.

language as the end to the story of the pre-linguistic child. This essay opens with the observation that:

> [w]hen I began to write of the recollections of my childhood, I thought that all those days which I could remember could well be told in these twelve chapters. But the remembrances of that long ago time crowded thickly on me . . . So my twelfth chapter is reached, and finds me still only ten years old, and finds me, moreover, with not one-tenth of the events of those ten years recorded.[38]

Nesbit concludes with the admission that her recollections exceed her capacity to record. Momentarily, that gulf between the remembered child and the retrospective adult—the gulf of language—seems beyond even Nesbit's abilities to transcend.

However, the conclusion to this final essay is an ultimate affirmation of the position which underlies Burnett's autobiography, and which informs the argument made in *Wings and the Child.* Nesbit concludes, tellingly, with a poem about her memory:

> There may be fairer gardens—but I know/ There is no other garden half so dear, / Because 'tis here, this many, many a year, / The sacred sweet white flowers of memory grow.[39]

The rhythm and rhyme of Nesbit's poem emphasises the linguistic construction of her meaning. That meaning is suggested by the fact that the poem is not about the significance of the garden to the child, but about the significance of its memory to the adult. Form and subject correspond in the conclusion to Nesbit's autobiographical essays to insist that the meaning of memory is constituted in, and as, the adult-in-language.

When Fivush and Nelson argue that 'as children develop the language and narrative skills to organise and recall their past . . . they are also beginning to differentiate the past *as* the past', and that *this* enables children to 'begin to develop the idea of a continuous self', they affirm Burnett's and Nesbit's view that the 'meaning' of the self depends on the narrated memory of that self, and that it is language which enables this narrative.[40] While Nesbit's treatise on children's needs suggests that non-linguistic narrative might be an alternative means for self-construction, it does not represent such narrative as, ultimately, capable of arriving at that end. Rather, *Wings and the Child* implicitly reiterates the view evident in both Nesbit's autobiographical essays for *The Girl's Own Paper,* and in Burnett's *The One I Knew the Best of All.* In each of these works, non-linguistic narratives are a preparatory play at a story of the self which must be told in language.

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[38] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 924 (Sept. 1897), 788-789, at p. 788.
[39] Nesbit, 'My School-days', *G. O. P.*, 924 (Sept. 1897), 789.
[40] Fivush and Nelson, p. 575.

Darwin's contribution to natural history destabilised Victorian understandings of the human race. In the standard text for psychology students in the decades following the publication of *The Origin of the Species*, language is the means by which a self-as-end can be constructed. Recent studies of autobiographical memory have examined the narrative structures which create a coherent self. The autobiographical works by Burnett and Nesbit, like the psychology contemporaneous with them, emphasise the underlying linguistic basis of these self-narratives. The story of the self in autobiography is, for both authors, as for the psychologists with whom they were contemporary, the story of the development into language. Through this story, the self can be represented as synonymous with the language it attains. Such a conceptualisation of selfhood as these autobiographies, and the psychological work with which they were contemporaneous, supports a progressive model of individual growth which is applicable, by extension through the theory of recapitulation, to species evolution.

6.3: Dialogue and Selfhood

Such a story is not told in James's autobiography, not only because James never finished the third volume, but because throughout even the first volume he presents the self less in narrative than in dialogic terms. While Nesbit and Burnett resist and superficially resolve both the otherness and the identity of the remembered self with the retrospective self, James depicts the full challenge implied by identification with the precocious Other of memory.

In those moments of what Hammond calls 'persistent doubling' in James's autobiography, the small boy is, often literally, a ghostly presence.[41] Although this encroachment of a ghostly Other self into the mind, and text, of the present self, is first referred to merely as '*mild* apparitionism', James's description of the effect of this apparition indicates its disturbing effect:

> To look back at all is to meet the apparitional and to find in its ghostly face the silent stare of an appeal. When I fix it, the hovering shade, whether of person or place, it fixes me back and seems the less lost—not to my consciousness, for that is nothing, but to its own—by my own stopping however idly for it. (p. 60)

Like d'Estrella, Burnett, or Nesbit, James can fix his childhood memories through language, but by suggesting that the other self of childhood 'fixes me back', James points to the significance of the identity of child and adult selves which Burnett and Nesbit disregard: the present self is created by, as much as he creates, the remembered self.

[41] Hammond, p. 344.

This Other self, moreover, has its own autonomous, even antagonistic, agency, over which James suggests that the present self has limited control. When James claims that 'I feel that . . . I remember too much' (p. 60), that his memories 'break in upon me and refuse to be slighted' (p. 71), that 'I lose myself, of a truth, under the whole pressure of the spring of memory' (p. 142), he expresses a sense of what de Man describes as 'the latent threat that inhabits prosopopeia': 'by making the death speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death.'[42] By reviving his past self in text, James not only fails to unify, but represents the risk of 'losing' his present self. James suggests that the small boy of memory might threaten to subsume the writing adult. Scott S. Derrick's question—to what extent the 'very old James' can speak of, or for, the young James—is altered in James's text, which asks instead to what extent the old James can retain an autonomous voice against the pressure of the ghostly revived past.[43]

By looking at the small boy, James creates an Other through which he can analyse the present, retrospective, writing 'I' of his autobiography. However, by doing so James the author also becomes an Other image of that textual 'I'. In fact, James seems almost to celebrate this Otherness of his self. By identifying himself *as* the precocious double represented by the small boy of his memory, James acknowledges that, through the very act of writing his autobiography, he is compelled to 'meet the apparitional' in himself, to recognise the 'ghostly face' (p. 60) of that autobiography as his own. James describes his memory of himself, as a small boy, watching other boys:

> They were so *other*—that was what I felt; and to *be* other, other almost anyhow, seemed as good as the probable taste of the bright compound wistfully watched in the confectioner's window; unattainable, impossible, of course. (p. 110)

At this point, just as the small boy sees, and desires, the boys who are 'so *other*', so he is 'Other' to the retrospective adult. The small boy becomes 'Other' to that retrospective adult, through the very act of looking, with desire—as if through a 'confectioner's window'—at those who are 'other' to him.

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[42] De Man, p. 78.

[43] Scott S. Derrick, '*A Small Boy* and the Ease of Others: The Structure of Masculinity and the Autobiography of Henry James', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 45/4 (1989), 25-56, at p. 28. Fred Kaplan notes that while James was writing his autobiography, a 'childhood virus became reactivated' (Kaplan, *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), p. 554). As Eakin suggests, this may indicate that 'text and context operated symbiotically . . . to create the thematization and manifestation of illness recorded simultaneously in [James's] autobiography and in the letters' he wrote during the same period (Eakin, p. 683). The recurrence of James's childhood illness while writing his autobiography thus literalises the disruptive intrusion of past into present self which is the underlying concern of the text.

Immediately after articulating this memory of his past self, James goes on to articulate the experience of his *present* self with precisely the same metaphor:

> A platitude of acceptance of the poor actual, the absence of all vision of how in any degree to change it, combined with a complacency, an acuity of perception of alternatives, though a view of them as only through the confectioner's hard glass—that is what I recover. (p. 110)

The retrospective adult, replicating the small boy's act of looking, with desire, thereby others himself. James's description of his desiring gaze, as if through a 'confectioner's window', at alternatives to the 'poor actual', becomes, then, an expression of his desiring gaze for the 'unattainable, impossible' (p. 110) Other that is his past self. The desiring gaze, as through a window, produces a reflection of the self which 'others' that self. For both the small boy and the retrospective adult, the act of looking with desire makes the self into an Other.

Of course, this specular structure extends to the relationship between the retrospective 'I' who appears in the text and the 'real' Henry James who writes that text. By looking at himself, in text, James the actual author others himself as well. This, the fundamental specularity of James's self-knowledge, and the Otherness of self which is its corollary, is embodied in the precocious child of James's memory. James's version of the past may be 'corrupted by the present' as Porter Abbott suggests, but that present self is, in fact, equally 'corrupted' by the disruptive autonomy of his past.[44] The small boy is therefore not, in Kincaid's words, '*safely* other'.[45] As an Other, he reflects the fundamental division of the writing self. Rather than unify that self, the remembered child is an image of its textually-produced specularity and, therefore, of the split which conditions its self-knowledge.

James is, moreover, sensitive to the power of language to disrupt a narrative end to the self. In a view which undermines the closure that Burnett and Nesbit offer at the end of their autobiographical works, James presents language not as the difference between remembered precocious self and writing adult self, but as a means to engage in the continual construction of both selves. The final chapter of 'A Small Boy and Others' opens with a statement of regret that the text must come to an end:

> I feel that much might be made of my memories of Boulogne-sur-Mer had I but here left room for the vast little subject; in which I should probably, once started, wander to and fro as exploringly, as perceivingly, as discoveringly, I am fairly tempted to call it, as might really give the measure of my small operations at the time. (p. 237)

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[44] Porter Abbott, p. 602.
[45] Kincaid, *Child-Loving,* p. 65, emphasis added.

James might regret the limitations of his form, but by coining such words as 'exploringly' and 'discoveringly', demonstrates the expressive power of his medium: narrative is necessarily finite, but language is perhaps infinitely capacious.

This contradiction between language and narrative produces the contradictory but expansive ending to James's autobiography. In autobiographical work by Burnett and Nesbit, language and narrative cohere to constitute the adult self; *language* marks the separation between child and adult on which the meaning of that adult self depends. James, by contrast, seems to mark the separation of the Small Boy from the adult self with a protracted and severe attack of typhus:

> This experience was to become when I had emerged from it the great reminiscence or circumstance of old Boulogne for me, and I was to regard it, with much intelligence, I should have maintained, as the marked limit of my state of being a small boy. (p. 238)

James thus not only gives less finality to the acquisition of language than either Burnett or Nesbit do. He actually uses language to obscure, rather than mark, the separation between adult and child. Although the recounted experience seemingly marks the limit after which the Small Boy becomes Henry James, the claim that 'I *was* to regard it [as such], with much intelligence, I *should have maintained*' (p. 238), undermines this separation. The past tense implies that it is the small boy who both was ill, and regarded the illness as the end of his childhood. James here represents the capacity of language both to separate himself from 'a small boy', and to confuse that small boy's perceptions with his own.

It is, additionally, not irrelevant that an episode of typhus raises the possibility of a limit to the small boy:

> The dreary months [of the illness] . . . are subject, I repeat, to the perversion, quite perhaps to the obscuration, of my temporarily hindered health—which should keep me from being too sure of these small *proportions* of experience. (p. 246)

In other words, James choses a specifically obscure moment—a moment when his experience and his memory are obscured by the effects of illness—to mark the separation of child from adult. He therefore cannot be 'too sure' (p. 240) of that separation itself.

He then promptly erodes this very uncertainty, by insisting that 'none the less, there flush as sharp little certainties . . . a connection [between objects, perceived by the Small Boy] that thrusts itself upon me now as after all the truest centre of my perceptions' (p. 246). Here, although the Small Boy's precociously true perception marks a moment of identification between him and the author, that author's certainty of the perception suggests that the previous 'proportion of experience' (p. 246)—the moment which, to the small boy, marked the end of childhood—might be equally reliable. In its confusion of voices, and in

the contradictory views expressed by those voices, James represents dialogue between his Other, childhood and present, adult self as the means continually to constitute and deconstruct their paradoxical, provisional identity. As Andrew Taylor argues, James's autobiographical work 'depend[s] upon . . . a commitment to openness and to the infinitely revisable self'.[46] It is, particularly, openness to infinite dialogue between remembered, precocious self and the writing, present self which enables what Taylor describes as the 'freed self' of James's autobiography.[47]

Language thus opens up the potential meaning which narrative would require at the end of 'A Small Boy and Others'. The end of the text is necessitated by its material properties, but is not presented as anything more significant, final, or coherent than that. Inevitably, in fact, 'A Small Boy and Others' does not end; it simply stops. James recalls a moment during his illness when, about to faint, he 'wavered toward the bell' to call for help:

> The question of whether I really reached out and rang [the bell] was to remain lost afterwards in the strong sick whirl of everything about me, under which I fell into a lapse of consciousness that I shall conveniently here treat as a considerable gap. (p. 250)

The question of selfhood is not only not answered at the end of this text: it is not even addressed. James's fainting fit creates a gap in consciousness, which temporarily replicates the narrative function of death. By describing his faint as convenient, James highlights the arbitrariness of the gap it provides in his narrative, and thus declares the falsity of any narrative closure prior to death. James represents, and finds not problematic but *convenient*, the impossibility of a narrative of the self in language, and instead presents the dialogic possibilities of language as a means continually to construct and recuperate the self throughout life.

Hannah Sullivan suggests that '[f]or writers of the next literary generation . . . James's belief in the impossibility of writing a straightforward, truthful autobiography became a perverse form of liberation.'[48] Rather than recuperate a unified self for the retrospective, writing adult, or offer a factually accurate account of that adult's early life, the remembered and written child instead represents the necessity, and possibility, of ongoing dialogue between present and former selves. The child in James's autobiography is a disruptive recruit in the textual construction of a unified self, and is consequently a subversive statement of both the limits and the possibilities for a linguistically constituted self. James's autobiography dramatizes both the identity of the precocious child with the

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[46] Andrew Taylor, *Henry James and the Father Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 59.
[47] Taylor, p. 60.
[48] Hannah Sullivan, 'Autobiography and the Problem of Finish', *Biography*, 34/2 (2011), 298-325, at p. 307.

writing adult, and the alterity of each from the other. Through this paradox, a dialogue with, and of, the self can be articulated.

Chapter Seven: Darwinism and the Victorian Ideology of Childhood

R. D. S. Jack claims that J. M. Barrie 'revealed his acceptance of the Darwinian world view unequivocally' as early as 1883, but Barrie's best-known work is far from unequivocal on the subject.[1] In *Peter Pan,* Barrie explores the significance for the individual of the questions raised about the human species by the theory of evolution, and by the mechanisms—Darwinian and otherwise—proposed to explain it in the Victorian period.

As Bowler argues, '[t]he most radical aspect of Darwin's approach was his reliance on adaptation as the sole driving agent of evolution', which then 'has to be seen as an irregularly branching tree—not as the ascent of a ladder toward some predetermined goal'.[2] It is because Darwinian evolution is problematically non-progressive that 'some of the most popular aspects of late nineteenth-century evolutionism can be seen as continuations of the developmental approach', despite the myth of the Darwinian revolution.[3]

The developmental model was predicated on the theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, and on the view that ontogeny is progressive. Thus, as the narratives of Child Study and autobiography discussed in the previous chapters suggest, the child plays a central role in teleological narratives of the self. It thereby comes to emblematise and enable a teleological narrative of the species as well.

The centrality of the child to the developmental model of evolution which was so dominant in the late nineteenth century is clear in Herbert Spencer's claim that although the 'current conception of progress is shifting and indefinite' it can sometimes refer to 'little more than simple growth'.[4] The 'progress in intelligence seen during the growth of the child into the man, or the savage into the philosopher' is identified as a means to shed light on 'actual progress' which 'consists in those internal modifications of which this larger knowledge is the expression'.[5] Spencer presents the growth of a child to adulthood as a simple, obvious instance of progress.

To epitomise progressive development, however, the child must be in the process of growing up. In *The Little White Bird* and *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* Peter Pan is 'always the same age', while his repeated refrain in the play is that 'I want always to be a little boy and to have fun', and the opening remark of *Peter and Wendy* is that '[a]ll children,

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[1] Jack, '*Peter Pan* as Darwinian Creation Myth', *Literature and Theology*, 8/2 (1994), 157-173, at p. 157. Jack bases this claim on two leader articles Barrie wrote during his time as a journalist for *The Nottingham Journal.*
[2] Bowler, p. 7.
[3] Bowler, p. 67.
[4] Spencer, p. 8
[5] Spencer, p. 8-9.

except one, grow up.'[6] Peter Pan is most famous as the boy who never grows up, and is therefore a troublesome child in an era in which the idea of progress was so central.

This chapter will argue that Barrie interrogates the idea of selfhood which emerges from a Darwinian, non-progressive theory of evolution. It will first analyse the study of precocious children and childish adults which Barrie offers in the characters of Wendy Darling and her father. Through these characters, Barrie problematizes the idea that the child's growth to adulthood is as progressive as Spencer and other advocates of progressive evolution require it to be.

Peter Pan will then be shown to epitomise this Darwinian self. However, the claim that 'all children, except one, grow up' (*PW,* p. 69) differentiates Peter from those children whose non-progressive selfhood he nevertheless emblematises. This chapter will attribute Peter's difference to an absence of story which is associated with the absence of his mother. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the function of stories and mothers thus implied, to illuminate the role the child was required to play in such teleological alternatives to Darwinian evolution as Spencer offers, and which proliferated during the Victorian period.

For Beer it is 'at the point of difficulty between resistance and explanation that many Victorian imaginative uses of Darwinism are located'.[7] Through its emphasis on the value of stories which it also insists are fantastical, *Peter Pan* argues that those alternatives to Darwinian evolution which were, as Bowler argues, 'designed to retain an element of teleology and progressionism', perform a function which is necessary even if it is falsifiable.[8] Thus, as an eternal child, Peter Pan epitomises both the endless process which is such a troubling component of Darwinian evolution, and the explanatory function of imaginary progress offered by models which resisted its implications.

7.1: The Darwinian in *Peter Pan*

Glenda A. Hudson argues that in *Peter Pan* '[w]isdom is acquired from the memory of past experiences, and adulthood is reached by assimilating these memories.'[9] This observation holds true for the autobiographical works of Nesbit and Burnett: as the previous

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[6] Barrie, *The Little White Bird* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p. 142; *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, in Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens and Peter and Wendy,* ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1-65, at p. 12; *Peter Pan* in *Peter Pan and Other Plays,* p. 99 and p. 151; *Peter and Wendy,* p. 69. Except in analysis of relevant differences, all versions of Peter's story are treated interchangeably and referred to as *Peter Pan.* I will indicate references to specific versions with the following abbreviations: *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens: KG*; *Peter and Wendy: PW*; *Peter Pan* (1928): *PP*.

[7] Beer, p. 112.

[8] Bowler, p. 7.

[9] Glenda A. Hudson, 'Two is the Beginning of the End: *Peter Pan* and the Doctrine of Reminiscence', *Children's Literature in Education,* 37/4 (2006), 313-324, at p. 322.

chapter illustrates, in these works adulthood is the conclusive assimilation of memories into a meaningful story with selfhood at its end. However, this teleological view of adulthood as the end to a narrative of the self is not supported by *Peter Pan,* in which adulthood of the kind Hudson describes is never reached by any character.

Such a view of adulthood is complicated both by Wendy's precocious maternity, and by its inverse in the 'child's outlook' which, as the stage directions insist, all 'characters, whether grown-ups, or babes, must wear . . . as their only important adornment' (*PP,* p. 88). Through these inversions of child and adult roles, the separation between 'growing up' and being 'grown up' is blurred. In consequence, selfhood cannot straightforwardly be associated with an imagined end to the process of growing up.

This challenges the recapitulation theory on which progressive models of evolution were predicated in the late nineteenth century. Nelson suggests that 'the arrested child-man often figures a moral and/ or evolutionary breakdown' in the Victorian period.[10] I suggest that the arrested child-man in *Peter Pan*, Mr Darling, and his precocious child-woman counterpart, Wendy, represent not evolutionary breakdown but the breakdown of that imagined adult selfhood which implies and corroborates a theory of progressive evolution. Precocity and childishness emblematise the breakdown of the adult self-as-end: Wendy and Mr Darling thus individuate the human species in a Darwinian model of evolution.

In the conclusion to *The Origin of Species*, Darwin insists that 'no line of demarcation can be drawn between species, commonly supposed to have been produced by special acts of creation, and varieties which are acknowledged to have been produced by secondary laws.'[11] A comparable difficulty is represented in *Peter Pan.* That 'delicate, impalpable dividing line' (which Darwin might call a line of demarcation) between the child-story and the adult-end in Burnett's autobiography is blurred throughout *Peter Pan*, so that the story of growing up is not a simple narrative with selfhood as its end.[12] Just as Darwin's theory of species does not, as Beer observes, 'allow either interruption or conclusion', so there is neither an end-point nor even what Kermode might identify as a transient 'moment of interpretation' in Barrie's theory of self.[13]

Adulthood as the embodiment of a selfhood yet-to-be-attained in childhood is problematized in the opening scene of *Peter Pan*, in which Mr Darling and his youngest son mirror each other's behaviour and language as they prevaricate over taking medicine:

Mr Darling: *(hedging)* Michael first.

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[10] Nelson, *Precocious Children,* p. 163.
[11] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species,* ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 345.
[12] Burnett, *The One I Knew*, p. 325.
[13] Beer, p. 8; Kermode, *Secrecy*, p. 16.

Michael:	*(full of unworthy suspicions)* Father first.
. . .	
Mr Darling:	. . . there is more in my glass than in Michael's spoon. It isn't fair, I swear though it were my last breath, it is not fair.
. . .	
Michael:	Father's a cowardy custard.
Mr Darling:	So are you a cowardy custard. (*PP*, p. 94)

Mr Darling performs the same 'childish' behaviour also displayed by Michael, and this parallel disturbs any easy taxonomy of adult or child, and therefore any sense that adulthood is an end.

The parallel between Mr Darling and Michael is explicitly linguistic in this scene. Gabrielle Owen applies Judith Butler's analysis of 'queer' relations to the term 'child', to suggest that 'to be a child is *to find that you have not yet achieved access to* adulthood, *to find yourself speaking only and always as if you were* adult, *but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming.*'[14] By undermining this imagined difference between adult language and child language, Barrie questions contemporary ideas about the relationship between language and childhood. The very quality which, for James, Nesbit, Burnett, and, according to Owen, contemporary thought, might define the difference between adult and child becomes precisely what undermines that difference in Barrie's texts.

Such a disruption of categories previously defined in, and differentiated by, language, is also effected in Darwin's theory. In arguing that '[t]he small differences distinguishing varieties of the same species, steadily tend to increase till they come to equal the greater differences between species of the same genus, or even of distinct genera', Darwin collapses previously separate categories.[15] Varieties can become as distinct as species, and can therefore become species in themselves.

As Rasheed Tazudeen suggests, furthermore, the metaphor with which Darwin closes his chapter on natural selection actually enacts the theory it describes. Darwin argues that:

> [a]s buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications.[16]

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[14] Gabrielle Owen, 'Queer Theory Wrestles the "Real" Child: Impossibility, Identity, and Language in Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan*', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 35/3 (2010), 255-273, at p. 262. Owen adopts the analysis presented in Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 30.
[15] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 99.
[16] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 100.

For Tazudeen, this 'is a metaphor for the irrepressible difference and multiplicity of life that, in itself, has no singular origin and no teleological finality'.[17] Darwin's metaphor becomes 'a mode of reintroducing the force of difference that language, in its nominalist function, covers over or sublimates into conceptual difference'.[18] Metaphor here operates, like the repetitions by Michael and Mr Darling in *Peter Pan,* to reduce apparently absolute differences between categories to degrees of variation which render such categories meaningless. Language becomes a tool for undermining its own ostensibly nominalist function in both texts.

Although in the *Origin* Darwin did not apply his theory to the human species, (motivated, according to J. W. Burrow, by 'a desire not to give unnecessary offense') he made the inevitable extrapolation in *The Descent of Man* (1871).[19] Although 'some philologists have inferred that when man first became widely diffused he was not a speaking animal', 'it may be suspected that languages, far less perfect than any now spoken, aided by gestures, might have been used.'[20] Consequently, '[w]hether primeval man . . . when his power of language was extremely imperfect, would have deserved to be called man, must depend on the definition we employ.'[21] For Darwin, therefore, it is 'impossible to fix on any definite point when the term "man" ought to be used'; both the category and the term are highly unstable.[22]

Just as, for Barrie, 'adult' as either category or term becomes meaningless because the self to which it purports to refer is constantly evolving, and is therefore impossible ever quite to 'fix on', so for Darwin, 'man' is an arbitrary term and an implicitly dubious category in light of the endless, non-directed process implied by his model of evolution by natural selection.[23] The human species, like the adult in *Peter Pan,* is not an end to be attained, but an ongoing process. Language becomes a less definite sign of humanity, or of adulthood, in this view.

A second parallel which undermines the difference between adult and child in *Peter Pan* is not linguistic but behavioural. In her distinction between male characters in *Peter Pan*, who 'play a game of make-believe', and female characters, who 'pretend to believe',

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[17] Rasheed Tazudeen, 'Immanent Metaphor, Branching Form(s), and the Unmaking of the Human in *Alice* and *The Origin of Species*', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 43/3 (2015), 533-558, at p. 541.
[18] Tazudeen, p. 542.
[19] J. W. Burrow, 'Editor's Introduction', in *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, ed. J. W. Burrow (London: Penguin, 1985), 11-48, at p. 15. Beer, however, claims that such an omission 'had an immediate polemical effect nevertheless, because it 'removed man from the centre of attention' (Beer, p. 54).
[20] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex,* ed. James Moore and Adrian Desmond (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 209.
[21] Darwin, *Descent,* p. 209-210.
[22] Darwin, *Descent,* p. 210.
[23] Darwin, *Descent,* p. 210.

Monique Chassagnol implies that adulthood is represented in the text, gendered female.[24] However, Mrs Darling participates as earnestly as Mr Darling in such games.

For example, while the servant Liza insists that 'I don't think it's respectable to go to his office in a kennel', Mrs Darling '*gently*' says that Mr Darling does so '[o]ut of remorse' (*PP*, p. 147). Her sincere enquiry, '[w]hat sort of day have you had, George?', made while her husband '*is sitting on the floor by the kennel*' (*PP*, p. 75), likewise indicates that Mrs Darling is playing the same game as her husband, and just as earnestly. Similarly, when she describes her Newfoundland dog as 'a treasure' (*PP*, p. 92) and refers to Liza as 'the servants' (*PP*, p. 96) in the opening scene, Mrs Darling pretends to enjoy a comfortably middle-class style of life, though her economical staffing arrangements indicate that her actual circumstances are quite different.[25]

Mrs Darling's pretending therefore aligns her with her childish husband. It is also replicated in the pretended motherhood of her precocious daughter. When both Michael and Mr Darling dissemble about taking their medicine in Mrs Darling's absence, Wendy has 'a splendid idea: "Why not both take it at the same time?"' (*PW*, p. 84). Her precocious performance of adult behaviour, and its contrast with her father's childishness, disturbs the identification and differentiation of adults and children according to age. Mr Darling and Wendy therefore indicate that each category is as much a performance as an actual state of being. For Judith Butler, '[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.'[26] According to this view, the ontologies of 'adult and 'child' are entirely undermined by their performativity in this scene.

It is, moreover, telling that Wendy's behaviour mirrors her mother's particularly because it is a form of pretence. Peter Hollindale suggests that while boys never really grow up in *Peter Pan*, '[f]or girls, . . . there was a possible continuum from childhood to maturity, and Wendy's favoured games are imitations of a life she can expect.'[27] However, Mrs Darling engages in the childish behaviour of pretending as much as her daughter does. Wendy's games are therefore not 'imitations of a life she can expect'; they are an actuation

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[24] Monique Chassagnol, 'Masks and Masculinity in James Barrie's *Peter Pan*', in *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film*, ed. John Stephens (New York: Routledge, 2002), 200-215, at p. 213.

[25] Indeed, as Ann Wilson has argued, the middle class was defined by its flexibility and permeability, and is therefore comparable to adulthood in *Peter Pan* in this respect as well as by the performativity which enables Mrs Darling's participation in it (Wilson, 'Hauntings: Anxiety, Technology, and Gender in *Peter Pan*', *Modern Drama*, 43/4 (2000), 595-610, at p. 597).

[26] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 136.

[27] Hollindale, 'Introduction', in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens and Peter and Wendy*, vii-xxviii, at p. xiii.

of the life she, as a female character, already has. Motherhood is not an adult function, but it *is* a female one, in *Peter Pan*.[28]

While there is some gendered difference in the representation of adulthood and childhood in *Peter Pan*, it is not, as Chassagnol suggests, that adult/female characters pretend to believe the games child/male characters play nor, as Hollindale suggests, that female characters eventually grow up. Rather, the difference is that female characters generally pretend to be adults, while male characters generally pretend to be children. A supposed continuum from child to adult is therefore problematized as much by Wendy's precocious motherliness as by her father's childishness.

Because of her precocity, Wendy is a problematic origin for a story which ends in adulthood. Because childishness is their most important adornment, Mr and Mrs Darling emblematise the falsity of adulthood as the end to such stories as Wendy tries to tell. As this indicates, Barrie uses what Sheila Kaye-Smith calls the 'trick of Laughter' to veil a 'tragedy'.[29] That tragedy is, specifically, the fundamental problem, presented by Darwinian evolution, of the ideas of origin and end on which progress depends.

Just as Darwin, by claiming that he saw 'no limit' to the power of natural selection, suggests that species—including humanity—are still subject to it, so the precocity and childishness performed in the opening scene of *Peter Pan* suggest that adults are in the same, ongoing process of evolution which they ascribe to the state of childhood.[30] Barrie sees no limit to the process of growing up. Selfhood is therefore no more the stable end of a story than species is the stable product of an act of creation. The child-man and the precocious woman of *Peter Pan* depict not 'evolutionary breakdown', but the breakdown of a developmental model of selfhood and, with it, a disruption of the premise on which recapitulation theory might support a progressive model of evolution.[31]

7.2: Peter Pan as the Darwinian Self

Amanda Phillips Chapman has argued that 'Peter Pan has no self.'[32] What he more accurately 'has' is a Darwinian self, which is so highly provisional that it invites itself to be read as a tragic lack. Peter's ephemerality is represented by his bodily insubstantiality. He

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[28] This is not to suggest that the ontological status of gender is unquestioned in Barrie's work. Indeed, as Wilson observes, the performativity of gender roles is suggested in this very scene, by Wendy's and John's performances of 'Mother' and 'Father' (Wilson, p. 597) The fact that Peter Pan was traditionally performed by an adult woman also, of course, disturbs the ontological status both of age and of gender.

[29] Sheila Kaye-Smith, 'J. M. Barrie, The Tragedian', *The Bookman Christmas Number,* 59/351 (1920), 107-108, at p. 108, qtd. in Jack, 'Creation Myth', p. 172.

[30] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 84.

[31] Nelson, *Precocious Children,* p. 163.

[32] Amanda Phillips Chapman, 'The Riddle of Peter Pan's Existence: An Unselfconscious Stage Child', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 36/2 (2012), 136-153, at p. 137.

can, of course, fly; indeed, according to the stage directions, he is '*no weight at all*' (*PP,* p. 124). In combat, Hook '*has a sinking that this boy has no brisket*' (*PP,* p. 144). As Wendy gets older, '*she does not see him quite so clearly . . . as she used to*' (*PP,* p. 153), and although the stage directions suggest that he '*flutters* . . . as if *the wind . . . blew him*' (*PP,* p. 146, emphasis added) they also suggest that adults actually '*think he* is *a draught at the corner*' (p. 151, emphasis added). To Hook's eyes, '*blurred or opened clearly for the first time*' while they duel, Peter '*is less like a boy than a mote of dust dancing in the sun*' (*PP,* p. 145). Perhaps most tellingly, and most tragically, he is '*never touched by anyone in the play*' (*PP,* p. 98).

The most striking evidence of Peter's insubstantiality—his separation from his own shadow in the opening scene—is associated with a lack of memory and therefore, as will be argued, with a lack of story. His entrance into the Darlings' nursery, and into the narrative of *Peter and Wendy,* is preceded by that of his shadow, which Mrs Darling is able to 'put . . . away carefully in a drawer' (*PW,* p. 78) for Peter to search through later: '[i]n his delight [when he finds his shadow there] he forgot that he had shut Tinker Bell up in the drawer' (*PW,* p. 89). Peter is so incomplete and insubstantial as a self that he can be separated from his own shadow. This extraordinary manifestation of his lack of self is represented in the same moment as an instance of equally remarkable forgetfulness.[33]

He is, initially, forgetful largely of others, a convenient characteristic for a boy who loves 'showing off' (*PP,* p. 99). It allows him to 'crow' (*PP,* p. 99) in triumph after Wendy has sewn his shadow back on, because, as the narrator of the novel explains, 'he ha[s] already forgotten that he owe[s] his bliss to' her (*PW,* p. 91). As Tinker Bell's imprisonment suggests, however, Peter's forgetfulness is deeply problematic. Wendy's concern, that 'if he forgets [his adventures] so quickly . . . how can we expect that he will go on remembering us?' (*PW,* p. 104) is vindicated. During the flight to Neverland, Peter 'sometimes . . . did not remember them, at least not well', and '*has already forgotten*' John and Michael by the time he arrives in Neverland, '*as soon maybe he will forget Wendy*' (*PP,* p. 114).

As Sarah Gilead argues, Peter's forgetfulness entraps him 'in an eternal present without emotional or cognitive meaning'.[34] Peter's lack of memory has its most pertinent impact on the 'meaning' of his own existence. On the journey to Neverland, therefore, his forgetfulness begins to pertain to his own adventures. He:

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[33] In the play's 'Dedication', Barrie suggests that 'to force open a crammed drawer' is a 'safe but sometimes chilly way of recalling the past' (*PP,* pp. 75-86, at p. 84). The connection between Peter's shadow and his memory is therefore emphasised by Mrs Darling's choice of place for safekeeping: Peter finds his shadow where others find memories. Of course, only Peter could lose both.

[34] Sarah Gilead, 'Magic Abjured: Closure in Children's Fantasy Fiction', *PMLA,* 106/2 (1991), 277-293, at p. 287.

> would come down laughing at something fearfully funny he had been saying to a star, but he had already forgotten what it was, or he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening. (*PW,* p. 104)

Similarly, when Peter returns to Wendy and the lost boys after an adventure of his own, '[h]*e may have forgotten it so completely that he says nothing about it; and then when you go out you find the body*' (*PP,* p. 128).

The full significance of this self-forgetfulness is figured, in the play, in the outcome of Peter's climactic battle with Hook. This battle ends not in Peter's victory during their sword fight, but when Hook sees that '[t]*he incredible boy has apparently forgotten the recent doings, and is sitting on a barrel playing upon his pipes*' (*PP,* p. 146). '*At this sight the great heart of Hook breaks . . . [he] prostrates himself into the water, where the Crocodile is waiting for him, open-mouthed . . . after what he has gone through he enters it like one greeting a friend*' (*PP,* p. 146). The central dramatic conflict in Neverland is resolved when the villain is forgotten. Hook has no past in Peter's memory, and therefore has no future either. Through Peter's forgetfulness, Hook comes to exist in an eternal present like that which Peter himself endures. Unlike Peter, however, Hook has his eternal present in death.

Many critics have commented on the parallel repeatedly drawn between Hook and Peter. In the play, this parallel is reiterated immediately after Hook's suicide. The curtain rises '*to show Peter a very Napoleon on his ship. It must not rise again lest we see him on the poop in Hook's hat and cigars, and with a small iron claw*' (*PP,* p. 146). John Pennington argues that 'death hovers over *Peter Pan* in spite of Peter's eternal youth', but for Peter to become Hook at this moment dramatizes a parallel between the boy who never grows up and the pirate who has just died, or between eternal youth and death.[35] This moment in the play suggests that death hovers over the text *because* of Peter's eternal youth.

The same parallel is also suggested in the novel, not only because Peter again becomes 'Captain Pan' once Hook dies, but also because, after Hook's death, 'Peter had one of his dreams . . . and cried in his sleep for a long time' (*PW,* p. 205). These dreams 'had to do . . . with the riddle of his existence' and are 'more painful than the dreams of other boys' (*PW,* p. 181). More particularly, 'in his dream he is always in pursuit of a boy who was never here, nor anywhere' (*PP,* p. 135). For Chapman, Peter's dreams indicate that '[i]f the price of never growing up is never attaining an interior self, Peter does not pay that price

[35] John Pennington, 'Peter Pan, Pullman, and Potter: Anxieties of Growing Up', in *J. M. Barrie's* Peter Pan *In and Out of Time: A Children's Classic at 100,* ed. Donna R. White and C. Anita Tarr (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 237-262, at p. 250.

entirely painlessly.'[36] Peter dreams of a boy who is never here immediately after Hook's death, and thus indicates his recognition, at least in dreams, of the equivalence of that death with the lack which defines his own existence—a lack of memory, and therefore of story.

Thus, although in the play Peter's forgetfulness has its most obvious effect on Hook, this effect, and the parallels drawn between Peter and Hook, indicate the full significance of Peter's forgetfulness for his own lack of selfhood. Fernyhough claims that, 'like every human being, I want to know who I am, and part of that is knowing where I have come from.'[37] Fernyhough's statement, and the retrospection which is so central to the autobiographies discussed in the previous section, point to the problem Peter's forgetfulness presents not only for Hook, but more particularly for himself. Peter has no memory whatsoever of where he has come from, and, with no memory, can have no story of the self.

As Karen McGavrock argues, Peter Pan's forgetfulness means that he 'finds beginnings and endings problematic', and is therefore 'the symbol of process' in *Peter Pan.*[38] As such, Peter Pan himself becomes the emblem of the model of selfhood implied in the precocious beginning which Wendy performs, and the childishness which is exhibited by the adults who are supposed to represent the end to her progressive development. Beer argues that 'Darwinian theory . . . excludes or suppresses certain orderings of experience.'[39] This effect is registered in the performance of precocious beginnings and childish endings by Wendy and Mr Darling, which problematize the narrative ordering of their existence. The same effect is epitomised in Peter Pan's forgetfulness, which excludes the possibility of any such narrative ordering of his existence, and thereby excludes the possibility of narrated selfhood.

The model of selfhood as endless process epitomised by Peter Pan is a Darwinian one and, just as Darwin's theory has implications for both creationism and a creator, so Barrie's model of selfhood is pertinent not only for the narrative but also for the narrator. Darwin insists that 'which groups will ultimately prevail, no man can predict.'[40] It is, as Beer argues, 'fundamental to [Darwin's] argument that [future forms] are unforeseeable, produced out of too many variables to be plotted in advance'.[41] Neither an end, nor even any possible

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[36] Chapman, p. 149. Rose identifies a note by Barrie in a first edition of *Peter Pan*, which substantiates this reading; Barrie writes that Peter 'is only a sort of dead baby' (Rose, p. 38). This is cited by Lucas Crawford to argue that Peter Pan's 'preservation' is 'violent, even if [it] looks like fantasy' (Lucas Crawford, '"A child is being beaten": Peter Pan, Peter Grimes, and a Queer Case of Modernism', *English Studies in Canada*, 39/4 (2013), 33-54, at p.51).
[37] Fernyhough, p. 68. The quotation is from Chapter Three, which focuses on childhood memory and childhood amnesia. Tellingly, the chapter is called 'The Sunny Never-Never'.
[38] Karen McGavrock, 'The Riddle of His Being: An Exploration of Peter Pan's Perpetually Altering State', in White and Tarr, pp. 195-215, at p. 196.
[39] Beer, p. 8.
[40] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 97
[41] Beer, p. xix.

future forms, to the process of Darwinian evolution can be anticipated. Likewise, as will be argued below, insofar as the self is in process in *Peter Pan*, the future becomes unknowable, and the end becomes hypothetical, with implications for the narrator within, and, indeed, for the author of the text.

As Beer points out, in Darwin's analysis of speciation God loses his 'explanatory function'.[42] Darwin argues that 'the more complex organs and instincts . . . have been perfected, not by means superior to, though analogous with, human reason, but by the accumulation of innumerable slight variations, each good for the individual possessor.'[43] Such a statement, as he subsequently acknowledges in the *Descent*, contradicts the idea that each individual is 'the work of a separate act of creation' by a divine creator.[44] Darwin had, in John Hedley Brooke's words 'delet[ed] the necessity for divine intervention in the natural order'.[45]

Tazudeen cites Donald Rackin's argument that Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books 'take place at a time when "natural moral progress, the sense of unitary, purposeful, God-given order and natural motion" are becoming outmoded ways of thinking about the world' to suggest that '[n]ovelistic form, narrative progression, and plot . . . are the first casualties of Carroll's world.'[46] As this suggests, the narrator is a victim of Darwin's erasure of the necessity for God. Barrie's engagement with the same ideas about God and progress result in the same casualties in his novel. Narrative authority, like God's, is replaced by Nature's authority, as represented by the mother.

In her case for the inclusion of theatrical productions in the study of children's literature, Gubar uses the example of *Peter Pan*, the play, and *Peter and Wendy*, the novel, to argue that '[n]ow is the perfect moment for children's literature scholars to focus more of their attention to drama.'[47] However, in a major point of departure from the otherwise comparable stage directions, the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* betrays an intense hostility towards Mrs Darling which suggests the threat she represents, as a mother, to the authority

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[42] Beer, p. xviii.
[43] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 338.
[44] Darwin, *Descent*, at p. 43.
[45] John Hedley Brooke, '"Laws Impressed on Matter by the Creator"? The *Origin* and the Question of Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to* The Origin of Species, ed. Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 256-274, at p. 269. In this essay, Brooke offers a detailed analysis of Darwin's contribution to, and position within, nineteenth-century debates about religion. See Brooke, 'Darwin and Victorian Christianity', in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin* ed. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (2003; 2nd edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 197-218, for a discussion of contemporary and current religious responses to Darwin's theory.
[46] Tazudeen, p. 534, quoting from Donald Rackin, 'Blessed Rage: The *Alice*s and the Modern Quest for Order', Alice's Adventures in Wonderland *and* Through the Looking Glass: *Nonsense, Sense, and Meaning* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 88-103, at p. 93.
[47] Marah Gubar, 'Introduction: Children and Theatre', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 36/2 (2012), v-xiv, at p. x.

of the narrative voice. This tension between Mrs Darling and the narrator is therefore thematically significant for the *Peter Pan* corpus as a whole, though it is not particularly prominent in the play.

According to Jack, Barrie 'use[d] the mother—Nature's vessel of creation—as a standard against which to gauge man's similar aspirations in Art', in *The Little White Bird* in particular, but also in the *Peter Pan* texts which followed.[48] The narrator's hostility towards Mrs Darling indicates that his aspirations as storyteller are seriously undermined because, as Nature's representative, the mother contests narrative, the narrator, and progress towards end as a mechanism for selfhood in *Peter Pan.* This contest reflects the tenacity of a developmental, teleological model of evolution, but also problematizes the dominance of that model in the late nineteenth century.

The narrator's aggression is ostensibly directed towards the mother's stupidity in loving and welcoming home her children unconditionally: 'the woman had no proper spirit . . . I despise her' (*PW,* p. 208). However, his imagined dialogue with Mrs Darling prior to this claim indicates that his hostility emerges, more precisely, because of the creative capacity implied in this attitude toward her children. The narrator suggests that he might 'spoil . . . the surprise to which Wendy and John and Michael are looking forward' (p. 207), by telling their mother they are about to return. His contempt for Mrs Darling who, we 'may be sure . . . would upbraid us for depriving the children of their little pleasure' (p. 208) is contempt for her as biological mother. The narrator attempts to present Mrs Darling's role as mother as inferior to his own role as storyteller.

Despite this, however, the narrator ultimately allows the children their surprise. He submits to Mrs Darling's wish, and openly attributes his aggression towards her to the inevitable triumph of the mother over the storyteller. While Mrs Darling is to be reunited with her children, 'we may as well stay and look on. That is all we are, lookers-on. Nobody really wants us. So let us watch and say jaggy things, in the hope that some of them will hurt' (*PW,* p. 208). As, in Jack's words, '*Nature's* vessel of creation', mothers can match and exceed the narrator's creative powers: the primary creative act in *Peter Pan* is not the narration but the creation of the self.[49]

The narrator's 'jaggy' (*PW,* p. 208) remarks about Mrs Darling therefore indicate, by his own admission, his inability to equal the mother's creative capacities. Narrators are mere 'lookers-on' (*PW,* p. 208) to stories which mothers can both initiate and be part of. In this representation of what Jack describes as 'man's inadequacy in the face of woman's

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[48] Jack, *Neverland,* p.141.

[49] See Lois Rauch Gibson, 'Beyond the Apron: Archetypes, Stereotypes, and Alternative Portrayals of Mothers in Children's Literature', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 13/4 (1988), 177-181, p. 177-179 on the stereotyping of mothers in *Peter Pan,* and for a comparison of mothers in a range of contemporaneous children's literature.

superior Nature as birthgiver', *Peter and Wendy* reflects the ramifications, for the narrator, of a primary contest in Darwin's theory—a contest between God and Nature.[50]

Of course, this contest is only superficially resolved in the transition from creationism to *progressive* evolutionism. As Bowler has observed, the developmental model of evolution only abandoned 'the vague notion of a divine plan in favour of some more naturalistic explanation of how development is controlled', and 'thereby preserves exactly those features of the creationist view of nature that Darwin challenged'.[51] The consequence of the more fundamental contest initiated by *Darwinian* evolution is that instead of an end, the self and the species are in perpetual process. Neither an end, nor even any possible future forms, to that process can be anticipated.

Consequently, as Jack suggests, '[t]he problem of authorship is of especial importance in an age of Darwinian doubt.'[52] This problem is foregrounded in *Peter Pan.* The text which might be identified as Peter's origin, *The Little White Bird* (1902), was published two years prior to the first performance of the play which made him famous.[53] Barrie re-published the six *Little White Bird* chapters featuring Peter as a separate novel, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, in 1906, and subsequently revised and expanded this into a full-length novel, *Peter and Wendy*, in 1911. There is therefore no one authoritative '*Peter Pan*'. The fact that, as suggested above, a study of the play-script alone would be blind to the narrator's attitude toward the mother in the novel—and, conversely, that an analysis of this feature of the novel belies the potential significance of its omission from the play—indicates the extent of the difficulty this presents for efforts to understand *Peter Pan.*

Further complicating the question thus raised—of which version of *Peter Pan* is the authoritative one—Barrie had at least ostensible difficulty settling on a final version of the play: '[c]hanges went on through a series of drafts, revisions were made in rehearsal, and major alterations continued for several seasons' after the first performance.[54] A version of the play-script was published in 1928, but, while this is now the standard reference for scholarship on the play, it is, as Kirsten Stirling observes, 'clearly intended to be read rather than performed', and several critics have outlined significant differences between it and earlier manuscript and production texts.[55] Since, as Stirling suggests, 'the play in

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[50] Jack, 'Creation Myth', p. 167.
[51] Bowler, p. 96 and p. 51.
[52] Jack, 'Creation Myth', p. 160.
[53] Even this first appearance is debated. Jack identifies Peter Pan in Barrie's *Sentimental Tommy* (1895), in which its protagonist imagines, as the subject for his next work, a boy who never grows up (Jack, *Neverland*, p. 164).
[54] Leonee Ormond, *J. M. Barrie* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 103.
[55] Kirsten Stirling, *Peter Pan's Shadows in the Literary Imagination* (New York: Routledge: 2012), p. 12. See in particular Roger Lancelyn Green, *Fifty Years of Peter Pan* (London: Peter Davies, 1954), for a detailed analysis of the differences between each of the many versions of *Peter Pan* Barrie wrote for stage and screen, and Jack, 'The Manuscript of *Peter Pan*', *Children's Literature,* 18 (1990), 101-

performance is, by its very nature, intangible', many of the possible variations to *Peter Pan* Barrie made during the twenty-four years before his published version are untraceable.[56]

Additionally, the programme for the first performance of *Peter Pan* listed the youngest cast-member as the author, and it was she—Ela C. May—who appeared as the author for the final curtain. This, along with Barrie's claim that he has 'no recollection of writing the play of *Peter Pan*', and the absence of any manuscript from the British Library, all help 'perpetuate the idea that the play simply has no written origin'.[57] By effacing its written origin, Barrie suggests instead that *Peter Pan* had an organic origin. The author, like God, is subsumed to Nature, and the products of Nature, *Peter Pan* ostensibly included, are not stable, fixed acts of creation but individual, and provisional, parts of an ongoing process.

The closing remark that the story of *Peter and Wendy* 'will go on' (*PW*, p. 226) is therefore verified: the story *did* go on, both in Barrie's hands and in the hands of the countless others who—authorized by Barrie's forgetfulness of his own authorship—have since re-told Peter's story, and attempted to provide prequels and sequels—beginnings and endings—to it.[58] Just as, in Darwin's concept of evolution, 'endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, *and are being*, evolved', so the story of *Peter Pan* continues to be told but never quite ends.[59] Barrie's efforts to grant the authorship of *Peter Pan* to anyone but himself replicate, for his authorship, the dispersal of God's authority into Nature enacted by Darwinian evolution.

The character of Peter Pan—and his difficulties with beginnings and endings—therefore epitomises the momentary and fragmentary existence which is the textual history of *Peter Pan.* This textual history disrupts any security in knowledge about the origin or end of any character within the story, and is thus both consistent with, and a constituent part of, *Peter Pan*'*s* disruption of story as a means to selfhood. *Peter Pan* performs Darwinian evolution, and its eponymous character embodies the Darwinian self: in each, story is an

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113, for a comparison of the manuscript (dated 1903-4 and held at the Lilly Library, University of Indiana) with the production text (dated 1904-5 and held at the Beinecke Library, Yale University).

[56] Stirling, p. 11.

[57] Barrie, *The Plays of J. M. Barrie* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), qtd. in Jack, 'Manuscript', p. 101; Jack, 'Manuscript', p. 102. Jack notes that Roger Lancelyn Green does claim to have consulted the Lord Chamberlain's manuscript, which, like all other plays censored by the Lord Chamberlain, would have 'found [its] way' to the British Library (Jack, 'Manuscript', p. 102). According to Jack, if this manuscript was held in the British Library for Green's research, it is not to be found there today.

[58] See Rose, pp. 155-171, and especially pp. 155-159, for a useful overview of the creative output generated by and about the figure of Peter Pan until the 1980s. That output continues today, and includes what has been marketed as the 'only official sequel', Geraldine McCaughrean's *Peter Pan in Scarlet* (2006). Its claim to 'official' status is based on its authorization by Great Ormond Street Hospital, to which Barrie bequeathed the rights of the play in 1929. See 'Peter Pan', *Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity*, <http://www.gosh.org>, last accessed 2 September 2016.

[59] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 360.

arbitrary construct, imposed on a Nature which lacks any such structure, origin, direction, or prospective meaning.

Eyal Amiran has described Barrie's work as 'a theatre for the performance of psychological linguistic anxiety'.[60] That anxiety is expressed in the very title of *Peter Pan*, in which the name—the linguistic sign of the self—refers to an absence.[61] The tension between the name of *Peter Pan* and its reference to a lack of story, and therefore of self, represents a tension between language and referent, between story and self, which disallows any knowledge about the latter to be secured by means of the former. More generally, then, *Peter Pan* problematizes the use of the child as the origin from which a story of the progressive development of the self or the species can be told.

7.3: The Non-Darwinian Difference Between Peter Pan and Others

As Beer suggests, the lacks exposed by Darwinian evolution—lacks of 'teleology and forward plan', and thus of God and human significance—'were not presented as lacks' in the *Origin*.[62] By contrast, the absence of story which defines Peter Pan's existence is presented as a definite lack, and is most poignantly presented as such in the painful absence of his mother. It is this lack of story which marks the difference between Peter Pan and others. Although story is problematized through the dubious beginning and ending which Wendy and Mr Darling respectively represent, only Peter Pan is defined by its absence. As will be argued, it is through stories, as told by the mother, that the process of growing up can be initiated, a remembered origin and prospective ending created, and progress toward selfhood thus imagined.

That Peter's lack of story is connected with his lack of a mother is clear in the narrator's insistence, in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens,* that '[t]here was something that he wanted very much, but, though he knew he wanted it, he could not think what it was' (*KG,* p. 14). The narrator's rather prosaic explanation that '[w]hat he wanted so much was his mother to blow his nose' (*KG,* p. 14) belies the significance of the fact that 'that never struck him'; that Peter himself does not know what he wants. Those dreams about 'the riddle of his existence' (*PW,* p. 181) torment Peter because they tell him what he cannot admit he wants: according to the narrator, Peter's longing to find that boy who is 'never here, nor anywhere' (*PP.* p. 135)—his longing to find the story of his self—is equivalent with his equally unacknowledged longing to find his mother.

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[60] Eyal Amiran, 'The Shadow of the Object in *Peter Pan*', *English Studies in Canada,* 38/3-4 (2012), 161-188, at p. 163.
[61] This absence which *Peter Pan* represents is also captured in the title, *Anon.*, of the manuscript version at the Lilly Library.
[62] Beer, p. xviii.

Consequently, when Peter is offered 'the wish of his heart' by the fairies in Kensington Gardens, 'for a long time he hesitated, not being certain what it was himself' (*KG*, p. 36). Unable to identify himself, Peter asks for 'two little wishes instead of a big one'; to 'go to his mother' and for the 'right to return to the Gardens if he found her disappointing' (*KG*, p. 36). Peter's two little but incompatible wishes indicate the impossibility of having both a mother and eternal youth. The mother is thereby represented as a mechanism for the process of growing up which Peter is at this point unwilling to initiate. Furthermore, Peter's two little wishes point to the uncertainty of self which prevent him choosing one or the other. Peter's uncertainty of self is both a consequence of the choice he, and only he, is offered, and the reason that he is unable to decide on either alternative.

Peter is granted his two little wishes, and returns to his mother to see how he likes her. However, the present tense when the narrator asks 'why does Peter sit so long . . . why does he not tell his mother he has come back?' (*KG*, p. 38) indicates that Peter's two little wishes only temporarily sustain both the possibility of eternal youth and of a story of selfhood. Although, as anyone familiar with Peter Pan's story knows, 'in the end . . . he flew away' (*KG*, p. 39) back to the Gardens, this is not a decision to return permanently to the condition of eternal youth. It is, rather, intended to be a further deferral: after sitting 'so long . . . in two minds' when he first returns to his mother, Peter finally decides 'to be his mother's boy, but hesitated about beginning tonight' (p. 39).

Leonee Ormond asks whether 'we [are] meant to admire Peter's stand against [adulthood], or to feel sadness for the excluded child'.[63] For Ormond, this is an 'unresolved tension', which is 'the key to the play's perennial fascination'.[64] However, the suggestion that Peter decides both to return to his mother, and to defer that return, suggests that simple admiration for Peter is not entirely supported by the text. Although he spends '[m]any nights, and even months' (*KG*, p. 39) saying goodbye to the Gardens, the narrator insists that 'he was quite decided to go back' (*KG*, p. 40). When he finally does return, 'the window was closed, and there were iron bars on it' (*KG*, p. 40).

Peter Pan is therefore not, as Ormond suggests, a 'hero' for *refusing* to grow up, despite his 'crowing' refusal of what Ormond describes as the 'dreary' adulthood represented in the text.[65] Unable to identify the one 'wish of his heart', '[p]oor little Peter Pan' (*KG*, p. 15) is in fact unable to initiate a story of selfhood. Forgotten by his mother, and

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[63] Ormond, p. 107.
[64] Ormond, p. 107. See also Paul Fox, ''The Time of His Life: Peter Pan and the Decadent Nineties', in White and Tarr, pp. 23-45, and especially the comparison between Peter and Hook at p. 42, for an affirmative reading of eternal youth. Karen Coats likewise suggests that the reader is free to choose whether to admire or pity Peter Pan (Coats, 'Child-Hating: *Peter Pan* in the Context of Victorian Hatred', in White and Tarr, pp. 3-22, at p. 17).
[65] Ormond, p. 107.

forgetful of himself, Peter is *unable* to grow up. Peter is 'Betwixt-and-Between' (*KG*, p. 17) because he has been barred from the possibility of selfhood while still in two minds about whether he wishes for it.[66] Despite what many critics suggest, there is therefore less room for two minds about Peter's condition than Peter himself displays: eternal youth is unquestionably a tragic state in *Peter Pan*.

Moreover, as his repeated returns to the windows of nurseries indicates, Peter continues to desire even as he refutes the possibility, offered by the mother, of a story of his self. Peter comes to the Darling family home '[t]o listen to stories' (*PW*, p. 96). He comes to the nursery because he is still unable to know whether the 'one wish of his heart' is eternal youth or a mother. Like the sadness of Peter's story in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, his response when Wendy tells him that 'I know lots of stories' once again suggests that that one wish, whether he knows it or not, is for a story: '[h]*ow he would like to rip those stories out of her; he is dangerous now*' (*PP*, p. 102).

Although this is one of the many stage directions in which, as Wilson suggests, Barrie 'includes important information . . . that actors would have difficulty conveying in performance', the 'greedy look in [Peter's] eyes' which the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* observes, and 'which ought to have alarmed [Wendy], but did not' quickly escalates into action that could be performed on stage:

> Peter gripped her and began to draw her towards the window.
> 'Let me go!' she ordered him . . . She was wriggling her body in distress. It was quite as if she were trying to remain on the nursery floor. (*PW*, p. 96-97) [67]

Wendy's entrance into Neverland is therefore implicitly compelled, and almost coerced, because of Peter's 'greedy', even aggressive, desire for her stories.

The synonymity of storytelling with motherhood is again apparent in the reason for Wendy's consent to come to Neverland: Peter invites her because he demands stories; she consents because she will be a mother. While subsidiary temptations—learning to fly, talking to stars, and seeing mermaids—are almost sufficient in the play, it is only when Peter becomes 'frightfully cunning . . . the sly one', and suggests that 'you could tuck us in at

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[66] There is an obvious connection between Peter's contradictory wishes at this point and those painful dreams he has about a boy who is never here. This connection is prescient of, and problematic for, Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the first English translation of which was published in 1913. In this work, Freud claims that 'the dreams of small children are simple wish-fulfilments' (Freud, 'The Dream is a Wish-Fulfilment', in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. Ritchie Robertson, trans. Joyce Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98-105, at p. 102). If Peter's pursuit, in dreams, of a boy he never catches *is* a wish-fulfilment, Peter's wish must be for eternal youth. However, these dreams are painful to Peter, because they foreclose the possibility of fulfilling his wish to return to his mother, and thus to attain selfhood. Peter's dreams might be understood as wish-fulfilment, but as such they are anything but simple.

[67] Wilson, p. 598.

night', laments that '[n]one of us has ever been tucked in at night', and even suggests that she 'could darn our clothes, and make pockets for us' (*PW,* p. 97) that Wendy is convinced. Wendy's first speech once the lost boys have built her house in both play and novel indicates that her two roles—storyteller and mother—are more or less inseparable:

> Come inside at once, you naughty children, I am sure your feet are damp. And before I put you to bed I have just time to finish the story of Cinderella. (*PP,* p. 116)

This is also the final speech of the first act set in Neverland, a position which emphasises the centrality of the text's conflation of mother and storyteller.

Peter's desire for Wendy's stories therefore demonstrates that what he 'really wants' is his mother. Wendy's interactions with Neverland indicate that this desire for a mother's stories is ultimately a desire to grow up. Wendy is differentiated from those in Neverland not only because she knows lots of stories, but because she therefore represents the motherhood through which the wish Peter cannot recognise—the wish to grow up—can be granted.

The connection between mother-storytellers and growing up is particularly suggested in the two stories Wendy tells while she is in Neverland, both of which implicitly end in an adulthood—stable, meaningful, and final—of the type described by Hudson. The first story, 'Cinderella', is archetypal. The second and last story has the same trajectory; adulthood as a stable end-point is signified by marriage. This story is propagated by Peter's anxiety to establish that their marriage is 'only make-believe' (*PW,* p. 161). Peter here asserts a difference between pretence and actuality, between child and adult, which insists on an absolute separation between the two. It is this separation between adult and child which reveals to Wendy that, in Neverland, to pretend to be married is neither actually to be, nor a means to become, married. By extension, in Neverland, unlike in Bloomsbury, to pretend to be adult is neither to be, nor to become, adult.

Once she realises that, in Neverland, she is always a child and therefore never an adult, Wendy promptly tells a story of her return to Bloomsbury. In this story, Wendy features as an 'elegant lady of a certain age' (*PW,* p. 166). Her story both describes and brings about her return to a process of growing up, and therefore both to memory and to the prospect of what Wendy perceives to be the happy end of marriage. Wendy's stories both represent and initiate a story which implicitly (though, as her parents have already made clear, never quite actually) ends in selfhood through the growth of their protagonists to the stable end which, for Wendy herself, adulthood represents.

However, while the audience knows the end of her first story, 'Cinderella', that end is never actually told within the play. Wendy's last story is also an unfinished version of a story of selfhood she expects will be attained in marriage. That she '*looks a little older*' in

the final scene, and that Peter has '*expressed displeasure at her growth*' (*PP,* p. 153), indicate that, despite her childhood perception of marriage as an end, her story is ongoing at the end of the play.

Similarly, despite its title, 'When Wendy Grew Up', the purpose of the final chapter of *Peter and Wendy* is not to end Wendy's story of her own self-in-adulthood, but to demonstrate that, as mother, she initiates another story, that of her daughter Jane:

> As you look at Wendy you may see her hair becoming white, and her figure little again . . . Jane is now a common grown-up, with a daughter called Margaret; and every spring-cleaning time, except when he forgets, Peter comes for Margaret and takes her to the Neverland . . . When Margaret grows up she will have a daughter, who is to be Peter's mother in turn; and thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless. (*PW,* p. 226)

As argued above, this passage invites the continuation of the story of *Peter and Wendy* which it ostensibly closes. The story of Wendy's progress to adulthood, which it likewise ostensibly closes, similarly does not end. It is, instead, subsumed in the perpetuation of story through the birth-giving powers of the mother, represented by Wendy herself and by the future mothers who are her descendants, and enacted, as argued above, by the textual history of *Peter Pan*.

Wendy herself states that '[a]lmost everything is a descendant' (*PP,* p. 131). Just as Darwin represented man as a modification, in-process, of ape, so, in a telling echo of the *Descent*, Wendy represents herself, and her stories, as a temporary modification of earlier selves and stories, to be subjected to further modification, and supplanted by further descendants. Gilead suggests that '[t]he official discursive thrust of children's literature in particular is toward linear plotting leading to a conventionally closed ending [in which] the traditional role of adults and of adult institutions *vis-à-vis* the child is virtually defined as the regulation of the transitional state of childhood.'[68] This view, typified by Hudson, is undermined in and by *Peter Pan*, in which adulthood is not the end to the 'transitional state', or story, of a childhood on which it imposes meaning.[69] Rather, if as John Darling states, '[d]escendants are only children' (*PW,* p. 165), adults, like 'almost everything' else, are in the same process of evolution towards an end which is never quite reached. The endless revision of Wendy's story disrupts the assumption of linearity towards a closed ending. If story is the mechanism for selfhood, selfhood can never quite be attained, because the story never reaches its end.

Wendy thus shares Peter's lack of either origin or end, but it is only poor little Peter Pan whose condition is so tragic. The 'real difference' (*PW,* p. 150) between Peter Pan and

[68] Gilead, p. 288.
[69] Gilead, p. 288.

others is, then, not that others progress where Peter does not, but that others have the capacity to *imagine* progress, through stories which Peter lacks the capacity—the memory or the mother—to tell.

In her tenacious attachment to stories which her own birth-giving powers falsify, Wendy evokes the contradictory conception of Nature which emerges from the *Origin*. Although Darwin does not identify any present end to evolution, Robert J. Richards has demonstrated that 'Darwin's language and metaphorical mode of thought' nevertheless produced a version of Nature as 'a wise selector that has the good of creatures at heart'.[70] Thus, Darwin suggests that 'Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends.'[71] This personification of Nature, and the attribution of selfless benevolence to 'her', allows Darwin to retain for humanity its special status within the process of evolution: Nature, implicitly, selects for 'the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals'.[72] Through a personified Nature, with implicit, benevolent agency, Darwin offers an implicit promise that, as Richards states, humans are 'the goal of evolution by natural selection'.[73]

Darwin thus retains a god—in the form of Nature—even in a thesis which has eradicated the need for, or at least what Beer calls the 'explanatory function' of, any such entity.[74] Comparably, there are, in Jack's words, 'limits to Barrie's artistic modesty' regarding the authorship of *Peter Pan.*[75] Jack cites a review in the *Times* after the first performance, which states that 'Mr Barrie's name is not concealed. He has the large letters and stands at the top', to demonstrate that Barrie's self-effacement was somewhat disingenuous.[76]

This presence of the ostensibly absent author is, like the threatened and aggressive narrator who is his representative in the novel, significant as a final variation on Barrie's engagement with the idea of selfhood after Darwin. The narrator and author are prominent presences, but are under constant threat of effacement, in *Peter Pan.* This indicates that stories—and, particularly, their origins and endings—are central to selfhood in this text, even if, as Wendy's stories and their failure in the face of her birth-giving powers as mother indicate, such frameworks are provisional, artificial, and ultimately ineffectual.[77]

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[70] Robert J. Richards, 'Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection and its Moral Purpose', in Ruse and Richards, pp. 47-66, at p. 65.
[71] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 65.
[72] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 360.
[73] Richards, p. 66.
[74] Beer, p. xviii.
[75] Jack, 'Manuscript', p. 101.
[76] Anon., *The Times*, 28 December 1904, p. 4, qtd. in Jack, 'Manuscript', p. 101-102.
[77] See also Beer's analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), p. 103.

Like Nature in the *Origin*, the mother in *Peter Pan* offers stories—the promise of an end—even while she operates to undermine that end. Peter Pan emblematises the self-in-process for which Wendy's stories attempt but never quite manage to find an end. He is also, paradoxically, representative of the conditions on which any selfhood in story must depend. Specifically, Peter is, eternally, the origin on which the end to that story must be based. As Karen Coats suggests, '[i]n his authorial asides as well as in his plot structures, Barrie sets up a deliberately antagonistic relationship between childhood and adulthood.'[78] This antagonism, represented most vividly in the contest between Peter and Hook, is the dramatic centre to the text, even though it contradicts the equivalence between adults and children implied in Bloomsbury.

By insisting on a separation between adult and child which is also dismantled within the same text, the hostility between Peter and Hook breaks the continuity of self in memory with present self, or the continuity, performed by Wendy and Mr Darling, of child with adult. Only through such a separation can the childish Mr Darling be transformed into '*that not wholly unheroic figure*' (*PP,* 146), Captain Hook. Burnett and Nesbit both traverse a 'delicate, impalpable dividing line' from inarticulate childhood to coherent selfhood.[79] *Peter Pan* demonstrates that, in a Darwinian world-view, no such 'line of demarcation' exists.[80] However, Barrie's text also offers a fantastical opposition between the child who never grows up and the consummate adult, Hook. It is through this imaginary but necessary line of demarcation that the child can become the story which ends in the adult-as-self.[81]

Peter Pan is therefore representative of the imaginative function which the fixity of concepts such as 'the child' performs in the late nineteenth century. This function of the child as a fixed origin which enables a story of the self to be told is perhaps clearest in Peter Pan's sinister readiness to compel other children to join him in Neverland. Peter spends his nights 'looking for lost ones' (*KG,* p. 64) to help, but he 'has been too late several times', and instead 'digs a grave for the child and erects a little tombstone'; '[b]ut how strange for parents, when they hurry into the Garden at the opening of the gates looking for their lost one, to find the sweetest little tombstone instead. I do hope that Peter is not too ready with his spade' (*KG,* p. 65). Despite the narrator's claim to the contrary, Peter ensures that *not* '[a]ll children, except one, grow up' (*PW,* p. 69). His appetite for these dead children is comparable with his appetite for Wendy's stories, not only in intensity, but because the dead child offers an origin from which his own story might be told.

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[78] Coats, p. 4.
[79] Burnett, *The One I Knew*, p. 325.
[80] Darwin, *Origin*, p. 345.
[81] The title *Peter and Wendy* is suggestive of the centrality of the tension between the two opposing models—process and progress, Darwinian and non-Darwinian—offered in the texts.

Although the mother, as Nature, undermines narrative in Barrie's work, she is also a narrator herself. In apparent contradiction to its representation of adulthood and childhood as arbitrarily differentiated stages in what is actually an ongoing process, *Peter Pan* also represents narratives—and therefore imagined origins and prospective endings—as essential to selfhood. It thus serves the function of myth in Beer's analysis, by 'making endurable the contemplation of [two] irreconcilable contraries' in nineteenth-century discourse: Darwinian evolution, and non-Darwinian progress.[82] In *Peter Pan,* it is through story that the process of selfhood can be imagined to reach a stable end. This story of progressive development is functional, even if it is fictional.

Bernard Lightman argues that '[o]rthodox Darwinism was difficult to market to a juvenile audience.'[83] The tenacity of the developmental model of evolution throughout the late nineteenth century indicates that orthodox Darwinism was just as difficult to market to an adult audience (which is often, in any case, the first audience of works for children). *Peter Pan* does not market Darwinism to a juvenile audience, but it does explore the implications of Darwin's theory for the individual—adult or child. The text undermines the idea of the child and adult as the origin and end of progressive development, and thus undermines the basis on which the theory of recapitulation supported the idea of progressive evolution as opposed to Darwinian process. However, just as Darwin offered a consolatory version of Nature which implied the promise of progress, so mothers are, for Barrie, both the agents of an endless process and the source of stories which provide the necessary false promise of selfhood.

If Bloomsbury is the real world, mothers are inextricable from it: if selfhood is endless process, the promise of an end is nevertheless essential to that process. As the tension between Peter Pan and Hook, and the separation it dramatizes between adult and child, indicates, Neverland is necessary to enable the story of the self to be told. The permanent separation of adult from child, enabled in a place where children never grow up, is a fantasy necessary so that the otherwise impossible story of the self can be told. Peter Pan, eternally without memory or story, and eternally young, epitomises the Darwinian self, and offers the fantasy of childhood as the origin on which the imaginary resolution to its endless evolution is based.

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[82] Beer, p. 106.
[83] Bernard Lightman, 'Evolution for Young Victorians', *Science and Education,* 21 (2012), 1015-1034, at p. 1018.

Chapter Eight: Precocious Authors

No study of precocious children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would be complete without reference to two significant contributions to this subject by precocious children themselves. The popular novella, *The Young Visiters* (1919), by Daisy Ashford, and the edition of the diaries of Marjory Fleming composed by Lachlan Macbean, both complicate the insights into precocity offered by adult writing on the subject. The reception of both texts indicates that they were seen to offer profound insights into the child mind. However, neither the precocious child-author, nor the adult she reflects, is consistent with precocity and adulthood as they are represented in contemporary psychological and literary studies of that mind.

The Young Visiters was written in 1890, when Ashford was nine years old, rediscovered when she was nearly forty, and published to great success, and some controversy, in 1919. For many critics, the book is good enough to deserve its popularity. A contemporary reviewer considered *The Young Visiters* 'one of the funniest books of the day'.[1] Clinton Fadiman goes further, and considers it 'one of the dozen funniest books in English', while Irvin S. Cobb, author of the preface to Ashford's *Her Book* (1920), suggests that *The Young Visiters* is 'almost the funniest book that was ever written'.[2] However, Ashford herself attributed its success to 'the great kindness of Sir James Barrie in writing such a wonderful preface'.[3] Others identify its value as a novelty as the reason for its success. One reviewer suggests that *The Young Visiters*:

> has served its purpose—it has wiled away many a dull half hour . . . has provided a subject for controversial argument—the psychology of a child of nine—in the columns of all the newspapers during the silly season—and last, but not least, it must have richly lined the pockets of both author and publisher.[4]

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[1] Anon., 'The Young Visiters, or Mr Salteena's Plan', *The Bookman*, 56/334 (Jul 1919), 147.
[2] Clinton Fadiman, 'The Case for Children's Literature', *Children's Literature,* 5 (1976), 9-21, p. 17; Irvin S. Cobb, 'Preface', in *Her Book,* by Daisy Ashford (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), v-xix at p. viii.
[3] Daisy Ashford, 'Preface', in *Love and Marriage,* by Daisy Ashford and Angela Ashford (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1966), p, 6.
[4] M. Romer, '"The Young Visiters", To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art,* 128/3334 (Sept. 20 1919), 268. Romer's cynicism reflects the fact that when *The Young Visiters* was first published, there was some debate as to whether it had been written by a child at all. Katherine Mansfield has 'no difficulty in believing this amazing child' (Katherine Mansfield, 'A Child and her Note-book', *The Athenaeum,* 4648 (May 30 1919), 400), but another reviewer assumes that Barrie is the author, on the basis that 'we have never known a child horrid enough to write "The Young Visiters"' ('Sir James Barrie and "The Young Visiters"', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art,* 128/3329 (Aug. 16 1919), 150). Despite such scepticism, the manuscript of *The Young Visiters,* which is held at the New York Library, testifies to Ashford's childhood authorship. The manuscripts of Fleming's diaries are held at the National Library of Scotland.

Sully claims that '[o]ne of the most interesting, perhaps also one of the most instructive, phases of child-life is the beginnings of art-activity.'[5] Although Ashford's reviewer is, seemingly, weary of the subject, the 'psychology of a child of nine' was a major interest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, as an instance of 'art-activity', Ashford's novel was seen to offer insight into that psychology.[6] This potential insight is, undoubtedly, another reason for its success.

The repeated re-issue, in the latter half of the century, of the diaries of Marjory Fleming is comparably indicative of this interest, as are the commentaries, omissions, and revisions which each editor made to his own edition.[7] Fleming's three journals were written between 1810 and 1811, and were, like *The Young Visiters,* rediscovered decades later. Portions of the diaries were first published, and, as Kathryn Sutherland notes, 'sentimentally embellished', by H. B. Farnie in 1858.[8] The diaries were popularised in a 'mawkish' review by John Brown, and, as Alexandra Johnson observes, ultimately 'given the seal of approval' by 'the *patri familias* of the Victorian literary establishment', including, among others, Leslie Stephen, Mark Twain, and Robert Louis Stevenson.[9]

The praise of these illustrious Victorians did for Fleming's diaries what Barrie's preface did for *The Young Visiters.* The reason for such eminent and widespread attention was also comparable. In *The Story of Pet Marjorie* (1905), which features his own commentary on extracts from Fleming's diaries, along with Brown's review, Lachlan MacBean claims that Fleming 'chanced to embody much of her mind and heart in the little diaries which are here published'.[10] Macbean's comment, like the claim by Ashford's more cynical reviewer, indicates that in their very existence, and in contemporary responses to them, the artistic works produced by children have long been recognised as a necessary part of the picture of precocity and the child mind in this period.

However, when Johnson asks what could be more attractive to the Victorians 'than a precocious diary kept by a child who died young', she points to the peculiarly morbid

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[5] Sully, *Studies,* p. 298.
[6] Romer, p. 268; Sully, *Studies,* p. 298.
[7] See Judith Plotz, 'The Pet of Letters: Marjorie Fleming's Juvenilia', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 17/4 (1992), 4-9, especially p. 4, and Alexandra Johnson, 'The Drama of Imagination: Marjorie Fleming and her Diaries', in *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature,* ed. Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Solokoff (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 80-109, especially p. 104, on the comments and impact of Fleming's early editors and biographers.
[8] Kathryn Sutherland, 'Fleming, Marjory (1803-1811)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com>, last accessed 4 September 2016.
[9] Johnson, p. 83. Johnson notes that Farnie's 'most obvious and egregious tampering . . . is his literal changing of her name from Marjory to Marjorie'; he is also responsible for the 'sugary epithet', 'Pet' (Johnson, p. 102).
[10] Lachlan Macbean, *The Story of Pet Marjorie* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1904), p. 2. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses.

quality of this fascination with juvenile art. In such diaries, as in so much fiction from the Victorian period, the child and everything she represents can be 'forever preserved in literary amber'.[11] Fleming died just before she turned nine. If the psychology of a child of nine can be read from her diaries, her premature death facilitated many readings of these diaries in which that mind was perfectly, and permanently, innocent. Ashford lived until the age of ninety but, as I will illustrate, for many readers the child-author of *The Young Visiters* is nevertheless preserved, imaginatively, in the same literary amber. Like Miles, Dolcino, and so many others, she too can therefore represent eternal innocence through eternal youth.

If their life stories are a point of contrast between Ashford and Fleming, the critical focus on these stories is a point of unity. As Cathryn Halverson observes, children's writing 'strikes most readers as such an exotic and intractable genre that their instinct is to subdue it by a distinct and narrow approach: they accord the author's child status almost obsessive attention, to the extent that her actual text is ignored or at least made subordinate'.[12] Their 'child status' is, of course, pertinent to my analysis of Ashford's and Fleming's roles in the nineteenth-century understanding of precocity. However, the content of their work is as pertinent to this analysis. The stylistic and thematic characteristics of *The Young Visiters* have been particularly neglected by much contemporary and current criticism. While Fleming's diaries have received more literary critical attention, however, an analysis of their contribution to ideas about precocity in the Victorian period requires attention to the diaries not in isolation but in dialogue with the commentary with which they appeared at the time.

This chapter will evaluate the extent to which the content of Ashford's novella and of Fleming's diaries is in tension with the idea of the innocent child mind which their Victorian readers attempt to create through their censorship of, and commentary on, those works. Through an analysis of the adults in *The Young Visiters* and in Macbean's edition of Fleming's diaries, and particularly of the issue of control as it relates to these adults, I will suggest that, in the mind of the precocious child, the adult and the child are not clearly differentiated. Instead, the question of control is used to suggest a more powerful difference between author and subject.

That Barrie so evidently enjoyed and wished to promote *The Young Visiters* is therefore not only consonant with late nineteenth-century fascination with precocity. Barrie's interest in the novella testifies to his recognition that it corresponds with the versions of childhood and adulthood represented in his *Peter Pan* texts. Lurie calls Peter Pan

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[11] Johnson, p. 105.

[12] Cathryn Halverson, 'Reading Little Girls' Texts in the 1920s: Searching for the "Spirit of Childhood"', *Children's Literature in Education,* 30/4 (1999), 235-248, p. 241. As Halverson herself admits, she 'replicate[s] this tendency' in her article, as I do in the first part of this chapter (Halverson, p. 241).

'the *last* and most famous of [the] unaging innocents' of contemporaneous literature.[13] I suggest that *The Young Visiters*, along with Fleming's diaries, contributes to the demise of this trope because in both, as in *Peter Pan*, and despite the best efforts of Peter Pan himself, adult and child cannot be clearly distinguished.

The adult and the child, and the knowledge and innocence they each represent, therefore cannot be mutually defining in the 'art-activity' of these precocious children.[14] The actual knowledge articulated by their precocious authorship undermines the notional innocence of their childhood, and undermines the counterpart to that innocence in the fully knowledgeable adult. Thus, the precocious child behind these texts articulates exactly what contemporary analyses of children's language fear she would. The adult she is supposed to know is replaced by the adult as he actually is to her. The words of these precocious Victorian children contradict adult versions of childhood, and therefore undermine the adult self constituted by such images of the child.

8.1: The Problem of Growing Up

Childhood and its vision of the world were of profound significance in the nineteenth century. The Victorian interest in juvenilia reflects, in part, a fascination with the child as something entirely other to, and far more precious than, the adult. Sully devotes two chapters of *Studies of Childhood* to a study of children's drawings, and thought it important enough to retain in his revised and truncated version of the text, *Children's Ways* (1897). However, in 'A Learned Infant', he identifies the extremity to which this fixation on 'precocious devotion to' art could, in fiction at least, be taken.[15] While Sully is clearly insincere in his proposal that 'the most perfectly loyal tribute to the childish king is probably to be found in the story of those gifted ones who, having been too much beloved of the gods, died in youth', such a view recurs not only in fiction by his contemporaries, but in criticism of juvenilia in the twentieth century as well.[16]

Because she 'died in youth', Fleming was inevitably subject to such tributes. Macbean, for example, makes the deceptively sentimental suggestion that '[i]t was perhaps well that [Fleming's] was the fate of those whom the gods love. Those deep, passionate eyes, that proud, sensitive mouth, that impulsive temperament, contained all the possibilities of disaster. The world yields no adequate satisfaction for an ardent nature like Marjorie Fleming's' (p. 10-11). Johnson comes uncomfortably close to the same claim in the twentieth century when she observes that '[i]n her diaries, we watch Marjory Fleming

[13] Lurie, p. 118, emphasis added.
[14] Sully, *Studies*, p. 298.
[15] Sully, *Studies*, p. 298.
[16] Sully, 'Learned Infant', p. 48-49.

literally learning the language of duty', and asks whether, 'in time, Fleming's restive intelligence would have dulled.'[17] '*Luckily*', according to Johnson, 'only Fleming the child answers back from her own pages.'[18] Macbean suggests that it was lucky for Fleming that she died young. Johnson verges on suggesting that this was lucky for her readers.

The assumptions and priorities which underlie such claims are perhaps most clearly articulated by David Sadler, whose article on the work and life of Barbara Follett offers what Sully, Macbean, and Johnson imply is the best 'tribute' to precocity.[19] Follett was an American, and another precocious and successful child-author. She wrote her first novel, *The House Without Windows* (1927), at the age of thirteen, and published several subsequent works during her teens, but stopped writing as an adult. She disappeared in 1939, and was 'never seen or heard from again'.[20] In his analysis of her work, Sadler focuses less on Follett's writing than on this 'poignant' end to her life-story.[21] Although '[i]t is impossible to say . . . whether her career as an author in her childhood was the direct cause of her unhappiness and disappearance in her mid-twenties' Sadler goes on to offer the dubious suggestion that by 'capturing her childish fantasy in *The House Without Windows*', Follett 'may have fixed more firmly in her mind what would otherwise have been an ephemeral notion—that the innocent purity of childhood can be preserved by escaping from society'.[22]

By implying that Follett disappeared because of the (threatened or realized) corruption of her innocence by 'society', Sadler attributes to her the same principle as that which motivates, for example, the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, or Beatrice in 'The Author of Beltraffio'. Follett's innocence—like Miles's and Dolcino's—is assured only in death, with which her disappearance is, in Sadler's account, equivalent. In fact, Sadler attributes this attitude to all of Follett's readers. In the claim that 'the prized innocence of the child authors was diminished, if not destroyed, by being purveyed to the adult world', he suggests that Follett's precocious output is valuable *only* for its innocence.[23] The precocious author's death is necessary as the only alternative to this loss of the prize. Consequently, for many critics, it is lucky that Follett, and Fleming, died in childhood.

Macbean's conclusion to Fleming's diaries is particularly clear about the prize they represent. He reports that, on looking at Fleming's body after her death, Fleming's mother observes that '[n]ever did I behold so beautiful an object' (p. 195). For Fleming's mother as

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[17] Johnson, p. 105.
[18] Johnson, p. 105, emphasis added.
[19] Sully, 'Learned Infant', p. 48.
[20] 'Biographical Note: Barbara Newhall Follett papers, 1919-1966', *Columbia University Libraries Archival Collections* (Columbia University Libraries) <://www.columbia.edu>, last accessed 4 September 2016.
[21] David Sadler, 'Innocent Hearts: The Child Authors of the 1920s', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 17/4 (1992), 24-30, p. 28.
[22] Sadler, p. 28.
[23] Sadler, p. 29.

for Dolcino's, the child is, seemingly, 'more exquisitely beautiful in death than . . . in life'.[24] More accurately, of course, it is the narrators—the vaguely sinister narrator in 'The Author of Beltraffio', and Macbean himself in Fleming's diaries—for whom these sentiments are significant. Thus, in his account of Fleming's death, Macbean focuses primarily on the enduring and beautifying presence of the dead child: '[t]he walks of Raith . . . wear a new glory since Marjorie revelled in their beauty . . . Charlotte Square still forms a green oasis' (p. 152). Macbean's primary objective in describing Fleming's mother's response to her death is to suggest that the child's presence in death beautifies what was ordinary in life.

Macbean's claim that '[a]s I gazed in solemn reverie, Marjorie's death seemed so real, so recent, so personal a sorrow that it was *impossible*, in that room, to realise that the grass had been green and the snow white over her tiny grave for fully eighty-seven years' (p. 152, emphasis added) is therefore an attempt to suggest that, like her more famous fictional counter-part, Peter Pan, Fleming exists in a Neverland of eternal childhood innocence. Consequently, Macbean closes his commentary on Fleming's diaries with the observation that, because those diaries survive, 'Pet Marjorie even yet is a vivid reality, and will remain a perpetual joy' (p. 153). Fleming is a perpetual joy in death, because only in death can she permanently preserve the innocence apparently indicated in her childhood diaries.

Ashford eventually attained what Johnson calls the 'threat of womanliness' avoided by Fleming.[25] She also lived through two world wars, and was predeceased by one of her four children. Ashford's life-story therefore falls short of a perfect tribute to the genius of childhood because the circumstances of her adult life do not easily sustain an eternally innocent child. However, although the precocious child-author of *The Young Visiters* is more difficult than the dead child-author of Fleming's diaries, she is nevertheless used to sustain contemporary ideas about childhood and the quality—innocence—which it is supposed to embody. Both the child and her innocence are, if only partially and imaginatively, preserved in the amber of her precocious text.

When the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) suggests that Daisy Ashford was an 'unworldly person' it makes the same oblique association which features in Sadler's article, between the child author and Neverland.[26] Ashford herself claims that 'I can

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[24] James, 'The Author of Beltraffio', p. 111.
[25] Johnson, p. 105.
[26] Hugo Brunner, 'Ashford, Margaret Mary Julia [Daisy] (1881–1972)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com>, last accessed 4 September 2016. Ashford's daughter uses the same word to describe her, but specifies that she was 'unworldly in the sense that money and possessions were unimportant to her…Nor did position worry her and she married entirely for love' (Margaret Steel, 'Introduction', in *The Hangman's Daughter and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), ix-xxii, at p. xxi). However, Penelope Schott Starkey notes that it was because of the financial independence she won through the success of *The Young Visiters* that Ashford *could* marry for love: '[w]ith this unexpected money of her own, she and James Devlin bought a small farm and were married the following spring'

never feel all the nice things that have been said about "The Young Visiters" are really due to me at all, but to a Daisy Ashford of so long ago that she seems almost another person.'[27] Her claim is consistent with that prevalent Victorian concept of childhood as separate from adulthood, even if she did not live out that concept to its fullest extreme by actually dying as a child. Ashford's remarks, and her description in the *ODNB*, covertly offer an eternal, unworldly, version of her childhood self, which is separate from the adult she became. This is consonant with Sadler's more overt ideas about childhood innocence. That unworldly other person embodies the same eternally preserved innocence apparently offered in the dead children of James's tales.

Child-authors like Follett, Fleming, and Ashford differ from fictional children like Dolcino and Miles in one significant respect however. Dolcino's innocence is protected through his murder by his own mother. Miles's innocence is, likewise, preserved through his death which is, again, brought about by the mother-figure of his governess. Even Peter Pan, although he struggles to make up his mind, is eventually 'quite decided' to grow up, but is locked out of this process by his mother.[28] Follett, Fleming, and Ashford, in contrast, are required to be both child and mother. Because they have 'fixed', in their texts, a notion of innocence which they are also supposed to represent, they are required both to be the innocent child and to be the mother who fixes that innocence permanently.[29] Follett's suicide may only be implicit and potential in Sadler's analysis, but it is also the only resolution to the problem he presents, of the precocious child's otherwise doomed innocence. Comparably, although Fleming's death was, actually, due to disease, it is, conceptually, necessary. Likewise, Ashford's claim that the author of *The Young Visiters* is 'almost another person' creates a child-author whose text is an articulation of innocence.[30] That innocence is 'preserved in literary amber' and with it, the idea, if not the body, of the eternally innocent child-author.[31]

Christine Alexander suggests that 'juvenilia reveal not just the maturation of the writer but her socialization.'[32] Of course, although the view of *The Young Visiters* which Ashford claims to hold in her preface demonstrates her 'socialization' into certain ideas

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(Starkey, '*The Young Visiters* Revisited in Light of Virginia Woolf', *Research Studies,* 42 (1974), 161-166, at p.166). Ashford's marriage may have been 'for love', but, since it could only come about because she had money, it seems unlikely that Ashford was entirely unaware of the 'worldly' obstacles to such marriages in general.

[27] Ashford, 'Author's Foreword', in *Her Book*, pp. xxi-xxiv, at p. xxiii-xxiv.

[28] Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens,* p. 40.

[29] Sadler, p. 28.

[30] Ashford, 'Author's Foreword', p. xxiv.

[31] Johnson, p. 105.

[32] Christine Alexander, 'Defining and Representing Literary Juvenilia', in *The Child Writer from Austen to Woolf,* ed. Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 70-97, at p. 75.

about childhood, the preface problematizes these ideas by its very existence. Ashford has, 'often been asked if I don't myself think it funny':

> I certainly did. That is one of the most curious things about it—to be able to laugh at what one wrote in such solemn seriousness—and *that* is why I can never feel all the nice things that have been said about [it] are really due to me.[33]

Such a remark, while it attempts to separate adult from child, and thus to preserve the supposed innocence of the child and her text, also points to the very fact which undermines this separation. Ashford could only know that *The Young Visiters* was written in solemn seriousness if she remembered writing it in that spirit. It is because she remembers writing it, and because she now reads it in a different spirit, that she demonstrates what she attempts to refute: the child author has grown up.

Two other child-authors who grew up—Frances Hodgson Burnett and Henry James—demonstrate, in their autobiographies, the alternative, and equivalent, sublimation of the child mind to adult need which might be enabled by a child who grows up instead of dying. In their autobiographies, as in many studies of juvenilia, 'the exploits of the juvenile intellect' are, as Sully suggests, discussed 'not so much for their own worth's sake, as for their supposed significance as an omen of a later and mature distinction'.[34] The special issue of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* devoted to juvenilia corroborates, in the final decade of the twentieth century, Sully's observation in the final decade of the nineteenth. The contributions to the issue focus almost exclusively on two of the three questions identified by the editor of the issue, Gillian Adams: in discussing when the work of precocious children 'cross[es] the line into adult fiction', and '[w]hy some juvenile authors disappear but others go on to become adult writers of distinction', the contributions to this issue focus primarily on the relationship between 'juvenile exploits' and 'adult distinction'.[35] In their edited collection of essays on juvenilia, Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster likewise focus on 'those scribbling children who achieved greatness as adults'.[36] Although they attribute this focus to the necessities of research—'a new study of juvenilia must begin somewhere'—the principal objective of their volume, *The Child Writer,* is, again, to illuminate the connection between precocious output and adult work.[37]

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[33] Ashford, 'Foreword', p. xxiii, emphasis added.
[34] Sully, 'Learned Infant', p. 48.
[35] Gillian Adams, 'Speaking for Lions', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 17/4 (1992), 2-3, p. 2. The third question, 'how and to what extent such texts are influenced by adult culture', is not as fully addressed, in any of the contributions to the issue, as either of the other questions (Adams, p. 2).
[36] Christine Alexander and Juliet McMaster, 'Introduction', in Alexander and McMaster, pp. 1-7, at p. 2.
[37] Alexander and McMaster, p. 2.

Ashford's adult life is a clear argument against the premise of many such analyses, from the nineteenth century and from the present day, of precocious children and their work, which make of the child mind a narrative progressing towards the end of the adult self. Aside from the prefaces to her childhood writings, Ashford wrote little as an adult, and published none of this work.[38] Moreover, although Ashford's claim that the child-author of *The Young Visiters* is 'almost another person' is ostensibly similar to the grammatical distinction between the 'Small Person' or the 'Small Boy' and the autobiographical 'I' in Burnett's *The One I Knew the Best of All* and James's *A Small Boy* respectively, it has a very different effect.[39] The autobiographical subject of the latter texts means that there is no possibility of doubt that the Small Person's precocious literariness, and the Small Boy's precocious insights, anticipate, and even constitute the famous adults who write about them. Ashford's reference to 'a Daisy Ashford of so long ago', by contrast, dissociates the retrospective adult from the precocious child. Rather than artificially construct, as James and Burnett do, a separation between the remembering adult and the remembered child, Ashford struggles to identify with that precocious child at all.[40] Burnett's and James's texts are unmistakably autobiographical; Ashford's preface is dubiously, and reluctantly, so.

It is, moreover, because the children in Burnett's and James's autobiographies, and in many other studies of precocious children, are specifically precocious *writers* that they can be identified with the authors they become. The children who feature in James's and Burnett's autobiographies, self-evidently and by reputation, grow into successful authors, and the same trajectory is invoked to validate contemporary analyses of the juvenilia of such comparably successful authors as Lewis Carroll and Louisa May Alcott. Jan Susina, for example, argues that:

> [w]hile [Carroll's] skills as an author certainly became more refined with age and practice, [his] juvenilia show that his youthful talent and ambition to become "one of the staple and essential portions of the literature of England" and the eventual achievement of this lofty goal had their origins in the series of family magazines he began creating as a child.[41]

Similarly, Daniel Shealy discusses Alcott's juvenilia to assert, '[w]ithout a doubt', that it 'aided her own future writings, both in content and style'.[42] In this research, like that which Sully criticises a century earlier, the assertion that juvenilia is an 'omen' of future distinction

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[38] Ashford began an autobiography in her old age, but destroyed the manuscript (Brunner, last accessed 4 September 2016).
[39] Ashford, 'Foreword', p. xxiii.
[40] Ashford, 'Foreword', p. xxiii.
[41] Jan Susina, '"Respiciendo prudens": Lewis Carroll's Juvenilia', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 17/4 (1992), 10-14, p. 13.
[42] Daniel Shealy, 'Louisa May Alcott's Juvenilia: Blueprints for the Future', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 17/4 (1992), 15-18, p. 17.

is a sufficient conclusion to the study of that juvenilia.[43] Both autobiographical and critical studies thus discuss juvenilia not for its own sake, but because of the adult supposedly foreshadowed by the precocity it represents, and it is particularly the writerly precocity of the remembered child which facilitates its identification with the now-great adult. Ashford's preface undermines its own attempt to constitute an eternally innocent child-author, but also inhibits the identification of that child-author with any adult greatness to come.

The counterpart to the view of precocity as eulogy on the adult to come is, of course, precocity as an indictment of that adult. The potential threat to the adult's self-image represented by juvenilia is evident in the fate of, for example, Anthony Trollope's childhood writings. Alexander suggests that Trollope burnt many of his childhood journals because he, and many other '[a]dult authors looking back, . . . want to dissociate themselves from early work that they regard as inferior.'[44] When as Ashford's daughter, Margaret Steel, wonders 'whether, if [Ashford] had continued to write, she would as she became more proficient have relegated her earlier stories to the waste-paper basket, so depriving the world of so much fun', she recognises that juvenilia can threaten as much as it might anticipate adult greatness.[45]

As A. J. O. Cockshut suggests, '[a]dults may tamper with early efforts . . . either out of shame, or more probably out of the vanity of being thought exceptionally precocious.'[46] That Ashford did not become an adult author has, implicitly, enabled her to enjoy her childhood work for itself instead. For Ashford, the same quality which, for other authors, is identifiable with the adult's self-image—the child's writerly precocity—inhibits such identification. Because she became an unwriterly adult, Ashford enables evaluation of her childhood work for its own sake and on its own terms, rather than as either an anticipation of or embarrassment to the now-great adult author. *The Young Visiters* requires its readers instead to be interested in the psychology of the child for its own sake. In this text, the precocious child is constituted not in the story of the adult she became, but only in the story she produced as a child.

8.2: Articulate Children and Adult Control

Although Ashford's juvenilia cannot be seen as an anticipation or devaluation of her adult writing, it is nevertheless deeply problematic for the adult. It implies that it is possible for a writerly child to become an unwriterly adult; that the *adult* may experience that

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[43] Sully, 'Learned Infant', p. 48.
[44] Alexander, p. 74.
[45] Steel, p. xxii.
[46] A. J. O. Cockshut, 'Children's Diaries', in *Children and their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, ed. Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 381-398, at p. 382.

separation from language which, according to James's and Burnett's autobiographies, defines the precocious child and distinguishes her from the adult author. However, as Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff observe, '[i]t is not the child writer but the adult editor or publisher, using criteria of which the child is unaware, who determines the final content of work written by children.'[47] I suggest that the unusual editorial practices which characterise the publication of Ashford's text are an attempt to control and limit the problem presented by this precociously articulate child. That Fleming's work is subject to the same policy suggests that her work represents a comparable threat. The editorial practices dictating production of works by children are a response to the breakdown, brought about by these works, of the dichotomy between articulate adult and pre-linguistic child.

Alexander has noted that many errors which appear in various editions of *The Young Visiters* do not feature in Ashford's manuscript. The novel's first editor standardised any errors Ashford made, so that they recurred each time the same word appeared in the text. The 'indignity' of having her own errors preserved is thus compounded as a 'marketing strategy' in the supposition that such errors are appealing.[48] By retaining and even standardising the spelling mistakes in Ashford's manuscripts, several of her editors have produced a version of *The Young Visiters* which partially disavows the collapse of the opposition between child and adult. Ashford seems 'childishly' uncertain of spelling, punctuation, and grammar, so that the articulate child, and the unwriterly adult she became, are less clearly distinguished by this editorial practice than they would be had Ashford's errors been treated like the errors in manuscripts by adult authors.

Fleming's spelling errors are also retained in published editions of her diaries. That this practice constitutes an attempted reinforcement of the supposedly inarticulate child and implicitly articulate adult is expressed most clearly in Macbean's claim that 'Maidie has a perfect genius for bad spelling' (p. 49). His telling word 'genius' is juxtaposed with a trait normally associated not with genius but with limited literacy. His observation consequently corroborates the assertion of a writer he cites in his preface, who 'remarks that [Fleming] is not so much a child genius as the genius of childhood' (p. vi). When Macbean describes Fleming as a 'real, natural child', 'differing in nothing from other children, unless in the extraordinary vividness of her feelings and the consequent piquancy of her language' (p. 1-2) he claims that the effectiveness of Fleming's language is a function not of her competence or articulacy, but of her extraordinarily vivid capacity for feeling. Through a simultaneous

[47] Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff, 'Introduction', in Goodenough, Heberle, and Sokoloff, pp. 1-15, at p. 4.
[48] Alexander, p. 87-88.

analysis of Fleming's language and her spelling, Macbean is able to present a version of the child's language which is not articulate in itself but is only articulate of innocence.

Analyses which, comparably, suggest that Ashford was not articulate in herself suggest that the same motivation may have informed editorial standardisation of her spelling mistakes. Laura K. Ray, for example, bases her comparative analysis of the novella and *What Maisie Knew* on the premise that Ashford was not fully in control of the language she used. Ray reads several passages of *The Young Visiters* as evidence of 'the author's confidence that in using [certain] phrases she is being grown-up'.[49] According to Ray herself, however, Ashford's 'authentic insight is actually owed to her yet unformalised perceptions about human impulses and desires'.[50] Like Fleming's 'vividness' of feeling, Ashford's unformalised perceptions are differentiated from her apparently inept language. Just as Maisie has 'almost infinitely quickened' perceptions which she cannot articulate, so Fleming and Ashford have an extraordinary capacity for vision but not for language.[51] Like the early editors who standardised Ashford's spelling mistakes, Ray attempts to discredit the image of the articulate child which is offered by *The Young Visiters,* by suggesting that that child had only partial control over, and understanding of, the language she used.

Maisie is, of course, a fictional and therefore functional child. Ashford and Fleming, though not fictional, seem to serve a comparable function: all three children are made to represent the child's vision as separate from her language and, therefore, as innocent. The seriousness with which Ashford insists she wrote *The Young Visiters* has consequently been read not only as the reason for its humour, but also as evidence of its innocence. For Cobb *The Young Visiters* 'is all the funnier because the writer was so desperately in earnest, so tremendously serious all the while she was writing it'.[52] Likewise, Ray suggests that the humour of *The Young Visiters* 'is all the reader's, unshared by the serious author who believes she is speaking a language she merely mimics'.[53] In these analyses, the language of *The Young Visiters* is funny because, like Fleming's spelling mistakes, it is evidence of the child's innocence.

Such analyses can only be based on assumptions about the author which, as I will demonstrate, are not supported by the texts those authors produced. They efface the linguistic abilities of the writing child, and thereby retain the genius of childhood which her writing is supposed to embody. Although, in Ashford's case, such assumptions may be

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[49] Laura K. Ray, 'Childhood and the English Novel: Two English Girls', *Genre,* 8 (1975), 89-105, at p. 96.
[50] Ray, p. 96.
[51] James, 'Preface IX', p. 293.
[52] Cobb, p. viii. Cobb's qualified praise for *The Young Visiters* is telling in this analysis; that it can only be '*almost* the funniest book ever written' seems to be associated with the author's supposed 'innocence' of its humour.
[53] Ray, p. 91.

invited in part because she herself claims that she was unaware of the humour in her work as a child, the certainty and the unanimity of so many critics on the question of the author's understanding of her work is, I suggest, enabled because that author is a 'child', which is to say that the author can be imagined as a static and coherent concept, which denotes an innocent inability to understand not only the language of others but even the language she writes herself.

Thus 'Daisy', as Ray calls Ashford, '*imagines* that she is simulating witty and romantic adult conversation' when she writes a passage of dialogue between Ethel and Bernard.[54] Likewise 'Marjorie', according to Macbean, 'ought to receive any story from a printed book as absolutely infallible' (p. 44), and 'is sometimes willing, as many children are, to use the words first and find out their proper use afterwards' (p. 42).[55] Such comments are tellingly similar to the view of nineteenth-century psychologists such as Hall, for whom '[t]he fancy of some children is almost visualisation', or Sully, who claims that, for children, 'spoken words as sounds for the ear have in themselves something of the immediate objective reality of all sense-impressions.'[56] For so many critics of the work of precocious children, as for Hall and Sully, the child 'serves to contain difference internal to language' because, as Ohi argues, she is an embodiment of the idea of innocence.[57]

Of course, such claims, and the editorial decisions which support them, are only partially convincing: *The Young Visiters* and Flemings diaries are demonstrably, and despite editorial dishonesty, the products of highly writerly children. Both texts consequently suggest something disavowed by the writers whose main interest is in the connection between precocity and adulthood. Both Ashford and Fleming suggest that, if the work of childhood can surpass adult greatness, it cannot do so because of its innocence, if this is synonymous with the author's innocence. The content of these precocious texts testifies to the knowledge, not the innocence, of their child-authors. Without innocence, Ashford and Fleming become, primarily, authors rather than children. Without innocence, their precocity is subsumed to their authority, and the subjects of that authority are the adults who are supposed to embody it.

8.3: The Authority of Articulate Children

Halverson suggests that 'the unnatural fact of a child having written a text that speaks to adults makes for an uneasy sense that this child writer is not a real child at all. To

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[54] Ray, p. 94.
[55] Macbean's surprise that 'at her age', Fleming 'hesitates' (p. 44) to believe a story she reads in *Mother Goose's Fairy Tales* is equally illustrative of his ideas and expectations about 'the child' and her relationship with language.
[56] Hall, 'Lies', p. 66; Sully, *Studies*, p. 55.
[57] Ohi, *Innocence and Rapture*, p. 7.

create too sophisticated a text suggests precocity as opposed to the "spirit of childhood" that readers seek.'[58] However, many texts of the nineteenth century present a form of precocity which could be consistent with some form of the 'spirit of childhood' in which there was such interest in the period.[59] Maisie's precocious vision, for example, represents a form of innocent knowledge of the adult self. Likewise, the precocious child exists, in different ways, for the adult to be constituted in autobiographies by James and Burnett. The precocious child might foreshadow, or might actually have knowledge of, the adult self to come, but in neither case can she articulate that adult self.

In seeming contrast, in representations of childhood in so-called 'children's' literature, precocious storytellers like Oswald Bastable and Sara Crewe are highly articulate. However, they primarily tell stories about themselves and about other children. Although those stories can have profound effects on adult culture within the texts, they are not studies or, worse, critiques, of that culture. Thus, unlike children such as Maisie, Miles, or Dolcino, Oswald and Sara do not exist to tell adult stories, but this apparent difference in function between precocious childhood in texts for adults and in texts for children resolves the apparent problem presented by the linguistic abilities of children in the latter group. Maisie's knowledge of the adult can be innocent so long as it is inarticulable; the Small Person and the Small Boy can anticipate the adult but, once they become articulate, they *become* that adult. Although the precocious children in children's literature are articulate, they do not write or speak knowingly about adults. Precocious children in literature in the late nineteenth century may be knowledgeable about adults, or articulate about anything else, but they are, almost invariably, inarticulate about adults.

It is, in fact, through the precocious child's inarticulate, and therefore innocent, idea of the adult that a coherent image of the adult self can be imagined. Precocity can thus bolster a concept of 'the spirit of childhood' in the nineteenth century, as long as the precocious child remains inarticulate on the subject of adulthood.[60] Unlike Small Person, the Small Boy, Oswald Bastable, or Sara Crewe, Ashford and Fleming are neither indifferent to, ignorant of, or the source of inarticulate idealisations about, adults. Instead, Ashford's and Fleming's knowledge about adults is demonstrably articulable, and therefore problematically innocent. Thus, it is the content of the text itself, not, as Halverson suggests, the precocity which that text evinces, which can create the 'uneasy sense' that the child writer is not quite a 'real child'.[61] Ashford and Fleming write about adults, and write not childishly and

[58] Halverson, p. 246.
[59] Halverson, p. 246.
[60] Halverson, p. 246.
[61] Halverson, p. 246.

innocently, but authoritatively and knowingly, and it is this which problematizes their status as real children.

As is indicated by the editorial practices which standardise spelling errors, and by the editorial commentary which accompanied Fleming's diaries, differences between adult and child are marked particularly by differences in control. The adult editor controls the child's text, particularly by presenting her control over that text as limited, and thereby attempts to constitute a 'real child' from an otherwise problematic text. By assuming control over the adults in their texts, Ashford and Fleming confuse this attempt. Rather than separate adult and child, control in their texts asserts the power of articulacy, or authorship. Precocious authorship becomes a manifestation of control over adults who are characterised by a 'childish' lack of such control. The knowledge articulated in *The Young Visiters* and in Fleming's diaries therefore precludes the idea of precocity as a consolidation of adult authority. Power, in these texts, is held not by the adult but by the author.

The Young Visiters features some of those very childish adults who seem so often to go hand-in-hand with precocious children in the period. This childishness is significantly different from the child-like-ness of, for example, Albert's uncle or Mrs Bax in Nesbit's *Treasure Seekers* series. Albert's uncle's ability to 'pretend beautifully' makes him a sympathetic and even aspirational character.[62] Mr Salteena, by contrast, abstains from 'an egg for his breakfast in case he should be sick on the journey'.[63] The difference between his own and Albert's uncle's childlikeness is, on the comic surface, a difference in dignity but is, more specifically, a difference in control.

Albert's uncle can control when he pretends, and it is this which marks him as an adult despite his ability to do certain childlike things. Albert's uncle's control over his childlikeness is clear to the reader, though, significantly, it is not clear to the child-writer represented in the text. When, for example, the Bastables are digging for treasure, Albert's uncle claims to 'have made a careful study of the whole subject':

> "What I don't know about buried treasure is not worth knowing. And I never knew more than one coin buried in any one garden—and that is generally—Hullo—what's that?" He pointed to something shining in the hole he had just dragged Albert out of. Oswald picked it up. It was a half-crown.[64]

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[62] Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers,* p. 164.
[63] Daisy Ashford, *The Young Visiters* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984), p. 22. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses. Unlike the previous editorial practices described by Alexander above, the 1984 Chatto and Windus edition, 'aims to reproduce the original in all aspects', correcting only 'simple slips of spelling and punctuation' ('A Note on the Text', in *The Young Visiters,* pp. 78-79, at p. 79). It therefore perpetuates the indignity, but not the dishonesty, with which Ashford's text has been treated. In line with standard practice, I will not correct punctuation and spelling errors that feature in this edition, or in Fleming's work.
[64] Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* p. 25.

If there is any doubt about the origin of this half-crown, it is quickly cleared up:

> [Albert's uncle] began to put on his coat and waistcoat. When he had done it he stooped and picked up something. He held it up and you will hardly believe it, but it is quite true—it was another half-crown . . . I wish Albert-next-door's uncle would come treasure-seeking with us regularly; he must have very sharp eyes: for Dora says she was looking just the minute before at the very place where the second half-crown was picked up from, and *she* never saw it.[65]

The childlike adult of the *Treasure Seekers* series can choose to participate in the Bastables' innocent knowledge (of, in this example, the fun of digging for treasure), but his adulthood enables him also to see what Oswald misses.

As represented in the *Treasure Seekers* series, then, the precocious child author approves of any adult who can share his knowledge, but is not interested in whatever else the adult can see. As Oswald himself puts it, 'I don't know how it is, but having to consult about a thing with grown-up people, even the bravest and the best, seems to make the thing not worth doing afterwards.'[66] Consequently, Oswald is not able to share whatever *else* the adult can see. Albert's uncle may not literally have the sharp eyes that Oswald attributes to him, but he can nevertheless see more than Oswald, because he can see both the fun of participating in the game, and the opportunity to engineer its success.

Unlike Oswald, Ashford *is* interested in what adults can see, and, unlike Albert's uncle, the adults in Ashford's text see much less than the child-author observing them. As Ashford states, Mr Salteena is 'not quite a gentleman but you would hardly notice it but cant be helped anyhow' (p. 20-21). While the Bastables' father might share Mr Salteena's difficult financial circumstances, the indignities of such circumstances are rather more obvious in Ashford's representation than in Oswald's. For example, when he visits his much richer friend, Bernard Clark, Mr Salteena betrays indecorous excitement over some of the service:

> Ethel are you getting up shouted Mr Salteena.
> Very nearly replied Ethel faintly from the next room.
> I say said Mr Salteena excitedly I have had some tea in bed.
> So have I replied Ethel. (p. 32)

Although, as Barrie observes, Mr Salteena 'cleverly conceals' his excitement until the footman leaves his room, he cannot exert the same control over what Ashford sees.[67] Just as he, clearly, cannot control whether he is sick or not, so Mr Salteena's childlikeness is not a controlled participation in childhood knowledge, but a lack of any control at all.

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[65] Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* p. 25-26.
[66] Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* p. 125.
[67] Barrie, 'Preface', in *The Young Visiters*, pp. 7-13, at p. 9.

This lack of control is associated with what a childlike—or, rather, an Oswald-like—limitation of knowledge. Mr Salteena's undignified excitement over tea in bed is anticipated when he gets 'rather flustered with his forks' (p. 28) at dinner, and has to follow his host's advice 'as to what to do with' the 'costly finger bowls' (p. 29). Mr Salteena's attempts to use correctly the forks and finger bowls betray his inability to do so. The very attempt to control the self he presents to the world exposes to the reader his lack of any such control. Thus, Mr Salteena cannot control the adult self as it appears to his more knowing and controlling (child) author. In Ashford's text, the most significant difference is not between adult and child, but between author and subject.

Adult control over the child is also subsumed to authorial control over subject in Fleming's diaries and, as in *The Young Visiters*, the controlled subject is the adult. There are moments, even in Macbean's edited version of Fleming's diaries, when Fleming seems to articulate 'promptings' (p. 41) about a prohibited subject—love, or, more accurately, sexual desire—not only *despite* her cousin's disapproval, but in part *because* of it.[68] Fleming recounts that '[a] sailor called here to say farewell, it must be dreadfull to leave his native country where he might get a wife or perhaps me, for I love him very much & with all my heart, but O I forgot Isabella forbid me to speak about love' (p. 27). Fleming articulates her own desire for the sailor and then, rather than obey Isabella's ban on the subject, writes about that ban. Thereby, of course, she continues to write 'about love' (p. 27). Thus, Isabella's control over Fleming's innocence is subsumed to Fleming's control over Isabella's representation.[69] As in *The Young Visiters*, the author controls the adult who features in her text.

Fleming's diaries also indicate that the articulate child thereby evades the innocence adults attempt to impose on her. Indeed, the question of control comes to undermine the idea of innocence itself. After writing of Isabella's prohibition of the subject of love, Fleming remains, less explicitly, on that subject. She writes that '[a] great many bals & routs are given this winter & the last winter too Many people think beuty is better than virtue . . . I wish everybody would follow her [Isabella's] example and be as good as pious & virtuous as she is & they would get husbands soon enough' (p. 27). In her reference to socially

[68] Fleming's sexual desire has, of course, no bearing on her sexual availability to its object, since it has no bearing on her capacity to give meaningful consent. This would require a far more self-aware understanding of sexuality than Fleming indicates in her diaries or, indeed, than she or any other nine-year-old is likely to have.

[69] While Isabella evidently tries to influence what Fleming writes, however, the only *corrections* she makes to that writing relate, as Plotz observes, 'to spelling and neatness; she makes no effort to censure Marjorie's sometimes profane comments on life, love, and crime' (Plotz, 'Marjorie Fleming', p. 4). In this respect, Isabella opposes Fleming's later editors; while they retain Fleming's errors in spelling, in order to make her knowledge appear innocent, Isabella corrects impediments to the expression of that knowledge in all its 'profanity'.

acceptable opportunities for meeting potential partners, and to the tension between two qualities—beauty and virtue—which promote success in this endeavour, and in her eulogy on Isabella's virtue, Fleming points to the primary advantage of virtue, namely, success at balls and routs, or, to be as frank as Fleming, success at getting husbands.

Following this illuminating series of apparently loosely-connected remarks, Fleming then immediately observes that 'love is a papithatick thing as well as troublesom & tiresome but O Isabella forbid me to speak about it' (p. 27). She reverts to explicit reference to love and, *again*, to writing of, rather than obeying, Isabella's injunction. The passage thus points to the basic hypocrisy of the supposed opposition between love and virtue, and between speaking about love and being told not to speak about love. In short, it points to the incompatibility of innocence with attempts to control it.

Fleming's diaries would seem to be, by definition, about Fleming's thoughts and feelings or, more broadly, her knowledge. It is perhaps because of this generic feature that the references to sexual desire in Fleming's diaries are paradoxically but almost aggressively attributed to her innocence. Thus, when Macbean describes 'Madgie's little love affairs with the other sex' (p. 40), he couples the dismissive 'little' with a further miniaturised version of his already diminutive 'Marjorie'. As 'Madgie's little love affairs' (p. 40), Fleming's sexual desires become less incompatible with the idea of innocence her diaries are supposed to uphold. However, despite all that 'Pet' and similar epithets can do, Fleming's insistence on those desires is deeply problematic. It not only points to the incompatibility of Fleming's innocence with Isabella's, or Macbean's attempts to control it, but to the impossibility of an articulate but innocent child.

In spite not only of Isabella's injunction, but also the disavowals of adult readers like Macbean, Fleming's sexual desire is repeatedly articulated. Macbean's explanation of this problem is problematic in itself. He claims that 'Marjorie was constantly yielding to the promptings of a heart too prone to love' (p. 41). According to this explanation, Fleming does not write of love because she knows it. Rather, she passively yields to the promptings of her feelings. To disavow Fleming's sexuality, Macbean disavows her control over what she has written: he attempts to sustain the sexual innocence of the child by presenting her as passive in her use of language; as innocent.

Macbean thus points to, by denying, the connection between sexual desire and language in the child's writing. His assertion of the innocence of Fleming's diaries inadvertently insists that those diaries *articulate* sexual desire, and therefore that it is language—Fleming's expression of desire in language, Isabella's articulated prohibition of that expression, and Macbean's own attempt to control the meaning of *Fleming's* language through his own written analysis of its meaning—which makes innocence impossible.

Macbean's attempt to control the innocence supposedly preserved in Fleming's diaries is therefore undermined by the very existence of those diaries, or, more particularly, by the language they contain. Indeed, perhaps the most vivid exemplification of the incompatibility of Fleming's innocence with her language has nothing to do with sex at all. Fleming records that, in a 'bad homour', she has called her friend John an 'Impudent Bitch' (p. 62) earlier in the day. This is a particularly vivid moment of self-expression, both in the diary and in the moment itself as re-constructed by the diary. Fleming's repetition, in text, of the words, with capitals which both suggest that the words were spoken emphatically and retain that emphasis in text, is difficult to cohere with the child who is 'too prone to love' (Macbean, p. 41), or who '*believes* she is speaking a language she merely mimics', as Macbean and Ray respectively describe the child author.[70] Fleming's perception of John is formalised in highly expressive language. Whether those words were mimicked at the time or not, they have dubious innocence in their capitalised re-appearance in the diary.

Consequently, many instances of particularly expressive language from Fleming provoke particularly incongruous assertions of her innocence from her readers. Macbean has no comment to make on Fleming's outburst about John, but on another example of her colourfully articulate version of innocence, he is predictably dismissive of the possibility that she *meant* what she said. 'Often', according to Macbean, children:

> attach to [a word] a conception which is not exactly the customary meaning, as when Marjorie says we should turn from wickedness "with horror and consternation" . . . Sometimes the meaning is clearly wrong, as when she says the history of all the malcontents that ever were hanged is very "amusing."' (p. 43)

The child whose heart was too prone to love could, clearly, not enjoy a story about hangings. However, since that heart must—because it was a child's—have been *innocent,* the word 'amusing' (p. 43) is, in Macbean's analysis, equally innocent, and not what Fleming meant at all.

However, Macbean's remark demands reference to another of Ashford's texts. *The Hangman's Daughter* (1920) was, in Ashford's opinion, her best work. There is no reason, in terms of plot or character, for the protagonist to be the daughter of a hangman. The gratuitousness of the detail suggests that it was included because Ashford found stories about hangings and hangmen amusing. *The Hangman's Daughter* raises the possibility that Fleming had similar tastes, and therefore that she meant what she wrote. Macbean, then, disputes her understanding of the word 'amusing' in order to assert her innocence at a point when it is under threat by her unseemly enjoyment of a morbid story.

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[70] Ray, p. 91.

John Brown is more explicit than Macbean in dissociating words from meanings when those words are used by children. The final couplet in one of Fleming's poems is as follows: 'But she was more than usual calm/ She did not give a single dam.'[71] Brown claims that '[t]his last word is saved from all sin by its tender age, not to speak of the want of the *n*.'[72] Incorrect spelling, and the 'tender age' of—in his phrase—the word, diffuse its potential offence.[73] However, as the final word not only in a rhyming couplet, but also in the poem itself, the emphasis on the word 'damn' is irresistible. Brown's attribution of the author's 'tender age' to the words she uses attempts to conflate the child with language, so that the latter can be as innocent as the former. The effort repeatedly fails; Fleming's words are emphatically expressive. The diaries cannot be innocent, whatever their author is.

Juliet McMaster's observation that '[c]hildren refuse to accept love and sex as out of bounds, whatever the expectations of surrounding adults' holds true for both Fleming and Ashford.[74] Like Fleming's discourses on love, the plot about Ethel and Bernard in *The Young Visiters* is, essentially, about sexual desire. The expectations of surrounding adults are equally comparable. Like Macbean's doomed attempts to demonstrate that Fleming's sexual desire is particular evidence of her innocence, many of Ashford's critics are particularly interested in establishing that her references to sex are paradoxically innocent; efforts which are, inevitably, disallowed by Ashford's text. Whatever the degree of Ashford's actual, material knowledge, several scenes in *The Young Visiters* are unmistakably about the supposedly adult-only topic of sexual desire. For example, at one point in the text, Ethel announces that 'I shall put some red ruuge on my face' (p. 22). Ray claims that Ashford here betrays her innocence of the customary secretiveness of women's 'cosmetic habits': '[w]e can see . . . in such painstaking allusions a child's pardonable confusion.'[75] However, Mr Salteena evidently sees something improper in the use of rouge. He remarks that Ethel 'will look very silly' (p. 22). Ashford is perhaps less confused about the status of rouge than Ray suggests.

Ethel's bluntness about wearing rouge, moreover, anticipates her characteristically abrupt manner throughout. She is similarly blunt in suggesting that Bernard 'ourght to give a ball' (p. 28), for example, and is equally self-assured in defending herself from Mr Salteena's pompous censoriousness. In response to his assertion that she will look silly, she retorts '[w]ell so will you . . . in a snappy tone and she ran out of the room with a very

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[71] John Brown, 'Marjorie Fleming: A Story of Child-Life Fifty Years Ago', in Macbean, pp. 155-203, at p. 188.
[72] Brown, p. 189.
[73] Brown, p. 189.
[74] Juliet McMaster, '"Adults' Literature," By Children', *The Lion and the Unicorn,* 25/2 (2001), 277-299, p. 283.
[75] Ray, p. 95.

superier run throwing out her legs behind and her arms swinging in rithum' (p. 22). She is, again, refreshingly dismissive when he remarks that he 'hope[s] Ethel will behave properly' at Bernard's house while he is away; '[o]h yes I expect she will said Bernard with a sigh. I always do said Ethel in a snappy tone' (p. 35). That Ethel is so open about her 'cosmetic habits' may be due to Ashford's 'pardonable confusion' about sex and adult secrecy, but the author's 'confusion' is not required to explain Ethel's unconventional behaviour.[76] Such eccentric frankness is consistent with Ethel's character throughout, and this is sufficient as an explanation of this scene, without appealing to the child-author's assumed innocence.

When Ethel and Bernard go to a hotel together, Ethel's honesty becomes even more explicit:

> The best [bedroom] shall be yours then said Bernard bowing gallantly . . .
> Ethel blushed at his speaking look. I shall be quite lost in that huge bed she added to hide her embarassment.
> Yes I expect you will said Bernard. (p. 58)

Ray claims that the effect of this passage 'on the reader is that of touching innocence'; the touching innocence, presumably, of the author.[77] An interpretation of the text itself, rather than of the child who wrote it, however, would suggest that, given Ethel's self-assured behaviour prior to this scene, she is flirting, quite explicitly, with Bernard. Innocence is only raised at all in an analysis of this passage because the clear reference to sexual desire throughout is inconsistent with ideas about child-authors which Ashford might evoke, but which her text undermines.

The reader cannot know what either Fleming or Ashford knew of sex or of the words they used. Just as Maisie can insist, with an indeterminate degree of knowingness, that she brought Sir Claude and Mrs Beale together, so when Bernard starts to pant 'wildly' and Ethel begins 'breathing rarther hard' (p. 67) after Bernard's proposal, the extent to which Ashford knows what these words suggest is indeterminate. Unlike *What Maisie Knew*, however, and despite the prurience which characterises some analyses of it, *The Young Visiters* is not about Ashford's knowledge. An analysis of *The Young Visiters*, rather than of the innocent author it is supposed to contain, demonstrates only that explicit flirting is to be expected of Ethel. Likewise, although her diaries are ostensibly about her own mind, whether Fleming is 'innocent' or not cannot be established from those diaries. The diaries themselves demonstrate only that that innocence is not contained within them. The child-author may be made to embody an idea of innocence, but her texts, because they are the

[76] Ray, p. 95.
[77] Ray, p. 94.

articulation of her supposedly innocent and therefore inarticulable knowledge, cannot support that idea.

Fleming's early death has enabled her diaries to be read as the preservation of her imagined innocence, Despite Ashford's growth to adulthood, she too has been preserved as 'another person', an 'unworldly' and eternally innocent child-author.[78] The precocious child-author can, then, be made to support a nineteenth-century idea of the spirit of childhood. However, if that author's writing represents '[t]he child's expression of his or her own subjectivity', these famous examples offer deeply problematic expressions of that subjectivity in light of the childhood which features in contemporary adult-authored texts.[79] Despite what Cobb, Macbean, Ray, and even Ashford herself, describe, and the assumptions about the 'child' which inform their analyses of precocious writing, no notion of the innocence either of characters within, or the authors of these texts, can by fixed by any attention to the texts themselves. Instead, by representing adult limitations, *The Young Visiters* and Fleming's diaries constitute an expression of the author's control over her subject, and thus of the precocious child's control over the adult. These precociously authored texts are consequently incompatible with the idea of innocence through which adults attempt to reclaim that control.

[78] Ashford, 'Author's Foreword', p. xxiv; Brunner, last accessed 4 September 2016).
[79] Alexander and McMaster, p. 1.

Conclusion

The Precocious Self in the Late Nineteenth Century

This thesis has argued that the theory of progressive evolution, and its basis in the theory of recapitulation, require that the innocent child of Romantic ideology originate, in the Victorian period, a narrative of the adult self. As such, the innocent child becomes precocious, and thus represents a highly disruptive component in Victorian self-construction. Consequently, although the adult has been a problematic counterpart to the image of the child across the nineteenth century from Lucy Gray to Daisy Ashford, late nineteenth-century literary and scientific texts epitomise, thematise, and narrate this problem. In the texts discussed in this thesis, the child embodies the start of a narrative for which adult is the end-point, but the precocity which this requires of the child reflects, and therefore undermines, the stability, coherence, and unity of the adult self it is supposed to constitute. The precocious children discussed in this thesis offer some insight into the precocious child's mind as it was imagined in the late nineteenth century, and into the difficulty even such imaginary versions of that mind present for efforts to narrate and thus to contain and define it.

Robert Louis Stevenson offers perhaps the most succinct articulation of the function of the child in Victorian thought when he claims that 'they dwell in a mythological epoch, and are not the contemporaries of their parents.'[1] The child as ancestor implies an adult who has progressed beyond that primitive origin. Children are 'not the contemporaries of their parents' so that they can represent an origin from which the story of the adult can be told. By the extension invited by the theory of recapitulation, the story of progressive evolution can likewise be told. The primitive origins of the human species imply progress toward the end embodied in the white, European, adult male. The primitive-child of this model is not, however, the 'pure' origin described by Rose, but an origin which, because it must both anticipate and progress toward the adult self, is necessarily and problematically precocious.[2]

Stevenson also wrote a satirical essay on this very opposition between (primitive) child and (civilized) adult which was so central to late nineteenth-century thought. In 'Crabbed Age and Youth', Stevenson asserts that '[a]ll error, not merely verbal, is a strong way of stating that the current truth is incomplete.'[3] Although he here refers to the errors of judgement which are supposedly typical of youth, his statement provides a useful filter

[1] Stevenson, 'Child's Play', p. 114.
[2] Rose, p. 8.
[3] Stevenson, 'Crabbed Age and Youth', in *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers,* pp. 39-50, at p. 48.

through which to summarise those 'errors' that testify to the inadequacy of many 'truths' about children and childhood in Victorian literature.

In this respect, the veiled disjunction between authoritative, adult narratives of precocity and the persistently disruptive precocious children themselves can be read as difficulties, or errors, which point to the inadequacy and necessity of the precocious child in nineteenth-century thought. Since texts like *Peter Pan* and *A Little Princess* allow for the function of such errors, however, Stevenson's claim that children 'are not the contemporaries of their parents', and texts which adhere to this implicit progressive narrative, ought to be analysed not only for their errors, but also for the function of their partial truths.[4]

Thus, the fanatical pursuit of innocence by the governess of James's *The Turn of the Screw* and by Beatrice in 'The Author of Beltraffio' are literally fatal errors: by denying the corruption which co-exists with, and necessitates a story of, innocence, the governess and Beatrice highlight the inadequate truth of an ideology of childhood innocence. Medical analyses which assert the pathology or, in Guthrie's telling words, the 'evil significance', of precocity register the same ideology of innocence, and likewise insist that innocence is possible, even in an era which requires that the child grows up.[5] The failed disavowal of an inadequate ideology of innocence is performed by these late nineteenth-century studies of a pathologised, and thus narratable, precocity.

It is specifically the blank innocence of Romantic childhood which is inadequate in these tales, however. An alternative, Victorian, precocious innocence is formulated in James's *What Maisie Knew* and in the emergent psychological study of the child mind with which James's novel coincides. The narrator's specious verbalisations of Maisie's thoughts suggest that linguistic truth, and narrative truth, are only partial truths: these are contrasted with the implicit whole truth of Maisie's vision, which corresponds with the vision of the pre-linguistic child as it is conceptualised by two leaders in the field of Child Study, Sully and Hall. The innocently precocious vision of this Victorian child is, moreover, the imagined resolution of the true problem which the governess of *The Turn of the Screw* tries to resolve by immortalising Miles's innocence. The Victorian child's vision is of the 'objective reality' and 'wholeness' of the adult self, which is therefore fully (if only imaginatively and transiently) true.[6] In *What Maisie Knew*, the child is imaginatively separated from the adult. Maisie embodies potential and progress, through which the adult can be imagined to embody fulfilment and end.

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[4] Stevenson, 'Child's Play', p. 114.
[5] Guthrie, p. 3.
[6] Sully, *Studies*, p. 55; Steedman, p. 15.

However, Maisie's precocious yet innocent vision of the adult self will implicitly be corrupted when that adulthood is eventually reached. Maisie's innocence thus problematizes the adult she might grow into, by associating that adult with corruption, even as it also implies an ideal, if only potential, unified adult self. This dividing line between an innocent child and a corrupted adult is inverted in Victorian psychiatry, and particularly in its pathologising view of children's language and children's imaginations. The scientific truths about children's lies offered by Victorian psychiatry are presented as inadequate through the deviant storytelling of Sara Crewe, but by collapsing the difference between children's lies and adult's stories, Sara represents a defence of those story-tellers who, like Beatrice of James's 'The Author of Beltraffio' or Sully in his conceptualisation of the innocently precocious child mind he studies, require the child to represent progress, so that the adult can represent end.

Oswald Bastable problematizes the truth of scientific analyses of children's imaginative lives in the late nineteenth century, by telling his own version of the Bastables' imaginative games. Oswald's narrative does more than present a fictional child's perspective on children, however. It also interrogates the extent to which his perspective can be defined as a *child's* perspective. By suggesting, instead, that it is the perspective of anyone with sufficient imagination, Oswald problematizes the difference between adult and child in much nineteenth-century discourse. As an alternative to such stories as Sara exculpates, and their reliance on an erroneous divide between child and adult, Oswald also invites the adult to participate in the imaginative and dialogic self-construction which his own narrative represents.

Oswald's model is disregarded by his creator in her own autobiographical work, however. The role of the child in the creation of the adult self is particularly clear in Nesbit's and in Burnett's autobiographies. These texts diverge from their authors' children's literature in adhering to a Romantic model of selfhood through identification with the remembered child, while paradoxically insisting on a Victorian model of separation from, and progress beyond, that child. Comparably, Sully hypothesises that autobiographical analysis of the remembered child might illuminate the adult self, and thus offers a model of selfhood in which the autobiographer must both identify with, and have progressed beyond, the precocious self of childhood memory. James's autobiography is more alert to the implications of this retrospective identification with the remembered child. The Small Boy of his autobiography is precociously corrupted by the needs of the writing adult's present self-image, but also corrupts the autonomy and authority of that self-image.

Since the Victorian child is required to anticipate and even enact progress towards the adult self, and since the child of Victorian autobiography is, by definition, invoked as the origin from which that adult self emerges, the remembered child of these autobiographies is

necessarily precocious. James's autobiography demonstrates that such precocity erodes the separation between adult and child on which the adult as end-point depends. Nesbit and Burnett offer narrative resolutions to this difficulty, which enable the writing self to be presented as the coherent end to the supposedly progressive developmental process of childhood. James points toward the forward-looking alternative suggested, two decades earlier, by Oswald Bastable. Just as Oswald posits dialogic engagement with other voices, so James's autobiography experiments with continuous dialogue between adult and child, present self and remembered self, and thus offers selfhood as a continuous process. While Burnett and Nesbit offer a child and an adult which are compatible with the function of the child in recapitulation theory, James offers a disruptive, non-progressive dialogue which is less useful for non-Darwinian models of evolution.

In *Peter Pan,* J. M. Barrie insists that supposed truths about childhood are fantasies which perform a necessary function. Barrie sustains the explanatory function performed by the child of nineteenth-century thought, but through precocious children and childish adults also falsifies that function. If, as Stevenson claims, such errors as the eternal child and the imagined progress it allows demonstrate that Victorian truths about childhood, progress, and selfhood are incomplete, *Peter Pan* both indicates the necessity of such partial truths, and performs the uncomfortable alternative to the fantasy of progress and end which the Victorian child enables.

Nowhere is the incomplete truth of this idea of the child clearer than in the errors in Ashford's and Fleming's published works. These errors, retained, and even standardised, by publishers who would have corrected the same errors in an adult-authored manuscript, reveal the incomplete truth of the image of the child in the late nineteenth century. The depictions of adults which feature in these works likewise points to the inadequacy of 'the child' as a nineteenth-century truth, because such depictions contradict the idea that if the child has any concept of adulthood, it is a redemptive, innocent concept. Although neither Ashford nor Fleming offer entirely plausible studies of adult experience, by representing adulthood at all they demonstrate that adult-authored studies of childhood experience are often fairly implausible as well. 'In short', as Stevenson suggests, 'if youth is not quite right in its opinions, there is a strong possibility that age is not much more so.'[7] Ashford and Fleming are not quite right in their ideas about adults, but adult ideas about Ashford, Fleming, and 'the child' are not much more correct.

This thesis has contributed to the understanding of Victorian childhood by comparing scientific, canonical, and children's literature on the subject. It has demonstrated that the innocent child of Romantic ideology was required, in the Victorian period, to

[7] Stevenson, 'Age', p. 49.

represent an origin to a narrative of the adult self and, by extension, to consolidate theories of progressive evolution. Precocity is a necessary but problematic response to a contemporary crisis of selfhood and its counterpart in speciation across discourses in the final decades of the nineteenth century. A theory of progressive development on a species scale is predicated on the theory of recapitulation, which itself requires a theory of progressive development on an individual scale. Within such a model, the child must be narrated. Innocence, as an unnarratable quality, is thus subsumed to precocity in late nineteenth-century discourse about childhood as an origin for selfhood, but by imbuing the child with adulthood, such discourse created a threatening alternative to its own authority.

The Precocious Self in the Early Twentieth Century

The eventual defeat of the progressive model of evolution was not achieved until the 1930s or later, with the advent of Mendelian genetic theory and the application of its findings to Darwin's model. James's autobiography, and Oswald Bastable's engaged and engaging self-portrait, indicate that models of childhood and selfhood evolved prior to this. Just as the nineteenth-century ideology of childhood informed and was re-formed by Darwin's contribution to how humanity saw itself, so it may have informed and been re-formed again by another revolution in humanity and its self-image which occurred in the early twentieth century.

Adam Phillips suggests that Freud's contribution to the discussion about narrative, childhood, and selfhood 'shaped . . . the whole intellectual climate of the twentieth century'.[8] Burnett and Nesbit published their autobiographies in 1895. Between this and the publication of 'A Small Boy and Others' in 1913, Freud published most of his work, including his individual case histories. These studies not only became foundational texts in psychoanalysis; they marked a paradigm shift in Western conceptualisations of selfhood.[9]

Although much of Freud's work was not translated into English until after the publication of James's autobiography, William James had been aware of it since at least 1894 when he wrote a favourable review of Freud and Breuer's 'Preliminary Communication on the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomenon', for the *Psychological Review.* Both W. James and Freud also stayed at G. Stanley Hall's home during the 1909 conference celebrating the twentieth anniversary of Clark University.[10] W. James seems to have thought highly of Freud's methods: at the Clark conference, he is

[8] Adam Phillips, 'General Introduction', in *The "Wolfman" and Other Cases,* ed. Adam Phillips (London: Penguin, 2002), p. i.
[9] See James Strachey, 'Sigmund Freud: His Life and Ideas', in *Sigmund Freud 8. Case Histories 1: "Dora" and "Little Hans",* ed. Angela Richards, trans. Alix and James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1990), 11-24 on Freud's contributions to psychoanalysis.
[10] See Rosenzweig for a full account of this visit.

reported to have said to Ernest Jones, 'then a young, newly converted psychoanalyst', that the 'future of psychology belongs to your work'.[11] Soon afterwards, James himself travelled to America where, as Fred Kaplan recounts, he 'had therapeutic conversations with a psychiatrist, Dr James Jackson Putman', who was 'a disciple of Freud'.[12] James reported himself to be 'enormously better' thanks to Putman's treatment, and published his autobiography the following year.[13] It is unlikely that Nesbit and Burnett were aware of Freud's work when composing their autobiographies. It is beyond doubt that James was aware of it.

Maud Ellman claims that, 'beyond these circumstances . . . there is little reason to suppose that Henry James was directly influenced by Freud.'[14] However, there is a degree of continuity between James's dialogic engagement with his past self and Freud's therapeutic method which suggests otherwise.

Although what Anthony Storr describes as Freud's 'rigidity' and tendency for 'excessive generalisation' led him to attribute all neuroses to the unsatisfactory or incomplete resolution of infantile sexual desire, the latent artistry of the small boy in James's autobiography corresponds with the significance, for the adult, of childhood capacities and desires in Freud's theory.[15] As Jonathan Flatley has suggested, moreover, the mechanism—transference—through which Freud proposed to identify childhood latencies, and thus to resolve the problems they cause for the adult, is 'analogous' to the prosopopoeia through which James's childhood self is revived in written memory.[16]

Transference has been defined as 'the process by which a patient attributes to his analyst attitudes and ideas that derive from previous figures in his life'.[17] Just as James testifies 'to what most comes up for me *to-day* in the queer educative air' of his memories, rather than to what actually happened to the small boy he remembers, so, as Patrick J. Mahony observes, the analyst's concern is not 'historical truth' but 'psychic genetic truth'.[18]

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[11] Eugene Taylor, 'William James and Sigmund Freud: "The Future of Psychology Belongs to Your Work"', *Psychological Science*, 10/6 (1999), 465-469, at p. 469.
[12] Kaplan, p. 532.
[13] Kaplan, p. 532.
[14] Maud Ellman, *The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 10-11.
[15] Anthony Storr, *Freud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 7, p. 8, and p. 28. Freud, of course, considered art an expression of, or means to discharge, repressed sexuality. In a Freudian analysis, then, the distinction I make between the two might be understood as the distinction between signifier (art) and signified (sexuality).
[16] Jonathan Flatley, 'Reading into Henry James', *Criticism*, 46/1 (2004), 103-123, at p. 106.
[17] Storr p. 37. Storr notes that it 'has now been extended to include patient's total emotional attitude to the analyst' (Storr, p. 37).
[18] Patrick J. Mahony, *Freud's Dora: A Psychoanalytic, Historical, and Textual Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), at p. 39. See Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), pp. 215-230, on the use of autobiography in Richard von Krafft-Ebing's pioneering contributions to psychiatry.

The patient might insist on her memory of what actually happened; the analyst is concerned with its effect '*to-day*'. In a successful psychoanalytic transference, then, the patient creates, in the present, a ghostly reincarnation from the past, through which he comes to a better understanding of his present self. The prosopopoeia of James's autobiography testifies to the disruptive significance of childhood memories which Freud identified, and represents a literary counterpart to the mechanism through which, according to Freud, this problematic significance can be resolved.

However, at least initially, Freud's idea of successful psychoanalysis reflects a specifically *Romantic* idea of autobiography, which—as James's autobiography indicates—is doomed to failure. The specifics of this parallel between psychoanalysis and Romantic autobiography are illuminated by Freud's claims for the former in the earliest of his case histories. In 'Dora', Freud's argument for the symbolic and therapeutic significance of his patient's dreams replicates the Romantic function of the remembered self in autobiography. Freud claims that '[a] regularly formed dream stands, as it were, upon two legs, one of which is in contact with the main and current exciting cause, and the other with some momentous event in the years of childhood'.[19] Like the autobiography, which is both a response to a present stimulus and a record of some event from childhood, the dream also 'stands upon two legs' (p. 107); it too has significance for both the present and the past self.

Moreover, just as this dual significance of present and past self for autobiography is more specifically that, through autobiography, the present self can be constituted *based on* the past self, so, Freud claims, '[t]he dream sets up a connection between those two factors—the event during childhood and the event of the present day—and it endeavours to re-shape the present on the model of the remote past' (p. 107). The dream sets up the same *constitutive* significance of the past to the present self as is the basis of Romantic autobiography.

Ultimately, Freud argues that the dream 'is continually trying to summon childhood back into reality and to correct the present day by measure of childhood' (p. 107). The role of the analyst is to interpret the significance of childhood as revived in the dream, and thereby to resolve the problems that childhood has caused for the adult. If, as James suggests, 'success in life may be best defined as the performance of some intention arrested in youth', the dream expresses the same desire which James endeavours to fulfil through autobiography; the desire that 'I may frankly put in a claim to' such success.[20]

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[19] Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora") (1905 [1901])', in *Sigmund Freud 8. Case Histories 1: "Dora" and "Little Hans",* pp. 29-164, at p.107. Subsequent citations will be given in parentheses.

[20] James, 'A Small Boy', p. 55. See William Veeder, 'The Feminine Orphan and the Emergent Master: Self-Realisation in Henry James', *Henry James Review*, 12/1 (1991), 20-54, at p. 45, for a

Psychoanalysis thus aspires to the same function as Romantic autobiography. Each endeavours to constitute a 'successful'—coherent—present self by summoning, and arresting in the present, a past self from childhood.[21]

However, as I have shown, James's autobiography undermines the assumption made in Romantic autobiography, and in Freud's case histories, that such self-knowledge is possible through memory in language. James represents the retrospective adult's power over his remembered self as partial and inadequate. In 'A Small Boy and Others', prosopopoeia is an intensely problematic mechanism for the consolidation of the self in text, not only because James can only imperfectly remember his childhood self, but because that child's precocity represents an uneasy double of the present adult's authority. In his autobiography, then, James points to the problematic nature of the remembered child for both participants in the corresponding genre of Freudian psychoanalysis.

As Freud himself admits in the Prefatory Remarks to 'Dora', when treatment was terminated 'some of the problems of the case had not even been attacked and others had only been imperfectly elucidated' (p. 40). Perhaps surprisingly, 'Dora' is nevertheless 'typically praised for the scientific empiricism of Freud's method, as well as for its identification of . . . the phenomenon known as transference'.[22] If 'Dora' is praised, it is not because the difficulties of its putative subject—Bauer herself—are resolved, but because it is the case history through which Freud came to recognise the transference and thus, by extension, his own position as a subject in psychoanalysis.[23]

Bruss posits that one of the rules according to which a text may be identified as autobiographical is that '[t]he individual who is exemplified in the organisation of the text is purported to share the identity of an individual to whom reference is made via the subject matter of the text.'[24] The fact that Freud—who, as the author of 'Dora', is 'exemplified in [its] organisation'—is not *purported* to share the identity of the individual—Bauer—to whom that text makes reference, is, I suggest, the primary reason that 'Dora' is not identified as autobiographical. That it might and ought to have been identified as such is, moreover, the reason for the failure of its ostensible aim; the 'clearing up' (p. 73) of Bauer's symptoms. Freud recognised that his patient brought figures from her past back to life in psychoanalysis, but failed to recognise the transference through which Bauer's story became

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Freudian analysis of the biographical, therapeutic function of the 'autobiographical moment' for James (Veeder, p. 45).

[21] James, 'A Small Boy', p. 55.

[22] 'Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria', *The Modernism Lab: Yale University* (New Haven: Yale University, 2010) <http://modernism.research.yale.edu>, last accessed 4 September 2016.

[23] I use the patient's real name, Bauer, rather than Freud's pseudonym, 'Dora', when referring to the patient, firstly to avoid confusion between the patient and the case history, and secondly because the difference between the subject of Freud's analysis and Freud's image of her is relevant to my discussion.

[24] Bruss, p. 11.

his. Though he failed to recognise this autobiographical element in his encounter with Bauer, Freud ultimately came to recognise the therapeutic potential of the mechanism—transference—through which psychoanalysis becomes autobiography.[25]

At the age of thirteen, Bauer was sexually assaulted by a married contemporary of her father's, referred to as Herr K.[26] Freud's insistence on the meaning of Bauer's response to that assault is expressed in terms which replicate the assault. He states that 'I should without question consider a person hysterical in who an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable' (p. 59). The terms of Freud's justification for persisting in an interpretation of Bauer's behaviour in which Bauer herself '[n]aturally . . . would not follow me' (p. 106) evoke, moreover, the defence still commonly offered by accused rapists:

> The "No" uttered by a patient after a repressed thought has been presented to his conscious perception for the first time does no more than register the existence of a repression and its severity . . . If this "No", instead of being regarded as the expression of an impartial judgement (of which, indeed, the patient is incapable), is ignored, and if work is continued, the first evidence soon begins to appear that in such a case "No" signifies the desired "Yes". (p. 93)

In other words, she was asking for it—asking both to be assaulted, and for Freud to insist that this is the 'psychical significance' of her response to that assault.[27] As Mahony argues, Freud's treatment and write-up of Bauer's assault can therefore, '[w]ithout any stretch of the imagination . . . be called an example of continued sexual abuse'.[28]

Like the rapist whose reputation depends on the acceptance of *his* interpretation of his victim's behaviour, Freud's primary interest is, as Hannah S. Decker has suggested, that 'Dora' 'support[s] his theories and his reputation'.[29] The meaning of Bauer's symptoms

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[25] George J. Makari identifies that Freud developed a theory of transference, first with Josef Breuer in *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), and then in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). However, he argues that it is only with the publication of 'Dora' that the theory 'could no longer be missed', and that it is 'Dora' which made transference 'an integral concept for any clinicians interested in psychoanalysis' (George J. Makari, 'Dora's Hysteria and the Maturation of Sigmund Freud's Transference Theory: A New Historical Interpretation', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association,* 45/4 (1997), 1061-1096, at p. 1061-1062.

[26] Mahony points out that Freud repeatedly and mistakenly claims that Bauer was fourteen at the time of the assault (Mahony, p. 9).

[27] Robert A. Paul agrees with Freud: Bauer 'transferred her powerful, mainly unconscious, and deeply conflicted sexual excitement about Mr K. onto Freud, and asked to be taken to his office where she could lie alone with him' so that she could, a century later, 'hijack the case history written by her doctor' (Robert A. Paul, 'Purloining Freud: Dora's Letter to Posterity', *American Imago,* 63/2 (2006), 159-182, at p. 169 and p. 181).

[28] Mahony, p. 148-149.

[29] Hannah S. Decker, *Freud, Dora, and Vienna 1900* (New York: Free Press, 1991), p. 199. As Philip Abbott observes, 'even Freud's sympathetic readers seem to agree on this point' (Philip Abbott, 'The Human Sciences and the Case of the Untrustworthy Narrator: Sigmund Freud's "Dora" and Louis Hartz's "The Liberal Tradition in America"', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* 84/3/4 (2001), 419-447, at p. 444.

matters to Freud less to facilitate the 'clearing up' (p. 73) of those symptoms than to control how he is constructed by their meaning.[30] Freud's case history therefore becomes less a record of the historical facts of its ostensible subject, and more a record of the psychic significance of that subject to *both* participants in psychoanalysis. The effect of Bauer's past is felt both by her present, adult, self and by the analyst through whom she can revive that past. The remembered child is problematically implicated in the retrospective adult, whether that adult claims a shared identity with the remembered child or not.[31]

It is precisely this dual significance of the revived past for both patient and analyst which the transference describes, and which Freud came to accept only after his failure with 'Dora'. Furthermore, although Freud's failure in 'Dora' is now generally attributed largely to his resistance to Bauer's transference of her feelings for Herr K's wife onto him, Neil Hertz suggests that 'what went wrong between Freud and Dora was not just a matter of unrecognised transferences . . . but also of unrecognised—or refused—identification.'[32] The radically productive problem in the case is not Bauer's (undoubtedly unwelcome) identification of Freud with Frau K, but her even more unwelcome identification of Freud with Bauer herself.

Steven Marcus suggests that in 'Dora', it 'becomes increasingly clear . . . that Freud . . . has become the *central* character in the action', and, more particularly, that 'Freud and Dora often appear as unconscious, parodic refractions of' each other.[33] When, for example, Freud states that *Bauer* 'had already had some training in dream interpretations' (p. 100), he points to this identification between patient and analyst. By looking at Bauer's self-images in their sessions together, Freud the analyst becomes an Other image of Bauer.

That he refers to Bauer's 'intellectual precocity' (p. 49) several times points to the similarity between a child with precociously adult ability and an analysand with her analyst's skills. Just as in James's autobiography the precocious Small Boy represents a latent threat both to the retrospective adult and to the author, so in Freud's case history Bauer's remembered self threatens both Bauer's present ability to function and Freud's authority. Thus, Marcus notes, that '[a]bove all, [Freud] doesn't like [Bauer's] inability to

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[30] Recent criticism of 'Dora' suggests that Freud has ultimately failed to control the meaning of Bauer's symptoms. However, this failure does not support, or excuse, Paul's astonishing claim that the events described in, and the subsequent history of, 'Dora', reveal, by realising, Bauer's intentions, and that Freud therefore 'didn't treat her badly at all', but instead 'did exactly what she wanted him to' (Paul, p. 182).

[31] See Freud, 'Twenty-Seventh Lecture: Transference', in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis,* trans. G. Stanley Hall (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2012), 363-378, for an overview transference and its implications for therapy.

[32] Neil Hertz, 'Dora's Secrets, Freud's Technique', *Diacritics,* 13/1 (1983), 61-80, at p. 67.

[33] Steven Marcus, 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History', in *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 247-310, at p. 300, emphasis added, and p. 307.

surrender herself to him', but Bauer's 'inability to surrender' might just as accurately be understood as Freud's inability to subjugate.[34] Like the identity of precocious child with adult self, Bauer's precocious ability for 'dream interpretation'—her identification with Freud—disrupts the unity of self on which her analyst's authority is premised. Consequently, each competes with the other for authority over the meaning of Bauer's story. Analyst and patient engage in what is explicitly a contest in, and about, language. The effect is to highlight the specularity not only of Bauer's self-image, but also of Freud's.

To one of Freud's interpretations of a dream, Bauer retorts that 'I knew *you* would say that' (p. 105). 'You'—Freud—is Other to the speaking self. Freud's statement is thus invalidated by Bauer's insistence on his position as *you*, as Other, within the world as *I*, Bauer, perceive and articulate it. Freud's response is a more aggressive iteration of this strategy. He retorts; '[t]hat is to say, *you* knew that it *was* so' (p. 105), and thus insists on the authority of his position as analyst not only to speak for 'you', but to rephrase what 'you' say, and thus to articulate what 'you' know.

By making Bauer a 'you', by reviving her past self in language, Freud creates an image of that past self as an Other which she might understand. Such specularity is the key to self-knowledge in psychoanalysis, and is thus central to its therapeutic potential. By pointing to Freud's identity with his precocious patient—his own specular status as another 'you'—however, Bauer creates an image of Freud as another Other. What Hertz calls 'the confusion of tongues between an author and his young surrogate' is, as Bauer's words insist, inherent to the medium of psychoanalysis.[35] Language creates the specularity through which Bauer becomes a surrogate Freud, and Freud a surrogate Bauer.

Instead of accepting the transference of Bauer's self-image onto himself, and participating in the therapeutic dialogue which might have helped resolve Bauer's difficulties, Freud attempts to insist on his own authority, stability, and coherence. His failure to 'cure' Bauer is thus more accurately a failure to respond to, instead of refute, the impossibility of his own selfhood in language. In attempting to construct a coherent self, not for Bauer but for himself, in 'Dora', Freud attempts the project of Romantic autobiography, and comes up against the impossibility, described by de Man, of that project. By terminating her treatment, Bauer prevents a narrative resolution to this impossibility. Bauer insists on the problem of language, and disallows the solution of narrative: thus, neither Bauer nor Freud is finally constituted in 'Dora'.

Psychoanalysis has developed, since 'Dora', an alternative, productive response to the impossibility of a narrated self-as-end. As Bauer's dispute with, and eventual dismissal

[34] Marcus, p. 309.
[35] Hertz, p. 67.

of, Freud insists, 'the transference ultimately must put into question the privilege of the analyst.'[36] It is now accepted that in a successful psychoanalysis 'there is no clear mastery, no position of privilege, no assurance, indeed, that the analyst and the analysand won't trade places, at least provisionally, and perhaps frequently.'[37] A successful psychoanalysis requires the analyst's participation in the negotiation of what de Man calls the gap between 'I' and 'you' which conditions self-knowledge. Freud came to recognise the lack of mastery which characterises psychoanalytic engagement with the past. However, what must be considered, at the very least, his failure to cure Bauer, can be attributed to his inability to accept the challenge to his selfhood represented by the precocious Other self which Bauer embodied, and his failure to respond to that challenge through a dialogic exploration, rather than a despotic diagnosis, of her significance.

In its dual investment in, and anxiety towards, the child as an image of the adult self, 'A Small Boy and Others' betrays its debt to Victorian psychology and autobiography, but in its engagement with the possibility of continuous dialogue instead of progressive narrative, it may also register the emergence of Freud as the most influential descendant of the dialogue between these two discourses. In this case history, as in James's autobiography, the absence of mastery, characteristic of true dialogue, facilitates a coherent, if perpetual, engagement between present and past self, between adult and precocious child.

The relationship between autobiography and psychology in the century between Darwin and Freud thus seems a potentially productive area for further research which might extend and complicate the argument made in this thesis, that the Victorian child offers a means to construct a progressive narrative of adult selfhood. A comparative analysis of early twentieth-century autobiographical works, in dialogue with contemporaneous canonical and children's literature, would offer a useful insight into the extent to which the role of the child changes in such texts in tandem with the transformations in models of selfhood that occurred during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The power of the precocious child is described and contained in various ways throughout the late nineteenth century, but that power ultimately points toward the dialogic negotiation between remembered child and remembering adult which is characteristic less of Victorian models of progressive development and associated authority than of the twentieth-century Freudian revolution and the negotiation between memory and selfhood which it inherits, transforms, and perpetuates.

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[36] Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 58.
[37] Brooks, *Psychoanalysis*, p. 58.

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