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1890-2010.*

MARGARET JANE JACKSON

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Margaret Jane Jackson.

An Exploration of Children's Literature and Death 1890-2010.

Abstract

Death is often considered to be a taboo subject, even more so when we try to think about addressing the subject with children. Nonetheless, it is an important subject which impacts the lives of all of us and often as children. Finding the way in which the subject has been dealt with for children can be problematic; however, it is possible to explore this subject via the medium of children's literature. This exploration uses both books, which are text only and also picture books.

This thesis uses a social constructionist perspective to explore notions of the 'child' and childhood', which assumes that no concepts have a pre-existing, given nature and that all things are shaped by culture and history. By exploring the ways in which concepts of 'child' and childhood' have altered over time it is then possible to consider and analyse how the subject of death has been presented and, altered overtime, within children's literature

Books are also constructions and here they have been analysed to offer some insight into what has been deemed suitable subject matter for a child to read and thus to allow prevailing attitudes towards children across the 120 year period of the study to be explored.

The study uses a sample from three periods within the 120 year time span: 1890-1910, 1950-1970 and 1990-2010. Comparison of the ways in which death has been addressed within each period is considered alongside prevailing notions of 'the child'.

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the books and serves to point up the more surprising findings where death has been addressed in a direct manner across the 120 years.

Although it is clear that the subject has been addressed directly in terms of language used (dead, died) what is also clear is from the 1890's to 2010 it is the construction of childhood prevalent at the time that alters and thus impacts what can deemed suitable for children.

An Exploration of Children's Literature and Death: 1890-2010.

Margaret Jane Jackson

Submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Education

Conducted in School of Education Durham University.

Submitted 2017.

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# **An Exploration of Children's Literature and Death 1890-2010.**

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Hester and Taylor (2011) stated that “dealing with death has remained problematic in the UK and ‘Western’ societies more generally” and that although “in many respects death has lost its taboo status, it remains a largely private event” (p.200). Walter (1999) considered that since the Enlightenment the decline in religious belief and the increase in scientific knowledge has left people having to make sense of death on their own. The increasing reliance and belief in science has also taken away from most people the need to encounter death too closely (Conway 2011), and may allow us to believe that “children have little direct contact with death” (Ribbens McCarthy 2006 p.6) and so, children should remain innocent and protected from it (Woodhead and Maybin 2003). Despite the apparent recent ‘revival of death’ (Walter 1994) the place and purpose of the discussion about death in children’s lives remains unclear.

My primary motivation for wanting to undertake this research derives from my personal experience working with children experiencing loss, and their teachers, who often felt unable to know where to begin to address the subject of death with those children. Gutierrez et al (2014) also noted in their research the common belief held by most adults that children should be shielded from death (p.43). A comment I have often heard made. This, despite others (Jackson 2013, Wass 2004, Anthony 1940, Isaacs 1930) having commented on children’s spontaneous interest in death, but also noting that often it was the adults around the children who felt this to be too distressing as a subject. There has been some research about children’s books and death but mostly from a perspective of its therapeutic use in helping children to cope

with bereavement. However, I wanted to find the 'ordinary' ways in which death might have been addressed for children, how this had been dealt with in children's literature by using a social construction of the child and childhood. By setting the books within a context of the social construction of the child it would allow to consider not only whether death did appear as a subject deemed fit for children, but also whether the prevailing attitude towards childhood might offer insights into whether and how death is a subject dealt with in children's books. The apparent 'revival of death', spoken of above, rarely includes children, and thus by focussing on them rather than death as such might offer a fresh view on the matter.

Finding ways in which to explore death and children throws up a number of practical and ethical issues. Some have found difficulty in getting permission to talk directly to children about death. They have even been asked to use terms such as 'end of life' rather than 'death' (Coombs 2014). Silverman (2000) noted that even though death is not uncommonly a feature in children's lives we remain "deaf and mute to children's thoughts about death" (p.3), this despite Anthony's (1940) assertion that death "comes readily" (p.43) to children's thinking.

Thus, in order to address my question of how death is manifested in the 'ordinary' life of the child I needed to find a way to do this. I have commented on the ethical problems, but also I wanted to explore the apparent change in the acceptability of permitting children to know and hear about death and how this might be explored by considering children as a social construction.

One less problematic way (in terms of practicality and ethics) was to consider how children and death come together through the medium of literature. This method would allow for comparisons to be made across a wide time range. Books are fixed points, and though written by adults can allow for the exploration of ideas about

children and death as they show what has been deemed suitable subject matter for children. By framing the study in a social constructionist perspective I accepted that how the notion of the child is presented at different points in time may impact of the acceptability of certain subjects and thus it would be possible to explore this through Children's literature.

Thus the question I am exploring here is 'how does the social construction of childhood impact the way death has been addressed in children's' literature? It should be noted that this study, therefore, looks only at the presentation of death in literature and is not an exploration of death and children in society in general.

It is a common assertion that in the past (usually considered as some point during the Victorian era) that children's books were full of death (Jones 2001). The implication being that somehow the subject had not continued to be one seen in children's books. Others have suggested from the beginning of specific children's literature they were often about death (Townsend 1996) and this can be seen in the morality tales of the past. Therefore it seemed useful to explore this further.

Wiseman (2012) commented that there had been only a small amount of research on children's literature and grief despite an increase in the number of children's books being published in recent years. Nonetheless there has been some research on the subject of death in children's literature (Green 2011, Johnson 2004, Jones 2001, Gibson and Zaidman 1991) although much of this has not focussed on how (or whether) the subject has been addressed, but rather how it might be used therapeutically to help bereaved children currently and confines itself to works published in the last 20 to 30 years. Other researchers (Delisle and McNamee 1981, Ordal 1980,) considered the appropriateness of the content in terms of child development and cognitive understanding of death and thus they also looked only at

books from the latter part of the twentieth century, and have accepted a particular view of 'the child'.

In a similar way Hunt (2006) discussed the use of literature in supporting bereaved children suggesting "literature can provide a vehicle for bereavement management" (p.39), although her research was not solely on the use of literature, but where it was she was concerned solely with its therapeutic use.

By focussing on 'bibliotherapy' much of the research has accepted that death is a subject to be found at least in specialised books. Poling and Hupp (2008) had initially hypothesised that the biological fact of death (and thus direct mention of the word) might be less apparent in books for young children and might not be a feature of books from the late 20th and the 21st centuries (they considered only books from 1986-2004), but found this not to be the case. Of other researchers in the field, Jones (2001) did not specify her search terms, although her study focussed solely on books for therapeutic purposes and thus confined to specialist websites. Green (2008) also confined his search to more specialist websites such as [www.compassionbooks.com](http://www.compassionbooks.com). Therefore, both Jones and Green had a more restricted list from which to select their sample, their concern not being about the inclusion of death in the story so much as the manner in which it was addressed, as noted previously. Poling and Hupp (2008) in their work found they got 20,000 hits when searching with the word death in [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and Green (2008) stated that he found over 400 titles in his search (although he included books that looked at grief and loss).

Wiseman (2013) in her study of recent (2001-2011) fiction publications for children used only the words death and dying as search terms. Johnson (2004) commented that this 'newfound' interest in death in children's literature is recent and added she

had not been able to find books for children prior to 1977 that addressed the subject (p.293). I did not want to take this comment purely at face value, but it served to highlight the apparent lack of such books for much of the twentieth century and thus might appear to begin to offer some explanation as to why, according to Hester and Taylor (2011), death is a problematic subject: perhaps it just was not something that was part of contemporary education. Poling and Hupp (2008) and Moss (1972) also note that the lack of books for children which take on the subject of death prior to the 1970s.

What would seem apparent from the previous research is the purpose for which the books are to be used: that is, they are for support in times of need rather than a normal part of the everyday education of children. Even the research done by Gurtierrez et al (2014) was not simply to consider the place of death in children's books but rather to place it within the context of the emotional and cognitive abilities of children to deal with death.

Gibson and Zaidman (1991) noted "children's literature often mirrors society" (p.232) thus it would not be unusual to see changes in social mores reflected in children's books. However their assumption that the apparent lack of references to death for a significant period during the twentieth century due to death moving out of the home (p.233 1991) might be one that should be questioned given the impact of war during that period. Moss (1972) contrasted the ubiquity of death in Victorian literature with an apparent lack in more recent times, suggesting "today.....we ignore it" (p.530). Jones (2001) also made similar comments. Moss's (1972) research uncovered only six books, two of which were non-fiction and found that "librarian after librarian was unable to come up with anything" (p.530). Despite this period being a time where children's fiction was blossoming once again "death is seldom mentioned" (Jones

2001p.33). I wanted to explore this further and to consider a possible explanation if this was found to be so.

Johnson (2004) attributed the change in attitude to the move towards urbanization in America and a focus on pretending that “everything was all right, even when someone died” (p.297). This view was also echoed by Jones (2001) who noted that it was not until around the 1970s that death reappeared as a feature in children’s stories; she attributes this to the rise in popularity of the school story from the 1920s on in which death was not a feature. She supported her assertion by offering examples of stories from the early to mid- twentieth century where children had been orphaned but discounted these as the circumstances of the death as the reaction to it were not the main thrust of the story (Jones 2001 p.33). As has been noted the focus of her research was bibliotherapy, and thus these stories were rejected as they did fit with her research aims.

For this reason much of the research considered the stage of cognitive development of the child to be a key factor in the selection of books (Polling and Hupp 2008, Green 2008, Jones 2001, Nikolajeva 1995, Pyles 1988, Delisle and McNamee 1981, Moore and Mae 1987, Ordal 1980). The assumption derived from developmental psychology that “most children achieve a mature understanding of death somewhere between five and twelve years (Hoffman 2002 p.13).

Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992) discussed the all-pervasive power of developmental psychology in our current (professional) understanding of children and how this view has become both taken for granted and seen as undisputable truth. In crude terms this questions the assertion that is often suggested that children cannot understand death before the age of 8 (Nagy 1948). This ‘fact’ it is held to be

true and as a consequence is taken to mean young children should not be exposed to death as this will cause them great distress (Kreitler 2005).

However it is notable Gutierrez et al (2014) partially considered the question of whether and how death was represented in children's literature without focussing specifically on its use in terms of bereavement support: one of their research questions being whether "death was a common theme for young children" (p.44) in books. Their study analysed 109 picture books spanning from 1939 to 2003, only 6 of these were from the earliest dates. They found many more examples within the later search dates. Their research also considered how the books were used by parents with children, and they found that the dominant adult 'folk theory' was that "children should be shielded from death" (p.60) despite their finding children being "curious about death" (p.61).

What would seem to be evident from most of the research that has been done is the general acceptance that death has been absent from children's literature for most of the twentieth century but has begun to re-emerge since the 1970s. Although there is some reason to suggest that it has not always been a popular topic this nonetheless bears scrutiny. The focus of much of the previous research has been on developmental appropriateness and its therapeutic potential and as such contains the assumption that death may be not an unusual event in children's lives but when it has occurred "children benefit from literature or bibliotherapy" (Johnson 2004 p.293).

As has been shown there have been many studies (e.g. Gutierrez et al 2014, Polling and Hupp 2008, Green 2008, Jones 2001, Nikolajeva 1995) that have looked at death and children's literature, but more usually from a perspective of bereavement and developmental stage, rather than "an inevitable part of living" (Moore and Mae

1987 p.52) and also they have tended to consider books only from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. .

Though these books exist it would seem that death is a subject on which we “remain silent” (Yalom 2008 p.3). Nonetheless the apparent ‘revival of death’ (Walter 1994) would appear to be clearly seen in the number of children’s books others have found featuring death produced from 1970s onwards.

In this thesis I sought to question how this view has come to dominate the accepted view of childhood (that they should be shielded from death) and by applying a social constructionist perspective to both childhood and the literature have sought to consider the place of death within children’s literature and how the prevailing view of ‘the child’ might influence the portrayal of death therein.

My specific focus was not on books written as therapeutic aids for bereaved children but rather to find, if possible, those books that simply included death as a subject within the story. This was not as easy as I had imagined it might be!

Gutierrez et al (2014) began their search from 1938. I chose to extend this period back to the end of the Victorian era (1890-1910) in order to explore the notion that death is and has been feature in children’s books continually from the earliest times (Gibson and Zaidman 1991). However unlike Gutierrez et al (2014) my purpose was to explore this from a social constructionist perspective in terms of how the changing understanding of the notion of ‘the child’ might influence the subject matter deemed to be fit for children, and thus how it is presented within the literature.

It should be noted that by applying a social constructionist perspective what is being explored is how notions of childhood influence what is written for children about death, rather than the social construction of death itself.

I felt that it would be useful to explore whether death had indeed disappeared from children's literature for a significant part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as many had asserted. This would then allow me to consider what ideas about childhood might have influenced this.

Thus, having considered previous research about death in children's literature, I set out to explore the question of 'whether death appears as a subject in books for young children over the past 120 years', and initially to explore simply the use of death as a subject in children's literature. By using a social constructionist perspective it would then be possible to consider how notions of childhood had changed and thus to offer some plausible explanation for this.

Simply put the exploration asks 'how does the social construction of the child impact on the way death is addressed in children's literature'?

With this in mind I set out to explore where and how death appears within children's literature across the past three centuries using the period 1890-2010. I divided this into three periods for purposes of comparison, these being: 1890-1910, 1950-1970 and 1990-2010.

The research is divided in to three main sections with a final section summarising my findings and a commentary on their impact.

Chapter Two offers an overview of social constructionism and explores the way in which childhood can be considered to have been produced and how this is manifested in the literature. Steinberg (2011) stated this more baldly asserting that "childhood is a creation of society" (p.3) and that it changes over time. Though childhood may feel like a fixed entity that is understood, but sometimes merely describes a mythical time in the past of our own lives and a wished for future for our

own children. It is important to note that the exploration raises the question of what it is we are referring to when we talk about childhood, and seeks to find some clarity by giving a historical overview. Having considered childhood as a social construction, I then link this to the development of specific literature for children, with a particular focus on the subject of death. I examine how the literature and subject matter therein has also been constructed and either reflects or challenges the prevailing view of childhood at specific points in time.

Chapter Three examines the method by which I explore the literature. By considering the use and application of thematic analysis I explain how this is a useful tool to examine work from a social constructionist perspective. I comment on its appropriateness particularly in an exploratory work such as this (Hennink et al 2011). This chapter considers how the use of language can be analysed to offer insight to the dominant discourse around childhood. I explore the problems associated with this method and the need for transparency within the research to avoid appearing haphazard and lacking in rigour. I offer some consideration of how it differs from discourse analysis as such and show how I have used elements of a range of methods which contribute to the uncovering of themes and trends in the literature (Phillips and Hardy 2002). This chapter also demonstrates that thematic analysis is not a *laissez faire* borrowing from whatever method is to hand but is a coherent and robust research method that allows for the justification of decisions.

Chapter Four is an analysis of the themes. I explain the themes that have 'emerged' from the texts and offer a general overview of these. Each theme is then explored in more depth using three examples to uncover how particular aspects of death have

been addressed both within and across each period of time. The themes that began to emerge were similar to those used by Jones (2001) and I used modified versions of her headings to explore the themes further. This chapter links the thematic analysis with the social construction of childhood and considers why and how the prevailing view of childhood is manifested in the literature. I explore each theme in depth using three examples in each theme to show how each period has addressed death. This allows comparisons across the 120 year period to be made.

Chapter Five is a concluding chapter highlighting the particular aspects of this research that offer new insights and challenges to some previous studies. I also offer some consideration about how the findings might be of use in practice.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Children, books and death: a social constructionist perspective.**

*“Before there could be children’s books, there had to be children”* (Townsend 1996 p.3).

The chapter is in three main sections. The first section gives an introduction to social constructionism in general and how this is applied to the interpretation of books, children and death, as depicted within the books. The next section offers a broader overview of children/ childhood as a social construction and considers the emergence of the concept of the child/childhood as a separate category up to the end of the 19th century. The final section is a chronological view of children and children’s books falling into the specific period of my study (1890-2010). This section shows how changing attitudes are manifested within children’s literature. I also give an interpretation of the way in which social construction is being applied to the subject of this study.

#### **2.1 Social Construction**

It will be useful first, to explain the key points of a social constructionist perspective in order to be able understand how I intend to consider the changes in understanding children and childhood over time. I offer a brief explanation of social constructionism

and also refer to works by others who also consider that “language constructs people’s perceptions of the world” (Potter 1996 p.100). Although some (e.g. Foucault) may have chosen not to align themselves with social constructionism in those terms, it should be noted that social constructionism “is a broad church” (Morss 2002 p. 41).

It is my contention that knowledge, and thus the way in which we might interpret the world around us in whatever form, is socially constructed and that the way we talk, write and think about anything is contingent on the time and culture in which we live. Berger and Luckman (1967) considered that the relation of ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’ is constructed by social relations. This is the opposite of an essentialist view of the world in which we can talk about ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ as fixed things. In this view the way things are presented, either in talk or texts, constitutes “part of social practices” (Potter 1996 p.105) and are thus available to be considered in terms of prevailing discourses. Social constructionism views knowledge about the world as a product of social interactions and this includes the way in which things are spoken and written about. So ‘knowledge’ is a version of the way we come to see and understand the world and is not a product of objective observations (Burr 2003). Thus our world is not “naturally or divinely given” (Hendrick 1997a. p.9), but socially constructed. This would also mean that the work here is my interpretation of how I see the world as presented in children’s books, which as themselves are constructions. It should be noted that within a social constructionist perspective all concepts are understood in inverted commas, and takes a critical stance towards taken for granted understandings of the world (Burr 2003). That is; there are no fixed understandings of the world.

Berger and Luckman (1967) discussed the problem inherent in showing that a social constructionist view of the world can have what has previously been accepted as having epistemological validity; because it challenges all preconceived notions and does not assert one truth. They suggested that to try to address such issues is like “trying to push a bus in which one is riding” (Berger and Luckman 1967 p.25). Thus one is both inside and outside the issue at the same time. This point is important to note and highlights one of the key issues with a view that accepts that the way in which the world and what is seen there as entirely contingent on historical period, culture and the society in which we live (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982).

A social constructionist account can be accused of being relativist and of using an ‘anything goes’ attitude. It rejects a positivist view of the world that argues ‘reality’ exists outside its cultural and historical context (Gergen 2003). In short, social constructionism offers “an alternative to the traditional view of fundamental knowledge” (Gergen 2015 p.148). Clearly a social constructionist view is “in opposition to what is referred to as positivism and empiricism in traditional science” (Burr 2003 p.3). Merton (1973) contended that ‘knowledge’ (as represented by scientific fact) asks us to start from a view point of accepting the nature of those facts. Potter (1996) also considered that social construction offers a way in which we may question such facts that claim to be “impersonal, empirically warranted (and) rigorously tested” (p.18). Thus it is hard to see things in a way other than the way we have been shaped to see them. In this thesis I argue that childhood and children’s literature are social constructions and this view runs counter to the dominant discourse of developmental psychology. Burr (1995) stated that we should be “suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be” (p.3); therefore it

is this questioning attitude that allows us (and for me) to attempt to see the world differently.

Any view that suggests that facts are socially constructed stands in opposition to this supposed 'scientific' viewpoint. To assess the validity of this viewpoint Bohan and Russell (2003) suggested that the way in which such interpretations can be judged is by asking questions such as "what purpose is being served by this position. How is it used, and by whom?" (p.249). This means that the reader is not being asked to accept that the exploration in this thesis as the only possible version, but whether it is an acceptable interpretation and that it is an "invitation to (a) new (...) dialogue" (Gergen and Gergen 2003 p.228).

Foucault (1992) stated that "there are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one perceives is absolutely necessary" (p.8). Although I would not wish to assert the "absolute necessity" too strongly, what I will consider by adopting a social constructionist standpoint is that it is possible to challenge the often taken- for- granted assumption that children should not know about (that is they must be protected from), and therefore cannot understand death. By accepting what we know and think about the world is socially constructed, and not fixed, it becomes possible to look at the world in a way other than one that is generally accepted, and thus to offer a different interpretation. Foucault (1998) further suggested that a way of interpreting the world is not to "go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the forgotten things" (p.374), but rather to uncover and discover the complex route events have taken. In offering a historical overview of the constructed nature of childhood and children's literature I seek to expose this route.

Gergen (2003) considered the task of the social constructionist is not to give an account that depends on any empirical validity, but rather to be understood as an account which shows the “vicissitudes of social processes” (p.16). This will also be echoed in the next chapter in Rudd’s (1999) notion of ‘running around’. Social constructionism accepts that “all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative” (Burr 2003 p.4) and are products of social processes, which is the focus of our concerns in this chapter.

Foucault (1972) described a concept which he terms an ‘episteme’; this is a way of seeing things at a particular period of time in history. It is a mental infrastructure that shapes how we see the world and is not conscious, but it operates in such a way we cannot conceive of the world as otherwise than the way we see it. He considered that ‘epistemes’ change in an arbitrary manner and that looking for a linear progression through history is unhelpful, as the changes occur through the networks coming together by, perhaps, chance. What I am suggesting in this chapter is how competing discourses about ‘what children need’ became contested. It is possible to point to events and practices that might appear to be turning points in the way the notions about children and childhood were seen, but they may be coinciding events that only incidentally occur at the same point in time. Nonetheless, in retrospect they appear to point to an alteration in the accepted discourse of the time. When differing or dissenting voices appear there is always a struggle for the power to authorise ‘truth’ (McNaughton 2005).

## 2.2 Social Construction and the emergence of Childhood

It will be important to establish the notions we use when we talk about the child, children or childhood are not fixed and can be shown to be contingent on such things as the historical period, political and cultural views. A common sense understanding tells us childhood is the experience of being a child, living through that early part of life, the 'quarantine' prior to entering into the adult world. James and James (2004) have suggested "the social category of "children" is (...) in many ways arbitrary and not solely determined by age and biology of children's bodies" (p.34). In order to establish the idea that the very notion of what constitutes 'child' and 'childhood' is constructed it will be necessary to give some background (Frønes 2005). This will take us further back in history than the dates being used later in the thesis. This section therefore will consider the establishment of the notion of the 'child' as a separate category, up to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Jenks (2005) suggested that within the social sciences childhood is a relatively recent phenomenon and "the idea of childhood only emerged at a comparatively late stage in the historical process (Cox 1996 p.60). Shipman (1972) considered it was only in 1899 that the law recognized children as having rights as a separate category. James and Prout (1997) have suggested this means that although we may look at historical representations of children and childhood we must consider these in terms of themes emerging over time (p.9), as each age will define childhood differently. Depending on where we seek those definitions we may also find a range of answers (Ariès 1974, Cox 1996, James et al 1998, Hendrick 1997a). Such categories include the child of the enlightenment, the child of romanticism, the Victorian child and the child of the millennium (Cox 1996, Hendrick 2015). Each of these historic views offers a different focus for the understanding of what we mean

by child and childhood and thus influences what may be deemed suitable as children's literature in that period.

Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992) would agree the terms are culturally, historically and politically contingent and this of itself means the terms are slippery concepts. Equally Steinberg (2011) stated "childhood is a creation of society" (p.3) and thus changing over time. I take the view that what is said about children is not fixed over time, but rather the ways in which children are spoken and written about "are intimately connected to the way (...) society is organised and run" (Burr 2003p.54). In a similar way to Ariès' (1996) exploration of childhood through the manner in which children are represented in paintings, I will, later, use children's books to demonstrate the changing views of children and childhood.

Ariès (1966) commented when referring to representations of children in art that "there was no place for the child in the medieval world" (p.31) and that also at that time "childhood was unknown" (p.32). He based these observations on how children were represented in paintings of the time. In art works the children were depicted as wearing the same clothing as adults and so, Ariès concluded, did not appear to have a separate life specific to children. (Let us note here that the art works are a construction and are 'artificial' in the fullest sense of the word, as are the books which I use in this thesis). Clearly there have always been infants and babies, but the point Ariès (1996) was making is the boundary between adulthood and childhood was not shown to be clearly defined in the way it would seem to be in later periods. From these representations (when children were dressed the same as adults) it could be inferred that childhood was not a separate state with the implication also being that the emotional content of parenting towards children was also less

significant in this period. He states “childhood was simply an unimportant phase of which there was no need to keep a record” (Ariès 1996 p.36).

### **2.3 Taboo subjects**

A similar example might be in terms of what might be deemed currently an ‘adult’ subject: death. In earlier times access to the same information and knowledge about the world did not appear to be constrained by age (Shipman 1972); there was no obvious barrier between the adult and child’s world if we accept the art work referred to by Ariès (1996) as ‘documentary evidence’. To illustrate this lack of differentiation we might consider that (although documented evidence about children’s access to information about death prior to the mid-17th century is scant), the ready access to visual material (for then a largely illiterate population) was a notable feature of the medieval world. The knowledge of the right way to die was written down and published in the *Ars Moriendi* and was available to be read by those lay people who could read (Binski 1996 p.39). It was a ‘How to’ guide for the ordinary sinner. Knowing how to die well was an important factor in the life of the medieval person, including children (Kastenbaum 2004). Death then was an event (if an ordinary one), for which one needed to prepare and to follow the correct procedure in order to die properly. It was fully part of the collective life and not a private matter. That children were part of this collective life and not kept apart would appear to be supported (Jenks 2005, Ariès 1996, Pollock 1983, Tucker 1974). Children and adults would have seen images in churches and graveyards, for example, depicting death and they would have heard the same bible stories and folk tales. As Postman (1994) stated the lack of the need and ability to be able to read allowed adults and children to access the same material. Learning was based on oral transmission of culture and knowledge. Children did not need to be seen as a separate category except in terms

of the division of labour (Jenks 2005), otherwise they were “not separated or insulated from the adult world” (p.57). Tucker (1974) agreed “the medieval idea that children were not important persists into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (p.229). So it is possible to assume that adult and child awareness (or access to information at least) of death might have been the same, or at least potentially so. The visual world needed no special skills to interpret it and if images were all around then adults and children alike would be aware of the same things. We can therefore suggest that before the seventeenth century children counted for little (Pollock 1983, Tucker 1974) and childhood was seen as a state to be “endured rather than enjoyed” (Tucker 1974 p.230). Early writings focussed on the obligations of the young to their parents and not vice versa. Some have suggested that this was due to the uncertain mortality of the young with emotional investment in children not encouraged or valued: - “The infant was too likely to die (....) to be of central importance” (Shipman 1972 p.8).

## **2.4 Childhood becomes a separate state**

Ariès (1996) considered it was during the seventeenth century that changes in behaviour towards a separate notion of what children should know became more widespread and no longer the notion of “a few isolated moralists” ( p.107). This attitude was manifested in literature, religion and pedagogy. What we can see in his work is perhaps the “emergence of various discourses relating to childhood” (Cox 1996 p.6). It became fashionable and ‘modern’ to expect that children should be kept separate from adults and indeed a crucial part of their upbringing was to ensure that they “were not spoiled and became ill-mannered” (Ariès 1996 p.127). Here we

see the beginnings of a special and separate category made visible not only by physical stature but also, for example- by specialist clothing, (at least in terms of how children were depicted in pictures). The same comparison can be also made about games. Children had always taken part in games and playing but had engaged in the same play and games as adults and the 'need' to separate children from adult games only began to be of concern in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where the separation was due to concern with the moral welfare of children (Ariès 1996). Games and playing were defined as either evil or good and the choice of those deemed to be good showed the newly found "desire to safeguard its (the child's) morality and also to educate it (sic)" (Ariès p.79).

This illustrates a change in attitude towards the notion of children and childhood and from this point onwards we can begin to see the emergence of two particular attitudes towards this newly defined group: on the one hand the need to protect children (and to keep them innocent) from adults, and on the other the need to keep children apart in order that they may be socialised (or trained) in the correct behaviour in readiness to (eventually) become part of the adult world. Children were thus not to be seen as "beings" but rather as "becomings", they were unfinished and "a project" (Smart et al 2001). Postman (1994) attributed this change in attitude towards the young to rediscovery of shame, lost, he suggested, in the medieval world. He asserted that "without a well-developed idea of shame, childhood cannot exist" (p.9). Children were seen as being unformed and incomplete and in need of being formed by adults to fit to society. The sense of shame would keep them apart from adult concerns. Shipman (1972) considered that "the socialization of the young is organized by adults in order that successive generations shall learn the blueprint for living that we call culture" (p.7).

Thus it would seem the status of the child had altered and we find some agreement that notions of childhood and consideration of children particularly came into focus in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Jenks (2005 p.58) suggested that it is from this period on the child comes fully into the spotlight as a focus of adult attention.

The publication of Locke's '*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*' (2016 originally 1728) introduced a new way of thinking about children as inherently neither good nor bad. Children were conceived as being born into the world as uncorrupted beings. They were seen as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, onto which could be written the desired ways of society (Woodhead and Montgomery 2003). As such they could be shaped and formed, starting from a point of neutrality. Scraton (1997) stated that "childhood is mapped by rituals imposed from above" (p.163) and so the "ritual" of schooling became significant in shaping the childhood. Children needed to be educated to develop rational minds and self-control. Thus in the 17th century, prior to the more ready availability of cheap books, books for children tended to be school based or focussing on morals and good behaviour, thus reflecting the societal norms demanded of children at that time. The best known of these books is "*A Token for Children*", (Janeways 1795) first published in 1671 and which remained popular reading in nurseries into the 1800s. The purpose was very clearly one of teaching children that they should never keep far from their thoughts the fact that they will die, and to shape their behaviour so as to avoid eternal damnation. High infant mortality rates made death a very real fact in children's lives but the importance of the religious focus on being prepared for death was clear.

It should be noted that fitting society rather than enjoyment or play was the main concern and so the purpose of childhood would not particularly contain notions of protection or maintenance of innocence at this point (Shipman 1972). Death was

seen as a fit subject for the young and should be part of their education, with a clear eye to the future.

However this was not universally accepted. Rousseau saw children as primarily innocent believing that nature was the best influence on the child and that they should be treated as “a little human animal destined for a spiritual and moral life” (Woodhead and Montgomery 2003). He believed that children should be valued as children, not as little adults in the making. Only by avoiding reading and education in a formal sense could “men live as close to nature as possible” (Postman 1994 p. 13). The Romantic Movement took up Rousseau’s notion of the natural child and considered the child to be innocent. The protection and desire to keep innocent childlike qualities became of key importance potentially giving a direct line to our current discourse on protection. The child was seen born innocent and it was society, particularly urban society which was the corrupting factor. Nonetheless the state of childhood, however viewed, required specialist materials.

It has been asserted -“the 1740s are commonly regarded as the decade in which both the English novel and the English children’s book got under way” (Townsend 1996 p.13). Even though the use of the printed text would allow for the exclusion of children from adult concerns it would appear that “when books expressly for children first appeared in English, they were often about death” (Gibson and Zaidman 1991 p. 232). However the purpose of the books was not to simply include children in ‘adult’ subjects, but rather to prepare them for the world in general.

Carpenter (1985) suggested that children’s books set out an idea of the world as it should be and thus presented an idealised view of society. However it is important

to remember that both the words idealised and society are unstable and constructed concepts.

## **2.5 The emergence of Children's literature to the mid- 19th century**

As the attitude towards childhood as a separate state from adulthood began to be more widely accepted the publishing of cheap books for children with pictures became more fully established (Tucker 1990). This began to mark an apparent change in attitudes in notions of what it meant to be a child and of childhood. At this time, for example, John Newbery (who was the best known of the children's publishers) produced a range of books whose purpose was not only to educate but also to entertain (Townsend 1996, Carpenter 2009) and these were often sold with a toy or pincushion.

Having fun, or at least the idea that children might play together (away from adults) was beginning to be seen as important. Moral tales continued to be published for children but often they were also meant to entertain and amuse as much as to offer instruction: for example *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes* published by Newbery (Townsend 1996). Children's books had begun to reflect the notion of childhood as separate and different from adulthood and thus needing or warranting its own specialised literature. The idea that amusement might be a purpose of these books was new (Townsend 1996), but they still carried overt messages about the expected behaviour of the time. So the books offered clear moral teaching and as Carpenter (1985) suggested, the message from the author was "by all means let them have their fun, but the opportunity of providing models of ideal behaviour is not to be wasted" ( p.1).

## 2.6 Contested attitudes towards childhood

Books influenced by the Romantic view featured stories of wise children who were able to triumph over the wicked. Deaths still featured but the stories tended to stress how the child's simplicity helped them see the wickedness of the adult world. The importance of witnessing the death bed scene would therefore be less important than learning how to live a good and sinless life.

In this late 18th century and early 19th century period it is clear that different voices could be heard speaking with, apparent, authority about children and childhood. The desire to keep innocent childlike qualities and to protect children began to be the more dominant discourse for a time (Pollock 1983).

This sentimentalised view of childhood remained prevalent in the Romantic Movement of the late 1800s (Woodhead and Montgomery 2003) and was arguably never entirely lost. However in the early Victorian era an evangelical revival moved that focus from childhood innocence to one of concern to shape and correct (Shipman 1972). It was thus that the 'ritual' of schooling became increasingly significant in shaping childhood. (In its early stages by no means available to all). Children needed to be educated to develop rational minds and self-control.

Concerns about childhood and the experience of being a child can also be seen manifested in the 19th century reforms of child labour. In the late 18th century few people spoke out about child labour but by the beginning of the 19th century those concerns began to be voiced (James and Prout 1997, Hendrick 1997 a). Child labour had previously been viewed as a means of teaching children the values of labour and discipline, but had become a focus of concern, and attitudes suggested that labour was not, or at least should not be, part of any 'real' childhood experience

(Shipman 1972). A movement to exclude the child from the world of the adult became apparent with the notion of protection beginning to be firmly embedded in societal attitudes (de Mause 1974). The linking of childhood to ideas of slavery and the lack of free choice in giving their labour became an important focus of the reformers. Children were to be seen as children first (and not small people with economic use) and thus as separate from adults. The use of Acts of Parliament (for example: The Factory Act (1833) to embed and enact this changing view of childhood served to enforce the discourse around what childhood should be. Children were seen to be in need of protection (to preserve their innocence?) and thus they needed to be educated separately in schools (Jenks 2005). Although reformers did not all share the same vision of childhood they shared concerns about the physical and moral dangers of child labour.

From a social constructionist view point it became apparent that the 'discourse' around children and childhood had shifted from the previously accepted authoritative voices (the church, community, family) to an 'expert' realm. These 'experts' held knowledge about children. In Foucauldian terms this authoritative voice is termed power/knowledge and allows for "cultural disciplining" (Gergen 2015 p.52). In other words it becomes possible to say 'this is how children should live and act', and structures were put in place to cause this to be so.

So, for example, in 1833 a Royal Commission declared that "the period of childhood ...ceases" at the age of 13. This conclusion was based on the findings from physiological studies on puberty and strove to show that childhood was a different state from adulthood (Tucker 1974). It set out rules protecting children from exploitation. The Factory Act of 1833 prohibited children under 8 from selective employment and between the ages of 9-13 they were restricted to working only 8

hours a day. Although in practical terms the Factory Act 1833 had little initial impact it nonetheless established the notion of the child as separate and in need of protection, whether from their own evil natures or from exploitation by adults.

In a similar way concerns began to be raised about the delinquent children who needed to be removed from the street in order to be corrected ( and kept away from adult concerns) and returned to their 'true' state –that of innocence (Jenks 2005).

The need for a more universal type school provision became more pressing in order to remove children from the dangers of the street and the wrong sort of influences.

When it could be known where children were then it was possible to make sure they were being guided on the right moral path and learning the things they would need to know in order to become full members of society (Ariès 1996), and by implication to be protected from things they should not know. Compulsory schooling therefore allowed children to both be protected from exploitation but also protected from their natural inclination to the bad (Shipman 1972). The impact of compulsory schooling also moved the child from the parents' grasp into the care of the state for a significant proportion of his time. Even when the child was not at school the state began to have the right to ask where the child was and what they were doing.

The 'Forster Act' or, more formally, the Elementary Education Act 1870 saw the introduction of local school boards to provide non-denominational education. A further act in 1880 provided for compulsory education from the ages of 5 to 10, the upper age limit being raised to 11 in 1893 (The Elementary Education Act (School Attendance)1893).

Thus, removing children from the work force by way of The Factory Act 1833 and then later requiring them to be in school also firmly placed the school (and thus the

state) in the position of protector of innocence, rather than the family. Schools were able to discipline children in order to protect children from delinquency despite the fact they were set up to remove them from exploitation and brutality by unscrupulous employers. The proper place for children became the classroom with others of the same age (Hendrick 1997); they were therefore different from adults and required different institutions.

It could be suggested that the placing of all children in the school setting was the beginning of a “new construction of childhood” (James and Prout 1997 p.46). Jenks (2005) states “The child has moved through time from obscurity to centre stage” (p.58) so that by the 19th century the focus of the Victorians became firmly fixed on the place of the child in society and in their protection and education. The focus on the belief that childhood should be special and that innocence should be part of the childhood experience became a dominant view. Thus by having defined children as a separate and special group it became possible to allow for a world where the attention was more narrowly focussed which thus led to “an increasing specialisation and technicalising of knowledge” (McGilchrist 2010 p.429). Thus the understanding of children and childhood would require experts to offer guidance on the best way to manage them. Children had become a cause for concern in terms of their place in the urban landscape. This was not only in terms of disease, but that of exploitation and exposure to adult immorality within the factory and the streets (for the children of the poor). Children were to be seen as children first and thus as separate from adults.

In the 1880s the Child Study movement came into being (Prout 2005). It concerned itself initially with impact of poverty and as such considered the physical and mental condition of children. All children therefore became a resource for close study as

'children' and not as factory workers or farm workers. It would appear that between 1840 and 1910 "children achieved a cultural status very different from what it was before" (Plotz 1995 p.4). By being in school children were available to be studied by dint of being together in one place and this allowed for children to become "attractive research-subjects" (James and Prout 1997 p.47). Thus they could be defined as a new social category and subjects of 'scientific' research.

## **2.7 Scientific focus on childhood**

There was an increasing interest in how the child developed following studies of evolution by Darwin and others (Prout 2005, Hendrick 1997). By observing children and developing "guiding principles" (James and Prout 1997 p.48) teachers and others concerned with the developing child could be given sound 'scientific' information about the individual child and how to promote her healthy moral and physical development. Hendrick (2015) stated that this movement was part of a "comprehensive movement towards enveloping childhood in a world of scientific experts of one sort or another" (p.42). Childhood was no longer something that could be seen as occurring naturally ( that is to say it was no longer deemed a quarantine period before adulthood), or at least there was a risk that left alone without the intervention of experts, some children would not manage to develop in the desired, or perhaps even prescribed, way. Thus the focus of the care and welfare of the child moved from the individual parent to the state.

Bratton (1981) claimed that "the concept of childhood, as a special and important state apart from adults (...) was one of the fruits of the age of revolutions" (p.11).

James et al (1998) also considered that the 18th and early 19th century discourse

around childhood innocence points us towards contemporary ways of shaping childhood. It would be foolish to suggest that there is a once and for all shift in the view of childhood (Locke did not share the view that childhood was “an Elysian paradise” (James et al 1998 p.15)), but that the child needed to be shaped (or protected) by ‘expert’ adult intervention had become firmly established. Thus what might be considered to be fit subject matter for children could also legitimately be controlled.

It thus became possible to define what was “normal as well as the abnormal” (Keir 1952 p.10) and so perhaps have the “authority” to influence children’s lives including their reading matter and thus to delimit what was ‘fitting’ for them to know. This illustrates a shift in the way childhood was thought about and thus had an impact on practices (for example in the content of children’s books). The discourse of the child as separate (Foucault 1980) became the accepted ‘truth’ and thus we see “to naturalise something is to accept it as part of the existing order of things” (McNaughton 2005 p.16). So, childhood had become a time for innocence, play and amusement, children had specific needs (even in books) that were firmly defined as being different from those of adults.

## **2.8 The new children’s literature**

In the mid-19th century although there were some changes in children’s books they did not avoid harsh subjects such as death, starvation and abuse (Bratton 1981) but, rather than being the simple moral tales of the early part of the century, tended to be written as romances or tales of adventure, using allegory to deliver their moral: *The Water Babies* by Kingsley published first in 1863 being a well-known example.

However the moral tone and improving nature of children’s literature was kept up by

those who rejected the influence of Rousseau and books for children continued to show a moralising tone well into the 19th century (Townsend 1996). One of the most influential was *The History of the Fairchild Family* (Sherwood 1818) perhaps most notable for a scene in which a child is taken off to see the corpse of the old gardener. “You never saw a corpse, I think?” (p.146). The purpose of this would appear to be to remind the child what might happen to sinners.

Many children’s writers produced books that reflected the attitudes of society at the time with a representation what was then deemed to be the ‘ideal’ child. Often these books were of an evangelical nature (often published by the Religious Tract Society (RTS). They were deemed to be suitable for education of the young as they had the “authority of inspired truth” (Bratton1981 p.38) with titles such as “*A Recent Instance of the Lord’s goodness to Children. Exemplified in the happy death of James Steven, Camberwell, Near London, who died March 8th, 1806, aged eight years and eight months*” ( in Bratton 1981 p.35). The RTS set out to offer suitable reading matter for the poor believing that “no proper reading matter existed for the use of children and those who were beginning to read” (Bratton 1981 p.32). Others wanted to challenge the RTS movement which encouraged children to read, by offering ‘penny histories’ which were stories of fantasies and fairy stories (Bratton 1981). These books reflected the conflict in the view that children had to be managed and shaped in order to be fit for society. Some felt that childhood might be deemed then as a waiting room, or mere preparation before entering the ‘real world’ of adulthood; whereas others wished for it to be a time of enjoyment and freedom. Following the rules and behaving in the correct manner was as important, for example dolls dressed in mourning clothes were sold (for middle class children) so that children might be aware through their play of the correct ways to mourn.

By the second half of the 19th century there was a flourishing of a new way of writing for children, and although the didactic story did not go away, stories for children were being written that included a wide range of themes such as adventure, domestic life, school days, fantasy and animal stories (Cunningham 2006). Children's writers had begun to express emotion (Butler 1972) rather than offering merely moral tales; even where this was still the case it was done with humour such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, written by Carroll (1865). Although fairy tales began to fall out of favour being deemed as irrational and thus unsuitable for children's education, many were adapted "to reduce the ethical irrationality .....and to present the reader with something approaching an ordered moral universe" (Carpenter 1985 p.4). Those fairy tales being written for children at this time demonstrated this juxtaposition of love and death, reflecting a change in attitude towards death, no longer as a warning but reflecting personal loss (Walter 1994). This was in turn perhaps a reflection of the increasing importance of the individual and of family and away from the wider community (Prout 2005). Examples of this more emotional rather than moral tale can be seen in *The Selfish Giant* (Wilde 1888) - where the little boy that the giant loves dies; or similarly in *The Happy Prince* (Wilde 1888) where the little bird helps the prince and then "kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet" (in Butler 1972 p.113). Death and remembering through love can be seen as coming together in some children's stories as they did in the more sentimental and showy expressions of memory within Victorian society as a whole. Children were not sheltered from the deaths around them in terms of the rituals of display. They too needed to be instructed on the meaning of death and its rituals (Douglas 2002). During this period it was also not uncommon for families to have post-mortem

photographs taken. The portrait would be on display and there would be a sense of pride in having a lasting memorial to the dead child shown as part of the family.

As the population increased by the movement of people in to towns then the significance of the individual death became less important except to those closely involved and so “bereavement becomes a psychological experience of the individual, rather than a shared experience of the group” (Walter 1999 p.34), but one that demanded an emotional response.

By the end of the 19th century the stories for children had moved away (for the most part) from the heavily didactic stories at the end of the 1700s and early 1800s and stories became much more domestic, in emotional content if not setting, reflecting the focus on the home and not the wider community (Hunt 1994).. “Christianity and a social morality (...) belonged to an earlier period” (Bratton 1981 p.197) and significant changes in family structure and the beginning of the nuclear family also occurred at this time. Hunt (2009a) suggested that “some idea of a child or childhood motivates writers and determines both form and content of what they write” (p.13). They may be influenced by the desire to depict an idealised view of childhood, whether real or imagined. Books children were able to read (Hunt 1994) as a result of schooling, began to reflect this new image of what childhood should be. The changing attitudes about children and childhood appeared to be evident in the content of books for children; “these changes in the didactic pattern of writing (.....) for children spring, one must presume, from changes of emphasis in what society regarded as desirable” (Bratton 1981 p.193). Thus the place of the child had been fully established as separate and special.

## **2.9 Childhood and Children's Literature from the late 19th century to 21st century**

In this section I consider more closely the established concept of the child and how this might be manifested in children's literature more particularly from the end of the 19th century to current times.

The change expressed in the Victorian period (that children are a separate category) is echoed by the physical removal of children into to the classroom and away from the adult world of work (Ariès 1996). Not only should they be in a "specialised" environment but this also required that they should have more specialised materials. As Nikolajeva (1995) pointed out that "the view of childhood and the educational aspects of reading have been crucial to children's literature" (p.ix). The schoolroom might have be seen as a place where control could be exerted on what might be deemed suitable for children to read, and as such influenced what might also be written for them (Cunningham 2006). Rose (1984) considered children's literature to be heavily controlled by adults so as not to disturb their own views of childhood, and so in this period we can see books beginning to reflect this new discourse of childhood being a time for adventure and fun.

For Foucault (1977) discourse is not only the language used to talk or write about something but includes practices and representations, so, for example, manifested in children's books. Discourses cannot be reduced just to be either language or material things, they are always both. Inevitably stories written for children reveal something about attitudes and mores of the time, as they are also constructions. So following Foucault (1980), we might suggest that a discourse can gain authority because "its authority can also be seen in its power to make things happen" (p.25).

Thus it is possible to say what children should know, through the books written for them (and therefore what they should not). Bratton (1981) considered that the changes seen in the literature “spring, one must presume, from changes of emphasis in what society regarded as desirable” (p.193).

By the end of the 19th century children were no longer merely valued for their economic contribution to the family and, as we have seen, the notion of children as a separate and special category with their own needs had become firmly established (Tucker 1990). By this time the role of the expert or the professional in the lives of children had also become a more significant factor in deciding the needs of children, including the books they should read (Bratton 1981).

Although children’s literature continued to offer moral tales at the turn of the century the focus became less explicitly Christian. Stories emphasised the importance of truthfulness and being unselfish; adventure stories where children could commit bad deeds or do wrong,(so long as it was for good reasons), began to offer a more interesting form of reading matter (Hunt 1994,Bratton 1981). Even so, these stories reflected a domestic life that would be familiar to the reader, which included death, but writing for children became professionalised and authors began to move away from the didactic and moralistic.

Following the Education Act (1870) there was a real flourishing in the style and nature of children’s literature often referred to as “the first golden age” (Hunt 1994 p.59). Reading and writing had become “an expected part of the childhood experience” (Bratton 1981 p.191). As a result commercial publishers began to expand their lists to include children’s’ literature, both in terms of school text books and more particularly, fiction (Tucker 1990, Bratton 1981). Fantasy stories brought

in the idea of talking animals and these creatures were not bound by simple moral rules. In previous centuries “instruction predominated over amusement”(Carpenter 1985 p.2), but by the late 19th and early years of the 20th Century the genre of children’s literature had become well established with adventure stories, fantasy and a rich vein of animal stories had begun to be available to children. Childhood had become a time to play and “reading was no longer felt to be (.....) to be a dangerous tool” (Bratton 1981 p.191). Children’s books at this time were for a “recognizable childhood (.....) and any didactic intent (.....) was a poor second to entertainment” (Hunt 1994 p.59).

The turn of the century saw changes in the fortunes of the British Empire and also the death of Queen Victoria. This brought in a new era and a new century. The high Victorian era had seen lavish sentimentalism manifested in mourning rituals but also in the emotional descriptions in children’s books (Bratton 1981), but in the early years of the 20th century this changed.

Notably children and their lives began to be seen as the focus of the story, they were addressed directly “rather than being mediated by the author” (Hunt 1994 p.59). This could be seen to mark a recognition that the story could be written as if through the child’s eyes and no longer needed an adult voice to interpret it (although of course those books were written by adults consciously trying to write from the child’s viewpoint). Authors did not seek to show any distance between them and the reader (Hunt 1994); they did not need to speak down to their readers but often used irony to allow their readers to share in the jokes. One notable example can be seen in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) where on the second page the picture of Peter’s father in a pie is meant to be read as a warning but is done with humour rather than heavy moralising of the earlier years.

As commented above stories had begun to reflect the family life familiar to the reader; even Peter Rabbit is a family story.

The family was becoming smaller in size and, as the infant mortality rate also began to drop, children (at least those of the middle classes) seemed to be more valued (Hunt 1994). The idea of the special and precious child within the family had been firmly established. Thus the purchasing of books and toys for the children of the middle classes became more common. Inglis (1981) cited the notion of 'family' as it can be seen to be constructed by the end of the 19th century as, the "central missing link in the interconnections of values, identity and politics" (p.85). The home had become a haven (or was constructed as such) from which to pass on "personal values" (Inglis 1981 p.85). Authors of children's books began to write 'Arcadian' stories such as *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (1994, originally published in 1908), reflecting a world remote from the urban landscape and "concerns of the everyday world" (Carpenter 1985 p.16). These stories served to show even more fully that the world of the child was seen as being separate from that of the adult. In these worlds they would be kept safe, and childhood could be seen to be a time of tranquillity and enjoyment (Butts 1992). This peaceful world of the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras seen in the books written for children at the time contained what has been described as "useful fictions" (Myers 1989 p.52) which served to reinforce the apparently new view of childhood as a time of play and innocence: - Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) might be one such example.

Egoff (1980) considered that once, having found this new separate state of childhood writers of children's books continued to depict this view from the "1900s to the late 1950s" (p.416) and showed a "surprising unanimity of purpose in their view of

childhood” (p.416). The former didactic stories of the Victorian period continued for a while but, after the First World War there was a change in the literary scene, we note “the effect was deeply felt in children’s literature as elsewhere” (Townsend 1996 p.119).

The change in tone was not immediate but rather “petered out rather than came to an abrupt end” (Carpenter 1985 p.210). Death no longer featured as a subject in children’s books in the same manner as it had done previously. Possibly the war had meant a too obvious awareness of death, touching almost all families, that it became a subject of taboo (Walter 1994). But the impact of war was not the only factor in this changing attitude that caused both death and grief to become private. As Walter (1997) suggested, for the women and children the losses were too great and death was too real and too pervasive for it to be thought about. A new attitude of public stoicism and trust in science became normal.

Increasingly in the 1920s and 30s deaths did not happen in the home but in the hospital ward. “The dying man’s bedroom has passed from the home to the hospital” (Ariès 1983 p.571). Death could be said to have been “sequestered” that is “removed from the public realm” (Howarth 2007p.16). As such death no longer was seen to be a subject that should be open for all to understand and know about. Or at least, there would seem to have been a consensus view that it could no longer be spoken about openly. Death had been taken firmly into the realms of ‘disciplinary’ power limiting what might be said about a subject and by whom (Foucault 1998). Death needed to be managed by experts. Thus removing death from the home had the effect of removing it from the experience of most children.

This change was mirrored in children's books with, death and other difficult subjects apparently no longer fit subjects. We might consider a parallel example suggested by Foucault (1981) in "The Will to Knowledge" (p.4). He suggested that children, in particular, became excluded from talk about sex. Foucault described this as a 'repressive hypothesis' and considered that by suppressing certain subjects the discourse altered those subjects to taboo. Foucault (1981) suggested that people had not begun to talk about sex any less but, that things were said in a different way and in different places. So by analogy, the structures and institutions (schools for example and also children's literature) in which children were found could repress or exclude certain ways of talking and being. Foucault (1981) described this as the transformation of talk into discourse; that is, the permitted way of talking about something and the repression of other ways of talking. Thus "officially sanctioned truth always silences alternative truths" (Rabinow 1984 p.27). In terms of the content of children's books this then allowed for the childhood to be constructed as a place free from adult concerns, such as death. A general silencing of death was seen not only in the lives of children, but there was a change in the place of death in public life.

We might also consider that the world had changed for adults and as Walter (1999) suggested there was a general reduction in the mourning period following the First World War. "There was no way that women of any class could spend the rest of the war in mourning" (Walter 1999 p.37). Although grief continued to be felt, loved ones were still missed; the overt expression of grief became to be seen as morbid if not indulgent. Freud's work, *On Mourning and Melancholia* was first published in 1917 in which he introduced the notion of the grief work hypothesis (Freud1940). This hypothesis suggested that the bereaved should go through a process in which they

remove all affection from the deceased in order to reinvest in another. Although his work was not applied to children, if this described the desired adult behaviour then it might be assumed children would also model this. Following the war this would seem to have described what many people appeared to do, at least publicly. It is not surprising then that the style and the content of children's books also reflected this change: thus "literature was for pleasure rather than for admonition" (Egoff 1980 p.416).

Hunt (1994) in quoting the Library Association Review described the children's books available in the post-war period as "a few admirable books, submerged in an ocean of terrible trash" (p.106). It seemed that writers were uncertain how to deal with war and death and so "respectable writers for children were silent" (Hunt 1994 p.104). By the mid-1920s there were new stories emerging but these avoided the realities of the world and were often fantasy tales; examples might be *Winnie the Pooh* (Milne 1926) followed by *The House at Pooh Corner* (Milne 1928). The previous suspicion of fantasy had been overcome and other stories for children described magical kingdoms; such as Masfield's *The Midnight Folk* (1927), *The Box of Delights* (1935) and Tolkien's *The Hobbit* in 1937. The books written for children at this time, arguably tended to depict the childhood the authors hoped the children might have. It might be suggested that the authors could not bear to look at real life too closely following the First World War and this was also an escape for them, or they wanted to look back to former idyllic times.

The gentle tales of peaceable animals and fantastic creatures spoke of a world not at war. Others have suggested that the war highlighted "the failure of adults and the vulnerability of childhood" (Hunt 1994 p.105) and so was too harsh to deal with in fiction (Watkins 1999). Egoff (1980) agreed that the desire to show childhood as a

time of innocence and nostalgia for the writer's own childhoods kept their stories to a separate world where children were "busy and happy" (p.417).

In the 1930s Arthur Ransome began to write his series of *Swallows and Amazons* stories and these books show clearly this constructed world of the busy, happy child (Hunt 1994). These were not fantasy as such, but real stories about the lives of real children – however far away from the lives of most children they might have been. This was an ideal 'real' life where parents kept children safe but were firmly in the background. Adventure and jeopardy of some kind could be seen in many of the stories written by others in this period, but they hint at (or paint in vivid colour) an Arcadian idyll (Townsend 1998). There was no need to remind anyone about death, they had lived through it on a daily basis. Other stories in this period were about family life –perhaps echoing back to former times - the daily domestic stories of the living not of the dead and the dying -children were sometimes orphans (as in *Ballet Shoes* by Streatfield (2015 originally 1936) but this appears to be used as a convenient device for adventure without the intervention or warning voice of a parent, rather than something on which the reader might dwell as a significant part of their story. On the whole the style of story being produced was "clear, uncomplicated, and generally neutral" (Hunt 1994 p.120). Where death did occur it tended to be in naturalistic animal stories, but on the whole "realism of the rougher kind was not common in children's books of the inter-war years" (Townsend 1996 p.142). Egoff (1980) would have agreed by saying "there were war stories, stories of poor children, (...) but they were few in number, and such subjects were not emphasized" (p.417).

## **2.10 Childhood as a specialist study**

At the same time children also began to be more clearly regulated by specialist knowledge such as developmental psychology. Thus the changes in tone of books deemed suitable for them could be supported by reference to 'scientific' knowledge. The work of child psychologists had a profound impact, and continues to do so, on how children were viewed and to impact our understanding of childhood (Hendrick 2015). The work of both Cyril Burt and Susan Isaacs was of particular influence (Hendrick 1997). The emotional and mental state of the child rather than merely the economic circumstances of their rearing began to be the focus of child studies. The development of Child Guidance Clinics in the 1920s and 30s highlighted the need to treat children who were maladjusted. The range of disorders it was possible to diagnose allowed for a raft of experts to be called in to promote certain practices in order to produce happy children in happy families (Prout and James 2015). (You will recall the comment earlier about children's books depicting busy happy children). The family was seen as being the key for the development of emotional and social stability (Reynolds 2005). The focus on child development as crucial for successful adulthood became established as fact and replaced religious notions of previous centuries and children's stories of the time reflected this. These were as much part of the construction as the notion of family being constructed by the social policy of the time (Reynolds 2005).

The child then had become the focus as regards a family member and as public responsibility (James and Prout 1997). Frónes (2005) suggested that the psychological focus considered that children were to be studied in such a way that "the social and cultural framework constituting the life and conditions of children was not part of the developmental analysis" (p.267). That is to say the cultural and

historical context in which the children were living was not seen as a relevant factor in their development, as that context (the nuclear family) was constructed as 'normal' and as such desirable. But as children, as a social category, became ever more separated from adults and were moved into specific social environments their "minds become the specialised territory of child psychologists and educationalists" (James and James 2004 p.35). Concern about 'healthy' development began to be the concern of all those involved with the children. Mothers were seen to be significant in shaping the next generation and were expected to make sure their children were being measured and checked to be sure they were developing healthily (Prout, 2005, Reynolds 2005). Although the focus of interest had altered (from the street to within the home) we can see echoes of previous times in this attitude towards the shaping of the child. From the 1920s and onwards this was no longer about morality alone but health in the broadest sense.

The focus on developmental stages meant that within the study of childhood there was a focus on the child's age and this allowed for them to be classified in relation to expectations in terms of behaviour, knowledge and competence in various areas: reading being one (Woodhead and Montgomery 2003). This also meant that the school where children were divided by age became a place where they could be assessed and measured against their peers. This understanding informs our everyday thinking about children and childhood where we can place each child on a continuum against certain milestones and assess how they are in relation to the 'normal' expectation for their age. "The very familiarity of developmental ways of thinking and organizing children's lives means it is easy to overlook how powerful age/stage thinking has become in contemporary Western constructions of childhood" (Woodhead and Montgomery 2003 p.90). The focus on developmental stages had

initially concerned itself more with the physical growth of children, but an awareness and concern about the intellectual ability and then the psychological wellbeing of the child increased over the twentieth century. Although this continues to be seen as relevant to child care practices it was between the 1920s and 1950s that the science around child-rearing was in its heyday (Reynolds 2005). It would be fair to say that from the late 19th century to the present, developmental psychology has “become the dominant academic discipline concerned with children” (Prout 2005 p.50).

Although I am writing in such a way as to offer a chronology in order to make sense of the concept of the ‘child’ what is clear is that this reading of events is also a social construction. This particular (psychological) understanding of the child allows us to say and believe they are too young to understand, setting childhood as “an inadequate precursor to the real state of human being, namely being ‘grown up’” (Prout 2005 p.18), and this appears thus to be self-evident. Postman (1994) saw this development as an important factor in differentiating children from adults, where childhood is a time where they can be “sheltered from adult secrets” (p.9); here death. Children’s books, certainly up to the late 1950s, appeared to demonstrate this differentiation of interest.

In social constructionist terms, Foucault (1998) might be considered to have suggested that the dominance of developmental psychology illustrates his assertion that what we currently accept as truth could otherwise be seen as an ‘emergence’. That is to say that it has been constructed. Discourses take on dominance which becomes ‘taken for granted’ and thus appear to always have been so.

Foucault(1998) considered that the understanding of practices does not come from a linear reading of history but rather by identifying “the accidents, the minute

deviations...the errors...that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us” ( p.374).

The development of this particular discourse (of the expert in children who know what is best) highlights the power relations around who has the right to have knowledge and who is deprived of this knowledge (Foucault 1977). Foucault (1977) considered that discourse is not merely about what is said but also the “things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden” (p.522). Thus it could be possible to construct a world view for children where the books at this time “largely ignored the contemporary political scene of slump and war” (Hunt 1994 p.119) and so reflect this notion of certain ‘adult’ matters being sequestered from their view. In this way the books for children of the immediate post Second World War period reflected a world that did not really exist for most people. The stories continued to, by and large, represent a middle-class way of life “with few attempts to write about life from a different angle” (Hunt 1994 p.124) and this continued for some time.

## **2.11 Post-war change**

Despite the apparent desire to go back to an earlier perception of tranquillity, following the Second World War changes began to occur in Britain. The National Health Service was set up in 1948 and earlier as already suggested, in 1944, the new Education Act (1944) brought significant changes to the schooling of all children in England and Wales. This Act made a sharp division between primary and secondary school, doing away with the former Elementary schools from 5-14. A few years later the leaving age of compulsory attendance was raised to 15. The Act also made provision for all children to receive a third of a pint of milk a day (until the age

of 18) and school meals were provided (but not free to all). The remit of schools was to look after the physical health of children as well as their intellectual growth and explicitly set out to take into account the “whole child” (Bell 2004). The Education Act (1944) therefore gave Local Education Authorities the duty to contribute towards the “spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community” (Bell 2004). The motivation for such an all-round concern may have been as a result of children who had been evacuated from towns to rural areas (and so concerns about their health and general well-being had become more widespread), but the effect was to allow for much greater intrusion into the family home and for the role of the child expert to develop even more fully (Hendrick 2015).

The focus on developmental stages had initially concerned itself more with the physical growth of children, but an awareness and concern about the intellectual ability and then the psychological wellbeing of the child increased gradually over the twentieth century (Prout 2005). In this view the child is seen as the subject of research in which they were considered to be unfinished beings; a project only seeing completion when they achieve adulthood. Such concern about childhood had become firmly established as “a feature of parental (...) discourse, the currency of educators and the sole theoretical property of developmental psychology” (James et al 1998 p.3). This understanding of the child made it possible to exclude children from certain subjects because ‘they are too young to understand’ and so set the state of childhood as “an inadequate precursor to the real state of human being, namely being “grown up”” (James et al 1998 p.18). The variety and different experience of each individual child was not encompassed by this view. The child, here, was seen as universal and each a similar unfinished being. The focus on the notion of the scientific knowledge about the needs and requirements of the child

being held by experts also justified, or at least allowed, the state to intervene in family life on the basis of supporting healthy development of the nation's children. Terms such as 'bonding' and 'stage of development' began to be part of the everyday language used in talking about children and thus took on a reality and meaning by dint of becoming the dominant discourse around children and childhood (Hendrick 2015).

The proliferation of professions "concerned with identifying children's abnormality and attending in some way to it" (Prout 2005 p.51) was a feature of the 20th century, illustrating perhaps the centrality of the child in the modern (western) world. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1992 p.7) discussed the all-pervasive power of developmental psychology in our current (professional) understanding of children and that this view has become both taken for granted and seen as undisputable truth (Reynold 2005). In a similar way the notion of the shameful death (Kellehear 2007) was perhaps accepted in an unquestioned way and thus death was moved out of view and became increasingly removed from the normal everyday lives of people and children in particular.

Foucault (1998) characterized this interplay of competing forces as: - "not the anticipatory power of meaning but the hazardous play of dominations" (p.376). Developmental psychology had become very clearly dominant in terms of the understanding of children. The discourse around children's development had become 'reality' by a process that Berger and Luckman (1967) term transmission. They suggest that "if one says, "this is how things are done", often enough one believes it oneself" (p.77). If one is told by experts that your child should be able to do X at age Y then one begins to accept that as fact.

Following the 1944 Education Act children were largely expected to be found in schools and as Gergen (2015) suggested “it is a commonly held belief that the chief purpose of education is to move students from a condition of ignorance to one of knowledge” (p.146). This deficit model is usually premised on the notion of need and not in terms of correction or training as in previous eras, although the need to form and shape the child is still evident, but is expressed in different terms. Nevertheless this still assumes that “children’s needs have to be met by adults in order for them to attain personhood” (Wyness 2012 p.51). The need for schooling had become an accepted fact, and although the manner in which schooling was delivered had changed since the 19th century, the need for compulsory schooling having the weight of scientific evidence behind it became part of the objective (and unquestioned) reality of social life (Berger and Luckman 1967).

This attitude (about the needs of children) was also seen in the changes in children’s literature of the period. The production of books that could be shown to be suitable and age- appropriate mattered, and they could be matched to age and need because there was scientific “evidence” to show (or prove) what was needed at each age. If both children and children’s literature are socially constructed then they will change depending on the social and cultural norms of the time (Watkins 1999).

Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, it is also around this time that tastes in reading would appear to have altered. We might consider this in the context of Foucault’s (1997) contention that discourses are both products of society and its practices. Tucker (2009) noted that whereas up to the early part of the 20th century “children’s writers had (...) been read and appreciated by all ages” (p.145) following the Second World War in particular, the separation of reading matter became “more exclusively child-centred” (Tucker 2009 p.146).

## 2.12 Post World War Two Children's Literature

Zipes (2002) considered a consequence of this separation was that these books tended to be “mostly formulaic and predictable” (p.5) and perhaps a low point for children's literature. It might be a kinder interpretation to suggest that in the years after two world wars children's books allowed for the reimagining of the world as we wanted it to be and that they are “public versions of the fictions we must have, if we are to think at all” (Inglis 1981p.310).

War and death continued to feature in a few books written at the time, but these were fantasy stories, following in the tradition of the early twentieth century. C.S Lewis began to write his Narnia books in 1950, and although death as a subject appears within this series of stories it occurs in a land populated by talking animals and strange creatures, and so at a remove from the day to day world of children and thus safe. At about the same time Tolkien wrote about a fantasy world in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, first published in 1954, where deaths were allowed to occur but only in a far off land of hobbits and elves. Thus even in children's literature death could be seen to be sequestered.

Whether by design, sheer exhaustion from the war years or by some turn in the zeitgeist, children's books became slightly benign in their focus as they moved away from these apparently adult subjects for a time. Children were protected from the “gritty realities” (Hendrick 1997 p. 87) for some time following the war. Children continued to be seen as in need of protection from adult things. This view restricted what the child could be permitted to know, and was supported by the new child sciences.

The turn away from death continued to be the norm and “the 1950s was a peaceful era in children’s books” (Townsend 1996 p.156) –nothing bad happened in books unless it was punished. The real world (that is perhaps what one might term the adult world of sex, smoking and bad language) was firmly banished from the realm of children’s literature. We might consider that this had become a cultural narrative (Burr 2003) and was needed to make sense of the events that had just been lived through. Perhaps the children’s books needed to show a world that was essentially good and peaceful in order to restore a sense of collective identity. Moreover it was perhaps the world in which authors would wish children to live. Thus from a social constructionist viewpoint these stories allow for a “generative potential” (Burr 2003 p.144). This allows us to rewrite our story without regard to historical fact, but rather in terms of how we would like to present ourselves and this would seem to be how children’s writers represented the world to their readers.

By the 1950s the level of economic stability had been restored (to some extent) and there was a great expansion in the books published for children (Hunt 1994). This period was very favourable for children’s literature with specialist children’s editors being appointed in many publishing houses and the quality of the titles being published greatly improved. For example, Puffin Books had been established in 1940 as a specific arm of the Penguin group to produce books for children and became one of the biggest publishers of children’s books by the 1960s. This perhaps serves to illustrate even more fully that children were seen as separate category from adults with their own separate needs.

On the whole, however, the books were regarded by many to be continuing to depict the values of the middle class nuclear family and to show this as the desirable way of life to which young readers should aspire (Tucker 2009). Christian morality tales

were no longer dominant, but rather decency and the right way to live could be seen depicted in stories about the nuclear family, such as those by Enid Blyton (Hunt 1994). In the immediate post-war period most of children's literature was "still located in a dream world of boarding school, ponies .....and holiday high jinks" (Cadogan and Craig 1978 p.238). Perhaps it could not be otherwise when people were still coping with War, rationing and other deprivations – a fantasy world far away from the lived lives of most children (and those who wrote for them) may have been what was needed. Publishers of children's books tended to "operate in a conservative cultural background" (Tucker 2009 p.150) and continued to produce the style of book that looked back towards an (imagined) childhood where life had been safe (the pre-war years). If adults were not to dwell on the past then certainly children should not.

Not all authors conformed however, although death had appeared in the fantasy tales of Lewis and Tolkien, one of the most well-known stories about love and death was published in this time period in 1952 by E. B. White: *Charlotte's Web*. This story became, and has continued to be, a well-loved story in which Charlotte, the spider, dies but is able to live on through Wilbur the pig's love for her and her 500 offspring. Inglis (1981) would perhaps not include this as a story about death as such but the type of story where death was transformed into loss, and thus made "safe for children. Inglis (1981) considered that the pain of loss expressed in some of the novels of this period could only be done by focussing on a future paradise where the loved thing (often a pet or wild animal) dies but the child is quickly lead on to thinking about the nature of love. This love was construed as un-possessive love that would relinquish the loved one and so the focus is on the pain of the loss and the beauty of the life, but not the pain of the death. White's (1952) story of the death of Charlotte illustrates this. This attitude towards death and loss seems to hark back to the late

Victorian view of grief (Walter 1999). Inglis (1981) went on to say that “individual pain and general loss are the nearest we can find with which to value death for children in the novels we give them. It is hardly enough: it has to do” (p.286). He was perhaps expressing the reluctance to talk openly to children about difficult subjects.

The fact that books for children had begun to avoid direct talk about death is perhaps not surprising (particularly as they are written by adults and not by children). They merely seem to reflect notions of “tact and discretion” (Rabinow 1984 p.29) which govern the rules of where to talk, what to talk about and how it is to be talked about. These notions are tacit, but understood by all. Perhaps this should not surprise us though as these were ‘quiet times’ for death anyway. This is not to say, of course, that people had stopped dying (clearly) but rather that death had become a private event, taking place in the hospital ward. The body was removed by professional undertakers and, in the United Kingdom (although not Scotland) the disposal of the body by cremation, a quick process for the bereaved, took the more messy facts of death out of sight so as to make death “invisible” (Ariès 1983 p.614).

The 1960s continued to view childhood as a time of innocence and this was still reflected in children’s literature. However things were beginning to change (Hunt 1994). A minority was beginning to point out that children’s books had become “too middle class and that there were not enough books about life as it was known to less privileged children” (Townsend 1996 p.157). The Plowden Report (1967) into Primary Education was also scathing of the middle-class bias in reading primers and added its voice to the demand for books that should reflect more closely the lives of a wider range of children (Tucker 2009). This was firstly in terms of the gendered roles of the characters, particularly the girls within the stories, and also the dominant ethnicity of characters.

The period between 1950 and 1970 was seen by some as a second Golden Age in children's literature (Townsend 1998) with its range of adventures and real world stories. The use of the frightening and the mildly terrifying continued to appear in children's books because "children of course, like a dose of the terrors at times –well controlled times, with a warm fire and all the lights on all the way upstairs to bed" (Inglis 1981 p.280). The view of the child kept safe by parents is clearly reflected in this comment. The outside world may intrude, but only briefly and carefully controlled by adults. So we see that "through education the cultural attitudes of the adult are passed on to the child" (Anthony 1940 p. 195). Books were expected to show the real world, but this real world was also expected to depict a place where divorce and family breakdowns might occur, but not, however, one where people died (Moss 1972). It would seem that "as death moved out of the home and into hospital it also nearly disappeared from children's books" (Gibson and Zaidman 1991 p.233). The world of the Swallows and Amazons became briefly unacceptable; being too middle class - but death (as such) was not on the agenda.

In this post Second World War period attitudes rejecting the old order had continued to assert themselves (Tucker 2009). Children's books began to reflect the "decline of deference" (Tucker 2009 p.155) prevalent in the post-war years and "parents were not always happy with this new literary frankness" (Tucker 2009 p.154). Children's books were increasingly expected to depict a wider range of experiences and to acknowledge that the world was a "perilous place" (Townsend 1996 p.156). The world of children's books was declared to be too white, too male and too middle class and there was an increasing demand (not least by educators) that a change was needed in the type of books offered to children. The interest in challenging the received wisdom of the time extended into questioning the prevailing view of

childhood, so that it became possible for “new representations (to) construct children as more active, knowledgeable and socially participative than older discourses” (Prout 2005 p.7) would allow for. In terms of the content of the books being written the authors no longer felt the need to represent a world of stability and safety (Godek 2005, Ellis 1970).

Authors began to write about a world in which children would be exposed to the challenges and problems of life in order to prepare them to cope. Some authors chose to write about the “grittier and more unpleasant aspects of life (Godek 2005 p.101) in what were often termed ‘issue’ books. Books attempted to be more realistic by reflecting the lives of working class children: - for example Allen’s (1968) *The Latchkey Children*. The children in that story were not children who would return home from school to a tea prepared by their mother, but had to fend for themselves. The underlying assumption was that children did not need to be protected and could benefit from reading about the real issues impacting and mirroring their own lives. This is a far cry from the idyllic and protected worlds depicted in earlier children’s books. It would seem to illustrate a direct challenge to the previous order where knowledge was in the hands of the experts. Reynolds (2007) considered that through children’s literature children are being asked to “look at images of themselves made for them by their societies” (p.3). Books written for children have always reflected a particular view of children and childhood (held by society) so when these views change so must the books.

We can consider the knowledge about what children ought to be reading as a form of ‘disciplinary power’ (Foucault 1972), this type of power is willingly accepted - and is an unseen mechanism of influence, but as knowledge and power are always coupled together for Foucault (1977) this also allows for new knowledge to appear and to

challenge and overturn previous ways of thinking. A positivist scientific tradition would claim that science “generates transcendent truths” (Gergen 2003 p.7). Thus “narratives invariably exclude certain objects for discourse while privileging others” (Harootunian 1988 p.114).

Despite the turn towards a notion of realism in children’s books in the 1960s and 70s it would seem that the writers of children’s books did not always agree that this made for the most interesting works for children. Although there had been much criticism of the immediate post-war literature which seemed to offer a view of the world far removed from the lives of most of the readers, some felt the new style of book offered little scope for the imagination (Hunt 1994). Whilst the newer ‘grittier’ stories might have begun to show the constructed nature of childhood and to challenge the notion of authors of children’s literature from the previous era what was being written nonetheless returned to a didactic form of address, albeit in a very different style (Sarland 1999).

### **2.13 Challenges to Authority**

There was an apparent decline in interest in children’s books over the next decades until the 1980s and 90s, perhaps as a consequence of the 60s ‘real life’ books and a backlash against them with complaints being raised that they subverted traditional (that is to say middle-class) values (Reynolds 2007). Arguments about what was considered ‘suitable’ for children to read had been made since the appearance of literature specially aimed at children in the 17th century and tended to reflect the prevailing image of childhood at any particular time (Reynolds 2007). It becomes clear that when we reconstruct notions of childhood outside ideas of the notions of

protection and innocence then we have to construct children's literature differently (Paul 1999) and "suitability recedes as an issue" (p.121).

By the mid-point of the 20th Century there began to be challenges to previously accepted notions of the expert. Glaser and Strauss (1965) had published their book *Awareness of Dying* which considered how although death might be seen as a taboo and controlled by the medics, communication around death and about death did not always abide by the apparent rules of polite society. At the same time, although not from a constructionist view point, Kübler-Ross (1969) published her work *On Death and Dying*, which also questioned the prevailing attitude of not talking about death. Both of these works were influential in thinking about the way we deal with death, and each concluded (in their own way) that the lack of public talk about death was unhelpful at best and potentially damaging. The idea of what could be talked about and what people actually were talking about began to emerge in range of academic disciplines where notions of the socially constructed nature of knowledge became increasingly apparent. This continued and in the 1980s works started to challenge the accepted theories suggesting that it did not really describe people's own reactions to loss. Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) proposed a new theory of grief based on personal experiences of grief. Other theories soon followed (Stroebe and Schut 1999, Neimeyer 2001) and contributed to a renewed (academic) interest in death; the so-called 'revival of death' (Walter 1994).

## **2.14 Challenge to developmental view of childhood**

In a similar way the study of childhood as a social construction began to emerge in academic writing in the latter part of the 20th century, and it is perhaps this renewed

consciousness about what 'child' meant that contributed to the lack of certainty about what a child should read. Academics, at least, began to question the validity of the age-based developmental work (James and James 2004). What had apparently been a consensus view supported by developmental psychology was being challenged (Mayall 2002). Although the earlier expert opinions continued to influence views on childhood, a newer discourse which we might call a 'discourse of individualism' had begun to allow for less certainty and uniformity (Burr 2003). Childhood studies which took into account the social and cultural context of the child could offer a different way of considering the childhood experience; not as a universal one applied to all but contingent on circumstances (Woodhead and Montgomery 2003).

This might appear to be a radical change in how children might be seen, but is perhaps more correctly seen in terms of disciplinary power (Giddens 1979). Those who had begun to talk in academic circles about the sociology of childhood (e.g. Jenks 2005, Woodhead and Montgomery 2003) had been able to raise their voices sufficiently for them to be heard above the accepted views of developmental psychologists. The newly emerging discourse on childhood began to pick up the debate about the nature and meaning of childhood, but for the most part did not suggest that children were no longer in need of protection (Guldberg 2009)

Some, (Postman 1994, Mason and Steadman 1997) argued that children were not being protected and could no longer be seen as different from adults. This fitted into media concerns that "children are growing up much too soon" (Buckingham and Bragg 2005 p. 59). The ready and unmediated accessibility of information via the image harked back to a time when, for Postman (1994) shame was absent from relations between children and adults, because they had access to the same

information via the television. He suggested that “one of the main differences between an adult and a child is that the adult knows about certain facets of life-its mysteries, its contradictions, its violence, its tragedies - that are not considered suitable for children to know” (Postman 1994 p.15).

The new way of conceptualising childhood had allowed us to consider that “children no longer had to be seen as empty vessels being passively socialized” (Smart et al 2001 p.12). This however tapped into the anxieties about control of children’s experience and access to the wider world. A study by Buckingham and Bragg (2005) into children’s use of the media to gain knowledge about sex reveals that children have a clear level of self-determination in their own abilities to seek out the information and also to have an awareness of what they feel the need to know. The child’s own sense of readiness to know about “adult subjects” was clearly demonstrated in this study. Similarly it is not uncommon to hear it suggested that death is a distant experience for most people in the late 20th and 21st centuries and thus for us to expect that most would go through childhood without experiencing a significant loss, despite there being strong evidence to the contrary (Ribbens McCarthy 2006).

Postman (1994) saw the television as a significant factor in allowing children to have access to a broader range of information than in previous eras. Increasing access to new media and technology allowed children to know and see the world in a less controlled way that we might previously have believed to be the case (Hendrick 2015). We may question the impact of this access and be fearful of the apparent lack of adult authority over the child, but it is possible to see that the impact of the access to a wide range of new media has also allowed children to see themselves as having agency and making decisions for and about themselves (Buckingham and

Bragg 2005). Buckingham and Bragg (2005) found that the sense of agency was not defined by age or supposed developmental stage. Steinberg (2011) also noted that children were not only able to use and understand the new media but that their image of themselves was altered and shaped by it. It would seem improbable that this shaping of identity is only a result of technology but rather that in focussing on input needed from the adult world to shape the child we have missed the 'shaping' children were already engaged in previously (Cunningham 2006 p.228).

Denzin (1977) noted that when children play they are actively constructing and reconstructing their social world, making moral judgments and developing ways of dealing with both adults and children. This view that children can be social actors in their own lives had "prompted a fundamental shift in thinking about their intellectual and emotional status" (Smart et al 2001 p.12). Into this shift in thinking there had also been a new focus on the language of rights and particularly the focus on participation within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) officially ratified in the United Kingdom in 1991 expressly allowed for children to participate in making decisions about their own lives.

In this vein we can begin to see a change once again in children's literature. Hunt (2009b) was very clear that the depiction of the child in children's books told us more about the "concept of childhood at a particular period, rather than portraying actual childhoods" (p.14 italics in original). When considering the child as depicted in children's books across the period from 1890 to 2010 it is not always possible to fit that depiction to the apparent societal view of childhood at any one point in time. So we see an apparent "need to preserve at least the semblance of innocent childhood in society" (Hunt 2009 a.p.81) in the late 20th century despite the challenge to this view. There is an apparent fear of ill-defined risk in society at large (Prout

2005). Examples of this might be children who have killed other children, such as the murderers of Jamie Bulger or the recent killing of a Katie Rough. These cases are rare, (Cunningham 2006), but perhaps, adds to adult fears about apparent risks and so feeds the desire to preserve the romantic ideal of the innocent child.

We might consider that these parental anxieties can be seen to be reflected in The Education Reform Act (1988) which paved the way for some significant changes to the delivery of education in England and Wales. The reform took little notice of experts in education but was heavily influenced by ideas of parental choice and the creation of a national curriculum that would be set centrally (Cunningham 2006). The idea of both market forces and consumer rights were central to this Act. Parental choice was highlighted by the publication of league tables so they might assess which schools offered the best education. This also served the needs of the state by limiting what schools would teach.

It might also be suggested that it effectively tapped in to notions that the liberal ideas of educationalists from the 1960s and 70s had been bad for the nation's children. The 'issue' books of the 1960s and 70s had subjected children to adult themes too soon and the results of this, apparently, were all too evident. Superficially it would appear to have challenged the idea of the expert and to hand back control to parents and thus address concerns about loss of parental control over their children (Cunningham 2006). The reform also put in place increased measuring of children's attainment but this seemed to be at odds with the emerging debates about the changing nature of childhood (Darbyshire 2007), which suggested that there is no universal idea of 'the child' (Prout 2005).

The Romantic ideal of the innocent child, though still evident in popular thinking, began to be challenged by notion of the un-childlike child which allowed for the notion that real children might be violent, sexualized and very far from the “rose-coloured, sentimental and fundamentally conservative view” (Darbyshire 2007 p.88) that adults might prefer to hold onto. It would seem that “parents are no longer in control of their children’s cultural experiences” (Steinberg 2011 p.33). Certainly the education reform appeared to speak to these parental anxieties and apparently offered a way to reassert parental control and protection. “Concern for safety, for assessing and managing risk” (Cunningham 2006 p.240) had come to dominate adult thinking in terms of their concerns around children.

## **2.15 Children’s literature in late 20th and early 21st centuries**

We see that by the end of the 20th century it had become increasingly common to talk not of childhood but, of childhoods in recognition of the variety of experiences and cultural differences impacting the lives of children (Montgomery and Watson 2009). The so-called Third Golden Age of Children’s Literature (Hunt 2009b) acknowledged and celebrated these differences, at least for older children. However Montgomery and Watson (2009) pointed out that despite this being an apparent change in terms of what is made available for children, the books still show “the long-standing dialectic between stern moral purpose and the need to amuse the child reader” (p.8). Many of the books being written since the 1980s and 90s addressed “adult” concerns and have not shied away from serious subjects and some would suggest that they have lost the aspect of joy and wonder of earlier years. Others would suggest that it is the picture book that serious subjects are now being

addressed with humour. Picture books do not have to rely only on words but the “illustrations can provide material which is not explicit in the text” (Pinsent 2007 p.169).

The vast increase in the availability and quality of picture books in recent years perhaps confirms Postman’s (1994) concern that children are able to access a wider range of subjects without the need for adult intervention. It would appear that as in the medieval era access to ‘adult’ subjects via the image (Ariès 1996) has become once again, unmediated. What can be found in contemporary picture books is that they range from the simplest ‘first book’ to far more complex texts which make them a “versatile medium capable of conveying a narrative at a variety of levels” (Graham 2005 p.221).

Often cited as one of the first picture books to address adult subjects is *Granpa* (Burningham 1984). The story considered the problems of ageing and on the final page shows an empty chair. Picture books allow for more to be said than with words alone (Sipe 2012). Another picture book showing this directness is *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005). Here the main character of the story encountered death on the first page and then the book continued to address the subject of death throughout. Books addressing the subject of death in an accessible manner can be seen to fit with the ideas of empowerment seen in child safety programmes designed to discuss the subject of sexual abuse (Kitzinger 2015).

For Postman (1994) it was access to reading (text), which meant that children could be excluded from certain matters and that the ready access via visual images subverts this. Hockey and James (1993) noted that the discourse around childhood divided itself into essentially two major themes: those around the child’s morality and

those around the child's capability. Jenks (2005) also echoed this notion but suggested that the late 20th and early 21st centuries mark then of the adult preoccupation with childhood innocence. Thus access to picture books that address serious subjects allow the child to decide what they understand from the book.

This new way of conceptualising childhood allows us to consider that "children no longer had to be seen as empty vessels being passively socialized" (Smart et al 2001 p.12). So the social constructionist views of childhood asserted an alternative view of childhood and what it was possible for a child to know. This new paradigm of child study rejected "positivism's universalist conception of childhood and child development" (Steinberg 2011 p.9). Children could be seen to be social agents in their own right making decisions about their lives and shaping their own worlds (Kitzinger 2015). The more ready accessibility of the picture addressing 'difficult' subjects permits them this choice.

Once we begin to allow that the developmental categories may not be the only way of viewing children's abilities the notion of participation can become a messier and more challenging notion to accept. Children thus are not seen as lacking in competence but "while children may have different competencies to adults, this no longer means that their knowledge and achievements are inferior" (Smart et al 2001 p.13). Allowing that children may not be bound by the more rigid developmental view also means that adults may also be viewed as 'becomings' and a work in progress.

## **2.16 Summing up**

In this chapter I have attempted to show how the concept of childhood is socially constructed and has altered across time. This has been my particular interpretation and has used children's books as a way of illustrating that construction. It would be

possible to offer a different interpretation by focussing on other aspects of that construction. What I have considered is how the notion of what childhood is held to be impacts what is deemed to be suitable for children to know and what is deemed too 'adult'.

## **Chapter Three: Finding the way in.**

This chapter describes in detail the method of research being used in this study. It explains how decisions have been made and how the method I chose has been used to interpret my findings. I discuss the use of thematic analysis considering it in the context of its appropriateness within a social constructionist view.

### **3.1 Death, children and books**

If as, Anthony (1940), contended “death, whatever it may mean to children, comes readily into their fantasy thought” (p.43) it should be possible to consider how and where that is demonstrated across time. However finding evidence of children’s fantasy thinking is problematic – where might this be recorded and who would have recorded it? To fix on places where there might be some evidence that children do engage in thinking about death I chose to consider whether, and how, death is dealt with as a subject in literature for children, and whether and how this might have altered across time. Of course it should be remembered that children do not write these books and so they can only show what might be deemed by adults to be a fit subject for children: thus it is only what is already accepted as permissible in their fantasy thinking.

My interest is in death as it appears as an ordinary theme in any narrative; for example in a story a parent might die and this fact may be part of the story but not the entire focus. I also have chosen to exclude books written specifically as

therapeutic in intent. I have perhaps, chosen an area that is difficult to describe and define in terms of ordinariness but note Silverman (2000) who suggested “death is always present in children’s lives” (p.2).

I did not want to look at children’s literature per se, nor specifically at the lives of children in different periods of history, nor even just at practices around death in isolation. What I wished to consider is how death is represented at different periods of history in children’s books and what this might suggest about the way death has been permitted to be ‘talked about’ to children over time. By considering books written for children in each of the time periods I have chosen for my thesis, and by (taking a social constructionist position), those stories may reveal something about how children are viewed , how death is viewed, and whether it is seen to be a fit subject to put before children and so on. As Burr (2003) suggested “discourses show up in the things people say and write” (p.66). By considering death (and, to some extent grief) as it is represented in stories for children, this will allow me to uncover something about society and children within and across different periods.

A basic assumption in thematic analysis is that “language constructs social reality” (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p.85). As I wanted to look at the subject of death in relation to how it might have been presented to children, rather than how children’s literature has developed as such, thus it is important to note that “texts are not meaningful individually: it is only through their interconnection with other texts .....that they are made meaningful” (Phillips and Hardy 2002, p.4). The type of analysis is inevitably partial as it “is based on the premise that a discourse can never be studied in its entirety, merely that clues can be found in the texts...” (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.85) Yet it also allows for the “locating of voices that are normally missed “(Phillips and Hardy 2002, p.85) and although children’s books are not written by children (as has

been noted) they may be considered to represent what is relevant, or appropriate to children at that time and so give some insight to the constructed nature of both death and childhood.

Death is also a subject that has become the domain of expert knowledge (Wass 2004) and so often is something which needs professional knowledge and language. It is often suggested that precocious knowledge about adult subjects should cause us concern that the child is in some way damaged or deviant (Anthony 1940). As I have considered in the previous section the discourse of developmental psychology allowed for the measurement and grading of normal development and gained the status of a universal truth about children and their capacities (Prout 2005; Mayall 2002). Foucault (1980) suggested when a discourse such as this gains authority “its authority can also be seen in its power to make things happen” (p.25). Thus what is deemed to be a fit subject for children becomes all that they can be permitted to know. This allows us to use evidence or reason in defining the terms of the knowable which can lead to “sweetness and light ....but it can be used to monitor and control, to constrict and repress” (McGilchrist 2010 p.350). Thus thematic analysis is a useful method to consider what is said in children’s books, but it will be important to note this analysis is only one way of interpreting what is being said or written.

### **3.2 Thematic analysis explained**

It has been suggested thematic analysis is often “poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged” (Braun and Clarke 2006 p.1) as a qualitative method of research, but nonetheless is widely used. Others (Green 2008, Jones 2001) have found that it a useful and appropriate way to study the subject of death in children’s books. Its

usefulness lies in the flexibility it offers and that it allows for the organisation of patterns to be shown. It has been further suggested that a clearly defined process using thematic analysis can be a methodology in itself and often is used but rarely named as such (Braun and Clark 2006). Phillips and Hardy (2002) preferred the use of the term discourse analysis, but comment that “what makes a research technique discursive is not the method itself but the use of that method to carry out an interpretative analysis....” (p.10 italics in original). Their definition of this research method mirrors closely what Braun and Clarke (2006) choose to term thematic analysis. The name of the method underpinning the research is perhaps less important than the clarity around its use. My analysis also concerns itself with the use of words and brings in notions from discourse analysis which concerns itself with the issue of meaning and interpretation. Any notion of discourse inevitably concerns itself with the text but also will have to be concerned with the social context (Guest et al 2012, Burr 2003, Rudd 1999). So the research must consider “the interplay between text, discourse and context” (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.5). Thus, as Phillips and Hardy (2002), I want to show here that I have been able to use thematic analysis as a “methodology -not just a method” (p.5). Therefore in this thesis thematic analysis offers a helpful framework when considering the socially constructed nature of books and childhood. This allows for themes to be compared both within and across the periods thus permitting the ideas seen to be highlighted more easily. It should be noted that their understanding of the term bears close similarities to the description of thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) where by studying the text we can “uncover the assumptions concerning the constructive effects of language” (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.5).

Both Braun and Clarke (2006) and Phillips and Hardy (2002) agreed that beginning with an explicit research question “provides a frame for making decisions about data collection and analysis, explains the motivation behind the study, and provides guidance for writing it up” (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.60). As has been suggested, in some ways thematic analysis can be considered to share similarities with discourse analysis (concerning itself with words) and thus might offer an appropriate methodology within which to frame this work. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlighted that discourse analysis and thematic analysis can be grouped within a range of ‘named’ methods of qualitative research and suggest that despite the differences in the names “one recipe guides analysis” (p.4). Phillips and Hardy (2002) have echoed this and state that “the boundaries between discourse analysis and other qualitative methods are sometimes blurred” (p.9). Because of the period covered here thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility.

Holloway and Todres (2007) discussed one of the tensions in qualitative research as being the need for it to be both art and science (see also Phillips and Hardy 2002). There is a need for the research to be both innovative and to demonstrate its search for meaning while also providing a clearly defined structure to allow others to be aware of the method being followed. “Qualitative research sits on the continuum between the two (art and science). It needs imagination and it should be communicated to others while also demanding rigour and structure” (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.13) (Clarification in brackets my own). It is important that I demonstrate how the method chosen for analysing this subject should demonstrate both rigour and flair.

Similarly, Boyatzis (1998) suggested that “thematic analysis is a way of seeing” (p.1) and that this way of seeing may allow us to view things in ways others do not, even

when we look at the same information, which sits well with an interpretivist view. This also fits well within a social constructionist framework. Thematic analysis acknowledges the constructed nature of language and allows for an “interpretive style of analysis” (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.5) and thus permits an acknowledged level of authorial bias. In any interpretivist approach to research it is important for the researcher to acknowledge her own subjectivity (Hennink et al 2011). My own prior assumptions have been made explicit earlier.

It is thus a useful method for identifying patterns and analysing the data being considered. However, because it is often poorly defined it can sometimes be considered as merely a technique for data analysis and not a named analytical methodology (Braun and Clark 2006, Boyatzis 1998). In this thesis I will suggest that, despite this criticism, it is a methodology within an interpretivist/ social constructivist perspective that allows for the exploration of a topic area, (here death in children’s literature), which sits uncomfortably across a range of disciplines.

Phillips and Hardy (2002) noted that one of the justifications for the use of this method is to look at a “familiar topic in a new way” (p.59). As will be explored later, many of those who have studied death in children’s books have done so from a perspective of either bereavement (how the books help children make sense of their feelings) or from a more developmental psychological view point about children’s understanding of death (Green 2008, Poling and Hupp 2008, Jones 2001). They have considered books from one time period only rather than across a wider period as I have done here, thus I offer a new perspective on the subject.

Another benefit of thematic analysis is that it offers a helpful way in which to consider death in children’s books by focussing on death as the subject and not on the books

themselves. It allows for questions of content and quality in terms of 'literature' to be bracketed. Rudd (1999) suggested that there is a tension between those who study children's books as "Literature (with a capital L)" (p.40) and those who choose to look at what the books say about children in terms of Piagetian notions of development focussing on a consideration of which books are appropriate for which age with the assumption that at certain ages children will "prefer certain books to others" (Rudd 1999 p.41). Rudd (1999) talked about a "discursive space" (p.40) in which to "bracket questions of value"(p.49) and so to side step any questions about whether the book is worthy of itself or indeed is deemed to be age-appropriate. This is a particularly helpful notion as the books used within this thesis range widely in terms of what might be thought of as literary merit and in terms of what can be considered to be age-appropriateness. Many of the books pre-date Piagetian notions of development (and so the idea of what is age appropriate becomes questioned) and the subject of death itself is contentious in terms of whether it is a fit subject for children. Thematic analysis allows for this movement between the "local" focus on the text and the "broader social context" (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.19) so that always the "what, how and where" of what is said becomes relevant to the research.

As has been suggested those who employ methods of qualitative research use the word 'discourse' to mean a wide range of things (Burr 2003) and the boundaries between the different types of qualitative analyses are "sometimes blurred" (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.9). Rudd (1999) considered the term discourse to mean the words used within the text whereas others (Potter 1996 following Foucault) allowed the term to include the construction of all objects and subjects (p.87). The Foucauldian notion of discourse suggests that the way a thing is talked or written about serves to define the practices around the thing. Both of these notions will be useful although I

primarily concern myself with text, but will then seek to contextualise it within a social and cultural perspective. In Foucauldian terms the discourse (named as such) around death and children cannot really be said to exist in any clear and agreed way. Except in that, where it is talked about outside esoteric academic papers, it is in terms of taboo, and as such is not talked or written about (Yalom 2008, Silverman 2000). Nonetheless, death does appear in the books for children and so it possible to study how it is written about and to analyse it in a thematic way. In these (Foucauldian) terms discourses limit what is 'sayable' and so the task of the analysis is to make 'visible the unseen'. In other words in this work I concentrate on the ways in which how the 'sayable' has developed, rather than to focus on its origins – although the two may be connected. Thematic analysis will facilitate me in uncovering the implied taboo around the subject of death and how this is something that has developed through the practice of "talking in certain ways" (Rorty 1986 p.42) by comparing the books across a long time period. Once again though, the "certain ways" in which death is addressed in the books may alter across the time period chosen and even within each of the periods. The concern here is not the influence of power but rather the "constructive effects of discourse" (Phillips and Hardy 2002 p.21).

A parallel example, as we saw previously, was the exclusion of children (and indeed often adults) from talking about death might be seen in *The Will to Knowledge* (Foucault 1981 p.4) where we see how children became excluded form talk about sex. Foucault described this as "the repressive hypothesis" (Foucault 1981). This theory will be useful to inform my analysis as I will need to consider how far this can be seen in discussion about death in children's books. Although the influence of Foucault's work cannot be ignored, in terms of this thesis and the spectrum of styles

of analysis my study looks towards an interpretivist perspective rather than a critical one (Phillips and Hardy 2002); that is I do not take any political stance here.

Rudd (1999) suggested that the root meaning of the word discourse is “to run around” (p43) and if that sense of the word discourse is applied here, then what can be attempted by looking for themes across time can allow for some comment on this subject. This might in some ways be compared with the idea of allowing themes to emerge from the texts rather than being pre-determined. This ‘running around’ should also be taken to imply that the research is not setting out to find any one thing, but to make connections and pick out those themes to make them visible. In many ways the research here might be considered to be running around a vast period of time and across a wider range of styles of writing and of differing literary merit. There is a danger this might lead to a lack of clarity about what exactly is being looked at and compared. However by using thematic analysis comparison of language used in nineteenth century children’s literature can thus be made with that which is currently used. This allows for the concepts under consideration to be the focus of the analysis and thus allow me to ignore questions of literary merit.

Despite the comment, above I had initially considered choosing only books that had won one of the awards for children’s fiction such as the *Kate Greenaway Prize for Illustration of Children’s Books* or the *Smarties Prize for Children’s Fiction*. However, linking this to year of publication, and subject and also finding sufficient award winning books that were concerned with death made the criteria for choosing the sample too restrictive. It should also be noted that these awards did not start until the mid-20th century –the *Kate Greenaway Prize* beginning in 1955 and the *Smarties Prize* beginning only in 1985- and so would not be useful for two third of the sample selection. It also seemed to be unnecessary if I did not intend to consider the notion

of 'literary merit' and thus could not form part of my selection criteria, although coincidentally two of the books in the final sample have won awards (Bruna 2005 and Erlbruch 2008). For my own research purposes it very quickly became apparent that this would not be a helpful selection criterion due to the period chosen.

Another consideration (in terms of merit) was that this concept might prove difficult to apply in any meaningful way to books only published in 2010, as they would not have had time to have become part of any established cannon. The bracketing (Rudd 1999) of the merit of the texts is key here as the earliest texts have, to some extent, become classics whilst the newer ones may not survive beyond the initial print run.

Just as Rudd (1999) did, I have been selective in the materials chosen leading to "a partial reading" (p.48). This will be considered in more detail later. Nonetheless thematic analysis allows for a broader contextualisation of these books and the theme of death. This type of analysis allows for the consideration of texts "by their use of language" (Fairclough 1995 p.8) to consider the dilemmas they throw up and how this impacts the construction of identity or concepts. This can add useful comment on changing attitudes to children, and how they are presented and how death is viewed, across the time periods chosen.

Phillips and Hardy (2002) agreed that meaning is constructed and that "discursive activity does not occur in a vacuum" (p.4). Thematic analysis can allow for the uncovering of such a process, if we allow that it exists. Fairclough (1995) has added that "discourse is a use of language seen as a form of social practice" (p.7) and for me this means that thematic analysis offers a method for the exploration of the subject of death over time in children's books (or not).

Thematic analysis can also allow for the development of themes to ‘emerge’ or rather, to be uncovered during the research. It does not require the researcher to have a pre-determined set of themes from the outset. However it should be noted that the themes only emerge because I choose to see them and name them as such (Braun and Clark 2006). Others may find different themes. Although there is a real benefit from allowing themes to emerge and Braun and Clark (2006) celebrated this flexibility of method, they also cautioned that because of this it is important that the researcher must make explicit all assumptions and choices made along the way. This is so that thematic analysis does not merely seem to be an ‘anything goes’ (Braun and Clark 2006 p.5) excuse for lack of clear method. These themes are not assumed to be pre-existing, or at least if an assumption arises from my previous reading, then the process of the thematic analysis should serve to question it and to offer a rationale for its existence. It is important therefore that in the thematic analysis I make clear how decisions have been made at each stage. Rudd (1999) also celebrates this discursive approach and considers that focussing on the words allows for the avoidance of the “charge of laissez-faire relativism” (p.49 italics in text).

### **3.3 Focusing the research**

At the start of this process, my research focus was to consider ‘death- themed’ books for young children (under the age of 8). I had an assumption that such books existed, due to perhaps a vague belief that they did. This was supported by an unfocussed general experience of coming across such books in the past, and, therefore, the belief- that there would be a wealth of books from which to choose. At

this point the question I set out to address was “how is death dealt with in books for children under the age of eight”? This assumed that it would appear as a subject in young children’s literature and thus be available for exploration. A second question which also seemed to be useful in terms of finding the books and so impact on the search terms was “and in what ways does this change over time (if at all)?” Again this contained the assumption that firstly this was a subject to be found and that having found it death would be dealt with differently over time. It should be noted that this second question allows me to declare my position in terms of believing the world to be socially constructed and not fixed.

I wanted to look at books that come into the lives of children in an ‘everyday’ sort of way. That is story books written for a general audience. This is quite hard to define, but nonetheless is crucial to explaining what might be included and what not. This excluded books that were specifically written for children who had been bereaved and so might be considered for specifically therapeutic purposes. I wanted to consider only books that were fiction and not text books, or written with specific educational intent. There are many of these in the final period chosen (Green 2008) but not in the earliest. I intended my sample to include books that simply talked about death in some way as part of the story (as seen in the early Victorian period).

Poling and Hupp (2008) noted in their research the usefulness of books being readily available to the researchers, although they looked only at the period between 1986 and 2004. Their accessibility might indicate that the books could potentially be accessible to the child reader as well. This criterion felt relevant to my study as I was not intending to offer anything that might be considered to be any sort of critical literary analysis of children’s literature in terms of worthiness (Rudd 1999) and so I did not want to seek out esoteric works that have passed out of sight and are no

longer readily available. What mattered was the subject matter rather than its literary merit, as such. It is common within exploratory research such as this to limit the parameters and so use purposive sampling which allows the researcher a certain degree of control (Barbour 2001).

The dilemmas and issues this posed are similar to those considered by Lampert and Walsh (2010) in their research into children's picture books dealing with sexual abuse. Others also suggested that the aesthetic and literary merits of books which deal with 'difficult' subjects are sometimes sacrificed because of the nature of the subject in question. (McDaniel 2001). Books dealing with difficult subjects can sometimes focus on the message rather than on being just a good story.

Nevertheless, it is possible that some books are both informative and enjoyable, and as such it should be possible to distinguish books where the story is the thing from those that are "didactic, contrived and one-dimensional" (Lampert and Walsh 2010 p.149). As I am neither a literary historian nor a specialist in children's literature, I could not judge the books for their literary merits.

I chose to approach this subject from a place where my experience has suggested over the years that children do get to know about death –sometimes through personal experience. It has been my experience that their questions come from the same place as the questions about "where do I come from" – that is they wonder about the world. Some children simply ask, "what happens when you die" (Anthony 1940). Therefore I needed to source books which addressed this basic question where death is just another fact of life much as childbirth or the changing seasons.

I had anticipated that the ordinary and normal place of death in the earliest set of books (1890-1910) would be relatively easy to find. In the early and mid-nineteenth

century death was not only seen as a subject fit for children (McGeorge 1998) but one that was a crucial part of their education (in the broadest sense of the word). The well-known story of *The Fairchild Family* (published in 1818 by Mrs Sherwood) has been cited frequently across the literature considering books for children as an example of how death appears in the lives of children on a day to day basis. Its tone is moral and somewhat gruesome to many nowadays. Although not anticipating books to necessarily take the same moral tone, I had assumed that the ordinariness of death might be present across the periods.

By contrast one of the frequently recommended books for children on death from the end of the 20th century, is *Badger's Parting Gifts* (Varley) published in 1984. Here Badger knows he is about to die because he is very old and he is not afraid to die as "dying meant only that he would leave his body" (Varley 1984 no page number). The story focuses on how he will talk to his friends to help them understand. The tone here though less graphic is nonetheless simple and fits the idea of 'tame death' (Ariès 1974), but notions of this teaching moral behaviour are absent.

Though it seemed that the subject of death was unlikely to continue to appear in such florid terms as in the first of these two titles, the purpose of the study was to find out whether and how death was written about in books written for children. A further consideration would be how it has changed over the period between 1890 and 2010. The period covers the last and first decades of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, in effect covering 120 years of children's literature.

### **3.4 Rationale for the periods chosen**

It might have seemed sensible to simply choose a 100 year period (1900-2000), however this period would inevitably stop short of including any books published in 21st century and therefore I decided to extend the 100 year period by 10 years on either side of the 20th century. By doing so, the periods chosen broadly cross three significant points in children's literature, said by some to be 'Golden Ages' (Townsend 1998, Zipes 2002). Each of these three periods 1890-1910, 1950-1970 and 1990-2010 represents a significant change in attitudes of writers of children's books, although the first 'Golden Age' was considered to have begun prior to 1890 and the third 'Golden Age' is not necessarily generally accepted as such by all (Hunt 2009b). These periods then might also represent significant changes in attitude towards children. Whatever the cause, the increased interest in writing for children at these points in time was useful in offering a convenient time span.

In addition, the first period, following the Forster Education Act (1870), occurred when families began to decrease in size for the first time (ONS 2003) and so investment in individual children was greater than in the previous years. The flourishing of writing for children might be seen as a response to this. Although childhood mortality did not in fact particularly decrease at this time, parents were beginning to have fewer children and were becoming more involved in their upbringing and education (Prout 2005). This period also coincided to some extent with welfare changes and societal and political concerns around childhood health becoming foregrounded.

The middle period is just that (- that is: it is the centre point of the twentieth century) but also followed The Education Act (1944) when compulsory education was

extended for all children from the ages of 5 to 15. The post-war period also coincided with some increase in wealth and availability of resources – such as paper (Townsend 1998).

The final period is at the turn of the millennium and so mirrored the first period – it also followed a shift in academic thinking about children from the major part of the 20th century towards a social constructionist view of childhood rather than the previously understood scientific developmental view (Jenks 2005). One major reform in education which occurred two years prior to this final period was the Education Reform Act (1988), sometimes known as the Baker Act.

The time periods chosen thus coincidentally all sit around major pieces of Education legislation, in periods of change in children's literature, and in attitudes to children, as has been discussed in the previous chapter.

### **3.5 Sourcing books**

I perhaps rather naively imagined that there would be lists of books published each year under themes. I assumed the British National Bibliography would be one useful source. Writers in the United States - Poling and Hupp (2008), Green (2008), and Pyles (1998) - who have researched children's books on the theme of death currently available to American children have a digital data base to which they can refer. The choice of the parameters for selection of the books did not initially cause me any great concern, and so I set out with the naïve assumption that if others had easily found these books then, so would I. However I quickly found that the first stage of finding the books was not unproblematic or straight forward.

Slightly ironically there was a particular problem with this process for most of the current period of time. In recent years the British National Bibliography has stopped cataloguing fiction under themes (unlike what those working in the US found). Additionally, the fiction lists that did divide fiction into themes stopped being published in the 1980s with no digital or online equivalent ever having been set in the United Kingdom (as far as my research revealed). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that this is the time period with the most books published, adding further challenge to this issue.

Although the British Library has a copy of every book published they also do not list them under specific topics (in terms of children's fiction). The children's books come under the generic heading of 'children's books' and as will be commented on later even the children's librarians I spoke to suggested that this would not be a manageable or helpful resource. They suggested a number of websites that might list books between the dates 1990-2010. However, they also commented that not all those listed would still be available as in recent years books tended not to stay in print unless they become popular enough for the publishing company to think it worth their while; that is economically viable.

### **3.6 Selection criteria**

As previously discussed my interest in this thesis the place of death in the child's world and considering how this appears through children's literature in an ordinary and everyday way, (following Ariès 1974). Therefore I did not particularly want to search for books that were about bereavement and loss as such. There are a number of books that are used for what is sometimes termed 'bibliotherapy' and as such are prescribed to help children cope with issues of loss and grief; -however this

is a relatively recent phenomenon. Green (2008), Poling and Hupp (2008), and Jones (2001), as noted earlier, had focussed on bereavement and grief and they were able to source a wide range of books from the late 20th century. But this was not the particular focus here and thus I excluded sites such as *Winston's Wish* (a bereavement charity for children; which although a good resource for bereaved children is specifically to help those children coping with death or bereavement).

Even the most basic of search terms, for example the word 'death' tended to find books looking only at grief and bereavement in many sites I used, and thus proved unhelpful.

This meant that there was a significant difficulty in finding a resource that might allow for a systematic and logical process for the selection of books. The process needed to be rethought and considered in much more depth. This difficulty has been commented on by others looking for a reliable source to search, for example Wiseman (2013) noted that searches are limited by the administrator of any database and by the way in which they choose to classify the books within their lists. This may mean they have chosen not to classify books by age range, when age suitability was an important factor for me in terms of selection. I wanted to consider books for young children under eight. So without lists I had to decide who might know of such books and where they could be found.

The question at this stage then was "who knows about children's books"? Perhaps to others the answer might have been more obvious, but it took me some time before I gave up my fruitless searching and I turned to children's librarians. I now note that others have also commented on the usefulness and helpfulness of librarians for such a dilemma (Green 2008, Jones 2001).

I contacted Seven Stories which is the National Centre for Children's Books. From its title it would sound like a national library but is not part of the British Library service, but rather has charitable status. Their archive starts in 1930, although they have been gifted some earlier books and thus were able to offer some help over the full range of my time frame. Yet again they do not classify books by theme and to search their catalogue you first must know the name of the book or the author you wish to search for. Nonetheless this resource proved useful in helping me to establish how librarians source books for children and their staff proved very helpful.

Through the various contacts they suggested I then met up with several children's librarians in the North East of England who were able to help me make sense of the type of searches possible. They told me that they do not get lists of books that are published via one source, unlike in the United States. They are contacted by a range of publishers; then they make selections based on their own tastes and interests. This meant that the books available on the shelves of the library are dependent on the individual librarian. But, the books have been selected by a person who has some expertise in the field of children's literature.

Not all libraries classified the books by theme –some do this by author, some by age - so it was additionally necessary to go to the websites suggested to me by the various librarians they used to help me find books in the right age group, right publishing dates and right subject. This allowed me to return to the local library catalogues to see which books they had on their shelves.

Although this might appear to be random in many ways there was organisation and decision used in positive way to define the search parameters. Lampert and Walsh (2010) also found that “although random selection is not widely used in literary

analysis” (p.150) it can be a useful way of being “even –handed” (p.150) rather than selecting those texts which are of interest or are preferred by the researcher and may not therefore present a representative sample. Albeit, this was only used once the initial parameters of the search has been applied.

As there was not one single database from which to select my sample it had to be generated in several ways. For the period from 1990-2010 I used online websites as well as library catalogues. The websites I used were more specialist in nature; for example: [www.littleparachutes.com](http://www.littleparachutes.com). - stated that it lists: picture books to help children with life’s challenges. This website helped me to find books listed under age categories and gave a brief synopsis of the content of the story. They also listed their books thematically so I could find those focussing on death rather than on loss in a more general way. I also used more general sites such as [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) and the Guardian children’s book website ([www.guardian.com/childrens-books-site](http://www.guardian.com/childrens-books-site)), [www.booksforkeeps.co.uk](http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk) and [www.healthybooks.org.uk](http://www.healthybooks.org.uk).

I excluded any non-fiction titles from my list and those books which were explicitly aimed at parents to read with their child (this was usually found in the blurb and sometimes there was an advice section on how the book might be used). I was not concerned with books written to be used specifically for therapeutic purposes, although they may well be recommended by some for that use (Jones 2001). The difference was not always clear. Even where there was a clear narrative story books can “have pedagogical intent” (Lampert and Walsh 2010 p.149) and so books were not always divided into clear categories.

For the earliest period, 1890-1910 and the middle period, 1950-1970 the online sites were initially not helpful. This meant that I had to use works by Townsend (1996),

Meigs et al (1969) and Darton (1982) which record the children's literature from this period and also index the subject and age suitability. These sources are cited by researchers in children's literature and have the benefit of giving the year of publication, although not always the age of the expected readership. This method of selection also paralleled, in effect, the consulting of children's librarians in the sense that I was consulting experts in children's books to lead my search. So, by combining a range of methods for finding my sample I was then able to begin the selection of my sample. This may appear somewhat haphazard but might be reframed as 'forced creativity'.

### **3.7 Search terms**

Having found where to source the books the next stage of selection was to search within the books for words such as *dead, death, died, dying, killed*. I looked for a direct reference to death either in the text or at least part of the synopsis. All books, even those categories as picture books contained some words. My selection did not include any 'wordless' style of picture books that are becoming more popular (Crawford and Hade 2000). I also included loss and grief in my first searches as the story might talk about death and these terms sometimes were used as catch all terms for death.

I felt it was important that death was a feature in some way. The death might have happened 'off-stage' prior to the beginning of the story or might occur within the story, but needed to be a factor addressed in the text. Reading the synopsis

obviously was an important factor – however, the word grief for example might produce a result but the word might be used in the sense of coming to grief, similarly the word death could bring results where the word had meant tired to death. As a result the words loss and grief proved to be the least useful and so were eventually dropped from my search terms. Poling and Hupp (2008) also noted the number of unrelated titles the word death throws up.

Death, dying, and dead were words that to some extent were easier to find in the older books (1890-1910) although not as easy as I might have expected.

In trying to look at death, I therefore rejected books that offered a lifecycle story such as *The Lonely Tree* (Halliday 2005). Here the focus is on renewal and change of seasons rather than death. Another which did not offer a clear notion of death was *Moonshadow* (Lobel 2009). This story is about swans; the grandfather swan is lost but nonetheless continues to live on “in our hearts”. This story did not fit in the sense of being clear about the idea of death being final – the word loss being too equivocal. A way of sorting books was to divide them into those focussing on loss and grief only and those that were more explicit about death (Appendix 1).

The choice of books in both the two earlier periods was more forced due to the lack of examples from which to choose. This being particularly apparent in the period 1950-1970 where inclusion merely by the use of the word death, or that fact that someone talks about a death at some point in the story found only six books. This was therefore more a forced choice than a true selection. Some of those rejected addressed issues of loss, (*High Road Home*, Corbin 1954, *A Poppy in the Corn*,

Weaver 1960, and *Nobody's Garden*, Jones 1966), particularly being an orphan, but were less explicit about death than those in the final selection.

In the period 1890-1910 there was a slightly wider range from which to choose but not the wealth of choice I had, perhaps naively, imagined.

One story which was rejected was, *The Three Mulla- Mulgars* (De la Mare 2016 originally 1910). It was rejected as it would be too difficult to read and compare with other stories. It concerns three mulgars “or, as we say in English, a monkey” (p.5). It is an adventure story of a journey to be undertaken to avenge a death and so might have been very suitable but for the use of ‘Mulgar’ language throughout the story. For example “And Mutt would whisper to Nod: “Sst, zun nizza-neela, tus-weeta zan nuome” (p.9)!

It should also be noted that the selection criterion relating to the age suitability of the books was also problematic across the time periods. Opinions in terms of what is a suitable text for young children is has altered across time and even within the search sites there was some variation in what was deemed appropriate. This has been explored in the previous chapter. Some books have been classified in terms of the number and the complexity of words. But others, particularly in the early period have been deemed to be suitable for young children (Darton 1982, Townsend 1996) based on the content of the story – whether for moral development or entertainment value and perhaps would not be so classified nowadays.

This provided a small initial set of criteria but was sufficient to allow for a range of books to be located. In the earliest period (1890-1910) the age of the reader was not always stated as clearly as with the later books –for reasons that have been considered in the previous chapter – and had to be estimated from the references

about popularity in schools and Sunday schools (Townsend 1996). Also despite the wealth of books that talked about death from the early Victorian period the 1890s to 1910 saw a change. I was able to find ten books but this was more difficult than I had anticipated. Johnson (2004) also found the same difficulty stating: “I know some readers will write us about their favorite children’s grief book published between 1900 and 1940, but I couldn’t find any” (p.297).

The middle period (1950-70) proved to be difficult in terms of finding books where death is a theme at all; one notable exception being *Charlotte’s Web* (White 1952).

The final period 1990-2010 offered a wealth of books and thus proved to throw up different challenges in terms of my final selection.

Braun and Clark (2006) suggested as one needs to get to know the texts in detail for a thematic analysis means it is useful to keep the data set comparatively small. I decided that ten books from each of the periods would be a manageable number to deal with (this would be thirty in total). First of all they had to be available and then purchased (easily) or loaned before they could be read and re read. This number would allow for a snapshot of the books in each of the periods specified.

### **3.8 Sampling with time periods**

Where books were listed on online sites the synopsis allowed me to quickly judge whether a book might talk more generally about death, rather than specifically about

grief and loss. I was able to reduce the number of books from which to select my final sample more easily because of this filter. Some of the websites mentioned earlier categorised the books in to age suitability as well as subject matter and this simplified the search, particularly for the books from 1990-2010. For all titles accessed where I could to read a synopsis of the text, I then used the interlibrary loan service to read as many them as possible in more detail. An additional refinement of searching locally gave me my final sample. I read those I had accessed to consider how they addressed the subject of death and rejected any where the subject appeared to be 'toned down' or avoided.

### **3.9 Accessibility**

The next consideration in the selection process was accessibility. In fact, the availability question in terms of ease of access for my research purposes seemed to be the more relevant factor here (Poling and Hupp 2008) and indeed became an important factor in the final selection. In order to become familiar with the texts I needed to be able to have access to the books for a significant amount of time. Thus any books that could only be accessed by the inter-library loan service and had a very short loan period were not useful for my research. All books eventually selected were available from libraries, but in addition some of the earlier books were available as eBooks and so were read on line for ease of access and to avoid the need to return them. This also meant that eBooks sometimes did not have page numbers as such but use location –referred to by the abbreviation 'loc' where used later.

### 3.10 My list

Books: in order of publication date.

1890-1910

Lang, A. (1890) The Red Fairy Book. London: Dover Children's Classics.

Lang, A. (1894) The Yellow Fairy Book. London: Dover Children's Classics.

Kipling, R. (1894) The Jungle Book. London: Macmillan.

Potter, B. (1902) The Tale of Peter Rabbit. London: Frederick Warne.

Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905) A Little Princess. New York: Charles Scribner.

Barrie, J. M. (1906) Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Belloc, H. (1907) Cautionary Tales for Children. London: Eveleigh Nash.

Lang, A. (1907) The Olive Fairy Book. London: Dover Children's Classics.

Potter, B. (1908) The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck. London: Frederick Warne.

Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910) The Secret Garden (1910) Frances Hodgson Burnett. The American Magazine (in serial form then 1911 London: Heinemann.

1950-1970

Serallier, I. (1951) The Silver Sword. London: Jonathan Cape.

White, E. B. (1952) Charlotte's Web. London: Hamish Hamilton

Lewis, C. S. (1956) The Last Battle. London: The Bodley Head.

Pearce, P. (1958) Tom's Midnight Garden. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gorey, E. (1963) The Gashly Crumb Tinies. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Wise Brown, M. (1965) The Dead Bird. New York: Young Scott Books.

1990-2010

Grindley, S. and Butler, J. (1996) Little Elephant Thunderfoot. London: Orchard Books.

Wild, M. and Spudvilas, A. (1999) Jenny Angel. London: Viking Books.

Grey, N. and Cabban, V. (2000) Little Bear's Grandad. London: Little Tiger Press.

Kerr, J. (2002) Goodbye Mog. London: Harper Collins.

Rosen, M. (2002) *Lovely Old Roly*. London: Frances Lincoln.

Bruna, D. (2005) *Dear Grandma Bunny*. London: Egmont.

Maddern, E. and Hess, P. (2005) *Death in a Nut*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

Anholt, L. and Coppletree, J. (2006) *Seven for a Secret*. London: Frances Lincoln.

Smith, W. (2007) *Grandad's Ashes*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Erlbruch, W. (2008) *Duck, Death and the Tulip*. Wellington NZ: Gecko Press.

### 3.11 First reading and initial themes

**Table 1: direct mention of death.**

	Die/dying	Dead	Death	killed	Had an accident	Not specified/IMPLIED
The Secret Garden. Hodgson Burnett 1910	√					
The Little Princess. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)		√				
The Yellow Fairy Book Lang, A. (1894)	√	√	√	√		
The Red Fairy Book Lang, A. (1890)		√		√		
The Olive Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1907)	√		√			
The Jungle Book. Kipling, R. (1894)				√		
Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Barrie, J. M. (1906)						√
The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Potter, B. (1902)					√	
Cautionary Tales for Children Belloc, H. (1907)				√		
The Tale of Jemima Puddle Duck. Potter, B. (1908)						√
Charlotte's Web. White, E. B. (1952)						
The Gashlycrumb Tinies. Gorey, E. (1963)						
The Last Battle. Lewis, C. S. (1956)						
Tom's Midnight Garden. Pearce, P. (1958)						
The Silver Sword. Serailier, I. (1951)						
The Dead Bird. Wise Brown, M. (1965)						
Little Bear's Grandad. Grey, N. and Cabban, V. (2000)						√
Death, Duck and the Tulip. Erlbruch, W. (2008)	√					

Goodbye Mog. Kerr, J. (2002)	√	√				√
Grandad's Ashes. Smith, W. (2007)		√				
Seven for a Secret. Anholt, L. and Coppletree, J. (2006)						√
Jenny Angel. Wild, M. and Spudvilas, A. (1999)	√					
Death in a Nut. Madder, E and Hess, P. (2005)	√	√	√			
Little Elephant Thunderfoot. Grindely, S. and Butler, J. (1996)					√	
Dear Grandma Bunny. Bruna, D. (2005)	√	√				

With a sample of twenty six books, rather than the intended thirty (only six in 1950-70, –for reasons noted and discussed later), I set about categorising the books by the words that were used in relation to death. As part of this initial stage I wrote out a synopsis of the texts to summarise the plot of the books. This was a basic first depth reading and allowed me to pick out themes that seemed to be of interest. The purpose of this was to begin to draw out potential themes in a logical and coherent way. The intention was to find a pattern (Boyatzis 1998 p.3) which might be categorised into themes. I did consider the usefulness of counting the number of times the words such as ‘death’, ‘dead’, ‘dying’ and ‘killed’ were used in each story. Of the twenty six books in this study only eight do not use the words death/dying or dead directly: - this includes four from the early period, two from the middle and three from the latest period.

I chose not to use this as one of the themes as it soon became apparent that the different lengths of the books appeared to make this unhelpful and, for me at least, meaningless. In addition to this, some of the sample included picture books and at

this first stage I had not developed a strategy for including references to images.

Therefore, word counting alone would not produce relevant or accurate data.

The next set of groups I considered was to put the books in to categories by 'who dies'. I also included in this a categorisation of real/fantasy and then also into animal /person groups. This then allowed to me consider how the subject of death was addressed in the story – was there any difference if the story was fantasy based or not, for example.

**Table 2: Who dies?**

Person	Pet	Anthropomorphised animal	Real (ish) animal
The Yellow Fairy Book Lang, A. (1894)	Charlotte's web White, E. B. (1951)	The Tale of Peter Rabbit Potter, B. (1902)	The Jungle Book Kipling, R. (1894)
The Olive Fairy Book Lang, A. (1907)	Lovely Old Roly Rosen, M. (2002)	The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck Potter, B. (1908)	The Dead Bird Wise Brown, M. (1965)
The Secret Garden Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910)	Goodbye Mog Kerr, J. (2002)	Little Bear's Grandad Grey, N. and Cabban, V. (2000)	Little Elephant Thunderfoot Grindley, S. and Butler, J. (1996)
The Red Fairy Book Lang, A. (1890)		Dear Grandma Bunny Bruna, D. (2005)	
A Little Princess Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)		Death, Duck and the Tulip Erlbruch, W. (2008)	

Within the generation of themes because of the range of styles of story it was useful to group the books by the main character of the story: was it an animal or a person, although this had a limited usefulness. Nonetheless, this allowed me to begin to frame my understanding of what I was reading. The depiction of the character then could be divided into whether the representation was 'real' or more 'cartoon' like.

Here for example Peter Rabbit (Potter 1902) is drawn in a realistic way –although he wears clothes - he always resembles a real rabbit in shape. Miffy (in *Dear Granma Bunny*, Bruna 2005), who is also a rabbit, is a simple rounded shape with a small cross for a mouth and is more cartoon-like. Mowgli, In *The Jungle Book* (Kipling 1894) is a 'real' boy and lives with 'real animals'; although the setting is perhaps

'unreal' it follows a similar style to *Little Elephant Thunderfoot* (Grindley and Butler 1996) where the little elephant is set in a realistic landscape.

Braun and Clark (2006) suggested that an inductive analysis derives codes that come from the data set and not from previous research on the subject. This appeared to be important as previous work in this area on death and children's books has tended to focus on books for use in bibliotherapy and so the themes they chose reflected the 'intent' of the book in a similar way to Lampert and Walsh's (2010) research on picture books dealing with sexual abuse. Holloway and Todres (2007) stated that the themes do not need to come from entire data set, and this proved to be useful in a subject that has not previously been addressed. It rapidly became clear was that not all themes were evident in each period. That is to say that each theme was not found in each book in each period. Phillips and Hardy (2002) considered that in terms of any discursive analysis successful recipes of how to proceed are hard to provide and that the "form that the analysis takes varies from study to study" (p.74). Again this should not be seen as giving licence to be laissez-faire, but rather that the 'art' of the analysis is seen in the choices made by the researcher (Mills and Birks 2014).

Becoming more familiar with each text after several readings it then became possible to do develop general themes. My next reading was to simply read the story and to note the type of language used. Further readings would allow me to pick out more specific themes across the range of books.

### **3.12 Reading pictures**

The first reading threw up one unanticipated issue. This was due to the group specified in this research, which meant that the more recent books (1990-2010)

tended to be picture books – or books with as much visual material as printed text. This was potentially problematic in terms of reading for themes across the data set. Phillips and Hardy (2002) also noted the issue of how to deal with images in their work on cartoons. Illustrations were not entirely absent from the 1890-1910 books but less likely to form a significant part of the story. This meant that in order to read all of the texts in the same way I needed to be able to include the information from the pictures as part of the text.

In this regard the work of Nodelman (1988) offered me a framework. He suggested that the main purpose of pictures in picture books is to assist in telling the story and not as objects of art as such. The picture, in effect, summarises the story and can add detail where there is limited text. Nodelman (1988 P.42) considered that the text and the image should be seen as the total narrative, with the pictures adding tone to the sparse words. There has been criticism of Nodelman however, notably by Doonan who objects to the way of interpreting picture books, calling him a 'word man' (1993) and so undermining the value of the picture. Nodelman's work does not focus on the aesthetic qualities of pictures as such but rather that it is the "non-textual elements that create the mood or atmosphere in picture books and are not really separable components" (Nodelman 1988 p.41). He also believed the combination of words and pictures add a third, and thus, additional dimension to the story, beyond reading either words or pictures separately. This view was helpful and allowed me to consider the stories as a whole rather than being overly concerned about the number of words used in each book. Initially this had seemed to me to be a problem – would it be possible to compare a book of two hundred pages with a book of only thirty two pages. Most picture books follow a similar formula of size and number of pages. Thus I was able to reconceptualise the picture books as something

more like watching a play for example where the words, actions and the set serve to illustrate the story, and so offered a broader reading of these books. Lampert and Walsh (2010) also found this to be the case in their research.

This then gave me a way of being able to categorise the way in which the reaction to death was described in the stories. Looking at the pictures in *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002) the words sad or cried are not used, but drawings that accompany the writing show sad faces and the children being held tightly by their parents. So, following the Nodelman (1988) framework I was able to interpret the tone of the story in the picture books even without explicit mention in the written text.

### 3.13 Reactions

**Table 3**

<b>Sadness</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>No reaction</b>
The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck Potter, B. (1908)	The Red Fairy Book Lang, A. (1890)	The Tale of Peter Rabbit Potter, B. (1902)
The Jungle Book Kipling, R. (1894)	Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens Barrie, J. M. (1906)	A Little Princess Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)
The Yellow Fairy Book Lang, A. (1894)	The Dead Bird Wise Brown, M. (1965)	The Secret Garden Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910)
The Olive Fairy Book Lang, A. (1907)	Seven for a Secret Anholt, L. and Coppletree, J. (2006)	The Gashly Crumb Tinies Gorey, E. (1963)
Charlotte's Web White, E.B. (1952)	Death in a Nut Maddern, E. and Hess, P. (2005)	The Last Battle Lewis, C. S. (1956)
Tom's Midnight Garden Pearce, P. (1958)	Cautionary Tales for Children Belloc, H. (1907)	The Silver Sword Serallier, I. (1951)
Goodbye Mog Kerr, J. (2002)		Grandad's Ashes Smith, W. (2007)
Dear Grandma Bunny Bruna, D. (2005)		
Jenny Angel Wild, M. and Spudvilas, V. (1999)		
Little Elephant Thunderfoot Grindley, s. and Butler, J. (1996)		
Little Bear's Grandad Grey, N. and Cabban, V.(2000)		
Lovely Old Roly Rosen, M. (2002)		
Death, Duck and the Tulip Erlbruch, W. (2008)		

I used three broad categories:-sadness, mixed reactions and no reaction. The mixed reaction category was used for those reactions that may have included a range of emotions and not predominantly one of sadness and grief. For example in *Death in a Nut* (Maddern and Hess 2005) the young boy is distressed and upset when his mother tell him she is going to die but angry when he meets death face to face. The children in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) are at first curious about the bird, feeling for a heartbeat but then a shed brief tear for the bird.

The reading for themes in the manner I had begun appeared to show such a wide range that I was concerned that I could not find a common thread, other than that they somehow related to death. This appeared to be in part due to the different styles of writing from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st, as I have already commented on above.

### **3.14 Second reading**

As stated earlier, Poling and Hupp (2008) found that books (and more particularly picture books) aimed at younger children tended to focus on what they term, 'biological aspects' of death (i.e. the fact of death) rather than on the socio-cultural or emotional aspects. Having considered the emotional reactions to death I decided to use the fact of death as a category. This may be reflected in the use of direct reference to the fact of death rather than the use of euphemism. Poling and Hupp (2008) suggested that the biological facts should include the four separate concepts of irreversibility, non-functionality, universality and causality which are thought (in a constructivist sense following Piaget) to be essential to understanding the concept of death (Speece and Brent 1992). Although not all of these concepts were apparent

in each of the books I selected some are evident and most of the books did refer at least to the concept of irreversibility and clearly show that death is a different state from being alive, or being asleep (we can assume that Peter Rabbit is very clear that his father is not returning having been put into a pie). In terms of the initial announcement of death in a story it seems very clear that this would appear to be an important message that is being given: that death/being dead is not the same as life. For example, in *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) we are left in no doubt that death and life are not at all the same. We are told Grandma is not sleeping and “she isn’t breathing anymore” (Bruna 2005 p.3). In this reading although the table shows similar words to table 1 the purpose here was to look for explanations of death, not just the use of the word.

**Table 4: Reason for death**

Killed – war	Killed -accident	Illness	Old age	Unspecified
The Silver Sword Serallier, I. (1951)	The Jungle Book Kipling, R. (1894)	The Secret Garden Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910)	Seven for a Secret Anholt, L. and Coppltree, J. (2006)	The Olive Fairy Book Lang, A. (1907)
The Last Battle Lewis, C. S. (1956)	Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens Barrie, J. M. (1906)	A Little Princess Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)	Grandad’s Ashes Smith, W. (2007)	The Red Fairy Book Lang, A. (1890)
Tom’s Midnight Garden Pearce, P. (1958)	The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck Potter, P. (1908)	The Yellow Fairy Book Lang, A. (1894)	Lovely Old Roly Rosen, M. (2002)	The Dead Bird Wise Brown, M. (1965)
	The Tale of Peter Rabbit Potter, B. (1902)	Jenny Angel Wild, M. and Spudvilas, V. (1999)	Goodbye Mog Kerr, J. (2002)	Death, Duck and the Tulip Erlbruch, W. (2008)
	Cautionary Tales for Children Belloc, H. (1907)		Little Bear’s Grandad Grey, N. and Cabban, V. (2000)	
	The Gashly Crumb Tinies Gorey, E. (1963)		Death in a Nut Maddern, E. and Hess, P. (2005)	
			Dear Grandma Bunny Bruna, D. (2005)	
			Little Elephant Thunderfoot Grindley, S. and Butler, J. (1996)	
			Charlotte’s Web White, E. B. (1952)	

### **3.15 Third reading**

Following the second reading I was able to draw out potential themes and what began to emerge was that these themes were not necessarily unique to this research. Despite thinking initially that the themes used by others would not be helpful and not relevant to the picture books in particular, it became clear the more I read and reread that this was not the case. The generation of themes as has been noted, is said to be both scientific and an art (Poling and Hupp 2008). Clearly it must be evidence based but if “analysis is also described as an “art”, and is often referred to as “creative”, “flexible” and involving “chaos”” (Hennick 2010 p.205) then responding to what I was apparently seeing mattered. At this stage it seemed to me that the chaos was very evident.

### **3.16 Potential themes**

As discussed, I had expected the themes to emerge from the texts with the intention (I hoped) of preventing my own assumptions driving the analysis. It became clear, however, that the themes apparent to me matched quite closely to those already identified by other researchers; this despite that they were only looking at books from the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and more specifically, at loss (Green 2008, Poling and Hupp 2008, Corr 2004, Jones 2001, Moore and Mae 1987). The notion of allowing themes to emerge has been criticised as it assumes passivity on behalf of the researcher and also assumes that the text has a fixed meaning (Braun and Clark 2006).

As I have stated, I consider both children's literature and children to be social constructions, and thus this thesis is also a construction, meaning that my shaping of meaning is inherent in my reading of the books and the way in which I have chosen to interpret them here. Others (Phillips and Hardy 2002) seemed to accept that themes emerge and chose not to acknowledge their own (potential) bias in the process. There is, nonetheless, a danger in imposing themes from outside and so there must inevitably be a reflexivity between the reading of the text, the awareness of what has been written about the subject previously and the readers own interpretation. It is important to note that this is part of the interpretivist nature of the research and as such is acknowledged and owned.

Using modified versions of Jones' (2001) headings I chose to analyse more fully the books under four broad themes in order to develop a structure for the analysis. In addition it occurred to me that it might be possible to consider the books by reference to the *ars moriendi* of medieval times (a book telling people how to die well), but although the initial theme of the announcement of death might seem to fit the themes did not align well enough.

The themes I chose were based on Jones (2001). These are: the announcement of death, reactions to the announcement, funerals/rituals and the afterlife and memory/continuing bonds.

The four main themes allowed then for a consideration of how death was addressed across time and within the time periods. However, it also left me with books which seemed anomalous and did not easily fit into these themes. In quantitative research 'outliers' are not seen to be helpful and need to be eliminated (Barbour 2001), but in qualitative research this is not the case. Miles and Huberman (1984) considered the

outlier to be useful in testing and potentially strengthening the findings. These 'anomalies' were considered separately by looking at them as exceptions and outliers, rather than mistakes. This then threw up new themes which had not been seen in the earlier readings. It is important to note that this process of new themes did not necessarily highlight any flaws in the original themes but rather was part of the process and complemented. Phillips and Hardy (2002 p.75) quote Wood and Kroger (2000) who say that "doing analysis is also like writing a paper.....and as in writing a paper it is not always easy to decide when to stop and go with what you have" (p.97).

### **3.17 Summary**

From the prior reading I had done (Green 2008, Poling and Hupp 2008, Jones 2001), I had initially assumed that because of the wider range of styles across the time periods it would not be possible to use a pre-existing themes. Counting words and categorising who dies could only take me so far whilst waiting for themes to emerge, thus I began to look at how the work of others might give me some help. From my first reading the books appeared to address the subject in very different ways. The styles used when writing for children have changed across the time period under scrutiny. The idea of the child and also of the meaning of death has not remained static, as I have commented in the previous chapter.

Others who have considered death in children's books (Green 2008, Corr 2004, Moore and Mae 1987) had chosen to classify them into those where death is either a major or a minor theme. In this thesis that seemed to be unhelpful as the books were taken from a much broader time range in this study and had not been written specifically to address the topic of death as is the case with those looking only at

books from the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As one of the criteria for selection of the books was that they address the subject of death (shown in table 1) in some way it was evident that all of those chosen would have death as a significant theme to a greater or lesser extent. That is to say that to distinguish between the major or minor role of death to the plot of the books chosen is unhelpful here. For example in *The Jungle Book* (Kipling 1894) although it cannot be suggested that death was a major part of the story the story starts with a death and Mowgli grows up aware that it will be his destiny to kill. So he is aware of the fact that death is part of life. In *Seven for a Secret* (Anholt and Coplestone 2006) death as such is not mentioned but the story hangs on the relationship between the grandpa and Ruby and their communication before and after his death (which is implied after the grandpa stops writing letters and passes on a gift to Ruby).

Nonetheless death featured as part of the story in all of the books in my chosen sample and so considering whether to term this major or minor did not seem helpful, but the manner in which the subject was addressed was of interest to me.

I have explored the issues in finding my sample which serve to highlight the importance of being aware of one's biases in this type of analysis. The apparent lack of books featuring death in the period 1890-1910 was an unanticipated factor which caused me to reconsider my search strategy. The method of selection I intended to use was purposive sampling (Braun and Clark 2006), though it should be noted that the final sampling was more forced and so more properly described as a convenience sample due to lack of examples in the periods 1890-1910 and 1950-1970. This produced a final sample of twenty six books rather than the thirty I had expected to find. Applying methods of thematic analysis to this sample, such as

becoming familiar with the texts by multiple readings I have been able to develop a number of themes which I will explore in the next chapter.

The four main themes are: - the announcement of death, reactions, funerals/rituals and the afterlife and memory/continuing bonds. Each of these themes will be broken down further and finally outliers or apparent anomalies have been considered separately.

## **Chapter Four: The themes analysed.**

This chapter presents both the findings and their analysis at the same time. In qualitative research this is often regarded as more useful, seeing the separation of the two as an artificial construct (Mills and Birks 2014). By exploring these together it becomes possible to make connections more closely to concepts informing the study shown in previous chapters.

Each theme is presented in general terms and then using one book from each period the theme is analysed in more depth. This has allowed for the links to concepts presented earlier to be more fully explored and to demonstrate the way in which social construction impacts the literature.

What follows is the presentation of the themes which are similar to those used by Jones (2001) and so using modified versions of her headings I have presented and analysed the books under four broad themes. These are; the announcement of death, reactions to the announcement, funerals/rituals and the afterlife and memory/continuing bonds.

For ease of reference I have termed the different periods: groups A, B and C. Each period is shown in a different colour in the tables used within the text. Thus; - A (red) 1890-1910, B (black) 1950-1970 and C (green) 1990-2010.

**Table 5: The announcement of death:**

Direct	Unclear	Indirect/euphemism
Olive Fairy Book Lang, A. (1907)		The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Potter, B.(1902)
Yellow Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1894)		Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Barrie, J. M. (1906)
A Little Princess Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)	Cautionary Tales for Children. Belloc, H. (1907)	The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck Potter, B. (1908)
The Secret Garden. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910)	Red Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1890)	The Gashly Crumb Tinies. Gorey, E. (1963)
The Silver Sword. Serallier, I.(1951)	The Jungle Book. Kipling, R. (1894)	Little Bear's Grandad. Gray,N.and Cabban, V. (2000)
Charlotte's Web. White, E. B.(1952)	Seven for a Secret. Anholt, L. and Coppletree,J. (2006)	Little Elephant Thunderfoot. Grindley,S. and Butler ,J. (1996)
The Dead Bird. Wise Brown, M. (1965)		
The Last Battle. Lewis, C.S.(1956)		
Tom's Midnight Garden. Pearce, P.(1958)		
Goodbye Mog. Kerr, J.(2002)		
Dear Grandma Bunny. Bruna, D. (2005)		
Lovely Old Roly. Rosen, M. (2002)		
Death in a Nut. Madden,E. and Hess, P. (2005)		
Grandad's Ashes. Smith, W.(2007)		
Jenny Angel. Wild,M. and Spudvilas, A. (1999)		
Death, Duck and the Tulip. Erlbruch,W. (2008)		

We can see from the above, briefly, the way in which death is introduced in the books varies across the different styles and dates of publication as one might expect, depending on the type of story. We might expect to see to some extent that the norms around the announcement of death would be contingent on the cultural practices of the time (Dunkle 2010). This, however would not appear to be the case as many of the books from this sample addressed the fact of death directly regardless of the period in which they were written.

#### **4.1 How and when is Death announced**

The books in Group C (1990-2010 in green) tended on the whole to be very direct and clear, as has been found by others (Jones 2001, Poling and Hupp 2010). In *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) we are told on page 1 “Do you know why she is

crying? Miffy's grandma died last night". Similarly *Grandad's Ashes* (Smith 2007) states on page 1 "When Grandad died, eighty –three people went to the funeral". These stories tended to announce the fact that they will feature death and get to the fact of death fairly quickly.

In the early period Group A (1890-1910 shown in red) this was not a feature in all stories, contrary to what one might have anticipated following the Victorian preoccupation with death (Pyles 1988). However, we see in two stories in particular death being spoken about openly and directly. In *A Little Princess* (Hodgson Burnett 1905) we are told in the first two pages that Sara Crewe's mother is dead – "her mother died when she was born" (p.2). This appeared to be merely an incidental fact in the story, but later in chapter seven the death of Sara's father was announced quite bluntly by the arrival of the solicitor to talk with the head mistress. The solicitor was talking about the financial situation of Sara's father and said "The late Captain Crewe" (p.71). This was the first indication we had of his death but the word dead or died was not used at the first mention, although it comes five lines later when Mr. Barrow the solicitor responded to a question clarifying "He's dead, ma'am"(p.71).

In *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) we found the same method of storytelling where in the initial chapter the family and servants of the main character die – this time they die in a cholera epidemic – "people were dying like flies " (p.4), and the child Mary Lennox was then sent to England. Here she met Colin and his father. On the way to her new home the housekeeper talked to Mary about the place she was to live and said in a conversational manner that Mr. Craven's wife died – "when she died" (p.15). Talk about dying, particularly with Colin and about Colin was a significant feature throughout the story. No one in this story expected Colin to live - he repeated this expectation quite openly "If I were to live" (p.131). These types of

comments happened in conversations between Colin and Mary from their first meeting.

Stories from Group B (1950-1970 shown in black) tended to not announce death in the first pages. However in *Charlotte's Web* (White 1952) the fact that Wilbur the pig was the runt of the litter and so was to be killed occurs on page one. "Your father has decided to do away with it. Do away with it? Shrieked Fern. "You mean kill it?" (p.2) (italics in original). As the story developed we find Charlotte the spider talking about her imminent death in the final chapters of the book. Finally Charlotte told Wilbur she cannot return to the farm with him and said "In a day or two I'll be dead" (p.223). The adventure stories in this period mention death as part of the story but in a similar way to *Charlotte's Web* (White 1952) it was not announced at the beginning of the story.

The announcement of death as seen in this sample ranged from being very bluntly, (or perhaps it might be better to say directly) stated to being alluded to obliquely in talk of ghosts or of natural events (*Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce 1958), *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (Potter 1908)). In a similar way the manner of the announcement altered over time in that sometimes death was addressed as a distressing event and in other stories as a mere fact of life using no emotional language in connection with death.

In this theme the nature of the deaths were also seen to be divided into accidental death, deaths through illness and death due to age (old age).

#### **4.2 Who dies**

Most of the deaths referred to in group C were due to old age, whether animal or person. Only in one story, *Jenny Angel* (Wild and Spudvilas 1999) did we find the

death of a child; in this case due to illness. This may also reflect the dramatic decline in childhood deaths since the 19th century (Walter 2017). It may be argued that death due to old age must be in some way related to illness in strict medical terms, however in this sample illness and old age are not always connected although it was often suggested within the story that ageing inevitably leads to death. For example; - in *Goodbye Mog* (Kerr 2005), Mog told us she was getting old and that she was “tired, dead tired” (p.1). The death of older people (and animals) sometimes occurred within a hospital setting but also occurred at home across the range of books. It should be noted that it is only in group A where parental deaths occur; this despite some evidence to suggest it is still far from an unusual experience for children (Ribbens McCarthy 2006)

In *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) both words and pictures were very direct about the facts of the death of Miffy’s grandma. We were told on the third page that grandma Bunny was not just sleeping: “she is much stiller than before” (Bruna 2005 p.3) and also that “Miffy knows she isn’t sleeping and she isn’t breathing any more” (Bruna 2005 p.3). The picture that accompanied these words showed grandma Bunny in bed lying very still. This is a book aimed at children from the age of 3 and above and appears to very clearly deliver the concepts of non-functionality and irreversibility (Speece and Brent 1992), and would appear to follow the findings of Poling and Hupp (2010) in that we are given an unambiguous message about death being not the same as life.

In *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) conversations between Colin and Mary, even on their first meeting, picked up on the theme of death and Colin’s preoccupation, not to say obsession, with his own death. This is perhaps, a book aimed at children at the older end of my range and in this book we have an indication

that death is universal (Speece and Brent 1992, Nagy 1948) – that is that everyone dies not just the old. Death was spoken about openly as a fact of life here as was not sentimentalised. This would appear to follow what Ariès (1983) suggested was a change in attitudes which began to happen from the middle of the 19th century, where death itself began to be considered an “indecent” thing (Ariès 1983) and no longer is regarded as something beautiful. Death had become dirty and was associated with smells, biological acts and needed to be hidden away (Rugg 1998). Death was not hidden away in *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) but it was not prettified or glamourized.

Poling and Hupp (2008) suggested that the basic information contained in the books for younger children was perhaps more comprehensible and direct than the more nuanced stories for older children where emotions and changes to life style might be more understood. Indeed it is evident in many of the stories in my sample that the announcement of death tends to be direct and clear - particularly those from group A and those from group C.

#### **4.3 Variation across time**

The use of the words dead, death, died and killed occurred across all the periods but with variations in how they are used within each time period, as has been shown above. In group B although direct words about death are used, the nature and subject matter of the stories differs somewhat. This will be discussed in more depth in the next section. However in the middle period death tended to be discussed as a consequence of war rather than as a natural life event - the middle period covers 1950-1970. It is perhaps the fact that the Second World War was still a recent event that might contribute to this difference. Everyone, including children would have had

experience of death, if only vicariously. In some ways this might seem to follow what Ariès (1996) described about the seventeenth century changes in behaviour towards a separatist notion of what children should know.

The one anomaly in this group was *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965), which is about a dead bird that is found by some children in a wood. This book perhaps represents the idea that had become accepted in the 1960s and 70s that children's books should reflect the lives of 'real' children; referred to by some as "trendy didacticism" (Kilpatrick et al. 1994 p.17). The bird had died from natural causes and the children examined the bird and then buried it. They showed an interest in the world around them and this included, inevitably, dead birds. As noted earlier, this was an era when books were beginning to show the real world, but rarely mentioned death (Moss 1972).

In group A, contrary to the findings of Poling and Hupp (2008), it is in the longer story books for the older end of the age group that the words death and dying appeared and they were absent from the "picture" books in that period, except in the more humorous *Cautionary tales for Children* by Belloc (1907); although this was more specifically a book with illustrations rather than one which used pictures to tell the story. (That is the pictures are not used to offer additional information). The idea of the nonsense story allowed for the distancing between real life and fantasy (Hunt 2006). It was clearly meant to be understood that the magical and the unbelievable were what was being written about – but this also offered licence to the writer to explore potentially distressing subjects, but also removed some of the horror. The

words (death, dying and so on) tended not to appear in the titles of the stories except in the fairy stories or folk tales.

Non-functionality and universality (Speece and Brent 1992) were not specifically used as selection criteria in the sample chosen but the direct use of the words dead, dying and so on nonetheless revealed that these concepts do appear across the sample. Poling and Hupp's (2008) study considered only books written in the late 20th century and early 21st and they chose books which they termed 'death-themed' literature and which were designed specifically to "help children understand death" (p165). It may be that the authors of the books in their study wrote their stories with these concepts in mind and were addressed to a specific audience. It may also be a function of finding what one is looking for and so is a reflection of purposive sampling (Barbour 2001). We see that Jones (2001) in her sample found very few books aimed at the under 7s that are so direct; she named only two books that address death in a direct and non-emotional way, but her sample was specifically focussed on books for bereaved children where emotion was a major factor. It should also be noted that the most recent of the books analysed by Jones was from 1990 and in the Poling and Hupp study they chose books published up to 2004. This may also be a factor in the way death is currently presented to children and perhaps might also reflect the turn in attitudes towards death that Walter (1994) terms the 'revival of death'.

#### **4.4 Real or unreal**

In this theme of the announcement of death, we can see that the stories also divided into real and anthropomorphised characters. This also provided a useful way to begin to look for commonalties and differences across such a varied range of styles

and lengths of story. Lampert and Walsh (2010) noted the usefulness of what they described as a “basic audit” (p.151) as a way of sorting prior to being able to consider the way in which books might construct difficult subjects. To refine this theme of the announcement of death it is thus useful to address the notion of ‘who dies’.

In Group A the stories tended to involve what we might refer to as real people. Although animals occurred in *The Jungle Book* (Kipling 1894) they interacted with humans and acted in what may be considered to be ‘natural’ ways despite that they talked. Only the in the Beatrix Potter books were animals used in an anthropomorphic way. However, her animals retained many real animal qualities, whilst also being able to talk and wear clothes. The illustrations showed this alteration and animals appeared both in their natural state and also dressed in clothes and walking on the hind legs.

Group B also showed the use of real characters. Wilbur the pig in *Charlotte’s Web* (White 1952) was presented as both a ‘real’ pig living on a farm and then as the story progressed, the animals gained humanised qualities. Only two books in Group C featured a story where all the characters were human – and indeed one was the only story in which the death of a young child occurred.

My sample would appear to contradict the findings of Poling and Hupp (2008) who found that the majority of books in their sample (from 1980-2004) dealt with human deaths, but again it should be noted that their sample focussed more explicitly on books designed to teach children about death. However, in my sample, what is evident is the differences, in terms of the announcement of death as direct or

indirect, do not appear to be related to whether the characters are real or anthropomorphised animals.

Looking at the theme of the announcement of death allowed for a better comparison across the periods. This allowed me to illuminate issues of style; – length of story/different way of writing for children/variation in style of language used in different historical periods. It also meant that reading the ‘pictures as words’ became less problematic and offered a way of interpreting the stories along thematic lines. Where pictures were significant in the telling of the story I based the analysis on Nodelman’s (1988) understanding of reading pictures as ‘words’ to convey meaning and not only as mere illustration . Lampert and Walsh (2010) also noted the importance of the interplay of text and image in constructing meaning in children’s books.

#### **4.5 Death announces himself**

By contrast, death was personified in some of the books (Nagy 1948) and, as the terms suggests, death arrived in the form of a person or animal to tell the protagonist of their death or to announce that a loved one was to be taken away. These tended to focus less on the ‘biological facts’ of death but did consider that death is inevitable and perhaps by implication, universal. This was mostly to be seen in the fairy stories or “folk” type stories. Examples of this were found in both groups A and C, but in group B only *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) used any suggestion of personification and this was of an explicitly Christian nature.

In group A one story from the *Red Fairy Book* (1890) by Andrew Lang is called *The Voice of Death*, a direct reference to death as a character. This followed the classic journey type story where the hero sets out on a quest (Campbell 1988). The hero of

the story found a land where no one died, but from time to time people heard a voice calling to them, and they set out to follow the voice but never returned. It would appear that death is shown as both something to be feared or resisted, but the moral of the story was clear: death cannot be avoided and comes to us all (Speece and Brent 1992).

Another example of personification is *Death in a Nut* (Madden and Hess 2005), apparently based on a traditional Scottish folk tale. Jack lives with his mother who he found ill in bed and she told him that she was dying. She said “I think Old Man Death will be coming for me soon” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.3). The story followed Jack’s attempts to waylay Death, which he did, and he trapped him inside a nutshell, causing all death to stop. Eventually Jack understood that “without Death there can be no life” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.24).

Whilst both of these folk stories addressed very clearly the idea that death is universal and inevitable they also seemed to show what Nagy (1948) found in her research in Hungary into children’s understanding of death. Whilst her findings were in some ways similar to those of Piaget, and also described a constructivist development of the understanding of death, she noted that children under the age of 8 tended to personify death and this would be seen in their drawings. This may also be connected to the lack of suppression of the folk tale in Europe, unlike in Britain (Carpenter 1985). It is perhaps interesting to note that in terms of the cognitive development of the concept of death the understanding of non-sentience is more often expected to be understood at a younger age than the concept of universality and inevitability (Speece and Brent 1992) and we appear see this concept reflected in more of the stories for young children. The folk tales by contrast tended to consider death as an inevitable fact of life and universal, a fact which Kellahear

(2007) suggested is known only to humankind. Thus it may be that the folk story may reflect an older understanding of death which did not need to see death as a physical state as such, and that it linked “to our deeper, primordial links with early humans” (Kellahear 2007 p.5).

Picture books, in this sample, tended to be more realistic and based in the lived experience of children, in that they gave factual information about the state of death, to some extent. Two stories that did not seem to fit into the general styles noted above are *Death, Duck and the Tulip* (Erlbruch 2008) and *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956).

In *Death, Duck and the Tulip* (Erlbruch 2008) death also appeared as a character. However this book, apparently, does not claim to be based on a folk tale but written as a picture book for children. Unlike most of the other books in this latest period it described not just the ‘biological’ facts about death but, also combined the personified character of Death. Death was shown as a thin character wearing a long coat (appendix 2). His head was a skull and he carried a tulip (although it is unclear why). Death announced to the Duck, “I am Death”, on page two. On page three, Duck asked him “you’ve come to fetch me” (Erlbruch 2008). The two then go on to have some small adventures together. Duck asked some questions about death and got some answers – such as illness and accidents can be the cause of death, but Duck was given no answers about the afterlife, despite posing the question. Although Death appeared here in person when Duck eventually died we are told that “she’d stopped breathing. She lay quite still” (p.23). This story appeared to offer both ‘traditional’ and ‘scientific’ explanations of death. Unlike in the earlier fairy stories or folk tales Death did not take Duck away or lure her to some far off land. This story sits between the ‘factual’ and the folk tale.

#### **4.6 Death as a beginning**

*The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) which offered a vision of death that suggests it is another world. The children passed through a stable door which appeared bigger inside than outside. Queen Lucy then commented that “in our world too, a Stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world” (Lewis 1956 p.172). In this story though, the message was that the world of the dead was in fact the real world and that the world which we would more normally think of as real was merely a preparation for the afterlife. This story later allowed us to know that the children had died in a railway accident and that their previous life in the Shadowlands was the unreal one and that now they were dead “the dream is ended” (Lewis 1956 p.221). Real life began after death in this Christian allegory. No other story in this sample was overtly Christian in the same way as this story and it appeared to consider death only from a spiritual view point, but did announce the fact of death directly, even though it disputed the meaning of death as an end. This book is perhaps the most difficult to categorise and sits uncomfortably within all themes.

#### **4.7 Three books**

Next I will consider three books: one from each of the time periods. I consider in a little more depth how death was announced and by comparing them across the three time periods I look more closely for the similarities and differences. This section offers commentary on the composition of the message showing how words and pictures have been used to deliver an explicit message.

The three books below offer useful points for comparison.

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902)

*The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965)

*Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005)

Each of these books was a picture book and followed the typical structure of a picture book where the interplay between the text and the image were both equally important in delivering the message of the story (Graham 2005). Each book was written and illustrated by the same person, which perhaps allowed for the closer integration of words and pictures. The picture was as relevant to the telling of the story as the words (Nodelman 1988). Pictures tended to be on separate pages from the printed words and also followed the left to right reading of the English language.

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) and *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) followed the convention of having the picture opposite the words, whereas *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) separated the words and pictures completely. Two facing pages were used for the picture and the two for words only – meaning that unlike the other two books the picture and the words could not be seen at the same time and this may have a different effect on how it is read.

In both *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) and *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) the fact of death was announced on the first page of the story. Miffy was shown with a tear in her eye in a full page picture with the words opposite stating:

*Why is Miffy so unhappy?*

*On her cheek a tear is bright.*

*Do you know why she is crying?*

*Miffy's grandma died last night.* (Bruna 2005 p. 1)

Our first introduction to Miffy in this story was to be told she is sad, and then very quickly as we turn to the next page we found out that although Grandma was in bed she was not asleep but dead, and that this was a different state from life. The concept of non-sentience (Speece and Brent 1992) was addressed directly when we were told that grandma was “not breathing anymore” (Bruna 2005 p.3).

*The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) showed a picture of blue sky and green grass over two pages looking from left to right. We then were shown a small white bird with grey/blue markings lying on the ground. Turning over on the right page at the bottom was one line.

*The bird was dead when the children found it.* (Wise Brown 1965 p.4)

This followed the same pattern we saw above with Miffy.

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) did not announce the death on the first page; this story started in a classic way with: Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits. (p.7)

However on the next page there was a warning

*Don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden* (Pottter 1902 p.8)

And then on the third page with the picture on the left-hand page:

*Your father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor.* (Potter 1902 p11)

The illustration of this event used darker shades than on the previous pages; (so blues, greys and purples) to show Mrs. McGregor serving the pie to hands out

stretched, with a knife and fork poised to eat (appendix 3). This was in contrast to the pastel shades used when Peter was outside in Mr McGregor's garden, perhaps signifying a more sombre event. Rather than using words to explain the different state it would appear that in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) allowed for the tone of the picture to deliver the message that something had changed (Hladikova 2014).

In each of the stories death was announced clearly and without any great ambiguity. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) perhaps engaged euphemism in that the word dead was not used and we were told only that the father "had an accident" (p.11), but the announcement together with the image of the pie made it clear that the father was dead. Beyond this page in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) there was no further mention of death but Peter was at risk of being caught and thus succumbing to the same fate as his father as the story continued. We might suggest that the fear and awareness of death was apparent throughout.

*Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) and *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) told us only about the death, that is there was no other plotline; picture books tend to follow the same word limit of five to eight hundred words (Hladikova 2104). In *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) the next two pages showed two children who had been playing with a kite pointing towards the ground where two other children were crouching over the dead bird –we were then given details about the bird:

*It had not been dead for long –it was still warm and its eyes were closed.* (p.7)

In a similar way Miffy went on to hear about her grandma – we are shown her lying still in a bed with her head on the pillow.

*Grandma lies there on the bed,  
She is much stiller than before-  
Miffy knows she isn't sleeping  
And she isn't breathing any more.* (Bruna 2005 p.3)

The children in the dead bird continued their interest in the physical state of the bird. Next all four are kneeling around the bird – leaning in with interest and although none of the children was shown touching the bird at this stage in the illustration, the words stated “even as they held it, it began to get cold and the limp bird body grew stiff, so they couldn’t bend its legs and the head didn’t flop when they moved it” (Wise Brown 1965 p.11). We were then told that this was a normal thing when animals have been dead for some time.

This gave a clear account of non-sentience, and took us through a range of behaviours that were no longer possible for the bird (Speece and Brent 1992).

Miffy in *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) did not offer quite the same style of detail about the body of grandma bunny, but we next were shown an image of grandma bunny in a coffin with an open lid (appendix 4).

*Then a coffin comes for grandma,  
Grandma looks quite comfy there.  
Inside, there's a pretty lining,  
very soft and made with care.* (Bruna 2005 p.5)

In each of these two stories the information was intended to be factual and unsentimental, which resonated with the findings of Poling and Hupp (2010). The stories told us what happened when someone died, in terms of physical changes.

*The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) was first of all concerned with the physical state of the bird whereas *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) did offer some minimal information about bodily changes, but then told us about the next steps when someone died: – that is, the body is put in a coffin.

It may not be going too far to suggest that this representation reflected the medieval situation described by Ariès (1974) who claimed that death was at that time “familiar and near evoking no great fear or awe” (p.12). These stories were not meant to be frightening, merely factual.

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) was equally frank in its portrayal of the fate of rabbits, but the focus on death was less important in the rest of his story – avoiding being caught by Mr. McGregor and not ending up in a pie was the thrust of the story, even though the subject of death appeared, almost casually one might say, as part of the tale; an ordinary event in the life of a rabbit, perhaps. The other two books offered information to help understand what had happened in apparently natural deaths. In each of the stories when considering the announcement of death we saw a directness and lack of ambiguity. Although each of the stories served a different purpose in terms of plot as each continued we could see the communication about the fact of death was clearly stated in both words and pictures.

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) perhaps avoided detail and this was one of the most marked features in the picture books of group A. This seemed to be counter to the understanding that death continued to be a preoccupation until the end of the First World War. Walter (1999) suggested that there was a reduction in the mourning period in the last years of the 19th century. He (1999) commented following the First World War for the women and children the losses were too great and death was too

real and too pervasive for it to be thought about and “there was no way that women of any class could spend the rest of the war in mourning” (p.37). The children’s books in group A for the most part, in the sample considered in this study, seemed to have moved away from the earlier preoccupation with death sooner than might generally be thought. Unlike stories from the early 1800s up until 1880s Walter’s comment would not appear to be reflected here.

Although we have seen also that *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) and *A Little Princess* (Hodgson Burnett 1905) from group A were much more direct in discussing death. They were written by the same author but are atypical of the style of writing for children in this period (Bratton 1981). What seemed to become apparent from the way in which death was announced was that although there was a directness of the telling of death across the periods there was a difference in the manner and detail of what was said.

Peter Rabbit was told in the least explicit way – “put in a pie” and “had an accident” and offered no additional information. We know, or must assume, that once in the pie Peter’s father will not return but other than that we were left to guess. Both of the other stories explained, in slightly different manners, the nature of death. The children in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) were able to touch the bird and look at it closely to examine its body to see how a dead bird was not the same as a living bird. The explanation might be considered to be ‘scientific’. These children have no attachment to the bird; it was not a pet, so they could be inquisitive about its state. Its body was cold and stiff. A new attitude of public stoicism and trust in science became normal which is perhaps reflected in the books from group B (Tucker 2009).

Miffy on the other hand was not given such details about her grandma but was made aware that she is not breathing and she was still – and that this stillness was not the same as being still when asleep. It might be suggested that the relationship to the deceased was a factor here in terms of the type of information given. Miffy had some emotional reaction and we noted that Miffy was sad at the very beginning of the story. By contrast in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) the children were allowed to feel a little upset about the death of the bird but this is perhaps not such a significant and the emotional reaction and is merely fleeting.

#### **4.8 Final comments on this theme**

What has been seen above is that death does clearly appear as a subject to be broached directly for the most part in the books from my sample. The variation across time was perhaps less evident than the variation shown within each group. The newest group, group C would appear to have shown the most similarities in the manner in which death was announced. This may be a function of the wider range of books available in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. This may change over time as fewer of these newer books are reprinted and so become lost or less accessible. It may also be a consequence of the way in which the books are categorised (by websites) and so merely be a reflection of my sample and atypical. The books from group C tended to be found under ‘specialist’ sections around death education or bereavement rather than being firstly stories for children. Books in group C in my sample were story books but thus might wear their message more noticeably. Lampert and Walsh (2010) noted that books in their sample around abuse also appeared to fall into either books that were didactic and apparently not literary, or others which they described as compelling and having literary merit. Again this may simply reflect the way in which they have been catalogued. In terms of

literary merit, though not one of my selection criteria, it is interesting to note that Bruna was awarded *The Silver Slate* for this Miffy story specifically for the text (Guardian 17.2.17) and also declared it to be Bruna’s favourite book.

#### 4.9 Reactions to Death

Table 6

Sadness	Mixed	No reaction
The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck. Potter, B. (1908)	Red Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1890)	The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Potter, B. (1902)
The Jungle Book. Kipling, R. (1894)	Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Barrie, J. M. (1906)	A Little Princess. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)
The Yellow Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1894)	The Dead Bird. Wise Brown, M. (1965)	The Secret Garden. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910)
The Olive Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1907)		Cautionary Tales for Children. Belloc, H. (1907)
Charlotte’s Web. White, E. B. (1952)	Seven for a Secret. Anholt, L. and Copletree, J. (2006)	The Gashly Crumb Tinies. Gorey, E. (1963)
Tom’s Midnight Garden. Pearce, P. (1958)	Death in a Nut. Madden, E. and Hess, P. (2005)	The Last Battle. Lewis, C.S. (1956)
Goodbye Mog. Kerr, J. (2002)		The Silver Sword. Serallier, I. (1951)
Dear Grandma Bunny. Bruna, D. (2005)		Grandad’s Ashes. Smith, W. (2007)
Jenny Angel. Wild, M. and Spudvilas, A. (1999)		
Little Elephant Thunderfoot. Grindley, S. and Butler, J. (1996)		
Little Bear’s Grandad. Gray, N. and Cabban, V. (2000)		
Lovely Old Roly. Roen, M. (2002)		
Death Duck and the Tulip. Erlbruch, W. (2008)		

This section follows the same format as that used to discuss the previous theme. The theme of reactions to death will be introduced and then three different books from each period will be considered to compare how the characters in the stories react after having been told of the death.

It can be seen from the table above that the range of emotions or reactions is limited. Others (Poling and Hupp 2008, Jones 2001, Green 2008) have explored a broader range of emotional reactions but their studies considered books from post 1980s and also selected books designed to help children who have been bereaved. This may

account for the difference in the range of emotions found in my sample. The tendency to show sadness, initially at least was perhaps unsurprising and this was a prominent emotion in the majority of the group C books. Where reactions were described as mixed, they were presented as showing some level of sadness, but also a more direct sense that perhaps death was inevitable and part of life, and thus not to be dwelt on. For example, in *Peter Pan in Kensington Garden*, (Barrie 1906) Peter mentioned the deaths of birds, dogs and small babies in a fairly matter of fact way, but hinted at sadness. Having just told us about the deaths of a bird in terms of one of the things seen when visiting the gardens he added...(we) "left the Gardens that day with our knuckles in our eyes" (loc. 128); the sadness here was implied. The bereaved were expected to be sad, perhaps talk about how they felt and then gradually get back to some sort of normal life (Ariès 1983).

Jones (2001) noted that there was a close relation between reactions to death in the nineteenth century books and the present day books, but it should be remembered the Victorian books she cited were from the early 19th century and what she termed her 'present day' books were also specifically for children who have been bereaved. Although tears were not uncommon as an expression of sadness the more dramatic 'fainting away' Jones (2001) described came from a story published in 1852. By the latter part of that century florid display had become less acceptable. In the early part of the 19th century Ariès (1974) suggested that "people were troubled not only at the bedsides of the dying ...the very idea of death moved them" (p.60), but by the end of the century this was no longer the case. This was echoed by Walter (1999). Although grief continued to be felt and loved ones were still missed the overt expression of grief became to be seen as morbid if not over indulgent. This change might also be due to the increasingly urban landscape and the move away from the rural

community so that “bereavement becomes a psychological experience of the individual, rather than a shared experience of the group” (Walter 1999 p.34).

I had expected to also find this more florid expression in reaction to death in the earlier books and perhaps less expression in the later books but this is not borne out in my sample.

The move from florid expression of grief was evident in the books in group A. The one example where there was a dramatic expression of grief was in *A Little Princess* (Hodgson Burnett 1905). Lottie lay on the floor screaming and kicking. Sara Crewe (the heroine of the story) initially said “Poor darling....I know you haven’t any mamma” (Hodgson Burnett 1905 p.34), but then changed tone and said “If you don’t stop Lottie I will shake you, Poor angel! There! You wicked, bad detestable child, I will smack you, I will!” (Hodgson Burnett 1905 p.35).

‘Pulling yourself together’ would appear to be the preferred or more proper reaction, which perhaps concurred with Walter’s (1999) suggestion that grief had become private. This stoicism continued through the middle period (group B) and although two books were included in the ‘sadness’ category it might be argued that there was only minimal reference to sadness in *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (Pearce1958), specifically on page 222. There Mrs Bartholomew talked about the loss of both her son and her husband but did not cry as “she had done her crying for that so long ago”. Nevertheless there were minor references to sadness in connection with loss which occurred throughout the story. This contrasted with *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown1965) where the children were interested only in the physical state of the bird. Although the children cried, they cried “because their signing was so beautiful and

the ferns smelled so sweetly” (Wise Brown 1963 p.29) and only as a final comment in the same sentence “and the bird was dead”.

Science and cleanliness in relation to death became more important in the middle part of the 20th century, death having been moved out of the public realm and into the hospital so that managing the death became the realm of the professional (Kellehear 2007, Howarth 2007) and perhaps replaced the significance of even personal feelings of loss. We might suggest that this is reflected in the manner of the story found in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965).

It might also be relevant here to consider the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross who published *On Death and Dying* in 1969. Although not alone in working with the bereaved and the dying her work on the stages of grief became (and continues in popular culture) to be one of the most well-known and widely used ‘theories’ of grief. Her stages of grief suggested that the first reaction was always denial (which might be manifested by a lack of emotional response), followed by anger. In the books from group B the lack of initial emotional reaction might be a reflection of what was apparently being seen by Kübler-Ross or reflect an apparent change in attitude towards the unacceptability of overt expressions of distress at that time. Similarly the work of Bowlby (1985) described the initial phase of grief as one of shock and numbing, also suggesting that the first reaction to death was apparently no reaction at all.

In all but two of the books from group C sadness was described as the most usual reaction to death. Poling and Hupp (2008) also found in their sample that sadness was the dominant emotional reaction in 90% of the books, with only one showing no emotional reaction at all. All of the books in their study were written between 1986

and 2004. It would seem that in a relatively short space of time then there had been a change of attitude either in what might be considered acceptable to depict in children's books, or in the understanding of how people reacted to the loss of a loved one (Neimeyer 2001, Stroebe and Schut 1999). A further possibility is one that was apparently evident from the end of the 19th century to the early 20th century where the acceptability (even requirement) of overt expressions of grief to a more stoical response was noted in society in general. Walter (1999) suggested that during this period grief continued to be felt and, as one might expect, loved ones were still missed, but the overt expression of grief became to be seen as morbid and self-indulgent.

The books from group A would appear on the whole to show this societal change, from the elaborate ritual of mourning. In *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) the stoical reaction was perhaps more even pronounced. When Mary Lennox found herself to be alone in surviving a cholera epidemic we were told that her reaction to the death of her mother was that "She did not miss her at all" (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.8). This was perhaps an extreme reaction but was deemed more acceptable than that of Mr. Craven, who was Colin's father in this story. His reaction to the death of his wife was to lock himself away from everyone and we were told that "it made him queerer than ever" (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.16). It is evident in the story that this was not an acceptable way to behave!

It should not be surprising that the books from group C also reflected a societal change in the acceptability of some expression of sadness and grief (Kear and Steinberg 1999). In this period the expectation would appear to be that expressing sadness is normal and, perhaps, desirable. Little Bear in *Little Bear's Grandad* (Gray and Cabban 2000) was hugged by his mother when he heard of the death of

his grandfather bear “she held him tight” ( Gray and Cabban 2000 p.19) and the picture accompanying these words showed us the small bear being held very tightly by his mother and Little Bear’s face showing distress and sadness. We did not see tears in his eyes but the line of the eyebrow and the wideness of his eyes showed us clearly that he is upset. Although within the children’s books of this group there would appear to be a general acceptance that a display of emotions is normal it should be noted that this is change to an apparent societal norm. Writing in 2001 Brennan commented on the relatively recent interest of sociologists in the place of emotions in society. Following the death of Princess Diana in 1997 the public display of grief became a subject of academic interest which has been described as being “widely considered extraordinary by any normal standards” (Walter 1999b p.205). The books in Group C did not show extreme responses however.

It should be remembered the display of emotion to Diana’s death was not particularly extreme in terms of hysterical outbursts, but that it happened at all appeared to mark a shift in the public acceptability of expression as a reaction to death. Walter (1999b) considered that those people who acted to resist the mourning for Diana did so as rationally acting agents, what might be considered to be the normal 20th century reaction. He further suggested that this resistance “can only be answered in terms of the twentieth-century British belief (a belief shared in some, but not all, Western nations) that grief should be personally and privately experienced; for many, to join in the public theatre of grief was simply ‘bad taste’” (Walter 1999b p.37). Nonetheless what this event appeared to mark was a change in the public acceptability of some sort of emotional display and so perhaps a return, to some degree of 19th century behaviours, or at least to a turn away from the previous stoical response that

appears to have dominated the 20th century. This change was to some extent mirrored in the books in group C.

#### **4.10 Grief**

At this point I think it would be useful to consider how grief and grieving has been understood and has changed over the time. In terms of changes in psychological theories of grieving the later 20th century saw a renewed interest (apparently) in this area. Prior to the early twentieth century the dominant understandings of how to grieve were influenced by the church and by popular societal attitudes towards the correct behaviour. From medieval times people apparently knew how to behave and as Ariès (1974) described death as a “household” event (p.12). The church laid down the rules of how to react and, so long as the deceased was in a state of grace then the death should be a returning home rather than a loss. However, the Protestant faith did not allow for prayers for the soul of the deceased after death, and so the focus shifted slowly from the deceased to the bereaved. As Walter (1999) commented “early Protestant funerals might affirm the faith of the living....., but in no way could they help the dead” (p.33). Ariès (1974) pointed out the way in which mourning was carried out mattered a great deal; there was a need to display sorrow to some extent but the mourning rituals “imposed ....a certain type of social life” (p.66). For Walter (1999) the focus was on the loss of the loved one and public demonstration of that loss began to matter. He suggested that the 19th century preoccupation with death thus became “how will I cope when my beloved dies?” (1999 p.35) and was a personal concern with the loss rather than the death.

Seale (1998) noted the role of medicine as a replacement for the church. Thus it was during the 19th Century developments in medical science and in public health

changed the place of medicine from one of comforting to one of potential cure and hope and trying to make death as painless as possible (Howarth 2007). Not only did death become a private family matter but the control of disease also became a concern. Howarth (2007) commented that this “scientific-rational approach (es) cast death as the enemy” (p.23) and what began to matter was how much could be done to prevent the death.

With the interest in scientific explanations and the desire to manage life we also saw that science should become interested in the reactions of the bereaved, and to try to reduce or prevent their pain. From the beginning of the 20th century the major influence on any theoretical understanding of grief was, not surprisingly, Freud. Having published *Mourning and Melancholia* in 1917 his ‘grief work’ hypothesis could be seen to underpin many of the most influential theories of grieving – not least the work of Kübler-Ross, mentioned earlier. However in the 1980s works started to challenge this accepted theory suggesting that it did not really describe what people reported of their own reactions to loss.

Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) proposed a new theory of grief which allowed for the sadness of the loss to be central to the experience of grief (perhaps rather surprisingly to anyone who had actually lost a loved one). Their work challenged the notion of the grief work hypothesis: that you must feel the pain of the loss and work through it to eventually be able to relinquish the loss and to reinvest in a new love. Klass et al (1996) told us that many people never ‘let go’ or ‘moved on’, but rather continued to feel the loss of the loved one. They found a way of continuing a relationship with the deceased – in the full knowledge that the loved one was dead and no longer physically present but could still in some way be a part of their life. The books in group C reflect this new understanding and which is perhaps both

interesting and surprising. The theory of Klass et al (1996) was founded on empirical research and took into account the experiences people described. It did not set out to prescribe how people should react (and incidentally it did not suggest that this model of grief was either a good or bad way to react to loss). It may be that the children's books in group C were describing what "real" people might feel. We can also notice that Continuing Bonds theory (Klass et al, 1996) seemed to describe, to some extent, earlier reactions to loss and might have seemed self-evident to a 19th century reader.

This long digression has been to point up the change in understanding of grief over the 120 year period of this sample. It begins with group A where loss was a part of life, regulated perhaps by the church – though becoming less so, and also by social convention, again declining over the 1890-1910 period. The first period predates Freud, but nonetheless there was some indication that letting go and moving on was the preferred reaction to loss rather than florid display.

Group B 1950-1970 fell into the era of medicalised death, when it moved away from the home and into the hospital (Conway 2011, Howarth 2007). Grief was not to be seen as an ordinary reaction but a psychological state needing expert help, and thus perhaps, not a fit subject for children's books. The final group, C, comes after the 'revival of death' (Walter 1994) where it was not only possible to talk about death and loss but seen as desirable, by academics at least.

#### **4.11 Three books**

Again I will consider three books, one from each of the groups, in order to consider reactions to the death in more detail. The writer and illustrator (where illustrations appear) were not the same person in these stories.

*The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910)

*Charlotte's Web* (White 1952)

and

*Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002).

In this theme the three stories to be compared and contrasted varied from each other in a number of ways. The first two books were of a similar length of about 150 pages and were separated into chapters. *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) used only text and although *Charlotte's Web* (White 1952) contained illustrations these were only ink drawings which depict the words on the page and did not contain extra information - for example when we were told that Wilbur (the pig) "burst into tears" (White 1952 p.223) we were given an illustration of the pig with tears in his eyes. The picture focused on the words already conveyed without adding extra information – the words thus conveyed all that was needed to understand this story.

*Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002) relied on both words and pictures to convey the meaning of the story, and thus may have allowed for the child reader to interpret the story differently. The colour illustrations took up most of the page with the text overlaid onto the picture, or alongside the words where smaller half page illustrations were used. These illustrations potentially added additional information about the emotional content of what had been said in the text (Graham 2005). So, for example, when we were told that the new cat was around nearly all of the time we were shown four different examples of activities where the children interacted with the new cat. We were shown the faces of the children looking directly at the cat and smiling happily or the cat apparently smiling when rubbing against the back of someone's legs.

*The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) began with a child finding herself alone in her home and her normal routine disrupted; “No one would tell her anything” (p.4). Mary (the protagonist of the story) tried to make sense of what was happening and recalled the events of recent days. She realised that “the cholera had broken out and people were dying like flies” (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.4). She was forgotten about in the chaos and had to fend for herself – “she did not cry because her nurse had died” (Hodgson Burnett p.5). When she was actually found and was told that there was no one left other than her – the men who found her felt sorry that she has been abandoned and it was only briefly in the reaction of one of the young men that we are given a small hint that the fact of the deaths might have been an emotional event. “Mary even thought she saw him wink his eyes to wink away tears” (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.6). The child, Mary, was not said to react in any way other than to understand that all the others were dead. In fact her reaction to the death of her mother was “she did not miss her at all” (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.7) and she seemed to accept that other people would look after her. “Had she been older she would no doubt have been very anxious at being left alone in the world, but she was very young, and as she had always been taken care of, she supposed she always would be” (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.8). It should be noted that Mary is not shown in a very kindly light at this stage in the story.

Throughout the whole of the first chapter Mary showed little emotion other than puzzlement about the whereabouts of the other people and then acceptance of the situation. This did not seem to resonate with any form of denial (Kübler-Ross 1969), but rather an ego-centric nature. Only once was there any suggestion that the fact of these deaths might be sad. It is not clear what the reader is to understand by the reaction of the young man, mentioned above. He might have had a tear in his eye,

but there was no expression of sorrow or sadness or any other emotion at all, and we are unclear who the tear was for. In this way the reactions portrayed here seem to have moved away from the florid Victorian expression and reflected the reactions that became more acceptable much later in the 20th century (Walter 1994).

In the second chapter we were told that Mary was angry although this was not directly linked to her losses in any way. Rather she did not like being with the family who she had been sent to initially, and whom she felt to be her inferiors. "They wore shabby clothes and were always quarrelling" (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.8). Again, this was not an example of the reaction to loss that Kübler- Ross (1969) described. Any expression of anger in Kübler-Ross's stages of grief is supposed to be directed towards the deceased.

Mary's reactions and behaviours to the death of her parents were contrasted with those of Mr. Craven who owned the house in Yorkshire where she was to live. Mr. Craven's wife died and following her death he became "queerer than ever" (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.16). This involved him shutting himself away and finally going away leaving his son to be looked after by the staff. All reminders of his wife were shut up, including the secret garden of the title. The loss of his wife would appear to have caused Mr. Craven to be in deep mourning. He insisted on the removal of all reminders of his wife and this extended to his order that Mary was not to be dressed in black: "I won't have a child dressed in black wanderin' about like a lost soul...it's make the place sadder than it is" (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.28). The implication was that Mr. Craven could not allow himself to think about his wife as the memory of the loss was too painful (Ariès 1983); whereas Mary does not think about her loss at all. Here again we could perhaps see the beginnings of the shift from the elaborate Victorian form of mourning ritual in the contrasting behaviours. Even if sadness was

not felt decorum might suggest that wearing black would indicate some emotion however understated, though here even this was not permitted for Mary.

*Charlotte's Web* (White 1952) introduced the idea of death from the first page – in terms of the potential need to kill the runt of the litter. The first reaction to this was that Fern (the little girl who lives on the farm) shrieked and ran outside then she sobbed “please don't kill it” (White 1952 p.2). This was not a reaction to an actual death at this stage but of the proposed death of a small pig. Fern was given permission to keep the pig if she could find someone to buy it, which she did, and by the kindness of a local farmer the pig was “saved from an untimely death” (White 1952 p.5). He recognised his foolishness in saving the pig, which in the terms of farm animals would not normally be considered to have died in an untimely way as he was too small to be of use. The story started with emotional reactions – anger, sorrow and then fondness “Oh, look at him! He's absolutely perfect” (White 1952 p.5).

The fact of death is evident throughout the story as Wilbur was made aware of the fate of all farm animals. But it was in the close relationship between Wilbur and Charlotte (the spider) where we learned about an actual death. Charlotte knew that she was going to die and when Wilbur heard this he “threw himself on the ground in an agony of pain and sorrow. Great sobs racked his body” (White 1952 p.223). Here we were in no doubt that this loss caused him emotional distress. Wilbur, in his concern to get Charlotte back to the farm to die, was so distressed that he felt that he would “die of a broken heart” (White 1952 p.227). This in some ways mirrored the reaction demonstrated by Mr. Craven in the story above. Despite this concern, when Charlotte death actually occurred, “no one was with her” (White 1952 p.232). The death was known about and anticipated with great emotion but the immediate

aftermath saw Wilbur return to the farm with the egg sac left by Charlotte. He placed it in a safe place within the barn and because he had returned home to a familiar environment we were told that “in the days that followed, he was very happy” (White 1952 p.234), but that he often thought of Charlotte and that “every day he would look at the torn, empty web, and a lump would come to his throat” (White 1952 p.234). Again, an understated reaction to death was seen to be permissible, if not the correct display of emotion. The reaction was muted following the death but we saw that Wilbur was clearly upset, and to some extent allowed himself to dwell on his loss. However in this story we also note the highly dramatic reactions to the thought of the death of Charlotte. This would appear to be closer to the florid rituals of the early Victorian period (Walter 1999). Wilbur perhaps demonstrated this emotionality only to the potential loss of his friend (rather than to the actual loss) and was portrayed as rather silly, foolish and selfish. Following the actual loss he only had a lump in his throat. This story was published before Kübler –Ross (1969) published her stage based theory and reflected perhaps the depiction of death on a farm as an ordinary life event and not one to be overly mourned. The thought of the loss was shown to be more distressing than the death itself (Ariès 1974).

In a similar way in *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002) we were prepared in advance to hear about Roly’s (a cat) death; so that on the very first page we were shown the children cradling him on their knees, wrapped in a blanket. The cat had a sad expression on his face and then we saw him curled up and lying still in his basket. The next two pages showed an illustration covering two facing pages, with words on the left hand side telling us that Roly had died and that “he’ll always be around somewhere” (Rosen 2002 p.2). The illustration showed the father finishing the grave in the garden (in the lower left hand corner) whilst the children watched. The little boy

was seen kneeling beside the grave and appeared to be sucking his thumb. His sister stood with her arms folded tightly around her, but her mother, standing next to her, had one arm around her daughter and she was stroking her hair to comfort the child. Although on this page none of the words used were expressions of emotion the pictures would appear to illustrate how the children felt. This may also point towards the more current acceptance of the notion of the continuing bond (Klass et al 1996). This notion is more overtly implied later in the story.

Another two page illustration of the children in their back garden trying to play was shown next– the children were depicted apart from each other and on opposite pages. The little boy held his ball stiffly in his arms whilst looking towards Roly's grave in the bottom right corner of the right hand page. His sister stood half on a pogo stick next to the grave but looking down to one side. The words told us that “we tried to play.....but Roly was too near” (Rosen 2002 p.3). The picture offered visual clues to their feelings, perhaps suggesting what Bowlby (1985) termed numbness. We were not told how long after the death this scene was, but it followed the burial in the garden and so would seem to be relatively close to the time of the death.

Again the next two pages show attempts to continue life as normal - “Mum said things had to be done. Breakfast and bedtimes and shopping. That sort of stuff” (Rosen 2002 pp.5-6). Here we were given a series of small illustrations. The children seated side by side at breakfast, not eating and with sad or blank expressions; shopping and doing other daily tasks – and the words Breakfasts and bedtimes and shopping” were repeated on the facing page – showing the mundanity of their daily lives and perhaps lack of joy and purpose. Feelings of sadness and expressing some feeling of the loss were shown as acceptable, if not absolutely normal ways of reacting to a loss. Here there was no denial (Kübler-Ross (1969) this would appear

to be an example Bowlby's (1985) notion of numbing. He particularly applied his model of phases of grief to children.

By the next double spread the children were smiling and looking at pets in a pet shop – asking if they might have a kitten or a puppy..... or a rabbit –and then on the facing page the pet shop animals were shown but the words stated “not yet – it's too soon” (Rosen 2002 p.8). This was just over half way though the book, but by the next page the children were playing again and smiling – the picture showed movement: running and the children interacting with each other. Both Klass et al (1996) and Bowlby (1985) would consider that a return to some sort of normality is usual and desirable, but both theories anticipated that the return to normality is not a letting go or forgetting. Life goes on, but in the top right hand corner of the right hand page Roly's grave could still be seen. It was now no longer prominent but can be seen as ever present. Klass et al (1996) considered that finding a place for the deceased in our lives was an important way of coping with loss. We might consider this to be a good example of that notion or indeed compare these reactions to Stroebe and Schut's (1999) Dual Process Model.

It would appear from the three examples given that there is a movement from stoical acceptance to acknowledgment of loss and the expectation that there would be some overt expression of that loss, however muted (Jackson in press). The children in *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002) did not cry but their lives felt empty and they were unable to engage in daily tasks with any enthusiasm for a while. Whilst Wilbur did express sadness by the lump in his throat, he was fully engaged in being happy and content to be back in his home and his was a private expression of loss. This did not appear to affect his behaviour in front of others. He did not talk to any of the other animals about his feelings and would seem to have moved on. Mary Lennox in *The*

*Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) showed no reaction at all in terms of emotional response. She talked openly about death, even perhaps with curiosity; “oh did his wife die” (Hodgson Burnett 1910 p.16). In this story open displays of grief were not encouraged, indeed they are disapproved of – so that Mr. Craven’s behaviour is describe as making him ‘queer’ differing from the acceptable norms of the day in this story. Though death was a central theme in this story the expression of grief was seen as unhelpful and problematic.

#### **4.12 Summing up**

The expression of emotion or any reaction to death has been shown to be varied across, and also within, each period. Group C tended to be the most uniform in accepting that an emotional reaction of some sort would (and should) be displayed, which may run counter to expectations. Psychology as a specific area of study barely existed at the beginning of this period and reactions to grief were more governed by dress and etiquette (Ariès 1974). Nonetheless sadness to loss was seen to be felt in this group. *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (Potter 1908) showed us that Jemima felt sadness at the loss of her eggs, but did not dwell on the loss, in a similar way to Wilbur (in group B) who felt sad at the eventual death of Charlotte but held back his tears. Wilbur did however see the continuation of life through her eggs when they hatched into spiders. This might be seen as pointing forward to the continuing bonds (Klass et al. 1996) seen as more natural in the final group. The theories (or rules) governing the reactions to loss might be seen to alter overtime but what would appear to be more evident was that the commonly asserted notion that ‘everyone grieves in their own way’ made in the post 1990s period may have always have been the case. People do not fit easily into the theories we try to develop to explain their behaviour. Based on this sample, the dominant discourses around mourning and

grief prevalent at each period would appear to have been highlighted to some extent. The books have not all demonstrated this change but, there has been a clear shift in the focus from outer, societal norms of display to inner personal feelings. From Mary Lennox to the children in *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002), this change was shown from the wearing of black to not knowing what to do following a loss (Walter 1999).

#### 4.13 Funerals/rituals and the afterlife

**Table 7**

Funeral – burial /cremation	Spiritual	Nothing
<a href="#">Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Barrie, J.M. (1906)</a>	<a href="#">The Red Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1890)</a>	<a href="#">The Olive Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1907)</a>
<a href="#">The Yellow Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1894)</a>	<a href="#">Tom's Midnight Garden. Pearce, P. (1958)</a>	<a href="#">The Jungle Book. Kipling, R. (1894)</a>
<a href="#">The Dead Bird. Wise Brown (1965)</a>	<a href="#">Charlotte's Web. White, E. B. (1952)</a>	<a href="#">A Little Princess. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)</a>
<a href="#">Goodbye Mog. Kerr, J. (2000)</a>	<a href="#">Seven For a Secret. Anholt, L. and Coppletree, J. (2006)</a>	<a href="#">The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck. Potter, B. (1908)</a>
<a href="#">Death, Duck and the Tulip. Erlbruch, W. (2008)</a>	<a href="#">Death in a Nut. Madden, E. and Hess, P. (2005)</a>	<a href="#">The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Potter, B. (1902)</a>
<a href="#">Lovely Old Roly. Rosen, M. (2002)</a>	<a href="#">Jenny Angel. Wild, M and Spudvilas, A. (1999)</a>	<a href="#">The Secret Garden. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)</a>
<a href="#">Little Elephant Thunderfoot. Grindley,S. and Butler, J. (1996)</a>		<a href="#">Cautionary Tales for Children. Belloc, H. (1907)</a>
<a href="#">Dear Grandma Bunny. Bruna, D. (2005)</a>		<a href="#">The Gashly Crumb Tinies. Gorey, E. (1963)</a>
<a href="#">Grandad's Ashes. Smith, W. (2007)</a>		<a href="#">The Silver Sword. Serallier, I. (1951)</a>
		<a href="#">Little Bear's Grandad. Gray, N. and Cabban, V. (2000)</a>

Where death is a significant part of the whole story it was not unusual to find some reference to burial or a funeral ceremony of some sort, although these tended to be rather informal affairs, particularly where animals were the main character. This was particularly the case in Group C books. These books tended to be focussed on the subject of death and as shorter narratives, dealt with less complex plots. Green (2008) noted that, in his study, the stories tended to devote the least attention to this part of the death narrative, perhaps because in the late 20th and early 21st centuries the role of the church in the life of the average person has diminished and there is

less certainty and clarity of how the end of life should be marked. Walter (1999) considered that the church was no longer the focus of spiritual comfort and that the focus moved into this caring for the emotional welfare of the bereaved –and thus into the space formerly occupied by the church stepped the psychologist and the therapist. Although, this was not entirely borne out in my sample, what did become apparent was a more creative attitude (Green 2008), towards the final disposal of the body in Group C. Cremation as an increasingly common practice with its quick and less ritualized performance could be said to be considered as “evidence of the triumph of the living over the dead” (Javeau 2001 p.246).

One of the books from Group C, *Grandad’s Ashes* (Smith 2007), told the story of the disposal of ashes following the grandfather’s funeral, and directly mentions cremation: “he always wanted to be cremated” (Smith 2007 p.5). We were offered no specific information about what cremation means, but were told that after the funeral “Grandma was given an urn containing Grandad’s ashes” (Smith 2007 p.6).

What was also apparent from my sample was that even without an overtly religious focus on the funeral ceremony the books from group C, at least appeared to show, as Holloway et al (2013) commented “there has been a renewed public interest in funerals in the UK over the last decade” (p.30). Thus it is perhaps unsurprising that this would also be found in children’s books.

Poling and Hupp (2008) found that in their study the majority of books they sampled (75%) discussed the concepts of heaven or mourning rituals such as funerals or memorial services. Their study conflated the concepts of the afterlife and ritual, and thus may have found more evidence by not separating these concepts as I have in this thesis. They also noted that many of the books discussed these topics in ways

that accommodated alternative practices or beliefs (p170) reflecting perhaps a more diverse society. This was also found in my sample, to some extent. From the table above it can be seen that reference to any ceremony occurred predominantly in Group C, despite the (or perhaps because of) lack of clear social norms around funeral practices (Holloway et al. 2013).

In *Little Elephant Thunderfoot* (Grindley and Butler 1996) the elephants gathered round Wise Old One (the grandmother elephant) and “touch (her) one last time... (and then)...rip clumps of grass and earth and throw them over her” (p.18). *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002) was given a burial in the garden on page 4 which was dealt with in one line. Following Roly’s death we were told, “we buried him in the evening” (Rosen 2002 p.4), and his grave was still shown on the following page when the children were playing in the garden. Though we were shown the burial the evidence of ceremony is minimal.

The Miffy story, *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005), although written for the youngest children (3 upwards), devoted more pages to the rituals around the death of the grandma bunny than most other books. We were shown her lying in an open coffin, then we saw the mourning rabbits with tears in their eyes before we then were shown the coffin with the lid closed –“when the wooden lid is closed upon the coffin chest, all the sad goodbyes are over, grandma’s time has come to rest” (Bruna 2005, p.12). The entire burial ceremony was continued with the coffin being taken out, a eulogy being said and then the coffin being covered over with earth, with a grave stone put above it.

In a similar way the focus of *Grandad’s Ashes* (Smith 2007) unsurprisingly from the title, focused solely on the ritual and memorialization of the grandfather following on

from the funeral ceremony. This story was about the search for a suitable place to scatter his ashes until finally one was found.

In Group B there was only one example of ritualization in the books selected. In *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) the children found a dead bird and buried it with a small ceremony in the woods. "They could have a funeral and sing to it the way grown-up people did when someone died" (Wise Brown 1965 p.15). We were then shown a picture of the children processing with the bird and a spade to the woods where we were told "they dug a hole in the ground" (p.20). The book depicted the entire funeral ceremony and nothing else.

It might be possible to suggest *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) also offered an idea of ritualization of death, but only in the sense of a symbolic description of the final judgment. At the beginning of the story we were not aware that the children have already died. (It should be noted that this is a Christian allegory but presented as children's adventure story, and perhaps often only read as an adventure story). The journey to the real Narnia is actually the Day of Judgment, when the righteous are chosen and go to heaven and the others do not. "They all stood beside Aslan, on his right side, and looked through the open doorway" (Lewis 1956 p.182). This story stands apart in each section due to its being overtly Christian in meaning and as such the notion of death as the beginning of real life might be problematic for a secular audience. No other book presented any obviously religious message, as has been noted previously.

The books in Group A, although being overt, to some extent, about death in the range of words used to talk about it, tended to avoid any description of ceremony or ritual connected with death. In *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906) we

were given a brief description of a small funeral ceremony. For example, in *Peter Pan* Pan found a lost child in the gardens “he digs a grave for the child and erects a little tombstone and carves the poor things initials on it” (loc. 935). And later; - David (who was a real child who visited the gardens seeing two graves there) “sometimes places white flowers on these two innocent graves” (loc. 939).

Again using one book from each of the periods I will consider in a little more depth the way in which the funeral is depicted, or not, across the 120 year period covered by these stories. The funeral was a much more significant feature of the later books (group C) and appeared in almost every one of the sample from this period. Finding examples in the earlier books to compare offered a narrow range of choices.

#### **4.14 Three books**

The following three books will be used to consider how the funeral is depicted when it occurs in the story.

*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906)

*The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965)

*Little Elephant Thunderfoot*. (Grindley, and Butler 1996)

*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906) was a story about the events that go on after the gates were locked in the park and about the adventures there of the fairies and lost children who lived there. They were not usually seen by others during the daylight hours. The fact of death, as such, was not mentioned explicitly in this book although it was referred to obliquely throughout. As the story opened the narrator walked into the park and described walking past a pet cemetery. This was quickly passed by for fear of upsetting the dog (who was accompanying the

narrator), we were told. Death would not appear to be a subject to be dwelt on. The story continued and told us about the lost children who fell out of their prams, unnoticed by their nannies. We might (as adults) be expected to understand this in a metaphorical way, but it was described as something that just happened from time to time and, which then allowed for the lost children to have adventures – although “if the fairies happen (ed) to be out that night they will certainly mischief you” (loc.932). This may have simply been a useful literary convention in that children without adults can have their own adventures.

Peter Pan took care of any lost children and if they “perish (ed) from cold” (loc.932) he would find these children “and he (would) dig(s) a grave for the child and erect(s) a little tombstone” (loc. 935). He did this because “he thinks it is what real boys would do” (loc. 935).

This would seem to concur with Jackson and Colwell (2001a) who noted that it is not unusual for children “often unprompted, (to) feel the need to mark the death of a pet with some sort of ritual” (p.72). Peter’s funerals took place with minimal ceremony but we note that something was needed to show that the little children had not been completely forgotten. We were told that Peter put the lost children “in twos because they seem less lonely” (loc. 935). These were not graves that had visitors who have personal connections to the deceased or named mourners and, thus perhaps mirrored the story of *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965). The act of conducting the funeral would seem to be shown as an act of kindness to the memory of those who would appear not to have been missed by those who ought to care for them. It should be noted that this story pre-dates the First World War. The story told of the loss and death of children, notably of very small children, something not seen in later stories. Two children Peter found and buried were 13 months old and the other was

“probably still younger” (loc. 939). Their ages were not put on the grave stone “for Peter seems to have felt some delicacy about putting any age on the stone” (loc. 939). Despite this there was no delicacy about including the death of tiny children, though but we were told by the narrator that it is “all very sad”, (loc. 942) but no more than this.

This would appear to be at odds with the new found centrality of the child at the turn of the 20th century (James and Prout 1997). It was also uncharacteristic of my sample; pets and older people were more normally the ones who died. As Green (2008) said “it may be inappropriate to ask young children to think about their own end” (p.142). The story of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906) occupied a space between the real world and a fairy world, and so perhaps in a fantasy realm it becomes possible to think about children dying. We saw clearly that it was the fact that they were looked after that was the concern here. This may also reflect some notion of etiquette of the period.

*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906) was one of the many versions of the Peter Pan books written before the more well -known and successful play which was eventually published in 1928. Versions of the story had been performed earlier and a novel (of the eventual play version) appeared in 1911. The 1906 version of the story used in my sample, contained elements of the later more familiar story but, as we have seen, also differed in significant ways.

In *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) the children who found the dead bird would seem, in some ways, to behave in a similar way to Peter Pan. The funeral ceremony was described in full in both words and pictures and we were shown all the actions of the children in burying the bird. This was one of the most detailed depictions of a

funeral that occurred in any of the books and it is interesting that it was in the time period where there are the fewest books available that consider the subject of death appropriate for children (Hendrick 1997a). Writing in the USA in 1972, Moss stated that death was still considered to be a “hush hush topic between parents and children” (p.530), also echoing Kellahear’s (2007) comment that death had become a “rather shameful affair” (p.8).

Moss (1972) began her study looking for children’s books that discussed the death, having talked to “librarian after librarian (who were) unable to come up with anything” (p.530) she located only 6 such books, and these were “already familiar” (p.530) to her. She noted that no one had referred her to *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965). Corr (2004) also found “not many books on death-related subjects” (p.291) at that time but had found *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965), in which “children encounter a dead bird, bury it, put a marker over its grave, and sing a song of lamentation” (p.291). Johnson’s (2004) reaction to this book was that it was the “first modern, in-print, actual hold-in-your-hands children’s book about grief in (her) memory” (p.293).

In *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) the children have no personal emotional connection to the bird but simply found it lying still on the ground, rather in the same way that Peter Pan (Barrie 1906) came across the lost children in the gardens. In a similar way in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) once the children had decided that they ought to bury the bird we were told they did this because they knew that this was the done thing.

“*They would have a funeral and sing to it the way grown-up people did when someone died*” (Wise Brown 1965 p.15).

The picture book format showed us the ceremony in both words and pictures. Having decided that a funeral was needed the children took the bird to the woods. A double page spread of the children walking in a line to the woods was then used to illustrate this. The first child was shown carrying a spade, the second child carried the dead bird in her hands - her head was slightly bowed. Once again we were given details of the actual process of the funeral – “they dug a hole in the ground. They put warm ferns in the bottom of the grave” (Wise Brown 1965 p.20).

In this picture book words and pictures do not appear together on the same page, so we had either words or pictures – the actions were described by the words on following pages. For example, the children were shown digging the grave and preparing the bird to go into the ground whilst the boys place the bird in the ground. Then the girl brought some white flowers to go on top of the grave. They then sang a song to the bird. There is no apparent religious content to the song, they made up their own words and sang what seemed to be appropriate. (Wise Brown 1965 pp.27-28)

*Oh bird you're dead*

*You'll never fly again*

*Way up high*

*With other birds in the sky*

*We sing to you*

*Because you're dead.*

In some ways this illustrated what Green (2008) termed “enthusiastic, sometimes quirky” (p.153) practices seen in the second half of the 20th century. The children then cried – because their singing was so beautiful and “because the bird was dead”

(Wise Brown 1965 p.31). The fact that the bird was dead was the last of the reasons given for their tears. It would appear that the beauty of the occasion was as much cause to cry as any other. We might compare this with Walter's (1999) comment on Victorian mourning behaviours when it became essential to display one's feelings so that it almost would seem that "bereavement is an invention of the romantic movement" ( p.35). *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) however, was written in a self-consciously scientific era.

Finally the children put a stone over where the bird had been buried on which they wrote "Here lies a bird that is dead" (p.34). They then put flowers on the grave.

Although in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) we were told that the children cried when they sang this is the only reference to any emotion at the ceremony at all and the children are not shown to cry in the pictures. We might consider this to be a factual account of the ceremony and other than being told that the children do what they do because they are aware that adults do this there was no reference to compassion or sadness for the deceased of the bereaved, as we saw with Peter Pan. The book is notable for its directness and lack of sentiment but in this period stands out as being unusual in that it mentioned death at all. Johnson (2004) suggested when she was setting up an organisation in 1977 to work with children who had been bereaved this was the only book she was aware of because "grief wasn't in then, and certainly not for children" (p.293). We note Howarth's (2007) comment cited earlier that during this period death began to be sequestered, that is "removed from the public realm" (p.16).

In *Little Elephant Thunderfoot* (Grindley and Butler 1996) we also were given a description of the act of the funeral ceremony, though in this story those involved were closely linked to the deceased. Little Elephant was the "grandson" of Wise Old

One who died. This was a family story. In this picture book the words were written to one side with the illustration (almost of photographic quality) showing some of the actions described. Thus the image took up most of the page. Wise Old One – the grandmother elephant -had fallen to the ground in a stampede. She might have been shot, though this was not actually specified. The Elephants returned to the place where she had fallen to discover her still on the ground and that “she didn’t move” (Grindley and Butler 1996 p.14). When the elephants returned, the mother elephant “began to explore and caress every inch of Wise Old One’s body with her trunk” (Grindley and Butler 1996p.20). This action was then copied by the other elephants including Little Elephant and, in doing this they were all overcome with sadness.

The story was written in a style that showed the behaviour of real elephants and aimed for verisimilitude in terms of the normal behaviour in the wild with only some hint at anthropomorphism. The elephants did not therefore dig holes in the ground, as in the two previous examples but, “rip up clumps of grass and earth and throw them over her” (Grindley and Butler 1996 p.20). Little Elephant seemed to be showing feelings of sadness and compassion for his grandmother and he tried to help with the burial as “he wants his grandmother to be safe” (Grindley and Butler 1996 p.20). This ceremony was shown on two facing pages; we were shown the picture of the elephants covering Old Wise One with the grass but by the next two pages the ceremony was finished and the elephants were seen walking away towards the hills. Although the ceremony was important in the story it took up a very small part of the book - two pages of thirty. However, this was more reflective of how ritual was covered, where it was, in the stories for children in my sample.

Where some sort of funeral did occur, it was more normally only the whole an explanation of what might happen following a death. It was only in *The Dead Bird*

(Wise Brown 1965) where almost the entire story was taken up with the funeral ritual. As the elephants in *Little Elephant Thunderfoot* (Grindley and Butler 1996), were given emotions, but not much more in terms of human qualities, no grave visiting behaviours or marking of the grave was shown. It might be that this would not be not relevant, as the story was written in a way that showed the elephants as both real elephants with normal elephant behaviours and only some slightly anthropomorphised reactions to death. The grandmother was not forgotten but there was no place to visit. This might show the more recent tendency of lack of grave to visit; fitting with changes in recent burial practices (Javeau 2001), but is more probably simply more fitting to this particular story.

#### **4.15 Summing up**

None of the funerals in the three examples made any overt reference to religion. Green (2008) also noted this tendency in his survey of books and considered that, on the whole funerals as depicted in children's books were "uninspiring" (p.141). He suggested that one of the purposes of the funeral might be for "comforting the bereaved and asserting the worth of life despite the inevitability of death, for expressing hope through ritual practice and gesture, for guiding the dead to their permanent abode with other spirits and ancestors, and for communal affirmation of transcendent realities" ( Green 2008 p.142). It would seem a tall order to expect children's books could address all of the aspects Green (2008) offered as the purpose of funeral ritual. Where a funeral was shown it addressed, at least, the idea of comforting the deceased or asserting the worth of a life (Jackson in press). Many of the examples of the funeral demonstrated what Walter (1999) has suggested was

a coming together to “boost morale” (p.110), and also perhaps the stories reflected the growing dissatisfaction with the nature of much of the (post) modern world. It might also be suggested “people need to have some idea of what to expect when they, or others, are grieving” (Walter 1999 p.208).

If a sense of the purpose and meaning of the funeral has diminished over time then, from my sample, it would seem that this has been evident since the early part of the 20th century at least. Where in previous centuries (pre 20th century) the practice in the funeral had been to focus on the soul of the dead since then it has become the loss of the relationship which is the focus of outward expressions of grief (Ariès 1983). It would appear my sample has not reflected the assumed sense that in the past we knew what to do at a funeral , but now has been replaced by the more ad hoc and amateur nature of the memorial (Green 2008). This has been said to be characteristic of a postmodern society (Walter 1999), if not also of modern society. My sample would appear to show that these amateur practices having been evident for some time. Rather than seeing a clear shift from well understood Christian ritual in the early period to a more diverse use of ritual in the newer books what appears to be seen here is that the funeral, where it is talked about at all, is for honouring the life of the deceased in some way and for saying goodbye. Whether it was Peter Pan (Barrie, 1906) or Miffy’s (Bruna, 2005) father presiding over the ceremony the purpose of the funeral would appear to be for the remembering of a life and serving no spiritual purpose at all.

## 4.16 Memory/ Continuing bond

**Table 8**

Good	No mention/ambivalent	Bad
The Yellow Fairy Book. Lang, A. (1894)	The Red Fairy book. Lang, A. (1890)	The Secret Garden. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910)
Charlotte's Web. White, E. B. (1952)	The Jungle Book. Kipling, R. (1894)	A Little Princess. Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905)
The Dead Bird. Wise Brown, M. (1965)	Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Barrie, J.M. (1906)	The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Potter, B. (1902)
Tom's Midnight Garden. Pearce, P. (1958)	Cautionary Tales for Children. Belloc, H. (1907)	The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck. Potter, B. (1908)
Seven for a Secret. Anholt, L. and Coppletree, J. (2006)	The Gashly Crumb Tinies. Gorey, E. (1963)	
Goodbye Mog. Kerr, J. (2002)	The Last Battle. Lewis, C. S. (1956)	
Little Bear's Grandad. Gray, N. and Cabban, V. (2000)	The Silver Sword. Serallier, I. (1951)	
Little Elephant Thunderfoot. Grindley, S. and Butler, J. (1996)	Death, Duck and the Tulip. Erlbruch, W. (2008)	
Lovely Old Roly. Rosen, M. (2002)		
Dear Grandma Bunny. Bruna, D. (2005)		
Death in a Nut. Madden, E. and Hess, P. (2005)		
Grandad's Ashes. Smith, W. (2007)		

Though the use of ceremonial was evident in many of the stories the purpose of the funeral was not depicted as a way to speed the loved one to heaven, or any afterlife. Even in the earlier books, of group A, tended to be shown this as an act of humanity and caring, rather than spiritual or religious. *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906), when he dug the grave for the lost babies who fell out of their prams, was not concerned with the souls of the lost babies but simply that they should be remembered by someone.

Nonetheless the notion of the dead continuing to have some sort of existence would seem to be a feature in many of the stories. This, however, tended to be as a memory or a desire to be like the person who has died. An example of this would be *Little Bear's Grandad* (Gray and Cabban 2000). Little Bear expressed the wish to be like his grandad when he and his mother sat talking about the good times they had

shared with him. Similarly the whole of the story of *Grandad's Ashes* (Smith 2008) was a remembering of the children's grandfather. Walter (1999) stated that in modern society "everyday conversation is probably the primary means by which the dead live on" (p.82). This is very evident in *Grandad's Ashes* (Smith 2008) and also in *Little Bear's Grandad* (Gray and Cabban 2000). It is only in Group A that remembering is seen to be unhelpful, although this is not the case in all stories in this period. Memory was also used to serve as a warning rather than a comfort. Although commenting on a slightly later period (post 1914-18) Walter (1999) suggested that people began to display the attitude that "stress is best coped with by not talking about it" (p.40). The sample here would appear to show that this attitude was not uncommon prior to the First World War.

In group B memory was generally not seen to be an important feature – the loss might be mourned but then moved on from. In group C remembering and the dead having a continuing place in the lives of the bereaved (Klass et al 1996) would appear to be an unquestioned assumption.

Remembering the dead (in the sense of what has been lost to us) was a particular feature in the most Group C, though not exclusive to this group. Green (2008) found that "the stockpiling of memories" (p.142) was a significant element in his sample – all from the late 20th and early 21st century. He also found in his sample the memory of the deceased that was given was unidimensional – there was no attempt to give a fully rounded view of the deceased and he suggested that "a purified memory of the deceased.....is the only immortality suggested in these books" (2008 p.144).

Thinking about the good things and the good times that were had before the person or animal died was one of the key messages given in group C of my sample. It should not be forgotten though, that within less than 30 pages it would be unlikely

that any serious character analysis could be gone into. The characters had no backstory and we were presented with an idea that was designed to comfort rather than to be more psychologically helpful in any real therapeutic sense.

Miffy visited her Grandma's grave and put flowers there because "grandma was so fond of flowers" (Bruna 2005 p.22) she also 'talked' to her grandma whilst she was at the graveside. However we were given no sense that grandma Bunny was present in any form but simply told "Miffy finds this comforting (and she thinks) that grandma understands" (p.23). Little Bear in *Little Bear's Grandad* (Gray and Cabban 2000) was comforted by his mother and told her, "I want to be just as nice as my grandad was to me" (p.21) following his grandad's death. The entire story told us about the importance of the relationship between little bear and his grandfather, so when little bear made his comment about how nice grandad had been we already were aware of the memories were that little bear wishes to hold on to.

Where a new pet was found, remembering the good things about the deceased pet was mixed with the experiences of having a new pet. *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002) died on the first page of the story and the children were affected by his loss initially but, then asked for a new pet. A stray kitten turned up at the house and eventually was allowed to stay (although as the cat is a stray he doesn't choose to live with them all of the time). He began to replace Roly but, on the final page we are reminded that although the new cat was with them for much of the time: "Roly isn't. He is with us all the time" (Rosen 2002 p.24). In this story the new cat was simply a new cat and not a re- incarnation of Roly.

Mog in *Goodbye Mog* (Kerr 2002) also was replaced and remembered in a similar way. We were shown the family with the new kitten being fully involved in their home

life. The little girl Debbie was made to comment though, "I will always remember Mog" (Kerr 2002 p.29). Unlike in the story of *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002), Mog exerted a spiritual presence over the story. This stood out as in group C (and indeed in the whole sample) by showing some sense of heaven or an afterlife. Green (2008) noted also that the majority of books available were distinctly secular in nature, although he also found that there were some "religiously inspired titles" (p.147), available, but that this was a small genre. On the first page we hear Mog saying that she was dying and are shown above, an image of Mog lying still in her bed. There was a 'ghostly' picture of Mog going towards the top of the page (to heaven?). Then a new cat came into the children's lives and they talked of Mog and remembered her. However, in this story the final word was given to the 'spirit' Mog who, when the children said we will remember her replied, "so I should hope" (Kerr 2002 p.30). We were then told "she flew up and up and up and up right into the sun" (Kerr 2002 p.30). Heaven is not mentioned but the direction is upwards and we might assume that it is implied.

At first sight *Jenny Angel* (Wild and Spudvilas 1999) might appear to deal with "heaven" as we were introduced to the young Jenny flying above bridges and trees on her wings that no one else can see. Her brother was dying and Jenny appeared to maintain the belief in her wings and that if her brother could believe in them as well he would not die; an example of magical thinking. Her mother offered her no comfort in this fantasy and after the little brother's funeral Jenny found her wings had gone. Despite this apparent spirituality there was no sense of an afterlife as such. Although on the final page we were shown Jenny and her mother sitting huddled together on the roof looking up to the night sky (Wild and Spudvilas 1999 p.30); again perhaps we were meant to think of heaven. We were shown a sky full of stars

and one shooting star - but there was no overt mention of her brother or his spirit, or heaven. Again as with Mog perhaps this was the nearest we might get to being told there was an afterlife in some form.

The books of Group B having been less overt for the most part in their addressing the subject of death, did not then consider the memory of the dead either. The two exceptions were *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) in which the bird was remembered briefly - but for whom there were no real memories anyway. After they had buried the dead bird the children continued visiting the grave, singing to the dead bird and putting fresh flowers there “until they forgot” (Wise Brown 1965 p.40). However in *Charlotte’s Web* (White 1952) we found that remembering Charlotte was a significant element of the story. Charlotte had been a good friend to Wilbur and when she died having given birth to hundreds of spiders Wilbur was able to befriend some of them. However “Wilbur never forgot Charlotte. Although he loved her children and her grandchildren dearly, none of the other new spiders ever quite took her place in his heart” (White 1952 p.170). This was similar in tone to the reaction to the new cat that appears after the death of Old Roly (Rosen 2002).

*The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) stood out in the entire sample, as being clearly about life after death. It did not offer a simple idea of heaven, in the sense of its being a happy place where dead cats fly off to, but was an allegory of the final days when people are to be divided into sheep and goats.

Memories of the dead in Group A tended to be avoided as painful or unhelpful. This certainly resonated with Walter’s (1999) earlier comment – and might indicate that attitudes were perhaps beginning to change in the pre-war period as already noted. In *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) the garden itself was a way of

remembering Colin's mother, but it had been closed off for years and the key had been lost. The garden and the lost key served as both the literal garden and, the metaphorical closing off of the father's heart. No one was to go into to garden and Colin's father avoided contact with his son who was a painful reminder of his dead wife. However, restoring the garden brought life back to Colin, his father and the garden. This act would seem to show ideas about looking forward, or moving on, and did not include remembering the past (Kübler- Ross 1969). All of the memories here were painful and it was only possible to look at the garden when it was brought back to life with no further mention of what it meant in the past.

In *A Little Princess* (Hodgson Burnett 1905) moving on and letting go also were favoured over thinking about those who were dead. There was a contrast between Sara Crew (the little princess) who stoically continued to be kind, good hearted and brave despite the death of both of her parents, and her school friend Lottie who cried loudly and often because "I haven't got any mam -ma-a!"(Hodgson Burnett 1905 p.34). The adults told Lottie that if she did not stop crying she would be whipped or smacked - she should not dwell on her loss clearly and the kind (?) teacher commented on this saying "we never had such a dreadful child before" (Hodgson Burnett 1905 p.35).

It might have been assumed that the earlier books being written at the end of the Victorian era or in the early Edwardian period, would still display some of the religious beliefs in heaven as a reward for a life lived well. This was not the case: it appeared that here the dead were best forgotten quickly. The church was no longer the focus of spiritual comfort and was beginning to be replaced by the psychologist and the therapist who suggested that remembering the dead rather than praying for

them was all that was possible (Walter 1999). If the memories were too painful then it would be better not to dwell on them.

In this period the fact that a parent or child (in Barrie (1906) *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*) had died appeared to be an acceptable theme as part of a children's story and thus be referred to. Once said though, there was no need to think about this too much. In fact, the apparent attitude would appear to be it was either too painful to dwell on death or too self-indulgent. Peter Rabbit (Potter 1906) and Jemima Puddle-Duck both were aware of their losses but, apart from the tears that Jemima shed "on account of those eggs" (Potter 1908 p.54) there was no mention of any particular memory of the dead. Jemima quickly went on to lay a new batch of eggs and her loss was never mentioned again.

#### **4.17 Three books**

Again I will consider the place and purpose of memory/ afterlife in a little more depth in the following books using one from each group.

*The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (Potter 1908)

*Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce 1958)

*Little Bear's Grandad* (Gray and Cabban 2000)

Jemima Puddle-Duck was presented from the beginning of the story as being rather sentimental and silly. She wanted to hatch her own eggs and this idea was ridiculed by the other ducks. So it is perhaps, not surprising that the notion of the loss of the eggs should be expected to be accepted as a fact of life and one that should not have occasioned sadness. Jemima Puddle-Duck was rather gullible and foolish and has to be saved from being eaten by the fox due to her desire to hatch her own

eggs. The dogs who liberated her ate some of the eggs in the rescuing of Jemima and she was “escorted home in tears on account of those eggs” (Potter 1908 p.54). We were shown on the page facing these words Jemima walking back to the farm in the company of the dogs who had come to save her. This was only a brief account of loss but the message here appeared to be clear (even though Jemima is portrayed with both human and duck –like qualities): that being too attached was not a good thing. The tears she shed for her lost eggs were meant to show us how silly she was. Jemima was thinking about the loss and not the fact she had been saved. It might be going too far to suggest that there could be any afterlife for the eggs but, remembering their loss would be possible. The attitude of ‘matter of factness’ and getting on with life was shown in this short story of rural life. It can be seen as not atypical of the sample in group A as a whole. Sentimentality and dwelling on a loss would not appear to be desirable in this period.

In *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (Pearce 1958) loss and memory ran throughout the story, although not specifically as a personal loss or the remembering of a loved one, as such. The story involved a young boy who had been sent away from home to stay with an aunt and uncle whilst his brother was ill with measles. This was the story of a lonely boy who became fascinated by a garden (which he could only access after midnight), and the people who lived in the house, in the past. He met a young girl called Hatty (later she is known as Mrs. Bartholomew), and became friendly with her and played with her. One night she fell from a tree house and he feared that she was dead from the fall. The time-shift nature of the story posed the question of whether Hatty was a ghost or not. This meant that loss and remembering did not obviously follow a death. Nonetheless the potential death and loss of Hatty allowed for the consideration of Tom’s reactions. When Tom finally met Hatty in the present (as an

old woman and not a young girl) they talked over their adventures and then when it was time for him to leave he said goodbye and slowly went down the stairs. At the bottom “he hesitated: he turned impulsively and ran up again – two at a time” (Pearce 1958 p.226). They then hugged each other goodbye with clear demonstration of emotion – no comment is made as such although, his aunt did remark that it seemed as if they had known each other for years. Perhaps this might seem to suggest that a long relationship allowed for emotional expression. No comment was made about a spirit world, however. Mrs Bartholomew (Hatty) talked to Tom about her dead husband and her two sons who had died in the First World War. She did not use particularly emotional language to do so but did remark that she “had done all her crying” (Pearce 1958 p.222) a long time ago. So that when she talked of her past and those whom she had lost it would appear to be that they were comfortable memories. She told Tom “When you’re my age, Tom, you live in the Past a great deal. You remember it; you dream it” (Pearce 1958 p.222). Remembering the past including those who have died was seen here to be normal and everyday– certainly in someone who is old. However there was little sense that there should be any effort made in remembering. There were no photographs to be looked at, and only the briefest of comment made.

Little Bear and his mother revisited Grandad bear’s house following his death in the picture book, *Little Bear’s Grandad* (Gray and Cabban 2000). They sat together in the tree house where Little Bear used to sit with his grandfather and looked out across a familiar landscape. The words at the top of the page described the scene we were shown illustrated across the two pages below. Mother Bear and Little Bear have their arms around each other “and cried quietly and hugged each other” (Gray and Cabban 2000 p.22). The scene was one where the recollection of and talk about

grandad bear was of importance. On the following two pages almost the entire page was taken up with the image of mother bear holding Little Bear's hands and reassuring him. Little Bear said to his mother "when I'm a grandad, I want to be as nice a grandad as my grandad was to me" (Gray and Cabban 2000 p.23). His mother looked into his eyes and said "you will be, Little Bear....you will be" (Gray and Cabban 2000 p.24). This scene comes shortly after we were told of the fact of grandad's death, in terms of the book structure, although we were not told how long it was since the death when this scene took place. However the message seemed to be clear that continuing to remember – even by trying to be like that person- was a good thing to do. This might also link to the notion of legacy as well as of memory (Klass et al 1996).

#### **4.18 Summing up**

The theme of memory or continuing bond reflected the manner in which almost all the books considered the deceased after they have died. Heaven or any overt sense of an afterlife was rarely mentioned and any sense of continuation after death appeared to be portrayed simply as one of having fond memories of the deceased. The notion of an afterlife (or any particular spiritual view of what happens to the dead once they are dead) was not a particular feature of the narrative in any of the stories across the entire sample. There tended to be an acceptance that the dead are still with us, at least in memory (Klass et al.1996). This would appear to be a modern notion when compared with the psychological understanding of grieving considered in the previous section. Although it should be noted even in the mid -19th century Ariès (1983) commented that cemeteries were not places where the dead were prayed for, but rather as evidence of the deceased's former place in society, again suggesting religion was less significant well before the turn of the 20th century.

Poling and Hupp (2008) noted they found that in some instances, their books portrayed death as a state in which a person might continue to exist (i.e., in an afterlife/in heaven) but, as noted earlier they combined the funeral service and heaven/afterlife into the same theme. They chose to use the term socio- cultural and may have considered the inclusion of a funeral ritual assumed belief in the afterlife. However their findings did not appear to be borne out by others (Green 2008, Corr 2007, Johnson 2004). As shown in the previous theme, the funeral ceremony across the time period of my sample has tended to be secular rather than overtly spiritual in tone.

In previous centuries the practice had been to focus on the soul of the dead but what has been seen in this study is the loss of the relationship as the focus outward expression of grief (Ariès 1983). It became important to cultivate the memory of the dead and to consider the loss as personal and this is reflected throughout my sample.

#### **4.19 The anomalies**

Having looked at a range of themes that emerged from the stories in my sample there remain a number of books that do not readily fall into the themes I have chosen to consider. The two particular categories that appear to be outliers or anomalies are the folk/tale fairy story book and also the 'humorous' books.

#### **4.20 Death as universal, inevitable and necessary**

Whilst I have considered the folk/fairy tale to some extent, it is worth reconsidering this style of story as an anomaly. This form of story had been actively suppressed in

Britain in the early part of the 19th century (Sullivan III 1992) and, unlike in much of Europe, did not appear to have been kept alive by an oral tradition thus handing down the stories across generations (Carpenter 1985). The stories are represented as “found” folk/fairy tales (Lang’s Colour books) and so imply an older tradition, were (mostly) written anew for the child audience of the time. Lang’s fairy stories from the 19th century had a considerable popularity and continued in print for some time; indeed there were 12 collections of the stories in ‘colour’ books published from 1889-1913 (Carpenter 1985).

The role of the folk tale is perhaps to tell universal truths in story form. They have been more common in central Europe, which may be why we find no similar story from Group B (Carpenter 1985). Although the awareness of fairy stories and folk tales may be evident in other cultures it would seem that they were actively discouraged in Britain in the 19th century and despite French and German imports (and later Andersen) the stories were adapted “to reduce the ethical irrationality .....and to present the reader with something approaching an ordered moral universe” (Carpenter 1985 p.4). It is notable that of group C two books which follow the folk tale style one is a translation from German (*Duck, Death and the Tulip*, Erlbruch 2008) and the other, *Death in a Nut* (Maddern and Hess 2005), is said to be based on an old Scottish folk tale, harking back to earlier times. Pyles (1988) suggested that because folk tales were often passed down orally they continued to have an appeal and she explained that this type of literature allowed that “death could be seen in its proper perspective” (p.105) and so was just part of life, as we see in the examples shown here.

Many of the stories within Lang’s collection addressed the subject of death, although not necessarily from a ‘real life’ perspective. They tended to show a more

philosophical view point whereby the notion of death as an inevitable and universal fact of life was the focus of the story. We might say these stories addressed the existential questions. They offer no heart-warming reassurance and often present the denial of death as a foolhardy idea. These stories also present a universal quest story in which the hero sets out to overcome some foe (Campbell 1988). Influenced to some extent by the Romantic movement of the late 18th century, there was a movement in the middle of the 19th century to reinstate the role of the imagination and fantasy thinking and this prepared the ground for some renewal in interest in the fairy story (Carpenter 1985). This was a perhaps a direct challenge or rejection to the moral tracts, mentioned earlier, published by the Religious Tract Society (Bratton 1981).

The notion of childhood innocence allowed fantasy to be part of childhood reading, and it was sometimes considered more appropriate for young readers than for adults as children were seen as “more perceptive” (Sullivan III 1992 p.100). For Children’s authors in the late 19th century this new found permission to write about fantasy allowed them some freedom to explore ‘adult’ themes (Hunt 1994) in an apparently innocent way. The suggestion of another world, and not the real world allowed authors licence to do so.

The two 21st century examples in my sample also demonstrated the same separation from the real world. Hunt (1994) suggested that the appeal of the folk/fairy tale was in their crudeness, and thus their slightly subversive nature allowed for ‘difficult’ subjects to be smuggled into these children’s stories. Fantasy, Hunt (1994) told us, “can overcome difficulties (evil, death) by changing the rules” (p.167). It might be suggested that this was no longer the function of the folk/fairy tale in the 21st century as the ‘difficult’ subject had become much more acceptable in

children's literature following the search for the realistic story from the 1960s on (Reynolds 2007).

Examples of stories in this section come from group A (1890-1910) and group C (1990-2010). There were no examples of the folk/fairy story in the middle group B, but *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) does address the subject as death as inevitable and universal and therefore it has been included for comparison. It cannot be called a fairy story in the same way as the other books in this sample but addressed existential questions, albeit from an overtly Christian stance.

#### **4.21 Three examples**

I will consider three of these stories in more detail below:

*The Voice of Death*. (Lang 1890)

*The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) and

*Death in a Nut*. (Madden and Hess 2005).

*The Voice of Death* (Lang 1890) used a very traditional fairy tale manner with the words "Once upon a time" (Lang 1890 loc. 10023), thus the subject of the story was taken out of the here and now and occurred at some unspecified far off time. This might permit the reader to distance themselves and thus be a protective factor from the 'difficult' nature of the story's subject (Inglis 1981). This was a classic journey story (Campbell 1988) where a man set out on a quest to find a land where no one died. The man eventually found such a land where "people did not even know the meaning of the word death" (Lang 1890 loc.10025). The man thought this must mean that the land was very full of people but he was told that this was not the case because; "from time to time a voice is heard calling....and whoever hears the voice

gets up and goes away, and never comes back” (Lang 1890 loc.10028). He considered the people must be quite stupid to take any notice of the voice and that he would not be so silly. The man decided to move his family to this land and resolved that neither he nor any of his family would take any notice of the voice if they heard it calling. Inevitably, after some time his wife heard the voice and although the man tried his best to prevent her following it, he was unable to prevent her going. Eventually the man heard the voice and shouted out that he would not go with it. The voice persisted in calling and the man became angry and rushed out to fight the voice; “running at full speed” (Lang 1890 loc.10068). He ran so fast that he fell over a precipice and “was never seen again” (Lang 1890 loc.10068). When the towns’ folk went to look at the pit into which the man had fallen they found a pit that “had swallowed up such numbers, and yet never seemed to be full” (Lang 1890 loc.10071). Once they had seen this pit the people of the town “began to die like ordinary mortals all the world over” (Lang 1890 loc.10074).

The message of the story was starkly made in the final sentence. We were offered no comment on emotional reactions, but it was clear we are meant to understand the foolishness of the man who thought he could avoid death. The people who lived in this land were not curious about death as such, but simply accepted both that sometimes people go and never come back. We might suggest that this reflects the medieval notion Ariès (1983) terms ‘tame death’. Finally, we were told the pit where the man had fallen, “was a vast plain that looked as if it had been there since the beginning of the world” (Lang 1890 loc.10071). The similarities of this “vast plain” with the final scenes of *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) might be noted. There was no complex message here, it was simple and straightforward: death happens to all, it always has and it always will. The message was also that it is foolhardy not to know

this. It is also clear that here death is not the enemy but a necessary fact of life. The concepts of inevitability and universality (Speece and Brent 1992) were the main focus of the moral: death happens to everyone. This did not illustrate 'acceptance' in terms of grief theories (Kubler-Ross 1969, Neimeyer 2001), but was just a bald statement of fact.

*The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) also featured a land outside the one in which the protagonists live. This story was an overtly Christian allegory and the intention might not have been to distance the reader with visions of a separate land, in the way shown in the previous story. The land of the dead was where we are supposed to hope to go.

This is the final book of the Narnia series and features Lucy, Edmond, Peter and Susan who appeared first in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis 1950). In the final chapters of *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956), following a great battle where we fear the children would be killed they 'escape' through a stable door and into a new land. A child who was familiar with the Christian story might pick up on the imagery here. A horn was sounded and the sky "became full of shooting stars" (Lewis 1956p.141). Then dark shapes appeared and the children realised that what they were seeing was not a cloud but "emptiness" (Lewis 1956 (p.142). As they watched they heard noises and then saw creatures of all kinds and "all these ran up to the doorway where Aslan stood" (Lewis 1956p.143). All of the creatures ran towards the door but some "swerved to their right.....and disappeared into his huge black shadow, which...streamed away to the left of the doorway. The children never saw them again" (Lewis 1956 (p.144). Here not only did all the creatures die but they did not all end up in the same place. In a similar manner to the previous story though we were given an image of death as a vast emptiness into which all fall. The children

however found themselves in a beautiful land that looked like Narnia but was different. The hills “have more colours on them” (Lewis 1956p.158) and seem to be “more like the real thing” (p.158).

The children became puzzled as Aslan (the lion) had told them they would never return to Narnia. Slowly they began to realise that they have indeed returned to Narnia but that the real Narnia “is of course different, as different as the real thing is from a shadow or as waking is from a dream” (Lewis 1956p.160). The reality of death is spelled out to the children “your father and mother and all of you are- as you used to call it in the Shadowlands- dead” (Lewis 1956 p.171). This was not a sad ending and as we were told “we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after” (Lewis 1956p.172).

This was not only death but also about paradise and what followed death was a place that “goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before” (Lewis 1956p.172). This view of death is not of an ending, but a beginning. Death here would appear to be neither a person nor a voice although, Aslan was King of that land and had guided the children through their lives and so might consider that death is to some extent personified here. Aslan as the Christ figure occupies the representing both life and death. Even with Christian overtones in this story we can see that it also follows the traditional quest (Campbell 1988) seeking to offer universal truths.

In a similar manner to *The Voice of Death* (Lang 1890) we were told there is a place where the dead lived, in a separate world to the living. This is a common theme with each of the three stories considered here. Death was again shown to be universal and inevitable but here we also had the addition of a Christian heaven and hell; we

do not all have the same end. The moral of this story was all die, but only some can be saved.

*Death in a Nut* (Madden and Hess 2005) followed the more traditional folk/fairy tale format. It was said to be based on a Scottish traveller story and in keeping with the folk tradition again started with “once upon a time” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.1). This version is in picture book format and as with many of the picture books the words offered part of the story but the pictures themselves offered additional information (Nodelman 1988, Hunt 1994). It maybe that by positioning the folk tale as a ‘found’ story its unusual (in Britain), format could be seen to be exotic and might explain its ‘foreignness’. It also might permit the story to appear timeless, that is, not fixed to any one period of history, but rather some unnamed ‘once’, as we saw in *The Voice of Death* (Lang 1890).

On the first page we were told that Jack lived with his mother in a cottage by the sea. “They kept hens, a goat and a vegetable garden. Jack’s mother took in sewing, and that’s how they got by” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.1). The illustration used showed the cottage and the hens, but we also were given an image of Jack playing outside with someone. This may be to reassure us that Jack was an ordinary boy, or that he was not lonely. This mirrors the protection of children by adults seen in many of the books in group C. By page 3 however, Jack was told by his mother “I think Old Man Death will be coming for me soon” (Madden and Hess 2005). This awareness of one’s own death has not been seen in other stories of group C. Indeed the concept of a mature understanding of death which acknowledges that everyone will die, and that also includes ‘me’ is often said not to be possible before the age of 11 moving from a concept of “all-gone” to a mature concept of universality and irreversibility by the age of 11 onwards (Nagy 1948). The use of age boundaries can be problematic

(Jackson 2013; Ellis and Stump 2000; Stambrook and Parker 1987), but the story format would seem to allow such considerations to be by-passed, although it should be noted it is an adult voicing this awareness here.

As in the first of the stories in this section death was not welcomed by Jack: “no mother, please don’t die” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.3). Jack then went out walking on the beach near the cottage and met Old Man Death on his way to his cottage. Despite Jack not wanting Old Man Death to go to the cottage he explained “well, she’s ill and in pain... It’s natural you know. It’s time for her to go” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.6). As in *The Voice of Death* (Lang 1890), Jack wanted to cheat death – he fought with Old Man Death, grabbed hold of him and pushed him inside a hazelnut and “plugged it with a stick”( Madden and Hess 2005 p.8). He then threw the nut into the sea. When Jack returned home his mother was not dead, but rather, she was well and about to cook eggs for breakfast. What we are shown next is that the eggs would not crack, and the chicken’s neck could not be wrung. All of the villagers had similar problems in killing their livestock for food. Jack realised “it was something HE had done!” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.19 emphasis in original). We were then shown a picture of Jack running home to tell his mother about what he had done. The message would appear to be that death is clearly something that needs to be accepted, and moreover is necessary. Rather than being just an emotional loss the story asked that we accept death as part of the lifecycle. This is similar to the message in *The Voice of Death* (Lang 1890).

Eventually after looking on the beach for the nut for three days Jack found the nut and let Old Man Death out of the shell. Old Man Death decided that Jack had been fair to him and so he would not take his mother “for a while” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.23). The message in this story is clear: death can be postponed but not got rid of

completely; and as we were told on the final page “without Death there can be no life” (Madden and Hess 2005 p.24). Though Jack may not have been represented as being arrogant or foolhardy as the man in *The Voice of Death* (Lang 1890), he was only able become wise by accepting the need for death in the world.

#### **4.22 Summing up**

The two folk/fairy tales accepted the fact of death as not only inevitable and universal but also necessary. Both stories demonstrate the concept of universality, and by suggesting the necessity of death perhaps make the point a little more fully than we have seen suggested by Speece and Brent (1992), considered to be part of a mature understanding of death. A mature concept is not usually expected to be seen in the very young (Jackson 2013). Each of these stories addressed the subject death in a clear and direct manner, as we have already seen in previous themes. Each of these stories began by suggesting that death is not to be desired and would be best avoided altogether. The only other story where we noted this reaction, though in a slightly different manner, was *Charlotte' Web* (White 1952). This attitude is shown to be foolhardy and here, even harmful.

We have seen earlier that directness is not avoided in talk about death in children's stories but in the newer story the directness has tended to be tempered with the inclusion of a protective adult. It would seem that even the folk tale has been impacted by changing notions of the child. Jack did have his mother, however she was not there to shield him from Death in quite the way we might imagine; she sent him back out to find Death and to set him free from the nut (Madden and Hess 2005).

Although *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956), was a very much more complex and longer story, it also addressed the universality and inevitability of death (Ellis and Stump 2000; Speece and Brent 1992). This story did not address the subject of death as simply inevitable, but would seem more akin to the early Victorian morality tales, which served as reminders of the final reckoning (Townsend 1996).

The stories in this theme are presented as fantasies; they are not 'real' stories. They are presented as tales from far off lands and, this perhaps allows them to be acceptable in their directness. Hunt (1994) stated that "we want to select what children may or may not know" (p.169) and that in fantasy the "laws of the physical world are suspended" (p.169). Complex, even existential questions can thus be addressed in the folk/fairy tale because, Hunt (1994) further suggested, this is also possible when the stories are not too long. It is also worth noting Nagy's (1948) work on children's concept of death in Hungary where she found it not uncommon that children had an image of death as a person. This is not found, or not reported, in Western developmental psychology. We might then wonder if the stories influence the concept or vice versa.

In *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) the notion of death, as universal and inevitable, was only spelled out at the very end of the story on the very final page. Even within the outliers *The Last Battle* (Lewis 1956) still would appear to be on its own and not sitting easily in any category.

#### **4.23 The humour of death.**

Death, as we have seen, was often addressed directly and without sentiment in children's books across the span of the sample. Two of the books in my sample (Belloc 1907, Gorey 1963) treated death as a source of humour. These books are

from group A and group B. There were no books in the final group that appeared to use humour.

Some have also suggested that *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) treated the death of Peter's father as a 'death joke' (Hunt 2016). The two particular books I consider in this section both follow traditional formats and they serve as an illustration, perhaps, of the way a "writer may vary the traditional elements to make unexpected points" (Butts 1992 p.xii). Belloc (1907) subverted the moral tale of the early 19th century in his '*Cautionary Tales*', "for the admonishment of Children between the ages of eight and fourteen years" (Belloc 1907 loc.64). Unlike their earlier counterparts (Gibson and Zaidman 1991) it was very clear that these were not stories of heroic children from whom we should take an example. Indeed in the introduction to his book we were told that these are not true stories "because if things were really so, you would have perished long ago" (Belloc 1907 loc.77). The moral aspect is no longer the message, entertainment is the purpose here (Townsend 1996).

Gorey's (1963) *The Gashly Crumb Tinies* used the "A is for apple" style of early reader which would appear at first sight to be designed for young children, again harking back to a much older style of story (Carpenter 1985). It is unclear how this book was marketed but, it may well have been bought for children in the way books are often bought for children by adults remembering their own childhood (Carpenter 1985).

The front cover shows a group of children in front of a skeleton, holding an umbrella, dressed in Victorian style funeral attire. The book was designed to be very small and apparently child-sized similar to that favoured by Potter for her children's books.

However if we compare this book with others in group C the images would perhaps not appear seem to be designed to appeal to children. They avoid any use of colour and are back and white pen and ink drawings (Hladikova 2104). If we contrast these images to those of Miffy (Bruna 2005) we can see a marked contrast in eye-appeal. Whether these books were addressed at an adult audience rather than for a child, we should remember that authors do not simply reflect the society in which they live but may “articulate its contradictions, question its values, or even argue against them” (Butts 1992 p. xiii). There may be permission in some circumstances for books to appear to entertain whoever reads them. We should not forget that children’s literature can also be “highly subversive” (Hunt 1994 p.6).

#### **4.24 Two examples**

The two books I will now look at in more detail can certainly be suggested to be subverting tradition. As has been noted these were the only examples found. They appear to be simple moral tales but offer unexpected outcomes. The books are:

*Cautionary Tales For Children* (Belloc 1907) and  
*The Gashly Crumb Tinies* (Gorey 1963).

The characters in Belloc’s *Cautionary Tales*, did not all die as a result of their misdemeanours, but many did meet with an untimely end. Some of the tales showed positive outcomes for “good” behaviour, but none of the tales could be said to offer a real world view, and as we have seen in Belloc’s (1907) own words, they were not intended to be believed.

The first of the tales was “Jim, who ran away from his nurse and was eaten by a lion” which ended with the well-known caution to “always keep a-hold of Nurse for fear of

finding something worse” (Belloc 1907 loc.149). We were told how Jim, who was always running off, ran into the jaws of a lion at the zoo and was eaten by it. The eating of Jim was described vividly, asking us to imagine how it might feel when “first your toes and then your heels, and then by gradual degrees your shin and ankles, calves and knees, are slowly eaten, bit by bit” (Belloc 1907 loc.121). There was no timidity shown in this description.

By the time the lion had got to Jim’s head “the wretched boy was dead” (Belloc 1907 loc.143). His mother and father were not surprised because Jim “would not do as he was told” (Belloc 1907 loc.149). This fitted with the stoical response to death we have seen earlier, but one might suspect that we were to be amused by the lack of emotion as much as the silliness of the tale. Although written in the same period as *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) the stoicism of parents is shown to be ridiculous, rather than being the done thing. Belloc’s (1907) tales thus echoed the early Victorian morality tales (Townsend 1996), and subverted them for amusement.

Henry King was another boy who was disobedient. He chewed bits of string and “was early cut off in dreadful agonies” (Belloc 1907 loc.157). By contrast with Jim’s parents, Henry’s parents brought doctors to help him, but all in vain. They were distressed by his death and “stood about his bed lamenting his untimely death” (Belloc 1907 loc.171). Henry, echoing the saintly children from the *Janeways’* (1671) stories, with his dying words warns others “that Breakfast, Dinner, Lunch, and Tea are all the Human Frame requires” (Belloc 1907 loc.177).

Perhaps the most “realistic” of the tales is that of Matilda “who told lies, and was burned to death” (Belloc 1907 loc.183). Although the intention was still to amuse, perhaps the circumstances of Matilda’s death might potentially most closely relate to

the child readers of these tales. Matilda was left on her own one evening and called the fire brigade saying her house was on fire (which of course it wasn't). The brave firemen being convinced that they had been called out to put out a real fire took some convincing that this was not the case. Matilda's aunt "had to pay to get the men to go away" (Belloc 1907 loc.219). When some weeks later Matilda was left alone as punishment; the house did catch fire and she called out of the window for help, "every time she shouted "Fire!" they only answered "Little Liar!" (Belloc 1907, loc.242). The sad end of the tale was that when her aunt eventually returned home "Matilda, and the house were burned" (Belloc 1907 loc.250). The apparent justice of this end was clear, no emotion or regret or even any additional moral comment was given. In these tales children die, almost casually and we were expected to read these stories for amusement, not for moral examples. The change we noted in the purpose of children's books from the worthy tracts of the RTS at the beginning of the 19th century to the sole purpose of entertainment by end is well highlighted in this book.

*The Gashly Crumb Tinies* (Gorey 1963) was an alphabet book in which a different child met his or her death in each of the 26 scenes. The words were simply one sentence for each letter with a black and white illustration above the words. Some of the pictures showed a graphic depiction of the death, others, perhaps being more bizarre deaths are less detailed. In some ways it was similar in its graphic description of death to the previous book, but with the words being replaced by pictures-thus more directly available to children without the need to be able to read (Postman 1994).

A was for Amy; she was shown falling down the stairs to her death. The words die, killed or death did not appear in these rhymes, but it was clear that none of the

children survived their various mishaps. The most graphic of these was perhaps Kate, “who was struck with an axe” (Gorey 1963 p.22). Kate was drawn lying on the ground with the axe sticking out of her body, but we also were shown a trail of blood in the snow coming from the distance to the front of the page where Kate lay, hollowed eyed and very much dead. Again though presented as morality tales it was the (supposed) humour of these stories which was meant to entertain.

#### **4.25 summing up**

The notion of the death joke (Hunt 2016) is perhaps an uneasy concept to grasp in terms of children’s literature, but we find examples of it across the first two periods of my sample at least. Each of these books would appear to be subverting tradition but at the same time offering highly moral tales. By using a non-contemporary style the author may be permitted licence to address gruesome subjects. This is perhaps even more pronounced in *The Gashly Crumb Tinies* (Gorey 1965) where the gruesome aspect of the deaths was not played down and was illustrated very graphically. Belloc (1907) was writing at a time when many would still be familiar with the moral tales of the early and mid-Victorian period and this may have allowed more licence for him to refer back to those stories and to poke fun at them. Gorey (1965) was clearly looking back to the same period but without the benefit of the recent memory (for the reader), this may add to his story book appearing more shocking. In terms of content it is not so different from the more graphic early 19th century children’s’ tales (Townsend 1996). However, as death barely featured as a fit subject for children in the 1950-1970 period its content seems more surprising. Death had been sequestered (Conway 2011) and thus the ‘death joke’ with it.

#### 4.26 Final summing up

What seems to be evident from the above is that death has not been absent from children's stories over the 120 year period selected. Whilst there is some variation in the way in which it is presented not only across the entire sample but also within each 20 year period some of the attitudes remain constant. This would not appear to concur with the idea that death was once an ordinary subject (late Victorian period) and then became one of taboo.

It would seem that directness in announcing death (where it is mentioned explicitly) is common across all the periods but it is the emotional reactions following death would appear to be more varied. We note that this was also seen in societal attitudes.

The wide range of styles of writing inevitably provided some problems in terms of comparison; however by trying to isolate the manner in which the subject of death has been addressed across the time it has been possible to highlight themes and to consider how they alter, or not, over time. Though it is evident there have been changes in expectations of the reaction to death, it would appear that this is not a linear progression and is far more complex and nuanced.

What is also apparent, and perhaps most surprising is that the lack of concern with an afterlife or the dead as spiritual beings seems to be a feature across the entire sample. My expectation was that I would see a clear change from the earliest stories prior to the First World War, where the role of the church in everyday life and more regular church going was more usual. My sample did not fit with the more often asserted notion that the change in the 'cult of the dead' and the romanticised views

from the Victorian period, changed as a result of the mass deaths in the second decade of the 20th century (Walter 1999).

It would seem unlikely that it is simply because the stories were for children that this change is seen here, as it is also clear that prior to this time children's stories more commonly were used to teach the moral attitudes of the day (Townsend 1996). The idea of sin and thinking on the last things was almost entirely absent from the books in group A, where this might have been expected to be a feature.

Death has not been absent from books for children and from this exploration of themes it would appear they have more similarities across the time period than might have been anticipated when considering the changes in social norms across the centuries.

## Chapter Five: Final thoughts and comments

I started from a position of wanting to explore death in children's literature through a social constructionist perspective. We have noted the tacit assumption that 'they' were much more at ease with death in the past, and this study has sought to explore this and to uncover whether was indeed the case. This discourse was reflected in the comment in chapter one that "dealing with death has remained problematic in the UK and "western" societies more generally" and that although "in many respects death has lost its taboo status, it remains a largely private event" (Hester and Taylor 2011 p.200). This study has sought to explore this question by exploring the notion of the social construction of the child and death in children's literature over a 120 year period. By choosing such a time span I have been able to interrogate these assumptions and offer some insights into death in children's literature.

I have considered the ways in which notions of childhood are socially constructed through the lens of children's books; also constructions. It should be further acknowledged that this research is in turn a construction. It therefore cannot make 'truth claims' (Burr 2003), but should be read as one possible version. Thus, these final comments can only be seen as my reading of what I have chosen to look at. Another person may have found different themes and considered them in different ways. However this perspective has also allowed for the subject to be considered in a fresh way and therefore has offered new insights.

Social construction allows for interpretation and the view point of the researcher will inevitably influence that interpretation (Burr 2003). This way of looking at the world (here children's books) acknowledges that this type of research is subjective and influenced by the researcher at each stage of the research process. However it is this interpretation of itself which has allowed for the books to be seen in their historical and social contexts (Hennick et al 2011). By using an interpretivist paradigm rather than a positivist one all pre-conceptions are available to be questioned and thus a fresh look is possible.

This thesis has looked at how death has been presented with in books for children from 1890 to 2010. My thesis has differed in significant ways from others researching in a similar area (Green 2008, Poling and Hupp 2008, Jones 2001). I have looked at death as an ordinary subject in children's books and have not been concerned with bereavement and loss as such, which is a notable difference. I have also set this within the context of the changing view of the child overtime, rather than as a fixed developmental entity. This was particularly relevant as this thesis included books published at a time before notions of child development had been influenced by child psychology (Frønes 2005). Thus I have been able to offer a different consideration to the question of whether death has been seen as a fit subject for children. What this study has also highlighted is that evident increase in books dealing with death in the final period (1990-2010) can be linked to a new attitude towards the notion of the child.

It is evident from this thesis that death has not been entirely absent from children's stories over the 120 year period selected, though the manner in which it has been addressed has been shown to be contingent on the prevailing view of 'the child. Despite Jones' (2001) assertion that "death is *no longer* a taboo topic in children's

literature” (p.125) (my italics), it would appear to have been a topic included in children’s literature in varying degrees over the period of this study and is not just a recent addition, as her words ‘no longer’ would imply. Although it is also apparent that death in children’s books was significantly less evident in the middle period (1950-1970), it has never been entirely avoided, indeed it would seem clear that authors have never entirely shied away from death as a subject for children, though the manner of its presentation alters across time. What is also clear from this study is that death began to be seen as a less suitable subject for children in the first period chosen (1890-1910), earlier than one might have anticipated and that changing views of childhood might be a plausible explanation for this change.

## **5.1 Social constructionism**

The decision to consider a broad range of children’s books over such a period posed a number of issues; not least being what we mean by ‘child’. By using a social constructionist approach in which to frame the research I have been able to sidestep issues around developmental views on childhood (Burr 2003). We have seen that the very idea of what constitutes a child (at any point in time) is crucial to consider when reading books deemed to be suitable for them.

Chapter two explored how social concepts of ‘children’ and ‘child’ influence what is written for children and, in turn, how that reflects what is considered to be meant by the word ‘children’ and ‘child’. This was a crucial factor in attempting to make sense of children’s books over time. From this perspective there can be no single view of children or childhood (and their books) (Jenks 2005, James and James 2004, James and Prout 1997). This also allowed for the question of suitability to be interrogated;

that is whether childhood is seen as a time of innocence or not. The notion of suitability of reading matter and reading age were clearly seen to be problematic by looking back over the 120 year time span. Nonetheless this served to highlight the changing perspectives on the notion of 'the child'.

It should be noted as Foucault (1998) comments, we cannot "go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the forgotten things" (p.374), but rather that each age will reinterpret and re-shape reality. Books from each period have been shown to address a very different notion of the child. By briefly tracing the development of children's literature from its earliest roots it has been possible to demonstrate changing perceptions of the child as manifested in books (Townsend 1996). So we have seen that each period reflected a different view of the child.

What was deemed suitable in one age was not necessarily seen in the next. A social constructionist perspective has allowed for a suspension of taken for granted ideas in terms of what we mean by 'child' (Jenks 2005), and allowed the possibility to think differently about the past, and indeed the present (Foucault 1992).

Developmental psychology has had a pronounced influence on our current expectations of what children should be able to do at each age (Prout 2005). By applying a social constructionist perspective I have been able to consider children's books in a different way from others (Green 2008, Jones 2001, Ordal 1980), who have accepted the notions of age-based development in their studies.

The social constructionist perspective has allowed me to show how the perception of what 'being a child' is considered to mean also influenced the way in which death was addressed in children's books. It would seem that it was not the subject of death, as such, that altered across time, but 'children'. I have struggled to answer

this question throughout the research. The place of death in society has clearly altered over the period studied here, but nonetheless death has remained a subject included in children's books in some way.

Although it would be fair to suggest that, "children's literature is not simply a reflection of (.....) its age's ideology..." (Butts 1992 p.xiii), authors (as much as anyone else) are influenced by the society in which they live. It is not surprising that children's books demonstrated this duality; they themselves being products of that society. By taking a social constructionist perspective what was very evident was the children's literature in each of the periods showed "there is an overlap with the discourse of child rearing" (Sarland 1999 p.52).

Notions of innocence and protection (Shipman 1972) which began to emerge in the mid- 19th century where thus seen to some extent in the 1890-1910 books. Books in this period pre-date the discipline of child psychology and did not show "apparent age-typical perceptions of death" (Delisle and McNamee 1981 p.3). However they also reflected Ariès' (1983) concept of 'tame' death more fully than those of other periods, although this was also seen to change within this period. It was also in this period that the child began to be the focus of the story (Hunt 1994) and the function of books was to entertain and not merely to serve as a form of didacticism (Carpenter 1985).

The 'apparent' perceptions of age-readiness were not found in books in this study until the middle years of 20th century. The changing understanding of 'childhood' across time, and the ways in which children had become subjects of specialist study (Prout 2005) has been an important feature in the consideration of books. The period 1950-1970 showed a significant change in what was written for children. Books

became increasingly about entertainment as the notion of childhood as a time for play and enjoyment were fully established by this time (Reynolds 2005). However, social construction allowed this study to note the impact of two World Wars on children's authors, if not the children themselves (Townsend 1996). The turn away from the subject of death in books in this period might, in addition, be accounted for by the influence of developmental psychology (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992). This thesis has juxtaposed other cultural factors alongside this dominant discourse and thus been able to offer a different perspective on the change in tone of children's books in the mid-20th century (Zipes 2002).

The final period 1990-2010 has then revealed a more complex view of the notion of childhood. The books in this period recognised a much more diverse range of childhood experiences (Montgomery and Watson 2009), whilst continuing to range between the desire to entertain or to instruct. Picture books featured in this period have been shown to offer access to a broader range of subjects without the need for adult intervention (Postman 1994). This would appear to mirror much earlier times (Ariès 1996).

Social Construction has thus allowed for not only language to be interrogated, but its uses and practices to be explored (Foucault 1977). Thus this perspective has permitted me to uncover not only changes in children's books, but also changes in society and how these two are intertwined (Bratton 1981).

## 5.2 Thematic analysis

Holloway and Todres (2007) described qualitative research as both art and science, and note the interpretation must be robust enough to be clearly stated and seen within the research. Thus thematic analysis lends itself to the discursive style of this research and for the “emergence” of themes (Braun and Clark 2006, Phillips and Hardy 2002). There is a potential for thematic analysis to be seen as a *laissez-faire* method in which anything goes (Rudd 1999). I sought to avoid this by demonstrating my decisions at each stage. The usefulness and purpose of thematic analysis is that it allows the researcher to look at things in a new way (Phillips and Hardy 2002) and thus offer a fresh interpretation (Foucault 1980). However it also risks that interpretation being dismissed as merely bias and lacking in rigour. It is a method which requires the researcher’s familiarity with the sample, and for her to make choices in what she chooses to become aware of. This can make the selection and discovery of the themes problematic as there is always a tension between merely confirming one’s own biases and justifying those claims based on the sample.

The particular usefulness of thematic analysis for this thesis was that it allowed for the subject of the research (death in children’s books) to be considered outside of the question of the literary merit of the books under analysis (Rudd 1999). This was a significantly important factor as the books across the time period were not only of very different lengths and style but, potentially written for very different audiences; as we have noted by the changing view of childhood.

Thematic analysis offered a solution to the difficulty of comparing books which comprised text only with those using both pictures and text. Nodelman (1988) suggested that pictures need not be seen as separate from the text but might be

interpreted in the same way as words; being another form of symbolic representation. Thus it was possible to apply thematic analysis across the range of books in my sample. Using a narrower sample which ranged across a shorter time period might have allowed for the selection of books written in the same style – but this difference across time only became apparent whilst conducting the research. However the range of books over the 120 year timespan was an important and unique feature of this thesis and has allowed me to offer different insights from those who have looked at death in children’s books previously (Green 2008, Jones 2001, Ordal 1980).

Despite this it became apparent the themes in my sample compared quite closely to those already identified by other researchers (Green 2008, Poling and Hupp 2008, Corr 2004, Jones 2001, Moore and Mae 1987). I had initially assumed that because of the wider range of styles across the periods it would not be possible to use a pre-existing themes, as from an initial reading the books appeared to address the subject in significantly different ways. The value of the process of being reflexive within this method permits the researcher to acknowledge assumptions and to be aware of their impact (Braun and Clark 2006, Phillips and Hardy 2002).

I have noted earlier this method is “a way of seeing” (Boyatzis 1998), and that it lends itself well to exploratory research. It sits well with a social constructionist perspective as it allows freshness to be brought to a familiar subject (Hardy 2002, Foucault 1980).

### **5.3 The analysis of themes**

From this analysis one of the most striking features within the books was the way in which death has been addressed directly. This would appear to contradict notions

that “children today are insulated from discussions of death in their literature” (www.deathreference.com). When death was addressed it appeared not to be done with hushed voices and unclear expressions and surprisingly seemed to echo Ariès’ (1974) notion of “tame death” of the medieval period that was “familiar and near evoking no great fear or awe” (p.12). Across the sample words such as dead, dying and death were all used directly: these words simply state a fact.

Whether children were able to understand what “dead” meant (and at what age (Nagy 1948, Stambrook and Parker 1987)) would appear not to have been questioned by the authors of these children’s books. Indeed it would appear to be a construct imposed by others in their studies (Jones 2001, Ordal 1980). Whether the authors were aware of developmental psychology was not clear. Although this question was not part of my thesis it may be interesting to pursue this in future research. It might be simply that authors considered that death happens and so sometimes happens in stories as well; stories simply perhaps simply reflect the world in which we live. It may be that those who write for children retain a closer understanding of what interests them. This would appear to be quite common across all periods. Where death was an integral part of the story the language used about death is clear and unequivocal. Ordal (1980) also noted this and also the use of concrete words, rather than abstract terms or euphemism. There appeared to be an assumption that children would be able to accept the notion. This was an important finding suggesting that directness of address has usually been considered to be important when addressing the subject of death with children.

The books in the period 1890-1910 addressed death directly and this would not surprise many people. It would seem to fit with what I have suggested to be a common assumption about death in the Victorian era. Indeed Anthony (1940) tells us

that “far from being shielded from the thought of death, had it thrust upon them” (p.75). However that this should also be the case with the final period (1990-2010) would appear to challenge the dominant discourse. The common expectation would be that children are either too young to understand or that death in daily life is a rare experience for the young in the current world (Ribbens McCarthy 2006). This assumption would appear to continue despite the evidence that experience of death is not uncommon to young children (Bluebond-Langer 1977, Anthony 1940, Ribbens McCarthy 2006).

This thesis has highlighted how death is addressed in simple, clear and direct ways in children’s books across the entire period, with a small variation in the middle of the twentieth century. Examples included *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906), *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) and *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) showing death was not euphemised. There was no significant variation in the words used about death across the periods, although the nature of the deaths varied.

The use of clear and direct language was particularly interesting as it challenged one of the anxieties often expressed (to me at least) by teachers who have had to talk to young children about death. Though the advice, when it is sought out, is always to avoid euphemisms (Gilbert 2010), it would seem that often there remains a reluctance to do so. It may be that this reflects reading of the generation of adults who were brought up after the trend in the middle of the twentieth century for more realistic stories but which avoided death. This also was time when death became sequestered and taken out of the home and into the hospital (Conway 2011).

However this on its own would seem to be insufficient to explain why there might be an expectation that death is not addressed in children’s books. Comments in academic literature about the dearth of books dealing with “highly controversial

subjects” (Jalongo 1983 p.796) such as death are still to be found. The evidence here would not seem to support this assertion. The range of books in my thesis has shown the wealth of materials available which address death in a clear and non-threatening way and might serve to help those who work with children. It should also be noted that the books here did not focus solely on the emotional response to death.

It may be that there is a certain licence afforded in literature (and other creative pursuits such as film) that permits death as a subject to be addressed clearly - there is both a distance and a connectedness in reading a story, making the subject “safe”.

#### **5.4 Emotional reactions to death**

I had assumed that emotional reactions would be expected and permitted in the earlier books (1890-1910) fitting in with the idea of the Victorian cult of mourning (Howarth 2007), but this has not been seen to be the case in this study. This was a surprising finding and one not seen in other studies.

Although there is some emotion expressed (in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906 for example) the overt display of emotion was, by and large, absent in this period. The most striking finding here was the apparent disappearance of the florid mourning ritual of the Victorian era from the books in the period 1890-1910. This would appear to challenge the now accepted notion that this overt display did not disappear until after the First World War (Walter 1999). Overt display in this period, was seen as ridiculous and to be discouraged – even Jemima Puddle-Duck (Potter 1908) was shown as rather silly and over emotional at the loss of her eggs.

Mrs Craven in *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) commented “I won’t have a child dressed in black wanderin’ about like a lost soul...it’s make the place sadder than it is” (p.28) and so may be reflecting an attitude towards children displaying the emotion of the loss or may be about the display itself.

The reactions we read within the books of this period would not appear to reflect the assumed societal norms regarding mourning behaviour. From *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Potter 1902) to Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* (Hodgson Burnett 1905) death would appear to be just a fact of life and no words of comfort were offered, nor apparently needed. That is to say that, if the late 19th century/early 20th century attitude demanded a stoical acceptance of death then it is not surprising that the children within these stories should also demonstrate that acceptance. Even within the humorous tales of Belloc (1907) this stoicism was evident. These examples would appear to demonstrate avoidance on the emotion of loss being demonstrated earlier than might have been assumed.

The books from 1950-1970 did not on the whole consider the emotional aspects of loss and it would seem that only Wilbur in *Charlotte’s Web* (White 1952) continued to feel the loss of Charlotte who was “in a class by herself” (p.249). Wilbur was also a rather ridiculous character in this story, but there was some allowance for emotion to be shown here. We can see this ridiculing of emotional display echoed some of the earlier books (*The Secret Garden*, Hodgson Burnett 1910, *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*, Potter 1906).

Delisle and McNamee (1981) suggested books from this middle period tend to demonstrate a “pragmatic orientation toward death” (p.12). This echoed Walter’s (1999) comment about the reduction in mourning following the First World War and it

is perhaps not surprising in this period when death had moved out of the home and into the hospital. It would seem that it was the subject of death itself that was unacceptable to adults rather than any view of how children might deal with it. It may also reflect the impact of the dominance of developmental psychology (Prout 2005). So for example when the children in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965) 'forget', Delisle and McNamee would suggest they did so because "they see it in adult's behavior" (1981 p.12) and thus were demonstrating the expected cultural norm of the time.

This comment of itself is interesting if we consider how this can be applied to examples from the books across the time period. In *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) Mary Lennox demonstrated a stoical composure in the face of death; she was given examples by some of the adults that stoicism in the face of loss was the 'correct' way to behave. Colin's father, who had given in to grief and was very emotional, was, by contrast, shown as a bad example and was only redeemed at the end of the story when he finally turned away from his grief.

By contrast emotional reactions (again not florid displays) were shown to be the norm in the books in the final period (1990-2010) where one might have anticipated lack of reaction or a more muted one (Walter 1999).

Nonetheless, in this final period under study showing some emotion would appear to be the norm. Following the death of Old Roly (Rosen 2002) the illustrations were of sad faces (p3) of both children and adults and even later in the story it was the children's parents who suggested that it is too soon to replace Roly with a new kitten. Here the message about behaviour was not one of simply getting on with life but, rather showing some emotion, for a while at least. That there was an acceptance of

some display of emotion, and even an expectation that there should be an emotional reaction was perhaps not surprising. These books were written in the period when Walter noted that there had been what he terms *The Revival of Death* (1994) where he described a change in attitudes to the displaying of emotions. Although this has become an expected form of behaviour in adults it is interesting that this is also seen to be the norm for children who we note have tended to be shielded from death.

### **5.5 Protective adults**

In the first period (1890-1910) the children within the stories tended to encounter death alone and without adult supervision. It should be noted that these books were written at a time when place of the child had begun to move to one where children were seen as precious and in need of adult protection (Sales 2012). Nonetheless such books of this period that dealt with death did not show this new -found protectiveness. They appeared to abandon the children within the stories to deal with death in the best ways they could, and on their own. However this may reflect the use of the child protagonist as a new phenomenon in late 19th century fiction (Hunt 1994) rather than showing any lack of parental care. Books are creations and not merely reflections of the world as it is. Allowing the child to be the lead in the story might have permitted the author to let death “be seen in its proper perspective” (Butler 1972 p.105) and its inclusion be just part of life. This also echoed the way death was included in the very earliest children’s books (Gibson and Zaidman 1991), prior to this first period.

Not only were the children in these stories often abandoned to enjoy adventures but none showed a child at the heart of a caring family; this despite the apparent

changing attitudes towards childhood in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The stories did not feature the nuclear family which had begun to be the norm towards the end of the 19th century (Cunningham 2006). Family sizes had begun to decrease (Walter 1999) and there was an increased focus on the needs of the child by that time, however most of the children in the early stories in this study were either orphans or living with only one parent.

Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* (Hodgson Burnett 1905) had lost both her parents by the end of the story as had Mary Lennox (*The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910)). Even Peter Rabbit (Potter 1902) though living with his mother and sisters, had no father – he had been put in a pie! None of these ‘children’ was offered reassurance or an explanation about death; it was merely a fact of life.

At the opposite end of the period of the study all of the characters (when they are shown as children) were offered comfort by adults. The expectation would appear to be that the subject of death was one that needed to be managed by adults, if it came into the child’s experience. This would seem to reflect Delisle and McNamee’s (1981) assertion that adults should facilitate the exposure of children to what would appear to have been deemed a ‘difficult’ subject. The implication is not that the children should not know about death, but adults should help them understand and offer support (Wass 2004).

In this final period the characters tended to be shown living within a family context the stories, although not necessarily living within a nuclear family. Many of the ‘children’ in the stories from 1990-2010 also appeared to live with only one parent, perhaps reflecting the reality that a quarter of all children currently live in single parent households ([www.gingerbread.org.uk](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk)). In *Little Bear’s Grandad* (Gray and

Cabban 2000) we met only Little Bear's mother, similarly Jenny Angel (Wild and Spudvilas 1999) would seem to live alone with her mother.

Other stories (*Goodbye Mog* (Kerr 2002), *Lovely Old Roly* (Rosen 2002)) from this period showed children living within a more traditional two parent household (Prout 2005). What was different for all of these 'children' was that their parents were there to protect and care for them when they experienced a death (Jenks 2005, James and James 2004). They were spoken to and reassured, they were not left alone to cope with death. Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) was self-reliant and she was left to her own devices (Townsend 1996), but Little Bear in *Little Bear's Grandad* (Gray and Cabban 2000) was held by his mother when he "sobs and snuffles" (p.23). This may reflect a world as unreal and Arcadian as those from the 1900s and be just as removed from the lived lives of the children who read these books.

This might allow me to pose the question of whether children's literature is always backwards looking and presents the world as it was in the author's childhood (Hunt 1994), and thus some idealised memory, or how far it reflects the contemporary view of childhood of the time.

The trend in the middle period 1950-1970 to show the real lives of real children in books was short lived and not well liked by many (Reynolds 2007), authors found that this style of story offered little scope for the imagination (Hunt 1994) and was perhaps too gritty and real for some. We noted that this rarely meant death was a feature. The shift in thinking about children's stories that occurred in the 1960s where the demand for 'real life' had become a concern has perhaps left a legacy not in the content of the stories written perhaps, so much as in the context within which

the stories are set. It should be noted that the examples of families seen in the sample did include nuclear families with two parents (*Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce 1958) *Charlotte's Web* (White 1952)). Where children came across death in this middle period it was often as a result of war (*The Silver Sword*, Serallier 1951) or adventure (*The Dead Bird*, Wise Brown 1965). Again the children these books encountered death on their own and with no comforting adult presence to help them make sense of their experience. In terms of the influence of developmental psychology it may be that these books were being written just at the point when it was beginning to have an influence on child rearing and education and the authors wrote from their own life experience not yet subject to this new discourse.

We have seen that Peter Pan was alone when he found the lost dead babies in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (Barrie 1906), as were the children in *The Dead Bird* (Wise Brown 1965). However, Miffy in *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) was surrounded by her family when she encountered death. These examples serve to illustrate changing attitudes toward children. Adult protection from unpleasant things would appear to be shown as the norm in the final period. This is particularly interesting as many of these books are picture books and thus may be possible to access without adult supervision (because there is less need to read words) (Postman 1994), but the books provide images of protective adults.

When considering children's literature in each of the periods chosen here what is apparent is that in each of those periods authors appear to present an idealised view of the world. Hunt (2009) considers that "what we think of as suitable for children is part of a complex network of social values" (p.24 italics in original). Although we have examples of the lone child in the first period (1890-1910) we also have examples of the Arcadian idyll which became the dominant mode of story-telling

from 1910s-1930s (Inglis 1981). Only Sara Crewe (*A Little Princess* 1905 (Hodgson Burnett 1905)) lived in a town, the rest live in or have moved back to the country, where life is perhaps more “real” and supposedly untouched and authentic.

The books from the final period offered a vision of children living with caring and concerned adults, who were open and honest in talking about death with them; this was perhaps as “unreal” as the countryside idylls of the earlier books. Perhaps this idealised world where children were comforted may be useful in terms of allowing comfort to be given, at least in the imagination. It may also allow for adults to model similar behaviours and to not consider death as taboo (Jackson and Colwell 2001a).

This takes us back to an implied earlier question about what books are for; to teach and inform or to entertain and allow for escape into imagined worlds? What has become very clear is that childhood (and children’s literature) has been shaped by adults in a variety of ways, not least by the authors. Nonetheless writers of children’s fiction cannot simply be considered to be benevolent entertainers; they too play a role in the shaping of the child’ world. As Hunt (1994) states clearly “the writers and manipulators of children’s books are adults” (p.2) and perhaps have (in some ways) as much influence as laws protecting children from the ‘cruel’ world.

## **5.6 Final comments**

By using a social constructionist perspective and considering death in children’s literature from 1890-2010 I have been able to demonstrate some interesting points that have not been seen in other studies.

From my research it is clear that death has been seen in children's literature across this time period, but the manner in which it is expected to be understood would appear to be influenced by the prevailing view of the nature of childhood at that period. It should be noted that the exposure of children to literature itself is culturally influenced and this research has not set out to consider those differences, whilst acknowledging that they exist. This research has shown the range of books that are available quite readily, this particularly in the final period of my research.

The exposure of children to the subject of death solely through books cannot tell us anything about the lived lives of many children (Ribbens McCarthy 2006). Both the writing of books and access to them is mediated by adults; Gutierrez et al (2014) also commented on this. Therefore this research has been able only to give a partial insight in the how children have been exposed to death through literature. Further research within a classroom setting might consider how children might interact with books on death, where they were made available. This too could not give any direct access to the 'child', the mediation of the adult influence being always difficult to overcome; Coombs (2014) also found this in her research. Nonetheless it may be of use to the primary school teacher to note the wealth of simple, direct and accessible material available.

The apparent change in mourning culture seen in the books in the period 1890 -1910 at an earlier point in time that is often asserted is a particularly interesting factor uncovered in this research. It may be simply that my sample is biased (which inevitably by dint of having to choose, it is) and that another sample would not show this. It might also be interesting to consider whether the same change is also seen in adult literature of the period.

Directness of address appeared to be a factor across the time span but often this has been mediated by the use of and the ability to understand the language used, particularly in the earliest period. Using simple language and the words dead and died were particularly common in the final period. Where I have considered picture books the difficulty of language would appear to be less significant. It is also interesting to note that where children are able to access picture books the mediation of the adult to difficult subjects was not needed (Postman 1994). However, the final period (1990-2010) always presents images of children protected and comforted by adults when faced with death, unlike the first period (1890-1910).

Although the purpose of this research was exploratory and to uncover whether death was indeed addressed in children's literature the findings may be useful in offering a wider perspective on how the subject has been addressed. It may thus offer some guidance to the teacher on the range of books available to them and the manner in which they talk about death. By taking a social constructionist perspective the question of the child's ability to understand has been sidestepped and we have been able to see the creative and different ways in which authors have chosen to consider death as a subject fit for children. As commented earlier, perhaps children's authors have an awareness of what interests a child and may not be constrained by what is deemed to be suitable. Indeed it has been shown in previous studies that children have also believed they should have access to information about death (Coombs 2014, Jackson and Colwell 2001b). It may be fair to say it is not the children but the adults who find the subject to be problematic.

Nonetheless it would seem to be it is the perception of what is meant by 'child' that influences the books. From Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* (Hodgson Burnett 1910) to Miffy in *Dear Grandma Bunny* (Bruna 2005) stories about death have been written addressing death in clear and direct ways. Mary Lennox had to cope alone but Miffy was not expected to.

Mary Lennox and Miffy are little girls who encountered death in the first pages of the books in which they appear. Mary Lennox was told the hard facts and was expected to get on with her life without fuss and emotion, and without any real adult presence. By contrast, nearly one hundred years later, Miffy was sad and cried at the loss of her grandmother. Her father was there to explain and help her. The books differed in style and length but have in common a directness in addressing the subject of death. What I have shown is how the prevailing societal views of childhood influence the way in which the subject of death is managed for children. Both little girls could know about death, but the ways in which they were expected to react and how they were looked after (or not) in dealing with the subject was seen to be highly influenced by adult (and thus societal) perceptions of childhood and thus it might be reasonable to suggest ( from this study) that it is not death itself that changes overtime but the way in which children are viewed and as such the way in which death is presented in the books reflects the prevailing notion of 'the child' and their supposed need for protection or otherwise.

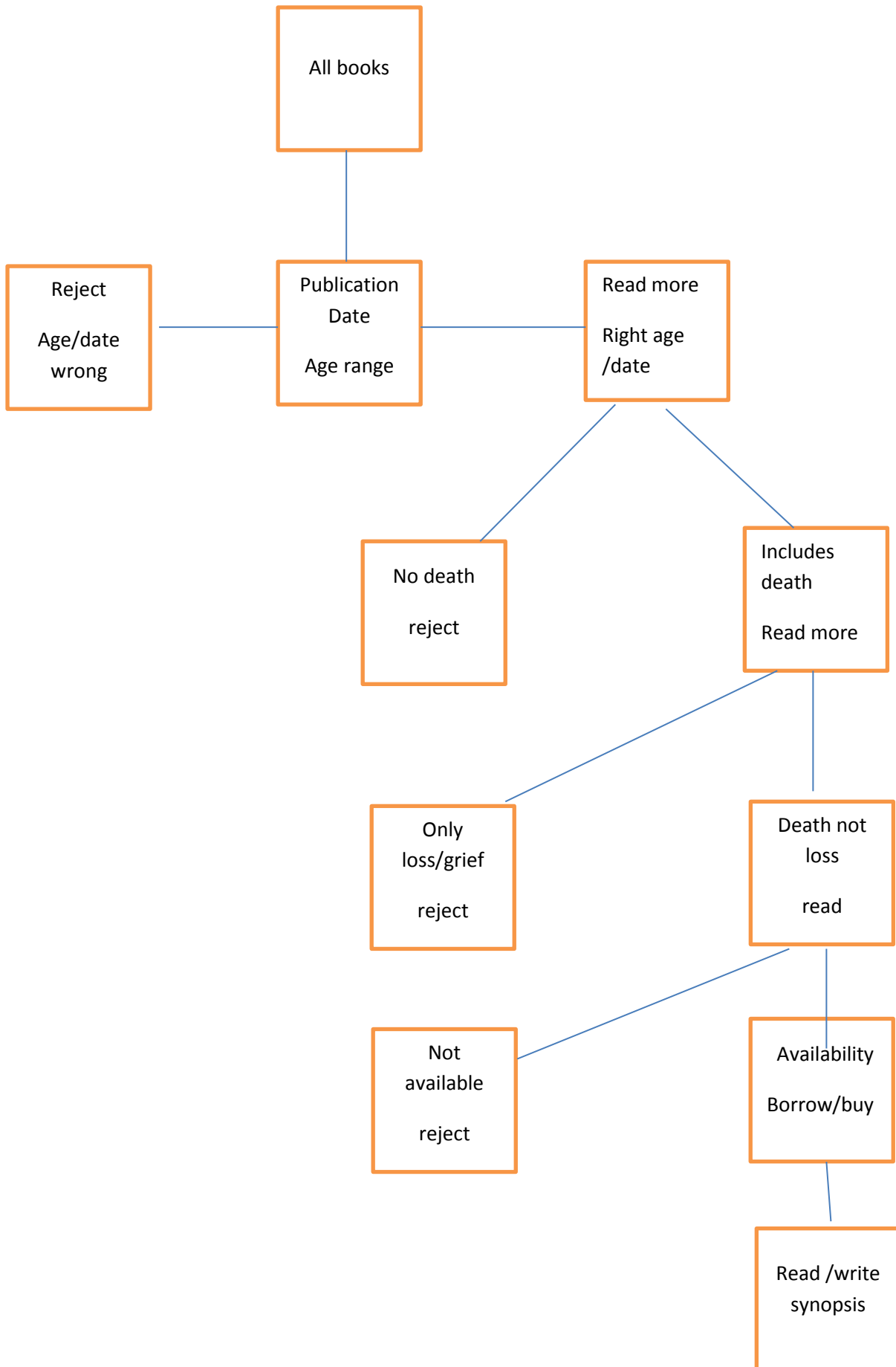
What this study has clearly shown is that "*death is a part of children's lives, let's not pretend it is not*" (Higgins 1999 p.82), by accepting Foucault's "absolute necessity" (1992 p.8) to look at things differently than has previously been done I have been able to uncover a different view of death in children's books and thus offered fresh insights on this subject.



## **Appendices.**

## Appendix 1

Table 1: Flow chart of selection process



Appendix 2



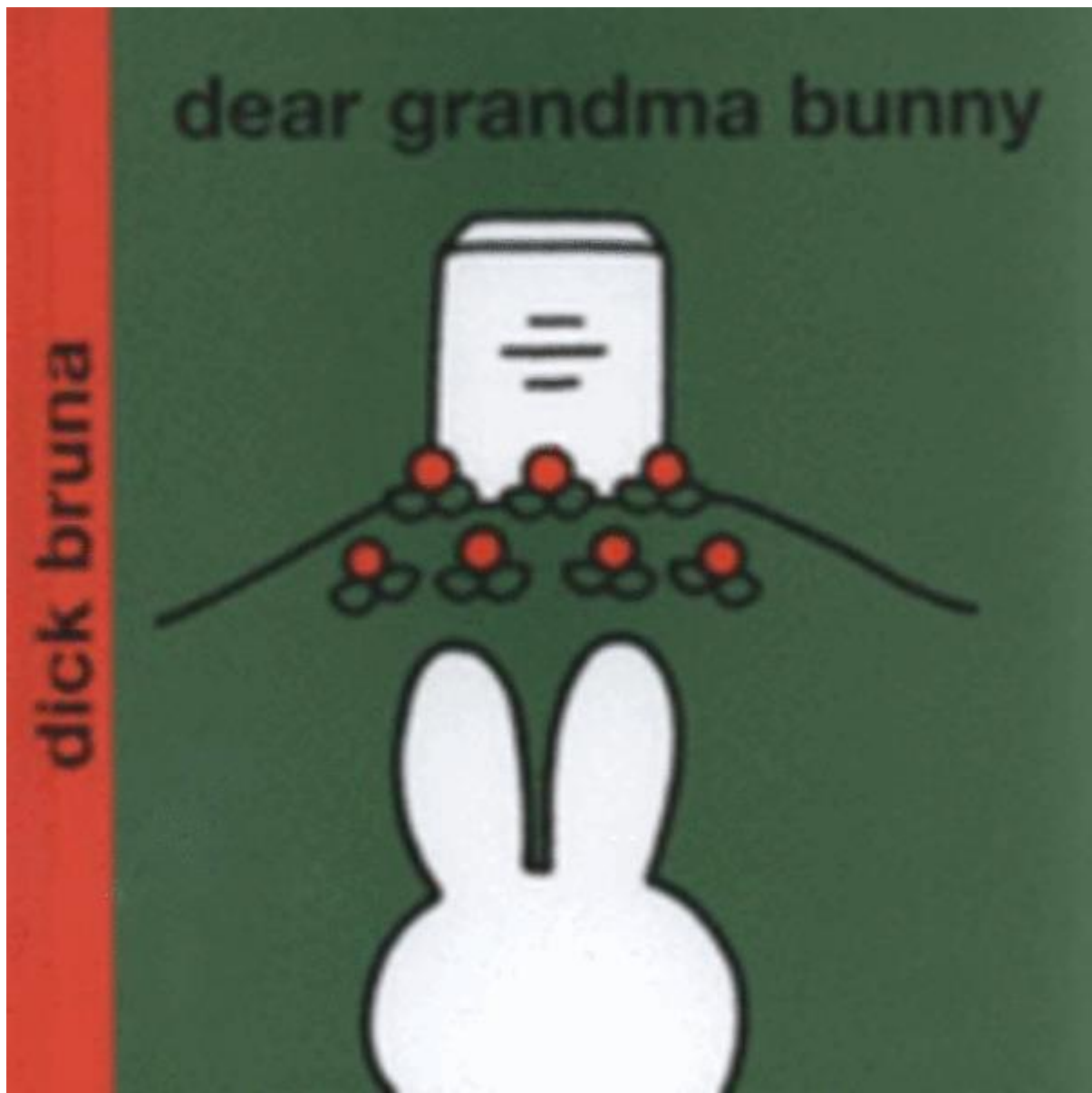
([www.brainpickings.org](http://www.brainpickings.org))

Appendix 3



([www.penguin.co.uk](http://www.penguin.co.uk))

Appendix 4



([www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk))

## Appendix 5

### Children's Books by author

Anholt, L. and Coppletree, J. (2006) *Seven for a Secret*. London: Frances Lincoln.

Barrie, J. M. (1906) *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 29 January 2014).

Belloc, H. (1907) *Cautionary Tales for Children*. London: Eveleigh Nash. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 12 July 2014).

Bruna, D. (2005) *Dear Grandma Bunny*. London: Egmont.

Erlbruch, W (2008) *Duck, Death and the Tulip*. Wellington NZ: Gecko Press.

Gorey, E. (1963) *The Gashly Crumb Tinies*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gray, N. and Cabban, V. (2000) *Little Bear's Grandad*. London: Little Tiger Press.

Grindley, S. and Butler, J. (1996) *Little Elephant Thunderfoot*. London: Orchard Books

Hodgson Burnett, F. (1905) *A Little Princess*. New York: Charles Scribner. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 12 September 2014).

Hodgson Burnett, F. (1910) *The Secret Garden*. *The American Magazine* (in serial form) then 1911 London: Heinemann. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 29 January 2014).

Kerr, J. (2002) *Goodbye Mog*. London: Harper Collins

Kipling, R. (1894) *The Jungle Book*. London: Macmillan. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 29 January 2014).

Lang, A. (1890) *The Red Fairy Book*. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 29 September 2014).

Lang, A. (1894) *The Yellow Fairy Book*. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 29 September 2014).

Lang, A. (1907) *The Olive Fairy Book*. <http://www.amazon.co.uk/kindle-ebooks> (Downloaded: 29 September 2014).

Lewis, C. S. (1956) *The Last Battle*. London: The Bodley Head.

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Pearce, P. (1958) *Tom's Midnight Garden*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Potter, B. (1902) *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. London: Frederick Warne.

Potter, B. (1908) *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*. London: Frederick Warne.

Rosen, M. (2002) *Lovely Old Roly*. London: Frances Lincoln

Serallier, I. (1951) *The Silver Sword*. London: Jonathan Cape.

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White, E. B. (1952) *Charlotte's Web*. London: Hamish Hamilton

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