

Bright Shoots of Everlastingness: Children's Fiction as Secular Scripture

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines adult interest in twentieth-century children's fiction within the context of adult culture and argues that it performs a religious function. A number of critical commentators have described the twentieth century as a period of cultural "failure," largely because of the destructive aspects of postmodernism and the diminishing of values. Children's fiction, however, has remained relatively resistant to these trends. The values of religion were once expressed in literature (and thence in liberal humanism), but they have now been relegated to literature for children. This is because childhood, especially its embodiment of innocence, remains a "sacred space" in our culture (though even this is under threat). The myths of Eden and the neo-Platonic tradition are particularly relevant to children's literature and recur in the novels themselves, in critical writing about them, and in writing about childhood. The sacred notion of childhood taps into the backwards journey to an eternal pre-birth existence that Henry Vaughan yearns for in "The Retreate," and this poem is a focus for the whole discussion.

The first half of the thesis explores children's literature as a form and as a genre. The implied reader, in particular the notion of the dual address that speaks to children and adults simultaneously, allows for a depth and significance similar to that of scripture, and of parable in particular. It is especially significant that children's literature preserves the romance form that Northrop Frye has designated "the secular scripture." The second part of the thesis focuses on the idealisation of experience that is such a strong characteristic of children's books. This is evident in the expression of wonder, the sublime and beauty, all aspects of the numinous and thus related to spiritual experience. Idealisation is also expressed in ideals of right conduct and moral goodness: the Good, that Iris Murdoch calls "the sovereign virtue." This discussion is indebted to Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, and his insight that when the numinous is schematised within goodness, it evokes an experience of the holy. Children's fiction is thus uniquely situated to successfully embody religious values and religious experience, "bright shoots of everlastingness," and is very frequently a form of secular scripture.

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Introduction

Happy those early dayes, when I
Shin'd in my Angell – infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white Celestiall thought,
When yet I had not walk't above
A mile, or two, from my first love,
And looking back (at that short space)
Could see a glimpse of His bright-face;
When on some *gilded Cloud*, or *flowre*,
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My Conscience with a sinfull sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A sev'rall sinne to ev'ry sence,
But felt through all this fleshly dresse
Bright *shootes* of everlastingnesse.

O how I long to travell back,
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plaine
Where first I left my glorious traine,
From whence th' Inlightned spirit sees
That shady City of Palme trees;
But (ah)! my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
Some men a forward motion love,
But I by backward steps would move,
And when this dust falls to the urn
In that state I came return.

(Henry Vaughan "The Retreat")

There is no doubt that children's fiction has "come of age" in recent times, and is now a significant art form for adults as well as for children. Children's fiction is "eagerly read by a substantial body of adult readers" (Abbs, "Failure" 123) for whom it provides a variety of satisfactions. Jill Paton Walsh, for example, comments that the current interest in children's books is "not pedagogic, or parental at all, but is the simple pleasure of a reader enjoying himself" (215). Yet much more is revealed in her elegant description of an ideal children's book.

I imagine the perfectly achieved children's book something like a soap bubble; all you can see is a surface – a lovely rainbow thing to attract the youngest onlooker – but the whole is shaped and sustained by the pressure of adult emotion, present but invisible, like the air within the bubble. (212-13)

This adult pressure encompasses a wide range of deeply felt aesthetic, psychological and moral concerns. Yet children's fiction is more again than this image of perfected stillness suggests, and many critics regard it as a dynamic genre. This is reflected in a question posed by Peter Abbs in his article significantly titled "Penelope Lively, Children's Fiction and the Failure of Adult Culture."

Why is it that at the present moment only children's fiction seems capable of forging the imagery of integration and transformation? Why is the creative energy so much greater in this area than in other areas of cultural experience? This, supposing I am right, is a vast question. (123)

An analysis of this question, and the various assumptions that lie behind it, underpins this study. The response that has emerged as the focal point of this discussion is that in forging imagery of integration and transformation through the purifying lens of childhood, children's literature is performing a religious function. It stands in implicit opposition to the enervation that has accompanied the almost total secularisation of adult culture.

The forcefulness and hyperbole with which Abbs frames his question are typical of the attitude of many writers who explore children's fiction. Jonathan Cott elevates his critical analysis of the genre to another dimension altogether, quoting Herbert Marcuse in order to describe its extraordinary power. Children's fiction evokes "the words, the images, the music of another reality, of another order repelled by the existing one and yet alive in memory and anticipation" (xvii). While Cott may appear to be overstating his case, it is difficult to dismiss the essence of his

argument because it is repeated, in one form or another, by so many others and from a wide variety of perspectives. Mark Macleod, while teaching children's fiction in a university English department, found that same vitality reflected in his students' reactions.

There's an energy and optimism in children's literature that I often don't find in adult literature any more. When you teach children's literature as a university subject, you find people in the classes making comments about morals and ethics; taking positions; being committed to what they're saying in a way that is very rare. (qtd. in Gardiner 4)

This again suggests that adults are finding something in children's fiction that no longer exists in adult culture. From the point of view of critical analysis, Maria Nikolajeva argues that children's literature "is at least as rich or even richer than certain adult novels" (*Comes of Age* 50). Isaac Bashevis Singer states he was "driven" to write for children by "a deep disenchantment in the literary atmosphere of our epoch." He claims that in sharp contrast to the deterioration of adult fiction, "literature for children is gaining in quality and stature." He goes so far as to state that a literary revival is destined to come about from books written for children (50-54). This is echoed in Fred Inglis' statement that writers now capable of combining "ardour and wisdom" are likely to be found writing for children: "We only risk speaking of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, truth when we talk to children" (*Promise* 34). In the first of his famous "Three Fallacies About Children's Books," Aidan Chambers criticises such sweeping comparisons and takes to task the liberal-humanist "refugee" mentality behind them (54-56). Nevertheless, Chambers too easily dismisses the comparison as merely expressing a personal taste for the past, and he does not properly consider that it might represent a more fundamental belief about the role of art and its responsibility to culture.

Certainly the above claims bear out Karin Lesnik-Oberstein's assertion that comments made about children's literature and its criticism more often "reveal personal emotional experiences and attachments" than in other areas of study (2). She points out that "humanitarian or liberal attitudes and feelings ... for instance, love, compassion, tolerance, and truthfulness" are qualities that recur in children's literature criticism and are values that are "attached to child-raising in general" (24). Thus the idealistic attitudes about "the enlightening and ennobling functions of art and literature [involve] values and ideals that anyone engaged in education and raising children attempts to transfer and preserve" (24). But this carries with it the suggestion that these attitudes and values may have nothing but a sociological and pedagogical function. Like many other postmodern critics, she strongly associates these values with the brittleness of liberal humanism rather than with the much older universal religious traditions from which they derive.

Lesnik-Oberstein's work is part of a steady stream of scholarship that examines childhood as an ideological and cultural construct. Studies by Phillipe Ariès, Lloyd DeMause, Neil Postman and Jacqueline Rose, for example, have greatly expanded our understanding of childhood, and legitimised it as an orthodox field of study. Each is rich in valuable historical, sociological and philosophical insights about the idea of childhood, but ironically some aspects of this scholarship have contributed to an intellectual downgrading of its importance. Rose, for example, in *The Case of Peter Pan: Or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* regards the idealisation of childhood as something of a cultural neurosis, and produces a philosophical proof of the impossibility of children's fiction that for all its clever sophistication seems to miss the point. Rose contributes to a trend that debunks the innocence of childhood and regards it as something of a sacred cow. Reinhard Kuhn, however, in his comprehensive literary investigation *Corruption in Paradise: The Child in Western Literature* fully respects the traditional sacredness of childhood and makes the important point that the use of a motif in literature often tells us more about its psychological and spiritual import than a more scientific or philosophical exploration. And it is not just in the motif of the child, but especially in twentieth-century children's fiction, that we can see the full force of this psychological and spiritual import.

Indeed, any analysis of adult involvement in children's fiction must necessarily reach deeply into psychological and spiritual domains. This certainly seems to be the case for Cott, who gave up his study of contemporary British poetry in favour of studying children's fiction. Instead of this signalling a decline into senility or depression, he found the literature acted as both a "consolation and critique," and he experienced a state of "renewal and awakening" (xvi-xvii). These latter words are those commonly associated with religious revival, but the former also have religious connotations. Children's literature consoles us for the necessary and unnecessary losses that accompany adulthood, and at a deeper level for the central mythic event of the Fall. Through its commitment to ideals and values, it also functions as a powerful critique of adult ways of living, and this kind of critique has always been an integral part of many sacred texts. With roots in the expression of folk wisdom and didacticism and the metaphysical connotations of fantasy, children's fiction is ineluctably associated with the religious function that was once the provenance of certain types of adult literature and scripture.

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The idea of literature as secular scripture has existed for a considerable period of time. Since Matthew Arnold, literary criticism has taken a self-consciously hierophantic role. Robert Scholes suggests that the whole concept of teaching literature has said less about the teaching of interpretation or criticism than it has

about the expounding of the wisdom of texts: "We have a canon; we have exegetes who produce commentary; and, above all, we have believed that these texts contain treasures of wisdom and truth that justify the process of canonization and exegesis" (13). Significantly, the last of these assertions lapses into the past tense. In fact we have also all but abandoned the notion of canon and seem preoccupied with an often-convoluted criticism that functions as arcane and empty exegesis. (We have a new theology without a scripture.) Roderick McGillis extends Scholes' insight and argues that the values of the sacred scripture have now been transposed to children's fiction.

Just as the child in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries took on the values that a vision of pastoral once held, and just as literature at about the same time took on the values that the church's vision of spirituality once held, so now children's literature takes on the values once found in the canon of Western literature. The tradition of a certain neo-Platonism coming through Sidney, Pope and Coleridge and Arnold and Eliot and on into the prominent modes of Anglo-American criticism through mid-century finds its latest expression in this version of children's literature. ("Pleasures" 20)

In McGillis' comment we see again that these values of religion are now almost inextricably associated with liberal humanism as if they are a kind of weaker accretion that cannot survive its demise. Indeed, while McGillis confesses a "profound attraction" to this tradition, he says he is uneasy with it because of its exclusivity and ideological manipulation. On one level this may be just criticism, but what has not been considered here is that there may be verities behind this tradition that lie beyond ephemeral ideology. Of course the forms of their expression will be shaped differently by variations in cultures, but this is hardly the same as ideology or exclusivity. These truths were not invented by Matthew Arnold, nor did they end with Northrop Frye. Nevertheless, it is Frye who has worked most with the concept of secular scripture (from the perspective of New Critic rather than liberal humanist) and he uses the term to describe both the structure and the meaning of the romance form. Romance is quintessentially involved with integration and transformation and it is no surprise that it is the key structure of children's fiction.

Scripture expresses the wisdom of a race. It is a kind of bridge that links material reality to a transcendent world and it is a culture's most treasured vehicle of the sacred. It speaks deliberately to young and old (in the sense of spiritual understanding) and it is centrally concerned with the problem of living. This concept of scripture is neither moralistic nor "preachy," but instead it functions as an illustrated revelation of how to live well. Like scripture, children's fiction is generally unashamedly didactic. Scholes and Kellog remind us that didacticism is a term that applies to "the intellectual and instructional potential" of all

narrative (qtd. in Chambers 57), and Chambers declares that it is time that we rescued the term “from the dustbin of dirty words” (57-58). It is heartening to see that this may be beginning to happen. In her recent semiotic literary study, Nikolajeva asserts that the pedagogical aspects of children’s literature should not be regarded as unimportant. She “provocatively” suggests that “too little importance is accorded to the pedagogical aspects of adult literature, if by those aspects we mean that the purpose of all literature and art is educative in the spirit of humanity” (*Comes of Age* 5). The didacticism of children’s fiction is beautifully expressed in Maurice Saxby’s description of fine children’s books: they are “metaphors for living from writers who have glimpsed something of the fullness and wholeness of life” (*Wings* 9).

There have been a number of studies that have touched on the religious aspects of children’s fiction. In a postscript to *The Literary Heritage of Childhood*, Frey and Griffith cursorily discuss the romance form in children’s literature as a new version of the circular journey that leads back home. They see this genre as a celebration of a “lost world that must remain lost forever” (231), and thus children’s literature attracts adult readers through its powerful nostalgic lament. Yet this is a narrow account of the genre’s appeal, and such nostalgia must be ultimately unsatisfactory, even dangerous, implied unwittingly in the title of their final chapter “The Siren Call of Child-Romance.” In *A Defence of Fantasy*, Ann Swinfen coins the term “theological romance” to describe the work of Macdonald, Chesterton and Lewis. Theological romance is fantasy that uses “myth, legend, folk tale or romance [and] embodies symbolic theology and a clear ethical code” (148). Despite its aptness, the application of this term is necessarily limited and thus ignores the religious potential of other types of narrative within the children’s genre. More interesting in this regard is *Beyond Words* by James Higgins, who creates the concept of “mystical fancy” to describe any fantasy literature that evokes the religious dimension of experience. The writer of mystical fancy “takes his communicant ‘beyond’ his material surroundings in order to lay bare those realities which are imperceptible to the physical senses” and to evoke “a spiritual universe” (5). In *The Renaissance of Wonder*, Marion Lochhead analyses the emergence of wonder in children’s fantasy from the nineteenth century onwards. She regards this trend as a type of religious expression that heralds an awakening of a new tradition of children’s fantasy. Wonder blew life into the dreary world of edifying children’s books just as the Oxford Movement revived “a sense of mystery and worship” in the Church (1). In *Webs and Wardrobes*, Joseph and Lucy Milner offer a collection of essays that view children’s fiction from humanist and religious perspectives, but the collection is focused on individual texts and matters of faith rather than the religious potential of the genre as a whole. More recently, John Goldthwaite’s *The Natural History of*

Make-Believe comes closer to an explicitly religious analysis. He charts the history of make-believe from an orthodox Christian perspective, a perspective that is at times too doctrinaire, but at others profound. He makes the interesting claim that the Book of Proverbs is the oldest surviving children's text in its ability to combine didacticism with the enticement of story: an ancient version of Walsh's soap bubble perhaps. These works provide valuable insights into the metaphysical aspects of children's fiction, but they are all focused on specific forms of fantasy. This present study examines twentieth-century children's fiction as a much broader canvas to show how widely the scriptural concept can be applied.

The first two chapters explore children's fiction as a form and as a genre, particularly its relationship to parable and romance. The first examines the complex notion of the child addressee, and how this, in combination with the form of children's texts, creates a genre that is highly conducive to religious expression. The second looks at where this genre stands in relation to the bleakness of contemporary culture. The third and fourth chapters consider aspects of content that are at present virtually unique to children's fiction. The drive towards perfection is very strong in children's literature and it receives expression through aspects of the numinous, particularly wonder, the sublime and beauty, and also through its moral force. Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* is a foundation stone for these final chapters and his insight into the breadth of religious experience is very apposite to this discussion.

Religion is convinced not only that the holy and sacred reality is attested by the inward voice of conscience and the religious consciousness, 'the still small voice' of the Spirit in the heart, by feeling, presentiment, and longing, but also that it may directly be encountered in particular occurrences and events, self-revealed in persons and displayed in actions, in a word, that beside the inner revelation from the Spirit there is an outward revelation of the divine nature. Religious language gives the name of 'sign' to such demonstrative actions and manifestations, in which holiness stands palpably self-revealed. (147)

While the third chapter is concerned with those longings and presentiments through the idealisation of experience, the final chapter is concerned with palpable signs and the embodiment of virtue in character and action. The pairing of the moral and the numinous is a particularly strong feature of children's fiction that is revealed not only in the texts but also unconsciously in statements about them. Greenway's reference to children's picturebooks and biography as "last bastions of pollyanaism and hagiography" (122) implies the twin impulses of idealisation and moral responsibility that lie beneath the falsely deprecatory connotations of these terms. These same impulses are also reflected in the title of Cott's work *Pipers at the Gates of Dawn: The Wisdom of Children's Literature* that makes reference to the

numinous peak of *The Wind in the Willows* and to the distillation of adult moral experience that we know as wisdom.

This thesis builds upon the work of literary critics, philosophers and aestheticians. It is important to include these latter voices because the simplified form of children's literature where we see things more clearly has much to tell us about what art is and should be, and their voices come to us from a valuable perspective once removed. Fred Inglis' bold study of children's literature, *The Promise of Happiness*, does much to isolate the essence of the genre, implicit in the title. Significantly, although his work makes no specific religious claims, its title is a sub-text of scripture world-wide. His view of writers entering a "gift" relationship with children is an essential insight that contributes much to this present discussion and it is a relationship that has the power to change both giver and recipient. When writing about children's fiction, Inglis is a liberal humanist who refuses to lie down and die. His much later article "Promising Happiness" stridently reiterates the substance of his earlier work and warns us of the possible waning of the genre. Inglis is an intellectually formidable cultural and literary critic. He is at once an idealist and a realist who is not caught up in intellectual fashion, and dares to consider the effect of values and meaning in fiction on real lives. Wayne Booth too defies intellectual fashion, and in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* he asks us to consider the ethical content of literature and its powerful influence, and to use this as a tool of literary evaluation. It is self-evident (or should be) that this is of the greatest importance in children's fiction.

John Gardner's polemical work *On Moral Fiction* offers a penetrating account of the role of art. He too loudly proclaims its inevitably didactic nature and pleads with us to take notice of what it is actually saying, rather than what it pretends to be. These theorists tend to be noted for their radical views, but perhaps this is a result of their needing to be heard in a deaf culture. There is none more radical than Tolstoy in his prophetic proclamations in *What is Art?* Though driven to extremes in the expression of his intellectual position, Tolstoy's radicalism has meant that he is too often summarily dismissed. His stature as a novelist, and his highly principled determination to lead a good life, give him a certain authority to assert uncomfortable truths. *What is Art?* is a magnificent (if necessarily messy) exploration of art's role, and his beliefs are particularly appropriate to a discussion of children's fiction. For Tolstoy, all art is deeply didactic and it is an instrument of making people good by choice rather than coercion. It has the power to do so because art is principally the transmission of feelings.

The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in their being united together, and to set up, in place of the existing reign of force, that kingdom of God – that is, of love – which we all recognise to be the highest aim in human life. (288)

This belief transcends any individual or doctrinal notions of religion, but expresses the essence of them all. Although it flows from Tolstoy's passionate Christianity, it is also a profound and sensible manifesto for the secular scripture.

Apart from their radicalism, these theorists are linked by a much more significant bond and that is their commitment to the Good. The moral and aesthetic philosophy of Plato has profoundly influenced them. Gardner claims that truth, goodness and beauty are the fundamental concerns of art and should thus underpin criticism (144). This understanding has been the substance of the life work of Iris Murdoch, and her philosophy is an invaluable resource in this discussion. Murdoch and Inglis both draw from the work of Simone Weil, the great mystic of the twentieth century, whose epigrammatic and lucid reflections are a wellspring for all concerned with an intellectual apprehension of the Good. Inglis argues that in our own time children's fiction expresses a range of imaginative insights which adult writers, "in response to the confusion and evasions of the times, have squeezed out of reference." This is a full imaginative sympathy that is very firmly linked with a "vision of the good" (*Promise* 36). Fittingly then, Henry Vaughan's neo-Platonic poem "The Retreat" is used as a foundation for this study. Like Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," Vaughan's poem is often peremptorily quoted in children's literature criticism where it is linked to the Romantic notion of childhood. Yet it does much more than serve as precursor to this later, precariously sentimental, ideal. Vaughan's references to the "gilded" cloud and flower, and the wounding of conscience, are another expression of the numinous and moral dimensions that are intertwined in children's fiction. The backward glimpse of heaven through the unsullied lens of childhood vision allows for the piercing apprehension of universal truths ("bright shoots of everlastingness") which is such an important feature of literature for children.

This study is focused on a core of twentieth-century children's novels deliberately chosen from both fantasy and realism, and from those curious texts that hover in between. Well-known, highly regarded texts have been selected as they are examples of books that are meaningful to adults and have attracted critical esteem. Many of them have been nominated as award winners or classics. Some of the texts used here, such as *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *A Sound of Chariots* and *The Sword in the Stone* have had uncertain histories as children's texts. They test the genre in controversial ways that also help to define it. Several others, notably Pullman's *The*

Amber Spyglass, have been included because they transgress the boundaries too far and are clear examples of bad art. They demonstrate the importance of ethical criticism, and in their weakness serve to highlight the genre's strength. What constitutes a classic in children's literature is of course a contentious issue especially in today's intellectual climate. Nevertheless, there are several definitions that are especially appropriate. The first, explicitly concerned with children's literature, is from Margery Fisher, who argues that a classic is a work with two lives: the first is linked to initial audience response; the second to re-reading. A classic must be "layered and expandable, available to different ages in different ways," able to travel between adult and child tastes and offer "universal truths" (1). This idea is extended but condensed in Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer's statement that "classics or canonical works for children are those books that do not only appeal to children, but also have an underlying depth of meaning that is satisfying to a mature sensibility" (14). The third is from T.S. Eliot's *What is a Classic?* He observes that a classic expresses "maturity of mind, of manner, of language, and perfection of the common style" (16). Of course this cannot be applied to children's fiction in the way that it is appropriate to adult literature; yet it often seems that it is in the children's genre that writers display this kind of maturity, and this reaching for perfection, more often than in contemporary adult works. These various guidelines for classics, based on depth, refinement, durability and universality, further reinforce the notion of "everlastingness" that informs this study.

Tolstoy proclaimed that "Art is not a pleasure, a solace or an amusement: art is a great matter. Art is an organ of human life transmitting man's reasonable perception into feeling" (*Art* 286). And it is no less great a matter in literature for children. In formulating ideas about ideals and values in children's books, adults are not simply recovering their own childhood; they are creating a mature and moral vision of society. In wanting what is best for children, and in as much as we attempt to shape what is best in our art for them, we help to better ourselves.

The Child Addressee and the Development of Genre

who were so dark of heart they might not speak,
a little innocence will make them sing;
Teach them to see who could not learn to look
– from the reality of all nothing

will actually lift a luminous whole
turn sheer despairing to most perfect gay,
nowhere to here, never to beautiful:
a little innocence creates a day.

And something thought or done or wished without
a little innocence, although it were
as red as terror, as green as fate,
greyly shall fail and dully disappear

but the proud power of himself death immense
is not so as a little innocence.

(E.E. Cummings)

From a theoretical, as distinct from a practical, perspective, the genre we label as children's literature is full of contradictions. The most significant of these is that children's literature is also adult literature. Implicitly these books will always have a double attribution because, "always and without exception, children's literature has an additional [adult] addressee," as adults are responsible for its creation, interpretation and distribution (Shavit, "Double" 83). Hence for Barbara Wall, the existence of children's fiction poses something of a "dilemma"; for Jacqueline Rose it is "an impossibility." At the level of reading, this double attribution takes many forms. Despite being addressed to children, a large number of children's books also make a direct or indirect appeal to the experience and comprehension of adult readers. Other children's authors aver that their books are not really written for children at all; they are written for adults, or for the child within the adult: as Astrid Lindgren puts it, "the child I am myself" (qtd. in Cott 155). Often children's books are just written: "Like so many authors, I simply write the book that bangs at my head and asks to be written, and then my publishers tell me what it is" (Susan Cooper 98).

This dilemma has been deepened by the notion of "crosswriting." This is a loose term that Sandra Beckett describes in her introduction to *Transcending Boundaries* as encompassing authors who switch from adult to children's literature and vice versa, or whose work has been appropriated into either field, or who deliberately address a double audience (xi-xiv). Then there is the complication of the reader's perspective. Reader response theorists, who have contributed so much to the understanding of children's literature, each have their own configuration of the writing and reading transaction. There are, for example, real readers, implied readers, virtual readers, ideal readers and mock readers, and often the boundaries around each concept are not clearly delineated. No wonder then, the critic of children's literature feels bogged down in "a quagmire of unproductive status and value arguments" (Hunt, *Criticism* 19). No single theory will ever be able to create a path out of this confusion. Instead, selected aspects of these theories will be used to illuminate a particular function of the genre: children's literature as sacred text. For this purpose, Barbara Wall's admirably clear schemata of the writer/text/reader relationship will be used as a foundation of the discussion.

The Dual Address

Wall builds on Chatman's notion of three pairs of addressers and addressees: real author and real reader; implied author and implied reader; and narrator and narratee (4-9), and focuses her attention on the narrator/narratee relationship. Here she distinguishes between the double and dual address. The **double** address occurs when adults are addressed over the heads of child readers (adults are separate but explicit narratees, rather than implied readers). The dual address is a "fusion" of adult and child narratee (9). Randolph Stow's *Midnite* is a clear example of the double address. To the child reader it is a simple humorous story; for adult readers it presents a sophisticated parody of such diverse subjects as the bushranger hero, Victorian morality, and Patrick White's *Voss*, all beyond the comprehension of children. Similarly, Ruth Manley's *The Plum Rain Scroll* describes an exotic quest which entrances on the child level, yet contains allusions aimed solely at the adult reader: "Alas, poor Yorikee – I knew him well" (185). In works such as these, the adult allusions frequently erupt from a spirit of playful wit. Adults enjoy their separate adulthood in appreciating the "in-house" allusions.

Wall argues that the **dual** address (confined largely to twentieth-century texts) occurs when both children and adults are addressed simultaneously. This is achieved through either "a conjunction of interests" or, significantly, through "the same 'tone of seriousness.'" It is quite "rare and difficult"; it ensues, she says (somewhat enigmatically), from "the nature and the strength" of the writer's performance, and is usually concerned with something that is not confined to children's interests. As two examples, she cites an author's pride in the craft of writing, and Charles Dodgson's mathematical and linguistic concerns (35-36). Wall's recognition of the dual address is a very significant contribution to the understanding of children's fiction; however, her exploration of the concept is too limited. In a great many texts it is difficult to determine whether the narrator's voice is addressed exclusively to children, and many of these grey areas encompass the dual address, thus widening its potential application. Indeed most of the classic works of children's fiction in this century are fine examples of the dual address, and it has arguably become a defining characteristic of the children's canon. The adult interest transcends any mere notion of craftsmanship for its own sake, or conceptual play. Both the investment that adults have in the idea of childhood and the ineradicably pedagogic nature of children's fiction lend themselves to the dual address through the conjunction of emotional involvement and a shared "tone of seriousness." In these texts, the adult level serves a deeper purpose than mere wit or cleverness (though this certainly does not preclude humour). There is often a moral or spiritual intent that is far deeper than wit or preachy didacticism, and it has the gravity of high art. The adult level and the child level are integrally

interwoven. More than that perhaps, they perfectly coincide, so that the very concepts of child and adult cannot be parted. This is suggested in C.S. Lewis' insistence that the good writers for children "work from the common, universally human, ground that they share with children" ("Juvenile" 41).

Very often, the dual address results in a literature that resembles allegory, parable and *exemplum* as much as it does the modern novel, and thus suggests its potential as a form of secular scripture. Beckett observes that dual address texts often have "the veiled, deceptive simplicity of myth and parable that conceals multiple levels of meaning for readers of all ages" ("Crosswriting" 53). Indeed, like parables, these texts are written not just for an ostensible target audience, but for those who have ears to hear them. Adult readers may be the implied audience of the deeper conscious meaning of the text, but never exclusively, because the meaning of parables is intended for everyone. Although the meaning is, in a sense, hidden from those outside the kingdom (Mark 4.9-12), parables are not a secret, gnostic code. The outsiders are not the story-lovers and the childlike; they are the learned exegetes whose responses are distorted by sophistication. Parables are at once for the apparent beginners in the spiritual life and for those who consciously appreciate the paradoxical simplicity of great truths. The simplicity of the parable format is equivalent to the child address, distilled language and simple form of children's fiction, and it renders parables potentially accessible to all.

The terms allegory and parable are used very loosely when removed from their formal literary and Biblical contexts. Both can be successfully applied to much children's fiction. However, allegory is now applied to almost anything that is metaphoric, whereas the notion of parable has retained a more specialised use and it is more appropriate and accurate in the context of literature for children. A parable is a simple story that exemplifies a moral or spiritual lesson, and Smith defines it further as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" that differs from allegory in that it is not just a personification of ideas and attributes (277). Despite the simplicity of the parable, its levels of meaning cannot be easily extricated from the narrative; the metaphysical cannot be isolated from, or privileged over, its concrete form. We see the distinction clearly in Frye's account of allegory, where "a metaphorical narrative runs parallel with a conceptual one, but defers to it" (*Code* 24). Louis Macneice's extended discussion of parable is of relevance here. He describes it as a type of "double-level writing" where the distinction between denotation and connotation does not adequately describe the duality, and he prefers instead the distinction between "manifest" and "latent" content (3). This terminology is very useful in the context of children's fiction; the child level is equivalent to the manifest content and the adult level is equivalent to the latent

content. These descriptors are particularly apt because they contain the important notion of their inseparability. Macneice's exploration reveals a number of other significant features. Parables are frequently enigmatic (2), and they are characterised by a "plain style" (23). There is a preoccupation with an inner reality that often has a strong spiritual or even mystical element. They are concerned with the problem of identity, though theme is more important than character. This theme is embodied through a strong story-line, and "theme and story often coalesce" so that they cannot sensibly be parted (77). Parables invite one to look below the manifest level for latent content. They are based on a poetic rather than a documentary procedure, and the formal elements tend to be more important than in ordinary prose. Finally, so that the spiritual Imagination can be at work rather than mere Fancy (in Coleridge's terms), the writer of parables "must have some kind of world-view which engages his deepest feelings" (79). Each of these aspects of parable is relevant to twentieth-century children's fiction and will be referred to at appropriate points in this discussion.

George Macdonald is the obvious precursor of this method of writing in the children's genre, and the words allegory and parable are often used to describe his style. Cynthia Marshall interprets *The Golden Key* in terms of Matthew's account of the Gospel parable of the hired labourers, concluding that parable is used as a narrative strategy. Yet Macdonald's use of parable is foundational, rather than a mere narrative strategy. The "accessible to all" requirement of parody is declared in his own version of the dual address encapsulated in his dictum: "I do not write for children, but for the child-like, whether of five, or fifty, or seventy-five" (qtd. in Carpenter 84). This expresses both a state of mind (childlike humility) and the continuum that exists between child and adult states of being. It is not so much a state of ignorance, but rather an openness of heart. *The Princess and the Goblin* could be regarded as a seminal text in the understanding of children's fiction as secular scripture. At the same time as it is a simple story for children, it creates an apparent religious allegory through its structure, content and the timeless quality of its fantasy setting and archetypal imagery. It is based on the pattern of restoration of identity and redemption, a structure that underlies the import of most Gospel parables and most of the major works of children's fiction. The narrative is focused on the string which Irene and Curdie must follow to achieve literal salvation from the dark forces of the goblins. Yet this string is also the golden string from Blake's *Jerusalem*.

I give you the end of a golden string;
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

The text functions as an invitation for child and adult readers, as one in the notion of childlike, to follow that string, sharing a common and serious interest (in Wall's terms) of safety and salvation.

The metaphorical writing is woven from a tapestry of culturally resonant symbols: doves, roses, a winding stair, a purifying bath and a refining fire. Thus adults reading this book, and especially educated adults who are familiar with literary and Christian symbolism, will inevitably respond to this book more fully (or at least more consciously) than the children for whom they are published. But the symbolic meanings are not available only to adults: being archetypal they will also to some extent be present or dormant in the unconscious of children of that literary culture. Yet the double meanings are inherently and inseparably locked within the symbols; like the characters, they are not mere personifications or embodiments of metaphysical concepts because they must live in their own right for child and childlike readers. Like most children's fantasists, Macdonald denied the allegorical import of his works. Macneice cites Macdonald's son as stating that his "images are never mere algebraic symbols" (97), as both the image and the man who is the maker of that image partake of the immanence of God. Higgins explains that Macdonald's belief in the spiritual import of all physical reality determined that "the symbol itself had a true substantive commonality with the idea" (63). This explanation itself has religious overtones, hinting at the mystery of transubstantiation, where the symbol and the reality it stands for are one. Carpenter too invokes the transcendental form and function of this book when he describes it as an expression of Macdonald's unorthodox Christian searching. It is an Arcadian vision of an "all-powerful grandmother presiding over [a] rambling, half-known, mysterious mansion," and it serves as "a clever parable for the whole universe" (85).

An entire school of children's fantasy writers has tended to follow this tradition of dual address within parable-like form, a tradition that loosely corresponds to Swinfen's "theological romance," Higgins' "mystical fancy," and Goldthwaite's version of "wisdom literature." But this is not a phenomenon restricted to fantasy form or to overtly theist writers. Cynthia Voigt's starkly realistic *Homecoming* is very far removed from *The Princess and the Goblin*. Yet its use of dual address, structure and central image is so similar to that of Macdonald's, that this too is a special type of metaphoric writing that is suggestive of parable. Using a threadbare map as their "golden string," the parentless Tillerman children journey towards their own version of an "all-powerful grandmother." She too lives in a "rambling, half-known mysterious mansion" in a country setting that is an American realist version of Arcadia. Voigt's secular "real" configuration of the symbol is still an elusive many-

roomed house that, like Macdonald's, is redolent with the Biblical phrase "my Father's many-roomed mansion" (John 14.2). This grandmother is all-powerful because her willingness to take in the children will determine their salvation. Redemption here is in literal terms, but still a powerful "common" and "serious" interest for adult and child readers who are addressed together, in fusion. That the grandmother is a flawed real person, not shining symbol, does not lessen her metaphorical impact, and increases the urgency of the reader's desire for her to give her grandchildren safe haven. These children also are flawed human beings, but more importantly they are vulnerable through having been betrayed by abandonment. This creates a very strong moral imperative that they should be saved, giving psychological and spiritual weight to the parable as theme and story-line become one. The nineteenth-century explicitly religious imperative is now a late twentieth-century ethical one.

Voigt's uncompromising realism makes painful allusions to the reality of "home." Dicey first ponders the inscription "Home is the hunter, home from the hill, and the hunter home from the sea" (96) on a tombstone, and it recurs as an important motif in the novel. Adults may recognise its bittersweet import and literary heritage (just as they may recognise the golden string), yet the meaning of the image, poetic and archetypal, is still accessible to children. Through this motif Voigt asserts the possibility that the idea of home can never be fully realised, and the substance of this idea is addressed simultaneously to adults and children.

If you took home to mean where you rested content and never wanted to go anywhere else, then Dicey had never had a home. The ocean always made her restless; so even Provincetown, even their own remembered kitchen, wasn't home ... nobody could be at home really, until he was in his grave. Nobody could rest, really, until then.

It was a cold hard thought written on that cold hard stone. But maybe true. (97)

Even in this modern realist setting, there are echoes of deeper truths. As part of that same literary heritage, it is hard to resist hearing echoes of the Biblical injunction: the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head (Matt. 8.20), and intimations that home is in and beyond the grave. The psychological and spiritual urgency is all the more powerful for adults when placed in the simpler parabolic form of the children's story, and particularly because of the dual address where they must share the children's plight from the child's perspective (a cold, hard thought, indeed). This provides a concretisation of a truth that is unavailable to the same extent in the more ironic mode of adult fiction where complexity is both distancing and distracting. Here the scripture has become totally secular, but it functions as a type

of scripture nonetheless. Theme and story coalesce in a narrative that engages our deepest feelings.

The dual address lends itself to parable-like form constructed through the clarifying lens of childhood, and it is a consistent feature of canonical twentieth-century children's fiction. *The Secret Garden* is regarded as the high point of the first Golden Age of children's fiction. The symbolic significance of this book, so perfectly embodied in its name and in its brilliant realisation, suggests it is the paradigmatic text of the whole genre. Hovering elusively between fantasy and realism, and between spiritual treatise and psychological pattern, it exemplifies the enigmatic qualities that characterise much children's fiction. Nevertheless, its moral pattern is quite clear. Homeless Mary Lennox, cast adrift as an orphan, lays down her anger, helps others, and regains her identity in the restoration of a paradisaal garden. Here she is guided by a bird instead of a map or string. Whilst the narrator's voice is clearly addressed to children, it is not so in a way that excludes adults: it is plain-speaking rather than talking down. The universal importance of the subject matter and the strongly resonant symbols fully engage both child and adult reader. Mary's story coexists at a concrete (and eminently practical) level and a transcendental level, touching a realm beyond words where the distinction between adult and child cannot be made. Certainly the imagery of the *hortus conclusus* and the rose is so much more powerful for the adult reader aware of their literary and theological connotations, and this too entices and authorises the adult into the dual address. But the novel still functions as an *exemplum* for child (and adult) readers for whom the archetypes function regardless of conscious cultural knowledge. In the later "garden" novel, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, this principle is expressed through the child protagonist, Tom Long, as he contemplates the carved angel (from the Book of Revelation) that stands above the dial of the grandfather clock. "He still did not know who or what was the angel creature painted there, striding on sea and land, with open book; but he felt that he almost knew the meaning: one day, soon, he might know" (132).

When fantasy meets reality in novels such as these we see very clearly the principle that the latent is not to be regarded as higher than the manifest; in Frye's terms, the metaphorical is not subordinate to the conceptual. The literal is essential not only because it is the only conscious arena of children's experience, but also because it manifests the proof of the truths. Pat Pinsent is aware of the danger of separating the levels in her discussion of *I Am David*. She sees the possibility of an allegorical reading, but actually rejects it, as it would "reduce the literal to a mere vehicle for it" (108). Similarly, Beckett touches on this distinction when discussing crosswriting and the common assertion that the best children's books are those that address both

adulthood and childhood. She examines Genette's discussion of a children's text by Tournier as a palimpsest where the adult level of reading is "superimposed" on the child addressee. This she sees as an example of the double, rather than the dual address. She contrasts this view with that of Tournier himself, who regards the adult reader as having "the same addressee status as the child" ("Crosswriting" 40). This equal status is an essential part of the genre and further affirms Wall's notion of "conjunction of interests" and "the same tone of seriousness." In the Gospels, those confined to the concrete level of story were not to be excluded from the truths. They determined the unique character of the genre, and ensured that the truths it embodied could not be misappropriated by the pride of the learned.

The above examples are from obviously serious texts with an arguably didactic intent (in the sense of wisdom literature). However, the dual address and parable features are also present in Tove Jansson's whimsical Moomintroll series. *Finn Family Moomintroll* is written with an exquisite charm and lightness of touch, yet at the same time still expresses the deep truths of human existence present in utterly simple stories of the "real" world. The names and bodies of the characters may be highly imaginative, yet their personalities and life-situations represent the essence of being human. The Hemulen is a categoriser (academic) and a misunderstood collector who despairs when his stamp collection is completed, for it is the collecting rather than the objects that interests him (26). Unlike the child characters, he alone does not express delight or surprise at the ant-lion's change into the smallest hedgehog (43). In fact, he is incapable of it, because he, with the ennui of an intellectual, knows what to expect. The muskrat is a self-confessed philosopher who detests the indignities of everyday living. He retires to a cave where he comes to the conclusion that "it is unnecessary to run about and chatter, to build a house and cook food and collect possessions," but he has requested that the Moomin family serve his daily food – "but not before 10.00 o'clock" (51-52). As befits a modern philosopher, he is immersed in a book about "The Uselessness of Everything" (150). Here the witty portraits are not above the child's head; a child is quite capable of seeing how absurd is the concept of the uselessness of everything, and arguably more capable of doing so than an adult. The Snork's discovery of gold is not used to increase wealth, but instead to decorate the edges of the Moomin's flower beds: "only the big bits, of course, because the little ones look so rubbishy" (88). This last example delightfully demonstrates the reversal of expectation so common to the parable that awakens and disturbs the mindset of the listener as a preparation for the reception of wisdom.

These texts accommodate not just the childlike (though as with parables that is a prerequisite for entry) but also the highest reaches of experience and

understanding. In all these cases, although the nominal addressee is a child, the "ideal reader" is a highly educated adult who, according to Gerald Prince, is a reader who can take account of all the possible allusions and intentions of the author (9). In children's fiction, the ideal reader is a step ahead of Prince's description. Far more than being the intellectual sophisticate, this reader is a good-hearted pilgrim who has journeyed through experience and is attempting to interpret it within the context of innocence in such a way that it is accessible to those at the beginning of the journey. This spiritual function of the dual relationship is implicit in Michel Tournier's description of a children's text as a "multi-storied structure" requiring "two readers at opposite ends of sophistication: a child at one end of the scale, a metaphysician at the other" (qtd. in Beckett, "Crosswriting" 52-53). This image suggests the importance of the ground floor despite the glories of the metaphysical summits. Nevertheless, Tournier also refers to one of his tales as "an ontological [sic] treatise that has all the appearance of a children's tale" (53), and here the equal status notion of the dual address is tenuous. It is more like Shavit's notion of "ambivalent texts" which are aimed at *both* adult and child readers, but where the child is not meant to realise the full meaning of the text (*Poetics* 63-66). The child is "much more an excuse for the text than its genuine addressee" (71). This is similar to Stephen Roxburgh's declaration that while children are indeed the excuse for children's literature, "they are – to use the terms of classical Aristotelian logic – the instrumental cause, which is quite different from the final cause" ("Humble" 2). But we must keep in mind Lewis' perception that in any personal relationship the participants inevitably modify one another. An adult becomes at least slightly different when talking to a child. This relationship produces a "composite personality ... and out of that the story grows" ("Three Ways" 23). Thus although adults "use" children's fiction as a vehicle for declaiming or exploring ideas which are associated with the concept of childhood, children are not just an excuse, and must inevitably have a considerable effect on the outcome. Higgins captures the essence of this composite personality in his discussion of *The Little Prince*. Saint-Exupéry takes the theme of the responsibility of love, and reshapes it to "a voice more attuned to the ear, the mind, and the heart of a child," rather than merely "reducing it to a child's understanding" (106).

More often than not, those ideas that are expressed through the instrumental cause of childhood do indeed concern ontological explorations of the great themes of human existence: time, love (*agape*), death, good and evil. And they especially concern the sense of "the ineluctable impoverishment which leads to adulthood" (Kuhn 6). Carpenter argues that Kingsley was the first writer in England "to discover that a children's book can be the perfect vehicle for an adult's most personal and private concerns" (37), and this is a discovery that has formed the

basis of the development of children's literature in the twentieth century. The underlying pattern of these themes is a working out of compensation for the loss of childhood through some form of transformation, whether through magic or a new level of awareness and maturity. Victor Watson comments that in this genre "the poignancy of passing time ... is transformed into negotiated possibilities of loving and communicating." It is not a self-indulgent adult preoccupation, "for children are concerned with it too" (21). This is the type of transformation of the inner life that is the point of parable, a resolution of the "problems of identity" that Macneice claims as the narrative momentum of parable. Both Margaret Meek ("Symbolic" 110), and Margaret and Michael Rustin, find that beneath the simplicity of children's texts lie deep structures of human experience, and it is this that contributes to their "moving and memorable qualities" (Rustin and Rustin 26). This seriousness is exemplified in Carpenter's description of the "simple ... but profound" *Stone Book Quartet*, and Garner's desire to create fiction of "integrity and maturity" and to "write about what matters" (221).

The Text: Form and Function

In its preoccupation with the simple and profound, children's literature is very much caught up with the idea of simplicity and restraint. We see this in Walsh's idea of the "perfectly achieved children's book" as a rainbow-coloured soap bubble "sustained by the pressure of adult emotion" (212). Much has been written about the determining limits of children's literature; as with all prescriptive rules in literature, most of these have kept the critics busy with disagreements and problematic exceptions. Myles McDowell has created a lengthy and open-ended list of features that distinguishes adult from children's texts. He includes a moral structure (absent in much adult fiction), optimism and a reliance on conventions (141-42). Perhaps the most influential has been C.S. Lewis' seminal four rules: limited vocabulary; exclusion of erotic love; reduction in reflective and analytical passages; and chapters suited to reading aloud (qtd. in Meek, Warlow, and Barton 158), all of which constitute a sense of restriction. More revealing are his comments about the fairy tale, that encapsulate much that he and subsequent writers find in children's fiction.

I fell in love with the form itself: its brevity, its severe restraints on description, its flexible traditionalism, its inflexible hostility to all analysis, digression, reflections and 'gas'.... Its very limitation of vocabulary became an attraction; as the hardness of the stone pleases the sculptor or the difficulty of the sonnet delights the sonneteer. ("Fairy" 36-37)

Of course, this challenge is at least partly imposed by the cognitive limitations of the child addressee. Singer, however, sees these limitations in different terms. He

describes children not as cognitively disadvantaged, but as a notoriously exacting audience demanding "consistency, clarity, precision and other obsolete qualities" (53). As Galef comments: "simpler does not necessarily mean easier" (31).

This has led to the evolution of a new art form that in itself appears to be as important as the children for whom it has been created. According to Edstrom, here simplicity is "an artistic device in itself," attractive because it is lacking in adult literature (qtd. in Nikolajeva, *Comes of Age* 48). Michel Tournier takes this idea to an extreme in his statement that "a work can be addressed to a young public only if it is perfect," for "every shortcoming lowers it to the level of adults alone" (qtd. in Beckett, "Crosswriting" 52). Tournier rewrote some of his adult fiction into a children's form that he regarded as an improved version. The constraints of the children's version refined his earlier adult attempts, representing "an evolution of his craft toward purification and simplicity" (qtd. in Beckett, "Crosswriting" 50). Nowhere better are these constraints seen than in the tight perfection of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The sparse, intense and poetic language resembles that of sacred texts and so does the subject matter. Ged's purifying apprenticeship at the school of magery is essentially that of a monk at a monastery, and his quest is one of atonement on a personal and cosmic scale.

Walsh describes this process of technical purification as the "simplicity-significance problem" and she elucidates it in somewhat paradoxical terms. It is the technically challenging problem of making "a fully serious adult statement." On the one hand, it must be "utterly simple and transparent." On the other hand, the child's need for comprehensibility "imposes an emotional obliqueness, an indirectness of approach which like elision and partial statement in poetry is often itself a source of aesthetic power" (212-13). This pared-down, poetic nature of children's books allows entry into a world which Jago describes as "sharp and significant" despite the fact that it is not overtly enriched by the complexities of adult consciousness (24), perhaps even because of this absence. Frye comments that a sacred book is written with "at least the concentration of poetry," and like poetry is "closely involved with the conditions of its language" (*Code* 3). So too is children's fiction: because children lack worldly experience and have a limited vocabulary, writers must communicate "serious matters of life metaphorically or poetically, or not at all" (Rustin and Rustin 37). It is a process that is like a religious discipline with concomitant effects. This is apparent in the words that Higgins uses to describe the writers of mystical fancy. They have "rigorously disciplined and awesomely simple styles," and create worlds that are "both wonderful and severe"; techniques appropriate to the difficult task of reaching for "Heaven's door" (106).

Here it is interesting to note Frye's discussion of Vico's three cycles of history and the language that characterises each. The first style of language Frye names the hieroglyphic, that is the poetic use of language; the next, the hieratic, is allegorical; and the last, the demotic, is descriptive (*Code* 5). The hieroglyphic, poetic style is equivalent to the childhood of Western culture (but certainly not in the sense of simplistic infancy), and Frye's explanation of it suggests a resemblance to the way language is used in children's fiction. It is a style where subject and object are linked; the word is related to the being of the object it names and thus can exert a magical power. (The principle is itself actually embodied as a subject in children's fiction in the spells and curses of fantasy; and, very specifically, in the naming power of words in *Earthsea*.) Frye says that "words in such a context are words of power or dynamic forces" (*Code* 6), and this effect perhaps contributes to the great creative energy that Abbs experiences in children's fiction ("Failure" 123). As an example, Frye cites Onians' study of Homer's language where such concepts as soul, mind, time and courage are "solidly anchored in physical images," and thought and feeling are inseparable (*Code* 6-7). In children's fiction, this is felt most strongly in the sharply delineated world of fairy tales. Tolkien observes that the best fairy stories deal with "simple or fundamental things" that are not in themselves embellished by fantasy: "It was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of the words, and the wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine" (*Tree* 55). But this effect also applies to the fantasy works of children's literature, and to some "realist" texts (Garner's *The Stone Book*, for example). It partly results from the simplicity-significance effect determined by the child addressee; and it bestows the sense of indissoluble unity between concrete and abstract that characterises parable.

Macneice incisively captures this stylistic effect when he discusses the plainness of style in the poetry of George Herbert (who is, of course, renowned for being childlike). He compares Herbert's plainness of style to "a truth drug," or a "knife that almost killed the writer [and] will cut the reader to the bone" (23). Merleau-Ponty's illuminating examination of two and three dimensional perspective in children's art casts a different light on the same effect. He perceives that three dimensional drawing fixes the scene or object within the parameters of a particular perspective. Two dimensional perspective, on the other hand, will "achieve a notation of the world that would be valid for everyone" because it can be translated into "every possible perspective," and shows things to us "as God sees them ... a god who does not get caught up in finitude."

Two dimensional perspective gave us the finitude of our perception, projected and flattened out, until it had become *prose* under the gaze of a god. The child's ways of expression, once they have been deliberately recaptured by an artist in a genuinely creative gesture, will, on the contrary, yield us the secret resonance through which our finitude opens up to the being of the world and becomes poetry. (149-51)

In one sense, this reduction in perspective takes us closer to the reverberant pristine world of Platonic forms. It is a reduction that seems particularly relevant to the similarity between children's fiction and the deliberately flattened yet alive world of parable. All these techniques contribute to a sense of spiritual significance that pervades the classic works of literature for children.

Maria Nikolajeva's discussion of children's texts as a canonical art form adds another sacred dimension to the genre. She adopts the notion of canonical art from Lotman, who uses the term to encompass "folktale or myth, a medieval icon, a church or temple, a rite" (*Comes of Age* 50). Thus in this context, the word canonical does not have the same signification as works that form a canon of classics, though it does seem that the best works of children's fiction derive much of their strength from their status as canonical art. Nikolajeva argues that children's literature is a ritual text-type that has structural and performance rules similar to that of folklore or medieval art, and until recently is far less open to experimentation than adult fiction (*Comes of Age* 9). There are two points of relevance here. The first regards the creation of the texts. In canonical texts, "the important part is not *what* is told, but *how* it is told" (*Comes of Age* 52); the content is to some extent fixed, and the essential part is how the message is formed: how that content is encoded. One might speculate that the prototypical fixtures of content encompass an ethical perspective, an absence of erotic love, and a happy ending, each of which will be explored later in this discussion. This notion is also expressed in C.S. Lewis' remark that "every ideal of style dictates not only how we should say things but what sort of things we may say" ("Good Work" 10), and in Frye's understanding that sacred texts are closely involved with the conditions of their language. Thus children's fiction can accommodate all types of experience from comedy to tragedy provided that experience is encoded appropriately. The master code here is that of a mature, redemptive and hopeful perspective.

Nikolajeva's second point concerns the reading of the text. She argues that the adult modern novel contains within it most of the information required to read it. This is similar to Merleau-Ponty's description of three dimensional perspective, and to Frye's view of the third demotic cycle of language that is preoccupied with the describing of a non-transcendent "objective" world. Nikolajeva argues that in contrast to this more literal perspective, a ritual art form such as a medieval picture

or a children's book functions symbolically (like two dimensional perspective), and "contains merely a portion of the information which its creator intends to mediate." It thus requires considerably more reader interpretation: "A non-canonical text is the source of information, while a canonical text is the evoking force" (*Comes of Age* 54-55). She too does not believe that restrictiveness is a limitation, arguing that the different rules that we bring to a canonical text mean that children's literature is a very rich art form" (50). Perhaps this richness also arises from the fact that canonical art forms have been traditionally associated with the transmission of metaphysical truths and ethical imperatives, and canonical texts have evolved with this aim as their primary purpose. And there is an added association between the "performance" of a ritual form and a notion of the sacred. Huizinga describes ritual in this sense as initiating "the *stepping out* of ordinary reality into a higher order" (13). Higgins argues that works of mystical fancy demand a reader response (performance) "that is playfully meditative" because they reach beyond appearance into the realm of spirit and imagination (101). Nikolajeva wants to resist an overtly religious implication and asserts that "a novel is a novel and can hardly function as a religious service" (*Comes of Age* 56). Nevertheless, her disclaimer itself suggests that it is a plausible idea; and, as the above discussion demonstrates, there are a number of other textual features that lend themselves to the notion of children's literature as secular scripture.

Authors and Readers: Who Do I Want to Be?

The limitations and purifications of the form of children's books also apply to the personas of their writers and readers. There is an ethical imperative that is not just restricted to form and content, but is also a part of the deeper levels of the writing and reading processes. Addressing a text to a child imposes special obligations and restrictions on the author who must work within a formalised code of technical and ethical obligations. As Prince says, the narratee "serves to characterise the narrator" (23), and children (as narratees who are also real readers) require a narrator who is highly principled and able to accommodate their needs. Nevertheless, because over time these obligations have been codified into a distinct genre, if the writer obeys these rules, the text will be suitable for children even if the writer does not intentionally address them. Cadden gives the example of Ursula Le Guin whose ethical notion of fantasy coincides with her notion of children, so there is "a conflation" of audience and genre (138). This accounts for the fact that not all good children's books are directly addressed to child readers. Generally, however, the narrator must adopt an overtly unsophisticated and non-jaded persona, becoming more childlike, and sharing, or at least taking into account, the child's relative newness to the world. This appears to be Alan Garner's motivation for

writing, "at least ostensibly," for children: "An adult point of view would not give me the ability to be as fresh in my vision as a child's point of view, because the child is discovering the universe and many adults are not." Yet at the same time he also states that when writing well, "I'm really flying, it's Aeschylus writing 'Desperate Dan'" (qtd. in Carpenter and Prichard 199), implying a sagely shaping spirit informing the simple façade.

Garner's statement clearly illuminates the difference between the narrator and the implied author: the voice (in the sense of comic book register) of "Desperate Dan" is the former; Aeschylus is the latter. Chatman describes the implied author as "the principle who invented the narrator" who "instructs us silently through design of the whole" (qtd. in Wall 6). Wall expands this notion to "the all-informing authorial presence" who "consciously and unconsciously shaped the story," establishing the "moral and cultural norms" of the text to which the real reader adapts. This is not just a depersonalised force, but a real presence, such that if confronted by the real author, the real reader may feel disappointment with the lack of congruence between the reality and the projection (6-7). Although Wall bases her study on the importance of the tone of the narrator's voice, it seems that the tone of the implied author is just as crucial in determining whether a book is suitable for children. Certainly the narrator's voice must be crafted appropriately, but the implied author is also invited to be a worthy self in establishing those "moral and cultural norms." Significantly, Garner identifies his authorial presence with Greek tragedy (itself an ancient version of wisdom literature), something that Walsh also does when she says that the roots of children's literature are in Odysseus, not *Ulysses* (215).

Katherine Paterson is explicitly conscious of the writer's need to present a "best self" through the deeper level of the authorial presence. She asserts that "those of us who write for children are called, not to do something to a child [i.e. knock them into shape], but to be someone for a child" (*Gates* 124), conveying the sense that this choice is more extensive than simply that of the narrator's voice. Wall's assertion that "in true fiction for children [the narrator's voice] will be seen to take children seriously, to care deeply for them, and to speak expressly to them" (272) is a vital one, but one that must also be applied to the implied author. It too is a mask, but less so than that of the narrator's voice because it is both a conscious and unconscious presence, and can affect even the adult reader subliminally.

The voice of the narrator and implied author posit corresponding narratees and implied readers, and here again there is an important choice of roles. It is useful here to consider Walker Gibson's concept of the "mock reader" because it cuts through the often distracting and grey distinctions between narratee and implied

reader to illuminate a significant moral point. The mock reader is a persona: "that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume" (1). (Here we must keep in mind that dual address texts speak to adult and child simultaneously so that the mock reader is never a separate adult.) Gibson argues that some books construct a mock reader we do not like, whose value system and world view must be rejected. Thus "a bad book ... is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become, a mask we refuse to put on, a role we will not play" (5). In the realm of children's fiction this insight is crucial, because children cannot clearly choose for themselves among good and bad reading roles. This is an important point in the consideration of what constitutes quality literature. Reading does help to make us who we are, and does involve life-affecting choices. Gibson says that "subject to our degree of literary sensibility, we are recreated by the language" of fiction (1). Thus the crude schoolyard humour in the Harry Potter series and in books by Paul Jennings (or, to take the argument to its extremes in adult literature, the uncritical reading of pornography) offer children subversive entertainment and inducement to read, but they do not encourage a "best self" reader or writer. This may well be one of the factors that will restrict them from being true classics, despite their popularity.

This is not to argue for censorship, but to focus on the wide-ranging ethical dimension implicit within this genre, and the responsibilities it places on writers and adult readers. And it is not just a matter of writing to a formula, or, as Cadden says, conflating audience with genre. Although one can be a suitable narrator for children by following the rules, it is much more difficult to be a suitable implied author. One's success as an implied author, as a shaping presence, depends on one's qualities and values as a human being: because the implied author is a pervasive underlying presence, the truth will out. Presence speaks louder than rules or words. This does not mean that writers of children's fiction have to be saints, but rather that they truly know the value of ethics and principles, despite the moral struggles they may be having themselves. The works of Lewis, Tolkien and Le Guin, for example, have an integrity that is absent from the work of most other fantasy writers. This is because they are not merely writing to formulae or form, but from strongly held moral convictions. Their chief interest is in the moral world of fantasy, not the glamour, and this is evident in their critical writing (Tolkien's "On Fairy-Stories," Lewis' essays, and Le Guin's *Language of the Night*). They exemplify Macneice's claim that the writer of parables must have a world view that engages the deepest feelings. Wall rightly says that we must remember that actual children read these books and the narrator's voice stands *in loco parentis* and thus must be a point of concern (273). But so too must the pervading presence of the implied author. A consideration of the implied author is arguably just as important as the

narrator's voice in determining what is suitable for children. The author must be concerned for the reader's good and this is more genuinely authenticated by world view rather than a narrow, self-conscious creative purpose.

This principle can be applied to texts by two crosswriters to help us see the superiority of one over the other. Margaret Meek makes the assertion that Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy is a test case of what constitutes children's literature ("Reading" 174), and we can see why when it is compared to Hoban's *The Mouse and His Child*. Both obey Lewis' four rules of writing for children, and the narrator's voice in each, though not directly addressed to children, is sufficiently at their level. The differences are far more apparent at the level of the implied author. In Hoban's novel, there is much to recommend it as suitable for children. The protagonists are animals and toys, and there is a didactic flavour to the narrative, with a liberal sprinkling of Gospel truth: the meek mice "inherit the earth"; "the losers become winners" and rise to high places from which the worldly have fallen. Yet the implied author has a dark and cynical view of life and the wisdom is unconvincing, hidden beneath heavy-handed disjointed allegory and social satire. Clearly the dual address lapses uncomfortably into the double address, but this is not the real problem. Rather it is the implied author who creates such a bleak, treacherous and haphazard world that it might convince us (briefly) that perhaps Jansson's muskrat is right to be reading "The Uselessness of Everything." The dubious ultimate truth of Hoban's book is expressed in its narcissistic last line: "be happy." In contrast, the implied author of *A Wizard of Earthsea* creates a world where everything matters. *Earthsea* is inherently wholesome and based on coherent laws; there is much good to be gained for others and oneself, and the good of the whole world results from personal responsibility. *The Mouse and His Child* illustrates Walsh's lament that "any book with a strong plot and no extreme erotic scenes and any book dealing in magic or fantasy seems to many people to be a book for children" (214). Hoban invites us to take on the persona of a very unpleasant mock reader, requiring collusion in an atmosphere of nihilistic menace. Le Guin's mock reader invites challenge and growth within an ordered and beautiful world.

The importance of actively choosing a reading role as a mock reader is implied in Norman Holland's assertion that interpretation of a text is a "function of identity" (124), and this can also be applied to a corresponding mock author. (Here this term is a more appropriate version of the functions of both implied author and narrator because of its emphasis on roles and choice.) Many children's authors may choose this genre in order to modify or shape an image of themselves at the same time as they write for children. Similarly, the mock reader, responding to the dual address, can create a new identity, or rediscover a remembered version of an old

one, by reading through the fresh experience and unique vision attributed to children. As either author or reader adults can lose their self-important and experience-tainted identity, and temporarily reforge themselves through identifying with the purifying aspects of childhood (something Hoban fails to do in *The Mouse and His Child*). This is not a hypocritical pretence, but rather a genuine statement of good intent. In this way, choosing to engage in children's fiction can for some writers or readers resemble a kind of religious retreat. A retreat is time-out designed to bring out the best in the retreatants; it deliberately invites a cultivation of simplicity and a fresh engagement with the present, both in the realm of feeling and concrete reality. It demands an ethical reorientation, a renewed relationship with right action and personal responsibility. The childlike simplicity needed to successfully read parables invites a similar approach. These methods encourage humility and a quality of openness that is needed not just to read parables, but to re-read the world.

The dual address makes a significant contribution to this type of reading, and its significance becomes apparent in the following insight from Kümmerling-Meibauer in relation to the creation of the canon.

It is the adult act of rereading that consecrates the masterpieces for children. Perhaps it is this double reading, by two distant, different but identical readers that affords a depth and a resonance to the best of children's literature, that set them apart from works written for and read by adults alone. (14)

These "identical readers" enact a "double reading" similar to that which Macneice says characterises parables. The adult cannot be lifted out from the child reading, just as the latent cannot be extricated from the manifest. The use of the word "consecrates" suggests the meaning of canon as "a list of sacred books accepted as genuine" as much as it suggests its purely secular connotation as very durable works of the highest quality. This double meaning is particularly obvious when reading *Tom's Midnight Garden*, a work that has been very securely consecrated into the canon. The adult "re-reader" of this richly symbolic world has a strong sense of entering hallowed ground. Here the manifest child level, the wonder and excitement of childhood discovery and secrets, is underpinned by a style of narrative where the complex is hidden within the simple. Neil Philip, obviously responding to the dual addressee, locates the richness of this novel in Pearce's dual perception of the garden: "as the adult narrator she sees it as a bare uncherished place, but through Tom's eyes, through the eyes of childhood, it is a place of infinite possibility" (24). Through the adult reader's eyes, the richness expands even further. It is a Fallen garden, the estate of man after the temptation in Eden. The garden(s) contain the apple tree of temptation and yew tree of death, set against the

distant heavenward spire of Ely cathedral. The novel is at once a vivid, strange narrative and a reflection on time passing and the nature of childhood. The child is indeed at the ground level and the adult is very firmly on a metaphysical summit. Through a child's eyes we can directly experience the story; through an adult's eyes we read as cultural commentator, philosopher and literary critic, yet we still yearn for the garden. As adult dual readers we are not just performing a meaningful kind of theological exegesis, but also engaging in a lived experience of narrative where, as in parable, theme and story become one.

The perfection of *Tom's Midnight Garden* points again to Jill Paton Walsh's description of the ideal children's book as a rainbow-coloured bubble. This multivalent image is based on a central icon of childhood, the perfect and fragile bubble, but is also reminiscent of medieval culture and the iconic richness of the rainbow-coloured stained glass windows where metaphysical truths are embodied in visual form. Pearce's novel is not explicitly religious, but her subject matter is necessarily metaphysical. It steps beyond ordinary reality, and its force relies upon the sustained use of Biblical imagery drawn from the myth of the Fall. It gives us (to use Tolkien's words again) "the wonder of the things" such as stone and wood, tree and grass, sky and ice. On two levels, the dual address and the subject matter, there is a tension between innocence and experience, a tension that gives the novel energy and depth. But it is still through the child's eyes that we experience the mystery and the meaning, and it is from the very notion of childhood that the novel derives its visionary power. The measure of this force is eloquently captured by Kuhn in his reflection on the meaning of the child in Western culture.

Although it is contiguous with the adult world, the autonomy of this realm [childhood] lends it an air of mystery that surpasses anything the most exotic countries have to offer. Despite its foreignness, this world is a continuous presence. It is this dynamic combination of strangeness and familiarity that has determined the nature of the enigma posed by the fictitious child. (6)

Childhood: The Sacred Site

In recent times, postmodern scepticism has cast doubts over the authenticity of childhood. But the debate whether childhood has been invented or discovered is often disingenuously complex, and is more a matter of historical interpretation and territorial claims than insightful literary criticism. Furthermore, the debate about the existence of childhood inevitably mirrors that of the children's book: "intriguing if possibly unanswerable, almost to the point of teleology" (Galef 29). Lesnik-Oberstein, building on the work of Ariès and Rose, declares emphatically that in the context of children's literature, "the child does not exist"; instead the child is "constructed and described in different, often clashing terms," carrying "a load of

emotional and moral meanings" (9-10). While Lesnik-Oberstein's psychological study casts doubt on the authenticity of this child, Kuhn takes an exclusively literary and metaphysical perspective, arguing that "the child has always been more or less central to human concerns." He shows, in explicit contrast to Ariès, how the child has been recognised and revered from earliest times (8), offering examples from *The Iliad* and medieval studies to show the pervasive historical recognition of innocent childhood. He shows no shame in observing the literary fact that "the child is the inarticulate bearer of tremendously significant but indecipherable tidings" (6).

Whatever the "truth," there are some important perspectives to be gained from the discussion. One is that while there is considerable disagreement over what constitutes childhood, most observers agree about the general characteristics of children: "they love to play; they appear irrational; they have limited powers of verbal expression; they tend to be oblivious to the trials and responsibilities of adulthood" (Marcus 4). Such accord suggests that childhood, a state that includes these characteristics, is not just a projection of needy adults, but is to some extent genuinely derived from observations of actual children. C.S. Lewis' remark that "there is no question of 'children' conceived as a strange species whose habits you have 'made up' like an anthropologist or a commercial traveller" ("Three Ways" 23) throws some refreshingly cold water on the debate. Another valuable perspective is that childhood nevertheless requires a certain set of conditions before it fully reveals itself, and these are usually located within the sensibilities of adults. A recognition of the vulnerability and innocence of children, for example, entails a responsive and open attitude in the observer. Peter Coveney equates the development of the child image in English fiction with developments in sensibility and thought which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century (29). Margaret and Michael Rustin suggest that children's literature has emerged partly as a result of the decrease in family size during the nineteenth century, which allowed adults to attend more to children, "especially in the domain of feeling" (5). The theorists may differ in their dates, but not in their understanding that childhood is linked to empathy rather than projection or fantasy.

More interesting, perhaps, is Neil Postman's version of this growth in sensibility. He asserts that while the earliest civilisations recognised the special needs of children, the state of childhood is a result of the invention of the printing press and the information revolution it created. Through print, information came under the exclusive control of adults and could be made available in stages that were deemed psychologically appropriate (72). Books allowed the adult world to become a closed-off repository of "cultural secrets" encrypted through the symbolic world of

written language; thus children required a special time where they could be protected from adult responsibilities and educated to learn the codes (49). Within that time, the full meaning of childhood could be discovered and nurtured. And more than simply offering education, it offered a means of nourishing the moral and emotional sensibilities of children. Postman laments the destruction of that protected environment through the information revolution. Now there are no longer any secrets, and childhood is rapidly becoming merely "a transitory aberration in cultural history" (144). Each of these perspectives suggests that children's literature arose out of the idea of childhood not just as a didactic tool, but as an outpouring from the cultivation in feeling accorded by these new opportunities for time and space for children. It has formed as a distinct genre because genres themselves are neither archetypes nor invented constructions, but "ideal patterns" of human feelings (E. Schwartz 81).

Separate from the sociological and psychological debates, there is a strong thread of consistency in the literary conceptualisation of childhood, evident in the studies by Coveney, Marcus and Kuhn cited above. This thread is not a creation of appropriate cultural conditions as much as it is an expression of an ancient mystical tradition. The child figure in adult literature is given reverential symbolic significance, most often representing precious or sacred qualities that the adult has lost in attaining mature consciousness. The force of this figure is especially and appropriately evident in poets, whose symbolic, rhapsodic language is also frequently used in prose about childhood. This does not mean that poets are merely prone to the idylls of Fancy; instead it points to the fact that they are visionaries who do indeed have intuitive access to spiritual truths. Unfortunately, this idealised conception of childhood is prone to corruption, as in "the erroneous sentiment" of the Victorians (Tolkien, *Tree* 41), or it is dismissively attributed to the Romantics, especially Blake, Shelley and Wordsworth. In this instance childhood is used as a historical marker and is not considered as having any real significance in itself. To the Romantics, the child is pure, and blessed with a profound simplicity that makes him wiser than adults and "father to the man." Yet the Romantic view is itself only a flowering of a much older tradition. In Platonic terms, the child is closer to the world of Ideal Forms and less defiled by the earthly realm than adults, and thus more able to remember the delights and wisdom of a heavenly existence.

Look at the soul of a child ... that has not yet come to accept its separation from its source: ... it is not yet fouled by the bodily passions; it is still hardly detached from the soul of the Kosmos. But when the body has increased in bulk, and has drawn the soul down into its material mass, it generates oblivion; and so the soul separates itself from the Beautiful and Good, and no longer partakes of that; and through this oblivion the soul becomes evil. (*Hermetica*, qtd. in Marcus 164)

The same concept is expressed in the ancient Gnostic parable "The Robe of Glory" from the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*. The soul is compared to a child, separated from its heavenly home through earthly incarnation where it must search for a mysterious pearl, a process that involves disrobing from the glorious cloak of heavenly existence and putting on the disguise of shabby earthly garments. Forgetful and troubled by the heaviness of the world, the soul falls into a spiritual sleep. The soul is awakened by a letter from heaven (the Word) and begins its return to "the ocean of pure being" where it can at last put on its forgotten heavenly mantle (Davidson 76). This is the theme of the neo-Platonist poets, and it is enshrined in Vaughan's "The Retreate," where the poet laments the loss of that state of mind which existed before the soul succumbed to the slumber of worldliness.

Happy those early dayes, when I
 Shin'd in my Angell – infancy.
 Before I understood this place
 Appointed for my second race,
 Or taught my soul to fancy ought
 But a white Celestiall thought,
 When yet I had not walk't above
 A mile, or two, from my first love,
 And looking back (at that short space)
 Could see a glimpse of His bright-face;
 When on some *gilded Cloud*, or *flowre*,
 My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
 And in those weaker glories spy
 Some shadows of eternity;
 Before I taught my tongue to wound
 My Conscience with a sinfull sound,
 Or had the black art to dispense
 A sev'rall sinne to ev'ry sence,
 But felt through all this fleshly dresse
 Bright shootes of everlastingnesse. (1-20)

This is no cowardly infantile or sentimental retreat. Child consciousness is closer to pure heavenly consciousness, the piercing clarity of pure celestial thought; and it carries with it the imperative that it must be regained. This reflects the Christian injunction that we must become again as a little child to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18.2). It seems that this construction of childhood has been around for a very long time. In *Centuries*, Thomas Traherne meditates upon the deeper level of this Gospel dictum, also using robe imagery.

Our Saviour's meaning, when He said, *He must be born again and become a little child that will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven* is deeper far than is generally believed. It is not only in a careless reliance upon Divine Providence, that we are to become little children, or in the feebleness and shortness of our anger and simplicity of our passions, but in the peace and purity of all our soul. Which purity also is a deeper thing than is commonly apprehended. For we must disrobe ourselves of all false colours, and unclothe our soul of evil habits; all our thoughts must be infant-like and clear; the powers of our soul free from the leaven of this world, and disentangled from men's conceits and

customs. Grit in the eye or yellow jaundice will not let a man see those objects truly that are before it. And therefore it is requisite that we should be as very strangers to the thoughts, customs, and opinions of men in this world, as if we were but little children. (112)

Traherne, writing in the seventeenth century, regrets that this pure state of being is not "commonly apprehended." How much worse is that misunderstanding in the twentieth. Yet the poets of the twentieth century are continuing to express this same insight. In "The Eyemote," Sylvia Plath reflects that the occasion of having grit in the eye has reduced her vision to a dark and painful narcissism. It is a loss as ancient and as harrowing as that of Oedipus.

What I want back is what I was
Before the bed, before the knife,
Before the brooch-pin and the salve
Fixed me in this parenthesis.

.....
A place, a time gone out of mind. (24-30)

Robert Frost's "Directive" reconfigures the grail quest in a retracing of steps in a search for a lost children's cup: "Back out of all this now too much for us,/Back in a time made simple by the loss/Of detail ..." (1-3). Frost makes a direct association between poetry, parable and the wisdom of children. The goblet, stolen from the children's playhouse, is hidden beneath a cedar, "Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,/So can't get saved as St Mark says they mustn't" (57-59). In "who were so dark of heart," E.E. Cummings affirms that innocence will dispel "darkness of heart," his equivalent of Vaughan's "black art." These all emphasise the backward motion that adults must make to retrieve their losses and attain redemption, whether in a religious context, or as a quality of heart and mind. The fact that this image of childhood constitutes such a strong historical tradition suggests that it is no mere cultural construct and that the mystics and the poets have the eyes to see and "the ears to hear" an integral aspect of reality.

Poets are especially conscious of achieving a special state of mind from which they can create their most original and fresh work, and they frequently perceive child consciousness as evocative of this state. Edwin Muir speaks of the "radiance of the child's world" that poets and mystics attempt to recapture (269). This notion of radiance penetrates much of the writing about childhood up until the middle of the twentieth century.

The lucky ones seem to be always as if they just came into the world. There is in them something of Adam upon the first day: they reconnoitre with shining eyes the layout of the garden, and stare in admiration at such novel curiosities as the moon and stars. (Montague, qtd. in Sansom 86)

This notion of childhood seems to be embedded in our psyches. The child who sees with a luminous vision is also a wise child with much to teach, hence the existence of the “knowing child” archetype. These idealisations of childhood certainly support Rose’s assertion that the child represents the site of a lost truth (43), but this so-called Romantic image of the child is not, as she seems to argue, just a desperate projection. While it is true that we can only remember and write about childhood from the distorted and distanced perspective of adulthood, it is equally true that in observing the reality of actual children, they do indeed have a “real” radiant innocence about them. Anyone who claims not to see this is surely blinded by cynicism or has spent too long in the dim grey world of abstractions. More importantly, recognising and valuing that quality of innocence is of inestimable value to children, who will become the beneficiaries of actions that stem from that recognition; and it is also of inestimable benefit to the further cultivation of adult sensibility and culture.

The Power of Innocence

Innocence is the foundational concept, the rock, upon which children’s literature is founded. Its importance is captured in Konisberg’s hyperbole that the love of children is really only the love of one’s own childhood and “only one aspect of it, called *innocence*” (Hunt, “Authors” 560). For most children’s writers innocence is implicit within the construction of the narratee, where it is used to interpret the world through a clear-seeing vulnerable vision. This is Tom Long’s view of the garden, or the whimsical clarity of Moominland. It is also a crucial aspect of the implied reader through whom it is seen in the process of being lost or under threat, and thus it functions as powerful moral or social critique. The innocence of Mary Lennox has been betrayed by her uncaring socialite parents well before her expulsion from the secure garden of childhood following their death through plague. In *A Sound of Chariots*, the innocence of Bridie McShane is prematurely destroyed through her father’s death from war injuries and through her witnessing the physical and mental horror of the maimed veterans in her village. Hobbiton is under threat from the outer forces of evil; like Earthsea, it is also threatened by the darkness within the soul. When Bilbo is forced to grow up and embark on his adventure, he is contaminated by the burden of power imposed on the ring-bearer. Ged battles the spiritual pride that is the burden of his maturing talents in magic. In Narnia, the outer threatening darkness is complemented by an inner one. Edmund succumbs to Turkish Delight through his own capacity to be tempted. But this is not to deny his innocence; as in “everyman,” it sits side by side with the lure of experience. In each of these novels, innocence must be regained, not in its pristine

original form, but as a new kind of innocence that carries within it an awareness of the potential perils of living without it.

Traditionally, innocence has been associated with the purity of the sacred. Now it is regarded with a measure of contempt in the world of postmodern criticism that builds in part on the Freudian "discovery" of childhood sexuality. Rose pertinently observes that the child of children's literature is above all else innocent: "a pure point of origin in relation to language, sexuality and the state (8). Nevertheless, she dismisses this notion of innocence as an adult manipulation that is used to hold off anxieties about being "grown up." Perry Nodelman also berates the literary criticism that celebrates "the wonderful innocence of childhood." He strongly criticises Hazard's *Books, Children and Men* for containing a simplistic and idealistic view of childhood where innocence is really "inadequacy, inhumanity [and] incapacity" ("Fear" 7). Ultimately, as for Rose, innocence is a political term and he states: "All children's books always represent adult ideas of childhood – and inevitably, therefore, work to impose adult ideas about childhood on children" (8). Indeed this is true, yet the negativity attached to such an "imposition" derives from a fundamental misapprehension of innocence and its power.

Innocence is not essentially a term of weakness or lack, though it does mean freedom from moral stain. Innocence is a virtue, and for the Apostles meant "the spiritual milk which is without guile" (Ottley 329). Thus innocence is not an "impossible" state, even though in reality, like all virtues, it is a "relative absolute" that cannot be fully realised in finite human form (Gardner 133). It derives from the Latin *nocere*, meaning not to harm, and this is an important aspect of its use in the context of literature for children. Although perceived and expressed as a quality within children, it is essentially a statement of intention by well-meaning, not misguided, adults, and its association with children has quite obviously evolved from both observation and hope. Can we really believe that Yeats' "Prayer for My Daughter," that longs for "custom, ceremony and innocence," is a manipulative imposition? In fact, Yeats posits innocence to counter the "inadequacy" and "inhumanity" of adult hatreds and passions (to reverse the thrust of Nodelman's accusation).

Since the loss of innocence is one of the chief subjects of children's literature, it is not surprising that the genre is pervaded with "wistful regret" and "authorial longings" to regain lost childhood (Frey and Griffith 228). But this is far more than empty nostalgia or self-serving "use." In previous eras, a belief in innocence has been an assertion of something that carries intrinsic value and a way of restoring balance, far more than it is a cowardly retreat. Peter Coveney's study of the child

figure in English fiction reveals that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the child represented the artist's dissatisfaction with society, and became a "symbol of Imagination and Sensibility, a symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in society actively denaturing humanity." More than that, the child became the artist's perfect image of "insecurity and isolation, of fear and bewilderment, of vulnerability and potential violation" (30-32). Here the child is indeed being "used," but in an admonishing way to portray a social comment through threatened innocence. In this image of the child, the new growth in empathy towards real children merges with the older iconic tradition that sees childhood as a mystical ideal, and secular joins with sacred. Inglis perceives innocence functioning in both a religious and secular context in children's fiction. He claims that the best children's books "reawaken our innocence" (8), and revive in us "freshness and innocence and delight." These are qualities "which traditional Christianity has always required grown-ups to keep alive if they are to be at all redeemable," and which the secular conscience of the West reveres in opposition to industrial and machine values (7).

Katherine Paterson states that it is likely that "most children in this world have never known that state of innocence which some romantic adults persist in linking to childhood" (*Gates* 106-07). But her comments imply a criticism of the society that corrupts innocence, and not a "deconstruction" of childhood innocence. Significantly, the persistence of the concept of childhood says as much about the adults who hold to this view as it does about the reality of childhood. Whether or not children are innocent does not matter as much as our wish to endow them with this quality and to create a protective space where they can flourish. More than any other critic, it is Inglis who best understands the innocence of children's literature: it is part of the "gift" of literature from adults to children (3), and certainly not a weapon. Although children may not be as innocent as our idealised projections, because we view them as such it may mean that we will behave well towards them. In such good intentions and actions there is a healthy confluence of metaphysics and reality. Theologian Karl Rahner asserts: "The child is conscious that it has nothing of itself, that everything has to be received as a gift. It lives waiting for the unexpected, trusting the unpredictable" (ix). This recognition of the innocence and sanctity of the state of childhood, even if it is an idealisation, is not only good for the growth of our sensitivity and empathy towards children, but it also has benefits for our adult selves. Postman makes the unequivocal declaration that this recognition of childhood brings out the best in us.

No one has disputed that there is a sense in which adults are at their best, their most civilized, when tending to the nurture of children. For we must remember that the modern paradigm of childhood is also the modern paradigm of adulthood. In saying what we wish a child to become, we are saying what we are. One might go so far as to claim that to the extent that

there has been any growth in empathy and sensibility – in simple humaneness – in Western civilization, it has followed the path of the growth of childhood. (63-64)

George Herbert understood this some four centuries earlier when he declared that “childhood is health” (qtd. in H. Gardner 65).

In children’s fiction, innocence excludes sexuality and the exclusion of erotic love is the most widely practised of C.S. Lewis’ four rules, though the theme occasionally subtly emerges when protagonists approach maturity. This exclusion is not the result of a lingering Victorian repression, or, as Rose argues, a means of keeping the problem of sexuality at bay (4) or holding off “panic” (10). For it is quite possible to acknowledge that children are sexual beings and at the same time wish to preserve their innocence by preventing their premature entrance into sexual consciousness. Innocence and sexuality are not incompatible. Freud’s recognition of pre-pubertal sexual arousal in his “Essay on Infant Sexuality” (1905) has certainly undermined a literal notion of sexless childhood innocence. Yet Kuhn sensibly argues that this does not mean that innocence is an impossible construct, and states that the association between innocence and childhood remains a significant literary fact, just as it is a significant theological fact: “it is perfectly possible that it is the Freudian hypothesis which is an artificial construct, and that the deep structure underlying certain fictional and poetic works translates a profound reality” (133).

Although children are sexual beings, their sexuality is in a state of dormancy. Most adults think this dormancy should be protected and preserved until children reach puberty. Indeed, sexuality is problematic enough for adults, and a primary way of acquiring moral stain and regret. Tolkien makes this hard-headed observation to his son: “This is a fallen world. The dislocation of the sex-instinct is one of the chief symptoms of the Fall.... The devil is endlessly ingenious and sex is his favourite subject” (*Letters* 48). These days, the veracity of this statement is too easily dismissed because of the explicitly Biblical imagery. Yet Postman phrases the same notion in contemporary terms. He describes modern culture as existing in a continual state of sexual excitement, and condemns it for transforming sex from “a dark and profound adult mystery to a product that is available to everyone ... like mouthwash or underarm deodorant” (137). Such a commodification is a contemporary version of Coveney’s forces that actively de-nature humanity. Thus to exclude sexuality from children’s literature is not only a way of preserving the relative innocence of children; it also preserves the spiritual integrity of the genre through adhering to the extremely important principle of not harming.

Nevertheless, there are plenty of critics now who would wish to question, if not undermine, the sexual innocence of childhood. Adult unease with the sexualising of childhood is interpreted as a psychological problem within adults rather than a moral issue. Julia Briggs dismisses the absence of sexuality in the classic works of the genre as a feature "comforting" to adults, who "revert" to them when ill or indisposed. She claims that sexual themes are suppressed partly because our own memories of childhood sexuality are suppressed, but that they re-emerge in children's literature disguised as images of food (27-28). Sexuality is not absent so much as "concealed." Thus we are to believe that Edmund's succumbing to the "forbidden desires" of Turkish Delight is something of a displaced sexual seduction. Such a reductive interpretation of Lewis' image seems far more an "imposition" and "manipulation" than the notion of sexual innocence it is supposed to counter. It shows how dangerous it can be to privilege a fixed adult interpretation of the latent level of an image over the child-oriented manifest level. Anne Higonnet's challenging study of photographic images of childhood, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood*, charts the transformation of the image of the innocent Romantic child, dismissed as "mythic nostalgia" (12), to that of the erotically charged knowing child that haunts contemporary art photography. This image, portrayed by "a growing number of photographers, many of them the parents of their subjects," represents children "who are far from being psychically or sexually innocent." She shows us that these children are desirable in a way quite different to that of the Romantic or maternal ideal. But Higonnet undervalues the significance of adult anxiety over this situation, and suggests it results from a resistance to change: "Being new, [the images] can be abrasive, exploratory, or raw" (12). She mistakes the shock of the wrong for the shock of the new.

Although Higonnet still argues in favour of some kind of child protection, her book nevertheless contributes to the incipient acceptance of the exploitation of childhood that reflects the broad spectrum of modern culture. This eroding process is very evident in the language in which Rose states her polemical accusations. She chooses Barrie and Carroll as her test cases for the impossibility of the genre: "an impossibility of which it rarely ventures to speak" (1). Yet both these writers are notorious for their interest in the sexuality of children. This informs Rose's choice, yet does not justify the application of her conclusions to the genre as a whole. As can be seen in the above quotation, Rose's own prose is laden with overt sexual metaphors that are no doubt deliberately provocative. For her, the invitation to suspension of disbelief is "something of a soliciting, a chase, or even a seduction" (2). Such critical writing exemplifies the type of postmodern political correctness that prompts adults to retreat into the refreshing and clarifying world of innocence; but here innocence functions as invigorating tonic, not as comfort food.

More worryingly, the actual consequences of such theorising may actually be damaging to real children through subtly eroding the sacred and nurturing space of childhood. Through observing, preserving and thus also creating innocence, we glimpse those bright shoots of everlastingness that are too easy to forget (at best) and to corrupt (at worst).

Just as erotic love has no place in the unselfconscious innocence of the Garden of Eden, the childhood garden of our race, we feel intuitively that it has no place in the real or fictional world of childhood. Postman argues that until the television age, sexuality has been one of those secrets that define the essence of childhood: "without secrets ... there can be no such thing as childhood" (80). This is far from being a foolish or romantic notion; rather, it is an integral part of maturity. Postman fully supports Norbert Elias' assertion in *The Civilizing Process* that a defining feature of civilised culture is that the sexual impulse is strictly controlled, and "a conspiracy of silence" concerning sexual urges is maintained in the presence of children (Postman 9). The strict control of sexual urges is also a defining feature of monastic traditions, which tend to enclose themselves within cloistered gardens. In the wake of the Freudian (and television) revolution it has become common to condemn celibacy, like innocence, as an instrument of repression and manipulation wielded by an anxious church structure. Yet most mainstream religions have always held sexuality as an aspect of the sacred that can be used for good or ill, and in each there is a celibate tradition that engenders the highest respect. Like innocence, celibacy is a religious mystery that is not an absence in the sense of emptiness, but a powerful source of purity and strength. In Burnett's novel, the secret garden must for a time be protected from adults: it is an enclosed order. Yet the point of this novel is not that children must move out, but that the negative distortions of worldly consciousness (afflicting adults and children) can be healed by spending time within.

Innocence then, the cornerstone of children's literature, is an aspect of the sacred, a concept that is increasingly difficult to grasp in a secularised self-seeking culture. It is not about adult coerciveness or foolishness, but instead represents an ascent to a higher state of being. And it is not just the prerogative of children, or something irredeemably lost; rather it is a force that drives the life of virtue.

There is such a thing as a re-created purity and beauty of character. And in this recreative process a chief agent is the very spectacle of innocence.... The vision of stainless purity, combined with perfect humility and gentleness to the sinful, awakens the longing for holiness.... This power of kindling the desire for holiness is one of the many precious privileges of innocence. (Ottley 330)

This spiritual notion is the theme of poets. It is akin to Blake's conception of Higher Innocence that lies on the other side of Experience, and to George Herbert's "pattern worked by grace," that travels from the littleness of childhood, to physical and ego enlargement, then back again to a childhood of the spirit (Marcus 103). It is also expressed in Yeats' concept of "radical innocence."

The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still. (66-72)

This is an innocence very far-removed from the gratuitous "be happy" that closes *The Mouse and His Child*.

We find a similar understanding of radical innocence in critical writing from other disciplines. Kuhn's study of the child figure across European adult literature traces a similar movement. The loss of paradise can be followed by the discovery of a richer one where childhood "informs a mature vision which operates within the reality of an adult world ... infinitely enhanced by the unlimited force of innocence" (161). This is not a specific theory of one critic or another, but a general impulse in the moral life of the human being. Iris Murdoch claims that our experience of emptiness or cynicism can be helped by "any person, any pure or innocent thing which could attract love and revive hope" (*Metaphysics* 503). The neuroscientist Jeffrey Schwartz praises innocence as the "highest and most sophisticated of human achievements": to scorn it is "to glamorize and promote human suffering" (xiii). It is "anything but naïve," and calls for facing the truth about the potential for harm in the world and especially "in your own nature!" (81). Innocence may well be a state that can only fully enter consciousness through the fallen vision of adulthood. But it is not an illusion, invention or manipulation. Quite simply, in the ancient words of Juvenal: "Great innocence is owed to a child" (xiv.47).

A Way of Seeing

Innocence is associated with clean "unadulterated" vision free from grit. Edwin Muir, for example, asserts that the child sees the world with "a unique clarity" (270). Certainly this notion has become a cultural icon in Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes," nowadays used to criticise any kind of theoretical obscurity. Randall Jarrell, an incisive and sophisticated critic, has given explicit form to this idea in his children's tale, *The Bat Poet*. A humble bat writes a poem

describing an attack by an owl, but the strength and life of the bat's poem is completely missed by the resident literary critic, "the mocking bird." He can only discuss the execution of form and the rhyme scheme, while ignoring the vivid and terrifying recreation of the owl's attack, which is the whole point of the poem. The disgruntled bat poet discovers that "the trouble isn't making poems; the trouble's finding somebody that will listen to them" (15), not in the sense of simply gaining an audience, but in the sense of finding someone who will "see" what is really there.

It is significant that Jarrell has chosen to present this parable as a children's story, especially as its moral is relevant only to adults. It is another demonstration of the fact that many children's novelists use this genre to discuss things that matter deeply to them, and this frequently includes the nature of childhood. More importantly, the parable-like wisdom and canonical form of the tale which render it suitable for children create an ironic sense of the message being hidden so "the wrong ones can't find it." As a children's tale, it is indeed resistant to the "analysis, digression, reflections and gas" which C.S. Lewis admonishes in adult literature. Thus the form of this work is entirely congruent with its moral. Yet this narrative is largely an example of the double rather than the dual address because the child is really only a nominal addressee. The concrete animal story is no more than an excuse for the adults-only moral, and it is neither compelling nor convincing as a children's story. The tale tries to be a parable, but it really functions as a clever didactic lesson for adults about itself: why children's literature is enjoyed and esteemed by adults.

The blindness and dishonesty caused by over-sophistication have been stridently criticised by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing*. His comments are about visual art but they apply equally well to literature. Berger points out that in the meretricious ramblings of modern art criticism the meaning, or intent of the work, has been subsumed beneath critical evaluation, and a "bogus religiosity" subsequently accorded to the criticism rather than the work (21). He cites as an example a painting by Hals, the officially commissioned portrait of the Governors and Governesses of an Alms House for paupers. Despite their public shows of charity, in actual fact these officials were men and women who were known to be miserly. Berger suggests that Hals' portrait is an accurate representation of the morally debauched state of the sitters; that we have only to look directly at the expressions on the faces to perceive an ugliness which may reflect their own inner states, as well as the disapprobation of the artist. Berger questions the subsequent art criticism of this painting which deflects the viewer from this clear-sighted perception and castrates the social critique he finds self-evident in the portrait. This deflection away

from the artist's purpose has been achieved through two main processes: firstly, through mystification created by false representation of the historical period and by meaningless rhetorical discourse; secondly, through the critic's concentration on artistic techniques which defuses the power and emotional charge of the image (11-16). Both these processes have the potential to devalue the work of art, whilst glorifying the critic. This lack of seeing is the problem with Higonnet's study of photographic images of the child. She does not see these images for what they are: an adult exploitation of children's latent sexuality. Instead she describes them as a re-invention of childhood, and as images that are "emotionally ambitious, free-ranging in their moods, intelligent, beautifully composed, and finely crafted." She ends her study with the worryingly ambiguous phrase: "Art asks us on its own terms to take our children seriously" (224-25).

The real "way of seeing," the pursuit of clarity and truth, is very close to that clarity of perception we attribute to children, and thus their perception does indeed seem to be a remedy for adult malaise. It allows the innocent child to be the knowing child, not in Higonnet's erotic sense, but as a source of wisdom. This idea is the essence of *The Little Prince*. Both adults and children are sharing a journey aboard a train, but the adults

are pursuing nothing at all ... they are asleep in there, or if they are not asleep they are yawning. Only the children are flattening their noses against the window-panes ... only the children know what they are looking for. (86)

Thus adults do indeed "use" children's fiction, but it is to see more clearly, to affirm metaphysical truths and to explore things about themselves. The innocence of childhood is like a mirror which gives a more honest reflection of the adult world. Jago concludes that

what we discern about childhood is perhaps the most significant not simply for children. The directness and 'nakedness' of a child's developing awareness of the world may be essential for our survival and wellbeing as adults whole in self and with a readiness for encounter with others. (24)

Reading not just as adults, but also as if we were children, allows us to directly partake of the child's way of seeing. This is the great strength of the dual, rather than the double, addressee. Adult readers of children's literature can actively replenish themselves in the vision of childhood, and not just eulogise it or lament its loss.

Works of sacred literature such as parables are meant to be a way of experiencing wisdom from the inside, through the vicarious, yet lived, experience of narrative; it cannot be felt from the critically literate outside perspective because consciousness

gets in the way. It requires immersion. W.H. Auden comments that to read *The Golden Key*, "you must throw yourself in ... there is no other way" (qtd. in Marshall 105). Cott finds he is a jaded adult reader, but in children's literature he can read with the "intense attention" of great literature that, in Helen Vendler's terms, induces "receptivity, and plasticity and innocence" (qtd. in Cott xviii).

Because children are perceived as relating more honestly and more directly than adults, they are deemed to be more free from the subject/object split which insulates adult consciousness from full experience.

The child does not observe the beauty of nature. He seizes it. He feels a kinship with all simple life – he clutches at the flower, the moth, the ant. He seeks to be at one with all living things. He is. (Higgins 4)

This split alienates us from the sensual beauty of the physical world, and from a genuine encounter with others. Such a barrier also divides adults from a full engagement with the imaginative world, whereas for children the boundary between the real and the imaginary is "more fragile and permeable than it is for most adults" (Rustin and Rustin 18). Thus, reading a book through the eyes of a child will enable adults to more readily abandon their rational and cynical mindsets and engage more fully with the narrative. If adult readers are enjoying a children's story, they do not have to say to themselves (as they might when reading an adult novel): how interesting that this author is defying postmodern conventions and concentrating on the story. They can become more involved and enter the "reality" of the created world, suspending their disbelief. This process is the major theme of Ende's *The Neverending Story*. For Bastian, the child protagonist, the fictive world of a fantasy novel becomes more real than the actual world, but this fictive world is in danger of being totally destroyed by the cynicism of modern culture and its mocking unbelief: it is "the Nothing." (It is also the practical, sceptical modernist world of Eustace Scrubb's parents in *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*.) Bastian's own spiritual journey occurs within immersion and belief in this symbolic world of the imagination, and his quest is to save it. This can only be achieved through his assent to belief, tempered by humility.

All these ways of seeing that we attribute to children are associated with idealistic and "good" images of childhood. But the child also represents unrepressed, unconventional and defiant aspects of human nature that have become overlaid by civilisation through maturity. This is Alison Lurie's subject in *Don't Tell the Grown Ups*, where she argues that an identification with the world of misrule may allow us a brief excursion back into hope and freedom, and serve to "renew" our instinctive energy, and act as a "force for change" (ix). More significant in the context of this

discussion is that because children have not been fully civilised they are a kind of primitive, suggested in Lurie's provocative opening to her study that refers to children as "an unusual partly savage tribe, ancient and widely distributed" (ix). This is no mere catchy statement. Like "the child," the concept of the primitive has long held a place of reverence in our culture, especially as society has become increasingly sophisticated. From the theories of Jean Jacques Rousseau to the mysterious naive jungles of Le Douanier Rousseau, contact with a primitive mode of consciousness has been regarded as therapeutic and regenerative. Like children, primitives are perceived as naive, unrepressed and vital. They are uncontaminated by the deadening constraints of a highly civilised society and without the intervening barrier of self-consciousness which divides subject from object. As Jung discovered on his travels, the consciousness of primitives does not have to invent myths because it experiences them (266-304).

Penelope Lively's *The House at Norham Gardens* uses recurrent lapses into a primitive world as a means of helping the adolescent protagonist step into the next stage in her maturity as she grows up in the ordinary world of Oxford. Lively here is reframing the rejuvenating force of childhood, repugnant of course to adolescents who have just stepped out of it. The primitive world too is innocent, timeless and mysterious: "Time has stopped here. Isolated, they have known no influence, learned no skills.... Their lives are both simple and deeply mysterious" (27). The primitive is also associated with the realm of the sacred. Cultural anthropology has shown us that the life of primitive and ancient societies was, like our own, taken up with pragmatic events and situations pertaining to survival. Unlike us, however, they also firmly believed in a world other than this one, "a supernatural world of divine beings and forces" which impinged on every aspect of their daily lives (P. Berger 15). Subsequently, primitives, like children, poets and mystics, feel the immanence of this latent supernatural dimension within the concrete world. This immanence is made plain in Lively's own evocation of primitive consciousness.

They live with spirits as easily as with tree and mountain and river. Their world is two faced: what seems to be and what lies beyond appearance. A stone is a stone and a tree is a tree – but they are also the qualities of stones and trees and must be approached in a certain way. Objects too have spirits. (16)

This evocation presents more than a simple animism and suggests that archaic blend of metaphoric thought where the word has a magic power and is indissolubly related to the thing that it names. Frye associates his first language of cultural history, the hieroglyphic, with the primitive as well as the poetic. He claims that the primary function of literature is to keep recreating this first phase of language

through eras that are dominated by the more rationalist modes of the later two phases. Poetry of course retains that function, but so too does children's fiction.

Jung's observations led him to a similar conclusion: primitives have much to teach civilised man, especially in that they think with their hearts and not with their heads. Here again we are looking at an impulse that is not needy projection, but a movement towards integration and restoration of balance to the psyche. Jung's theory of individuation is one such adumbration of this process: the purpose of humanity is to integrate the neglected, disparate aspects of the psyche, and reclaim those parts which are repressed or neglected. In Western culture, especially post-Enlightenment, the head rules the heart, and the heart has very low status indeed. Thus an interest in the primitive and subversive "shadow" aspects of childhood may be one means of redressing this imbalance, at both an individual and a social level. Instead of rejecting childhood, some (in the sense of Wordsworth's paradox) seek to connect the child to the man he has fathered. Jung maintains that because of the "naivety and unselfconsciousness" of children, the concept of childhood allows us to apprehend a more complete picture of what it means to be a whole person.

Consequently, the sight of a child or a primitive will arouse certain longings in adult, civilised persons – longings which relate to the unfulfilled desires and needs of those parts of the personality which have been blotted out of the total picture in favour of the adopted persona. (272)

Jung says he travelled outside Europe to Africa to find a sphere of his personality that had become invisible under the pressure of being European. So, too, adults travel to children's literature to find a sphere of their personality which has been lost beneath the alienating accretions of adult sophistication – beneath the pressure of being adult. Here again we see this literature functioning as a means of reforging identity. And we revisit the claim made by many writers of children's fiction that they do not address an external child, but rather the child within.

The Child Within and Without

Childhood is not simply a thing of the past that exists only in memory or as empty projection. It is a living part of the present that continues to inform adult consciousness, and there is a wide range of authors and critics who continue to espouse this view. C.S. Lewis famously remarks that his liking of hock does not mean that he has entirely left behind his liking for lemon-squash ("Three Ways" 25). Higgins claims that the great children's authors "enter the stream of childhood not through the door of memory, but by immersing themselves presently in the current of child experience" (7). This is an immersion not confined to children's fiction.

William Empson observes that some nineteenth-century artists deliberately kept a "tap-root" into their own childhoods as a means of "withdrawal from spiritual and emotional confusion in a tired culture" (Coveney 32). More recently, Alison White suggests that Eliot's "Burnt Norton" may have a tap-root embedded in the imagery of *The Secret Garden* (74). Tolkien too respects the continuity between childhood and adulthood, stating that in maturity we are "not to lose innocence and wonder, but to proceed on the appointed journey" (*Tree* 43). Writing and reading through identification with the child addressee is not necessarily a mask that we put on, but a reconnection with a state of mind already existing within ourselves. Lewis amplifies his lemon-squash metaphor to argue that childhood and adulthood coexist like rings in a tree: "a tree grows because it adds [not sheds] rings" ("Three Ways" 26). This continuum is intimated in Kuhn's understanding that the adult writer's conception of child is a confrontation between two beings, "between an avatar and his pre-existing persona, both of whom are in a state of perpetual development." This is a conjunction "of what is and what might have been, of the interaction of two states of becoming" (7). Abbs makes a similar observation when he suggests that the discovery of the child within oneself is a rediscovery of "that pristine experience where what is and what might be are closely interwoven and never distinct" ("Failure" 123). It is a discovery that contributes to the fused reading process of the dual addressee.

This inner child inhabits an "*immobile childhood, a childhood without becoming, liberated from the gearwheels of the calendar*" (Bachelard 116). Thus this child is a manifestation of eternity within us: deathless. This is profoundly embodied in *Tom's Midnight Garden*. The elderly Mrs Bartholomew remembers her childhood vividly through the reconstructions of dream. But the reality of this childhood is so "real" that young Tom is actually able to enter it through his own dream-like excursions into the formal midnight garden. Dream and memory both inhabit a kind of collective unconscious that circumvents a one-way linear notion of time. At the conclusion of the novel a circle is created and completed when the old and young embrace, in loving recognition of each other and in celebration of the immortality of being. Like its great predecessor, *The Secret Garden*, it is neither realism nor fantasy, but something more. Yet Pearce enables us to glimpse the truth of a transcendent order through the plain and concrete images of a child's world (clock, garden spire, river, yew and apple tree), images that also strike with the symbolic resonances of time (transient and eternal). Neil Philip understands so well Pearce's achievement.

The book's great virtue is in its simplicity, its directness, its entirely specific believable and enthralling narrative line. But its artistic success lies in the way abstract thought has been caught in concrete images; the way the eternal garden has fused with the temporal one.... It is a book about time, innocence,

experience, redemption. Yet it is triumphantly what it sets out to be: a book for children. The treatment of the themes makes it so: for the mystery at the heart of the text is that the relationship between Hattie [sic] and Tom is the same as that between author and reader. Pearce is an adult giving narrative shape, for a child, to her sense of what is lost in the transition from childhood to adulthood, and the grace which enables us to make good that loss. (25)

In fact, Philip additionally presents what is essentially a brilliant summation of the genre. He points to the importance of the concrete, and to the consolation through, and recovery of, innocence, that redemptive shaping process. He captures the dual relationship between author and reader and between adult and child. And like so many other critics, he is drawn to the use of terminology with religious connotations ("mystery" and "grace") to evoke the novel's power.

At the core of Philip's understanding of the importance of this book is the claim that it is triumphantly still a book for a child. This reminds us that the conception of child has been crucial in moulding a genre; not just the idealisation of the inner or outer child (or the narratee or implied reader), but the real child who will read the literature. This is extremely important because it protects from the dangers of narcissism inherent within the inner child. Thus the real writer must ultimately write to the "not self," a real person who is owed the best that can be given. The impulse to give the best to children remains very strong. It survives both the trivialisation of childhood and its romanticism, and continues to function in the most polemical of critics. Lesnik-Oberstein notes that even commentators such as Rose "are somehow seeking to benefit children, even if it is only to protect them from being told what is supposedly right or good for them" (4). Wall uses this notion of care as a criterion for "true fiction" for children. The narrator's voice must "be seen to take children seriously, to care deeply for them, and speak expressly to them" (272), and this is an essential ingredient of the "best" works that form the canon of children's fiction. This cannot be a rigid rule, as it would eliminate some of the best crosswriting that is not addressed specifically to children. Nevertheless, the real child must always remain the fundamental concept of childhood.

Between the real child and the eternal child falls the shadow of mystery. The elusive appeal of this mystery is nowhere better expressed than in R.S. Thomas' "Children's Song."

We live in our own world.
A world that is too small
For you to stoop and enter
Even on hands and knees.
The adult subterfuge.
Although you probe and pry

With analytic eye,
And eavesdrop all our talk
With an amused look,
You cannot find the centre
Where we dance, where we play.
Where life is still asleep
Under the closed flower
Under the smooth shell
Of eggs in the cupped nest
That mock the faded blue
Of your remoter heaven.

This poem so poignantly expresses the enigma that is childhood. The image of the dance connects childhood to the paradoxical nature of spontaneity and ritual. In religious symbolism, dance is a sacred, non-rational yet highly formal act of creation and celebration. It is canonical art in Lotman's sense of religious ritual. Similarly, play is a spontaneous yet ritualistic action which defies rational analysis. One of the most lingering images of childhood depicts circles of children playing or dancing on green lawns. This image appears in the iconic pictures of Kate Greenaway; as an idealistic image in Hazard's *Books, Children and Men*, and in the magic circle of children playing "Beatie Bow" in Ruth Park's novel. These images represent the ritual dances of actual children as they enact "Ring-a-Ring a Rosie" or "Oranges and Lemons." The children may not be in actual circles, or literally dancing on green lawns, but they earnestly perform a ritual as much as they play, paradoxically free yet formally constrained within the pattern. It suggests a physical enactment of the simplicity-significance concept of Walsh's "rainbow surface."

The dance and the reading ritual of canonical art are essentially a type of play and both suggest the sense of seriousness that Wall finds in the dual address. In his seminal analysis of play *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga maintains that play is an ultimately serious activity, and it is a ritual essential to adults as well as children. Play steps out of normal time and space; it casts a spell over us, but while we are enchanted and absorbed there is still the consciousness that it is a game (29-41). Here again are the dynamic tensions similar to those between subject and object, and between the consciousness of the adult reader and the suspension of disbelief. In play too the "distinction between belief and make believe breaks down," but never completely (25). Significantly, Huizinga draws a comparison between the play of primitives and the development of religious ceremonies, leading to an understanding that ultimately play is related to a consciousness of holiness (19): nevertheless, "child-play possesses the play form in its veriest essence" (17). Peter Berger captures this perfectly when he says that adult play brings about "a beatific reiteration of the timelessness of childhood" (77).

This deeper notion of play is exemplified in *Finn Family Moomintroll* where there is the delight of conceptual play at many levels. It is present in wonderfully imaginative character creation and linguistic frolic: in their names (Hattifatteners; Groke) and the syllabic misrule of the spoonerisms of Thingumy and Bob. At the same time, there is always an undertone of deep significance. The Moomins embark on an adventurous and refreshing voyage into a primitive uncharted land, "wild and tempting." Here they are "enraptured by the masses of rare flowers" and experience their pristine (hence larger-than-life) beauty: "Heavy, silvery-white clusters which looked as if they were made of glass; crimson-black kingcups like royal crowns" (63). There is a solemn collecting of treasures, a disturbing magic hat and the ultimate ritual of feast and fireworks. The narrative is loosely structured upon the Hobgoblin (at first a restless, "miserable" adult figure) and his quest for the King's Ruby. This is a "pearl of great price" that is neither in the sun nor the craters of the moon where he expects to find it, but with the diminutive child characters Thingumy and Bob. This precious stone evokes "silent rapture." It constantly changes colour from a pink glow "like the sunrise on a snow capped mountain" to a "great black tulip with stamens of fire" (133-34). There is also a parable-like unexpected reversal of action that is replete with pearls of wisdom. When the Hobgoblin offers to grant wishes, Thingumy and Bob forsake their own. Instead they use their turn to grant the Hobgoblin his own heart's desire: a replica of the Ruby. This text is both a charming and serious game, at once an entry into the innocent, good and deathless world of childhood and a rumination on the nature of that world. Jansson delights in the intense reality of the concrete physical world, but she also masterfully creates an intensely real otherworld and inner world. Her celebration of human folly and human joy together attains a quality that approaches the sacramental.

It may be reasonably conjectured that in our cynical society which is so inimical to joy, to holiness, and to ritual, opportunities for this deeper level of play (as distinct from sensual pleasure) are not as abundant as may be generally supposed. Children's fiction offers us a form of access that is close to this earlier "veriest" form of play, through the act of reading. As a canonical art form it offers custom, ceremony and innocence, and as wisdom literature it reconnects us to what really matters. When Higgins and Hazard are making their idealistic claims for the child, they are not erecting a false cultural construct, but an intuitive understanding of a hallowed state, one that has been lost beneath the postmodernist fancies of pseudo adulthood. Perhaps it is better to listen to the wisdom in Higgins' claim that "the power of innocence is the power to grasp the simple truth, be it pleasant or not. This uniqueness doesn't divorce the boy from the adult, but rather it gives him a contributory status in the lives of all men, be they young or old" (95).

In "An Art of Poetry," James McAuley celebrates the way in which poetry embodies the divine through functioning as parable. In doing so, he unwittingly captures the essence of the genre of children's literature and its connection to the sacred. Here is a poetics of children's literature that is far more insightful than those that are trapped in the theoretical quagmire.

Lord Christ from out his treasury
Brings forth things new and old:
We have those treasures in earthen vessels,
In parables he told,

And in the single images
Of seed, and fish, and stone,
Or, shaped in deed and miracle,
To living poems grown.

Scorn then to darken and contract
The landscape of the heart
By individual, arbitrary
And self-expressive art.

Let your speech be ordered wholly
By an intellectual love;
Elucidate the carnal maze
With clear light from above.

Give every image space and air
To grow, or as bird to fly;
So shall one grain of mustard-seed
Quite overspread the sky.

Let your literal figures shine
With pure transparency:
Not in opaque but limpid wells
Lie truth and mystery.

And universal meanings spring
From what the proud pass by:
Only the simplest forms can hold
A vast complexity. (9-36)

No matter what the ontological status of child and childhood, because children's literature is given to real children its expression must be tempered by an "intellectual love." It is intellectual because of the effort involved in creating the condensed perfection of form, and because it draws on the highest knowledge. It is given in love as "gift relationship," a protection against, and a remedy for, the intellectual hatred that Yeats recognises in adult enterprises. Because of the dual addressee (and the dynamic of "new and old" readers), children's literature also re-reads the world for adults, providing fresh vision of old truths about human existence. The notion of radical innocence rediscovered through consideration of the child allows adults to find a way through the carnal maze (the potential

obfuscation of sexual desire and intellectual complexity), so that by becoming again as a child there may be at least a glimpse of heaven.

This clear vision offers an elucidation that "the proud pass by." The simple form of the genre, its use of archetypal imagery and wisdom content, and status as canonical (ritual) art, all contribute to a sense of the metaphysically resonant two dimensional perspective of sacred literature. The importance placed upon the concrete manifest level allows the literal images to shine transparently with the light of clarity. This is in sharp contrast to many of the opaque texts that characterise contemporary adult literature. Although there is a wellspring from the child within, above all else, children's literature is addressed to others: others who require that we become our best selves as writers and readers, and this demands an expansion, not contraction, of the heart.

Cultural Despair

Literature as a whole ... is the range of the articulate human imagination as it extends from the height of imaginative heaven to the depth of imaginative hell.

(Northrop Frye, *Educated* 44)

The epigraph that begins this chapter has been chosen because it underpins the four-fold vision of the literary cosmos that Frye expounds in *Anatomy of Criticism*, and it is a vision that forms the basis of much of the following argument. Frye's vision is fundamentally binary: the upper world of comedy and romance stands opposed to the lower world of tragedy and irony/satire, and these oppositions also carry the connotations of summer and winter, and light and dark. The modernist and postmodern *zeitgeist* that has dominated the twentieth century has been one of a chilly winter of irony and satire. This has been the culmination of a very lengthy process of descent that has left us with a debilitated art: "as Schiller and the subsequent liberal-humanist tradition clearly perceived, our need is for an art which can engage with, and thereby redeem, the mechanised and desecralised world of practical life" (Falck 169). In the twentieth century, it is perhaps the art of children's fiction that best fulfils this need.

Our literary winter of discontent is reflected in the associated realms of philosophy and aesthetics. Iris Murdoch regrets the emasculation of moral philosophy, where the domination of linguistic analysis provides descriptions of morality as a phenomenon but does not make moral claims (*Sovereignty* 49). Similarly, John Gardner states that in the realm of aesthetics and criticism, "we are rich in schools which speak of how art 'works' and avoid the whole subject of what it ought to do" (16). Children's fiction remains one arena where moral judgements are still practised and the ethical obligations of aesthetics still observed.

A very significant way in which children's literature counters the desecralising forces of contemporary culture is through its use of the romance form. Romance is the substance of Frye's *The Secular Scripture*, and it is a form that is intimately involved with the theme of identity and integration. The form begins with a bewildering descent into a lower night world, and then ascends towards the light of renewed identity and redemption. The classic texts of children's literature closely follow the pattern of romance and its dialectic of descent and ascent. From a still broader perspective, the current decline into relativism and despair is equivalent to the amnesia and descent motif of romance. Children's fiction is a literature that helps to remind us of what has been forgotten, and the actual reading of it can enact an upward journey for the reader towards a state of renewal and integration. Scholes argues that literature can no longer function as secular scripture because of

a loss of faith in the idea of universal truths (13). In children's literature we are very reluctant to give up that idea. Here texts still refer to a spiritual universe, and they are largely uncompromising in their commitment to its truths.

Cultural Despair: The Descent into Hell

In her study of the child figure in seventeenth-century literature, *Childhood and Cultural Despair*, Leah Marcus speculates that there is a relationship between "the experience of cultural breakdown and an idealisation of the undifferentiated wholeness of the child's perception." She identifies this phenomenon in the fourteenth, seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries. Far from conceiving childhood as peripheral to serious adult interests, she regards our attitudes to childhood as a very significant cultural barometer (242-43). Her argument is that childhood's inner meaning remains essentially the same, but in each epoch it performs a different function, from religious icon to symbol of political revolt. Marcus' theory certainly seems applicable to the massive cultural changes of the twentieth century, where she finds a new trend towards the "exaltation of the child" (246). Here, however, there is a very significant difference. Now adults relate to the image of childhood through the abundance of literature that is written for children. Hence Abbs' contention that there is an important relationship between the current popularity of children's fiction and "the failure of adult culture" ("Failure" 118).

Cultural despair is a frequently recurring phenomenon in history, and arguably omnipresent as a manifestation of our natural human feelings of incompleteness and discontent. Dissatisfaction with the present and nostalgia for the past are deeply etched into the human psyche. In his recent study of the decline of literature in the university, *Literature Lost*, John Ellis deftly proves this point by citing a German poem on this theme by Walther von der Vogelweide. Ellis invites our agreement with the poet, who laments the loss of integrity, taste and style in contemporary culture, and criticises the cacophonous state of modern music and moral decline. Ellis then reveals that this poem was written in the Middle Ages around 1200 (41). So archetypal is this dissatisfaction with the *zeitgeist*, that Frye calls it "a mythology of decline from earlier standards of authority" (*Secular* 177). We must concede that to some degree the nostalgia for the past glory of childhood is part of this phenomenon of the "pastoral myth" (*Educated* 62), and perhaps not take this new despair too seriously. But at the same time, it is arguable that never before in the history of culture has there been such a devastating loss of values and meaning. This is reflected in an art that is often degraded, and in an impotent

criticism that serves it. Because art has the power to radically affect our lives, the implications of this decline are of the utmost importance.

Despair has been endemic in the culture of the twentieth century as it plumbs the depths of an imaginative hell. The arts and the practice of criticism have been beset by a general malaise, characterised by a loss of meaning and a pervasive sense of entropy. The boundaries of art have been pushed beyond all reasonable and intelligible limits, and its power and meaning progressively undermined, so that art and criticism tend towards gratuitous perplexity and fruitless solipsism. Visual art, music and literature all remain in the grip of an experimentalism that is dedicated to the new god of self-expression, and requires an obligatory display of self-reflexion. This is what James McAuley deems the dark and contracted landscape of "arbitrary and self-expressive art" (70). Music is dominated by the "absences" of minimalism, and a cacophony that is far more symbolic of loss of meaning than the radical shifts in styles and modes that disturbed medieval harmony. In literature, works representing the absurdity and inherent meaninglessness of existence continue to be elevated into cultural icons.

[We now have] a cosmos strangely shifting and sinister. The nightmare frustrations and metamorphosis of Kafka, the living death of Beckett's cold vision speak now for a generation caught in the grip of an increasingly materialistic and lethal society. Ironically, the ideal realm of unity, beauty and peace is now entrusted to science. (Rodax 132)

Psychological realism has reached its limits in probing the fine nuances of tortured despair and personal depravity, and has slipped into the shifting sands of magic realism. This is a genre that is very different from the firm moral certainties of its literary cousin, traditional fantasy. Many works in these new genres of "high art" are conceived from a fascination with violence or a treacherously sophisticated eroticism that licenses voyeurism and provides a subtle intellectual affirmation of perversion. It is far more likely that what is remembered of *Lolita* is its ravishing brilliance and breaking of taboos rather than the novel's alleged criticism of Humbert's behaviour. At the other end of the spectrum, it is interesting to note Frye's comment that much popular literature "is quite as prurient and brutal as its worst enemy could assert, not because it has to be but because those who write and sell it think of their readers as a mob." The traditional literary elements of love and adventure have become simply "lust and bloodlust" (*Secular* 26). This observation was made some twenty-five years ago, but these qualities seem even more in evidence in many recent literary offerings.

Janette Winterson's novel *Sexing the Cherry* uses such fashionable devices as metafiction, magic realism and fairy tales in order to create the illusion of art. The

power of this novel seems to derive almost wholly from voyeuristic excursions into the violent and erotic feats of the imagination. Lust and bloodlust figure prominently. Its extrinsic crudity and its lack of real intellectual substance are not issues for the critics. Reviewers quoted on the blurb acclaimed the work: the *Times* insisted that it must be read and re-read; the *Financial Times*, obviously impressed by the allure of Winterson's poetic style, described it as "swift, confident and dazzling." To find fault with works such as these on the grounds of their confluence of eroticism and violence is to risk being labelled old-fashioned or prudish; worse still, a Leavisite, an archaic remnant from a distasteful outgrown liberal humanism. But such summary dismissal is often the result of unquestioned belief in what Frye terms "the progress myth" (*Educated* 62), the converse of the pastoral myth, that regards the past as worn out and backward instead of considering its contribution to social good. Thus, instead of looking for integrity and substance in the message of a work of art, postmodern criticism deals only with how the message has been said (or not said), and with the "originality" (intertextual or otherwise) of its expression. Gardner shows the danger in worshipping "unique personal vision" by pointing out the absurdity of admiring equally both Ivar the Boneless ("an obscenely savage monster") and King Alfred ("the first and last truly Christian King"). Indeed, the logical end result of this relativist illusion must be a negation of ethics, and a giving up of the right to say to our children, "Be good!" (22). C.S. Lewis describes much twentieth-century art as "puddles of spilled sensibility" that we are "'brow-beaten' into appreciating." They are not good works because they are not "work" at all, not having been crafted into accessible and beautiful forms that have respect for their audience. Thus while the high-brow "work" may use high feats of the intellect, it remains a puddle without this craft, "whatever rich wines or oils or medicines have gone into it" (whether they be metafiction, magic realism or fairy tales). For Lewis, writing mid-century, the remedy for our times is in simpler forms, in what he sardonically terms "low-brow art," such as the detective novel or the children's story: "sound structures; seasoned wood, accurately dovetailed, the stresses all calculated" ("Good Work" 110-11). Already, children's literature is being conceived as an antidote to cultural despair.

Fortunately, there remains a small but strong stream of authors and critics who have the insight and the courage to incisively criticise the vogue for shallow, formless or potentially corrupting art; as Herbert Read describes it: "all those manifestations of permissiveness characterised by incoherence, insensibility, brutality and ironic detachment" (qtd. in Abbs, "Note" 1). Similarly, critical theory often tends to undermine meaning and subvert for the sake of subversion, a demolition that is executed through the mystique of jargon and incomprehensibility. How can it be otherwise when so much attention has been

paid to devaluing the author and promoting the critic as high priest? Bennett makes the telling observation that the gradual demotion of the status of the author to structuralism's "scriptor," to Fish's "necessary fiction," and finally to Barthes' "dispensable trope of reading" reflects not just a progressive alienation, but also a "reification of the social relation of writing and reading" (23). The problem here is not so much the intellectual scrutiny that is applied to understanding reading, an activity that is inherently worthwhile, but the fact that its excesses have taken us away from the proper purpose of criticism. Gardner asserts that contemporary criticism is very far removed from the human.

[it is] not talk about feelings or intellectual affirmations – not talk about moving and surprising twists of plot or wonderful characters and ideas – but sentences full of large words like *hermeneutic*, *heuristic*, *structuralism*, *formalism*, or *opaque* language, and full of fine distinctions – for instance those between *modernist* and *post-modernist* – that would make even an intelligent cow suspicious. Though more difficult than ever before to read, criticism has become trivial. (4)

These "large words" are themselves further examples of the process of reification that often attains the level of deification. They have acquired that aura of "bogus religiosity" that so distressed John Berger in contemporary criticism of visual art (21). While it is easy enough to dismiss Gardner's comments because of his tendency to radical overstatement, we must remember that Gardner strives to wake us up and reclaim an immensely significant and life-affirming role for art. Indeed, this trivialisation of criticism nurtures the economic forces in society that have led to the commodification of culture. Writing to the mob sells; and in the world of the high-brow mob, it also wins prizes. This has implications that go far beyond the sphere of art.

London intellectuals, in the fashion of copy writers, are forever preoccupied with naming and celebrating the next fashion, the next trend, the next excess. Their love of the ever-more public and ever more literal spectacles of cruelty, of absurdity, of sexuality, is nothing but an inverted form of progress and shares that same anti-human frame of reference. As a consequence, they not only make no attempt to criticise society, they actively prepare people to accept the brutality, the ugliness and inhumanity of the mechanical system. (Abbs, "Mechanical" 219-20)

George Steiner refers to the current state of literary studies as domination of the "parasitic" (7) and "a limitless proliferation of the secondary" (39). Derek Brewer damns the nihilistic subversions of poststructuralism as "a rampant subjectivity which wilfully downgrades the text and leads to the despair of distinguishing true interpretation from false, or indeed any interpretation from any other" (16). This is not just "literature lost," but all meaning lost, and the nadir of cultural despair.

Of course, it is also necessary to view these developments with some measure of detachment and examine them within the widest possible context. Using Frye's map of the literary cosmos, it would seem that the cynicism of contemporary culture is simply part of a cycle, where the perspective of the upper world has given way to an inevitable descent into an age of irony and satire. We can perhaps console ourselves that the wheel will turn again. But such a dispassionate view runs the risk of tacit complicity with this new meaninglessness and its accompanying brutality. Already universities are in the process of dismantling the notion of any kind of great tradition of quality literature in favour of sociological analyses of anything. Frye himself has trouble with this kind of analytical detachment. On the one hand he strongly asserts that literature is not "an aggregate of exhibits with red and blue ribbons attached to them" or "a body of adjudications," but rather "man's revelation to man" (*Educated* 44). In the same breath, however, he argues that if the critic is measuring a writer of the stature of Shakespeare, then it is the critic who is really being judged. In making this statement, Frye himself has already judged, and has clearly awarded a blue ribbon to the Bard. So perhaps it is very important to award ribbons. Some revelations are better than others, and others are so bad they should not be disclosed, such is their potential to harm. Even to assume that such a truly detached view is possible, to watch quietly while high culture is dismantled and to witness the impoverishing social effects of this erosion is like watching a vandal, aimlessly destroying all in his path. It is to play a fiddle while Rome burns. The increasing cultural acceptance of this havoc is exemplified in Damien Hirst's comment in the *Observer Review* after winning the Turner Prize: "It's amazing what you can do with an E in A-level art, twisted imagination and a chainsaw" ("Art" 23).

To reject this high-brow vandalism is not to imply that all art should be prudishly moral or extrinsically beautiful; for art can work its affirmations through implicit condemnation of an unjust, immoral or ugly world. Dystopia, by implication, suggests utopia. While nineteenth-century fiction was dominated by versions of the evils of industrialism (Dickens' London; George Eliot's North), such portrayals were always subordinate to portraits of the good in human nature and the real possibility of a better way to live. Shakespearean tragedy describes catastrophes that should not have happened; the causes are carefully delineated in such a way as to suggest that they lie at least as much in redeemable human nature as in the whim of the gods. Frye argues that the imagination has the potential to give us life that is better than we know it (in comedy and romance) and worse than we know it (in irony and satire) and it "demands that we keep looking steadily at them both" (*Educated* 40). Good literature then provides a kind of two-lens vision focused into one. It would seem that postmodern literature has lost an eye. Even if we

accept the authenticity of this impaired vision, we must realise that it remains pathological. Falck argues persuasively for the necessity of health and balance.

There must always be a place ... for a literature which expresses our current spiritual condition – which may at the present time be one of jumpiness, neurosis, despair, immaturity, or a sense of the world in bits and pieces. Literature which – like *The Waste Land* – expresses this ‘alienated’ spiritual and cultural condition can be authentically revelatory. But because to experience the world in this way is to experience it mainly through a disability ... there must also be the possibility of a literature which reaches beyond this disability to a greater wholeness and which aims to cure our spiritual condition rather than merely to express it. The one-armed poet does not content himself with a one-armed vision, and to try to transcend our spiritual disabilities must be the higher aim because it is to attempt to go beyond our contingent limitations ... in order to re-connect with the most central meanings of human life. (167-68)

This aim is precisely the opposite of Winterson’s “one-armed assertions” in the final page of *Sexing the Cherry*.

... the city is a fake. The future and the present and the past exist only in our minds ... and even the most solid of things and the most real, the best-loved and the well-known, are only hand-shadows on the wall. Empty space and points of light. (144)

Strangely, the *London Review of Books* claims that this book “cheers you up.” For all that Dickens’ London may only be a collection of empty spaces, and scarce few points of light, it does not exist in a moral vacuum; the bad is very bad and the good must be pursued and created. Dickens’ ethos is the product of a profound bifocal vision. It is certainly more productive for a culture than a mere recognition of the human capacity for illusion that is essentially the premise of Winterson’s novel and much of the postmodern enterprise. Perhaps the problem with this brilliant emptiness is best summed up by Gardner’s view of Stoppard. While he finds the plays amongst the best of modern drama, ultimately they are disappointing: “they raise intellectual and emotional expectations, then abandon us” (Gardner 59). While this ironic mode of literature has indeed produced some brilliant satires, “we cannot keep the plumber on as cook” (Falck 33).

The disaffection with modern culture revealed in the above comments suggests that literature is failing to fulfil its traditional function: a reaching beyond our experience of disability (our finitude) to a greater vision of wholeness and a connection with the most central meanings of human life. Abbs accuses contemporary art of having lost its visionary function, instead being content “to reproduce and magnify the diseases that surround us” (“Failure” 118). Kermode maintains that our modern scepticism has rendered fiction less satisfactory than ever as a means of making sense of the world. This is reflected in the plot of the

modern novel: its formlessness conveys a purposelessness that cannot be used to make sense of our lives. Modern fiction no longer functions in "an explanatory sense" (30-36), a notion related to that of art as clarifying vision. Gardner, too, speaks of art's function in terms of sight, lamenting that now it is commonly used merely as a *divertissement* for our neuroses.

Art is the means by which an artist comes to see; it is his peculiar, highly sophisticated and extremely demanding technique of discovery. Hence the artist – even the essentially great artist – who indulges himself, treating his art as a plaything, a mere vehicle for his ego and abstract ideas, is like a man who uses his spectacles to swat flies. (91)

This clarifying and explanatory function of art no longer resides within the work itself. It has transferred to readers and critics, who must decipher the unstable text, somewhat paradoxically, into a coherent reading that is politically acceptable but invariably provisional. This may afford the type of satisfaction associated with completing a cryptic crossword, and the more complex the text, the higher the sense of (ego) gratification for the explicator. Too often, professional critics respond to texts with their own incomprehensible decodings, full of "large words" and very "fine distinctions." Such pretentious writing and the acrobatic novels it deciphers are examples of what T.S. Eliot rejected as "complexity for its own sake," which is not literature's "proper goal." He suggests that to counter this situation "a new simplicity, even a relative crudity, may be the only alternative" (*Classic* 16). It is not surprising then that children's literature is seen as a remedy for the failure of adult culture. It has a simplicity of style and clarity of thought as well as a certain "crudity": not that of violence and raw emotion, but that of the elemental and newly formed; that profound primitiveness that Frye finds in myth, and Tolkien, more specifically, in wood and tree and stone. Abbs argues that the writer of adult novels feels obliged to be "'knowing,' 'clever,' 'camp,' 'witty,' 'amusing' and 'scintillating,'" whilst the novelist writing for the child feels free "to duck below this barrier of social expectation" ("Failure" 123).

Frye compares twentieth-century civilisation to the Tower of Babel; it is a gigantic technological structure composed chiefly of words and devoid of humanness. The original tower was founded on a confusion of tongues and had strayed from the one true language. He says that this is not the language of nation or region, but that of "human nature, the language that makes both Shakespeare and Pushkin authentic poets, that gives social vision to both Lincoln and Gandhi." It is a quiet language that requires time and reflection. If we listen to this language, it tells us that "we are not really getting any nearer to heaven and that it is time to return to earth" (*Educated* 67-68). Such a return seems precisely the movement of children's fiction in the present age, as we recover the sweet simple language of our roots, that

speaks to us of human dignity and the deepest concerns of our nature. The importance of such a language is the governing principle of Le Guin's *Earthsea*. In the creation myth that structures Ged's world, dragon and human were one: "one race, winged and speaking the True language. They were winged and beautiful, and strong, and wise, and free." This is the language of the mages, the religious language of this mythological universe. It became inaccessible to humans when they "gathered up treasure, wealth, things made, things learned," and lost touch with their true identity and origin (*Tehanu* 19-20).

Myth and poetry are obvious attempts to connect with that one true language, but so too are books for children that focus on the mysteries of fantasy or the elemental forces and experiences of the natural world. We speak at least a version of this language to children because of their perceived needs, and also because, as a concomitant of their own simplicity and uncorruptedness (immunity to intellectual sophistry), they are an exacting audience. Singer claims that in contrast to the contemporary writer of adult literature, the writer of children's books cannot "bribe his way to the child's attention with false originality, literary puns and puzzles, arbitrary distortions of the order of things, or muddy streams of consciousness which often reveal nothing but a writer's boring and selfish personality" (50). Singer's hyperbole obviously arises out of anger at cultural vandalism, but its significance here is that it touches on the focus on the self as one of the most pressing reasons why twentieth-century culture can be perceived as having failed. The self-exploratory motives such as sincerity, freedom and individualism that propelled modern literature into its present experimental forms are worthy enough in themselves. During their development in the Romantic period, their destructive potential was balanced by a general belief in a universe with design and purpose, and a notion of self that still held some notion of coherence and whose agency was held in check by the relatively clear demands of social responsibility. But with the elevation of the new religions of science and postmodern theory, the self has been dismantled into what Eagleton describes as a "decentred network of libidinal attachments, emptied of ethical substance and psychical interiority, the ephemeral function of this or that act of consumption" (qtd. in Bennett 21). Eagleton maintains that "a reasonably secure identity" is necessary to wellbeing, and those postmodernists who ignore it are "morally irresponsible," because such a decentred self is "unlikely to be an effective agent of social transformation" (126-27).

Frye's claim that all literature is structured upon "the loss and regaining of identity" (*Educated* 21) will not serve here, because postmodern literature is stuck in loss, or grounded by its own dialectic: all is "fake" and there is no integral identity to be regained. Yet ironically, this same decentred tangle has become the dominant

focus of self-reflexive art, particularly in the metafictional preoccupation of literature. An *ersatz* self has become the only centre that will hold. C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man* gives a prophetic account of the cultural dissolution that will result from this new kingdom of self that substitutes its personal unstable needs for the traditional universal precepts for right living. His epigraph from Confucius: "The Master said, He who sets to work on a different strand destroys the whole fabric," captures the dangers of such an enterprise. This is exactly the situation of Earthsea portrayed in *The Farthest Shore*. True magic and selfless action in the service of the traditional laws have been replaced by self-seeking psychopomp. As a result, the universe is collapsing into a dark, chaotic entropy that is a literal unravelling. Hort Town is a city where there is "no centre left," where "robbers robbed because it was all they knew how to do," and where under the surface things are "not entirely real." It is "a dream city, empty and dreary in the hazy sunlight" (60-61). This is so very reminiscent of Winterson's London, but here it is a state of affairs that must be righted, and itself an illusory vision of life that is deplored.

Lewis gives an even more apposite version of this destabilising process in his preface to D.E. Harding's *Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth*. At the beginning of cultural history, everything was imbued with a sense of divine significance. Inevitably, "the advance of knowledge gradually empties this rich and genial universe: first of its gods, then of its colours, smells, sounds and tastes, finally of solidity itself as solidity was originally imagined." The meaning that was accorded to objective reality now becomes attached to the subject's thoughts, sensations and emotions. As a result, "the Subject becomes gorged, inflated, at the expense of the Object." But our sense of self also turns out to be mistaken, and we too are merely personifications, and the subject is regarded as empty as the object. Lewis adroitly sums up the absurdity of this position thus: "almost nobody has been making linguistic mistakes about almost nothing. By and large, this is the only thing that has ever happened" (qtd. in Kilby 103). Iris Murdoch diagnoses the problem when she ruminates on the bankruptcy of much modern moral philosophy: "we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves, and we have no adequate conception of original sin"; and subsequently, "ethics has not proved able to rethink the concept for moral purposes" (*Sovereignty* 47). This loosening of the boundaries of self ironically results in a narcissistic preoccupation that Falck identifies as "a spiritual disorder" (161).

The children's novel, dealing as it does with the central meanings of human life, is alert to the problem of the engorged self. In *Finn Family Moomintroll*, Moominpappa is prone to self-indulgence, but Jansson's clear-sighted humour destroys his solipsism in one deft stroke.

In the next room Moominpappa sat writing his memoirs. Nothing amusing had happened since he had built the landing-stage, so he went on with the story of his childhood, and this brought such memories that he nearly burst into tears. He had always been a bit out of the ordinary as a child, and nobody had ever understood him. When he got older it was the same, and he had had a frightful time in every way. Moominpappa wrote and wrote thinking how sorry everyone would be when they read his story, and this cheered him up again, and he said to himself: 'It will serve them jolly well right!'

Just then a ripe plum fell onto his paper and made a big, sticky blot. (106)

In Mollie Hunter's *A Sound of Chariots*, the affliction is addressed more soberly. Bridie McShane's English teacher warns her of the dangers of poetic introspection and creativity, of self-expressive art.

... such an experience ... can only be constructive if the subject of it succeeds in building *outwards* from it. Otherwise, there is only a self-destructive burrowing-inward, a futile self-consumption of the intellect that is the antithesis of creativeness. For creativeness my child, is all outgoing. It is experience absorbed and put forth again in a finer form. (172)

Children's literature is an exemplification of this process of refinement. It begins with the life experience of the artist, Walsh's "pressure of adult emotion," and then refines it (seasoned wood, stress calculated) to a version that will be of use to another: a selfless gift, as Inglis claims, and not a self-portrait.

Adult culture is now full of the "antithesis of creativity" and often seeks to regurgitate experience in deliberately debased rather than finer forms. Faced squarely, such works of art can only offer a gift of shared meaninglessness or even shared corruption. The penny finally dropped for Richard Neville, once infamous for his defence of freedom of the press at the Oz obscenity trials. In 1990, he issued a thorough condemnation of the cultural degeneracy in Peter Greenaway's film *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover*, which graphically features acts of torture, child molestation and cannibalism. This film was lavishly praised by the critics: Derek Malcolm of the *Guardian* acclaimed it as "one of the finest movies to come out of Britain in the last decade." Yet whilst critics admired its "painterly gestures" and "mobile revelations," Neville attacks not only the film, but the critics who praised it. Even more so, he attacks the intellectually and morally passive culture which has spawned such a monster. He asks the very pertinent question: why is it our society is so conscious of the need to clean up our physical environment, while oblivious to mental and spiritual pollution?

For as surely as toxic residues kill the fish and the fowl, so the gangrenous sludge of a bastardised intelligentsia kills the spirit. It is renewal and valour that is needed now, honour and optimism, not the sordid excesses of lionised shock addicts. (75)

It seems that valour, honour and optimism are qualities that have been relegated to children's fiction.

Neville and many other writers quoted above infer that literature has a responsibility other than to regurgitate or perpetuate cultural despair. In 1946, J. Donald Adams published a small book *The Writer's Responsibility* that is of interest because of the persuasive sense and benevolent spirit of its claims, and also because it occurs mid-century, written in reaction to what he perceives to be the problems of modernism and the coming postmodernism. But it is a book in which Neville, who may once have rejected it out of hand, would now find a common chord. It certainly does fall within the last stages of the liberal-humanist tradition, though it is the contention of this discussion that the notion of the responsibility of art to preserve core human values is much more than a passing "ism." Like Falck, who writes some fifty years later, Adams points to the spiritual poverty of the modern writer. He posits an outline of the qualities that constitute a healthy function of literature, declaring that literature must exist to "invigorate and restore" (21). He also understands the necessity of bifocal vision, claiming that out of the contrast "between what was and what is, or between what is and what might have been, have come some of the most profoundly moving utterances" (22). Thus literature can encompass hells, but these are always in contrast with heavens. Literature should invite fruitful reflection (24), and it "has an obligation ... to assist in restoring the dignity of the human spirit" (28). As a genre, children's fiction is founded on these principles and is a particularly cogent reminder of what was or might have been and how things could be. It constitutes a renewal through the child's uncontaminated vision, and a salutary reminder not only that things should be better, but that it is our responsibility to make them so.

Although the notion of the writer's responsibility is acutely felt by children's writers, this does not necessarily mean that this attitude should be confined to the children's genre. Le Guin remarks that "a denial of authorial responsibility, a willed unconsciousness, is elitist, and it does impoverish much of our fiction in every genre" (*Fisherman* 4-5). Katherine Paterson clearly sees literature's potential to alter lives. She quotes Frances Clark Sayers who asserts that authors are called to give the best that is in them to "the audience that lives by what it feeds upon" (*Gates* 124). The great potential of such feeding to influence living is seen in the recollection of reading theorist, Shirley Carson. She attributes the moulding of her adult personality to her mother's repeated reading of classics such as *Little Women* and stories from the Bible.

I fondly recalled values from them when I made important decisions in childhood and adult life ... I thought of the lessons Heidi learned. I looked at some problems of my own life at the time, and I used those deeply embedded lessons to solve them. (212)

In today's intellectual climate, this may sound simplistic, but Carson is obviously a woman of character who understands the importance of character, a quality radically devalued in contemporary society. Her real-life experience supports Frye's theoretical musings on the writer's responsibility: "in every age it has been generally assumed that the function of serious literature is to produce illustrations of the higher truths conveyed by expository prose ... to persuade the emotions to align themselves with the reason" (*Secular* 24). Similarly, Gardner asserts that "the true artist's purpose, and that of the true critic after him, is to show what is healthy, in other words *sane*, in human seeing, thinking, and feeling, and to point out what is not" (180). Children's fiction served Carson in this manner, not in terms of direct didacticism, but in showing her examples of sane ways to live and sane decisions. Adams sums this up in a potent image: "great creative works ... are lamps for the wayfarer" (19).

Traditional adult literature has been concerned with seeing, casting light on heaven and hell, the twin moral poles of human action. Frye provides a cogent example of this when he examines the blinding scene in *King Lear*. He points out that here we know the scene is not real, whereas to watch a real blinding scene would be a degrading experience. The horror that we feel when reading of such cruelty in literature is not the sickening horror that we would experience in reality, but a horror "full of the energy of repudiation." The effect rests on the distancing and unreality of art. However, contemporary literature, film and television give us the sickening horror of events such as this every day, in appalling real-life detail. After a time, we become complicit voyeurs rather than repudiators, unless we repudiate the work itself. Frye says that literature "refines our sensibilities" and give us "the exhilaration" of being able to stand apart from these bad acts "and see them for what they are because they aren't really happening" (*Educated* 41-42). Less so with postmodern art because of its lack of formal (and thus distancing) structure, and because its use of realistic detail satiates and dulls our sensibilities, encouraging an inquisitive thrill at its catalogues of human evil and suffering.

An excess of unredeemed despair can be as morally enervating as a surfeit of violence, and represents an eternal hell without any possibility of heaven. This is certainly the case in the highly stylised and remote worlds of Beckett's *Endgame*, or Marquez's fanciful *Love in the Time of Cholera*. In these works, meaninglessness is cleverly achieved, but they are nonetheless stagnant. More recently, Coetzee's

Disgrace, a Booker Prize winner, charts the same stagnation, but this time through detailed realism. The novel concerns exposure of the sexual misconduct of an ageing academic, complemented by the parallel story of the brutal rape of his daughter. It closes with the protagonist musing on his loss of sexual attractiveness and approaching grandfatherhood, and expressing a lame hope that he may be bequeathed the grandfatherly virtues of equanimity, kindness and patience once his capacity for sexual passion has waned. But even in this, he remains content to be the slave of his passion, making no effort to cultivate those virtues that he feels he might as well acquire. He toys with the idea of trying to become a good person, but decides he is too old. The closing pages describe his assisting an animal welfare worker to put down diseased, unwanted dogs, in a "room that is not a room but a hole where one leaks out of existence" (217-20). Such moral enervation carries with it the suggestion that it would not disturb his passivity too much were he to be doing the same to human souls in a concentration camp.

Although children's fiction offers a stimulating contrast, the darker side of existence is rarely denied or glossed over. A large number of children's novels deal frankly with life crises and tragedy, either directly or indirectly. Nearly all those examined in this study involve some version of loss of a parent. George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind* and Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* portray the unthinkable, the death of a child, one through metaphor, but the other realistically. However, in both cases it is an event placed within the context of a coherent and meaningful universe. Children's fiction also concerns itself with the extreme difficulty of just living, but does so in a manner that is arguably far more mature than its adult counterparts. In Voigt's *Homecoming*, the "slow" Maybeth must face her worst fear, a series of aptitude tests where her intellectual inadequacies will be mercilessly exposed. Her grandmother does not attempt to protect her from the ordeal or offer empty platitudes, saying instead:

Maybeth? You've got two hard times coming. This now is the first. Tomorrow morning is the next. Nothing will make them easier. That's the way it is ... will you try?... It'll take some courage but I think you've got that. (344)

Here life is hard enough, but in the sequel, *Dacey's Song*, Dacey must finally face her mother's permanent absence and eventual death: "lost to them, maybe forever." She learns that this is a sadness that is not going to go away, and must be "carried around deep inside her all the time" (23). She also learns that her grandmother knows much "about carrying sorrow around" (23), and that "life is a hard business" (47). In this truth telling there is no hint of ugliness, wallow, moral passivity or permanent despair. Instead there is a human dignity that restores and inspires. The children act well for each other, and each hard event becomes an

exercise in building character. They share good times as well as bad, and heaven is clearly glimpsed amidst the hell. Despite their themes of loss, despite their recognition of inevitable sorrow, these books are on "the side of life" (Adams 21), an inestimably important function of literature. For Katherine Paterson, books are "good or great" because they make the right connections: "they pull together for us a world that is falling apart" (Gates 18). As Kermode elegantly argues, we need fictions of concord (62-64).

Simpler and more meaningful forms are felt to be a remedy for the disorder and impoverishment of adult culture. In an analysis of the uses of myths and fairy tales, Heuscher suggests that because of our culturally malnourished state, adults need a different type of literature to replenish them: "it is particularly the grown-up person who may be most in need of something that can still speak to the hidden, forgotten part of his personality" (xiv-xv). Myth, epic and fairy tale are "healthy compensation" for the psychic ravages of this materialist and excessively rational world. Similarly, Frye argues that certain types of literature, such as fairy tales, are good for the imagination because "they restore the primitive perspective that mythology has" (*Educated* 51). Yet, as Tolkien observes, these older, primitive genres have been "relegated to the nursery" (*Tree* 34). Indeed, Walsh postulates that if *The Odyssey* were presented for publication today, it would be published as a children's book with the following recommendation: "Mr Homer has a lively vein of invention and a fresh eye for detail that will entrance the nine to ten year old" (215). Although myths continue to inform twentieth-century literature, they most often appear in a self-conscious or ironic way. The few modern heroes or anti-heroes of adult fiction are tainted with irony, or they are in some way questionable; of dubious personal morality, or resorting to unethical behaviour by force of circumstance (Le Carre's George Smiley, for example). Postmodern life is either too complex or too chaotic to sustain a heroic stance; indeed, how can there be a hero when life is essentially meaningless? And there is something singularly unsatisfying about an existential hero (surely an oxymoron).

In another version of the "seeing clearly" metaphor, Frye maintains that literature is not just an amorphous dream world into which we project our desires. Instead it is two dreams: "a wish-fulfilment dream and an anxiety dream, that are focussed together, like a pair of glasses, and become a fully conscious vision" (*Educated* 43). In the view of literature as a whole, children's literature, in its resolute commitment to the upper world and profusion of heroes and heroines, could well be seen as a wish-fulfilment dream. But at the textual level, there is nevertheless a balance of the two dreams. What may be seen as the predominantly upper world of Moominland is beset by anxiety: the alarm of being stranded on an island in a storm; the threat of

the house being suffocated by a rampant vine; and the pervasive menace of the Hobgoblin. Conversely, the anxiety-filled world of Dicey's America is elevated by the familial loyalty and courage of the Tillermans, their delights in simple concrete pleasures and the rich rewards of virtue. This is a balance that Frye finds in the greatest works of literature where "we get both the up and down views, often at the same time as different aspects of one event" (*Educated* 40). In recent times, it seems that it is mainly in literature for children that we find such balance. Walsh argues that the mainstream adult novel in our century has "turned its back" on the "epic balance" and "hopefulness, that good stories need." Such attributes are generally dismissed as "unreal, deluding, wishful thinking" (215).

Perhaps it is inevitable that adult attraction to children's literature is mistaken for mere relaxation, or even, as philosopher Mary Warnock has argued, as "imaginative laziness." Warnock derides her students for reading children's books when they could be engaged in far more mind-stretching activities in adult culture. Jago convincingly refutes Warnock's charge by analysing the depth and significance of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. She claims that while much children's literature does not encompass the conceptual complexity of the adult world, it nevertheless presents the challenging and cathartic patterns of the human psyche (26-29). Hollindale too strongly criticises the "exceptionally lucid intolerance" of Warnock's argument and takes issue with her irritation that an intelligent adult would rather read *The Secret Garden* than peruse a newspaper or attend a lecture on contemporary affairs. Hollindale offers his own penetrating riposte.

None of the heavyweight papers I have read, nor the politicians I have listened to as a model Warnock adult, have given me remotely as intelligent an insight into [human] troubles as does the moving demonstration of *mens sana in corpore sano*, the diagnosis of psychosomatic illness, the celebration of therapeutic play, the castigation of parental neglect, the proof of redemptive power in constructive motivation, which I find in *The Secret Garden*. These are not simple matters, but child readers can register them, and so in more sophisticated ways could Warnock's students. (*Childness* 33)

Both Jago and Hollindale demonstrate that adults read these works more for their integrative patterning and their appeal to the deeper levels of experience than for uncomplicated relaxation or simplistic fulfilment of narrative desire. If such novels are used as escape, it is as a therapeutic retreat from the overwhelming and barren complexities of the modern world; a retreat from vulgarity and darkness to clean, wholesome and regenerative order. Lloyd Alexander makes the significant distinction between wishful thinking and hopeful dreaming. Wishful thinking is a form of "if only," and involves a retreat from reality into something regarded as impossible. Hopeful dreaming is a version of a mature delaying of gratification that suggests that the dream, or what it represents, may one day be realised (148). Here

we must remember Tolkien's famous statement that one must not confuse "the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter" (*Tree* 56). The desire to escape, to be transported from ordinary reality, usually means to be taken to a better place, not one of literal luxurious surroundings, but one in which good things happen, things which put the world right. Such experiences can offer an increased understanding of reality on our return, and of our responsibilities within it. For Adams, good literature offers us escape "from life into a wider life," and inevitably then serves to "elevate the spirit" (30).

Romance: The Upward Journey

Perhaps the most outstanding quality of children's fiction is its ability to make the spirit soar. This is not just a fulfilment of narrative desire when apparently facile plotting culminates in a happy ending. Instead it has more to do with the closeness of children's fiction to the romance form of earlier literature that functions as an enactment of the spiritual quest. Importantly, although Frye calls romance the secular scripture, it is really another version of sacred text. Frye divides mythology into sacred and secular streams. The sacred aspect is that of revealed scripture given to man by God or a higher power. The other is an evolved tradition of stories, the secular scripture, where man verbally structures his experience into a certain type of meaningful narrative. Frye states that revealed and created scriptures have to keep fighting one another, for "it is through the maintaining of this struggle, the suspension of belief between the spiritually real and the humanly imaginative, that our own mental evolution grows" (*Secular* 60-61). The concepts of sacred and secular are not truly oppositional in form, only in genesis, and Frye notes the recurrent similarities in structure between the two, citing Borges' idea that romance provides a parallel epic to the crucifixion (*Secular* 15). Like the sacred Christian scripture, romance is centrally concerned with the problem of a disorienting descent from a higher world and the climb upwards that makes some kind of return to original wholeness and goodness. Romance is a reclamation of core identity, and its movement forwards and upwards also enacts a travelling back. In contrast, the modern novel, with great phenomenological precision, tends to describe the state of chaos at the bottom of the fall, but makes few attempts at an upwards glance.

Frye's description of the foundational plot of Greek romance has very strong parallels with children's fiction. This form concerns "stories of mysterious birth, oracular prophecies about the future contortions of plot, foster parents, adventures which involve capture by pirates, narrow escapes from death, recognition of the true identity of the hero and his eventual marriage with the heroine" (*Secular* 4). It is a theme upon which most children's stories construct marvellous variations. The

capture by pirates is usually replaced by an equivalent motif of descent, and restoration of family and true identity is substituted for the fulfilment of marriage. In the last large scale children's fantasy of the twentieth century, *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman casts a backwards glance at the genre in which he is writing, and shows (in uncharacteristic metafictional style) that he is conscious of using the romance form within a romance. Echoing Scheherezade, Lyra must tell the Harpies stories to buy time. Her mind races ahead through "the story she'd told the night before, shaping and cutting and improving and adding: *parents dead; family treasure; shipwreck; escape ...* " (307). Pullman's use of italics and ellipsis here further emphasise his point that Lyra is listing defining features of romance, as well as participating in her own romance where her escape and upwards ascent will reveal her true identity as a saviour of the universe.

Romance is frequently belittled, as is children's fiction, because of its alleged naivety and excessive sentiment. Brewer attributes this to our reliance on science as the arbiter of reality, and our long acquaintance with realism and naturalism in the novel: romances now seem "silly." But this results from lack of understanding of the function of romance. Romance focuses on the deep, shared issues of our lives "in a way that both objectifies them and allows us to absorb them" (17). There is of course a similarity between the stories of naive and sentimental romance and those of folk tales and *marchen* (Frye, *Secular* 3), though even in these earlier literary forms (now associated with children), there is much more than meets the eye. Their countless retellings derive from each generation's perception of their deeper significance, their embodiment of the inner truths of human life. Falck, though not directly considering romance, argues that the dominance of literary reflexivity in the twentieth century, "the sophisticated and reality-rejecting hesitations of modern metapoeticality," is more damaging than any "mere naivety or sentimentality" because it strikes "at the very roots of our existential courage" (167). Indeed it is a pity to see this kind of reflexivity appearing in children's fiction, as it erodes the integrity of the dual address and gets in the way of the deeper meanings. Reading Pullman's in-house allusion to romance, the wink at the adult reader over the child's head, breaks the spell of literary belief and dissipates the real seriousness of involvement that is a crucial aspect of this art. This same process occurs in *Alice in Wonderland* and it accounts for much of the dissatisfaction that many readers experience in reading it as a children's book. Purely adult allusion creates irony and satire that results in disenchantment. There may be the pleasure of recognising sophisticated allusion, but it detracts from the journey of understanding that is the purpose of the romance form.

Romance does require our belief, not literal belief, but an openness to its deeper truth. This is the truth of myth that evokes, rather than mimetically represents, a knowledge that will not fit into words. Frye cites romance as "the structural core of all fiction" because it is derived from folk tale and represents "man's vision of his own life as a quest" (*Secular* 15). Its events take place in a mythological universe, not a real one, and the whole human action depicted in the plot is ritualised action (*Secular* 56). In children's texts, this is immediately evident in chivalric fantasy texts such as *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Sword in the Stone* where almost every event is obviously connected to noble or sacred ritual. For Frye, all romance is essentially anti-representational and focuses on stylised patterns and formulaic structure; the novel has developed as a progressive displacement of this structure. By the time we arrive at realism, the attention is focused not on the structure itself, but on a setting or context wherein the structures are made believable (*Secular* 36-41). But even the realistic texts of children's literature tend to place more emphasis on the formulaic structure, with an astonishing consistency of pattern: an initial fall from stability and wholeness, and movement towards the restoration of identity and the happy ending.

This emphasis on the formulaic resembles Nikolajeva's notion of children's literature as a canonical art form (*Comes of Age* 47-59). It is fundamentally different in type to the modern novel, which places emphasis on novelty and individual rendition of detail. The emphasis on structure is also a key feature in Brewer's conception of traditional literature, where the story is recognised as a pattern and has "what may be described as a pre-verbal existence" (11). Frye maintains that the earlier undisplaced versions of a story are a kind of abstraction, and he compares this to cubist and primitive painting, which present the geometrical form of images more directly than would more realistic representations (*Secular* 41). This observation resembles Merleau-Ponty's conception of the transcendent quality of the two dimensional image that has not become trapped in the details of finitude (149-51). Similarly, Brewer notes that implausibility and significance are paradoxical but related aspects of traditional stories. They enhance our ability to recognise the potential of the story to help us deal with matters of fundamental importance (6). Thus, as a ritual art form, romance leans towards the metaphysical in its theme and in its structure, further contributing to the way that children's fiction functions as secular scripture. The postmodern novel has become so "displaced" (often to the point of being formless) that it has lost its connection with romance entirely. Alternative modes of romance have rendered themselves unsatisfactory. What we now call popular romance, the Mills and Boon variety of light reading, is merely naive and sentimental, and holds little interest for readers who require depth. Here the happy ending is no earthly shadow of a higher

metaphysical truth, but a limited culmination of a hormonally grounded erotic tension devoid of symbolic force. These stories are impotent shadows of a once-noble form. Detective fiction is arguably another contemporary type of romance. It follows a ritualised pattern of descent into darkness followed by a restoration of order that is achieved through finding the identity of the perpetrator of the crime. But this form of romance is also significantly displaced. It is dependent on naturalistic detail, and more often than not is stubbornly earthed in the irony, cynicism and "bloodlust" of twentieth-century culture. Thus it too cannot reach the metaphysical heights or the inner depths of the pure form.

Frye's spatial conception of literature provides us with a variety of rich insights that evoke the sacred function of romance. He conceives of realism as having a logical "horizontal continuity," whereas romance gives us a "vertical perspective" of two opposed poles. These are the upper worlds of heaven, childhood innocence and wholeness; and the lower regions of hell, pain and wandering in confusion. Whereas realism strives to take us simply to the end of the story, the point of romance is to scramble upwards to the top" (*Secular* 50). This is similar to the metaphysical summit described by Tournier that is part of the children's story. The end point of romance is a return to that summit of "undifferentiated wholeness of the child's perception" described by Marcus, or the regaining of the heavenly mantle that is the summit of the parable of The Robe. The dynamic force between these two poles contributes to the sparse and improbable nature of the plots of children's books. The focus is on the poles themselves and not so much on the fleshing out of what happens in between them. Ultimately, this seems a far more satisfactory account of the formula plots of classic children's fiction than an explanation grounded purely in children's cognitive capacity or lower threshold of credulity. Many children's books feel important because their plots are enacting this steep ascent back up to the top. This polarisation also contributes to the "the sharp significance" we get from the genre, that in some cases evokes the paradoxes of mysticism. This is captured in the wonderful epigraph of Cresswell's *Moondial*: "Light and shade by turns, but always love." This polarised significance is also the very fabric of Earthsea, forming the creation myth of Ea that is used as the epigraph to *Tehanu*.

Only in silence the word,
only in the dark the light,
only in dying life:
bright the hawk's flight
on the empty sky.

Again, children's fiction is creating a world that is sacred. The central argument of *The Secular Scripture* points to the profundity of romance, and Frye defends it from

its sophisticated detractors who dislike its popularity and its resistance to convoluted explication. He explicitly links it to a childhood state: "The profoundest kind of literary experience, the kind that we return to after we have, so to speak, seen everything, may be very close to the experience of a child listening to a story, too spellbound to question the narrative logic" (*Secular* 51). This is another version of the journey to Higher Innocence.

There are a number of other features of romance that contribute to its metaphysical aura. Its movement towards the regaining of identity enters a hallowed realm of the psyche. Frye's notion of identity is pure mysticism reminiscent of the backward glance of Vaughan and Traherne and the primary reality of pre-birth existence in the mythology of Plato. He describes identity as connected to "a state of existence in which there is nothing to write about." It is an existence

before 'once upon a time,' and subsequent to 'and they lived happily ever after.' What happens in between are adventures, or collisions with external circumstances, and the return to identity is a release from the tyranny of these circumstances. (*Secular* 54)

This is similar to Brewer's description of traditional stories that give "glimpses of something evermore about to be" (19). In the myth of *The Robe*, the soul recovers her forgotten royalty (identity) at the metaphysical summit, and in the fantasies of children's literature there is very commonly a regaining of royal or noble heritage. Irene discovers the lineage she shares with her holy grandmother; this connects her literally to her royal bloodline, and metaphorically to the spiritual force of Christ. The Pevensie children attain their identities as kings and queens of Narnia, and more importantly, discover their heritage as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, and of God. The lowly Ged assumes his predestined role as archmage of Earthsea, and in *Tehanu* peasant-born Therru is destined to be archmage and recover her true descent from the original inhabitants of Earthsea, the dragonlords. In realistic fiction such as *Homecoming* or Katherine Paterson's *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, the protagonists are apparently merely orphans in search of who they really are. But their royal status is to be found in the moral beauty of their decisions in the real world: this too is an ennobling process. Every realistic displacement of the quest pattern in these novels is nonetheless subordinate to the attainment of identity that is both discovery and recovery. Thus even these grimly realistic novels are more romance in their movement, meaning and structure than the extremely displaced versions of their adult postmodern counterparts that have evolved into the new discrete postmodernist forms. The displacements of children's fiction are more like those of Victorian literature, where they remain subordinate to an overriding conformity to morality and a just notion of providence that closely resemble the clear polarities and restitution of romance. Just as landscape is a genre but

Impressionism a style within it (Scholes 2), in children's literature, romance is more properly the genre and realism an internal style.

The great journey of romance is the upward sweep towards the individual's regained identity. This is the movement of eros in its Platonic sense. The incarnated soul, sensing its loss and incompleteness, seeks to regain wholeness in beauty and goodness in their various symbolic manifestations. But even in this realm, all is not sweetness and light. Frye observes that in the ritualised formulaic world of romance, violence and sex are upward propulsions and thus part of the erotic drive (in its broadest sacred sense) that pushes towards the metaphysical summit. And here again the force of polarisation is at work. Violence becomes polarised into the dynamic of good and evil: "angels of light" stand opposed to "giants of the dark"; and sex is sublimated throughout the action. Frye refers to the motifs of sublimation in Plato and Dante as supreme examples (*Secular* 183). In much postmodern fiction, sex and violence are present as themselves, and far from being sublimated they are indulged and inflated, left in their earthiest forms and highly regarded in themselves. But in children's fiction, the forces of polarisation and sublimation are made very strong narrative principles, not just to protect the innocence of children, but also because they are features of the sacred quest (and are explicit religious viewpoints and disciplines in real life). Although there are occasional graphic depictions of the giants of the dark meeting their end, such as the battles in Tolkien and Lewis, they reinforce the dispensation of justice, rather than serving as bloodlust.

Through a consideration of the romance form, we see more clearly that the absence of erotic love in children's fiction is not a sublimation that involves a polite displacement into a more acceptable form, but rather a channelling of energy towards a more spiritual purpose. It functions almost as the reverse of the Freudian notion of sublimation that regards spiritual yearnings as disguised transformations of primal sexual desire. In the context of romance, it is sex that is a less important and displaced version of a more real spiritual desire. This absence of sex in children's fiction is also equivalent to the virginity motif in romance that symbolises an unviolated aspect of one's core identity (*Secular* 86). Importantly, the virgin figures of romance are redemptive in their "innocence and goodness" and also in "astuteness in management and intrigue." Competence adds another dimension to innocence, and they are often represented as having powers of healing (*Secular* 87). Mary Lennox exemplifies all these roles of the virgin heroine, just as the whole novel exemplifies the larger themes of romance. Mary's journey begins near the end point of descent in the loveless environment of India, and thence to the initial barrenness of Misselthwaite Manor. Because *The Secret Garden* is a novel, there is a

measure of displacement from the archetypal romance form, and this accounts for Mary's character defects made plain at the outset. Although she certainly does represent innocence and goodness, in embodied form she is initially wilful and angry; but her sullenness is clearly shown to be a result of damaged innocence rather than an arbitrary development of character. Her role is almost entirely redemptive. She achieves her own salvation as she regains her original goodness (identity), and is the healer of the damaged Colin and the wasted garden. She also exhibits astuteness in the management of the adults around her and in eliminating the unnecessary intrigue that surrounds Colin's illness, while judiciously preserving the beneficial intrigue necessary to the proper tending of Colin and the garden.

In the far more displaced version of romance in *Homecoming*, Dicey's role is nevertheless consummately redemptive. She brings herself and her family towards their true identity as they journey in hope towards their unknown home; and she is highly competent in survival skills, becoming practically and emotionally resourceful. She deftly manages intrigue when it is necessary, always judging how much can be told to inquiring adults, and what can be told to her siblings. Her younger sister, Maybeth, is another virginal heroine, but incapable of intrigue because she is intellectually "slow." In this, and in her vulnerability and particular beauty, she functions as a symbol of all that is innocent and good. Dicey's redemption of her family's situation is given impetus by her desire to protect this innocent child figure, and her grandmother is similarly motivated to fight for the family's cohesion in the face of Maybeth's helplessness. Thus Dicey is the redemptive heroine who accomplishes salvation; Maybeth is "the very spectacle of innocence" against whom the goodness of others is measured and who kindles their desire for redemption.

Frye says that the motif of secrecy is often associated with the heroine of romance who often works under cover until her identity can be safely revealed. This is why Mary Lennox must hide the secret garden (a symbol for her own rejuvenation) and Colin's recovery until their return to health is sufficiently established to risk exposure. In *Tom's Midnight Garden*, the identity of the mysterious Hatty is not revealed until Tom is "ready" and has experienced enough of the garden (hidden out-of-time) to begin to comprehend the time's mysteries. This is the process of his own ascent from the defiled Eden of the dingy backyard to understanding his place in the timeless metaphysical universe. Of course children's literature abounds with secrecy and intrigue and it makes for narrative suspense, but in these classic works it is an integral part of the romance pattern far more than it is an enticement to read. It protects the pearl of great price, and the kingdom of heaven (the treasure buried in the field) of Biblical parable (Matt 13.44-46), until the time is right for them to be

revealed. Secrecy is frequently associated with the motif of mysterious birth, or amnesia concerning one's true origins, and allied to a descent in status (*Secular* 102), again a critical motif in The Robe parable. This is so of Lyra in *Northern Lights* who for some time lives without proper knowledge of either of her parents and lives a relatively poor life in an uncaring scholar's world. This hiddenness of origin is very frequently associated with that of being temporarily or permanently parentless, and it is reflected in the bewildered orphans who so thickly populate the plots of children's fiction. The motif is just as strong in realistic fiction as it is in fantasy. The parents of the Tillerman children are dimly real yet remote, having disappeared in inexplicable circumstances. In both fantasy and in realism, it seems that the protagonists must descend into some form of hell and journey sufficiently in the vale of suffering and bewilderment before they can attain the knowledge of who they really are. Like the merchant who finds the hidden treasure in the Gospel parable, the heroes and heroines of children's fiction must sell everything they own (in other words lose their identity, or in Biblical terms, self) in the process of descent. Only then will they be able to purchase the field and have access to the buried treasure that is the kingdom of heaven. This is a very clear example of how the sacred and secular scriptures are one.

In the sacred scripture, the descent is into the darkness of hell (Christ's descent before resurrection). In the secular scripture, the descent is frequently into an underworld, often of caverns or corridors, or into a labyrinth or under a mountain. The pattern is particularly clear in Lewis' *The Silver Chair* because it is modelled on the romance motifs of medieval myth and legend. Prince Rilian is lured by a Lamia figure to a cavernous underworld where he is made to forget his true identity that can only be regained through a perilous ascent. In *The Hobbit*, the descent into goblin caverns yields literal but dangerously seductive treasure in the underworld of the dragon's lair, but the real treasure is the destruction of evil in the upper world: the slaying of the dragon, and Bilbo's gaining of his real identity as reluctant but courageous hero. The moral splendour that lies within the symbol of the riches is what Frye terms romance's "more authentic form of the treasure hoard" (*Secular* 121). There is a descent in all four Earthsea books: the first in the facing of the shadow from "the lightless coasts of death's kingdom" (*Wizard* 15); the second is to the tombs of Atuan; the third a return to the realm of the dead; and in the fourth novel, *Tehanu*, the whole society has descended into hell.

During the descent, the protagonist may encounter a version of the doppelganger, often a sinister figure, and confront the shadow self before the movement of ascent can begin. In the general form of romance, the doppelganger is associated with the theme of double identity and twins and descent into a lower subterranean or

submarine world where one faces one's mirror image (*Secular* 106-08, 117-18). This gives spiritual weight and wisdom to the journey, as integration of the inner psychic forces must be achieved in addition to confronting monsters in the outer kingdoms. In *The Secret Garden* (years before Jung published his theory of the shadow) Burnett shapes a fateful meeting between Mary and her cousin Colin, her malformed mirror image. The encounter takes place in the dark, cavernous corridors of the manor and Mary must bring Colin into the light before a restoration can be effected. Another version of pattern is fleetingly intimated, but not developed, in *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*. At the end of the world, so close to Aslan's country, Lucy looks over the ship's side and encounters "a little Sea Girl of about her own age" who is a sea shepherdess in the ocean underworld: "The girl, gliding in the shallow water, and Lucy, leaning over the bulwark, came opposite to one another" (117). On the farthest shores of Le Guin's Earthsea, Ged's dark doppelganger is a twin figure who becomes the pivotal element in the resolution of the plot. Again "at world's end," Ged faces his shadow, "utterly black," who takes the shifting forms of all his enemies. Ged must embrace them as forces within himself before his own spiritual blunder and its effects on the world can be righted: "Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one" (197-98).

Frye states that mirrors and clocks are important elements of romance because they help to objectify our experiences in the dream-like night world of descent. This is related to sense of identity in ordinary experience, where we are unable to see our own image or understand our existence in time without such devices (*Secular* 117). In *Tom's Midnight Garden*, the descent into the night world is through a clock that enables Tom to measure the distortions of time that significantly shape his eventual understanding. In *Northern Lights*, Lyra's connection to deeper forces of reality and her own descent is initiated by her possession of the alethiometer, a prophetic clock, and through it she meets Will (her thematic twin) in *The Subtle Knife*. In early Christian romance, this meeting of the dark double involves a separating of truth from error, the real from the demonic double (Frye, *Secular* 140-42). This is very obviously the case in Ged's confrontation when he must separate his good self from his bad before achieving integration, but it is also the case in other examples. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo comes to recognise his brotherhood with Gollum, who is finally identified as a spiritually withered hobbit. Mary Lennox recognises the errors of her own nature in the neurotic Colin, and even Tom Long must experience intimations of mortality and his own limitations through his meeting with Hatty.

Frye states that romance commonly uses dark sayings and riddles (*Secular* 122), and they are a common feature in children's fiction. Bilbo has a riddle contest with Gollum in the depths of the mountain at the end point of his fall and they are the

key to his liberation. In most children's fiction the enigmatic sayings are at the beginning of the journey and have the function of supernatural prophecy or divine guidance. Aslan's four mysterious commands to the children when they begin the descent of *The Silver Chair* perform this function, as do the mysterious prophecies which surround Lyra's role in *Northern Lights*. They hint at her part in determining the fate of the universe. But even Dicey's refrain of "home is the hunter" functions in this way; its full meaning is elusive and it provides a focus, rather like a talisman, for her quest. The use of a special language is also a common feature of romance, and it has the effect of enclosing the story in "a glass case in a verbal museum" (Frye, *Secular* 110). It is a way of putting walls around the garden. Mary Lennox must acquire the Yorkshire dialect before she can be fully admitted to the regenerative world of the moor. It appears as the rich sparse dialect of Garner's *The Stone Book*, that not only adds verisimilitude, but also signals to readers that they are entering a special world. Le Guin uses simple, poetic, and exceptionally refined language, so perfected it is redolent with significance. It is certainly like a glass case around a specimen, or the grove of trees that surrounds the mysteries of Roke. Frye extends his observations of special language to the notion of "charm" where words are used as magic to cast a binding spell (*Secular* 110). This is the final state of descent that is equivalent to "imprisonment or paralysis or death itself." This concept is enacted in *Tehanu* when Ged and Tenar, at the very end of their descent, are literally paralysed by the binding words of the malevolent wizard. But the linguistic charm of romance has another more positive function as it casts a spell over the reader, paralysing disbelief, signalling entry to a spiritually resonant world.

The correspondences between children's fiction and romance are almost inexhaustible. But the point of this discussion is to demonstrate how the romance form in children's fiction creates a scripture that is secular in form, but whose meaning is firmly metaphysical, so that the genre serves a religious function amidst the bleakness of adult culture. This is evident in two texts that stand almost at opposite ends of the children's literature spectrum. *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and Alan Garner's *The Stone Book* (1979) are both structured on the dialectical themes of descent and ascent, and both are very clearly connected to the sacred. While *The Princess and the Goblin* is a fantasy that obviously concerns a supernatural realm, *The Stone Book* purports to be a realistic social history framed through a child's narrow but vivid perspective. Yet despite its claims to realism, it is far more a romance than it is a modern novel. In its sparse text, disorienting perspectives and lyrical intensity, this novel easily fits into the categories of mystical fancy and romance.

Both books are grounded in the spiritual mystery of elemental things, evoking a sense of deep connection with, and thrill from, the ancient and primitive. Stone is the thematic focus here and it is the medium of descent and ascent. It is the rock upon which truth is founded, and a link between earth and heaven. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, the descent takes place in rocky caverns of the goblins and miners. Similarly, in *The Stone Book* the descent is into the natural stone of the cave journey. But both novels also use stone to involve an ascent to a metaphysical summit. Irene ascends through the stone walls of the castle to its tower, and Mary ascends to the top of the spire constructed by her stone-mason father. On the heights, each has a peak experience of wholeness that is explicitly religious in nature. On top of the spire as the world turns around her, Mary is giddy with delight and heightened perspective; her father's voice crosses "parishes and townships," and "everywhere across the plain [are] churches" (22-24). Irene's ascent is to the topmost tower of the mysterious mansion where she encounters the Christ-like presence of her grandmother. In both experiences the heroines are held safe by family members and put in touch with their genealogical heritage, symbolic of a reconnection to identity. In *The Stone Book*, there is much more displacement and Mary's father seeks to connect her to her family rather than to God, but the imagery is so mystical that this movement cannot be discounted. The books share the unusual feature that the romance journey begins with an ascent that is quickly followed by a descent into the night world of subterranean caves. Irene journeys through this descent under the guidance of her grandmother, just as Mary is led by her father. In both cases, this carries with it the religious implication that God is with us, even through the worst of times. The symbolism is obvious in Macdonald's text, but it is interesting to see how the apparently secular text uses the same pattern. In a remarkable parallel, both children are given a version of "the golden string" to find their way. Irene's is woven at her grandmother's loom and tempered by fire; Garner's much more displaced version is a ball of silken yarn woven from rejects from the family livelihood.

The eros theme that inspires the ascent of romance is a fundamental principle of both novels. Irene experiences two unions: her kiss with Curdie at the end is not so much a chaste expression of a sexual theme as it is representative of unity with the twin. There is a strong hint that Curdie is, in a sense, a prince, in his courtly manners and his insistence on making amends to Irene for disbelieving her vision of her grandmother. In this he is her mirror image. More important, however, is Irene's reunion with her grandmother, which represents a union with the divine. In Garner's novel, Mary finds identity through connecting with the generations that have carved in and visited the cave. Frye notes that the descent of romance is often genealogically based, and "the crucial event is the discovery of the real relation

between the chief characters and their parents" (*Secular* 122). Here this is expanded to a union with all humanity as Mary surveys the world from the top of the tower. At the end of the tale, she too achieves intimations of a divine union as she listens to William bawling the hymn.

Oh, the years of Man are the looms of God
Let down from the place of the sun;
Wherein we are weaving always,
Till the mystic work is done! (60)

Afterwards, she hears the last cry of summer, and reads the stone book, finding within it "all the stories of the world and the flowers of the flood" (61). This is an extraordinarily epiphanic ending. Mary does not literally end her ascent on top of the spire, but in the heights of consciousness as she recognises the wholeness, purpose and identity that link her with all the generations of the world woven on the loom of God. This tiny book creates a very high degree of integration and design that matches this sense of divine patterning. William's loom has created the string of silk which, as it falls in patterns on the cave floor, mimics the fossil patterns of the flowers that Mary sees later in the stone book.

Frye's description of the principle of subterranean descent and Garner's own prose elaboration of the pattern are remarkably close. Frye associates the pattern of meandering and descent into the night world with the labyrinth of Palaeolithic caves, "where we are surrounded by the shapes of animals" painted on walls. This is a retracing of "the oldest imaginative steps of humanity," and it is a movement of immense significance (*Secular* 111-12). Mary finds a bull painted on the wall and the imprint of a human hand. Here again we have the deepest experiences of human life forming the subject of a children's novel. Mary says the cave is "the most secret place she had ever seen. A bull drawn for secrets. A mark and a hand alone with the bull in the dark that nobody knew" (52). The bull is marked with the arrow, her father's stone-mason mark. Here it not his signature, but one that was drawn in primitive times, and its discovery establishes the family's sacred continuity with countless generations.

The uniqueness of the child's vision is an important part of both these versions of romance. Mary's father can no longer reach the cave and its special vision of mythic primitive significance. The cave entrance has been altered by the fruits of learning. The mining and machines of industrial civilisation have barred the traditional entrance from above ground and access is restricted to children able to negotiate the labyrinth of narrow cave tunnels and apertures: "before the Engine Vein and that chap who could read books, we must have been able to come at it from the top. But that's all gone" (57). This symbolism goes back further in time and encompasses

Biblical mythology, as Mary's father tells her that "we have to go before we're too big to get past the fall, though I reckon years back the road was open; if you knew it was there" (56). The fall is The Fall of civilisation from Eden into knowledge and the problems of progress, as well as the individual fall out of childhood to adulthood. In contrast, the sacred knowledge of this cave ritual is special and secret. In *The Stone Book* it is only available to the initiated in Mary's family: "The hill. We pass it on: and once you've seen it, you're changed for the rest of your days" (56). In *The Princess and the Goblin*, the grandmother can only be seen by those who are ready. After her experience in the caverns, and her trust in the string, Irene acts with a new sense of maturity and more fully assumes her identity as princess (her robe of glory); though as Curdie's mother reminds us, she is also a good girl "and that's more than being a princess" (151). Royalty is merely symbolic of a greater glory.

Romance is often associated with "the release of life-giving powers that come with the spring and the rain," and Frye regards this as another representation of the riches of the treasure hoard (*Secular* 121). Water is an important agent in both novels. Irene's passage to the underground caverns is from a spring that gushes from the hillside, and it later becomes a cleansing flood that releases the upper world inhabitants from the threat of the goblins. In Garner's apparently realistic universe, Mary too experiences a similar ritualistic and ultimately oceanic cleansing. Her underground initiation begins where water flows beneath a hillside; when she emerges from the cave, she washes her boots in the spring that comes out of the hill, that in turn soaks into Lifeless Moss, "and Lifeless Moss spill[s] by brooks into the sea" (57).

While Macdonald's highly symbolic and timeless world is linked to the sacred realm of scripture, Garner's novel provides "realistic" proof of the same truths in a plausible secular setting. Mary may not assume an obvious royal heritage, but her descent to the underworld has left her changed. Heaven and hell may be more displaced than those poles in Macdonald, and more secular, but they still refer to spiritual experiences of ascent and the interconnectedness of all things.

They went back to the shaft, and up, and out. The sky seemed a different place. All things led to the bull and the mark and the hand in the cave. Trees were trying to find it with their roots. The rain in the clouds must fall to the ground and into the rock to the Tough Tom. (54)

The lives of Mary and Irene have both been given a wider and deeper context of meaning. For the involved adult reader of these texts, there is powerful affirmation that life is meaningful and this affirmation is sufficient to enhance and even alter real lives. This is so very different to the message of Winterson's postmodern vision. Winterson asserts that "the future and the present and the past exist only in our

minds.... And even the most solid of things and the most real, the best-loved and the well-known, are only hand-shadows on the wall. Empty space and points of light." Garner, on the other hand, shows that the past is real and is part of us. The hand-shadows on the wall in his text are not only real, but sacred.

Ruined Adult – Ruined Child

In *The Secular Scripture*, Frye argues that romance has the potential to do considerably more than provide a cosmic map of human experience. The reader is "the mental traveler" and "the hero" of what he has read. This is because the message of all romance is that "the story is about you; and it is the reader who is responsible for the way literature functions, both socially and individually" (186). This supports the point in the previous chapter that reading involves a crucial component of choice, of text and of the type of reader one wants to be, and it also confirms Carson's claim that reading develops character. Altieri also moves towards this conclusion, stating that texts empower us through "our senses of who we can become by virtue of our provisionally taking on the stances towards the world that the artist makes articulate" (76). Thus reading must inevitably enter the realm of ethics and value. For Frye, the reader/hero

contemplating the cycle of descent into subjects and objects, where we die each other's lives, as Heraclitus says, and of ascent to identity where we live each other's deaths, is a Moses who can see the promised land, in contrast to the Joshua who merely conquers Canaan, and so begins another cycle of descent. (*Secular* 186)

Such a vision of the promised land and such a resistance to the endless cycles of descent (where contemporary culture has foundered) suggest that the up-beat universal pattern of romance is actually a form of "not-self." It is the antithesis of personal self-expression; it is participation in a myth, an objective formulaic recreation of the way up.

Not all children's literature follows this pattern, especially in the last thirty years when many texts have lost the romance visions and have tended towards becoming mirrors of their dark adult counterpart. As they "fall" out of innocence, children have a natural interest in sex and violence, darkness and despair, and this is now perceived as a market. This is a particular problem because of the decline of ethical criticism in our society, and the preference for relativism and plurality of interpretation. In *The Nimble Reader*, McGillis invites us to become agile readers, and he clearly and justifiably enjoys jousting with the theoretical issues that surround the reading of children's books. He deftly states that "a critical activity that concentrates on the polysemous nature of language has the potential to liberate

readers from reified codes of meaning" (19). But such enjoyment of intellectual play can prevent us from properly considering the affective power of art. McGillis expresses disquiet over Inglis' assertion that "the shocking ugliness and cruelty of image and action in the latest horror comics and movies can only be horrible and harmful and any sane teacher will want to keep his children out of such harm's way" (*Promise* 6). McGillis labels this "as an extreme example of evaluative criticism" that "implies moral worth," and he notes, somewhat ruefully, that children's literature and its criticism have tended to be didactic. Yet surely an attention to ethics is more useful than pondering on being liberated from "reified codes of meaning," a notion that will not hold up sensibly in ordinary discourse. Abbs regards this kind of liberation as a sign of the deterioration of culture because it disregards any notion of ethical coherence or human dignity and meaning. It results in a situation where "the intellectual has provided explicit justification for a society which is only held together by the relentless drive for more power and more profit." Authors write to sell, and without any serious moral criticism "the artist fits himself to the prevailing orthodoxy to achieve success" ("Mechanical" 227). This is certainly the case with children's authors who proclaim that they write what they write because it is what children want.

A recent trend in children's literature is the emergence of cynical fantasies that are capturing both the adult and children's market. The child element of these books is underscored by a smart wisecracking cynicism. As in modern films for children, this addition makes these cultural products more marketable to adults, though this has some disturbing implications concerning what is happening to our notion of adulthood. Some time ago Postman noticed the beginning of this unfortunate development when he linked the dissolution of the secret garden of childhood to a similar destruction of adulthood. Similarly, Griswold observes that the erosion of boundaries between adult and children's literature has resulted in children becoming "more cynical, more parodistic, more adultlike. Sensibilities have changed." Hence these books are not written for "children of all ages" but for "adults of all ages" (39-40). Griswold refers to this dual literature as "shared story," but it seems that what is being shared is not the traditional sharing of the best in life and human nature, but something much lower. It represents a dumbing-down for adults (a situation that Mary Warnock may indeed justly criticise), and it does not result in an elevation for children. Instead it is a cynical degradation of their innocence. Cynicism, sardonic irony and "the culture of cute" are not suitable for children. The very notion of cuteness is an adult imposition reflecting a radical impoverishment of vision. This situation exemplifies Gardner's assertion that art is tending to become "either trivial or false." It arises when "a culture's world view and aesthetic theory have gone awry," allowing artists "to mistake bad art for

good" (16). Postman is one of the few loudly polemical voices who resist this decline. He shows us that adulthood is disappearing with the vanishing of childhood, but he is far more concerned with the destruction of childhood itself. He regards this as a social disaster with long term consequences.

To have to stand and wait as the charm, malleability, innocence and curiosity of children are degraded and then transmogrified into the lesser features of pseudo-adulthood is painful and embarrassing and, above all, sad. (xiii)

It is hard to say how much mainstream children's literature will resist the forces of cultural despair. Will it continue to assert core human values and remain committed to the wellbeing of its nominal addressees, or will it discard its commitment to romance and evolve into a new, more lucrative genre? In "Promising Happiness: The Good Writer, the Perfect Reader, the Obedient Consumer," a recent postscript to *The Promise of Happiness*, Inglis examines the present state of children's literature through a *fin-de-siècle* perspective. He stridently attacks the present age of cultural despair, and decries the postmodern theories of the "Parisian Pentecostals." Inglis laments that they have "invented a way of talking about the tales which constitute the humanity of the Humanities which extrudes moral principle and refuses ethics" ("Promising" 61). But children's literature continues to function as a corner in the "conversation of culture" in which the storyteller still feels and claims a sense of responsibility to the reader ("Promising" 66). Responsibility is partly achieved through the creation of heroes and heroines, but Inglis regrets the gradual erosion of the concept of hero into the irksome notion of the role model. To clarify his argument, Inglis makes the distinction between the individualist notion of being a character, and having character, the latter defined as "consistency of attributes and dependability of conduct" ("Promising" 69). One might speculate that chainsaw artists and the cynical anti-heroes of contemporary fiction are being characters in their struggles towards their unique personal vision. On the other hand, the protagonists of children's fiction do indeed have characters in Inglis' sense and inspire others to do likewise; hence Carson's praise of her childhood reading.

However, Inglis himself succumbs to cultural angst and points out that although children's fiction still retains this sense of character, it is nevertheless undergoing change, and he invites the reader to speculate upon the character of the heroines of stories written for children in 2030. He predicts that this future heroine will be without "the radical innocence" that Yeats desired for his daughter. With this in mind, it is interesting to examine the characters of the heroines in two highly regarded recent works of children's fiction that are representative of the last days before the millennium. Both Le Guin's *Tehanu* and Pullman's *Northern Lights* are

substantial and thoughtful fantasies. They both reflect Docker's definition of *fin-de-siècle* culture as a time of intellectual turbulence, "awash with futuristic glimmerings, prophecies," as well as Gothic "forebodings" and "forecasts of disaster" (103). *Northern Lights*, the first of a trilogy, is a vivid elaboration of cultural despair and its consequences, and the power of childhood to resist and redeem it. Le Guin's novel is an unexpected postscript to a trilogy, and contains some of her most mature and heartfelt reflections. Each novel has child figures who are dramatically deprived of radical innocence. Le Guin creates a novel fashioned around the image of a "burned child" and Pullman creates the concept of the "severed child," both potent images of the destruction of innocence in postmodern society.

The heroines of both novels have unconventional roles. Therru is so damaged, physically and emotionally scarred from incest and burning, that despite her thematic importance and eponymous role (as *Tehanu*), she remains a shadowy, almost entirely passive, figure. For most of the novel, the narrative is not focused on the child protagonist, but instead on the bitter and enraged perspective of the middle-aged Tenar. Thus it is difficult to identify with Therru as a heroine, even when it becomes apparent that it is she who will ultimately save a degraded and decayed culture. We remain too shocked by her damage, as we are meant to be, and this is Le Guin's way of continuing the tradition of bringing out the best in us: this novel is a very savage dystopia. Thus *Tehanu* is less a children's book than it is an adult's. But it belongs in the children's genre, not only because it is the last of the Earthsea novels, but also because its indictment is so much stronger when read in the context of a child's environment. It is also arguably still a children's novel in its assertion of value, and because it is wholesome and healthy in the face of the darkness it abhors; but its place in the children's canon will always be controversial. More than any other novel published for children (and because it is published for and will be read by children) *Tehanu* demonstrates the truth of Inglis' declaration.

Telling a story to children presupposes our having a picture of how we want, and hope that those children will be. Inextricable from this wanting and hoping – Jacqueline Rose is right about this, if nothing else – will be as keen a sense as possible of all the things that the present generation has ill done and done to others' harm, which once it took for the exercise of virtue. ("Promising" 68)

It is hard to see the mutilation of a child as anything other than the horror that it is. But it is entirely possible that the gradual degradation of childhood, often sanctioned by an unquestioned belief in progress, has eventual consequences that are far more than what Postman claims as "sad."

Lyra, the child protagonist of *Northern Lights*, takes centre stage as anti-heroine, and there are echoes of the early unredeemed Mary Lennox in her defiant behaviour; but unlike *The Secret Garden*, for much of the novel Lyra's heroic role is not clear because the reader is confused by the uncertain moral orientation of the culture she inhabits. Her world is confusing and dark, epitomised in the "dark materials" epigraph from Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "all these in their pregnant causes mixed/confusedly." Even the relevance of the epigraph is itself confounding. The atmosphere of Lyra's world is "full of dark intentions, like the forms of thoughts not born" (390). So dark are the adult intentions in this world that Lyra comes to suspect that the mysterious Dust must be in fact good, because it is reviled by the adult world which is so thick with deceit and betrayal. Here is *fin-de-siècle* turbulence and Gothic foreboding. Uncertainty is supreme.

Tehanu also creates a telling reflection of current cultural despair. There is a universal (not just local) loss of innocence and goodness, wholeness and cohesion. Earthsea is beset by marauding gangs and thieves, and there has been "a loss of peace and trust." Youths behave as strangers in their communities, abusing hospitality, stealing and begging. Magic (religion) has weakened and is "going amiss": charms and spells have lost their potency, and traditional sorcerers have been usurped by charlatans promising health, power and even immortality (strongly suggesting the bogus spiritual fashions of The New Age). As if in direct answer to Yeats and Inglis, it is a world where "we must turn again to the centre or be lost." The unravelling is taking place at every level, and even Ged, the "hero" of the previous three novels, has lost his magic and is impotently self-absorbed in fruitless shame. Significantly, Le Guin articulates that despair is no mere eruption of perennial discontent: "What Lark had said about gangs and thieves was not just the complaint each generation makes that things aren't what they used to be and the world's going to the dogs." Instead it is a "time of ruining, the end of an age" (22-23).

Whilst Le Guin's sense of cultural despair is recreated in a completely secondary world, Pullman creates a strangely parallel universe using features of our real world to embody his disquiet. The centre here (world governments and religion) is of dubious morality and engaged in a violent and possibly evil struggle to keep hold. The villains seem to be the theologians and the scientists, and the decay is associated, at least on one level, with Dust. There is the light and dark here, but it seems that they may have reversed their orientation. Pullman's universe has no clear design from which the current state of affairs has deviated, and it is not until we reach the end of the last novel of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass*, that things even

begin to come clear. Earthsea at least has a centre, even if it is falling apart: the light is always light, and the dark so very dark.

Overt thematic allusions to sexuality in both these novels also signal a significant departure from traditional children's fiction. They function as urgent manifestations of cultural despair, but also as part of the mystical notion of innocence. Eros has the potential to be lowered wholly into the material world and there degraded into lust, or contained and thereby sacralised and used as an energy of propulsion in the upward quest towards wholeness. One of the most important and terrible motifs in *Tehanu* is the rape of Therru by her father, and it prompts a questioning of all traditional values. The shocked Tenar can only cry out from her inadequacy.

What's a child for? To be used. To be raped, to be gelded.... When I lived in the dark places that was what they did there. And when I came here, I thought I'd come out into the light. I learned the true words. And I had my man, I bore my children, and I lived well. In the broad daylight. And in the broad daylight, they did that – to the child. In the meadows by the river ... I am trying to find out where I can live, Moss. (55)

Tenar refuses to fill this void with platitudes, and instead she acknowledges the long-lasting consequences and irreparable consequences of human evil.

But it was not enough, the right and the truth. There was a gap, a void, a gulf, on beyond the right and the truth. Love, her love for Therru and Therru's for her, made a bridge across that gap, a bridge of spider web, but love did not fill or close it. Nothing did that. And the child knew it better than she. (142)

But this is not bleak self-indulgent despair; this is facing the horror of life and responding well. Therru's sexual violation and ruining is at once a measure of the horror of cultural decline and an impulse to stop the decay. It fills Tenar with a passionate power to protect Therru. She cries that Therru has been "wronged, wronged beyond all repair, but [she is] not wrong" (73), and it is Therru's ruining that helps to create a clear value, the protection of innocence, that can be clung to in the last days. It gives to the reader Frye's "energy of repudiation." The corruption of innocence is the bottom line of cultural decay, and it is also the place where regeneration can most needfully take place.

Thus despite its radical darkness, *Tehanu* remains committed to the central concerns of traditional childhood. Even the sexual dimension hints at the mystical power of innocence, and this in turn relates the secular to the sacred scripture. Therru, because of her injuries, is condemned to an apparently loveless life. No man will have her, and she must be celibate. Yet both her injuries and her implied celibacy suggest that there is a power in this contained sexuality that connects to her ultimate destiny as archmage. Moss tells Tenar that mages must remain celibate to

preserve their (good) power (92), and now Ged is only free to have a sexual relationship with Tenar because he no longer controls magic. On this level, more properly the structural level of romance, Therru's violation does not just function as an admonitory irreparable corruption of innocence. Instead she is the suffering hero who sacrifices her life to save the world. Indeed, those in the novel connected to magic recognise immediately that Therru has great power (83). She is virtually a Christ figure in her torture and her capacity to redeem the world through her suffering. More than any other heroine in children's fiction, Therru embodies Frye's observation that the romantic heroine is the secular counterpart of the Christian Passion (*Secular* 88).

In *Northern Lights*, the twin principles of violated and contained sexuality are strong thematic elements that drive the narrative, and are linked to the descent and ascent pattern of romance. We are alerted to Lyra's own status as a sexual being when Pantalaimon looks away when she is naked (78), and at the end of the novel, when she approaches puberty, she knows she cannot be naked with Roger in the bath (365). But it becomes established as a much wider theme when it is suggested that prepubescent children do not attract Dust (89-90). Later, this principle is developed into a driving universal force when it is revealed that the dark forces of humanity are severing prepubescent children from their daemons to harness the unique form of energy that will be released. This power, and only this power, will enable humans to enter into alternative universes. Unlike adults, children have daemons whose animal forms are not fixed, and this seems to be associated with the vulnerable potential and lack of rigidity associated with innocence. This innocence is very strongly connected to sexual dormancy. The imagery that suggests interference or violation of this innocence is very frank. The Gobblers, who seek to separate children from their daemons, are "child cutters" (181) who "slice" (46), and what begins as "tearing" becomes known later as "intercision" as the scientific model is advanced (274). The word intercision suggests circumcision, and although there is no direct relationship between these operations, the resemblance reinforces the sexual nature of the daemon concept. Mrs Coulter's defence of intercision to Lyra further confirms this.

... the doctors do it for the children's own good, my love. Dust is something bad, something wrong, something evil and wicked. Grown-ups and their daemons are infected with Dust so deeply that it's too late for them. They can't be helped.... But a quick operation on children means they're safe from it. (283-84)

There is also a strong taboo on contacting another's daemon that again suggests sexuality. It is "the great prohibition"; when it occurs, it is "as if an alien hand [has] reached right inside where no hand [has] a right to be, and reached something deep

and precious." It provokes "disgust" (276). Lyra's daemon is an integral and intimate part of her, her "own dear soul" (279), but at the same time "at the age we call puberty ... daemons bring all sorts of troublesome thoughts and feelings and that's what lets Dust in" (284-85). When daemons stray too far, their humans experience "a strange tormenting feeling," and a "part physical pain deep in the chest, part intense sadness and love" (194). This is suggestive of the spiritual Platonic charge of the eros principle, where sexuality is conceived as the splitting of the being in two as part of the incarnation of the soul, resulting in the drive to regain undifferentiated wholeness. Essentially, intercision is the ultimate violation of childhood sexuality and equivalent to the rape and burning of a child in Le Guin's novel: it has physical, emotional and spiritual consequences. Where Tenar asks "what's a child for, if such a thing can happen," Lyra cries out when she knows that Roger is to be cut: "Do they all hate children so much that they want to tear them like this?... Why *do* they do these things to children?" (389).

These are not the usual innocent child figures who Marcus says emerge as shining contrast to historical ages of cultural despair. Instead they are corrupted by their times. Lyra Belacqua is later renamed Lyra Silvertongue, and this later appellation doubly hints at her skill as a liar. What begins as imaginative embroidery of the truth to friends later becomes a talent for full-blown lies. She is a smart child, street wise, who speaks with an uncouth dialect and smokes, a "coarse and greedy little savage, for the most part" (37). She is sanguine, practical, and lacks imagination (249), and an unlikely heroine. She, too, is not seen as innately bad, or "wrong," but rather a victim of her upbringing and her destiny. Like Therru, she is destined to bring about the end of destiny itself, and if she fails "it will be the triumph of despair" (310).

But for all Lyra's uncouthness, her experience of the suffering of others awakens her from the slumbering innocence of childhood, and this leads her to deep and regenerative emotions that inspire her to action and help fulfil her redemptive destiny. She feels "pity and gentleness" for the wild, exiled Iorek (195), and when she finds the shattered Tony Makarios who has been severed from his daemon, she feels "a passionate pity and sorrow for the half-boy" (215). As she begins to fully comprehend what has happened to Tony, "revulsion struggled with compassion and compassion won" (217). In *Tehanu*, it is Tenar who struggles with these same emotions as she confronts the brutalised maimed child. It is her indignant compassion that forces her to cry out to the forces of darkness: "I served them and left them ... I will not let them have you" (14). Thus, despite these potent portrayals of "end times," both novels are infused with the conviction that positive emotions (compassion, courage and hope) must stand counter to chaos and despair. And it is

children who engender these emotions. The adult world in *Northern Lights* is complex and treacherous through the misuse of sophistication. Lyra, for all her uncouthness, is passionately loyal and good-hearted, and prepared to sacrifice her life for the good of others. This is no simplistic fictional solution, but a foundational truth of both the sacred and secular scripture.

The currents of mystical childhood continue to run even through these end time novels. Children's innocence gives them access to elusive truths and power that escape the adult world. Iorek can so skilfully defeat humans in battle because he can see their deceptive tactics. He compares this to the fact that only children can read the alethiometer. He explains to Lyra.

We see tricks and deceit as plain as arms and legs. We can see in a way humans have forgotten. But you know about this; you can understand the symbol-reader ... adults can't read it.... As I am to human fighters, so you are to adults with the symbol-reader. (227)

In contrast to the intellectual and spiritual decadence of Oxford and the Magisterium, the world of the gyptians is earthy, plain, wholesome and good, and offers a clean counter to the corruption of religion and politics. This is also the wholesome alternative offered by Le Guin. Tenar, who has rejected life as a priestess in Atuan and as a courtier in Havnor, chooses the life of a farmer's wife. Similarly, Ged has given up his powerful arcane magic, and it is an ultimate sacrifice to save Earthsea that prefaces the sacrifice imposed on Therru. Magic is not in itself bad, but carries with it the dangers of power, like that of the Magisterium, and the proud deceits of Gnosticism. Here is the embodiment of Inglis' notion of the hocus pocus of the Parisian Pentecostals.

In *Tehanu*, Tenar states that "a wrong that cannot be repaired must be transcended" (101). Both these novels expose a "wrong," the violation of childhood, that symbolically and in reality is the end point of cultural despair. Both transcend these wrongs. While this is achieved partly through the majestic sweep of destiny, it is also achieved through humble and refreshingly ordinary means: the assertion of character. Both have heroines who exhibit Inglis' sense of consistent attributes and dependable conduct, and it is this which leads to rightness of action, allowing destiny to play its hand. In *Northern Lights*, Lyra's persistence, courage and determination to do good make her reliable and dependable: she is steeped in character. In *Tehanu*, it is Tenar who doggedly acts selflessly, always for the good, even when Ged fails her. These novels exemplify Abbs' declaration that while good literature reflects its age, it must also "transcend it by pointing to those deep and elusive truths without which life quickly becomes empty and banal" ("Failure" 118). They diagnose our current state of cultural despair, making plain

the things of harm, and point the way out. Gardner, echoing Adams, maintains that literature must point us "toward a vision of how things ought to be or what has gone wrong." But contemporary fiction fails to provide us with "the flicker of lightning that shows us where we are," instead wasting our time, "saying and doing nothing," or celebrating "ugliness and futility, scoffing at good" (16). The diagnosis has been left to children's fiction. This is the task of Pullman and Le Guin, and it is the very opposite of the ineffectual, but aptly named, *Disgrace*.

The potential for connection between the spiritual dimension and literature is wryly made by Carlyle, when he proclaims that books are like men's souls.

Some few are going up, and carrying us up, heavenward; calculated, I mean, to be of priceless advantage in teaching, in forwarding the teaching of all generations. Others, a frightful multitude, are going down, down; doing ever the more and the wider and the wilder mischief. (qtd. in Adams 20)

It is not surprising that we choose to preserve this tradition of teaching, and forwarding the teaching of all generations, to children through our literature for them. The pity is that our own adult culture is dominated by a frightful multitude that would, even if unwittingly, drag us down, and lower our potential as human beings. As Frye says, literature spans the whole imaginative range, from heaven to hell, yet it would seem that the heavenward vision is the most important function of literature, particularly in an age that is obsessed with hell. Le Guin looks hell squarely between the eyes and tells us what she sees. She does so in order to tell us where we are, to articulate an outraged flicker of lightning, but she also gives us the vision of where we ought to be. Tenar still believes in the possibility of another order.

The vision of the city was in her, the wide streets, the towers of marble, the tiles and bronzed roofs, the white-sailed ships on harbour, the marvellous throne room where sunlight fell like swords, the wealth and dignity and harmony, the order that was kept there. From that bright centre, she saw order going outward like the perfect rings on water, like the straightness of a paved street or a ship sailing before the wind: a going the way it should be. (*Tehanu* 63)

Just as there is a strong connection between children's literature and the elemental and spiritually restorative world of fairy tale, myth and romance, there is also a strong connection between the myths of the secular and sacred scriptures. Frye finds that they keep meeting up rather than remaining inseparably parallel. Tolkien too senses this unity, saying that "something really 'higher' is glimpsed in mythology: Divinity ... in fact 'religion.'" This does not indicate merely that they are closely related, but rather that they were originally one (*Tree* 27-28). C.S. Lewis has a similar sense of this interrelatedness, and his version of myth is particularly

relevant to the context of contemporary culture: myths are derived from “gleams of celestial strength and beauty falling on a jungle of filth and imbecility” (qtd. in Kilby 151). That is precisely the function of Tenar’s bifocal vision falling on the travesty of Earthsea and its dangerous despair; for it is counterbalanced by a vision of the ideal that is not useless or unreal, but points us upward in the direction of what is sane and good.

The Idealisation of Experience

What Sacred Instinct did inspire
My Soul in Childhood with a Hope so Strong?
What Secret Force moved my Desire
To expect Joys beyond the Seas, so Yong?
Felicity I knew
Was out of View:
And being here alone,
I saw that Happiness was gone,
From Me! For this
I Thirsted Absent Bliss,
And thought that sure beyond the Seas,
Or els in som thing near at hand
I knew not yet (since nought did please
I knew.) My Bliss did stand.

(Thomas Traherne "On News")

'They're strange here,' Arren said. 'It's that way with everything, they don't know the difference. Like what one of them said to the headman last night. "You wouldn't know true azure from blue mud...." They complain about bad times, but they don't know when bad times began; they say the work's shoddy, but they don't improve it; they don't even know the difference between an artisan and a spell worker, between handcraft and the art magic. It's as if they had no lines and distinctions and colours clear in their heads. Everything's the same to them, everything's grey.'

'Aye,' said the mage, thoughtfully.... 'What is it they're missing?'

Arren said without hesitation, 'Joy in life.'

(Le Guin, *Farthest* 98)

In his opening of *Secret Gardens*, Humphrey Carpenter asserts that "all children's books are about ideals"; whereas adult books are about the world as it really is, children's fiction presents the world as it should be. Although a bold overstatement, Carpenter's assertion offers us a valuable insight into the function of children's fiction. Idealisation is obviously present in ideals of character and action, but it is also expressed through wonder at the richness and beauty of the sensory world; through themes and motifs which satisfy deep patterns of desire; and through the clustering of "upper world" images of radiance and light. These are visions of the world that restore a sense of "joy in life." In this genre, idealisation involves some introspection and tension concerning what has been lost, what might have been and what can be recovered. This is the reflection through childhood described in the opening of "Burnt Norton," the necessary journey back "through the first gate" of childhood "into our first world." In this it is a contemporary version of Vaughan's "Retreat," and *Four Quartets* is perhaps the nearest thing we have to a sacred text in twentieth-century literature. Indeed, the beginning of "Burnt Norton" is something of a cultural icon so often is it quoted, but this seems only to validate the power of what it expresses. The echo of footfalls in the memory, "Down the passage which we did not take/Towards the door we never opened/Into the rose-garden," is the journey we take in children's fiction towards a sense of "unitary reality" (Jacoby 19) and an idea of perfection.

Idealisation in children's fiction is very often associated with an apprehension of the numinous, and the following discussion will draw substantially from Rudolf Otto's very fine examination of sacred experience in *The Idea of the Holy*. The numinous is a *sui generis* experience, irreducible to any other, an "absolutely primary and elemental datum" that can be discussed but not defined (5-7). A capacity to feel and express the numinous is evident even in primitive consciousness. It is demonstrated in the earliest cave paintings, and later in myth, legend and fairy tale, and it is an integral component of mature religious experience. As civilisation progresses, the numinous is inevitably interpenetrated with the rational, ethical and cultural demands of consciousness, and thus becomes what Otto terms "schematised." Schemas that help us to understand the numinous include wonder, the sublime and the beautiful. But when the numinous is enriched with the concept of moral goodness, it reaches full fruition in an experience of the holy. Otto finds that responsiveness to the numinous is a potential in everybody, but it is often dormant.

It will emerge in the growth of the human mind only if certain conditions are fulfilled: "a due growth in suggestibility and spontaneity and responsiveness to external impressions and internal experiences" (128). These conditions are remarkably like those we associate with childhood, and they are incompatible with the mind-set of irony and satire that pervades contemporary thinking. The strong impetus towards idealisation in children's fiction and its association with the numinous suggest another way in which children's literature functions as secular scripture.

The Idea of Perfection: "A White Celestial Thought"

The word 'ideal' is associated with the pursuit of something that is better than the common or real; it connotes high or noble principles, visionary perspectives and the pursuit of perfection. Perfection must not be dismissed as an unattainable ideal: as Murdoch says, the very idea of perfection "moves, and possibly changes, us (as artist, worker, agent) because it inspires love in the part of us that is most worthy" (*Sovereignty* 62). 'Ideal' is also synonymous with the notion of *exemplum*, a word frequently used in the context of "example for one's children," and is thus strongly connected to the didactic element of children's fiction. In the best children's fiction, didacticism functions in the sense of giving children the best that is in us, rather than laying down rules.

Nevertheless, the notion of ideals must be carefully differentiated from "ideology." Ideology, though centrally concerned with ideals, is a more specific term referring to the level of beliefs at the base of a social system or institution. Hollindale identifies three levels of ideology in the context of children's fiction. The first is the explicit moral, social or political perspective (the level of doctrine). The second is a passive level implicit in the author's personal assumptions and style. The third is a wider level again, the systems of codes and rules that constitute the text and derive from the conventions of the age: a level of text that is not written by the author, "but by the world its author lives in" ("Ideology" 15). Although understanding a text through these levels offers a valuable means of analysing discourse and is a preferred method of contemporary literary criticism, ideology is not the same as idealisation. Idealisation is a movement towards perfection that has little to do with the changing contexts of finitude, though the two terms inevitably become entangled within texts. It may be of some small benefit to examine *The Wind in the Willows* as an example of patriarchal ideology, but this is far less important in understanding the essence of this text than being inspired by its pastoral Arcadia, and attempting to understand the meaning of that inspiration. Ideology is a product of instability and transient doctrinal rules whose worth is relative to the prevailing

age. Ideals are concerned with intuited transcendent realities; they belong to the realm of "everlastingness." Ideals remain, but ideologies change and pass, though the boundaries are often blurred between them.

The fairy tale, a seminal form of children's literature, has been a traditional vehicle of idealising experience through the splendours of the imagination and detachment from realism. It is also the Perilous Realm because it offers "joy and sorrow sharp as swords" (Tolkien, *Tree* 9), and disaster befalls any who do not keep its laws. It is not a world of whimsy. Within the fairy tale, we see the crucial difference between idealism and ideology. Heuscher acknowledges the importance of recognising "the superficial purposes" of the fairy tale, purposes that can include overt moralising and political propaganda and parody (395). This is the ideological level extensively examined by Zipes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. However, Heuscher finds the deeper purpose of the fairy tale in its correspondence with another world that is more intense and more real than the primary world of our everyday lives. This is the magnetic world of ideals to which the forces of idealisation are drawn: a world of radiant forces and spiritual values. The ideals of beauty and virtue that inform the fairy tale also form the core of the great children's novels, most obvious in, but not limited to, fantasy. If the scepticism and relativism of contemporary adulthood force us to doubt the existence or worth of these ideals, we can still experience them as valid within children's fiction. This can occur through outright belief, or at the very least through the suspension of disbelief, and perhaps even this latter method will still allow the ideals to function as an inspirational force. In Lewis' *The Silver Chair*, the Underland witch uses a destructive and beguiling scepticism to deny the existence of the sun by claiming it is only an inferior copy of lamps and thus a foolish dream. Puddleglum counters this shrewd inversion of Platonism with his own insightful and sensible logic: "suppose we have only dreamed, or made up ... trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself ... in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones" (156). His faith is vindicated at the end of the novel, and in *The Last Battle* he is shown an even greater reality in the Platonic revelation of heaven.

Within Narnia we have examples of ideals and ideology. The muscular, fascist and misogynist Christianity for which C.S. Lewis is so frequently criticised is perhaps an example of the way in which one's unexamined assumptions and the commonality of the age can distort ideals into ideology. His rendering of Christianity is certainly influenced by the ideologies of his day (an implicit patriarchal viewpoint; a belief in the necessity of the battlefield; a racist view of the Calormenes), just as any rendition of a concept will inevitably be an ideologically distorted interpretation. But one only has insights into the limitations of one's ideologies with hindsight; and this also

applies to Lewis' critics when viewed by future generations. To focus on Lewis' apparent flaws is to ignore the strengths of the idealisation of experience that is achieved throughout Narnia. He gives us brilliant depictions of spiritual landscapes, an extraordinary embodiment of Christ as lion, and compelling numinous imagery that expresses values of a long-forgotten past. It is a world of "chivalry, honour, freedom, gentillesse ... an idealisation – yes, but therein lies its power" (Cameron 42).

The creation of the marvellous and beautiful in fantasy is an obvious example of idealisation that functions as a symbol of the rich heights that can be reached in the inner life of the psyche. Idealisation also occurs through making ordinary reality seem more real and more precious. In both cases it heightens and intensifies experience, often approximating the luminous vision of the mystic. Bridie McShane sees peaches whose skins are "golden yellow flushed deeply with a rich dusky pink and overlaid with a barely perceptible fuzz of minute hairs glinting in the sun"; they have "the whole ripe sweet warmth of summer" enclosed within them (Hunter 136). The real world viewed in such a way yields its own perfection. Childhood itself has been idealised into a time of perfection, immortalised by Kenneth Grahame as *The Golden Age*. Significantly, this term has been adopted by the historians of children's literature to chart British children's fiction into two distinct eras. The first Golden Age describes the Arcadian visions of writers of the Victorian and Edwardian eras, and the next, following the Second World War, describes a literature that revisits and consciously ponders the meanings of those Arcadias (Carpenter 217-21).

The immutable radiance of gold is thus the golden glow of childhood. Because of this association, together with its highly symbolic and poetic concentration of form, children's fiction lends itself to the expression of idealisation and the longing for perfection. The intensity of poetry is similar to the intensity we claim for childhood consciousness. Commenting on *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Rees asserts that "children of Tom's age experience joy and disappointment with an intensity that adults hardly ever realize" (43). Here, too, is the capacity for "joy and sorrow sharp as swords" that Tolkien finds in the fairy tale, though it extends into a great many other works of literature for children. Idealisation and the intensity of the "first world" are eulogised in Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry."

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and honour, grief and pleasure, eternity and change ... its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life. (155)

This is very much the transformation of experience that characterises children's fiction. Shelley claims that poetry works this magic as it "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world" clothing it in an "Elysian light" (131). In *The Book of Merlyn*, the world-weary Arthur must rinse his stiff and rusted brain from adult preconceptions; this is the essence of his re-education and it is termed "The Elixir of Life" (37-42). The lifting of the veil has been the substance of Arthur's whole "wondrous childhood" in *The Sword in the Stone*, where the natural world is recreated with a clean, exhilarating intensity. Merlyn's task (and that of the children's author) is akin to Shelley's view of the function of poetry: "it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures us from the wonder of our being" (156). Tolkien labels this "Recovery." It is the "regaining of a clear view" and "seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them," without the "drab blur" of possessiveness (*Tree* 53).

The process of idealisation carries with it a sense of light because it really does illuminate reality. It also tends to condense experience in its spotlight effect, and this evokes the sense of perfection that we find in miniatures of art or within the perfected symbolic moment of lyric poetry. Together, illumination and condensation create the "rainbow surface" of children's fiction. Children's books are laden with the seminal poetic images of our culture: the waterfall, the castle, the grove, the enclosed garden, the rose, the apple tree, and of course the child. For the adult reader, these multivalent symbols are themselves a form of idealisation. They function as a perfected short cut to a world beyond words, encapsulating an entire cultural tradition that is a rich melding of the sacred and secular. They are all visual images of great beauty that evoke the vastness of time, either through their antiquity or their evocation of eternity. These images are the primary colours of the tapestry of Western culture; hence they suit the primary nature of children's fiction.

James Taylor has studied what he terms "poetic knowledge," another version of the intuitive "first world" response that has formed a vital part of our cultural heritage. It is the widest possible method of understanding which involves the whole human being in a way that is not limited to the rational, or to the mechanistic, computer model of the brain. He finds poetic knowledge firmly rooted in the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition where all the arts were considered a means of "real and valuable knowledge, a knowledge of permanent things" (12). This bears some resemblance to Frye's description of hieroglyphic language, mentioned in the first chapter of this discussion. In this type of language, thoughts and feelings are inseparably bound up with concrete images, and Frye gives us Homer's language as an example (*Code* 6-7). Taylor describes poetic knowledge as an immediate sensory and intuitive engagement with reality that is experienced prior to logical

categorising and critical evaluation. It is knowledge we associate with the uncontaminated perception of the child that is more acute than that of adults. For Plato, it was a vital means of education. The sensory world properly "seen" would yield an intimation of perfection that would then lead to spiritual apprehension: the inward significance of things. Like Frye, Taylor illustrates his point with an example from Homer, Odysseus' famous banquet encomium.

I myself feel that there is nothing more delightful than when the festive mood reigns in a whole people's hearts and the banqueters listen to a minstrel from their seats in the hall, while the tables before them are laden with bread and meat, and a steward carries round the wine he has drawn from the bowl and fills their cups. This, to my way of thinking, is something very much like perfection. (13)

This is far more than an image of satiation. Taylor claims that it leads from "a penetrating gaze" into the real to an understanding of the transcendent nature of reality, a movement that is to be found everywhere in Homer. One is drawn to perfection through the "ordinary objects of delight and wonder," and this creates "an upward movement of the senses and emotions that sees the invisible meaning of things" (13-14).

Taylor's choice of example is particularly interesting because it shows us how the poet's gaze, so close to what we believe to be the child's naked image of the real, can lead to numinous experience (and Taylor's explication also suggests the upward motion of romance). Otto says that numinous experience is a kind of revelation that resists rational intelligence.

Something may be profoundly and intimately known in feeling for the bliss it brings or the agitation it produces, and yet the understanding may find no concept for it. To *know* and to *understand conceptually* are two different things, are often even mutually exclusive and contrasted. (139)

The passage from Homer is also relevant here because, as well as exemplifying poetic knowledge, it resonates with the symbolic import of the banquet, a religious image of perfection. The feast motif occurs frequently in children's literature, where sometimes it is merely an appeal to children's love of food, but at others it is an expression of attained perfection, a version of the heavenly banquet that is a spiritual act of fellowship and celebration. *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* begin with a feast prior to the descent into the night world where good must battle evil, and here it represents a perfection that is to be lost. It is perhaps a version of The Happy Beginning of make-believe that Goldthwaite says must prefigure The Happy Ending (354). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the stone table is Aslan's altar of sacrifice and symbolic of the Eucharistic meal, but in *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, Aslan's table becomes the feast at the end of the world as the

Dawntreader approaches heaven. In the culminating pages of *The Secret Garden*, the picnic in the quickening garden is an Arcadian feast consecrated to "The Joy-Maker." In Jansson's world, there is a feeling of deep significance in the bounty and fellowship at Moominmamma's table. Even in the realism of the Tillerman novels, the shared meal is an important motif, and the table becomes increasingly bountiful as the children create a home (their idea of perfection) with their grandmother. The feast is not just a symbol; the whole point of poetic knowledge is to feel that the resonances of perfection are within concrete reality. Otherwise the natural world is mere allegory: nothing more than a shadow. The feast is also allied to romance structure, where the ascent back up is accompanied by "images of increased participation" in human society and nature, reflected in "festive endings" and "pastoral and Arcadian imagery" (Frye, *Secular* 183). Occasionally, as with the food described in Uttley's *A Traveller in Time*, the feast is described with a luminosity and sense of slowed enriched time that we find in still life painting.

Children's fiction as a whole resembles a much earlier literary form, the novella, not only in its condensed literary form, but also in its simultaneous evocation of two realities. Rodax's study of the evolution of the novella in European literature argues that these are the tales of the realist who faithfully recreates the external sensory world, and the idealist who looks within to the brightly coloured realm of his psyche (1). This is not the unbridled psyche of the twentieth-century *id*, but one that is held within the limits of metaphysical rules. Rodax finds that the novella has a sense of wholeness that depends upon an interpenetration of the ideal and real (128). This wholeness is a "fusion of categories" increasingly unavailable to culture since Descartes "slit the throat of poetry" in his separation of thought and feeling (3). However, this same interpenetration of real and ideal is strongly felt in children's fiction and helps the reader to gain a glimpse of perfection through the solidity of the real. The reader of contemporary adult fiction has plenty of the "real," but this is left unqualified by reference to an ideal. The result is a literature that is enervating and self-absorbed in solipsistic interpretation. On the other hand, the ideal, with its lustre of the transcendent, gives vigour to literature. Such vigour once reflected a coherent and universally accepted system of belief. It informed the vital culture of late medieval Europe, where everyone "from popes and pirates to peasants viewed the world as a vibrant arena of visible and invisible reality" (Taylor 35).

There is often a distinct medieval flavour about modern renditions of fairy tales, and this style of interpretation is perhaps an instinctive acknowledgement of their life in the ideal. Certainly, their cultural significance has much to tell us about the numinous undercurrents of children's literature. Otto argues that fairy tales

"presuppose" fantasy and narratives as entertainments; but more significantly, they only properly come into being when they contain a sense of the wonderful or miraculous, which act as "an infusion of the numinous" (126). The chief delight of fairy tales is their ability to render this vibrant arena of interpenetrating realities; but here there is a paradoxical inversion where we know their utter unreality embodies truths that are somehow more real than real. Perhaps it is this that accounts for their "grandeur" that is far removed from fairyland "tinsel-and-gauze" (Lochhead 5). For Chesterton, they describe a world of "wonder and war" (258). Heuscher declares that the fairy story is a revelation of the invisible and ineffable, and a "transparent mask of God" (x). Tolkien acknowledges their "Mystical" aspect that faces towards the supernatural (*Tree* 28), and explores their "imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires" (62). In this they offer "profound escapisms" from the restrictions of time and space imposed by individuality and mortality. They satisfy lesser desires: "the desire to visit, free as a fish, the deep sea; or the longing for the noiseless, gracious, economical flight of a bird"; and they respond to deeper longings, such as the ability to converse with other living things, a desire "as ancient as The Fall" (60). The fulfilment of these desires is the very fabric of *The Sword in the Stone*, too modestly described by T.H. White as "more or less a kind of wish fulfilment of the things he would like to have happened to him as a boy" (Wall 33). These are primordial desires to which folk literature responds with "tantalising alternatives, glimpses of something evermore about to be, which may make us less forlorn" (Brewer 19).

The forlornness to which Brewer alludes is inevitably associated with Keats' resonant image "fairylands forlorn." Solzhenitsyn, too, locates this same conjunction of desire and loss in the "small mirror" offered by fairy tales: here "what you see is not yourself; for an instant you glimpse the Inaccessible ... and the soul cries out for it" (qtd. in J. Cooper 16). Forlornness is not confined to this literary form, however, and it is one of the central psychological and philosophical issues that adults explore within children's fiction. The Rustins approach it from an astute psychological perspective in *Narratives of Love and Loss*, but it is even more meaningful when placed within a metaphysical context. Higgins names it as "the joyful sadness of mortal men reaching for the immortal" (104). C.S. Lewis has a much fuller explanation of it in his essay "The Weight of Glory."

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now ... I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you – the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience.

We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. (*Weight 4*)

This exposé helps to explain why literary evocation of the numinous, like the whole genre of fairy tales, has been largely consigned to children's fiction. It is not just that the fantasy medium provides fertile opportunities, or that children are receptive to such experience. It is that children's literature provides a safe and distanced form of fiction where such desires can be given reign without embarrassment, away from the withering gaze of scepticism. Lewis' use of the phrase "our own far-off country" suggests the concept of regained identity that is the driving force of romance, and at the same time it evokes the idea of the "mysterious, elusive Good Place," so often symbolised as home, that pervades children's fiction (Carpenter 13). Much earlier, Lewis embodied it in far more awesome terms as "Northernness" as he describes it in *Surprised by Joy*: "a vision of huge clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity" and a "single unendurable sense of desire and loss" (74-75). Later it became incarnate in the fabulous kingdom and constellations of the northern world of Narnia. It is very interesting to note that Pullman, avowedly anti-Lewis, expresses a similar version of this same desire in *Northern Lights*.

The moon had set by now and the sky to the south was profoundly dark, though the billions of stars lay on it like diamonds on velvet. They were outshone, though, by the Aurora, outshone a hundred times. Never had Lyra seen it so brilliant and dramatic; with every twitch and shiver, new miracles of light danced across the sky. And behind the ever-changing gauze of light that other world, that sunlit city, was clear and solid. (390)

As in Lewis, the pull of the North acts as a kind of soul magnet. Lyra's quest is irresistibly drawn towards the resplendent glory of the aurora, and the beckoning radiant vision of a world beyond it. Northernness seems to exemplify Higgins' explanation of mystical fancy as a reaching for "that hidden universal beyondness" (86).

Goldthwaite admits this longing through another perspective, referring to it as "the allsense." He glimpses it in the strangeness of the incongruities of nonsensical fantasy, exemplified in the nursery rhyme. It is not the opposite of sense, and he quotes Strachey's observation that it brings out "a new and deeper harmony of life in and through its contradictions" (15). For Goldthwaite, nonsense is merely a "rhetorical access road" to this new overview; his version perhaps of heightened perspective.

The contrary of sense can only be that which transports our disparate, sensible understandings into something – a kind of light, perhaps – that precludes and justifies them all. This harmony which I am going to call ‘allsense,’ is the bounty residing in everything we know generically as make-believe.... It is not a thing that can be written into a story, [or that] you can go looking for as a reader. Either it happens to you or it doesn’t. The pure moment is fleeting and probably rare when, or when in memory of an earlier reading, you feel a sudden uplift in the solar plexus and a translation of your whole being into a longing for something unnameable ... the invisible atmosphere of make-believe becomes an enlightening ether and touches a child with a quickening of gladness. (16)

Here the pure moment of allsense seems allied to the concept of the miraculous in fairy tale and fantasy. Otto regards receptivity to the miraculous as a precursor of a later ability to perceive the holy (66-67). While the allsense cannot be written into story in the form of guaranteed experience, mystical fancy, in all its variety of forms, is an important gateway to the sacred.

This longing for something unnameable is an invisible presence in all those novels where corridors are created into other worlds. This is very much Bilbo Baggins’ experience when he hears the “deep-throated singing of the dwarves in the deep places of their ancient homes,” songs that inspire him to leave the boundaries of Hobbiton. Thorin’s golden harp sweeps him away into “dark lands under strange moons, far over The Water.” It is a desire kindled by the love of beautiful things, not necessarily admirable in itself, but here it is symbolic of the longing for even more distant and greater beauty. The desire is simultaneously kindled by love of the natural world, the Tookish part of Bilbo’s nature. Together they produce in Bilbo the courage to “go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick” (*Hobbit* 13-15). Most emphatically, Bilbo’s wish to wear a sword is not proof of Tolkien’s militaristic tendencies, but rather a symbolic role within the world of spiritual combat.

Children’s fiction can also locate this “unnameable” desire outside the arena of fantasy, and squarely in events of the real world. Bridie McShane has such intimations in church music that give her a far richer intimation of heaven than that offered by her restrictive world-hating Sunday School. Here she is delighted by “the dark richness of the men’s voices” and “the quavering sweetness” of the women’s. But she is transported by the hymns that

had mourning in the music for, as she sang these, she could feel being drawn out of her a feeling of longing, a great and terrible yearning for something she could not name and which she knew she would never reach. It was a strange and painful feeling, this yearning, yet still it was more desirable than any pleasure and sometimes it gripped her so strongly that tears came from nowhere and ran down her face. (Hunter 26)

Again the note of forlornness is struck, demonstrating its pervasiveness in children's literature. While it is a loss that is very frequently embodied as parental loss in the motif of being orphaned, it simultaneously functions as a spiritual loss. This is quite different from the existential emptiness and spiritual dereliction of contemporary adult culture. In children's fiction the loss carries with it the possibility of consolation and recovery, two of the essential elements that Tolkien identifies in the fairy tale (*Tree* 52-63). In this literary medium, as in children's fiction generally, we know that the pearl will be regained, as everything works towards the happy ending, and more importantly, it is a literature that dares to speak about the pearl.

The loss of chivalry noted earlier in Eleanor Cameron's statement is perhaps emblematic of more universal loss, the ideal of nobility, so eloquently lamented by Wallace Stevens in his essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words." Stevens can find nobility only in the poetry and drama of the past, yet this ideal survives in twentieth-century children's fiction, where the perceived naivety of children does not scoff. Nobility is represented in fantasy: in the codes of honour and self-sacrifice in *Earthsea*; more recently in *Northern Lights* it is represented (inadequately perhaps) in the fighting codes of Iorek and the bears. As we shall see in the next chapter, there is a nobility inherent in right conduct that is present in children's texts of hard-edged realism. Tolkien, perhaps the greatest exponent of nobility, embodied it in the chivalric codes, archaisms and yearning nostalgia within the myths of Middle Earth, and in the qualities of individual characters; even in, perhaps especially in, homely hobbits. For Tolkien, fairy tales and fantasy take material from the natural world and the sub-creator's art of making gives them greater life: "by the making of Pegasus, horses were ennobled." Thus things of the natural world can be "manifested in glory" (*Tree* 55). Lewis, reviewing *The Lord of the Rings*, brings this back to man: "the real life of men is of that mythical and heroic quality.... The value of the myth is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by 'the veil of familiarity'" (qtd. in Higgins 27). These are authors who infuse their work with *pietas*, that "old strong virtue which cherishes the good of the past and which is loyal to right tradition, carrying it towards the future" (Lochhead 108-09). This is the ideal that lies beneath the wars in Tolkien and Lewis, not a love of fighting in itself, but acknowledgement that *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (Horace, *Odes* 111. ii.13). This should never be mistaken for the corrupted ideology of fanaticism.

In children's fiction, this lament for the past and yearning for the unnameable is very commonly expressed in the idealisations of pastoral. Pastoral is present in both the realistic and fantasy modes of the genre, and underscoring this is the fact that

childhood is itself regarded as a pastoral form. The golden age of a Classical past has become a more personal pastoral, the innocence of childhood that everyone can remember (Marinelli 4). The imagery of pastoral is that of the upper world of Frye's literary map, and it connotes "a quite special kind of good feeling" (Ruhe 103). Hence it has a natural affinity with childhood, an association that can be traced back to the *Idylls* of Theocritus. The "idyll" literally means "little picture" (suggesting again the perfection of the miniature), but it has become synonymous with "ideal" (Ettin 30). Pastoral is the quintessential backward glance, the retreat into a timeless rural perfection. It is a longing for simplicity that is universal, "intrinsic to man's nature" (Marinelli 7). Of course the very consciousness of a need for simplicity presupposes a measure of sophisticated awareness of what has been lost. Thus in this sense children's fiction serves the needs of adults rather than children. Forlornness is a silent accompaniment of pastoral because, like all conceptions of perfection, an understanding of Paradise "presupposes knowledge of its opposite" and inevitably contains a grief over its loss (Jacoby 26).

In its purest form, pastoral represents the longing for perfection. Marinelli says that all pastoral is a search for the "original splendour" (11), bringing to mind Wordsworth's *Vision Splendid* and Vaughan's "gilded cloud or flowre." The golden age ideal of the Classical Roman poets became the unspoilt innocence of the Garden of Eden, and it is no coincidence that children's fiction is replete with images of gardens. The defining qualities of pastoral are simplicity, innocence and timelessness, and idealising an inaccessibly remote place or time creates a kind of symbolic memory of eternity. When pastoral is a retreat from a specific period in time, it is very often from adulthood to "the visions of childhood" (Marinelli 11). True pastoral is concerned with an age before machines, and its tranquillity is properly regarded as an antidote to, rather than permanent escape from, the far-reaching violence of industrialisation: the destroyers of Hobbiton; the tree-cutters of Narnia; the scientists of intercision. Swinfen makes the important point that the Industrial Revolution and reductive scientific and economic theory have resulted in pollution not just of the landscape, but also of the mind. It is a "devaluation of personal dignity" that regards people, in Hoban's terms, as "wind-ups" (229). This historical process is pithily described by Marinelli as a descent from a golden age to one of plastic (82).

Of more interest in the context of this discussion is Empson's conceptualisation of pastoral as a process of putting the complex into the simple (qtd. in Hardin, "Pastoral" 4). Thus pastoral has come to mean "any literature which deals with the complexities of human life against a background of simplicity" (Marinelli 3). Because much children's literature is centrally concerned with the philosophical

issues of human existence as a genre, it is strongly linked to pastoral in this modern looser sense. For pastoral is indeed a retreat in its religious sense, a way of seeing through the labyrinthine demands of complex reality to a renewed vision. Marinelli makes the very significant observation that in pastoral the issues of the "great world, or of adulthood are transported into Arcadia or into the magic gardens of childhood" where "they may be better scrutinised" (11-12). This is a very significant function of children's fiction. Here the clarity and simplicity of idealisation reflect light on the issues of the "great world," and the child addressee is the flawless mirror (a further idealisation) through which these issues can be penetratingly, yet safely, explored. The reading process too enhances this experience of children's fiction as pastoral, for the "rainbow surface" of simplicity is read against the adult reader's complex consciousness. Added to this are the pastoral associations attached to the child, epitomised in Rousseau's unadulterated perfect child of nature.

Pastoral is unsuited to the cynicism and self-consciousness of contemporary thinking and has always existed in opposition to that mode of thought, so it is hardly surprising that there are precious few examples of it in adult fiction. Hardin includes Huxley's *Island* as a modern example ("Pastoral" 9), but even this version of pastoral is so laden with contemporary ideas that it does not meet the requirement of "simplicity." Significantly, Hardin claims that contemporary ironic versions of pastoral do not indicate that the myth is waning, as much they indicate "the depleted condition of both mind and heart" (16). Perhaps the most vivid expression of ironic pastoral is in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* that so savagely debunks the idea of childhood innocence and the "special type of good feeling" that results from the naturalness and simplicity of a non-urban environment. Here nature is entirely a bloodlust force that creates a psychological and anthropological dystopia. If man stands halfway between the beasts and angels, Golding pushes him towards the beasts, whereas true pastoral remembers angels.

In the Christian era, pastoral reflects the key event of the sacred scripture, The Fall out of Paradise and the longing to return. Twentieth-century children's fiction cannot let go of this myth, and constantly explores the philosophical and emotional consequences of expulsion. Philip goes so far as to state that the Fall is "the key story of contemporary children's literature" (21), an interesting phenomenon given the atheistic humanism of our times. The writers of children's fiction do not simply lament the fallen state, or hide in the past; rather they explore how to regain Paradise. Though the way back may now be barred, they seek roads that might lead to return, or they explore how to make the fallen world bearable and meaningful. Ettin, like Marinelli, notes that traditional pastoral served to criticise life as we ordinarily live it, helping us to see its faults more clearly through a vision of life

without them (30), and so pastoral serves as another example of how idealisation prompts us to some kind of improving action. In fact most children's literature is situated outside Eden. Although it is crammed full of healing idyllic moments within a version of the Garden, they are not sustained, and most of the Arcadias are under threat. The worlds of Narnia and Middle Earth, the secrecy of Mary Lennox's garden, Tom Long's midnight garden, cannot last. Indeed, the search for a "mysterious, elusive Good place" that Carpenter identifies as "central to the great children's writers" can never yield a permanent or perfect home (12). In most instances, the protagonists can only keep the knowledge of Arcadia if they make sustained effort, whether against the forces of evil without (in fantasy), or the destructive forces within the self and human society. As in the sacred scripture, Arcadia lives on only through its use for good.

Time rather than place is the key feature of pastoral in children's literature. It is time that has sundered adult consciousness from the Eden of childhood and, even if a safe, good place can be found, it is never immune from mutability. Children's literature offers adults the pastoral satisfaction of a remote location from the unsatisfactory present and, even more significantly, brief numinous moments where time is transcended to a state of timelessness. The genre is also used as an arena where the philosophical problems of time can be explored, and often these aspects are combined within a single novel. This is the case with *A Sound of Chariots*, which borrows its title from Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Superficially, it is about growing up, but at the same time it is an adult retrospective meditation on the subjects of "Time and Death and Eternal Circling" (172). It is chiefly concerned with Bridie's shocked confrontation with mortality and her attempts to outrun "time's winged chariot," a flight that is occasionally transcended in epiphanic moments out of time.

Almost at these moments, it seemed as if Time stood still for her and she was painfully, breathlessly on the point of escaping from the closed circle of life and death in which she knew she was caught. But the feeling of identification with something outwith and beyond her normal consciousness was too fragile in concept to be sustained by the stumbling process of her thoughts. It touched her mind only lightly, and even as she struggled to understand, it would dissolve in her grasp and leave her with only a nameless yearning for something – she could not quite remember what it had been. (133)

Bridie is eventually rewarded with an awareness that "each passing moment is a fragment of the totality of Life itself" (185), just as a single peach can contain the whole of summer (137). It is an acutely poignant exploration of these themes, where joy and sorrow are as sharp as swords, a heightening made possible through the intense clear focus of childhood perspective. In so many ways, the complex is given coherence through the redeeming lens of the simple.

Tom's Midnight Garden is the children's novel most overtly concerned with the recovery of Eden, and it is described by Pearce herself as "glimpses of paradise" (Philip 21). Tom Long's (*longtemps*) encounter with the Garden occurs in a shift to the not too distant past, Edwardian England. Yet the book is so laden with Biblical imagery, the adult, reading through the filters of cultural knowledge, has the sensation of the antiquity of Eden through symbol and association as well as through the literal recreation of the still, time-lapsed garden. Time is no longer the time of sequential *chronos*, but the eternal moment of *kairos*. *Kairos* is the fulfilment of God's time, the eternal present, captured in "historical moments of intemporal significance" (Kermode 48). Through the experience of *kairos*, adult readers can recover a glimpse of lost perfection, and gain "time out" (*otium*) to review their current preoccupations. And if such an experience cannot encompass an extended experience of actual timelessness, the larger perspective that time distortion allows is nevertheless expansive and restorative. Smedman, building on the anthropological and theological work of Eliade, refers to this process as the recovery of primordial mythic time (93).

Tom's Midnight Garden is so fittingly described by Inglis as a "great threnody" (Promise 113), though the wailing of threnody is perhaps even more appropriate to *A Sound of Chariots*. Yet Pearce's novel is much more than an expression of grief, as it sets out to prove that there is another kind of time beyond the apparently irretrievable passing of years. This is intimated in the inscription on the memorial tablet in Ely Cathedral that remembers the man "who had exchanged Time for eternity" (184), a phrase that in this context is far more than a cowardly euphemism for death. An apprehension of the reality of eternity becomes the preoccupation of the entire novel. Pearce's own description of the writing process reveals how the pastoral movement from complex to simple can transcend the grief of time.

Before I ever thought of writing *Tom's Midnight Garden* I had read J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*. From it I borrowed a rough framework for the operation of dreams and shifts of time in the story. I also borrowed the analogy of a man painting a scene of a man painting a scene ... [a man in infinite regress].

One of the things most difficult to believe – with your imagination as well as your reason – is the change that Time makes in people ... I tried to explore and resolve this non-understanding in the story of Tom Long and Hatty Melbourne. (qtd. in Crouch and Ellis 99)

Despite Pearce's grand beginnings in Dunne's philosophic and scientific speculations, it is a resolution that can be achieved through the simplicity of childhood vision and the power of image: the flowing river of time, the perfection of the garden, the loving embrace of the young Tom and the elderly Hatty. This last is a triumphant living image of Eliot's paradox in "Burnt Norton" of "time past" and

"time future" being reconciled in "time present." Philip captures the essence of Pearce's success here in his insight that the book shows us "knowledge of the human heart is not subject to the sequential laws of the pendulum" (22). This overcoming of *chronos* through an understanding of *kairos* is declared in the epigraph of another time-shift novel, Uttley's *A Traveller in Time*: "Time is/Time was/Time is not." These books are ruminative meditations on the eternal perfection behind transience; they bear "bright shoots of everlastingness," and convey to the reader a numinous thrill.

Wonder and Sublime: "Through all this Fleshly Dress"

The "white celestial thought" of perfection can be approached through the emotions of wonder and the sublime. They are means to penetrate this fleshly dress with shadows of eternity. Wonder is another type of "first world" experience that is associated with the unstained consciousness of children; the sublime is a reflective shock, as Addison described it "a pleasurable horror" (Mothersill, "Sublime" 407), and thus related to adult thought. Yet the two are not clearly differentiated from each other and elements of both are manifest in children's fiction. Wonder is a kind of marvelling at the beautiful and strange; it can be aroused by the natural world or by fantasy, and it is a hallmark of the fairy tale. Tolkien, however, makes a very important distinction between wonder at the marvels of zoology and palaeontology, of "Real things," and wonder at "Other things" of which the world of Faërie is an evocation. He argues that it is essential not to subsume the latter beneath the former, because "there is a part of man which is not 'Nature' ... and is, in fact, wholly unsatisfied by it" (*Tree* 69).

The notion of the sublime has undergone a number of iterations since Longinus, but it has almost always been associated with a state of elevation, purity and boundlessness. The elevation and limitlessness of the sublime suggest a relationship to the numinous. Otto argues that they are not the same, but they can arouse each other, so the sublime has become an authentic schema of the holy (43-47). We may feel that the sublime is not appropriate to a children's genre, yet it is interesting to note that Frye firmly situates it within the upper world of the literary cosmos (where children's literature belongs). This world is characterised by words such as "sublime, inspiring and the like, where what we feel is not detachment but absorption" (*Educated* 42). Frye uses gods, giants, passion and ecstasy as examples, and although they are not all concepts we would usually associate with children, all are represented in their literature in one form or another. Furthermore, reading as a child through the dual address and the suspension of disbelief predisposes us to feelings of rapture and absorption.

Otto's analysis of the numinous provides an account of the sublime that is very fruitful in the context of children's literature. The numinous is "the *mysterium tremendum*," a coupling of concepts that is very resonant with meaning. The *mysterium* suggests that which is wholly other and cannot be reduced to conceptual terms (24); *tremendum* is the feeling of terror and dread when confronting the unknown. He terms this "daemonic dread" to show its derivation from earlier religious impulses, particularly from the ancient concept of the daemon as an intuition of uncanny forces or spectral presences (13-18). As religious consciousness evolves, terror and dread are replaced by feelings of "grandeur" and "sublimity" (65). We see an illustration of this difference in Lewis' *The Last Battle*. The false god Tash inspires feelings of daemonic dread, but here the word daemon, once standing for genuine but earlier religious impulses, has now been corrupted to the worship of a false god and thus has the import of demonic. The terror of Tash is sheer fear, whereas a higher kind of religious awareness perceives Aslan as true God, and dread is replaced by awe.

Otto identifies *fascinans* within daemonic dread, an element of beguilement, and it is the Dionysiac element of the numinous (31). He says this accounts for our universal attraction to ghost and monster stories (though this is quite different to the fascination with bloodlust noted by Frye). They attract because they are nevertheless "degraded offshoots of the genuine numinous dread" and invoke fascination with "the wholly other" (29), a fascination that resembles Tolkien's allegiance to the wonder of Other things in the Perilous Realm of Faërie. Otto, however, claims that wonder and astonishment at nature (Tolkien's Real things) can pass over into the numinous, so that they predispose the mind to see the natural world as an arena of portent and marvels. Such two-way stimulation results in an increased capacity for mystery and dread. The mysterious has stimulated "inexhaustible invention" in folk tale and myth, and it is an indispensable element of religious ritual. Whether "in narrative or sacrament [it is] the most powerful factor that keeps the religious consciousness alive" (66). Folk tale and myth are now commonly associated with children, as is the concept of magic. Yet magic too is "nothing but a suppressed and dimmed form of the numinous, a crude form of it which great art purifies and ennobles" (69). Magic is unquestioningly given to children because we unconsciously realise that they are at the earlier part of their development, and it is somehow appropriate to give them a more primitive manifestation of sacred experience through this form of *fascinans*. For Otto, fairy tales are "at the threshold of the vestibule of the real religious feeling" (126). For Tolkien they are rather more: they tell of "shoreless seas and stars uncounted" (*Tree* 9), and in their act of "sub-creation," they "effoliate" and "enrich" the Creator's art (*Tree* 66). In either case, fairy tales and all the literature of wonder are

important bearers of the numinous. For child readers, they can waken spiritual emotion. For adults, they can act as consolation for the absence of more evolved forms of religious expression in contemporary culture.

Otto's understanding of the evolution of the numinous helps to explain why magic realism in adult fiction is so unsatisfying. It is because in this genre there is nothing but the numinous, an evocation of a feeling that in itself is not satisfactorily religious or linked to ontological purpose. It has not been schematised into the necessary rational and moral interpretations that give the numinous the necessary infusion to evolve into the holy. It offers cake to the starving when what is really needed is bread. It may satisfy some unevolved religious instinct, or the "lesser" of Tolkien's ancient desires, but it is not sufficient for mature consciousness. In children's fiction, however, the numinous is almost invariably invoked within a moral framework: the ethics of elfland, and the good and evil polarities of High Fantasy. Nevertheless, the *mysterium tremendum* is not confined to fantasy, and it is evoked as hallowed moments or insets within a realistic setting. It is very self-consciously created in Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*, where the children create a secret woodland kingdom that echoes the mystery of faraway Terabithia in Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*. It is a necessary secret, because Jess realises that he cannot explain its significance to an outsider. "Just walking down the hill towards the woods made something warm and liquid steal through his body" and fills him with "a kind of wild exhilaration." He anticipates the feeling of being "taller and stronger and wiser in that mysterious land." It is a place of special stillness, "like the moment after Miss Edmunds finished a song, just after the chords hummed down to silence," and it is a "sacred" place that can only be entered "at times of greatest sorrow or of greatest joy" (56-57). Veronica Brady specifically refers to the *mysterium tremendum* in this novel, and associates it with "a longing for paradise" and, significantly, it is a yearning "that kids have that doesn't get knocked out of people" (8). Jess likens his feelings of mystery to music, an experience that is reminiscent of Bridie McShane's experiences of mystery in church hymns. Otto argues that the unique element in music that cannot be described by correspondence to human emotions is one of the closest analogies we have to the "wholly other" of the numinous; herein lies its spell (48-50).

While it is true, as Brady says, that the actual longing for mystery does not get knocked out of people, habituation and sophistication have done much to render the experience of the numinous untenable to adult consciousness. The scientific "natural" wonder of the Victorians, so brilliantly described in the seashore explorations of Gosse, is no longer possible for most adults, who are thoroughly inured to scientific marvels; and, additionally, the process of conceptualisation and

categorisation almost inevitably destroys it. This is perhaps why Tolkien was so resistant to the wonder of natural history. Instead, the wonder of the Other world, both strange and resistant to logical analysis, is much closer to “the wholly other” that is an essential component of the numinous. Hence Tolkien’s claim that the mystery of the Other world is “the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind of imagined wonder” (*Tree* 18). Taylor also argues that wonder is possible only because it pre-exists any kind of structured thought; hence it is a poetic experience, not a rational one (26). Nevertheless, childhood consciousness, when not fed histories of the natural world as marvels to be consciously wondered at, is perhaps capable of fusing the wonder of the Real and Other worlds. This has been Merlyn’s method, as remembered by the ageing Wart.

He felt that it was strange to be visiting the animals again at his age. Perhaps, he thought to himself with shame, I am dreaming in my second childhood, perhaps I am given over to my dotage.

But it made him remember his first childhood vividly, the happy times swimming in moats or flying with Archimedes, and he realised that he had lost something since those days. It was something which he thought of now as the faculty of wonder. Then, his delights had been indiscriminate. His attention, or his sense of beauty, or whatever it was to be called, had attached itself fortuitously to oddments. Perhaps, while Archimedes had been lecturing him about the flight of birds, he himself would have been lost in admiration at the way in which the fur went on the mouse in the owl’s claws. Or the great Mr M. might have been making him a speech about Dictatorship, while he, all the time, would have seen only the bony teeth, poring on them in an ecstasy of experience.

This, his faculty of wonder, was gone from inside him, however much Merlyn might have furbished up his brain. It was exchanged for the faculty of discrimination, he supposed.... He did not feel proud of the change. (White, *Merlyn* 76)

The education of Wart, here and in the earlier *The Sword in the Stone*, is achieved through the wonder and awe overflowing from the lived immediacy of sensory experience, and the numinous nature of things in themselves. It seems to exemplify what philosopher Joseph Pieper says of modern learning: dominated by analytical and discursive *ratio*, it has ignored that of *intellectus*, a capacity of “*simplex intuitus*, of that simple vision to which truth offers itself like a landscape to the eye” (qtd. in Taylor 77). In this vision, things are what they are – and more.

To read a description of the aurora borealis in an adult novel would be an experience inevitably tinged with the knowledge of electromagnetic radiation at the poles. To do so through the eyes of Lyra in *Northern Lights* is to view through the ignorant lens of childhood consciousness, so we are better able to respond with wonder and awe. This suspension of disbelief is connected to the recovery of

primordial consciousness before the eating of the apple and gaining of knowledge through the Fall. Lewis rages with desire for the sublimity of "Northernness," yet comes closer to answering that desire in the less self-conscious quest of his children's novels than in his adult science fiction, where metaphors are carved and joined with intellectual deliberation. This creates a rational allegory rather than the series of inspired images that characterises Narnia. We might expect then an authentic experience of awe through Wallace Stevens' poetic sensibility as he wrestles with his own version of northern lights in "The Auroras of Autumn." Yet Stevens' discrimination, his probing intellectuality, impedes any direct sense of the aurora's magnificence. Despite his dictum that poetry must defy *ratio* and "resist the intelligence almost successfully" ("Adagia" 197), his own does not do so sufficiently for the reader to experience *simplex intuitus* and become wondrously absorbed.

Wart is not taught science or the rules of the universe, or even an alternative system of magic. Instead, he is made to feel as other sentient beings feel, and becomes a fish, a raptor, a goose, and an ant. Merlyn's technique is a fine example of poetic knowledge, and it is similar to the educative process of pastoral that works through the evocation of feeling, not dictum (Ettin 178). Here it is the feeling of the wonder of nature, poetic knowledge of it, that edifies Wart, and leads him on to a higher numinous experience of the sublime.

He saw the stars above his face, whirling on their silent and sleepless axis, and the leaves of the trees rustling against them, and he heard small changes in the grass. These little noises of footsteps and soft-fringed wing-beats and stealthy bellies drawn over grass blades or rattling against the bracken at first frightened him or interested him, so that he moved to see what they were (but never saw), then soothed him, so that he no longer cared to see what they were but trusted them to be themselves, and finally left him altogether as he swam down deeper and deeper, nuzzling his nose into the scented turf, into the warm ground, into the unending waters under the earth. (*Sword* 30)

Here in reverie, Wart moves from the wonder of the natural world to the larger sublime experience of the unloosing of human reality as he becomes a fish. The horizons of his consciousness then expand into the boundlessness of "unending waters," a somewhat gentle rendering of the sublime that lacks terror and merges more into the oceanic consciousness of the mystic.

Here, as elsewhere in children's fiction, the sublime tends to be toned down; nevertheless, there are other more robust examples that work by a combination of boundlessness and a fear-tinged awe. Such is the great waterfall of Caldron Pool in *The Last Battle*, that must be climbed as a prelude to heaven.

Even if you hadn't have been drowned, you would have been smashed to pieces by the terrible weight of water against the countless jags of rock. But in that world you could do it. You went on, up and up, with all kinds of reflected lights flashing at you from the water and all manner of coloured stones flashing through it, till it seemed you were climbing up light itself. (157)

The full potential of the sublime is most brilliantly achieved in Lewis' evocation of Christ in Aslan, the mighty Lion of Judah who resonates with the fearful symmetry of Blake's Tyger, yet simultaneously engenders the total trust of children. Aslan is "good and terrible at the same time." At first he can only be glimpsed as a flash of golden mane, and his "great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes" mean that the children cannot look at him directly, and they feel "all trembly" (*Lion* 117). In *The Last Battle*, in the larger life beyond death, he is seen "leaping down from cliff to cliff like a living cataract of power and beauty" (164).

His hair was like pure gold and the brightness of his eyes like gold that is liquid in the furnace. He was more terrible than the Flaming Mountain of Lagour, and in beauty he surpassed all that is in the world even as the rose in bloom surpasses the dust of the desert. (148)

Yet he is also the God of infinite suffering, who allows his mane to be shaved, and who gives up his life for Edmund, a traitor and a mere child. Some years earlier in *The Sword in the Stone*, White embodies the suffering Christ as the goddess Athene. Wart journeys "beyond the midnight country of sorrow and the sun-drained wastes of solitude" to find her. Her beauty is "unthinkable." He sees at once that "to be her was terrible, whereas to be with her was the only joy." Archimedes, however, is not so overawed and greets her as if he were

a prosperous banker who had always tried to be reasonably decent, meeting the man whose destiny it was to be nailed up and left to die of sunstroke, agony and exhaustion, in order to save prosperous bankers. (232)

In both these instances the authors evoke the *mysterium tremendum* and the boundless majesty of the sublime, as well as the sense of creaturely abasement and unworthiness that properly accompanies it (Otto 10). There is indeed a grim irony in White's rendition of Archimedes' cool-headedness in the face of God; his is the adult position, immune to wonder and humility, and here he is overly wise. Of course this is an irony for adult readers, but in this instance it does not detach us from the force of the image, serving only to reinforce it, and encouraging us to read (and perhaps live) as a child. It is difficult to imagine such evocations of God being possible in adult fiction; such powerful subject matter needs the childlike filter of innocence to embody its blaze.

Goldthwaite, from his own quite rigorous Christian perspective, is critical of what he regards as the apostasy of Lewis and Tolkien in their fatal attraction towards "the

dark sublime" (237). This sublime is epitomised in the alluring paganism of German Romanticism and Norse mythology, and the fascinating menace of Arthur Rackham's art. Although its dark presence is felt in Tolkien's Elvish Kingdom, its perverse potential is thoroughly thwarted by the humble down-to-earth hobbits; their own bright goodness outshines the beauty of the Elves and clearly wins the day. Goldthwaite finds Lewis' depictions of pagan gods cavorting with Aslan particularly offensive (234-35). Yet both Tolkien and Lewis are clearly responding to the *mysterium* and daemonic dread that reside in these earlier pagan religious manifestations. They were, and remain, valid intimations of a later revelation. In fact, Lewis virtually hammers home this very point in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where "deep magic from the dawn of time" is replaced by "deeper magic from the dawn of time." This is of course paganism giving way to Christianity. Otto's analysis of the evolution of the numinous helps us to understand it better. Deep magic is the earlier manifestation of religious emotion that consists merely of numinous intimations; as consciousness evolves it must be replaced by a sense of the numinous that is interpenetrated and schematised by reason and moral goodness. In this way, humanity can progress from perceiving the merely numinous to the fullest realisation of holiness. It is significant that in *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, Northernness, representing both the geographical orientation and the spiritual allure of Narnia, is replaced by an even more significant Easternness, associated with the coming of Christ from the symbolic east. All his life, Reepicheep has been haunted by the prophecy of a dryad, a wood woman, who spoke this verse over his cradle.

Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter East. (21)

At last, Reepicheep sails eastward to meet his Saviour at "the very end of the world." Here, surrounded by a sea of lilies, the crew draw "buckets of dazzling water from the sea, stronger than wine," and more real than ordinary water (177). This notion of an evolution from deep myth (dryads) to a deeper one, couched in the sublimely simple evocation of "utter East," brings to mind again Lewis' dictum that because one grows up from a liking for lemon squash to a liking for wine, it does not mean that a liking for lemon squash is totally discarded ("Three Ways" 25-26). It is an evolution of maturity, where the later can still accommodate the earlier.

Children's fantasy is redolent with stock images of the sublime: endless deserts, waterfalls, rugged cliffs, raging seas, ruined kingdoms and castles, and foreign

constellations. No doubt the fact that fantasy is a dominant form in this genre affords these opportunities, but there are other factors that make this genre conducive to its expression. Childhood itself is a ruined kingdom for the adult. Alison White suggests that T.S. Eliot uses the world of childhood, like the Elizabethan world, "to evoke glimpses of lost kingdoms" (74). One might speculate that, in simply reflecting on the loss of our kingdom of childhood and the terror of the knowledge of our own mortality, we are capturing a hint of the sublime. Furthermore, the very simplicity of childhood lends itself to the successful expression of sublime themes. Longinus describes the sublime as a ravishing and transporting of the reader that often calls for extreme simplicity (Mothersill, "Sublime" 408). Harold Bloom's concept of the sublime reveals a further correspondence. The sublime is necessarily reliant "upon the trope of hyperbole, the overthrowing (or overtaking, or overreaching) that is closer to simplification through intensity than it is to exaggeration" (1). Thus the sublime also lends itself to the principle of poetic intensity that is so strong in children's fiction: less is more. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Pullman at the end of *Northern Lights*, where the sublime takes a sharp descent into purple prose. The wonderful description of the aurora quoted earlier rapidly descends into overblown apocalyptic writing, culminating in the torrid sexual embrace of Lyra's parents and their daemons under the swaying and surging heavens. At this point the book ceases to be children's literature. The snake has fully entered the Garden with unseemly force, and we have lost the primordial wondrous connection with the infinite.

This is a far cry from the simplicity of "utter East," or the sublime Aslan whose passion is entirely that of *agape*. Simplicity also guarantees the success of Ged's epiphany when, still as rustic goatherd, he meets the Archmage of Roke.

As their eyes met, a bird sang aloud in the branches of the tree. In that moment Ged understood the singing of the bird, and the language of the water falling in the basin of the fountain, and the shape of the clouds, and the beginning and end of the wind that stirred the leaves: it seemed to him that he himself was a word spoken by the sunlight. (*Wizard* 47)

This passage works because of its restraint, and because of the larger economy of language and expression that characterise the whole novel. While the sublime has become clichéd in adult literature and an object of satire since the eighteenth century (Mothersill, "Sublime" 408), this example from Le Guin shows how children's literature offers a unique opportunity for its expression in prose. The simplicity of the medium, the freshness of the child's vision, and the humility of the protagonists help to prevent emotional or rhetorical excess. This is also the case in a quite different rendering of sublime in *The Secret Garden* when Dickon brings together the fox and the lamb. Here the opposites of red clawed nature and the

innocence of the lamb are juxtaposed in a mystic paradox, heightened for adult readers by the Biblical associations of the lion who lies down with the lamb: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11.6). This conjunction is awesome in its Biblical context, yet Burnett also achieves a different, though no less inspiring, effect in this children's medium. It is, perhaps, especially disarming in a children's context.

There are many instances of the sublime in T.H. White's novels, and he constantly uses the concepts of innocence and humility to counter grandiosity as a key to his success. Wart's final lesson before attaining kingship is from a badger who teaches him the true end of philosophy is "to dig, and to love your home" (*Sword* 272). This is a very small example of White's skill in earthing the sublime so that it cannot float away into bathos. The technique is particularly evident at the end of *The Sword in the Stone*, when Wart innocently claims the fateful sword. His foster-brother Kaye, swollen with pride as a newly made knight, now imperiously demands that Wart, his liege man, fetch him a sword for the joust. Wart must swallow his pride and honour his commitment to the code of chivalry, and in this act of humility he is more truly heroic than any of the tournament knights. Wart's humility is further tested as he is forced to be a burglar, like Bilbo Baggins, and steal a sword to fulfil his obligation. These rites of passage prepare Wart so that his soul is in a fit state to claim the sword. This is a long-awaited moment for the reader aware of Arthurian myth, worthy of a fanfare, and almost impossible to accomplish successfully in twentieth-century style. But White manages it brilliantly, as Wart practically stumbles upon the sword and, unwitnessed by dignitaries, pulls it from the stone.

'I feel queer when I have hold of this sword and I notice things much more clearly. Look at the beautiful gargoyles of this church, and of the monastery which it belongs to. See how splendidly all the famous banners in the aisle are waving. How nobly that yew holds up the red flakes of its timber to worship God. How clean the snow is. I can smell something like fetherfew and sweet briar – and is that music that I hear?'

It was music, whether of pan-pipes or recorders, and the light in the churchyard was so clear, without being dazzling, that one could have picked a pin out twenty yards away. (290-91)

It is very significant that the sword is grasped unconsciously, not with a grand flurry of expectation and egotism, but in innocence and humility. It is all the more powerful for this, and in association with its rich metaphorical associations for the adult reader, demonstrates many of the themes throughout this discussion. It is a moment of illumination out-of-time, and it is a perfected state of sensory experience so often reported by mystics. Clean snow is here wonderful in itself, as well as carrying the connotation of purity. The pan-pipes suggest heavenly choirs (and also

a pastoral connection), but the potential for sentimental hyperbole is pre-empted by the possibility that they are mere recorders. The description gains force through paradoxical contrasts: the serf boy who is really king; the impossibility of beautiful gargoyles; the noble yew that is also a conglomeration of red flakes of timber (the vision that sees the world in a grain of sand). The yew is a death symbol for the adult reader, but its terror is redeemed in the yew's worship of God, an image that carries with it a connotation of immortality. Here is the clarity of vision that the light of idealisation throws onto everyday experience, but this same vision imparts the prosaic ability "to pick out a pin twenty yards away." The sublime and the ridiculous tread a very fine line here, but it is the successful negotiation of these extremes that assures the strength of White's accomplishment.

There is another element in this version of sublime that links it to the higher reaches of the numinous. Wart is helped to lift the sword by the goodwill of all the various members of creation he has met, vulgar crows, dainty unicorns and mighty trees, a veritable boundless multitude. They come from waters, sky, field, and there are figures from the sanctified imagination of heraldry that emblazons the banners in the nearby church (deep magic now in service to deeper magic). Each offers a gift from the uniqueness of its being: the powerful snap of the pike; the gravity defying "biceps" of the oak, and the patience and coherence of stone. They come to help Wart "on account of love" (292). Here again is *agape*, love manifest in the entire creation, and it is a theophany of extraordinary power. Wonder and sublimity lead to an experience that may be justly called holy.

Beauty: "Gilded Cloud, or Flowre"

A.C. Bradley succinctly distinguishes between the concepts of the sublime and the beautiful by linking the sublime with transcendence and the beautiful with immanence. Beauty is "the image of the total presence of the infinite within any bounds it may choose to assume" (qtd. in Carritt 230-31). Thus beauty creates a tangible bridge between the real and the ideal. For Vaughan in "The Retreat," the uncorrupted gaze of childhood can more clearly perceive the spiritual immanence within creation, the radiance that makes the cloud and flower golden. Significantly, the word beauty is absent from many postmodern texts on aesthetics and has been replaced by a changeling and impoverished term: "aesthetic value." Yet in children's literature, beauty is silently flourishing. Its survival here rather than in adult art forms again illustrates Abbs' contention that children's literature compensates for the "failure of adult culture."

Beauty, like Truth and Goodness, is unfashionable because the very idea of beauty is an untenable absolute in the relative scales of postmodern aesthetics. It is also unfashionable because it is indefinable, resisting classification within the strictures of language. Yet this does not mean that it lacks existence. As Murdoch perceptively comments: "what is truly beautiful is 'inaccessible' and cannot be possessed or destroyed. The statue is broken, the flower fades ... but something has not suffered from decay and mortality" (*Sovereignty* 59). Mothersill notes that while Plato, Kant and Hume have very different aesthetic theories to account for beauty, they do not differ on what it is that needs analysis, and that it accords with the opinion of the reflective layman ("Beauty" 46). In other words, it is largely self-exemplifying. Baumgarten, often acknowledged as the father of the study of aesthetics, called aesthetics the science of sensitive knowing that is in a class of its own and not governed by logical knowledge. This is equivalent to Taylor's idea of "poetic knowledge," a source of knowing that is chiefly available to our sensory and intuitive faculties. Nevertheless, many writers both before and after have attempted to provide explanations of beauty that are at least partly grounded in the reason. In fact, most people when discussing beauty will refer to some aspect of form, such as ratio, proportion, harmony and symmetry, that provides a unique type of pleasure. Once again, Yeats' "A Prayer for my Daughter" reveals a truth about childhood. His question "how but in custom and ceremony/are innocence and beauty born?" (103) is significant in its intuitive association of order, beauty and the innocence of the child.

At the very least, in these approaches we sense that beauty creates a satisfying and therapeutic pattern from the tensions and chaos of the sensory world, but it is also so much more. For philosopher Arthur Danto, the artwork is a "transfiguration of the commonplace" simply by virtue of being regarded as art. Yet, for Danto, as for generations of artists and philosophers before him, visual beauty is somehow related to the capturing of outer and inner light. Indeed, clarity (*claritas*) is one of Thomas Aquinas' three conditions for beauty, accompanying integrity (*integritas sive perfectio*) and harmony (*debita proportio sive consonantia*). Clarity is gift of light and is thus linked to radiance, a connection made by Stephen Dedalus' inquiry into aesthetics in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Despite Danto's commitment to rational analysis, his use of the term "transfiguration" is interesting because it suggests a link to non-rational and spiritual levels of existence. Most of the great writers in aesthetics imply that beauty is connected to a higher state of being, even though these theorists differ in their conceptualisation of that realm. Plato's view is, of course, seminal: art is an imperfect copy of a transcendent world of ideal forms. For poet Robert Bridges, beauty is the quality of appearances that awakens "spiritual emotion in the mind of man" (qtd. in Carritt 331). Susanne

Langer argues that creation produces forms that are symbolic of inner processes, a dimension of articulate but not discursive feeling. Art is linked to an inner ineffable world, where feeling and form are inseparable (20-23). It can give us “a sense of exhilaration” (395), and it has the force of a revelation (405). Hence when beauty becomes the focus of the verbal images in children’s fiction, or the visual images in picturebooks, we sense another manifestation of the numinous.

Otto compares the capacity to perceive the numinous with that which perceives beauty; both are quite separate from rational discursive consciousness, and both are *sui generis* experiences. He states that joy in the beautiful is not just an extension of pleasure in the agreeable, it is derived from a quite different quality, just as specific religious awe is not the same as ordinary fear, however much there is a useful analogy (138). In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant argues that beauty conforms to a higher law of universal suprasensible rules which requires a unique form of apprehension. In making ordinary, commonplace judgements, the imagination augments the received sensory data so as to fit them to a pre-existing concept. The result is an objective judgement. In aesthetic contemplation, however, the imagination seeks out relations of form that are entirely independent of the scene that contains them. This is reflective judgement, and it has no purpose other than enjoyment of itself. Hence, to perceive the beautiful exercises an entirely different set of faculties, and these are part of the same suprasensible realm from which our religious perceptions derive. Iris Murdoch takes the detachment of reflective judgement a step further, and regards the experience of beauty as an “unselfing” (*Sovereignty* 84); it has the power to dissolve the distorting solipsism of our consciousness, an idea that suggests a connection between beauty and the moral realm and the nurturing of virtue. This connection implies that beauty is a spiritual experience that can be good for us, and it also explains why we still instinctively preserve beauty in art forms for children.

Childhood itself is idealised as a thing of beauty. In *The Poetics of Reverie*, Gaston Bachelard makes the important claim that when adults engage in reveries about childhood, they are not reliving actual childhoods, or indulging in illusion; rather they are inventing a significant, symbolically resonant, imaginative structure. Within this structure, the adult conceives childhood as a state where everything that is seen is beautiful. Poetic images within this construction both create and retrieve a beauty that is “within us at the bottom of memory.” This becomes “the beauty of a flight which revives us” (101). But renewal can also come from a purity of vision. Ruskin’s notion that painters must see the world with an innocence of the eye is that same vision we attribute to children. It would seem that there is kinship between children and artists as well as children and poets. It is interesting to note in this

regard that picturebook illustrators often paint the world in the way they think that children see it. Not only are they giving children what they think children see; they are also refreshing their own vision through unadulterated lenses. Thus artists frequently distort perspectives, enlarging faces, for example, as a small child would experience them, and adding an Edenic radiance through a play of light. This quality of light that is so common in picturebook art visually embodies the notion of the Golden Age of childhood. The visual world is idealised, so that the colour and form of the sensory world are represented with a mysterious depth and a sheen of glory. This vision is superbly captured by Jean Follain when describing his perceptions of the eternity of his early childhood: "there were mornings when it rained substance" (qtd. in Bachelard 110).

When we recognise the beauty of either a visual or verbal image, we are making what Kant regards as a *reflective judgement*, using the suprasensible rules that are outside time. To know something is beautiful is to experience a sense of detemporalisation, and this is another means of experiencing everlastingness. As Bryson comments, "the gaze of the painter arrests the flux of phenomena ... in an eternal moment of disclosed presence" (qtd. in Nodelman, *Words* 17). In picturebooks especially, but also in highly symbolic children's fiction, adults step twice into timelessness: firstly into the symbolic depths of childhood, and secondly into the timelessness of beauty. In *The Secret Garden*, for example, Burnett describes experiences of beauty that allow one to feel timeless: that "one may live for ever and ever." She verbally paints "the mysterious deep gold stillness slanting through and under the branches of a wood" at sunset; the "immense quiet of the dark-blue at night with millions of stars waiting and watching"; and "sometimes a look in someone's eyes" (215). These are intense experiences that picturebook artists render visually. Such plain and obvious references to the numinous aspects of beauty have become an embarrassment to our empirical and subjective world order. In child culture we can approach this dimension vicariously through the wonder we suppose children to experience, and for ourselves (at least) the beautiful may be tinged with the quiet joy of a spiritual encounter.

Of course art should not only contain idealised images that are beautiful, but we should pay more attention to the effects of the verbal and visual images we give to children and imbibe ourselves. This is because all art is didactic, influencing our consciousness and subliminally giving us messages about the world. Plato distrusted art, not just because it represented an imperfect copy of a higher reality, but because he knew that art cannot be "a self-sufficient pursuit; its power to 'enter the soul' and to influence the life of a culture is too great" (Halliwell 328). In *Nature and Art as Needs of the Mind*, Gombrich warns that "it is still possible, indeed likely,

for a child to pass through school without ever hearing a piece by Mozart or seeing a work by Rembrandt in the classroom." Why, he asks, do we teach children the words of language but not the images of our tradition? (22). We can nurture children's minds, not just by giving them exposure to the images of our great tradition, but also by exposing them to the emotions that accompany beauty. Langer's insight that our psychological vocabulary is too crude to capture the reality of inner experience is of value here (91). In creating and experiencing art, literature and music that express highly significant feelings, we give children and ourselves access to realities that lie beyond the reach of discursive prose. This has enormous potential for the nurturing of finer feelings. Berger affirms that a painting by Rembrandt "increases our awareness of our potential moral courage," and a classical Greek sculpture increases our awareness of "our potential dignity" (qtd. in Meynell 100). Otto states that everyone is capable of having loftier *a priori* cognitions, but they do not necessarily occur spontaneously and must be awakened through "the instrumentality of other more highly endowed natures" (181).

Importantly, the fine feelings which are evoked have the potential to encourage human goodness. Both Plato and Schiller believed that the experience of beauty is part of the individual's progress towards an understanding of virtue. Beauty must not be valued for art's sake alone. This was Yeats' hard-won understanding when he said that beauty is not "a sufficient end." The power of visual imagery, whether to indoctrinate or to elevate, suggests that we need to be more outspoken in our judgements of what we give children. Hankla's criticism of Sendak's *Outside Over There* as "a paranoid vision ... an icy surrogate for a literature which will benefit humanity" (qtd. in Steig 142) is controversial, overstated and perhaps wrong, but at least it is raising an awareness of what ought to be talked about. Tolstoy, like Plato, believed art (including literature) is too influential to be judged for its own sake. As art is capable of making men better or worse, its social and ethical consequences must be considered. He believed that art's purpose is the transmission of the highest and best feelings, and thus the most worthy art is that which communicates the feeling of brotherhood and the love of one's neighbour (*Art* 288). This is a form of moral beauty, where beauty contains the goodness of the ethical realm within the allurements of the numinous, a form frequently contained in both fantasy and realism in literature for children.

The highest claim for beauty is that it mediates between ourselves and a transcendent reality. The clear coherent vision of beauty in a sense idealises the ordinary world, arousing our good feelings towards it as it intimates a connection to a metaphysical order. Lewis sees it as an expedient that substitutes for that inconsolable longing.

We do not want merely to *see* beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled the air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves – that, though we cannot, yet these projections can, enjoy in themselves that beauty, grace and power of which Nature is the image. (*Weight* 12-13)

These imaginative, “sub-creative” projections and the beauty reflected in Nature live on in children’s literature, contributing so strongly to its numinous and idealising force.

In Paradisum

The numinous and its manifestations, the ache for a better reality behind appearances, point heavenward in a longing for paradise. Such is the end point of perfection, but it is untranslatable into words. In *The Voyage of the Dawntrader*, Lewis is able to very convincingly render the mystic state of the travellers as they grow near to Aslan’s country. They do not want to sleep or to eat much, and they do not talk except in the reverential hush of low voices. At first there is too much light; even the seawater becomes “drinkable” light and “the loveliest thing” they have ever tasted (166-74). It is then that they themselves partake of the light and everything reveals its deeper radiance, but they do not reach heaven. In *The Last Battle*, Lewis draws closer again and dares to give us a representation of paradise, but it is veiled behind a series of Platonic copies that beckon us “farther up and farther in” (153). Even entry through the imagination is barred at a certain point: “the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them” (165).

The attainment of paradise is of course the ultimate happy ending, and it remains a device that is the cornerstone of children’s fiction. While the happy ending provides the satisfaction of narrative desire, it also often represents an idealisation of another order. Tolkien’s conception of the eucatastrophe is of crucial importance to understanding the significance of the happy ending. Whereas tragedy is the highest function of drama, the eucatastrophic story is the highest form of fairy tale. The eucatastrophe is the opposite of tragedy; it is the good catastrophe, the sudden joy when things come right at the end of the fairy tale, and it is neither “escapist” nor “fugitive.”

It is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of the *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (*Tree* 62)

The major function of the eucatastrophe is redemptive. It “reflects a glory backwards,” and “rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through” (63). Tolkien restricts his discussion of the eucatastrophe to the fairy story, the supreme example, but it is present in a wide range of children’s fiction, displaced perhaps from this original pure form, but still able to work its magic. We feel it in Tom Long’s difficult and poignant realisation of what has happened in the midnight garden as he embraces Hatty; in Ged’s facing of himself at the end of the world so that all can come right; in the Pevensie children’s absorption into the further and deeper world through the other side of Narnia; and in the Tiller’s real and difficult eventual homecoming. Even here, there seems a rightness about it that is more than wishful thinking, an echo of a hidden higher law.

Tolkien understood the eucatastrophe as a vehicle of deep religious significance. The joy that is experienced in the eucatastrophe is more than can be accounted for in the satisfactory conclusion of events in a secondary world. Instead, it presents “a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world” (*Tree* 64). From Tolkien’s perspective, this is the essential truth of the Christian story, and another example of the principle of deep magic bearing fruit in deeper magic. Whether we accept or reject his religious allegiance, it is difficult not to agree that the happy ending in children’s fiction is charged with a supernatural significance. Otto’s analysis of the numinous again helps us to understand further why this is so. The various manifestations of numinous experience, whether a desire for paradise that is conceived through a specific religious doctrine, or for “that beatific Reality that is ‘above the world,’” are essentially a “mighty propulsion towards an ideal good known only to religion,” which the mind knows of only “in yearning and presentiment” (36). The happy ending is itself a presentiment of that ideal good.

While the orthodox religion of Lewis can give us an image of the Christian heaven, the embodiment of a “beatific Reality” is achieved in other types of children’s fiction. Tove Jansson’s *Moominvalley in November*, as much as it is a children’s book, is also a mature, lyrical and numinous meditation on the idea of perfection and an earthly incarnation of paradise. The Moomin family are absent from Moominvalley, and the narrative describes the experiences of subsidiary characters who have appeared in earlier novels. Each seeks their version of remembered perfection as they journey in late autumn to the Moomin home. Snufkin, the eremitic traveller, finds the numinous deep within the forest.

Snufkin padded along calmly, the forest closed round him and it began to rain. The rain fell on his green hat and on his raincoat, which was also green, it pattered and pattered everywhere and the forest wrapped him in a gentle and exquisite loneliness. (9-10)

He is seeking the perfect song that will express "the hundred miles of silence" of the forest (14). He dismisses the million tunes of summer, and seeks instead a solitary and elusive tune he catches in "the faint whisper of rain and running water ... the same tender note of solitude and perfection" (27). When he eventually finds his mere "five bars of music," they are even "more beautiful" and "even simpler than he had hoped" (154). Here is Otto's "wholly other" that can best be expressed through an analogy with music.

Toft, an ethereal orphaned child figure, seeks a safe, good place, and "a mamma" (117). His idea of perfection is a vast imaginative reconstruction of a summer at the Moomin's house that seems to be part memory and part imagination. It recalls Bachelard's notion of invented childhood, that is neither real nor illusion, but lives at the bottom of memory. Toft's construction becomes a consoling story he tells himself about "the Happy Family." In his mind he locates the Moomin household in a pastoral paradise, "a wild green garden lit by sunshine" where the apple trees are in bloom; here in reverie he lets "the wind sigh high above the valley ... and then die down again, so that the stillness [becomes] perfect again" (16). For Grandpa Grumble, perfection is represented as "a clear, flowing brook" that is so exactly conceived it can be neither a river nor a stream. It is situated in "the Happy Valley," a place where one can "play and sing all night." More significantly, it is a place where he can shed his past and the clutter of unwanted memories. Every morning he wakes in "secretive expectation" and sets about "the business of forgetting in order to make the valley come nearer." Here "no one disturbed him, no one told him who he was" (43-44). He is pursuing the core identity that is the end point of romance, and he is also enacting the parable message that one has to lose one's life to find it in the kingdom of heaven.

For the strange and gentle Hemulen, perfection is sought in returning to the Moomin house, but also in his yearning to go to sea. He composes a poem on that longing that is both charming (tinged with the creaturehood of his animal status) yet profound. Here again, the high rubs shoulders with the humble.

Oh say, where lies true lasting happiness?
In evening rest? In friendly glance? 'Tis more:
In sailing from the mire, the reeds, the mass,
The mighty ocean's vastness to adore.
Oh what is life? 'Tis nothing but a dream,
A vast and enigmatic flowing stream.
Such tender feelings fill my heaving breast
I know not how or where they'll come to rest;
My cares are multitudinous and sore,
I long to feel the friendly rudder in my paw. (122-23)

When the Hemulen finally does go to sea, he experiences the *mysterium tremendum*, even if, again, it is tinged with a gentle humour. He acclaims "the majesty of the sea," but it fills him with horror: "This is what sailing is like. The world turns upside down and you hang on for dear life to the edge of the yawning abyss" (147).

In a mysterious, fascinating counterpoint to the experiences of each creature in Moominvalley, the narrative is interspersed with Toft's reading of passages from a book about the evolution of sea creatures at the bottom of the ocean. This is the world of nummulites and radiolaria, "curious beasts and murky landscapes" (49). Toft encounters an experience of awe reminiscent of Mary in *The Stone Book* when she experiences the cave paintings of her ancestors.

'It is impossible for us to express sufficient amazement,' read Toft, 'at this rare variant of the Protozoa group ... we have grounds for conjecturing that an electrical charge was a crucial necessity of life for it. The occurrence of electrical storms at that period was exceptionally abundant, the post-glacial mountain chains described above being subjected to the unceasing turbulence of these violent electrical storms, and the adjacent ocean became charged with electricity.' ... [Toft] didn't really understand.... But he thought all the strange words were beautiful. (50)

Sublimity of the grandeur of nature combines here with the wonder of creation in the remotest possible past. It is a lovely irony that Toft, a creature of Jansson's numinous imagination, feels strange wonder at the "Real world," the wonder that so dissatisfied Tolkien because it was not strange enough and threatened to cheat him of wonder at the exotic, foreign realm of Faërie.

When the characters variously arrive at Moominvalley, they find the house cold and deserted, and each character must come to terms with the gap between the idealisation of memory and imagination, and what seems at first an impoverished reality. Eventually, there is a ritualistic feast, a variant of the heavenly banquet, to celebrate the absent Moomins, who, as the embodiment of nostalgic perfection, are almost deified. The Hemulen proposes a toast with an invocation to observe a minute's silence in appreciation of the Moomins: "We are eating their food ... we walk beneath their trees, it is in the spirit of tolerance, companionship and *joie de vivre* created by them that we are living" (123). The subsequent entertainment includes a strangely realistic shadow-play of the Moomins at sea, called "The Return": "the boat glided slowly on across the sheet, over the sea, never before had a boat sailed so silently and so naturally" (129). This is another image of hand shadows on a wall, but here it is immensely rich, invoking the Platonic notion of images that suggest an even more real perfection. However, Jansson shows the dangers of spending too long in the ideal. Toft is exhausted by his enormous dream of meeting the family again. His image of Moominmamma has grown "so perfect

and gentle and consoling" that it is "unbearable." Worse still, "the house, the garden and the river were nothing but a play of shadows on the screen and Toft no longer knew what was real and what was only in his imagination" (155). He must let go his imaginative excesses and remember their reality. Toft is bereft, and so is the reader, who is beginning to doubt whether the Moomins have always been nothing but a fantastic dream. Yet it is from this very forlornness that Jansson shapes a eucatastrophe. Toft sits atop a mountain looking out to sea, and just as the sun goes down, it throws a last ray of light, illuminating the heavy clouds and the desolation of winter. It is exactly at this moment that he spots the storm lantern of the real Moomin boat sailing into harbour (157). The shaft of sunlight illuminates the moment of maximum desolation and the quickening gladness of return, so that the gleam of sunlight quite literally rends the web of story. The shadow-play has been vindicated as a presentiment of a real happy ending of "return."

The Secret Garden is a very different realisation of the beatific vision and the forces of idealisation that help to achieve it. It is one of the most inspirational texts in either the children's or adult canon, yet is firmly rooted in reality: in the narrator's own words the novel is about "a hard, little, unloving girl and a sickly boy who believed he was going to die" (148). Marghanita Laski describes it as "the most satisfying children's book I know" (qtd. in Threadgold 113). For Katherine Paterson, it is "more a mystical experience than a book" (*Gates* 104). Despite its Romantic conception of childhood, it also offers a very modern psychological portrait of why Mary at first falls so short of the ideal. Here is another ruined child. Her parents have ignored her and she has been spoiled, and she endures the ultimate childhood loss through being orphaned. She is temperamentally and physically unattractive. Similarly, Colin and his father are also emotionally and physically disfigured by their loss of mother and wife, and overindulgence in grief has grossly distorted their thinking. Mr Craven is so lost to gloom and despair from the start, he is unmoved even by the beauty of the Austrian Tyrol, a beauty "as might have lifted any man's soul" (284). The beginning of redemption for him comes in reverie as his thoughts cease to be focused on himself, and he becomes lost in a mass of blue forget-me-nots growing by a clear alpine stream. By filling his mind with the loveliness of the image and the "wonders" of its myriad blue blossoms, the dark waters of his mind are gradually washed clean, and the black burden lifts as he finds himself increasingly able to fill his mind with good thoughts. He is moved by the "crystal blueness of the lake" and the "soft, thick verdure of the hills." His body, his mind, and his soul grow stronger (283-86). This corresponds to the poetic knowledge of the world as he begins to wake up to the world outside his ego-locked tortured consciousness. This awakening of beauty then instils the virtues of courage and hope, so that "instead of giving way to thoughts of the worst he actually found he

was trying to believe in better things" (290). This process is an enactment of that larger redemptive process of adults healing cultural despair by dipping into the "good thoughts" of children's literature, and it demonstrates the capacity of beauty to nurture fine feelings.

Burnett is answering the question implied in the fall from Arcadia that each of the grief-warped characters has experienced. The question is posed in psychological terms of plot: how does one cope with the loss of parents or spouse and the resultant damaging of personality? Burnett makes it abundantly clear that immersing oneself in despair is narcissistic and fruitless. It may not lead directly to bad actions, but it is unlikely to lead to good ones. The restoration is achieved for these characters through the devices that have been explored in this chapter and all are to some degree concerned with idealisation. It is gained through the finding of the secret garden that represents what we all long to find: "a safe private place, perfect freedom" (Bawden 167). Here too is the poetic archetypal satisfaction of regaining a lost ancestral hall that is linked both to the notions of nobility and identity. And restoration is achieved through the pastoral experience of moor and garden, and "poetic knowledge" of the natural world that leads adults and children through a continuum of numinous experiences of wonder, sublimity and beauty.

One of the strengths of this novel is its seamless straddling of the genres of fantasy and realism, and this is paralleled in a melding of its interpenetration of the ideal and the real. It lends the idealisation in the novel a particular kind of cogency and force. The supernatural coincidences that direct the action, Mary's finding of the key to the garden and Mr Craven's clairaudient vision of his dead wife's voice, are more than sentimental wish fulfilment, and are hardly outside the range of most people's actual experience. (Coincidences, dreams and visions are reported by a large percentage of the population.) Always, the supernatural threads are tempered by a clear, cool psychological insight, such as that in Mary's understanding that others were disagreeable, "but she did not know that she was so herself" (12). The development of Mary's character occurs against the backdrop of the moor, a place of the limitless sublime, at first filling Mary with some astonishment tinged with fear. It forms an "endless, dull, purplish sea" (24), and seems to "spread out on all sides and climb up to the sky" (45). The "heavenly" (61) blue of sky above the moor sparkles "like the waters of some lovely, bottomless lake, and here and there, high, high in the arched blueness [float] small clouds of snow white fleece" (60). Its "fresh, strong pure air" has something to do with her change in temper and growing imagination (67). The wind sweeps down "in soft big breaths" and is "strange with a wild clear-scented sweetness" (211). The moor's boundlessness extends to human life as it makes Colin feel that he will live for ever and ever (215).

As with White's sublime at the end of *The Sword in the Stone*, there is an intermingling of processional, celestial and courtly imagery. Mary's announcement of the coming of spring on the moor makes Colin think of "a great procession and big burst and wafts of music ... crowds of lovely people and children with garlands and branches with blossoms on them, everyone laughing and dancing and crowding and playing on pipes" and "golden trumpets" (210). Colin's first afternoon in the garden seemed "to devote itself to being perfect and radiantly beautiful and kind to one boy." Even Dickon, used to the transcendental depths of nature, registers the afternoon with "a growing wonder in his eyes" (216). "It was like being taken in state round the country of a magic king and queen and shown all the mysterious riches it contained" (217). Here too all of nature joins in celebration of abundant life, life that is new and life that has been healed; and spring crowds everything it possibly can into one place, "perhaps out of pure heavenly goodness" (216). Here is another example of the numinous joining with the realm of moral goodness to evoke the holy.

The "magic" in the novel also hovers between the credible and the fanciful. On the one hand it is very much that of the nature poet: Dylan Thomas' "green fuse that drives the flower"; but it is also associated with religious imagery and what Lewis terms "deeper magic," expressed in their repeated singing of the Doxology at the novel's end (273). Bawden claims that the magic is really "matter-of-fact" and to do with all those things we know that children should have: "companionship ... fresh air and exercise." The real magic she claims lies in its unconscious expression of "a basic human longing for life as it should be, and the concept of a secret garden where everything is happy and peaceful and growing and good expresses this longing simply but perfectly" (169). This much is indeed true, but Bawden's common sense, psychological explanation is an inadequate account of the numinous quality that surrounds the magic. For the adult reader, Misselthwaite's walled secret garden has associations with the medieval notion of the *hortus conclusus* of monastic simplicity, and the roses that grow within its walls are inescapably linked to the mystical notion of perfection. This is reinforced by Marian imagery when Mrs Sowerby enters the garden luminous in a long blue cloak (274). The moment is "majestic and mysterious" when Dickon and the fox and the lamb (and other animals of innocence) sit in a circle on the grass (242). And in the closing pages of the novel, magic is described as "the Joymaker," an appellation which suggests the metaphysical gleam of the eucatastrophe.

Like White, Burnett is able to achieve her transcendental vision in this book through the real and humble lens of the unsentimentalised child protagonist. Inglis suggests that the great strength of the book is not its idealisation and exhortation, but the life

it gives to "moving commonplaces." He cites Mary's astonished wonder at the quickening of spring as things push themselves up from the earth and the delight of being able to hold a living lamb; this he asserts is a process that uses the positives of Romanticism and turns them into solid details (*Promise* 112-13). Yet so delicate is Burnett's touch in this novel that the physical and the metaphysical are indistinguishable. This is finely captured in the children's perception (through poetic, not rational knowledge) of "the immense, tender, terrible, heart-breaking beauty and solemnity of Eggs" (261). This quietly suggests a vision of something that is very like perfection.

For Burnett, and for Pearce after her in the second great garden novel, the enclosed garden is an emblem of the child within and of the soul. It creates a place for retreat that is not complete in itself, but rather a place where wisdom is acquired for living better in the world outside the garden. Inglis states that Burnett deliberately wants the values of the garden restored to "the new public life of an ideal social order." It is a message for children which is implicit in every good story we give to them: "Look, this is how the world ought to be. Try to make it like that when you're grown up." It is a book that "seeks to imagine the finest life possible and to use it to criticise and improve the life being lived around it at the time" (*Promise* 112). These are messages for adult readers as well as children. Here is clear demonstration of Marinelli's assertion that in pastoral the issues of adulthood are placed within the gardens of childhood for clarification (11-12). Both Marinelli and Inglis imply that the literary creation of perfection is a casting of light that we might better see and redeem the dark. In this sense idealisation is not illusory, but instead fulfils Tolstoy's claim that art is the transmission of the highest and best feelings to which man has risen. *The Secret Garden* in particular satisfies Tolstoy's view of good art in that it joyfully communicates brotherhood and love of one's neighbour. The "magic" that works through the perfected loving actions of the characters and through the idealised beauty of nature exemplifies the life-enhancing purposes of education and art, expressed so well by R.F. Holland in his essay "Education and Values."

... by being brought into contact with forms of understanding and apprehension in which some good is to be encountered, some wonder to be seen, whether in nature or in the work of human beings, a person might be helped to see the beauty of reality, helped to live more fully, helped to be glad that he is alive. (*Empiricism* 59)

This too is the process that White proclaims through Wart's experience of the sea through his "first world" vision as a goose: "the dawn, the sea-dawn and the mastery of ordered flight were of such intense beauty that he was almost moved to sing." He wanted "to cry a chorus to life" (*Future King* 177).

This is a far cry from cultural despair. Cultural despair is a stagnant look at now. Idealisation within children's fiction is a looking back to something better; and in its ability to cast light on and improve the present, idealisation moves us forward into the realm of ethics and value. In this forward motion, the best works of children's fiction exemplify the truth of Thoreau's declaration: "if you have put your castles in the air ... that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them" (215).

Virtue

Art must embody the highest moral virtues lest it set a bad example to the young and the weak.

(Plato, *Laws* Book II)

The Good ... presents a goal for the human condition here in this world, a conceptual abstraction of our actual experience of moments of good in human life; it is the essential subject of all literature ... but not all literature illustrates it: badly thought out literature obscures it, and nihilistic literature perniciously denies it.

(John Gardner 136-37)

Literature deals supremely with human life as it is lived, and morality is woven into life at every point.

(McGinn 6)

The literature of the twentieth century is essentially psychological; and psychology consists in describing states of the soul by displaying them all on the same plane without any discrimination of value, as though good and evil were external to them, as though the effort towards the good could be absent from the thought of any man.

(Weil, *On Science* 168)

Good art 'explains' truth itself by manifesting deep conceptual connections. Truth is clarification, justice, compassion.

(Murdoch, *Metaphysics* 321)

Well, you can't have *Anna Karenina* and leave out Levin. It just doesn't work. All you have left is another adultery gone sour, and you can get that every night on 'Dallas'. You don't have Tolstoy's experience of truth.

(Paterson, *Spying* 142)

We come now to the last and most important way in which children's literature functions as secular scripture. This is its inherent acknowledgement of the moral realm where truth, beauty and goodness merge as images of the Platonic notion of the ultimate Good. In contemporary adult culture, morality is too often dismissed as an entirely relative quality, or as a reactionary or political idea invoked solely to cramp the freedom of the individual. As Raymond Gaita remarks, morality is currently a term that invites "sneer quotes" (6). Yet many adult readers of children's literature admit that they find the morality of children's fiction profoundly attractive, especially in the ethically passive climate of contemporary adult culture. The failure of adult culture to concern itself with morality is beginning to receive censure from highly respected literary critics and philosophers who cannot easily be dismissed as second-rate or reactionary. After a lifetime's scholarship, Wayne Booth has come to the conclusion that fiction cannot be severed from the realm of ethics because the books that we read both overtly and covertly affect our actions in real life. In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, he likens the reading of novels to the cultivation of friendship, and forcefully argues that our companions in fiction are of vital importance to our wellbeing. Some books may be good for us, and some may be bad for us, just as the friends we choose may have positive or negative influences upon our lives. He reiterates the neglected fact that we create ourselves by the choice of ethos we prefer to have, and this choice extends into the act of reading. When reading fiction, modes of action, life-plots and characters will be emulated or despised, attended to or ignored. Just as with friendships, we must learn to distinguish narratives which will nurture from those which may "deliberately or accidentally, destroy or cripple" (266). As Le Guin pithily expresses it: "writing can damage people" (qtd. in Cadden 133).

In *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction*, moral philosopher Colin McGinn examines the traditional concerns of ethics through exploring fiction, having arrived at the belief that morality is best understood in character and action, rather than in the realm of precepts and abstract ideas. McGinn argues that the moral and aesthetic content of parables is a potential that exists in all fiction, but regrets that "the role of morality in fiction has been underestimated in recent years." He places much of the blame on "the relativism and formalism that afflict so much of contemporary literary studies." So strong is his conviction that aesthetics must not be separated from morality, he

asserts: "it is simply not possible to discuss literature adequately without seriously taking on the ethical dimensions of the text" (174). More importantly, he makes the point that fiction is now the primary way in which people acquire morality: "Our ethical knowledge is aesthetically mediated" (175). For John Gardner, this is a self-evident truth that he loudly proclaims: "Art instructs. Why, one may wonder, would anyone wish to deny a thing so obvious?" (39). Gardner vehemently denounces the current linguistic focus of literary criticism and implores us to attend to fiction's moral force. He warns that contemporary criticism does not ask crucial questions of its art, such as "who will this work of art help?" or "what baby is it squashing?". Instead it seeks only to define rather than to evaluate, and thus has the potential to be dangerously misleading: "as when we define Count Fosco's crocodile as a smiling animal weighing four hundred pounds" (17). These thinkers show us that the criticism of the ethical force of narratives is "one of our most important cultural assignments" (Booth 227).

The morality of literature is something not generally ignored when writing for children, or when reading and assessing these works. Most adults actively seek to preserve children from keeping bad company, both in their choice of friends and their choice of literature. Our guardian relationship to children and the common belief that literature affects the development of their character ensure that we see a strong relationship between the morality of life lived and the literature which describes and informs it. Thus children's fiction preserves the notion that there are some actions and qualities in life that have intrinsic excellence and worth and are therefore desirable. Children's literature shows us not just how to be good, but goodness itself, a decidedly unfashionable and misunderstood virtue. The following discussion is indebted to Iris Murdoch's unceasing exploration of "the sovereignty of Good," and to the great mystic and philosopher Simone Weil, who is a seminal influence on Murdoch's work. Murdoch makes two claims that are of central importance here: the first is that art should be a source of "good energy" (86); the second is that "if quality of consciousness matters, anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected to virtue" (84).

Values and Verities

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Western culture still acknowledged a relatively rigid code of values. Derived largely from the ethics of the Old and New Testaments and Greek philosophy, this code encompassed a wide range of virtues such as honesty, kindness, compassion, justice, mercy and love. They formed a code of imperatives that knitted together the diverse strands of social and personal

impulses into a cohesive and meaningful fabric. Truth, beauty and goodness were generally esteemed as transcendent absolutes and the fundamental concerns of art. Thus embodied, they were meant to inspire humanity, and respect for them helped individuals to resist the forces of moral entropy within themselves and within society. With the decline of religion, and the decay of belief in any absolute values or moral imperatives, our culture is in an ethical decline. Postmodern theory has exposed the instability of the signifier, but at the same time the reality of the signified has been devalued. So much attention has been given to exploring the subjectivity of "I" and the post-structuralist "Other" that we have come to disregard the ethical imperatives that accompanied the older, clear-cut notions of self and its responsibility to others. When the notions of "I," and hence of "my neighbour," are unclear, how then can I be expected to love my neighbour as myself?

Weil observes that the "essential characteristic" of the first half of the twentieth century (and she did not live to see the second) is the virtual disappearance of the idea of value, a phenomenon that seems to be "really new in human history" (*On Science* 167). What values remain are now seen as consumer items that can be chosen as lifestyle accessories, and even the language of values has been eroded to that of rights (Inglis, "Promising" 64). As positivism and linguistic philosophy have rendered any sort of definition suspect, we are also encouraged to question the validity of values because we cannot adequately define them or empirically verify them. But if we cease to discriminate between what Gardner terms "true morality – life affirming, just, and compassionate behaviour – and statistics (the all but hopeless situation of most of humanity) or, worse, trivial moral fashion, we begin to doubt morality itself" (76). Yet while the virtues are notoriously resistant to rational, precise definition, we can neither deny their existence nor do without them, because we consciously experience them, and their presence or absence significantly shapes our world. Nevertheless, as Weil observes, the use of words such as "virtue, nobility, honour, honesty, generosity, have become almost impossible to use or else they have acquired bastard meanings; language is no longer equipped for legitimately praising a man's character" (*On Science* 168). Nowadays it seems we rarely even desire to praise a person's character, preferring to gloat on his or her faults. It is easier and more comfortable to accept that others are as flawed as ourselves, than to be challenged by another's moral excellence.

Those contemporary critics who have especially concerned themselves with the moral dimension of fiction tend to believe that values are a given of human existence and not a personal or social construction. McGinn compares the faculty of ethical knowledge to that of Chomsky's theory of language. Linguistic knowledge is related to a "special purpose module that is innate and universal to the human

species." Similarly, there is "a natural, spontaneous knowledge of ethical truth which is part of [our] innate endowment." McGinn quotes Chomsky's assertion that the "acquisition of a specific moral and ethical system, wide-ranging and often precise in its consequences, cannot simply be the result of 'shaping' and 'control' by the social environment" (45). History, too, seems to authenticate the notion that these values are somehow given. In *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis presents a concise collection of the basic values from major civilisations in order to show their similarities and to prove that they are in fact eternal verities, and not ephemeral values. He terms the natural law they all espouse "The Way," and demonstrates its existence in the writings of disparate ancient societies, from Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek to Aboriginal and Red Indian cultures. The values of The Way promote magnanimity, beneficence, veracity, justice and mercy, responsibility to parents, children and posterity. They are enshrined in the Tao, in the Ten Commandments, the commandments of the New Testament, in the Vedas, and in Sermons of Buddha. Booth also looks to history for a perennial philosophy or general principle that will help us choose a worthwhile life path.

Though [the] distinction between what is thought to be good and what is really good is missing from many contemporary literary theories, where the very word 'really' is repudiated, it is central to every philosophy and religion that has outlasted its first generation. (270)

Guroian cites a long tradition of intellectually brilliant figures: Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Maimonides and Calvin, who all maintained that morality is "rooted in a permanent Good, in a higher moral law, or in the being of God" (31-32).

Inglis insists that while some values may be privileged over others according to the precepts of fashion or class, the concepts behind them are eternal (*Promise* 126-27). For Gaita, paraphrasing Plato, "morality is not the servant of our desires and interests, but their judge" (38). Gardner uses the swift blade of logic to authenticate his position.

Either there are real and inherent values, 'eternal verities,' as Faulkner said, which are prior to our individual existence, or there are not, and we're free to make them up, like Bluebeard, who reached, it seems, the existential decision that it's good to kill wives. (24)

Other thinkers simply draw from the validity of their own experience. Murdoch finds verification in an intuitive and phenomenological perspective and proceeds to use it as a foundation stone of her rigorous ethical enquiry.

Are we not certain that there is a 'true direction' towards better conduct, that goodness 'really matters', and does not that certainty about a standard suggest an ideal of permanence which cannot be reduced to psychological or any other set of empirical terms? (*Sovereignty* 60)

Yet if we are not engaged in reflective or religious contemplation, it is increasingly difficult to conceive of these values as eternal, so brainwashed are we by the hedonism of material affluence. Furthermore, when embodied in real life, the eternal verities can only ever be "relative absolutes." For a variety of practical and philosophical reasons, there can never be a wholly good man. Nor can anyone be in "perfect health," as health embodied is never an absolute state, as it is necessarily qualified by material circumstances, such as the age of the person to whom it is applied (Gardner 133). Nevertheless, the illustration of these virtues in their "relative absolute" state in real life or in art does not mean that they are merely relative. Murdoch asserts that it is a psychological fact that "we can all receive moral help by focussing our attention upon things which are valuable: virtuous people, great art ... the idea of goodness itself" (*Sovereignty* 56). Art can bring the verities into our conscious awareness, inspire and change us. As Tolstoy declares, art helps to make us good by choice.

It is in children's literature rather than in contemporary adult literature that these verities have been preserved. This is in part related to the sacred notion of child, a cultural space where the idea of virtue still seems at home. Yet it is not only our own idealised conception of childhood which determines the ethical dimension of the literature; it is also the clear seeing vision and vulnerability of children themselves.

... the young reader is inclined to maintain not only the spiritual truths of his own group but also those of other nations and races. With an instinct no fashion-making can destroy, the child has become the guardian of those moral and religious values which the adults have rejected in the name of an ill-conceived notion of social progress. Our children refuse to mock or subvert family life. Daddy and mommy, grandpa and grandma, brother and sister, remain for them serious and stable institutions. (Singer 53)

Inglis argues that children are "our moral measures of the present. Any morality which does not test itself in the scale of your children's lives is likely to be rather abstract" (*Promise* 33). Gardner also implicitly uses children as a test case, claiming that the nihilism of postmodernism "supports, even celebrates ideas no father would wittingly teach his children" (56). These are modern secular versions of Christ's injunction that "we who are evil" still know what is "good" for children: "Is there a man among you who would hand his son a stone when asked for bread?" (Matt. 7.9-11). In fact it is through our response to children that we can most easily apprehend the non-relative quality of the verities.

If the Good seems relative in our dealings with adults, it seems less so in our dealings with children. No one who has worked with children, who has watched healthy and unhealthy families in action, or clearly remembers his own childhood, will be tempted to deny that wanton cruelty, consistent indifference, betrayal, habitual insincerity, and the like do noticeable psychological harm. (Gardner 135)

While relativism insists that truth is not an absolute quality, how many of us would also be prepared to deny that it is invariably wrong to willingly damage a child?

A child is the form in which the flesh brings forth its promise.... Every child has an inalienable right to be bonded in welcoming arms, kindly initiated into a caring culture, allowed to play freely in the realms of the senses and imagination. As the seed is betrothed to fertile soil, sun, and rain, the child bears an organic right to nurture. This right, which is nowhere guaranteed by law and cannot be proved by abstract reason, is inscribed in our inarticulate genetic sense of the sacred. Paradoxically, our certainty of the sacredness of the promise of childhood is renewed each time we see it desecrated. The bruised and battered child calls forth in most people an instinctive moral outrage: By all that is holy, this child *ought* not to be treated in this way. (Keen 47)

It is little wonder then that the violation of family stability has become a major subject of realistic children's fiction. Perhaps more than any other children's novel, Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mr Tom* provokes our "instinctive moral outrage" at the bruising and battering of a child. Its extraordinarily affecting portrayal of childhood neglect, set against the powerful goodness of how that situation is put right, shows us that Keen is right when he equates such outrage with sacrilege. Our outcry is far more than just emotional distress, and if we really listen, it helps us "feel" the spiritual basis of morality.

It is highly significant that much children's fiction deals with fractured or dysfunctional families through the unadulterated pain of the child protagonists who are the victims of this family dissolution. The portrayal of this fracturing from a child's perspective is an excellent means of reinforcing or expanding our adult sensibility, thus increasing our capacity to empathise with the values and emotions of children. Novels such as *Goodnight Mr Tom* embody in concrete human terms what the statistics of psychology and sociology cannot, and they show us what adult literature rarely explores: the intense fragility of children's emotions and the devastating damage that is inflicted when "the serious and stable institutions" of family life are violated. Implicit in this empathetic evocation is the imperative that these things should not happen. For adult readers these stories function as parables that imply this damage is avoidable. This "hidden" message for adults is not a betrayal of the dual address, for it is not a level above the heads of children, but instead speaks through and for them. To child and adult readers alike, these novels plainly show that virtues such as courage, steadfastness, hope and love can help to

alleviate that damage and are the means of redemption. The family is not respected as a stable institution in much contemporary adult fiction, which tends instead to explore the sexual and self-fulfilling forces which undo this institution from an adult's perspective. This exploration is often achieved with much subtlety, but without expressing any serious suggestion that life would be better if conducted otherwise. In sharp contrast, the central preoccupation of children's fiction is how to live a good life, rather than the aesthetic glorification of the uniquely personal and tragic dramas of the protagonist or author. It rarely affirms that life is just a "raw deal," or an aesthetic game to be dealt with as cleverly as possible. As Inglis argues so well in *The Promise of Happiness*, children's fiction insists that each individual is responsible for the outcome of his or her life, and that only through acting with right conduct and adherence to principles can the promise of happiness be fulfilled.

Aesthetic posturing so frequently conceals the presence or absence of the ethical dimension of art. Booth emphasises that in choosing the company we keep in fiction, as in real life, we often have to make difficult ethical choices and distinguish between "friends and flatterers, lovers and sado-masochists, wise companions and pretentious frauds" (178). Murdoch's assumption that art should be a source of "good energy" is a valuable criterion for those who wish to recognise the ethical dimensions of literature and to make sound choices. This criterion does not condemn art which holds up a mirror to the bad in order to promote good, but it does condemn art which leaves us feeling enervated or malnourished. It is revealing to view an icon of contemporary adult fiction in this light. *Endgame* is certainly the offer of a flatterer as we are seduced by Beckett's intellect; but in terms of the view of life it offers and the nihilistic feelings it arouses, it is unquestionably an example of what Booth terms "the offer of a sadist to a presumed masochist" (222). It focuses our attention on meaninglessness and misery and could hardly incite us to virtue. At best we may view *Endgame* as dystopia, or we may, after much serious reflection, reject it as very clever but bad art; perhaps even as a "pretentious fraud."

Many adults choose to read children's fiction because, in moral terms, they enjoy and esteem the kind of role it offers them, allowing both an affirmation and an exploration of the verities through a perspective that is clean and clear. The relative simplicity of the genre ensures that the friends and the frauds are usually more easily discernible. Here readers find clarity and confirmation of a stable moral order. Murdoch suggests that in attempting to make ourselves better, the "ordinary man, with the simple religious conceptions that make sense for him, has usually held a more just view of the matter than the voluntaristic philosopher" (*Sovereignty* 83). The simple religious view of the ordinary man is again very much like that simplicity of seeing and responsiveness to goodness that we associate with

children. This is the substance of Robert Westall's exploration of sainthood in *The Windeye*, another children's book that hovers elusively, and here very deliberately, between fantasy and realism. Bertrand, academic father of two daughters, is a passionate atheist who has a vindictive hatred of anything to do with religious faith. He continually and volubly rubbishes "ordinary" men with "simple religious conceptions." Bertrand is deeply threatened by the possibility that his children may have encountered the "living" St Cuthbert, a metaphysical reality whose powers can still create miracles in the twentieth-century physical world. Subsequently, he is more appalled at the collapse of his theory of the finality of death than the probable drowning of his own child (119). He is thus cut off from morality by his intellectual pride (172), and he is gradually exposed as not a "good man" and a pretentious fraud. It is to his innocent youngest child Sally that St Cuthbert first appears. Her eyes are "sharper" because her mind is "empty," but it is not only the factual world that she is able to see (200). This relationship between children and the "everlasting" verities is beautifully expressed in Plato's myth in the *Phaedrus*.

... every human soul has seen, in their pure being, the Forms (Ideas) as justice, temperance, beauty and all the great moral qualities which 'we hold in honour,' when dwelling with the gods in a previous existence; and when on earth we are moved toward what is good it is by a faint memory of those pure things, simple and calm and blessed, which we saw then in a pure light, being pure ourselves. (Murdoch, *Metaphysics* 497)

Didacticism

In the context of art, the seriousness which attaches to the notion of the moral life is often unfairly associated with the rigidity of didacticism. This is particularly so in conjunction with children's fiction because of its historical roots in the production of pocket books and religious tracts. In this light it is fruitful to consider Katherine Paterson's unabashed confession: "I want my [child readers] to see the nature of the game we are all engaged in so that they may make purposeful moves" (*Gates* 38), a statement that certainly suggests a didactic, yet surely legitimate, intent. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with didacticism, especially when we consider that there is, as Le Guin points out, an important distinction "between being preachy and being ethical" (qtd. in Cadden 133). Paterson's didactic intentions are neither narrow nor moralistic, and have become a rich source of genuinely moral art. Cadden argues that the didactic origins of children's fiction have created a genre that now contains the moral dimension as one of its defining features. This feature is so strong that while writers claim direct "moral relationships with child readers," their works are also simultaneously addressed "to a demanding and clear tradition" (138).

A dislike of preachy art does not mean that we can dispense with acknowledging the moral power of fiction. Traditionally, in fairy tales (especially those written or modified for children), parables, romances and novellas, the portrayal of human conduct has carried with it a strong moral comment. Even in the late nineteenth-century novel, fiction was recognised as an effective vehicle to praise or to condemn certain attitudes and modes of behaviour. Buchan compares the Victorian novel and the fairy tale saying both are full of characters recognisable as real types and both forms of literature pass judgement on those types (222). Novels can of course go much further than fairy tales in exploring character, and the great Victorian novels realise that "all of us are a compost of good and bad," but are nevertheless not afraid to say what is good and what is not, unlike the "moral molluscs" of later fiction (225). Because all art instructs, overtly or subliminally, we must pay attention to the quality of its lessons. As McGinn argues, "a novel can instil an entirely new ethical perspective in the reader" (177). Booth finds evidence for this unfashionable fact in an impressive catalogue of students' and colleagues' responses to the question: "what books have changed your life?" To account for the pervasive instructive power of art, he maintains that narratives "both depend on and implant or reinforce patterns of desire." To respond fully to a narrative, we must surrender to these patterns, and when we make this surrender then inevitably we are "to some degree shaped into those patterns" (272). This surely makes the ethical dimension of fiction its most important aspect.

Twentieth-century children's fiction is rarely preachy, but rather an arena where morality is tested and authenticated within the complex reality of experience. In great adult literature, the moral dimension is embedded within a perceptive and complex rendering of reality. *Anna Karenina* and Robertson Davies' *The Salterton Trilogy* (a fine example of complex and ethical twentieth-century fiction) are deeply moral, not just because of the broad inferences we can draw from them about the best way to live, but because they attempt to show us as faithfully as possible the motivations, and environmental and psychological factors, which have resulted in pain or in happiness. Gardner, from the twin perspectives of critic and author, conceives of art as "a process" through which it has to discover what it can say; and that, he claims, must be the basis of art's morality (14). Its message cannot be arbitrarily imposed. Like Gardner, McGinn believes that in fiction we can "put an ethical idea through its paces, testing its ability to command our assent ... we can face moral reality in all its complexity and drama" (176). Inglis describes this same process in children's fiction where "the best values of the day ... are imaginatively struck, tested and tempered." He notes that some of those values are "counted out by old history herself" ("Promising" 71), suggesting they are verities. Booth claims that the authors who become our lasting friends are those "who offer to teach us, by

the sheer activity of considering their gifts, a life larger than any specific doctrine we might accept or reject" (222). Their enlarged vision that is different from our own challenges us and enhances our moral awareness. Ged's spiritual quest in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is not a shallow attempt to tell and teach its readers that the responsibility for evil lies within oneself, though this indeed becomes Ged's discovery as he is faced with a spiralling sequence of evil consequences unloosed by his own pride. The complex trials of his journey must be actually experienced (by Ged, and vicariously by the reader) in order that the final wisdom be proved from the riches of life as it is lived. This bleeding of abstraction works out and verifies the central values on which the novel is based. Jago acknowledges the wisdom of this book as a version of the "know thyself" commandment. Le Guin's rich narrative embodiment of this verity means that Ged's recognition that the shadow "bears his name ... can be seen in moral, Christian, mythic, or psychological terms" (Jago 29), and so the truth the novel proves is one that transcends doctrinal allegiance.

Fantasy is a particularly appropriate means of embodying moral dichotomies. It is a medium where the polarities of positive and negative, and light and dark, achieve a recognisable metaphysical value as good and evil. Like fantasy in children's literature, where good and evil can be represented as supernatural forces and thus clarified, the idealist novella demands that we distinguish good from evil: "the actions or qualities of character serve to make manifest in the world of fact an intangible verity, and are intended to serve as a model or an inspiration for lesser folk" (Rodax 4). Children's fantasy can also be a most effective means of affirming these values for the adult reader. We easily regard children as "lesser folk," needing strength and guidance and order, but too often our postmodern hubris blinds us to our own weaknesses and needs. (We are all in a sense "the young and the weak" for whom Plato prescribed the highest virtues in art). Most children's realist novels also manage to preserve these verities, not through simplification as we might expect, but by expansion into the more complex reality of everyday life. Through being tried and tested, their truth is clarified. This process is enhanced by the effect of plot structure. Because both realism and fantasy in this genre are based on romance, they move inexorably towards order and restoration, thus exemplifying the end point of the moral life itself.

Like Frye, Booth develops a typology of plot structure, and his version breaks down the major patterns of narrative into a few simplified prototypical "life-plots." Some plots journey from high promise to happiness to misery; some from high promise to misery to happiness; but Booth observes that the life-plot of "too many modern novels" is "from misery to misery to maximum misery" (289). He argues that most of the "good genres" follow a similar pattern

traced by many an explicitly religious narrative, but also by many a modern seemingly secular novel that portrays heroes and heroines engaged in a spiritual quest. 'Born radically ignorant, inescapably provincial; became (largely through the miracle of deriving better desires from good stories told by others engaged in the same quest, and with the lesser assistance of ethical criticism) less and less ignorant, less provincial, less egocentric, less chauvinistic. Developed, before a predictably premature death, a *character* that could warmly embrace and even celebrate the not-self, the "others," even the Other.' (290)

This is certainly the pattern (without the death) which underlies the best children's novels, as protagonists move towards an increasing unselfishness, or an enhanced awareness of their place in the wide world. Occasionally, through evocation of the numinous, they may encounter the religious dimension of the sacred Other. The pattern, in its insistence on "unselfing," is an essential part of the sacred scripture, and in children's fiction is reiterated in secular form. While Booth describes this life-plot as belonging to, even defining, the "good genres," it describes the spiritual pilgrimage from illusion to reality that for Murdoch engenders "good energy" when it is expressed in art.

Constantly, the heroes and heroines of both fantasy and realism are engaged in a battle against enormous odds in order to secure some form of happiness, but this happiness is only rarely sought entirely for themselves. It is also conditional upon some aspect of virtuous behaviour. The conditional nature of happiness is most obvious in High Fantasy, but it is also strongly present in the secular novels of post-Christian fantasy and realism. Because we no longer share a universal belief system, "the moral premises must be established in the work itself" (Swinfen 2); yet still authors continue to create and prove those same premises. In the fantasies of Le Guin and Tolkien, a new mythology is constructed from a moral framework that is nonetheless based on the concept of self-sacrifice, a traditional virtue in the real world. This same morality is operant in secular novels. The struggles of Wilbur and the miracles of Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*, or the emotional betrayals that characterise novels of the New Realism, establish a frame of reference in which personal desires are proved to be inferior to acting in a way which will benefit others. They satisfy Inglis' demand that the promise of happiness we give to children must be given "with a watchful eye on the happiness of others, on the depth or virtuousness or significance of that happiness, and on its place in a rough and ready hierarchy of valuing" ("Promising" 66).

As much as this law of condition is an implicit repetitive pattern, in recent children's fiction the nature of happiness is consciously scrutinised in a way that rarely occurs in contemporary adult literature. Voigt's *A Solitary Blue* is typical of this approach.

Happy, unhappy – Jeff was beginning to think that wasn't the question at all. The Tillermans never worried about that, they worried about ... living right for each one of them, together. He guessed you might call that happy, but he didn't think that was it – he didn't think that was the half of it. (219)

Happiness is not an end in itself; instead, fulfilment, which expands and almost supersedes our conventional notion of happiness, can be found only in loving and responsible relationships with other people. This theme is repeated throughout Voigt's other Tillerman novels. The idea of "living right for each other" is also a central theme in *The Windeye*. Beth, the more mature older sister, is naturally virtuous, "always wanting other people to be happy," a fact that baffles her step-brother. When he asks her what makes her happy, she replies: "I don't know. Other people being happy, I suppose. Things being *right*" (41). Adherence to this principle offers a far more lasting satisfaction than any conventional notion of personal happiness, or the notion of "living happily ever after," which is a symbolic truth in the world of fantasy and fairy tale, but an *ignus fatuus* in the context of a real life. It is interesting to compare Voigt's understanding of "living right" with that of Levin's revelation towards the end of *Anna Karenina*. Levin, whose understanding of values has been profoundly shaken following the birth of his child, finds himself leaning inescapably towards religious faith. He wrestles again with the philosophers, but does not find their wisdom as satisfactory as that of the old, worthy peasant, Platon. Platon does not live for his own wants; he lives for his soul. He is generous beyond the call of duty and lives "rightly in God's way," a way that is equivalent to "living for each other." This revelation of the good life, and its particular and superior happiness, unlocks a flood of important thoughts, pushing Levin on towards his later revelation about goodness, "blinding him with their light" (829).

The conditional nature of happiness also stresses the vital importance of choice: its responsibilities and its consequences. In *Homecoming*, the Tillerman children's mother, father and, for a time, their grandmother, make the wrong choice of neglecting and rejecting them, thus casting the children's lives into the inevitable gnawing hollow of despair and pain. The novel skilfully shows, however, that these wrong choices were themselves at least partly initiated by the wrong choices of the previous generation, causing an ever-worsening web of emotional destruction. Bad choices (as psychologists and Biblical tradition remind us) have far-reaching and intergenerational consequences. Le Guin's universe of *Earthsea* focuses on this same web of moral interconnectedness symbolically. When Ged makes the wrong choice, summoning the dead and thus disobeying the laws of his moral universe, a ripple effect is created which influences the entire world; at the same time it weakens him, making him dangerously vulnerable to the forces of evil. Ultimately, Ged does not

seek or find happiness; instead he attains fulfilment from hard-won self-knowledge and self-sacrifice aimed at the restoration of universal, rather than personal, order. In Paterson's *The Great Gilly Hopkins*, happiness is this same notion of fulfilment that comes from recognising responsibility to others and "doing good on a tough job" (138). Here both fantasy and realism present a very challenging embodiment of the relationship between personal choice, responsibility and the state of the world. These novels are examples of the fact that because their characters "will have to struggle with evil ... will have to confront the darkness and death," they are "more adult" than much adult fiction (Brady 7).

Recognising the importance of the moral dimension of art, as of life, does not imply that making ethical judgements about books will be either narrowly moralistic or easy. It is not that moral qualities are themselves negotiable, but in the world of relative absolutes competing "goods" can make them difficult to discern. Booth, for example, understands that no narrative will be good or bad for all readers at all times, and says that we must attempt "to discover what is good or bad for us in our condition *here and now*" (489). In that decision-making which involves the recognition and discrimination of values, we are defining and re-making ourselves. Booth points out that once it was assumed that one should distinguish between good and bad characters in literature, and "the ultimate point in talking about character was to improve it, to save one's soul" (230). In the act of reading, this is part of the process whereby the actual act of reading and interpretation changes us; whereby art instructs.

The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity.... The production of the meaning of literary texts ... does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness. (Iser 68)

McGinn, too, is keenly aware of the character-building role of interpretation: "stories can sharpen and clarify moral questions, encouraging dialectic between the reader's own experience and the trials of the characters he or she is reading about" (174). This is the force of parables: they forge our souls through the act of interpreting them. By becoming practitioners of ethical criticism, we can extend the notion of choosing what is good for children, to choosing what is good for ourselves, and perhaps also rediscover what our cultural sophistication has obliterated from the proper consideration of our consciousness. It is like returning from abstruse theology to the demanding but refreshing simplicity of the Gospels. The adult reading of children's fiction becomes a means of re-establishing moral awareness. Reading about virtuous people, ideals and sensing "the idea of goodness

itself" will have a beneficial effect on our own moral development. Furthermore, making ethical decisions on behalf of a child reader (whether that reader is an actual child, the child addressee, or the child within ourselves) flexes our moral musculature. What is good for children is generally what is good for adults: constructive, not destructive, attitudes; strong adherence to the notion of moral responsibility; meaning, not purposelessness; the call to action that ensues from utopian vision rather than passive chaos. All these attributes help to infuse the moral life into everyday reality, and thus children's fiction becomes a potent version of secular scripture.

While it is abundantly clear that morality and its good energy are the cornerstones of children's fiction, it is interesting to look at some of the less successful works to gain an insight into the crucial role of ethics and ethical criticism. The application of ethical criticism can provide reasons which account for the unsatisfactory nature of William Mayne's *A Game of Dark* and Victor Kelleher's *The Red King*. Both are structured on the quest form, but they pay lip service to it without understanding the moral truth that underlies its structure. In *A Game of Dark*, which alternates between a teenage boy's worlds of fantasy and reality, the secondary world is relentlessly dark with the elusive claustrophobic quality of nightmare. The primary world is similarly disturbing with no positive resolution of negative emotions or the suggestion of future hope. The apparently heroic slaying of The Worm that haunts the boy's unconscious is hardly exemplary behaviour, because in this shadowy world there is no discernible value system, no polarisation into light and dark, good and bad, and so this action cannot appear genuinely heroic. This novel may offer us some startling psychological insights into the disturbed mind of an adolescent, but to what end? Self-knowledge is pointless in a meaningless universe, a fact reinforced by the relative incomprehensibility of both worlds. In contrast, Penelope Lively's *The House in Norham Gardens*, although offering a plot with a similar juxtaposition of conscious and unconscious worlds, provides a meaningful ethical dimension which gives the novel depth and cohesion. The secondary world is similarly vague and primitive with hints of darkness appropriately reflecting the psychological turmoil of the central character; however, the primary world, despite its problems, is meaningful, and sharply and richly real. This is enlivened by Lively's warm and sympathetic portrait of the aunts that creates a sense of empathy and goodwill as it expands the reader's awareness of their world. Unlike Mayne's text, this novel is good company.

Victor Kelleher's fantasy *The Red King* is a work which does not enhance consciousness; rather it depletes and degrades the fullness of life. This work is also based on the familiar quest pattern with a liberal use of archetypes that suggest it

has metaphysical import. Yet the pattern is used as form only, unsupported by the moral development which in traditional literature it was meant to describe. At the novel's conclusion, subverting our expectations, the heroine, a former slave who has worked hard to attain literal freedom and psychological maturity, voluntarily enslaves herself to the unscrupulous trickster figure who functions as an anti-hero. He has relentlessly used and exploited her and shows no sign of reform. This leads to disappointment in the reader as it completely negates the value of the heroine's struggle and gratuitously mocks the meaning of the traditional quest. It is useful to consider Goldthwaite's warning here, that once children's literature was liberated from "the old didacts," it led to the mistaken view that the new world of make-believe is nothing but "innocent intellectual play," and is not accountable to the traditional realm of value. Goldthwaite argues very firmly that in fact "every book teaches." The dark chaos of *Alice in Wonderland* (the epitome of liberated make-believe) teaches "the content of Charles Dodgson's mind – all of it, including the subtleties of his sceptical and ... unholy thoughts" (168-69). While this is an extreme position, there is truth in it. It actually accords with Booth's more palatable version that when we respond fully to texts we must surrender to their patterns of desire, and we are to some extent shaped by those patterns (272). Goldthwaite believes that imaginative inventiveness is in itself neither a good nor a bad thing, but becomes a problem "when we make a fetish of it." Then it becomes merely an indulgence disconnected from the moral dimension of life, and has the capacity, however subliminally or tangentially, to harm: "Never mentioned in [the] assertion that the imagination and its products are sacrosanct is the reality that wherever the light of *agape* is occluded, Poetic Genius will be floundering in the dark, spitting out its scorn" (168-69).

The Amber Spyglass serves as an exemplification of Goldthwaite's position. It is extremely important to consider this work through the lens of ethical criticism, because it is far more likely to become a classic, if only because of the audacity of its message, and the stature of Pullman's powers of invention. Nikolajeva raises the issue that in the sequel to *Northern Lights*, *The Subtle Knife*, the loss of innocence and the vagueness of the category of evil raise questions as to its suitability for children ("Children's, Adult" 78). *The Amber Spyglass* at last shows Pullman's true colours, and confirms Nikolajeva's unease. It is a clumsy inversion of theological romance in which the journey points firmly downwards. It boldly inverts the notion of secular scripture, arguing for atheism through a supernatural cosmology, and has been described as "the most subversive message in children's literature in years" (Lyll 3). This final novel of the trilogy seems based on the premise spoken by the ex-nun Mary Malone: "The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all" (464). Pullman has explicitly stated that he is arguing for a

"republic of heaven" where there is no life beyond, and that he believes in "the absolute primacy of the material life" (Lyall 3). However, in placing his message within the medium of High Fantasy, the novel rests on a very illogical foundation, because in Pullman's fictional universe there is a supernatural heaven (of sorts) and a god (who is impotent), and a variety of metaphysical creatures. Rather than proving their non-existence, Pullman merely reinvents them in a diminished form. Thus what develops into the credo of the novel, "we have to build the republic of heaven where we are, because for us there is nowhere else" (382), is simply untrue within Pullman's own frame of reference. There is a land of the dead, though it is not a land of reward or a place of punishment: "It's a place of nothing. The good come here as well as the wicked, and all of us languish in this gloom for ever, with no hope of freedom, or joy, or sleep or rest or peace" (336). Either there is no heaven and hell, and the republic of heaven is what you make of life on earth, or there is a heaven and the artist may represent it as part of a metaphysical universe. Pullman has actually chosen the latter alternative, but finds that the traditional concept of heaven is not to his taste. Instead of disproving or ignoring heaven, he has staged a revolution and established what can only be described as an *ersatz* republic.

Pullman very superficially dismisses Tolkien because he "doesn't say anything new or truthful about human beings" and tells "an essentially trivial story" where "the goodies are always good and the baddies are always bad" (Eccleshare 18). This is certainly not the case in his own novel, where the "lines between good and evil are muddy and shifting" (Lyall 3). This is not the same as the complex moral issue of finding good and bad in each soul, but rather a dangerous blurring and devaluing of good and evil. Mary Malone remarks that good and bad are just names for doing things that please or hurt people, thus reducing them to purely pragmatic and personal constructs. Pullman's personal cosmology is essentially iconoclastic, and as such he has an interest in the breaking of taboos, and has no qualms in introducing material normally excluded in fiction for children: erotic love, sexual perversion and cannibalism. Pullman himself states that he is not "dewy-eyed" about children (Eccleshare 18), and he seems keen to undermine any innocence they might have. He dwells too long and too aesthetically on the bloody death of the bird killed by Father Gomez (388), and creates a lurid description of Iorek eating "the flesh and bone" of the dead Lee Scoresby. Iorek eats Lee to "both nourish him and keep him restless until blood was spilled enough to still his heart" (45). Although we are never quite certain whether Iorek is good or bad (no doubt an example of Pullman's determination to show us that the lines between good and bad are muddy), this is a dangerous message in a children's novel. Lyra's devotion to the brave, protective but revenge-filled bear will suggest to child readers that he is an admirable

character. Worse still, Iorek is sufficiently anthropomorphised to make this meal an act of cannibalism.

Yet the problem of Iorek is not nearly so disturbing as the hypocritically perverse relish with which Pullman describes the priests, voiced through the alleged maternalism of Mrs Coulter.

If you thought for one moment that I would release my daughter into the care – the *care!* – of a body of men with a feverish obsession with sexuality, men with dirty fingernails, reeking of ancient sweat, men whose furtive imaginations would crawl over her body like cockroaches – if you thought I would expose my child to *that*.... (343)

Obviously Pullman has an axe to grind here that seems to extend beyond warning children of a possible evil. This vivid description can only corrupt the imaginations of his child readers. This in itself seems a violation, with a very widespread potential to harm considering his very successful sales figures. At best it is a message we are unsure how to interpret because it is a judgement made by a woman whose morality is extremely dubious. Is she making a worthwhile point, or is this statement the product of her own debasement? This is a question for sophisticated adult readers, but most children will have no such insulating powers of reason. This graphic image instructs children that priests are nothing more than dirty old men, and makes such a strong impression that children may be unable to erase it from their consciousness. Pullman's irresponsibility here is a cautionary reminder that children's literature also has a negative potential. It is "a territory controlled by adults ... and in that space they indulge all manner of needs not directly related to the interests of child-readers" (Watson 13).

Pullman's lack of concern for child readers is also reflected in his use of the double address where the author talks in a self-congratulatory way above the heads of children. Mary Malone's peak experience at the top of a tree is described as "a kind of bliss she had only felt once before; and that was not when she made her vows as a nun" (287), a tasteless image that is particularly out of place in a children's novel. The hubristic intertextuality that is gratuitously present throughout becomes utterly banal when Lyra refers to her own "negative capability" (484) to explain her ability to read the alethiometer. Stranger still, Xaphania later tells Lyra that she could read it by "grace" (520), a distinctly theological concept that does not sit well in Pullman's attempt to destroy heaven. Pullman seems to delight in impressing us with his allusions to Biblical imagery, but any other purpose seems unclear. Mrs Coulter describes her (dubious) new-found love for Lyra in the images of parables. Her love has come "like a thief in the night," and it burgeons like "a mustard-seed" (426-27). Strange too is the subversion of the opening of John's

Gospel: "the wonder was in her and the scepticism was in the world, and the coolness was in both" (454). Again it winks at the educated adult, but it is empty rhetoric, signifying nothing.

Pullman strongly equates sexuality with religion, but instead of seeing eros as a way to God, substitutes sex for God. Mary Malone throws God away as she feels the stirrings of sexual love, and remarks that it was then that she "stopped believing there was a power of good and a power of evil that were outside us" (470-71). When the Authority/God finally appears, he is indeed as Mrs Coulter predicts: "some inconceivable age, decrepit and demented, unable to think or act or speak and unable to die, a rotten hulk" (344-45). Metatron sniffs and gulps "at the scent of her [Mrs Coulter's] flesh" (425) and is a god obsessed with seducing her (419). No-one who wants the best for children could give this book to them, and it is certainly not "good company," but the bankruptcy of Pullman's world and his confused cosmological elaboration are masked by the brilliance of his imagination. Despite the fact that it is meant to be a book that argues for "the primacy of the real world," it is wonderfully wrought with fantastic landscapes and mysterious beings that stir the sense of *fascinans* that accompanies the numinous. Yet it also leaves the reader feeling flat and hollow. Perhaps these limitations can be best explained by Otto's comments concerning Goethe's undeveloped religious sensibility.

It is rather the fruit of a mind which for all its depth, was not equal to such profundities as these, and to which, therefore, the non-rational counterpoint to the melody of life could only sound in confused consonance, not in its authentic harmony, indefinable but palpable ... it is divination that functions only at the level of the 'daemonic' which as we saw precedes religion proper, not at the level of the divine and the holy in the truest sense; and it shows very clearly how that sort of merely 'daemonic' experience of the numinous may in a highly cultivated mind only stir emotional reactions of bewilderment and bedazzlement, without giving real light or warmth to the soul. (157-58)

In denying the validity of metaphysics and undermining the transcendent nature of morality, Pullman has pulled out the rug from beneath his own creation. All he can say through Will's father is that "we have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and brave and patient, and we've got to study and think, and work hard" to build the republic of heaven (548). He understands the practicality of virtues, but does not have a comprehension of the Good that simultaneously informs and justifies them.

Once Pullman has disposed of the old values that don't "say anything new," he puts a new god in place of the old. At the end of the novel it is love that saves the universe. This is not *agape*, but eros, and eros in its infancy, the love of first sexual awakening: "The children no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of

it all" (497). Their love reverses the flow of Dust from pouring out of the universes in the abyss (506). This is powerful love in real life, and good in its place, but it is hardly the love on which to base a universe. To say so is to downgrade the other types of love; the unfailing love of parent for child, the compassionate love of forgiveness, the love of one's neighbour, the disinterested love of saints, all far more difficult but enduring than the ephemeral love of eros. For all the initial promise of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass* denies children bread, giving them instead a bright and intricately painted stone. It serves as an example of Gardner's admonition that "in art as in politics, well-meant, noble-sounding errors can devalue the world" (8).

Goodness

Goodness, the sovereign virtue, is the pinnacle of Platonic philosophy and a concept that underpins all the major religions. As Murdoch so poetically puts it: "Good represents the reality of which God is the dream" (*Metaphysics* 496). Of all the verities, this is the one which receives least attention in contemporary adult culture, and it lies completely outside rational definition. Whereas we can at least approach the concept of truth through reason, we can only intuit the Good (Gardner 139). It is not the same as the "being good" or "doing good" of moral platitude, though these qualities can certainly be manifested as physical approximations of the Good in worldly action, despite their potential to be used for ill. The Good in its ultimate, unitary sense deserves the capital letter that so many writers and thinkers instinctively accord it. In Plato's cave allegory, the Good is the sun that cannot be experienced in its reality or it would blind the prisoners. While we intuit the Good through the property of goodness that informs character and action, "the Good itself is not visible" (Murdoch, *Sovereignty* 70). Contact with this level of goodness would silence artists (Murdoch, *Metaphysics* 12), hence Plato's notorious ambivalence towards art. The beatific vision of the Good quite literally silenced the eloquent brilliance of Thomas Aquinas. Less spectacularly, Tolstoy, too, came to reject the worth of his own best writing as he increasingly understood goodness, and instead pursued a simplified philosophical and religious reflection on the morality of life and art. And perhaps a joyful glimmer of what is truly Good in the work of great artists partly accounts for Gardner's vociferous rejection of bad art.

To pursue goodness is not to bend beneath the dry yoke of restriction and moralistic laws, but to experience the profound magnetic attraction of the Good that will make self-evident the necessity of a moral life. As Augustine famously remarked: "Love and do as you will," though this is a level reserved for sainthood. The rest of us must cultivate subsidiary virtues of the Good, such as justice, kindness and humility, that are its earthly reflections. Art is of critical importance in reminding us

of the Good, even if it is ultimately inadequate to the task. Hence Murdoch's insistence that "art is not a diversion or a side-issue, it is the most educational of all human activities and a place in which the nature of morality can clearly be *seen*" (*Sovereignty* 87-88). It is in children's fiction that goodness is most frequently found and here it has the potential to deeply affect the lives of its readers of all ages. C.S. Lewis came to realise that he admired the mythopoeic works of George MacDonald chiefly because of their embodiment of goodness.

I would have been shocked in my 'teens if anyone had told me that what I learned to love in *Phantastes* was goodness. But now that I know, I see there was no deception. The deception is all the other way around – in that prosaic moralism which confines goodness to the region of Law and Duty, which never lets us feel in our face the sweet air blowing from 'the land of righteousness,' never reveals that elusive Form which if once seen must inevitably be desired with all but sensuous desire – the thing (in Sappho's phrase) 'more gold than gold.' ("Introduction" xii)

Goodness is also a remarkable property of MacDonald's children's fantasies, especially in the mystical goodness of Irene's grandmother and the humble, earthly goodness of Curdie's family. For Lochhead, the essence of goodness is "true holiness," and she argues that "the joy which is part of sanctity" was unknown in children's fiction until MacDonald combined holiness with magic (2). Lochhead's intuitive perception here seems akin to Otto's when he states that when the numinous becomes schematised into moral goodness it becomes "the holy." In *The Windeye*, just being touched by the holy St Cuthbert heals Madeleine of her anger, and the wind from the saint's island blows with "a lovely clean smell" (81). This is a version of the traditional odour of sanctity that emanates from the body of saints, reminding us of the sweetness of the land of righteousness, and symbolising goodness itself.

As we have seen, in Christ's injunctions in the Gospels, children are the touchstone of goodness; children need goodness and children are goodness. Yet in literature, goodness can only be a relative absolute, and thus its portrayal presents the writer with considerable difficulty, as Simone Weil's inspired analysis reveals.

Nothing is so beautiful and wonderful, nothing is so continually fresh and surprising, so full of sweet and perpetual ecstasy, as the good. No desert is so dreary, monotonous and boring as evil. This is the truth about authentic good and evil. With fictional good and evil it is the other way round. Fictional good is boring and flat, while fictional evil is varied and intriguing, attractive, profound, and full of charm....

The simplicity which makes the fictional good something insipid and unable to hold the attention becomes, in the real good, an unfathomable marvel. (*On Science* 160-61)

Whilst this perception may well hold true for much contemporary fiction, some older forms of literature are especially suited to evoking, if not fully embodying, the Good. Allegory, parable and high fantasy can capture at least a measure of the sweetness and light that shine from goodness without necessarily becoming boring and flat, because in these forms the characters and actions are symbolic. The power of symbol is able to suggest the elusive, rich, simplicity of goodness within finitude, without too greatly compromising its radiance. However, the successful portrayal of goodness is certainly not restricted to fantasy. In the best works of children's realistic fiction, as in some of the best adult fiction, goodness is not boring, though it is never manifested in a pure form. There are characters in adult literature who have glimpsed, and are pursuing, the Good. For all their flaws, Dorothea Brooke, Septimus Harding, Levin and Monsignor Quixote all carry with them the fresh wholesomeness of goodness. These characters stir in us a love of the Good through the integrity of their struggles to achieve it, and through the delightfulness of their very being. The problem is that there are too few of them. This is not the case in children's fiction, where the central concern of so many of the protagonists is how to be good, however variously that is interpreted.

Children's fiction, which retains structural, symbolic and moral links to the traditional forms of literature, has a huge advantage over adult literature in its ability to portray goodness in a way that is both convincing and thus self-evidently compelling. Being richly didactic and highly idealised, goodness falls naturally within its scope. Murdoch maintains that goodness is "both rare and hard to picture." It is most likely to be "convincingly met with in simple people," and she notes that good men in history are known by the "simplicity and the directness of their diction" (*Sovereignty* 52-53). Child protagonists, in their vulnerable innocence, are in a sense already "good," even if their circumstances have forced them to act otherwise. Furthermore, children's literature, in its tendency to express the complex through the simple, is able to express the paradoxical unfathomable simplicity of goodness. The ethical complexity of reality can resolve in the clarifying light of goodness.

Visual beauty is the only way we have of representing moral virtue in visual art, and this transfers itself to fiction, especially the iconographical aspects of fantasy and fairy tale, where goodness may be symbolically expressed. A good queen, for example, may be represented not only through kind or generous actions; her goodness may also be manifested symbolically in the physical dimension where she is depicted as resplendent and beautiful; her regal status may reflect the sovereign status of goodness as a virtue. In this context, goodness is usually painted in sharp contradistinction to evil, the ugly sorcerers and creatures of terror and dark heart.

This very strong connection between physical beauty and goodness in the realm of fantasy expresses our natural propensity to equate beauty of feature with goodness of soul, an equation that reflects the interconnectedness of beauty, truth and goodness in their Platonic forms. But they are not equivalent in real life, and this represents a very common spiritual trap in the limited vision of the material world. The mistake arises because of our intuitive delight in the virtues and our intuition of "the thing more gold than gold." There is a long tradition of writers and philosophers who perceive the beauty of morality, and McGinn refers to this concept as the aesthetic theory of virtue (93). He quotes Thomas Reid who suggests "that a virtuous character excites our sense of the beautiful, thus inviting our love" (95). Yet it is also the role of fiction to expose the illusory equation between outer and inner beauty. Reflecting on the role of physical beauty and ugliness in both *Frankenstein* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, McGinn sees that a contrast between outward appearance and inner moral quality has been deliberately created: "External ugliness is used to set off moral beauty, so that it can be apprehended without the mask of physical beauty" (99). McGinn says there are two independent aesthetic dimensions to a human being, the physical and the moral, and by pulling them apart "the autonomy of inner beauty is stressed" (99). Children's realistic fiction, and even fantasy (far more than its adult counterparts) tends to do just this, and so reveals the powerful agency of moral beauty and moral ugliness in our lives.

McGinn's analysis of the aesthetic nature of virtue yields the insight that "virtue, especially exceptional virtue, *does* make us think of – even yearn for – a world in which virtue is the norm." It is the inner beauty of virtue that points us upwards, so that "the notion of heaven enters our thoughts: it is that ideal world in which morality *always* prevails" (111). Conversely, ugliness drags us down.

Thus when we are confronted by the ugly soul of an evil person we are transported to a world in which evil actions and states of affairs are the norm. Our aesthetic disgust takes the form of bringing to mind ignorance, violence, despair, and so on. Hence the peculiar feeling of depression that accompanies witnessing an aesthetically debased would-be work of art. (112)

This is the ugliness that provokes disgust in Gardner, and that for Murdoch is the contrary of good energy. This vital distinction between good and bad energy of art corresponds to the method of spiritual discernment developed by St Ignatius: the good and evil of a situation can be felt as emotions of either consolation or desolation. This is not the empty consolation of personal egoistic fantasy, but the clean wholesomeness that accompanies even difficult or unpleasant decisions if they are just and good.

Children's fiction, especially in its unique capacity to blend fantasy and realism, provides opportunities for the embodiment of goodness in a variety of powerful ways that pass far beyond the black and white concerns of the paradigmatic fairy tales. Physical beauty becomes less obviously the bearer of the spiritual. In *The Secret Garden*, the matronly Mrs Sowerby is an embodiment of goodness, rendered in her unfailing maternal love, and her special care and support of Mary, despite her own poverty. At the end of the novel, as the real world blends into the supernatural, Mrs Sowerby's goodness transcends the mortal world and there are hints of a physical transfiguration in her appearance in the burgeoning garden. Her long blue cloak and "her nice fresh face" are like "a softly coloured illustration in one of Colin's books," and her comfortable, rosy face gives the children a "delightful" and "warm, supported feeling." This feeling is the genuine consolation of goodness. More significantly, all the creatures and blooms in the garden are truly seen by her "wonderful affectionate eyes" (274-76). It is her loving soul that is beautiful. Another transfiguration is seen in Mary's facial features as she changes from being unloved and sour-tempered into a person actively receiving and bestowing love, and this love is the love of *agape*. She no longer has a disagreeable appearance and is a child expected to blossom into a "blush-rose" (276). Of course, this matches the transformation of the garden, but really it suggests a beauty that is a reflection of physical health and, more importantly, a healthy inner life and good thoughts: a strength of character and right action that can turn around her own misfortune and help to redeem that of others. This is a transfiguration we can witness in real life. When we are in the company of a really good person, they appear beautiful to us in a way that occludes or transcends their physical appearance. This novel is sufficiently realistic to convince the reader that such goodness is not only desirable but possible.

Surprisingly perhaps, children's literature is particularly adept at showing us the reality of "the boredom of evil," despite the initial *fascinans* of the monsters and enchantments that represent the metaphysically bad. For all the initial attraction of Jadis' offer to Edmund of Turkish Delight, her castle turns out to be cold and stagnant and most of its inhabitants have been turned into the lifelessness of stone. This is the true desolation of evil. In Narnia, as in most secondary worlds in this genre, goodness is always depicted in an even more and genuinely attractive light than evil. Certainly the nourishing food, warmth and care of the prosaic beavers are far more attractive and solidly real than the false sickly sweets of Jadis. *The Hobbit* too shows a number of faces of the bleak monotony of evil. It is present in the dull and predictable violence of the orcs, who only briefly carry an initial *fascinans*, and in the flat wastelands of what is literally named "the desolation of Smaug." It is most evident in the moral erosion caused by power. As ring bearer, Bilbo becomes

thinner and weaker in both physical and spiritual senses, experiencing the same erosion that has resulted in the wizened horror of Gollum, the shadowy former hobbit who lives in the dark and is never fully real. There is a similarly bleak and ultimately boring portrait of evil in *The Neverending Story*, as the reader, as well as Bastian, eventually becomes sated with the fascinating adventures that lead to his corruption by power. This satiation is a boredom that so effectively sets the stage for the entrance of the plain, substantial Good. Goodness is embodied in the healing ritual of Dame Eyola, and the washing away of Bastian's sins as he must cease to be a great lord and become again a little child (400-08). Like the flow of life-giving water that cleanses Bastian, goodness is indeed "an unfathomable marvel." These examples illustrate Gaita's comment that "evil can only be understood in the light of the good ... it cannot lucidly be an object of fascination, competing with goodness for our allegiance" (42). Goodness is that Platonic force that is never tiring and becomes increasingly real the more we are able to perceive it, calling us, in Lewis' terms, "farther up and farther in."

Twentieth-century writers of adult fiction are more than adept in portraying moral erosion in their works, but this excites a particular fascination whose ultimate emptiness is rarely exposed through a contrasting vision of goodness. Moral decline is presented as a wholly aesthetic or scientific portrait, obeying the laws of realism or naturalism. The writer poses as an objective onlooker, or a metafictional participant, examining without passing judgement. Such writing often has overtones of celebration, particularly when accorded the outlandish praise of today's literary columns. Thus, simply through aesthetic excellence or perceptive accuracy, such a portrayal begins to take on a notion of "good" in a culture where the word means merely that which gives personal satisfaction. Weil claims that we all fictionalise our lives, living in a waking dream or fog, and this is reinforced by inferior art. Great writers, however, have the power to awaken us to the truth. Although their medium is fiction, they nevertheless have the power to release us from it, offering "something equivalent to the actual density of the real, that density which life offers us every day but which we are unable to grasp because we are amusing ourselves with lies" (*On Science* 162). Contact with goodness, in life or in art, is a way of improving the quality of our consciousness; it takes away our distorting solipsistic fantasies, it puts us in touch with reality of others: it makes our own lives more real. This is Levin's great discovery at the close of *Anna Karenina*. He comments that life "is no longer meaningless as it was before, but has a positive meaning of goodness with which I have the power to invest it" (853). One cannot help but think of Thoreau here, writing on another continent some twenty years earlier: "Goodness is the only investment that never fails" (148).

While the concerns of morality are clear in the classic works of fantasy cited above, the morality of children's fiction is just as powerfully felt in many contemporary works of realism, where one is perhaps less likely to expect it. Paterson's *The Great Gilly Hopkins* illustrates most of the issues discussed in this chapter and is a particularly fruitful text to study in this regard as Paterson herself has written about the beliefs and experiences that shaped her writing in general, and this novel in particular. Chiefly, Paterson writes from concern for the world and for her readers, and from a desire "to write not only a story that is going somewhere, but a story about something that matters deeply" (Gates 37). In doing so, she has produced a work of expansive moral consciousness that takes her readers, both child and adult, into the complexity and misery of the real world, yet shows them how to live justly within it. *Gilly* falls into the category of the New Realism that aims at verisimilitude, and does not flinch from portraying the sordidness and suffering of the real world. However, this "slice-of-life" sub-genre has attracted a significant amount of negative attention from critics because of its tendency to lapse into self-indulgent bleakness, and it is the one area of children's fiction which occasionally exhibits the inflated negativity of cultural despair. This is certainly not the case with Paterson, whose insight and integrity combine with technical accomplishment to shape a moving and illuminating work which enlarges and challenges both child and adult readers. *Gilly* is an extended commentary on the dissonance between fantasy and reality, and the dangers of being unable to distinguish between them. Above this, it strongly asserts that goodness is neither a fantasy nor an unattainable ideal, but belongs firmly in the real world.

In *The Promise of Happiness* Inglis posited the existence of a Great Tradition of children's literature, and produced a list of well-known classics to prove it. Paterson's novel, written later, could certainly be a central work on such a list, and, from the viewpoint of ethical criticism, is a masterpiece of its kind. It is, in the context of its genre, a great novel. Paterson is very skilled at putting the complex into the simple: in evoking the messy complexities of the phenomenal and emotional world in condensed and simplified form. But her mastery is more significant in her presentation and penetration of reality that encompasses not just faithfulness to everyday life in the late twentieth century, but a verisimilitude to the life of the spirit. Paterson's perspective resembles the spiritual quality that Weil calls "attention": "a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality" (Murdoch, *Sovereignty* 34). It also accords with Murdoch's reiterated argument (based on Weil) that "the realism of a great artist is not a photographic realism, it is essentially both pity and justice" (*Sovereignty* 87).

Fittingly then, *Gilly* has its genesis in an examination of conscience. Paterson states that the novel arose from reflecting on her experiences as foster mother, and her growing awareness of her obstructive attention to self that had failed to acknowledge the problems of her temporary children.

I knew from the beginning that the children were going to be with us only a short time, so when a problem arose, as problems will, I'd say to myself, 'I can't really deal with that. They'll be here only a few weeks.' Suddenly and too late I heard what I had been saying. I was regarding two human beings as Kleenex, disposable. And it forced me to think, what must it be like for those thousands upon thousands of children in our midst who find themselves rated disposable? (*Gates* 110)

Thus we see the moral impetus towards clear-sightedness that informs the novel and a dedication to the realism that accompanies "quality of consciousness." Paterson's admission also illustrates Gardner's understanding that art has its origins in the problems of imperfection: "a wound inherent in the nature of life itself." He views art as "an attempt either to learn to live with the wound or to heal it," and as such can be classified as either "distraction" or "medicine" (181). *Gilly*, then, is medicine, but not the bitter pill of didacticism; rather a healing tonic that offers genuine consolation and leads its readers (adults and children) to a fuller life.

Paterson is very conscious of the simplicity of her work and describes it in terms of a musical analogy. She says that when she reads good quality adult literature, because of the intricacy, the density and the design, it is like hearing a symphony orchestra, whereas when she reads her own *Bridge to Terabithia*, she hears "a flute solo, unaccompanied" (*Gates* 36). In fact, an unaccompanied flute solo by a masterful composer can be more subtle, more satisfying and even more sophisticated than an orchestral extravaganza by a mediocre composer (an unaccompanied partita by Bach is arguably a good deal more illuminating than a Bruckner symphony), and this is the case for *Gilly* in the eyes of the adult reader. Unaccompanied works of music make up for their lack of detail and colour through the subtle interplay of rhythmic patterns, and contrasts between high and low pitch, and the quality of the emotion they express. Similarly, in *Gilly*, Paterson achieves a satisfying and meaningful blend of highs and lows: of joy and sorrow sharp as swords; of order and chaos; of despair and hope; a balance which contributes to the novel's sane and clear-headed view of reality. Although it has been written specifically to acknowledge the pain of abandonment, it is also a work of comedy, full of humorous interchanges and even an element of farce, a blend that is very faithful to real experience. The entrance of the rescuing fairy godmother, Gilly's own grandmother, is superbly mistimed, coinciding with the Trotter household being plunged into chaos by the degradations of flu. Because of Paterson's skill in economy and counterpoint, the work ends in a very ambiguous and very life-like

blending of two emotional extremes. Gilly makes a difficult and painful decision, yet one which is so “right that it cannot be any better” (as Julian of Norwich defined what is “good”), thus transmuting pain into a measure of joy. This is the *tierce de picardie* of music when a minor key resolves into a major, and it is the musical counterpart of Tolkien’s eucatastrophe.

Paterson’s stylistic economy is committed to portraying the real, to see what moral truths can be brought forth from the fruits of illusion: disaster and despair. Paterson’s images, for example, are sharp and concise, almost hitting below the belt in their vivid emotional intensity. She creates images that are appropriate to the experience of children yet also include a sub-text for adult readers, but it is a sub-text that still functions within the dual rather than the double address. When Gilly’s hard-pressed social worker is to decide on Gilly’s fate, her voice is described as “glittering like a fake Christmas tree” (93). Similarly, Gilly’s emotional deprivation is graphically rendered through a single image: “The word ‘mother’ triggered something deep in her stomach. She knew the danger signal.... This was not the time to start dissolving like hot Jell-O” (17). These images are particularly effective for adult readers, and in fact convey a level of irony, indeed poignancy, through the blending of the raw emotional vulnerability of childhood with barren icons of advertising: fake Christmas trees and chemical Jell-O, both associated with the artificial, disposable world which has produced a generation of Gillys.

Her characters are drawn swiftly and sharply with concise idiosyncratic description, but they are brought to life more vividly because Paterson always feels affection for them, and this exploration, commitment and regard gives moral strength to the work. She states that the characters of children’s fiction should be characters which the reader can care about: “I don’t want to waste my energy reading, and certainly not my energy writing, about people I hate. Even if I start a book with a satisfying villain, I seem doomed to care for that person before the end” (*Gates* 37). Gardner, too, understands the necessity of this perspective in the creation of good art.

The artist who has no strong feelings about his characters – the artist who can feel passionate only about his work or ideas – has no urgent reason to think hard about the characters’ problems, the ‘themes’ in his fiction. He imitates human gesture in the movements of his puppets, but he does not worry as a father worries about the behaviour of his son; and the result is a fictional universe one would not want one’s loved ones forced to inhabit. (84)

Because of the constraints of writing for children, there is no scope for long or detailed descriptions of characters. Yet Paterson, through empathy with her subjects, is able to convey the most important and revealing aspects, and achieves vivid and non-stereotyped portrayals. The raw, terrified intensity of William

Earnest, totally overwhelmed by a hostile world, is very evocatively sketched through his silent gestures. This serves to remind adult readers what they may choose to forget about children, as Paterson herself did, and shows children respect for, and affirmation of, what they already know.

The humble dignity of Mr Randolph is discreetly conveyed through his reaction to commonplace events around him. We know immediately that he is generous and gracious when he so gallantly, yet sincerely, compliments Trotter's cooking.

'I declare, Mrs Trotter,' said Mr Randolph, 'every day I think to myself, tonight's supper couldn't be as delicious as last night's. But I tell you, this is the most delicious meal I have ever had the privilege of eating.' (21)

Furthermore, there is a kind of moral beauty conveyed here too. The smallness and disarray of Trotter's house and circumstances, or the unsociable aspects of Mr Randolph's blindness, do not disqualify these two pre-eminently civilised human beings from behaving towards each other with the utmost courtesy. There is a quiet nobility in their interactions, a kindness and respect that indicate a very high quality of moral regard. Indeed, such civility stands out more sharply against these impoverished material circumstances. If the novel were set in a castle, such actions would pass by unnoticed, and may well result more from expectation and habit than sincerity and good feeling. Instead of focusing on their desperate existence as members of the urban poor, Paterson is offering us a fuller view of reality, and showing us that virtues are not dependent on material circumstances, nor need they be absent from contemporary society. The fruits of this civility are later reaped: Gilly begins by despising this behaviour, but later in the novel she emulates it. This occurs on a small scale when she is able to comment positively on her grandmother's hair (though still a significant connection in the economical tightness of the plot). It occurs on a life-changing scale at the novel's end when, in an extraordinary act of courage, she is at last able to put the welfare of others before her own needs.

Gilly's mother, Courtney, bears no stamp of individuality, but this is appropriate as we see her mainly through Gilly's distorting fantasy. She first appears locked in a photograph, where her "glossy black hair [hangs] in gentle waves without a hair astray" and looking "as though she is the star of some TV show" (16). The only other description we have of her is when she is seen again through Gilly's eyes, but this time in the flesh. In reality, she is frumpish and unkempt; her hair is still long, but "dull and stringy" and she is described as "a flower child gone to seed" (136). Although Courtney has abandoned her daughter and wishes to have no responsibility for her, Paterson does not regard her character with what might seem

justifiable contempt. Judgement is strongly present, but it derives simply from the clear view of the pain that Courtney has inflicted on both Gilly and her own mother. In a later comment on the novel, Paterson generously describes Courtney as “a flower child who had read all of Tolkien, but who was still too much of a child herself to care for a real live child of her own” (*Spying* 27). Paterson’s narration here is reminiscent of Burnett’s description of Mary Lennox, who saw others as disagreeable but did not yet understand that she was so herself. Both authors blend the humanness of pity with the clear-sighted accuracy of justice. Gilly is short for Galadriel, from Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. No doubt Courtney was enchanted with the thought of such a child throughout her pregnancy, but afterwards was unable to cope with the huge difference between the ideal queen of Lothlorien and the real needy child. Beguiled by the effortless world of fantasy, Courtney has been unable to recognise the real loveliness of her own daughter. Similarly, Gilly has imposed her own idealistic fantasies upon her image of her absent mother, whose return, she desperately believes, will change “gruesome Gilly into gorgeous, gracious, good, glorious Galadriel” (35). This is the trap of the empty consolations of private fantasy: “the tissue of self-aggrandising and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one” (Murdoch, *Sovereignty* 59).

After years of rejections, Gilly has become another ruined child, and her name Galadriel is now a bitter irony. Paterson describes Gilly as a child “who lies, steals, takes advantage of the handicapped, bullies the weak [and] acts out her racial bigotry in a particularly tasteless fashion” (*Spying* 29). But even at her worst, Paterson allows her reader to really see why this is so, describing not a monster, but an angry “lost child” who protests at her disposability “with every available weapon – fair or foul” (*Spying* 30). Her defensive toughness and self-obsession derive from pain, a driving force that deliberately dominates the novel.

But I can’t stay. I might go soft and stupid, too [like W.E.]. Like I did at the Dixons’. I let her fool me with all that rocking and love talk. I called her Mama and crawled up on her lap when I had to cry. My god! She said I was her own little baby, but when they moved to Florida, I was put out with the rest of the trash they left behind. I can’t go soft – not so long as I’m nobody’s real kid – not while I’m just something to play musical chairs with.... (*Gilly* 71)

All her life, Gilly has been the object of others’ illusions. Abandoned by her mother for not being able to fit a fantasy ideal, the action has been repeated by a series of foster parents seeking her as an acquisition in a consumer-oriented culture. What Gilly most wants is to “stop being a ‘foster child,’ the quotation marks dragging the phrase down, almost drowning it. To be real without any quotation marks” (119).

Each of those carers had been trapped in an illusion, and the moral consequence of that illusion was the damaging of a real child.

Through the very limited lens of Gilly's own solipsistic vision, Trotter is merely "a fat, fluff-brained religious fanatic" (20). Unlike Gilly's other foster parents, she is working class and lives in relative poverty. Trotter is physically large, and her name is inevitably associated with pigs, an irony as savage as that of Galadriel. For Trotter is a convincing image of goodness in a real and recognisable universe, and thereby has much power. It is because of this far more than her size, that she carries an overwhelming sense of presence; so much so that it is really she rather than Gilly who is the most important character in the novel. When unexpectedly asked "who is Trotter?" at a conference, Paterson found herself spontaneously shouting out that Trotter is "Good." Later she explained that "Maime Trotter is an image of God, modelled shamelessly after the father of the Prodigal [son] ... Trotter is the foster mother to end all foster mothers – the expiation for my sin" ("Books" 50). Such a successful embodiment of "authentic" goodness, potentially "flat and boring" as Weil argues above, is a very considerable achievement, and it contributes significantly to the greatness of this novel. Trotter is the antithesis of physical beauty, and it is because of this that her goodness can be experienced plainly, for itself, clearly and authentically. Ironically, this is a technique self-consciously used by Tolkien within fantasy: "the elucidation of truth and the encouragement of good morals in this real world, by the ancient device of exemplifying them in unfamiliar embodiments, that may tend to 'bring them home'" (*Letters* 194). In fantasy, it is more to do with strangeness of the Other world that can intensify the workings of moral law. In realistic fiction the technique exemplifies McGinn's idea that by deliberately pulling apart the physical and moral aesthetic dimension, inner beauty is more clearly revealed. It brings the dilemma into consciousness.

As Trotter's portrait is developed we gain a sense of goodness as Weil describes it: a "fresh and surprising" quality that is "sweet and compelling," wholesome and regenerative. It is present in Trotter's valiant protection of her foster children, in her giving of self, and in her plain speaking that is kind or tough, depending judiciously on the situation. It is very strongly present in her love for her neighbour, Mr Randolph; in her (far from fanatical) devotion to her Lord; and in her clear-sighted understanding and respect for her potential rival, Gilly's grandmother (another more challenging neighbour). Importantly, Trotter is not perfect, suggesting (appropriately in the medium of realism rather than allegory) that she is an agent of goodness rather than the thing itself. She has emotional distortions of her own. After Gilly's cruel escape in pursuit of her mother, the social worker justly accuses Trotter of talking about her own needs rather than Gilly's. "Yes, Lord knows, I need

her," Trotter replies. "A funny broken sound like a sob came from Trotter: 'I like to die when I found her gone'" (93). Goodness in time and space can only be a relative absolute, and instead of being rewarded in this life, more often than not exacts a heavy price.

We sense that the "boring and monotonous" desert as Weil describes the reality of evil is exactly the fantasy world of Gilly and her mother that can never live up to reality (and not vice versa). Trotter, and Trotter's world, on the other hand, has the "density of the real," and this is a density that is apparent through the illuminating quality of goodness. As Gilly struggles out of the cave of her own delusions, she is able to gain glimmerings of this light. Indeed Paterson herself uses this imagery. When Gilly stoops to her lowest and attempts to use William Earnest to steal money, she tries to buy his willingness by making him paper aeroplanes. Against her expectations of him as irredeemably inadequate, he is able to fly them successfully. It is a moment of triumph for him, and even the hard-hearted Gilly begins to soften. Trotter, who has taken this incident at face value, looks at Gilly in sheer gratitude, and says simply and softly, "thank you." The duplicitous Gilly looks at Trotter, but then quickly turns away: "as a person turns from bright sunlight" (54-55). This is another example of a brilliantly economical image, redolent with meaning, particularly for the adult reader who is aware of the cultural resonance attached to it. It is also an example of the inspirational force of virtue and the instructive potential of good art. Gardner argues that literature abounds with saintly figures who through their very being have the power to "make us uncomfortably conscious of our lies" (34). Dante's Beatrice is perhaps the highest example we have of this in art, and it is a phenomenon that illustrates the Platonic understanding that "the Good [is] the source of light which reveals to us all things as they really are" (Murdoch, *Sovereignty* 70). It is perhaps an overstretched analogy to move from a contemporary children's novel to such an illustrious example, yet this is precisely Paterson's own achievement. Trotter illumines Gilly's darkness, and in creating her, Paterson illumines the social darkness she has perceived through the "wound" that inspired her to write the novel.

The necessity of illumination and of seeing behind appearances is a very important moral imperative that underpins *Gilly*, and it is inextricably allied to the clear-seeing, hard-headed justice of the Good: "Goodness is a form of realism. The idea of a really good man living in a private dream world seems unacceptable ... the chief enemy of excellence in morality (and also in art) is personal fantasy" (Murdoch, *Sovereignty* 59). *Gilly* demonstrates in a number of ways that personal fantasy and self-centredness are a form of blindness. Paterson is not condemning fantasy for its own sake, and greatly admires many fantasy writers, especially Tolkien. The fantasy

she condemns is empty idealism that feeds the desperate desire for escapist fictions (in Tolkien's terms, the cowardly escape of the deserter, rather than the noble escape of the prisoner). Gilly is blinded by fantasy to the richness of reality around her: William Earnest is dismissed as "a mentally retarded seven-year old" and, in a rich irony, Mr Randolph (whose "vision" is steeped in pity and justice) is merely "a blind black man who came to eat" (20). The terrible consequence of this is that when Trotter extends genuine affection and respect towards Gilly and offers her a loving family, for Gilly it is only a dimly perceived reality and much less palatable than her delusive dream: "the look on Trotter's face was the one Gilly had, in some deep part of her, longed to see all her life, but not from someone like Trotter. That was not part of the plan" (55). Hence Gilly's castle must topple tower by tower. She has to unlearn her incomplete and wholly negative version of reality and know it as inadequate and untrue. Similarly, she has to unlearn her inflated fantasies, in which her mother is a glamorous woman who will love her forever. The cost is very high. Gilly confronts the fact that her mother came to visit only because she had been paid to, and she must also face the possibility that she has thrown away her life for a "stinking lie" (137). Nevertheless, Paterson wants her readers to see that truth is always to be preferred to the fog of illusion: that "we must prefer real hell to an imaginary paradise" (Weil, *Gravity* 47); a harsh truth, perhaps, for a children's novel, but scripture is full of them.

The illusion of the happy ending, so appropriate to High Fantasy, but so potentially dangerous to realism, is held out to Gilly and the reader like a carrot on a stick. Then Paterson subverts the expectations of both to reveal an important truth. In fact, Gilly's unreal view of the happy ending is subverted well before the close of the novel, in a way that emphasises the toxicity of lies.

It was not at all the way she'd imagined the ending. In Gilly's story, Courtney herself came sweeping in like a goddess queen, reclaiming the long-lost princess. There was no place in this dream for dumpy old-fashioned ladies with Southern speech, or barefoot fat women in striped pyjamas, or blind old black men who recited poetry by heart and snored with their mouths open. (110)

So far, so good; if not for Gilly, then for the emotionally engaged mature reader, who understands the health behind this shattering of illusion. However, at the very end of the novel Gilly's own "good" desire for a real happy ending with Trotter is also thwarted, upending expectation at its most crucial point. This is shocking to the reader, and an acute frustration of both the protagonist's and the reader's "pattern of desire." Yet herein is another aspect of this novel's greatness. Paterson allows us to see, with the vision of pity and justice, that even our healthy desires cannot be gratified so simply in the world of reality. Reality is complex, and there are rarely

simple or wholly satisfying answers to its challenges. Hence Gilly, a mere child (another example of Tolkien's "unfamiliar embodiments" that bring the moral home) must make a most difficult and mature ethical choice: living with Trotter and the adopted family with whom she has at last known love, or living with her emotionally reserved grandmother who, like Gilly, has been crippled by loss. There is no way out from pain at the end of this novel, for even the better choice must result in suffering.

As definitive, medicinal and real consolation, Trotter offers Gilly the astringent cleanness of truth, not the deluding fog of dreams.

All that stuff about happy endings is lies. The only ending in this world is death.

And there is lots of good things, baby. Like you coming to be with us here this fall. That was a mighty good thing for me and William Earnest. But you just fool yourself if you expect good things all the time. They ain't what's regular – don't nobody owe 'em to you. (138)

This is not a pessimistic betrayal of readers' expectations; in the terms of realism, it is perhaps the very best of happy endings within a moral context. Now Gilly too can see clearly and act unselfishly, and her pain has given her the gift of empathy that enables her to choose well.

The word 'alone' twanged in Gilly's head. She knew what it meant to be alone. But only since Thompson Park did she understand a little what it meant to have people and then lose them. She looked at the person who was smiling shyly at her, who had lost husband, son, daughter. That was alone. (126)

The rightness of her decision to join her grandmother, to follow duty, and to make reparation for her family's losses, makes sense of her own and the others' suffering. This ending is like the eucatastrophe of the fairy tale, still so fitting in the context of realism. Its appropriateness in this expanded genre is suggested in another explanation of it that Tolkien included in a letter to his son.

... the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears ... produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back ... this is indeed how things really do work in the Great World for which our nature is made ... it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love. (*Letters* 100)

Paterson has categorically stated that although she will not withhold from her child readers "the harsh realities of human hunger and suffering and loss," she will not "take a young reader through a story and in the end abandon him" (*Gates* 38). The creation of a eucatastrophe is the very opposite of abandonment. Paterson has to be

hard-hitting to offer her readers the gift of reality: "a test of what is real is that it is hard and rough. Joys are found in it, not pleasure. What is pleasant belongs to dreams" (Weil, *Gravity* 47). Hence Trotter's admonition to Gilly that life is not about personal happiness, but there is nothing like "doing good on a tough job." In retrospect, Paterson comments that the ending of *Gilly* is not a promise of living happily ever after: "certainly not the heavenly city, but an ending rooted in this earth and leaning in the direction of the New Jerusalem" (*Spying* 191).

Nevertheless, the New Jerusalem certainly hints of a world beyond this one, and this is taken up in the novel through reference to Mr Randolph's love for Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality." Paterson uses it to make some important claims about childhood as well as to provide a thematic framework for her work. *Gilly* is ardently opposed to the dangers of fantasies and unhealthy idealisations, yet here is the manifesto of the Romantic conception of childhood. The fact that it is revered by the gentle and good Mr Randolph suggests that Paterson is deliberately drawing on unfashionable truths within the poem to make ironic comment about other issues. If children are too easily regarded as disposable, then a dose of reverence for childhood is a medicine required by our sick culture. This is not to regard children as angelic beings, and indeed the portrait of Gilly works hard in the opposite direction. Paterson does show us, however, that there is a great difference between expecting a child to be Galadriel and regarding a child as a sacred human life. The introduction of the poem at the centre of the novel, and especially its central line "trailing clouds of glory," foreshadow the final scene. Gilly must choose between what she desperately wants to do, return to Trotter, and doing what is "right," living with her grandmother. The significance of this poem is keenly felt in Gilly's own parting words, and in the narrator's comment upon them: "'I'm ready to go home now.' No clouds of glory, perhaps, but Trotter would be proud" (139). Trotter has helped Gilly become good by choice. The word "perhaps" here is significant. In fact the eucatastrophe does provide clouds of glory for the reader, even if, as in real life, these are unlikely to be felt by the actual agent of good (Gilly). It is through decisions based on a morality that seeks no rewards that we can indeed attain glory, but not for ourselves. Instead these decisions will contribute to the redemption of what Gilly describes as "the whole stinking world" (123).

Thus *The Great Gilly Hopkins* is medicine for, rather than distraction from, "the wound inherent in the nature of life itself." Paterson believes that her task is to tell about the world as it is, and "that such stories, even when they are painful, have a power to illumine the reader in a way that a nice tale with exemplary characters does not" (*Spying* 137). Paterson's moral and emotional sensibility does not prompt her to try to teach through her books in any narrow or preachy didactic fashion. Yet,

in constructing the novel around a child's pain, and showing the reader, objectively, the forces within adults that have created that pain, she cannot help but implicitly tell adult readers how **they** ought not to behave. Furthermore, and to this end, in embodying goodness so successfully in such an unlikely embodiment, and in resisting the hoped-for ending, she shocks the reader into recognising the reality of goodness and its potential to redeem. Paterson herself refers to a comment made by Caroline Gordon in *How to Read a Novel*, which makes clearer the distinction between art and entertainment, between morality and preachy didacticism, and between medicine and distraction.

... the man who has spent the evening reading Sherlock Holmes in an easy chair, before a blazing fire, is not likely to act differently toward his fellow creatures the next morning, no matter how much he admires Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's masterly creation. On the other hand, the man who succeeds in finishing the reading of *War and Peace* ... may not feel himself the same man afterward, and this change of heart may reflect itself so clearly in his daily conduct that other people will recognise the change. (qtd. in *Gates* 44)

Paterson says that art has the power to influence the real world: "a great novel is a kind of conversion experience. We come away from it changed" (*Gates* 59).

How then can we measure Paterson's achievement? *Gilly* is indeed "good company" in Booth's sense, and comes to us as neither "fraud nor flatterer," but as honest "friend." And it is rich in the compassion without which "no artist can summon the will to make true art" (Gardner 85). We can hold up *Gilly* against Murdoch's view of good art.

Art presents the most comprehensible examples of the almost irresistible human tendency to seek consolation in fantasy, and also of the effort to resist this and the vision of reality which comes with success. Success is in fact rare. Almost all art is a form of fantasy-consolation and few artists achieve the vision of the real. (*Sovereignty* 64)

The objectivity, pity and justice of Paterson's vision, as well as her portrayal of goodness, have effected a vision of the real. The achieving of this vision is Paterson's method in this book, as well as her theme. This is a reality that is squarely of life, yet is larger than it. Here is a children's novel that can stand beside the works of traditional great artists: they are works that, as Weil declares, are "made out of words, [but] there is present in them the force of gravity which governs our souls" (*On Science* 162).

Maturity

The Rustins argue that while the morality of fairy tales is "splitting and punitive," in modern children's literature the moral assumptions are "integrative and forgiving" (21). In fiction other than High Fantasy (which by generic definition preserves black and white moral distinctions), children's literature is certainly distinguished by its capacity to evaluate the morality of character and action, and also to forgive and to redeem. In *The Secret Garden*, the flaws in the characters of Mary, Colin and Mr Craven are examined first through Burnett's just and penetrating moral lens. Then Burnett gives to them the means of redemption. This is accomplished through the revivifying beauty of the natural world, and more significantly, through the moral energy (and for the reader, the moral beauty) that accompanies their gradual process of "unselfing." This is a redemptive pattern in children's fiction that persists into the realism of the present day. Carpenter claims that the distinctive feature of contemporary children's fiction is that it encourages children to grow up (216). This, however, is a process that extends far beyond the developmental progression from childhood to adulthood. Perhaps instead it is that good children's fiction, like good adult fiction, encourages maturity, quite a different thing to growing up, and something that few adults genuinely achieve. The maturity of children's literature is grounded in its moral vision, and in the clarity that accompanies this responsible and self-consciously chosen way of seeing.

Clarity of vision relates to the secular scripture in several ways. The moral dimension of literature is not limited to the work, but must also be considered in both writers' and readers' attitudes. The first chapter of this discussion argues that reading children's fiction through the focus of a child's view enables the adult to achieve a renewed way of seeing which could redeem the blinding eye-motes which have accrued around adult consciousness, those "distracting lies" mentioned by Weil. Inglis maintains that writers who render innocence in a "pure, radical way," such as Blake in *Songs*, or Wilde in *The Happy Prince*, are not "naïfs" or "primitives," but have a "moral and intellectual quality which must occur somewhere in the sensibility and intelligence of those who write for children" (*Promise* 8). This moral and intellectual quality and the sensibility it engenders are related to a responsive openness to life and a clear seeing, and contribute to the currents of good energy that freely flow in children's fiction, unrestricted by complicated aesthetic distractions. It is a sensibility that we find so frequently in the moral vision of the saints, those "fools for God" so frequently labelled as childlike. We also find it in the work of great religious painters such as Giotto and Fra Angelico, who sought to render goodness and holiness, and did so through simplicity of style and a disarmingly complementary gravity and grace. This same sensibility in children's fiction enables readers to begin to apprehend not only the "radical, purity of

innocence," but also the "fresh and surprising" and "sweet and perpetual ecstasy" of the Good.

The children's writer is encouraged to produce a text that is clear and meaningful. Although this does not prohibit rich language, richness will not prevent the author from making good sense. It is not language written for its own sake to impress, but rather to enhance the sense of what is being communicated. Thus the virtue of consideration for others is relevant to the writer's own attitude to readers; it is exemplified in the medium and not just the message. When we acknowledge an ethical dimension to literature, the postmodern preoccupation with language, the privileging of texture over structure, of form over content, becomes a moral issue, "a mistake" which demonstrates the writer's lack of concern: "linguistic opacity suggests an indifference to the needs and wishes of the reader" suggesting "misanthropy, a perversity or shallowness" (Gardner 69).

Another level of clarity is in the vision of reality that is being presented. Of course no one is able to see perfectly without vision being influenced by the bias of the observer. This applies to writers as they transmit their observation of the world and to readers as they interpret this observation. Given this inescapable bias, how best does one see clearly? Murdoch uses a reformulation of her vision of pity and justice to suggest a way of seeing that produces the best kind of art.

Art transcends selfish and obsessive limitations of personality and can enlarge the sensibility of its consumer. It is a kind of goodness by proxy. Most of all it exhibits to us the connection, in *human* beings, of clear realistic vision with compassion. (*Sovereignty* 87)

One of the most moving examples of this type of compassionate vision occurs in *A Sound of Chariots*, following Bridie's terrifying confrontation with the reality of the maimed war veterans who live in her village. "To be able to see the grownups around so clearly" leads to a "frightening significance for her in the crippled condition of the men in the street" (112). She looks with "fascinated attention" at the "monstrous fact" of Mr Lockhart's stump. This experience is perhaps horrifying for her child readers, yet Hunter makes something magnificent from it. Soon after at a children's party, Bridie is asked to do her party piece. She is unable to recite her prepared poem and instead sings her dead father's gentle song. It sweeps her up as she begins to sing.

The sadness poured out of her in the song, a sadness that was somehow not only for herself now, but for them all. She saw the hall as she sang and it was no longer a big place to her, a gay and exciting party place. It was small suddenly and shabby, the floor greasy with spillings and squalid with littered ice-cream cups. But it was only with the background of her vision that she saw it for she was watching the women's faces as she sang and seeing on each one of them the shadow of the cripple that stood behind it. And she was aware

too, as she sang, of the darkness outside the hall, aware of it not as the ordinary dark of night but as a great and terrible *something* surrounding them all: and her mind cried out through the song to the women that here inside the hall they were safe together in the little oasis of light in the big darkness.

They were all inside it, linked together and pushing back against the great dark outside, and a wave of compassion was carrying her forward into them, into the chain of women linked together to hold off the great world of darkness pressing in all round them. All the familiar identities she knew for them were gone, swallowed up in an overwhelming awareness of their common weakness, their common plight. And from this awareness, and from her compassion there was flowering such a vast, incommunicable love for them all that the song was finally choked in tears and faltered to a stop....

The crippled men shared in it and in the remembered wave of her compassion, for then she thought of them now crouching like everyone else in their own little lit oases in the dark, the pity she felt for them was stronger than the horror she had of their mutilated bodies. (118-19)

Here Bridie achieves the moral discernment implicit in justice, and one which does not just rely on surface vision, but also on understanding the viewpoints of others so that they may be extended pity and fellowship rather than revulsion. It is not just a case of "there but for the grace of God go I," but of "there, too, go I." Murdoch regards this kind of realism as a "moral achievement," and it leads her to the understanding that "true vision occasions right conduct" (*Sovereignty* 66). This is very similar to Tolstoy's dictum that the purpose of art is to make us good by choice. The moral, loving and compassionate vision of Paterson and Hunter, representative of the moral force of children's fiction, exemplifies Tolstoy's final declaration that a work which shows us love of one's neighbour is the highest form of art. It is through this embodiment of *agape* that the sacred and the secular scripture become one.

Conclusion

It is always dangerous to draw too precise parallels between one historical period and another; and among the most misleading of such parallels are those which have been drawn between our own age in Europe and North America and the epoch in which the Roman empire declined into the Dark Ages. Nonetheless certain parallels there are. A crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman *imperium* and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that *imperium*. What they set themselves to achieve instead – not recognizing fully what they were doing – was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness.... What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.... We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St Benedict.

(Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 263)

Children's fiction is a literature of light. The preceding discussion has revealed the many ways that ideas associated with clarity, radiance and gold are applied to childhood, to the genre of children's literature, and to images within the books themselves. Rosemary Sutcliff's aptly named *The Lantern Bearers* is about the historical situation that philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre describes in the epigraph above. Aquila abandons the failing values of the Roman *imperium* as it withdraws from Britain, and he and his lineage must carry the light of morality and civility through the Dark Ages that are to come. The novel begins and ends with the image of a lit beacon sending hope across the night to those who feel the threatening forces of barbarism. Sutcliff crafts her novel around motifs of enclosed spaces of retreat that nurture the forces of goodness and light: the family hearth, the mountain fastness, and especially the sacred space of the good monk Ninnias, the healer, keeper of bees and bean rows (surely an allusion to Yeats' "Innisfree"). Each of these enclosures functions as an aspect of pastoral retreat, and as an endangered community struggling to hold onto the light against the encroaching dark. In this *The Lantern Bearers* typifies the nature of children's fiction and its place in contemporary culture.

There is a very significant relationship between the idea of light bearing and that of the *exemplum*. Medieval dictionaries related the word *exemplum*, something "cut out," to "a clearing in the woods ... the place where light falls, cultivation occurs, a cabin beckons hospitably." This in turn suggests exemplars, saints, who like St Benedict, cut out a clearing in the woods of complex reality and through cultivation of the virtues illuminate a worthy model of living (Marty 296). This notion forms the core of *The Secret Garden*, and of the whole genre of children's fiction. The cultivation of the garden and of the spirit forges the energy of integration and transformation that changes people, just as barren winter changes into light-filled spring. The garden is a safe, secluded place, fruitful and sacred. This *exemplum*, here the *hortus conclusus*, is the pastoral place of withdrawal and regeneration that casts light back out into the needy world and connects human beings with each other. It is very different to the dark, egoistic withdrawal that has enclosed Colin. These communities also perform the role of guardianship, a notion that is central to the sane and protective relationship that exists between adults and children. This guardian responsibility is the essence of what Inglis asserts so forcefully in *The Promise of Happiness*, and it is an aspect of the "gift" of literature from adults to

children. Thus far, children's literature has generally preserved that guardian relationship with children, and increasingly it has stood as guardian for the truths of an entire culture. The revelation and guardianship of truth have always been central functions of scripture.

Children's literature can be a source of profound experience for adult readers because it has the capacity to reach deeply into our innermost lives. Frey and Griffith state that children's books both "define and measure our maturation," and show us where we have come from, where we are going, and where we would most wish to go (vii). This has always been the function of scripture. In the Christian tradition, the mythological basis of Western literature, scripture shows us our origins in the transgressed Garden, how to live a good life here and now, and how we can reach happiness in heaven. Thus children's literature is a secular shadow of a sacred pattern. The dual address speaks to children and adults simultaneously (to the child within, but especially to the real child without), and invites us, as in parable, to contemplate the meaning of living. This dual lens resonates with the irreconcilable tensions between adult and child, between innocence and experience, just as the imagery within the novels so often resonates with the energetic tensions between the concrete and the metaphysical. But the transforming and integrative power of children's fiction does not only draw from the energy of tension and paradox, but also from the romance pattern and the drive towards the restoration of identity and order. Macleod comments that children's literature has "the ability to put the world back together again" (qtd. in Gardiner 4). A profound and whimsical example of this occurs at the end of *Finn Family Moomintroll*. The sophisticated and pessimistic muskrat's book *The Uselessness of Everything* undergoes a mysterious conversion. Its title is magically changed by the Hobgoblin (that unlikely harbinger of mystery and good) to *The Usefulness of Everything*. Children's literature has the power to similarly transform the existential angst which so afflicts modern adult culture. Again, this is a function of scripture; reminding the people of the earth that their lives make sense in the context of the wider, deeper reality conceptualised as heaven.

This sense of meaning is also engendered through the evocation of the sacred, the numinous that Otto describes as "inklings of a Reality fraught with mystery and momentousness" (151). Its role in children's fiction is especially important in the light of Otto's understanding that the numinous cannot be taught: "it must be 'awakened' from the spirit" (62), and art has a particular potential to do so. For adults and children, for whom the sky has become "ungodded," opportunities that lead to such awakening are of paramount importance: as initiation, or as validation of a realm that has already been intuited but remains unacknowledged. However, as Otto is at great pains to emphasise, the numinous is not enough in itself, just as

beauty in itself is not "a sufficient end." Thus he insists that the most valuable form of religious experience is that which infuses the non-rational feeling of the numinous with the rational schemata of moral goodness. Only then can we know the holy. At this level of experience the rational compartments of knowing tend to break down and intermingle, just as the Platonic absolutes of beauty, goodness and truth are conjoined and an understanding of one necessarily invokes the presence of the others. It is from this position that we may speak of children's literature as an aspect of love.

For great art, even concern is not enough. Great art celebrates life's potential, offering a vision unmistakably and unsentimentally rooted in love. 'Love' is of course another of those embarrassing words, perhaps a word even more embarrassing than 'morality,' but it's a word no aesthete ought carelessly to drop from his vocabulary. (Gardner 83)

Love, like holiness, is present as a "sign" in literature, an outward manifestation of the spirit "encountered in particular occurrences and events, self-revealed in persons and displayed in actions" (Otto 147). Love is in the character and actions of Trotter, and ultimately of Gilly. Love is The Joy-Maker in *The Secret Garden* that creates bonds of sympathetic communion between the people in the garden even more than it is the force that makes plants grow. It is also present within the writers themselves, expressed through the longing for perfection and the idealisation of experience, in moral exemplification and in the very difficult act of "seeing clearly with pity and justice." Love at this level resists words, but Shelley catches its essence: "the great secret of morals is love; a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own" (131). After a lifetime of scholarship in children's literature, Maurice Saxby concludes that love is a central concern of children's fiction. It is manifested in love of story, love of life, and love of people: "to detect that love and respond to it is both the responsibility and the joy of the literary critic" ("Matters" 12).

This intertwining of moral goodness and the numinous is a pattern that can be discerned in Goldthwaite's assertion that in the realm of make-believe it is only through the marriage of fantastic inventiveness, the allsense, with a sense of *agape*, that worthwhile fantasy literature can be achieved. The realm of the verities from which *agape* derives provides a foundation upon which imagination can marvellously, but not emptily or egoistically, create and embellish; a process humbly described by Tolkien as the sub-creator's art (*Tree* 50-52). *Agape* is also the essence of Tolstoy's understanding that, in the modern age, the kingdom of God is that love where men are united to each other by feeling: love of neighbour and brotherhood of

man. This is plain speaking, but it is at the heart of religion, and for Tolstoy it represents the highest function of art.

Through children's literature we discover that the Golden Age is not back in the irretrievable pasts of our own childhoods and available only to memory. It remains as part of us, waiting to be discerned by our maturity. A symbolic return to an earlier state of existence is a journey that must be undertaken to achieve true adulthood. It is the understanding of mystics, and writers of pastoral, that "knowledge of the world crowds out knowledge of the garden" (Philip 21). This travelling back is the theme of Robert Frost's "Directive" (a provocatively didactic title), and this poem is a contemporary secular version of Vaughan's "Retreat."

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry-
.....

First there's the children's house of make believe
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny's
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet near its source,
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it.
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

This directive is a kind of pilgrimage; it is not just a backward glance, but also a vision of how best to go forward. As Hardin says of both "Lycidas" and Marvell's "The Garden," "the soul in pastoral seclusion enjoys a momentary glimpse of the eternal, carrying us, as Schiller urged, not back to Arcadia, but forward to Elysium" ("Pastoral" 7).

These are very large claims and not all children's fiction serves this lofty purpose. But the principle is strongly present in those works considered "best," shaping and sculpting the genre that has emerged at the time when it is most needed. Children's literature offers the potential of redemptive experience for adult writers and readers alike, and in that we must acknowledge its debt to the full meaning of innocence. It is the recognition of the sacredness of innocence (in either a respectful secular or religious connotation) that has produced this genre and contributed towards its immense capacity to nurture goodness. Rather than distrust innocence as Rose does, it is far better to revere it, remembering that Postman regards it as the strongest indicator of a truly civilised culture. Again it must be stressed that this is not an innocence which abandons or refuses to face the pain of experience. The best contemporary spokesperson for this regenerative innocence is Katherine Paterson as she examines her reasons for writing for children.

I cannot transmute their pain to joy, but I shall continue to try to provide a space where they can, if they wish, lay down a burden. I want them to know that despite all the evidence that the world tries to crush them with, there is still room for hope. That the good life, far from ending in childhood, barely begins there. That maturity is more to be desired than immaturity, knowledge than ignorance, understanding than confusion, perspective than self-absorption; that true innocence is not the absence of experience but redemption of it. (*Gates* 52)

This is the same insight which informs both Blake's concept of Higher Innocence and the Biblical injunction that we must become as a child again to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is a paradox of the kind that informs and invigorates scripture: the way back is the way forward. In travelling back, children's literature has the capacity to penetrate the obfuscations of this "fleshly dress," and bears for us "bright shoots of everlastingness."

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